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## BETTER LATE THAN NEVER, A CASE OF IBM

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### ABSTRACT

*“I fundamentally believe that as we continue to uphold the values of diversity, inclusion, and equity, we will make IBM a better and stronger company.”(Arvind Krishna,CEO, IBM). Dickens, the Chief D &I officer of IBM was going through the feedback from the employees as regards the D & I practices in IBM. One of the remarks caught her attention. “I don’t feel like I need to hide anything about my identity here and it’s really nice”, the transgender employee wrote. Dickens felt elated that people can be their authentic self in IBM. IBM had come a long way in its D &I initiatives and practices. All employees including transgenders feel comfortable to work in IBM.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Transgenders, Potential, Diversity, Identity, Collaborative, Diversity, Emphasized, Aligning.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

“I fundamentally believe that as we continue to uphold the values of diversity, inclusion, and equity, we will make IBM a better and stronger company.”(Arvind Krishna,CEO, IBM).

Dickens, the Chief D &I officer of IBM was going through the feedback from the employees as regards the D & I practices in IBM. One of the remarks caught her attention. “I don’t feel like I need to hide anything about my identity here and it’s really nice”, the transgender employee wrote. Dickens felt elated that people can be their authentic self in IBM. IBM had come a long way in its D &I initiatives and diversity practices. All employees including transgenders feel comfortable to work in IBM. [1]

IBM’s approach to have been as important as its approach to innovation. IBM believed that both were essential for its sustenance. By embracing diversity IBM created grounds for better innovations. IBM’s philosophy emphasized diversity and inclusion to make it one of the most integrated global business corporates in the world (Exhibit 1). Their diversity policy and practices were not limited to hiring practices. It also made way for aligning them together in a collaborative work environment so that everyone realized their potential.

**Milestones in IBM’s D & I Practices:** IBM had initiated D & I policies and practices long before enactment of Civil Rights Act of 1964.

- 1911: IBM, included Black and female employees as early as 1911
- 1914: 76 years before ADA(Americans with disabilities Act) was enacted , IBM started recruiting disabled persons.
- 1935: T.J. Watson introduced equal pay for equal work for women.(Exhibit 4)
- 1944: The President of IBM appointed as advisor to UNCF (United Negro College Fund).

- 1953: A decade before the Civil Rights Act , equal opportunity policy devised by IBM
- 1984: ‘Added Non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation’to IBM’s equal opportunity policy.
- 1996: ‘Domestic Partner Benefits’comparable with married couples was added to policy.
- 2002: IBM’s equal opportunity policy included Gender, identity, orientation, and expression.
- 2006: LGBTQ+ voluntary self ID programmes launched
- 2012: P-TECH®—an innovative education model in diverse and underserved communities for building skills and competencies to make them career ready was started. Recently AI, Cloud computing, Cyber security and other emerging fields were included in the programmes.
- 2015: Innovative work life balance measures introduced.( breast milk delivery, increase in paid parental leave, webbased elder care, to name a few).
- 2016: LGBTQ+ OUTRole Model program launched
- 2017: Part of movement in Texas to do away with the discriminatory “bathroom bills” that limited transgender access to bathrooms in public schools and Government buildings.
- LGBTQ+ inclusive benefits offered in 50 countries. The 8-bar rainbow logo launched( Exhibit 3).
- 2018: Coalition for the American Dream and IBM cosigned representation for dreamers promoting diversity of thoughts.

## **2. AWARDS & RECOGNITION**

IBM’s continuous and consistent commitment to D & I practices had been recognized by a number of organizations. Some of them were listed below.

- Recognized within Top 10 companies for inclusion of PwD, LGBT, and promoting Global Diversityby Diversity Inc.
- Earned a 100% score in the Corporate Equality Index of HRC.
- ‘UK Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion’recognized IBM for Agile and flexible working and inclusive procurement.
- ‘Professional Women’s Magazine’; (PWM) recognized IBM in four (4)categories:
- Top Diversity Employers.
- Top Supplier Diversity Programsfor Women;

Top Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender (LGBT)-Friendly

Companies and Top Disability Friendly Companies.

- ‘Diversity Business.com’ selected IBM as one of “America ‘s Top 50
- Organizations for Multicultural Business Opportunities”
- Women’s Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC)’s consecutively regarded IBM for 10 years as one of the Top Corporations.
- IBM named ‘Best Companies for Multicultural Women’ by ‘Working Mother’
- ‘The Black Equal Opportunity Employment Journal’ (Black EOE Journal) lists IBM as one of their Top Disability-Friendly and Top LGBT-Friendly Companies.

Dickens went through the draft report on D & I in IBM and expressed satisfaction over the contents. IBM had successfully established itself as a forerunner for D & I initiatives for Women and LGBTQ+ communities along with people of colour, race and other diversities.

Out of all these recognizing the rights of transgenders had been really challenging. It had included gender identity protection in its Equal Opportunity Policy since 2002 and helped a number of employees transition on the job. It had received a perfect 100 score and the designation of being the best place to work for LGBTQ+ equality since 2003. [2]

### **3. BACKGROUND OF THE COMPANY:**

Initially set up as a computing and tabulating company, was named IBM in 1924 with focus on mainframe computers and related devices. Since then it had come a long way having presence in more than 170 countries in the world and recognized as a reputed IT company with an employee base of 345000 and revenue of \$73.6 B in the year 2020.

### **4. TRANSITION FRAMEWORK:**

The gender transition framework at IBM provides comprehensive guidance and support for an employees' journey in the transition process.

1. Consent of the transitioning employee taken before a team can assist to make the transition plan. Privacy of the employee is protected.
2. Personal story telling includes short videos of transitioned employees telling about their experiences.
3. IBM's LGBTQ+ learning system includes a module on 'Transitioning at workplace' easily accessible by keyword searches.
4. The module includes a pathway map for stakeholder engagement, sample transition timelines and communications plan for managers, colleagues and even clients. It also provides necessary flexibility for customization and personalization of the plan to suit the employee.
5. The workshop materials include practical example of micro aggressions and other expressions of bias and tools for managers and others to address these unwelcome biases.
6. Ready to deploy resources were available. Managers will be paired with experienced transgender, global diversity leader to facilitate delivery of the content.
7. Iterative process is followed by the project team for continuous improvement based on user feedback.
8. All documents and materials uploaded to intranet and open to continuous updating by the global D & I team.

By creating training and development resources IBM guides its leaders for successful outcome. The conversation around gender identity continues to grow and expand impacting policy makers and governance mechanisms in the process to take note. The legal landscape surrounding the rights of LGBTQ+ communities continue to evolve in America and around the world (Exhibit-2).

The mobile rang bringing Dickens back from her reverie reflecting on IBM's D & I journey. It was A K on the other side, asking her to switch on the Television. The Supreme Court of America had just delivered a landmark judgement. The LGBTQ+ communities were celebrating all around the Globe welcoming the judgment flashing the rainbow flag, "Today, by affirming that sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination are prohibited under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Supreme Court has confirmed the simple but profoundly American idea that every human being should be treated with respect and dignity"(Joe Biden, 2020). 15, June2020 marked the long-awaited federal recognition to LGBTQ+ rights by bringing them within the scope of 'Title

VII' of the 'Civil Rights Act 1964'. Now an employee cannot be fired on the ground of sexual orientation. "This decision sends an unambiguous message that equal protection under the law applies to all and that an employee's failure to adhere to an employer's gender stereotype is not a license to discriminate," (Kristen Browde, statement quoted from NYT, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020). A historic moment indeed thought Dickens. Her thought process moved to Lynn Conway, an IBM Alum, an established computer engineer known for her VLSI innovations. She moved on to academics and retired as a Professor from University of Michigan in 1999. In the early 2000's, Her website started publishing information supporting people facing gender transition issues giving them hope and encouragement for a better future. She expressed her purpose as to "illuminate and normalize the issues of gender identity and the processes of gender transition." She came out in the open through her website as a transgender and told the story of her life. [3]

Since then, they were all aware of her IBM roots. They were also aware of the fact that she was fired for undertaking gender transition process way back in 1968. Supreme Court's ruling came as a reminder for them about the injustice meted out to Lynn five decades ago. The reason given by the then authorities in the company was to save it from scandalous publicity. Conway was a talented computer engineer, working on an important project and on the verge of innovating a breakthrough solution in the field of enhancing speed of computers to a great extent. But these were not enough to retain her in the company. Conway has moved on coping graciously with the job loss, the loss of income and the resultant difficulty in getting the divorce, the restraining order by authorities to meet her children, the associated psychosocial trauma. She went ahead with the gender confirmation surgery and began to rebuild her career from scratch.

Talented as she was, she eventually landed up with a job at Memorex and then at Xerox. She developed computer chips that was used worldwide. Her VLSI design was a great innovative contribution to the field of computer science. She joined University of Michigan as an academician later and continued there. But all these years she never disclosed her gender identity publicly.

Because of her contribution to the field, people started searching for her early life and work. She understood that the time had come to be outed with her gender identity as people will eventually know about her history in IBM while finding out about her work. She created her website and rest was history. Dickens thought about Lynn again. She was feeling ashamed and guilty for the unfair treatment meted out to Conway in 1968. IBM failed to support an employee facing existential identity issues then. IBM (International Business Machines Corporation) has been doing amazing contributions to ensure gender equality over the years in the 170 countries it has been operating in and winning accolades for the good work done. But can all these condone the lapses made by it decades ago!! Conway's website had been a constant reminder of her history in IBM. The company had been aware but keeping silent over the matter all these years. Can she do something to course correct? If so, what? Can IBM rectify the damage done to Conway?

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