LAYING FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

IT and business services specialist CGI is creating a high-tech culture that is truly inclusive

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"We work hard to increase gender diversity because we want a better mix of ideas and opinions"

Tara McGeehan, CGI

From local and public government to defence, energy, utilities and financial services, the information technology services company CGI has been a pioneer in the IT industry since it was founded more than 40 years ago. CGI has laid the foundation for critical technology infrastructure across a diverse group of sectors. The company has also been hard at work laying foundations that will shape the future of the IT industry by fostering greater diversity in the workplace.

"The technology sector was born in the last 40 years, so in many ways it's still in its infancy," says Tara McGeehan, President, CGI in the UK. "It's very important that we set examples, focus on progress and create environments that present equal opportunity for all." She observes that IT-based degrees still attract more male than female applicants. "We tend to see more males coming into the sector so we have to work hard to increase gender diversity – not just for altruistic reasons, but because we want a better mix of ideas and opinions."

To this end, CGI has established schemes aimed at laying a foundation for the future. Female employees on maternity leave and planning a return to work are offered online training courses while still at home. CGI has also rolled out an ongoing series of unconscious-bias awareness sessions, and implemented a successful "Bring Your Daughter to Work" programme.

The company's search for talent begins when the employees of tomorrow are still at school. CGI is a patron of The Prince's Trust, and members regularly volunteer to visit pupils and promote career opportunities. In 2016, to coincide with CGI's 40th anniversary, the company introduced a new global programme called Dream Connectors, to help employees connect with the community around them.

In addition to seeking candidates with diverse skill-sets not specific to gender and increasing opportunities around STEM (science, technology, engineering, maths) at entry level, CGI established an apprenticeships scheme that provides women with a path into the IT industry.

"Apprenticeships are important to us and to the government," says McGeehan. "We're using our various apprenticeship schemes – including a Higher Apprenticeship Programme and a Service Desk Apprenticeship Programme – to encourage more young women to join IT in a way that doesn't disrupt their lifestyles. We are trying to be as creative as we can be to level out the playing field and ensure that the work environment presents opportunity for everyone entering the workforce who is interested in a position in IT."

In recent years, the company has also assisted a technological breakthrough in the voting process, thanks to an electronic vote-counting system called eCounting. After being awarded a £6.5 million contract, CGI introduced eCounting in the 2012 Scottish local government elections, using it again in 2017. It enabled voters to see the election results much sooner. Where manual counting of ballot papers can take up to four days to complete, digital scanning takes only a matter of hours and calculations are made in mere minutes. "We're actively involved in making the process of calculating votes easier," says McGeehan.

CGI has been widely recognised for these innovations, winning plaudits such as the Top Employers Institute's Top Employer in the UK Award, as well as Top Employer Europe certification for five years running. It supports a workplace environment that values a variety of opinions, perspectives and cultures, in order to maintain a working team that boasts not only breadth but the highest standard of performance.