

Gender Sensitivity and Role of Business Education

Tarun Tejpal is the latest to join the hall of fame (?) which includes Justice A K Ganguly, Phaneesh Murthy, David Davidar and Gopal Kanda and face accusations of sexual harassment. Tejpal has been booked for rape (IPC Section 376), rape by a person in a position of control or dominance (IPC Section 376(2) (k), and outraging the modesty of a woman (IPC Section 354).

A recent survey undertaken, by International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) states, around two in five men in India – nearly 40.7% held rigid and discriminatory gender views. This segment believes women to be inferior. However, an individual of any gender can sexually harass and be sexually harassed by an individual of any gender (ie male to female, female to male, male to male, female to female). Another workplace sexual harassment survey by the Centre for Transforming India, a non-profit organization concludes awareness levels of sexual harassment among female employees is poor and a majority of them continue with their ordeal for fear of professional victimization. Often, but not always, there is a power differential between the individual engaging in sexual harassment (harasser) and the individual being harassed. Often the harasser holds some level of authority (real or perceived) over the individual being harassed. Organizations lose women employees disproportionately because definitions of what is right and good in the workplace, at least in the Indian contexts are almost always based on a masculine model.

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and responsibilities of women and men in a given culture or location. These roles are influenced by perceptions and expectations arising from cultural, political, environmental, economic, social and religious factors as well as customs, law, class, ethnicity and individual and institutional bias. Gender sensitivity encompasses the ability to acknowledge and highlight existing gender differences, issues and inequalities and incorporate these into strategic actions. Men and women are not created equal. They are different, and the corporate world is now forced to embrace this reality, rather than continue to operate on the fallacy that men and women should be treated the same. A gender sensitive workplace creates the right condition for optimal utilization of human potential. Managers, both men and women, must stay constantly attuned to these gender differences if they are to effectively manage across the gender divide, for e.g.; respecting personal spaces, not crossing the line while giving a compliment, being aware and conscious of one's language and sense of humor etc. Globally winning companies are the ones who

acknowledge the unique gender differences, embrace the idiosyncrasies, and create harmony in their workforce. In fact, we as a society need to learn how to create this balance

A study conducted Caliper, a Princeton-based management consulting firm concludes, 'Women leaders are more assertive, possess stronger interpersonal skills (empathy, flexibility and sociability), are persuasive, have a stronger need to get things done and are more willing to take risks than male leaders. An article in Harvard Business Review by Zenger and Folkman states, "...two of the traits where women out-scored men to the highest degree – taking initiative and driving for results – have long been thought of as particularly male strengths". Conclusions; ignoring the well-being of women in the workforce can be a bad business decision for India Inc. , discontented women employees affect the balance sheet. Sexual harassment and gender discrimination in the workplace has serious, detrimental effects on both the employees who experience it and the organizations in which it takes place. It is disruptive, stressful to all involved, and often requires expensive legal and administrative solutions. Gender sensitivity and equal opportunities is not a new fad but a necessity for organizations aspiring sustainable growth.

Business schools aim to contribute business leaders to society. Business studies programmes are intended to prepare students to apply their education to real world challenges, experiences and opportunities. Research findings suggest gender attitudes and behaviors are learned and can be changed. Self-assessment inventories, psychometric tests help students explore their personal values, perceptions and biases towards the opposite gender. Case studies, videos, live organizational examples, group discussions, role plays, workshops can help enhance gender sensitivity as well as highlight the implications of behaviors that are not acceptable in organizations. Our students should be taught to focus their energy, resources and raise awareness towards gender competence, work in synergy, and respect each other to enhance the quality of their personal and professional lives. The answer lies in acknowledging, understanding, respecting, and encouraging both men and women based on the proclivities of their genders. The business schools should not only try to harness the concept of gender sensitivity by conducting specific workshops; the concept of gender should be brought out by integrating it with the curriculum of different subjects. One of the big challenges before the business schools today is how to create gender sensitive managers for the corporate.

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