

'Each Job is Expanding Due to Technology Augmentation'

ET Q&A

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Technology is impacting all sectors and Unilever, a consumer goods company, is no exception. The company intends to stick to the current global headcount for the next few years owing to greater adoption of technology, says global chief human resources officer **Leena Nair**. In an interview with **Prachi Verma Dadhwaj**, Nair speaks about technology impact and diversity initiatives at the company. Edited excerpts:

Globally there are 1,55,000 employees at Unilever. What would be the number of employees by 2020?

The number would be the same for next year too. Each job is expanding due to technology augmentation. But going forth, the employee numbers would remain more or less the same. Almost every year, we hire about 10,000-15,000 people based on attrition rate. This year too we would have similar hiring numbers across the world. Of course, there are mergers and acquisitions that may increase the numbers. We also hire about 800 people from top universities and MBA schools for the Unilever Future Leaders League (they may be taken in as interns or management trainees in their home countries) every year.

How has Unilever performed on gender diversity?

We had a goal to achieve 50% of organisation gender balance by 2020. Today, globally, we have 49% women at manager level moving up from 38% in 2010. At senior level or Unilever leadership executive table, we are four women out of 12. In our external board, we are 50% women. So, we have made some stunning progress on this front. We are very pleased with the progress that India has made. HUL India has over 40% women across the managerial rank, up from 26% in 2012.

APPRENTICE PROGRAMME



We are beginning to challenge university education by bringing people through apprenticeship programme

EMPLOYEE STRENGTH



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men so that they understand the importance of diversity at workplace and last, intervention by the organisation through initiatives and policies like sabbatical, reverse mentoring, agile working, leadership programmes.

What are the other types of diversity that the company is working on?

Parts of the organisation are no way close to 50% women, like in supply chain, engineering within supply chain and customer development. We call these the hotspots, where we need to make more progress. We are looking at functions and geographies that are hotspots where we need to work.

Within diversity, we focus a lot on gender as 80% of our shoppers are women. But for us, diversity also means disabled people. By 2025, we are looking at 5% of disabled people. At the moment, we would be 1%.

We are doing a lot of work around race and ethnicity. We also have successful apprentice programme in 10 countries, where bulk of our recruitment comes from apprenticeship. We are beginning to challenge university education by bringing people through apprenticeship programme where we train people fresh out of schools. These are early experiments that are needed in the world which is changing so fast.

What have been the interventions in improving gender diversity?

This kind of target needs serious management commitment and intervention. The organisation must drive change at all three levels. First, we support women by creating flexible environment, especially for mothers. Second, we work closely with