TODAY'S MANAGER

Issue 4 \\ 2021

Is India the Next Gold Mine?

Trade Tech Talk \\ **Seizing Business Opportunities Beyond Asia**

Rapid Growth Zone \\ **Organisational Development? Forget all You Know!**

Choosing Change Mastery \\ **Can We Have Two Golds?**

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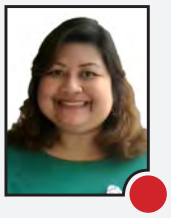
FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



Dear Readers,

Is India the next gold mine? There have been discussions surrounding this topic for a while now however, though India started off as a slow burn and during the pandemic, that flame has been fanned and they are stepping up even more than before.

We all know that there are many multinational companies who transferred their production hubs over to China, but there were many who set up shop in terms of customer service call centres and the like in India. When the pandemic hit, many re-routed their production hubs over to India, helping the already thriving economy. An article published by the BBC in March 2020 and the *PWC's The World in 2050 Report* projects that India's enroute to be a close second, following China as a Top 10 Economy in 2050. This is strengthened by India's booming high-tech sector and its constant growth in terms of rapid digitalisation.

For our cover story, I speak with Ms Deepshikha Kumar, Founder and Managing Partner of Speak-In and discuss her views about whether India is the next gold mine, as well as get her insights on leadership and management.

As always, we have various articles that look at leadership, empowerment, and companies that thrive on food sustainability methods.

I would like to thank our various contributors who have contributed to *Today's Manager* throughout the years. We will be going on a hiatus as we relook at revamping our approach to thought-leadership and how to align it to SIM's new vision and mission.

While we determine what to do next, I would like to thank you dear readers for your support since 1995. Watch this space as we will be back!

Till then, do take care, stay resilient, and healthy always.

Merry Christmas in advance and here's to a fabulous 2022!

Excelsior!
Dr Sadie-Jane Nunis
Editor

The Heart of Diversity—
Encouraging Empathy and Openness at the Workplace

If companies seek to achieve a truly gender, ethnic, and culturally diverse workforce, they need to first look at diversity using a structural lens.

by Melanie Cook

Truth is, when it comes to running a business, profits define success.

And when it comes to discussing diversity in the boardroom, the buzzword is usually framed as a long-term revenue enhancer or a safeguard against hefty discrimination lawsuits. The cause is not nearly as salient as the (financial) effects or risks of the lack of diversity in such discussions.

Yet, a clear understanding of what causes a problem is often crucial in finding a solution—both in science and the social sciences. If companies seek to achieve a truly gender, ethnic, and culturally diverse workforce, they need to first look at diversity using a structural lens.

This means unpacking and understanding the various inequalities built into the fabric of different societies, and viewing the lack of representation of certain groups as a fundamentally structural issue.

Companies that fail to appreciate—and help their employees appreciate—this might see various pitfalls in their diversity approaches. Firstly, if the focus of the diversity programmes is to avoid lawsuits, boycotts, or getting "cancelled," then they are prone to using negative messaging in their diversity training programmes.

For example, emphasising the legal costs of discrimination lawsuits might be interpreted as implied threats by employees ("if you discriminate, we all get in trouble"). When it comes to winning over true converts, the carrot has proven more effective than the stick.

Secondly, people often respond to compulsory courses with ambivalence, and doing so without helping employees understand the true value of such efforts might evoke even more anger. Studies have shown that reluctant participants actually report animosity towards other

groups after compulsory courses, whereas voluntary training evokes the opposite response and thus, outcome.

This is a far cry from what Lawrence Wong when he was the then Minister of Education, wanted for Singapore.

He said: "Learning for good transcends every job, whatever job you're doing—have that mindset of wanting to be a better person, wanting to do better in everything that you do."

Indeed, employees need to be given the time and space to first learn and understand the processes that cause the lack of representation of certain groups at workplaces before they are offered a choice to attend diversity training.

This may reduce the risk of compulsory diversity programmes being viewed as forced charity—or arbitrary at best, unfairly or unnecessarily competing for the already limited time, energy, and attention of employees. Employees need persuading that having empathy with and understanding the need for diversity is part of their personal growth and development, and not just a box ticking or quota achieving exercise.

Such pre-programme conversations need to first help employees appreciate and accept a lack of diversity as a structural issue that requires systemic ideological change, instead of viewing the issue as a problem with the characteristics of certain individuals or groups. Without rethinking cultural norms at an organisational or societal level, diversity initiatives will always risk erring on the side of tokenism.

According to the World Economic Forum in their *Global Gender Gap Report 2020,* Singapore is improving in our gender equality efforts, but we still lag behind countries in the region like the Philippines and Laos.

The importance of changing a cultural value system was recently emphasised in Singapore, where a White Paper titled *Conversations on Women Development* was recently issued to help the country work towards greater gender equality.

The initiative highlights how a lack of diversity has not only to do with structural disadvantages that certain groups face, but also to do with our value system as a society and how we value certain characteristics, skills, and ultimately professions, more than others.

For example, jobs in the spheres of child-rearing, homemaking, teaching, and nursing are usually paid less and disproportionately undertaken by women and/or female migrant workers for a lesser wage.

In this aspect, true gender diversity can only be achieved through not only rethinking gender roles, but how we fundamentally value such labour. For as long as such jobs are thought of as lower-skilled and hence valued less, they will only be undertaken by (or relegated to) groups that lack other options.

A lack of diversity at the workplace is a complex issue that involves the interconnecting (and sometimes compounding) effects of gender, ethnicity, and class. While companies do not have to put their employees through a crash course in sociology, a thorough understanding of the issue by directors and managers will help inform the rest of any diversity strategy.

In fact, a study by *The Harvard Business Review* found that engaging managers and getting them involved in the problem-solving process boosts the efficacy of diversity programmes. Experiments have shown that people tend to alleviate cognitive dissonance by changing either beliefs or behaviours that are at odds of each other. For example, if someone learns why discriminating is wrong, they will either stop discriminating or rationalise a justification for doing so.

In the same vein, when employees are given the time and space to fully understand the who, what, why, and how of a problem, they are more likely to have a change of heart, mind, and action.

Another effective way to do so is through mentoring. By taking protégés of diverse genders, ethnicities, and backgrounds under their wings, mentors give minorities a chance to prove their mettle, and give themselves a chance to unlearn their own biases.

Indeed, diversity is both cause and effect of a deep understanding and appreciation of the lived experiences of others.

Melanie Cook is a futurist who considers herself an educator, systems thinker, and a tech humanitas. She has deep debates about the operational impact of new technologies at the workplace, and true to her DNA, focusses on the organisations of tomorrow and what we should be doing about it today.