

**Charu**

Hello, and welcome to Mrigashira Raahil, Radha and Rashmi. Allow me to start by thanking you, Raahil, for finally bringing in the women leading change awards to India. Tell us more, who should enter and why.

**Raahil**

Right, you mentioned finally, it's something that we believe too finally, I think we are a few years late to introduce these awards. We've been talking about this internally as a market since 2018. Now, and it all stemmed from the fact that we were reading reports that while there were plenty of women in advertising, media and marketing, when it came to the women progressing and taking them leadership positions, the number fell drastically. And then I think a couple of years later, I remember seeing something in 2020, which stated that the percentage of women in leadership, leadership positions across advertising and marketing was increasing, which is good news. But then came COVID. And with the COVID pandemic, obviously a lot of companies were under pressure. They were reducing work staff not giving. They were not giving the salary hikes that people deserve. And again, who were impacted the most were women. And this is LinkedIn report, which suggests that 85% of women in India missed out on a race completely during 2020 and 2021. And this is something that I mean, while a lot of us faced pressure, but it was obviously impacting women more. We believe this needs to be changed and that can only be changed and we celebrate women. And we that's when we thought we have to launch women leading change right away. This is one way of recognizing women and celebrating the men in leadership position. And I think once we do that, and people see more women in the limelight, I think that's what's going to help women in this space.

**Charu**

You Know it's very interesting that you say that because it is time that we move beyond just lip service and Rashmi let me come to you and ask you How is your organization encouraging aspiring women leaders, grooming them for leadership roles?

**Rashmi**

So at Dentsu, we have a very unique proposition where we want to create a fair and equal society. That's the mission with which our social impact strategy is defined as well. Now, in order to create a fair and equal society, it means that we need to also ensure that we are creating equitable opportunities for people. And I think that is a reason why we are encouraging more women to apply for roles in advertising for to apply for roles in technology, as well, and at the same time aspire to grow into leadership positions. Now, if you look at some of the top chief marketing officers across the globe, there is an equal distribution of men and women in these roles. But at the same time, when we try to look at decision making roles, that's where we see a lot of women falling off. So at Dentsu, so we have a number of programs that we run, and we run it across the globe, you know, basically, in order to provide women opportunities to interact, network and learn from other, colleagues across the globe, and at the same time, give them opportunity to have mobility in their careers as well. So I think that's where we are in the journey. I don't think we've reached there yet. But I feel that it's a journey, and then we are moving along.

**Charu**

Yes, absolutely. I'm certainly looking forward to the women leading change awards and know more about the success stories of women with diverse backgrounds. It's very interesting, what you've talked about Rashmi, what your organization is doing, would you be encouraging women to participate in some of these awards? Or do you see reticence?

**Rashmi**

I wouldn't say reticence, I think that it is an opportunity for women to apply for these awards. It's an opportunity for them to have their stories heard. And I'm a very strong believer in the power of stories. And not every story has just one single identity, there will be multiple layers to it, it could be stories, which have a lot of struggle in it. It could be stories which have allyship in it, it will have stories where they have seen sponsorship, you know, helping them grow, at the same time how they've lent a hand in making sure that even men within their teams are growing. So I think these stories need to come out because it'll encourage other women, other men as well to participate in this program. And I feel it. It kind of moves beyond the binary at a point of time, right? And so I feel that the narrative has to start and I would encourage folks to apply.

**Charu**

Thank you so much. Rashmi, tell us more about the categories. Raahil, any tips for women who are thinking of applying, who should be applying some more details there?

**Raahil**

See, we have I think more than 20 categories. So it's pretty much anyone who's in the advertising marketing PR. In the digital workspace, I think this there's enough opportunity to everyone for everyone to apply into them. And like we've mentioned before, as well, it's it's just a combination of things that Rashmi said that people should be putting out the stories out there. That's what we want. We want women to come and put their stories up there. I think what we are anticipating is more than 100 entries, which is I think a great start for the awards we've made. We weren't expecting those many. So we believe there, there are innocent more women out there in the industry want to put their story forward. And that's what we want to encourage. We want everyone to just participate in the various categories. We have some we have one for under 30. We have the CEO of the Year, we have the entrepreneur of the year. So plenty of categories for everyone. And that's what we want to do even within the women's race. We have diversity out here. And we want to just celebrate women across industries in the categories that we cover.

**Charu**

That's good to know because then there's something for everybody to look at Radha I am going to ask you you know, as you know somebody which rep who represents wiki public relations and Digital Marketing Council and is working on focus initiatives to encourage talented and capable women stay on track in their careers. what Raahil had mentioned earlier that about her LinkedIn study, where he found that leadership roles when it came to leadership roles in the communication industry, you didn't find as many women how is Wicci trying to support that to ensure that more and more women, take on the leadership roles.

**Radha**

So one of the things typically that Charu you and I, as part of Wicci members have seen is that somewhere along the line when people have about six years seven years experience, or even further matter later, between 6 to 12,13, either people tend to put their career on a backseat, or sometimes just, you know, move out or move away, because personal priorities, managing personal priorities and managing career sometimes becomes a bit of a problem. So I think from Wicci perspective, we are trying to address it at multiple levels. At one level, every year through the survey, we are trying to understand, where the needle has moved for the better, and where the needle still needs to move for the better. And consequently, what are some of the three key areas where the industry needs to be sensitized, and industry needs to know, I think the survey, the annual survey that we have planned is, is a good one in that direction. The second thing that we do is the mentorship program, where specifically we have chosen the experience group that I was talking about, and trying to support them through various aspects that requires for them to be leaders, or gives them the confidence to be leaders and, and just hang in there and not give up immaterial of what the challenges are. The second aspect of it. And the third aspect of it is sometimes you know, we just need somebody like, like a professional shoulder, if I may call it to where we just talk about what our industries are, what some of the very, very basic or operational challenges that we go through and how to handle that better, is just that, you know, an opportunity to vent out and an opportunity where we can seek a professional counselling or help. And that's where he or her initiative comes in, where we are basically supporting a lot of women, when their career is in doubt, or when some of the work related issues bother them, they are just in a position to talk to us. So I think we tried to address it at multiple levels. And, you know, it's always better to be consistent, it is always better to be persistent. So that's what Wicci is intending to do.

**Charu**

Tell us more about mentoring, what role can mentoring play to develop leadership skills and bridge the quality gap.

**Radha**

So you know, we are addressing it at two levels. One is the basic skill that is required for somebody to be able to, you know, climb up the ladder, doesn't matter whether eventually leads to as you or not like for example, you know, many people sort of say that, you know, the moment you become a CEO, you you become like a p&I head and I don't understand finance, I don't understand how sector like for example, if I'm pitching for an oil and gas industry, I don't understand the basic industry dynamics, from a finance point of view, etc, etc. So some of these are basically adding on to your present skills that is required for your job, and somehow purely from a soft skill point of view, how to build better, you know, networking skills, for example, all of us know, and all of us, I think, acknowledged that men are very good at networking and, and when it comes to women, we tend to somewhere, you know, rationalizing, I don't have time for this, I can't be doing all this, I need to manage many things on the personal front, etc, etc. And we don't realize the importance of networking. Right? And, and networking doesn't mean that we need to do all the things or the same things that men do, right? I mean, we can do networking in our own way and still, you know, still be on top. So on top of it. So some of these skills, you know, how do you build in networking as part of your work life or as part of your daily life? How do you how do you handle interpersonal relationships? How do you handle conflict? You know, these are some of the things which are on the softer side. Eventually, probably all of us have learned it and all of us have

learned how to do it, but that is taken us time, and that is taken us intense amount of experiences. Right. So these are some of the things that we're trying to address through mentoring.

### **Charu**

Right. Rashmi, let me ask you, what kind of programs do you have when it comes to mentoring at Dentsu International?

### **Rashmi**

Yeah, thank you for that question. I think the way we are looking at mentoring is in multiple areas. Now, what Radha mentioned was one of the traditional ways in which we've looked at mentoring in terms of creating opportunities for someone to look up To or someone to reach out learn from mentors skills, as well. I believe that we are also in a journey towards allyship over here where a mentor also gets an opportunity to learn from the skills that the mentee is bringing to the table. In our organization, there are multiple opportunities for this to happen. While we don't have a formal mentoring program within the organization, the aim is to encourage managers to encourage leaders to provide that opportunity to provide that allyship where they are seen as open and welcoming for mentees to approach them and formalize the relationship where they can ask questions, understand how a mentor is influencing or negotiating within the organization. What are some of the skills that they bring to the table that the mentees can aspire to? This is some of the informal ways in this in which this is happening. In terms of formal we have leadership development programs that have been established within the organization. And in this particular program, what happens is that there are opportunities where the participants hear from various role models and speakers across the organization. And these are both men and women leaders who have done some really amazing work in the space of advertising and marketing. And it's an opportunity for the participants to actually expand their network, and learn from these folks as well. And what Radha brought up was a very beautiful concept, right? In terms of, you know, ensuring that people are made comfortable to even speak about some of the challenges that they face, both interpersonal, as well as the professional space. From my experience working in the DEI sector, I see many times really successful women struggling with some of those concepts where, you know, they want to break into a conversation, but because of their inherent nature, they may be struggling to do that. And that's when they this whole network, or group of people come together and help them to grow forward.

### **Charu**

Thank you. organizations like Dentsu, and people like you are really working towards ensuring that we pave the way, you know, bigger way and a better way for future leaders, future women leaders. Coming back to you Raahil, what does diversity in advertising look like today? and being an authority, the voice of the media, marketing and advertising community in the country? How could campaign India help mold the narrative.

### **Raahil**

So this is something we've been looking to do for a while now. And I don't know if y'all have followed this thing. I think we started this back in 2013, or 14, which was, we would put up a review of all the ads that we covered on on campaign India, and you'd have creative heads that were reviewing them. And he also had Dr. Sharda, who heads laadli, which is basically a group that works with works in the media

space to change the way people look at women in advertising. And we have something called a gender sensitivity score for each of these ads. So while the while the creative heads will be looking at it, from a creative point of view, Dr. Sharda will be giving you a gender sensitivity score for each of them. And what we are seeing is and this is based on a conversation, which I had with a creative head just a couple of weeks ago, there was this point which Dr. Sharda would bring up in almost every ad, which he reviewed, when it came to cars, it was shown that the man is driving and the woman is sitting next to the man. And obviously those terms are not rated as highly as the other ones. And she would bring that up in almost every ad campaign. I'm not naming the creative head out here. But he had a word with me just two weeks ago saying that he took note of this. And in the ad campaign, which is agency released, I think a couple of weeks ago, a little more than a couple weeks ago, they made sure that the woman was at the driver was was driving and was seated at the passenger seat and interchangeably adding the next thoughts of the man driving the woman sitting on the on the co-passenger seats. So things like this small things, but they're helping you to change the whole narrative of women. You don't want to see them on women drive. That's something that we've seen happening for years now. But it wasn't shown in advertising for some reason. So small changes like this were, I think a long way in changing perceptions. It's also that I think the IEA did a study then later, which also I think surveyed. They looked at all the ads that were published in India during I think 2019 and 2020, the there again, they saw that when it came to a film, which was showing households, the man was watching TV, the woman was in the kitchen. And that was, I think, for about 70 to 75% of the films. So that's also something which we need to change. I mean, during the lockdown, we saw they were the women who were cooking. And a lot of men do cook. It's just not portrayed in advertising yet so that that's something which probably the industry needs to look at. And maybe late like I've been reading that advertising is following pop culture of normally, they're not really had power. But I think that needs to change. Because we all are, like men are cooking women are driving. It's as simple as that it's an ad campaign in the show that instead of a woman and a man driving, I think it changes a lot.

### **Charu**

Right? Now over the years, we've seen it since advertising has created stereotypes. And yes, gradually, it's being changed that it's going to take some time. And little little steps like these can really add value. And together I mean, make a lot of difference. Rashmi last question, and I'm going to ask you the same question Radha, policymakers, businesses, civil society, everyone has been discussing talking about gender equity, but there has been little progress today, how can we cut the chase and take concrete actions to accelerate change?

### **Rashmi**

I think it is a conversation only in many spaces. And to be honest, I think only when action happens at a business level. Say for example, if you look at how my role in Dentsu is positioned, it's not it does not sit with an HR, it sits with the business. That means the company understands that diversity, equity and inclusion is a business imperative. Only when we make decisions, and we stand by them and say that these are business imperatives, I think only then will change happen. If you look at, you know, the journeys that we've had, I think, at least from two decades, it has become myopic in some nature. But I think if you remove that aspect of myopia from the whole conversation, I feel, at least for organization like ours, in the advertising and marketing field, our clients are expecting to see these changes in terms of either gender diversity or inclusion of folks from the LGBT plus community, or even at ensuring that

we feature disabled talent in either the work that we do, or even in our teams. So that means that the clients are expecting these, the clients can actually see the changes that we make, social media is much more visible these days. So whatever happens is coming out in the market, people are reacting to this. And I think this is one opportunity for us to, encourage this as organizations, because clients will ask us, and they will want to know whether they are being reflected, you know, in either the advertisements that we feature, or even in the teams that we put forth, whenever there was a campaign that was being brought about. And I really liked what Raahil said that, you know, we are a mirror on the society advertising. It's like a mirror on the society. It also has a very powerful ability to shape the society. So the way we position conversations, be it gender, be it LGBT plus, or disability or any other aspect of diversity that I'm missing out of. I think that's how the industry can play a very important role in leading the change within.

**Charu**

Thank you so much. Rashmi. Radha, your thoughts?

**Radha**

that's a very interesting point what Rashmi pointed out. And just to add to the Charu, what we're trying to bring in here is not change, per say, it's a transformation. So any transformation effort that one does, whether it is an organizational level, or at a societal level takes a lot of time, and it has to be consistently, you know, driven. And that apart, I think the good thing is that there are, some visible changes that we can see. It is not as bad as what it was maybe 10 years ago, and awards like these are only going to further enhance or further the journey that we're on to. The other point that I want to say is that at some point in Time, you know, we should probably also have awards like, you know, those among among men who have been encouraging women leaders, those who have been, you know, supporting women in through different walks of life to succeed, etc. Because I think that's also in some way recognizing we have to build the ecosystem today. As much as the effort one one puts into sort of encouraging women to come out, we should also have probably programs to tell men how to handle women leader how to handle the complexity they come with, because they are even today, by and large, trying to manage both spectrums at with equal attention, right. So these are some things that probably still needs to be done. And I'm hoping that at some point in time, such awards also get introduced as part of the overall recognition of men and women's achievement.

**Charu**

Oh, absolutely. And in the future, there will be no women leaders, but only leaders is the change I wish for. And thank you so much for joining us on Mrigashira.

**Radha**

Thank you Charu.

**Raahil**

So that's what we aspire to do. I mean, women leading change, awards will probably only be running till women need to get the recognition at the end of the day, we want women and men to both be dominating their workspace. And I think once women get the sheer recognition that they deserve, we

probably have to do without the awards and we'd be more than happy to probably cancel them within the future.

**Rashmi**

Well said Charu. I think in future. Awards should become more gender agnostic so that anyone who has really achieved something really good and has a story to tell should be positioned and should be a call for this.

**Charu**

Thank you so much for joining us on Mrigashira