



From Rhetoric to Action *Creating Gender Inclusive Workplaces*

Event Report

30 May 2024

The Park, MG Road, Bengaluru

From Rhetoric to Action

Introduction

The Udaiti Foundation, in collaboration with the Qess Corp. Limited organised the event *From Rhetoric to Action Creating Gender Inclusive Workplaces* on May 30, 2024, at The Park, MG Road, Bengaluru. The event aimed to foster a profound discussion on crucial aspects for women in the workforce. The specific initiatives, stories from the field shared by women and a closed door roundtable involving sector experts is an attempt to spark conversations around challenges faced by women in the blue and gray collar workforce.

Agenda



1

Qess DEI Initiatives

Guruprasad Srinivasan,

Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director, Qess Corp. Limited

2

Report Launch

Qess Corp Limited:

Guruprasad Srinivasan (CEO & ED), **Lohit Bhatia** (President, Workforce Mgmt), **Vijay Shivaram** (CEO, Qess IT Staffing), **Akshatha M** (Senior Research Analyst)

The Udaiti Foundation:

MP Karthick (AVP- Data & Applied Research), **Manya Aggarwal** (Research Associate), **Annu T Poullose** (Senior Data Associate)

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Report Insights

MP Karthick,

Assistant Vice President - Data and Applied Research, The Udaiti Foundation

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Stories of Female Associates

Ayesha Sami, HR Executive-Operations, Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd., **Priya N**, Assembly Operator, Wistron Infocomm Manufacturing (India) Private Limited, **Harshita**, HR Executive, UltraTech Cement

5

Roundtable Discussion

14 experts across different sectors

Unlocking Insights and Initiatives: A Dialogue on Women Representation at Quess Corp

Presentation by Guruprasad Srinivasan, Executive Director and CEO, Quess Corp. Limited

The presentation focused on the current challenges of female labor force participation and unemployment rates in India. It highlighted the significant number of unemployed women who could potentially be integrated into entry-level jobs or associate roles within the organization. Furthermore, the presentation detailed initiatives undertaken by the organization to enhance the hiring and retention of female associates. These initiatives encompass various strategies aimed at recruitment, and creating a supportive work environment and thus reducing the early attrition among female associates.



Presentation by MP Karthick, Assistant Vice President - Data and Applied Research, The Udaiti Foundation

The presentation highlighted key insights from a report on the representation and challenges of women associates in the Quess workforce. Women make up 17% of Quess's associate workforce, with significant early retention issues, as nearly half of female associates leave within the first 90 days. It also detailed how reasons for exiting vary across gender, sector, and tenure. He emphasized the critical need for leadership commitment to drive change, urging companies and representatives to take active roles as change-makers to achieve better gender inclusivity.





Report Launch: From Rhetoric to Action: Creating Gender Inclusive Workplaces

Lessons and Insights from Quess Gender Transformation Journey

Insights from the Report

Guruprasad Srinivasan, CEO and ED at Quess Corp. Limited and **MP Karthick**, Assistant Vice President at The Udaiti Foundation, presented insights from the report, **'From Rhetoric to Action: Creating Gender-Inclusive Workplaces'**, co-authored by The Udaiti Foundation and the Quess Corp. Limited, which underscores the barriers women face entering the formal workforce at blue and grey-collar levels and offers actionable solutions to foster women's representation.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Quess aims to increase 17% women's associate-level representation through targeted sourcing strategies and a gender-inclusive hiring process.
2. Tackling early attrition challenges and dropout rates for associates within the first 90 days of joining can retain them for an additional 9-10 months.
3. Focused initiatives to ensure workplace safety and secure living for women in the rapidly growing manufacturing sector could catalyze progress towards broader gender parity goals.
4. Providing female employees with access to benefits like provident funds, employee state insurance coverage (ESIC), and performance-based incentives can significantly improve their retention rates.
5. Women cite family responsibilities and health issues as key reasons for leaving jobs, in addition to seeking better career opportunities across genders.
6. Sampoorana Rozgar Yojana by Quess is an initiative to provide accommodation facilities to female associates for a safe and secure living in new work locations.

Unfiltered Women's Voices: Stories from the Event

Ayesha Sami, HR Executive-Operations, Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd.

"Earning my own income and achieving financial independence fills me with an incredible sense of victory. The pride I feel when I pay for something as simple as my meal is unmatched. This job has given me a sense of identity and empowerment that I treasure deeply. Moving from a small startup to Aditya Birla was a complete transformation, offering better benefits and a supportive environment. Here, I feel a significant sense of freedom and safety, and I appreciate that they allow everyone to be themselves. It's a truly empowering experience for women."



Priya N, Assembly Operator, Wistron Infocomm Manufacturing (India) Private Limited

"When families in my village see me working, they are inspired by it. My father is a farmer, and these families often reach out to him and me to learn about where I work and to know more about Qess. This job has made me feel like a role model in my community, showing that it's possible to achieve financial independence and personal growth. I am deeply thankful to Qess for providing me with this opportunity and for the safety and support I have experienced since joining."



Harshita, HR Executive, UltraTech Cement

"Qess has transformed me into a more confident person. As an introvert, I never imagined I would be training around 1,000 to 2,000 associates at Qess, something I am incredibly proud of. The rigorous training and support from Qess have been instrumental in building my confidence and allowing me to step out of my comfort zone"



Interdisciplinary Dialogues: A Cross-Pollination of Knowledge and Experience

Voices of Experts: Closed Door Roundtable

The closed-door roundtable brought together sector experts as speakers to discuss the challenges women face in blue and gray-collar workforces. Speakers candidly shared personal motivations for dedicating their efforts to the pivotal domain of gender. Key points covered recruitment barriers, hiring biases, retention struggles, and sector-specific initiatives for inclusivity. Proven strategies were exchanged, along with forward-looking solutions for building equitable workforces.

Moderated by



Vijay Shivaram
CEO, Quess IT Staffing-
Recruitment & Search



Atul Mohann
Director, Corporate,
APAC, CGI



Megha Jain
Senior Advsiors,
BMGF



Kartik SM
Global Head of Talent
Acquisition, Biocon Biologics



Guruprasad Srinivasan
ED & CEO, Quess Corp
Limited



Kartik Varma
Core Team Member and
Director, Piramal
Foundation



Rajesh G
Corporate HR, EHS & CSR
– Industrial Automation,
Yaskawa India



Lohit Bhatia
President, Workforce
Management,
Quess Corp.



Sayantan Nandy
HR Director,
Delhivery



SV Nathan
Former Chief Talent
Officer,
Deloitte India



Vasanthi Srinivasan
Professor, Organisational
Behavior and Human
Resource Management,
IIMB



Vikram Jain
Managing Director,
FSG Advisory Services Pvt.
Ltd.



MP Karthick,
AVP- Data and Applied
Research, The Udaiti
Foundation



Neha Sinha
Director, HR,
CGI



Anitha Jayapal
HR Head, L&T Edutech

Challenges for Women in the Workforce as shared by Speakers

1. Labour Market Barriers

Disparity between marriage market rewards and labor market rewards for women in India: Societal and familial expectations often prioritize marriage over career development for women, creating a significant obstacle to increasing female workforce participation.

"Unfortunately for India, marriage market rewards are far better than labor market rewards. It's something for all of us to think of as an exponential reward for the same BSc graduate in the marriage market compared to the BSc in any of our companies."

2. Organisational and Structural Issues

Traditional organizational structures impeding women's career progression: The prevalent organisational structures pose a challenge for women where geographical mobility is required. One solution suggested was to decentralize tech teams and allow them to work from plant locations, which helped women balance their family responsibilities and career growth.

"My husband is working in a plant in a Tier 2 city. Now you have this tech job in a central corporate in a Tier 1 city. What do I do? I can't break my marriage."

3. Social and Cultural Factors

Deep-rooted social and cultural norms that affect women's participation in the workforce: It underscores the need for a gradual but consistent effort to shift societal norms and values to support gender equality in the workplace.

"India has a peculiar problem. Our persistent issue for the next 40 years is going to be gender. Gendering is the way roles are constructed with the male and female in the country."

4. 4 M's

4 M's catering to the day-to-day challenges face by women in any role: It emphasizes that solutions and recommendations made in respect to women in workforce should cover the 4M's, which is the bare minimum requirement.

"4 M's that challenge women at work are: Marriage, Maternity, Motherhood, and Medical Care"





Key Insights from Roundtable Discussion

Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges



Pay Disparity and Role Identification

Evidence

1. Women performing physically demanding tasks like carrying bricks and mortar are paid less compared to men in the same roles. This was highlighted with an example where male workers were paid 600 rupees while female workers were paid 450 rupees.
2. Despite demonstrating proficiency in strenuous tasks, women often encounter barriers when it comes to exploring other job opportunities where their skills could be equally valuable. This limits their career advancement and perpetuates the cycle of underrepresentation in higher-paying roles



Solution

1. **Equal Pay Initiatives:** Introducing comprehensive policies that guarantee fair and equal compensation for all employees, irrespective of gender, who are engaged in identical job roles. These initiatives aim to eliminate wage disparities observed between male and female workers performing similar tasks within the construction sector, thereby fostering a more equitable work environment
2. **Role Identification and Suitability:** Starting by identifying roles that are more suitable for women and gradually increasing their presence in the workforce. This method helped place women in roles where they could succeed more easily and demonstrated their capability.



"In our sector, a male worker gets 600 rupees a day while a female worker, who might be doing the same heavy lifting of bricks and mortar, only gets 450 rupees. This disparity is not justified by the nature of the work performed by women. We decided to introduce a policy where all workers, regardless of gender, are paid the same wage for the same job."



Safety Concerns and Family Apprehensions

Evidence

1. Safety concerns remain a significant barrier for women in the workplace, as evidenced by families waiting at work sites due to apprehensions about their loved ones' well-being. This lack of trust underscores the urgent need for comprehensive safety measures to protect female workers and reassure their families
2. Industry experts emphasize that perceptions of safety are pivotal in building trust among families and encouraging greater female participation in labor-intensive industries.

Solution

1. **Safety Assurance Initiatives:** To address safety concerns effectively, initiatives should prioritize the implementation of robust safety measures tailored to the needs of female workers. This includes regular safety audits, improved security protocols, and transparent communication about safety practices. By demonstrating a commitment to creating a safe work environment, companies can alleviate fears and foster a supportive atmosphere for women employees.
2. **Building trust** with families requires ongoing efforts to communicate safety initiatives effectively. Proactive engagement with families, such as open dialogue sessions and regular updates on safety protocols, can significantly enhance trust and alleviate concerns about workplace safety

"Many families are worried about the safety of women at work. In some cases, family members wait outside the workplace until the women finish their shift. This indicates a profound lack of trust in the workplace environment. To build trust, we must ensure that workplaces are safe and perceived as such. We need to work on changing the narrative around safety at work."



Stereotyping and Capability Misconceptions

Evidence

1. Stereotypical beliefs about women's capabilities often hinder their employment prospects in physically demanding jobs. Hiring managers frequently underestimate women's ability to handle strenuous tasks, perpetuating biases that limit their career opportunities.
2. Despite evidence showing women's competence in roles traditionally dominated by men, misconceptions persist regarding their suitability for certain jobs. This highlights a critical need for cultural shifts within workplaces to challenge these ingrained biases.

Solution

1. **Changing Workplace Culture:** Efforts to change the culture on the shop floor to challenge existing mindsets. This includes ensuring management supports these changes and setting specific targets for female hires.
2. **Apprenticeship Programs:** Implementing all-women apprenticeship programs training women for six months and then convert them into full-time employees. These programs help demonstrate women's capabilities through hands-on experience and reduce resistance from hiring managers.
3. **Training and Capability Building:** Providing training and capability-building programs to women to equip them with the necessary skills for various roles. This helps in overcoming misconceptions about their abilities and demonstrates that women can excel in physically demanding jobs if given the opportunity.

"There is a pervasive belief among hiring managers that women cannot handle physically demanding jobs. This stereotype limits the opportunities available to women. We launched an all-women apprenticeship program where women receive six months of training before becoming full-time employees. This program has been highly successful in demonstrating the capability of women."



Capturing Conversations: Caricatures from the Round Table



This caricature captures key insights from the roundtable discussion on creating gender-inclusive workplaces. It highlights themes like leadership commitment, recruitment and retention strategies, unconscious bias, and gender awareness. The image also addresses challenges such as family responsibilities and social stigmas, suggesting solutions like automation, tailored training, and safety measures to improve productivity and retention.



Annexure

(List of Attendees and Speakers for Roundtable Discussion)

Attendees and Speakers List

S. No.	Name	Designation, Organisation
1	Akib KR	Associate, Qess Corp
2	Amitabh Tripathy	Senior Vice President, Aditya Birla Group
3	Anand	President, Qess Corp
4	Ananya	PR Agent, Adfactors
5	Anitha Jayapal	Head HR, L&T Edu Tech
6	Anunay Sahay	General Manager, Workforce Management , Qess Corp
7	Anupama	Manager, ACT
8	Atul Mohan	Director, Corporate, CGI
9	Ayesha	Associate, Qess Corp
10	Bhavadharani	HR Executive, Yaskwawa India
11	Debangana Sen	Asisstant Manager, Content Design, Qess Corp
12	Deborah	Qualitative Researcher, Good Business Lab
13	Deepa Raj	Account Manager, AvianWe
14	Devidas	HRBP, ACIEEE
15	Gowri	Data Associate, Good Business Lab
16	Guruprasad Srinivasan	CEO and ED, Qess Corp
17	Harshitha	HR Executive, Qess Corp
18	K. Mukund	Chief Reporter, EENADU
19	Kapil Joshi	Deputy Chief Executive Officer, IT, Qess Corp
20	Karthik SM	Global Head of Talent Acquisition, Biocon Biologics
21	Kartik Varma	Core Team Member and Director, Piramal Foundation
22	Kathryn Moore	Social Impact Manager, Lodha
23	Keerti	HR Executive, Yaskwawa India
24	Lakshmi	General Manager, HR, Qess Corp
25	Lohit Bhatia	President, Workforce Management, Qess Corp
26	Megha Jain	Senior Advisor, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
27	MP Karthick	Asisstant Vice President- Applied Data Analytics, The Udaiti Foundation
28	Neha Sinha	Director- HR, CGI
29	Poornima	Program Manager, GAME
30	Prasad	People Management, ANZ
31	Priya	Assembly Operator, Qess Corp- Vistron Facility
32	Raaga	Data Associate, Good Business Lab
33	Rajesh G.	Corporate HR and GA, Yaskawa India
34	Sayantan Nandy	HR Director , Delhivery
35	Sunitha Karthikeyan	Vice President, HR, Qess Corp
36	SV Nathan	Former Chief Talent Officer, Deloitte India
37	Vanya Kaushik	Implementation Lead, GAME
38	Vasanthi Srinivasan	Professor, Organisational Behvaieur and Human Resource Management, IIMB
39	Vikram Jain	Managing Director, FSG Advisory Services Pvt. Ltd.

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