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Diversity & Inclusion: How to promote a stronger national talent pool

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Women in work at International Finance Corporation Program Manager Carmen Niethammer

Fortude CEO Arjuna Sirinanda

HR - Virtusa Polaris Senior Director Chandi Dharmaratne

The Association of Human Resource Professionals hosted the Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) forum recently at Fortude Ltd. It was an opportunity for HR professionals to think about the importance of D&I and the strategic benefits it can offer businesses.

Fortude sponsored the program and Diversity Collective collaborated as event partner. The forum was a packed audience with attendees across diverse industries and professional tiers, eager to discover how they could make a difference in their organisations through increased D&I.

The forum was kick started by Oshana Dias, Senior Vice President HR at Fortude and Vice President – AHRP External Alliances and Professional Affiliations. Carmen Niethammer, Program Manager of Sri Lanka’s Women in Work Program, gave the keynote speech on the importance of D&I. Highlighting the current situation, she talked about the lack of talented women represented in the workplace, and offered solutions on how to attract and retain a diverse workforce.

Fortude Ltd. Chief Executive Officer Arjuna Sirinanda spoke about his commitment to ensuring a diverse and inclusive workforce. His personal experiences have shaped an international perspective, and this drives his corporate management strategy. Arjuna believes in ensuring full representation across the corporate landscape, and he underscored the need to accommodate a diverse, capable workforce.

Diversity Collective President Chinthi Weerasinghe talked about the reasons why

women leave the workplace and offered tips on bridging the gender division. As she spearheads Diversity Collective, she is fully committed to driving necessary change. Chinthi presented a business case that argued that it is more lucrative to retain working parents rather than to hire and train new recruits. In addition, providing more benefits such as childcare and care for aging parents both aids a company's commitment to diversity and increases employee retention. According to a survey conducted by Diversity Collective, eliminating discrimination and providing complementary benefits are wise business decisions that can increase productivity and ROI.

Following these thoughtful talks was a panel discussion moderated by Kavitha Gunasekara, Group Manager – Learning and Development at WNS Global Services. The panel consisted of Bani Chandrasena, Head of Human Resources – London Stock Exchange; Chandi Dharmaratne, Senior Director – HR at Virtusa Ltd; Dinusha Jayamanne, Human Resource Director at Fonterra Brands Lanka; and Ransi Dharmasiriwardhana, Head of Human Resources at Standard Chartered Bank.

The panel fielded great questions about some of the biggest challenges in D&I initiatives and important obstacles that women encounter, such as the need to be “perfect” or “wonder women” in order for D&I to be deemed “successful”.

In addition, it was acknowledged that social movements succeed with across-the-board participation. Thus, it is critical that men and other traditionally well-represented demographics support D&I initiatives, as it results in a stronger, more talented, and globally competitive national workforce.

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[arithmetic/4-662922](http://www.ft.lk/columns/Understanding-the-debt-trap--Nothing-but-simple-arithmetic/4-662922))

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