

Is Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) really that important?

We think so and here are just some of the reasons why: we believe our workplace should reflect today's emerging workforce; every culture needs diversity to thrive; and it supports fair treatment and opportunities for all our people.

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DEI is a vital part of our global culture at Novartis, with initiatives led at a country level by many of our Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). In India DEI is a huge focus. A DEI council supports four ERGs and is led by Nidesh, Head of Finance for Data, Digital & IT. While Saswati, Country HR Business Partner for Data, Digital & IT, co-leads the India DEI charter. We sat down with them to learn more.

What are your reasons for being a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion advocate?

Saswati: I feel incredibly privileged to be born to parents who have always encouraged women to have their own minds, stand on their own feet and have financial independence. But that wasn't necessarily the case for our mothers and grandmothers. There are still parts of society which have deep-rooted stereotypes about working women and underrepresented communities. So, for me, it's important to help facilitate these conversations and make an impact where I can. I think we have an incredible opportunity to shape this topic for the next decade and I am proud to have a significant role in this.

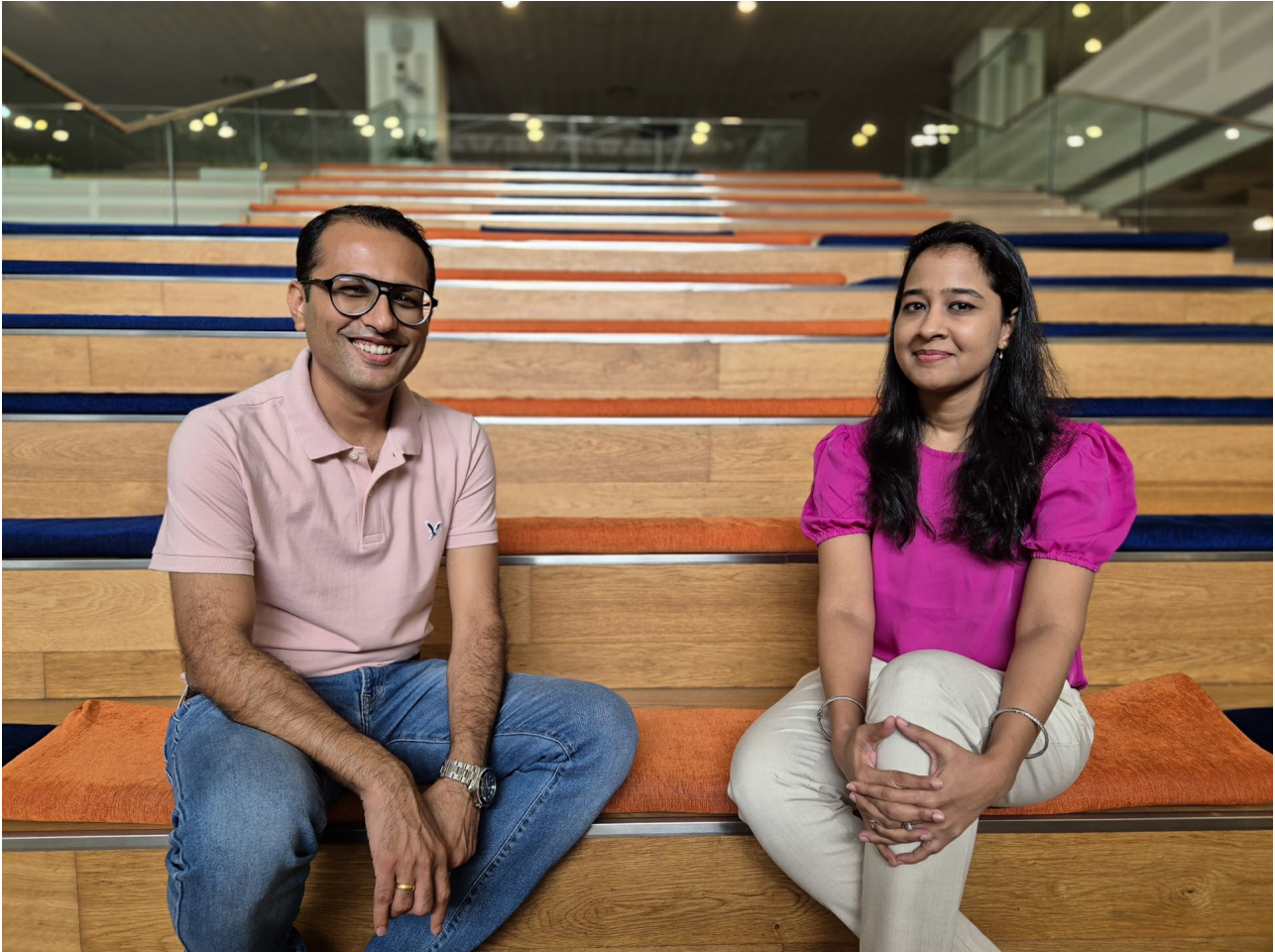
Nidesh: I have been fortunate to travel quite a bit, and it's made me realize that there is still so much ignorance around topics like DEI among my peers. I want to help change this. I have two children, and I can see that their generation are not as accepting of the prejudices and bias that exists in society. They openly challenge ideas and fearlessly share their opinions. This inspired me to get involved with the DEI Council that supports the Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) in India. It has been such a rewarding experience and has helped me find balance in my work life.

What impact does DEI and Employee Resource Groups have on our people as well as the business?

Saswati: DEI has always been a high priority for Novartis, especially in India, and I have a great opportunity in my role to support and lead this Corporate Center towards our DEI goals: creating a better workplace and by extension a better society. We look at all elements of the employee life cycle from hire to retire and incorporate elements of equity and inclusion throughout their journey. We have carried out a global equity assessment which has given us a solid baseline for internal and external benchmarking, helping to mould our policies, practices, and key processes. We are very proud of the progress we have made in India in the last few months. From diverse interview panels, innovative technology helping to ensure we use inclusive language on our job posts, to providing unconscious bias training for all our people. But why is it so important for us as an organisation? Because we want our community to represent the spectrum of patients we serve and create an environment where everyone can belong.

Nidesh: I believe we are in the business of innovation, but we cannot innovate until our people can bring their

best selves to work, which is enabled by inclusive HR policies and the work we do with our ERGs. These groups are the eyes and ears of the organization, driven by passion and, as a community, they help create change from within. At Novartis, the ERGs also are advocates for topics that need attention and are consultants in framing inclusive policies. As a member of the diversity council, I can see how the power of different perspectives pushes Novartis to be progressive across the board.



Nidesh, Head of Finance for Data, Digital & IT and Saswati, Country HR Business Partner for Data, Digital & IT.

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Nidesh

What key initiatives & Employee Resource Groups would you like people to know about?

Nidesh: In India there are some unique ERGs such as 'GenFlex' representing generational diversity. We have a wide range of demographics in the workforce within the country so we thought this could be beneficial to help navigate the intricacies of different generations working together and exploring how we can harness their different views for shared success. We have also been exploring experiential learning with our 'CapABLE'

group which supports the inclusivity of people with different abilities. By allowing people to experience what it's like to not have one or more senses, it brings out a deeper empathy for our colleagues and peers with special abilities. Other key ERGs include 'AGLOW' - our ERG supporting the LGBTQI+ community - and the 'IWIL ERG', which helps empower women and promotes gender equity in the workplace. We are also proud of our efforts to make our Hyderabad site a very accessible site.

Saswati: We have strong HR policies and programs to support our people, and we're not afraid to pilot new initiatives. An example being the Women Returning to Work program, for which we provide dedicated sponsorship and mentorship, because we know it's not a 'one size fits all' kind of approach. We are also proud to say that 100% of our employees have gone through a pay equity review in line with our EPIC (Equal Pay International Coalition) Pledge, which supports pay equity and pay transparency. Furthermore, we are part of communities like the Healthcare Businesswomen's Association, which are well known in Europe and US but lesser so in India. These help us achieve gender equity in leadership positions, facilitate business connections, and enable us to realize the full potential of our female talent. We have also been pioneers in conversations across the industries regarding developing women leaders. Last but not the least, I'm proud of our parental leave policy, which offers every parent through birth, adoption, or surrogacy, at least 26 weeks paid parental leave in India.

Final Words

Nidesh: I would say as a company, we've been given the platform to stand for what we truly believe in. We can be true role models, make a tangible impact and can see the real benefits of advocating for DEI through our Employee Resource Groups.

Saswati: I have always been a very strong advocate, an ally of DEI, and, as a HR Leader, taking on this responsibility has deepened my commitment even more. The ongoing drive to create a diverse, inclusive and equitable workplace is really helping us pioneer and steer some of these efforts. I am very proud to work for an organization like Novartis and happy to play my part on this journey.

Learn more about our commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

If you are curious and would like to know more about our commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, as well as how we support our people, visit the Thrive Together Handbook.

[Thrive Together Handbook \(PDF 4.5 MB\)](#)

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