



SCAN TO READ THIS ARTICLE IN ENGLISH

BEYOND NUMBERS

EMBEDDING DEI IN STRATEGY — LESSONS FROM GUJARAT FOR EVERY LEADER

Kaushal Kumar | The CEO Magazine

In my recent Strategic Minds newsletter on LinkedIn, I explored how Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in Gujarat is evolving from a “people agenda” into a strategic growth driver for talent, competitiveness, and long-term resilience.

In this article, we go deeper—from diagnostics to design, from data to lived impact, and from intent to organizational outcomes.

1. DEI AS COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE: WHAT CEOs MUST INTERNALIZE

Many leaders still view DEI as a compliance requirement or an HR initiative. The reality is different: DEI is a value-creation strategy. Research globally—and patterns emerging in Gujarat—show that organizations with diverse leadership teams outperform peers in innovation, decision quality, customer insight, and stakeholder trust. DEI directly influences:

- Strategic decision-making agility
- Market relevance in diverse customer segments
- Talent pipeline strength and retention
- ESG performance and investor confidence

For CEOs, this reframing is critical: inclusion is now a financial and strategic metric, not a checkbox.

2. GUJARAT'S DEI LANDSCAPE: FROM DATA TO STRATEGY

Earlier analysis highlighted progress in female workforce participation, women in manufacturing, women-owned MSMEs, and education trends. But numbers alone do not make strategy—the application of insight does. Consider these patterns:

A. Industry Anchors Inclusion Through Policy & Practice

- Leading Gujarat-based firms have



DR. RUPALI SINGH
DIRECTOR
LRC, ATMIYA
UNIVERSITY,
RAJKOT,
GUJARAT
(INDIA)

linked DEI goals to leadership KPIs

- Return-to-work programs and flexible work models are improving retention for mid-career women
- Investment in women-specific skill-development is creating pipeline-ready talent

B. Education to Employment: Closing the Loop

While Gujarat’s female literacy and higher education enrolment are strong, the real value lies in bridging education with employability. Leaders are investing in:

- Apprenticeship partnerships with universities
- Industry-academia councils focused on women in STEM
- Soft-skill incubation for women entrepreneurs

This alignment is already showing impact in pharmaceuticals, logistics, and tech services.

3. LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS THAT MAKE DEI STICK

From my advisory experience, the difference between lasting DEI initiatives and symbolic ones lies in leadership behaviour. High-impact organizations exhibit:

A. DEI Owned at the Top

CEOs and boards must consistently communicate why DEI matters — not just that it matters. Visibility at the executive level sets tone and accountability.

B. Metrics Owned Across Functions

DEI metrics must be embedded in business dashboards:

- Leadership diversity goals
- Internal mobility statistics
- Attrition & retention analytics
- Supplier diversity spend

C. Reinforcement Through Culture

Policies enable inclusion — culture sustains it. This requires:

- Inclusive language and behavior norms
- Cross-functional mentorship ecosystems
- Safe channels for feedback and escalation

4. BEYOND THE CORPORATE STAGE: ECOSYSTEM AND POLICY ENABLERS

Gujarat’s MSME networks, progressive state policies, and vibrant start-up culture provide fertile ground for DEI-led growth. But corporate leaders must also engage with:

- Skill development boards
- Local chambers of commerce
- Government incentive schemes
- Education and vocational partners

Successful DEI strategies are co-created with the broader ecosystem, not walled within organizational boundaries.

5. THE ROAD AHEAD: COMMERCIALIZING INCLUSION

DEI is now central to competitiveness.

Leaders should now think about:

- Predictive DEI analytics to forecast talent gaps
- DEI-linked innovation challenges to leverage cognitive diversity
- Inclusive product and service design for a diverse market
- Supplier diversity programs for equitable economic participation

CEOs must transition DEI from a moral imperative to a commercially driven, strategy-led business priority.