

RESEARCH 2016

CREATING EQUITABLE CAREER PATHS FOR WOMEN IN INDIA





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CREATING EQUITABLE CAREER PATHS FOR WOMEN IN INDIA



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women's limited participation in the workforce has steadily emerged as an area of concern for governments and corporations across the world. Despite a global push for structural reform in the last two decades, women continue to be underrepresented, especially at the board, executive and senior management levels.

In India, the situation is particularly alarming. On a global ranking of women's economic participation, India's position seems fixed at the bottom¹. India is also one of the countries where women's participation in the workforce has declined significantly in the last two decades – from 33.7% in 1991 to 27% in 2012². India ranks 108th out of 145 countries on the 2015 Global Gender Gap Index and is among the 20 worst-performing countries based on indicators such as labour force participation, estimated income, literacy rate and sex ratio at birth³. It is evident that India needs a concerted effort to empower women and drive gender-inclusive growth.

This qualitative research was undertaken as a first step to develop a nuanced understanding of women's career advancement in corporate India. The aim was to identify specific factors and opportunities that enable women to attain and more importantly, retain senior level positions. For this, 93 in-depth interviews were conducted with women from 10 companies across 5 sectors: e-commerce; fast moving consumer goods (FMCG); finance and banking; information and technology (ITES); and pharmaceuticals.

Below are the key highlights of the findings.

AMBITION VERSUS WORKPLACE REALITY

A key finding from the interviews was that women wish to carve a strong identity for themselves outside the typical roles of daughter, wife and mother. They plan their academic and professional careers in great detail and work hard to achieve their goals.

- Despite being ambitious, a majority talked about being limited by **gender-based stereotypes**.

- **Women have to work twice as hard** to prove their ability; they often take on additional responsibilities for fear of being seen as slacking off.
- Women have to be commanding and assertive in order to be heard and acknowledged but **assertive women are often judged negatively**.
- Although self-promotion is necessary to get ahead, **women typically underrepresent their achievements** and consequently, receive less recognition for their contribution.
- Even though visibility is a key contributor to promotions, **women find it difficult to overcome years of social conditioning in order to showcase themselves and their work**. In addition, they have to compete with a more vocal and visible male peer group.
- **Women have to carefully monitor their demeanour at all times** in order to avoid censure or become the subject of gossip.

THE SAFETY NET OF WORKPLACE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Women rely heavily on two kinds of safety nets in order to achieve their ambitions: women-friendly policies in their companies and opportunities for mentorship.

- **COMPANY POLICIES:** The interviewees expressed unanimous appreciation for women-friendly policies such as maternity leave, flexi-hours, flexi-location, sabbaticals and special initiatives that facilitate return to work after long breaks such as Career 2.0 and Career-by-Choice.

Clear articulation and awareness of anti-bullying and sexual harassment policy measures make for a safe and congenial workplace. Women are grateful for policies that safeguard their health and safety, especially when travelling out of town. They also appreciate equal opportunities for women and men – challenges that expand their sphere of responsibility and enable them to learn and grow.

- **MENTORS:** Women at all levels feel a strong need for a mentor who can help them navigate their professional and personal lives. As women climb the career ladder, mentorship becomes increasingly important. Realizing the singular importance of mentorship, women who mentor others report being conscientious in providing the kind of guidance that they did not receive in their career.

This research shows that mentoring typically happens in an informal manner: participants took the initiative to look for a senior who could support and encourage them. These mentors often happened to be an immediate boss who would urge them to continue working and take on new challenges.

Female mentors were preferred because women could talk about personal issues freely. According to the interviewees, since female mentors had similar struggles and experiences, their advice was more empathetic and relevant.

ROADBLOCKS ON THE WAY

Even with these safety nets in place, there is one important caveat: bosses and supervisors translate company policies into practice. Therefore, for women, their boss (supervisor or reporting manager) plays a critical role in providing career growth opportunities and workplace recognition.

Bosses (who are frequently male) come with their own biases about women's capabilities and a misplaced sense of protectiveness. Instead of engaging with women about their career aspirations, they are prone to making assumptions about what women are capable of contributing. Often, they doubt a woman's competency and dedication, especially in the case of young mothers and in roles that demand "toughness."

For all respondents, their relationship with their supervisor became the point of reference for assessing their company's gender sensitivity. It became evident that equitable career paths are not created by company policies on paper but by practices carried out in spirit.

HOW WOMEN HOLD THEMSELVES BACK

While external factors can hinder career growth, women are also conscious of how they hold themselves back. Two interlinked themes emerge related to (a) women being visible; and (b) women creating and participating in networks.

- A. BECOMING VISIBLE:** Visibility in the company is a crucial contributor to career growth. The research highlights three ways in which women hold back thereby, becoming less visible and losing out on opportunities:
- Women are less proactive than men in seeking new assignments and roles.
 - Women are not comfortable lobbying for promotions despite putting in extra effort to prove themselves.

- Women are less visible due to a dual commitment to career and family; even though their productivity is the same or greater than that of their male peers, they are reluctant to talk about their achievements.

The unfortunate result is that women's invisibility prevents them from being recognized as equal contributors and from rising to positions of power and influence within their company.

B. CREATING AND PARTICIPATING IN NETWORKS: Networking makes women visible and leads to new assignments and roles. Networks also contribute to career success in several other ways:

- Networks or non-work relationships build rapport and help teams function effectively.
- Networks help to get tasks done across departments and serve as a forum for information exchange about new technical and organizational developments.
- Networks help in creating awareness about opportunities inside and outside the company, leading to new roles and assignments.

Unfortunately, women are less “networked” than their male counterparts due to gender differences and socialization patterns, both during and after office hours. One of the challenges faced by women is discomfort around men who smoke and drink, especially if they do not do so themselves. Even when some women break into these groups, there are implicit expectations about their behaviour and confusing norms about cross-gender relationships. On the other hand, many women desire to complete their office-work on time so they can leave and fulfil their responsibilities at home.

Visibility and participation in networks are vital precursors to career success. Without visibility and networks, women are far more likely to miss out on nominations for promotions and new growth opportunities.

WIND BENEATH THEIR WINGS

All interviewees in this research acknowledged that a strong support system at home (including husbands, parents and in-laws) played a critical role in their success. A number of women highlighted how societal norms and gendered roles have evolved and cited examples such as a father-in-law taking care of a child, a stay at home husband and an extended family member who was willing to relocate.

Of course, there is the very real complaint that when domestic help is unavailable, most husbands do little at home. Indian working women, like their global counterparts, often work two shifts – clocking in a regular work day only to transition to the primary homemaker in the evening. Due to this, they often struggle to put in long hours at the office.

WALKING THE TIGHT ROPE

Women interviewed discussed their ambitions to move ahead in their careers and get recognition for their talents and capabilities. However, their early life socialization and conditioning nudged them towards balancing this with their primary role as homemakers and caretakers.

In the Indian context, when a woman enters gainful employment, she finds herself under increasing pressure to reconcile the dual obligations of her work and home. Several respondents talked about having to make compromises without feeling guilty. Stemming from a socially imposed sense of obligation, these feelings of guilt were counterproductive and hindered their growth.

Some respondents had found ways of lightening their guilt by delegating domestic tasks. They had learned to accept their own limitations and invested in reliable nannies, housekeepers and drivers.

WHAT WOMEN BRING TO THE TABLE

The interviews clearly illustrate that women are dedicated, focused, patient and constantly endeavour to expand their skill-set. Due to their dual career obligations, they learn to multi-task and manage disparate tasks. Women tend to exhibit a collaborative and participatory style of leadership and demonstrate high Emotional Quotient (EQ). In management literature, these behaviours are known to promote new thinking and innovation. As good communicators who typically show concern for other team members, women are effective at inspiring and motivating others.

WHAT NEXT?

Based on the interviews, below is a summary of key recommendations to make career paths more equitable in corporate India. These should be seen as the first steps towards recognizing disabling factors and instituting best practices in the workplace.

- **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:**
 - Sensitize and educate people managers and change the framework of performance assessment to ensure gender neutrality.



- Recognize and respect differences between the way men and women perform and communicate.
- Encourage men to see women’s success as an enhancer rather than a deterrent to their success.
- **MENTORSHIP:**
 - Formal mentoring is just as important as informal mentoring.
 - Everybody benefits when senior leaders proactively facilitate career advancement of junior women colleagues.
- **ARTICULATE AND AMPLIFY POLICIES:**
 - Ensure that company policies regarding flexi-hours, work from home and leave benefits are clearly explained to everyone.
 - It is important that men are encouraged to use these benefits as well so that both feel an equal responsibility for managing home and family life.
 - Senior leaders should walk the talk and consistently promote women-friendly policies, providing a signal that is unmistakable and gets picked up by employees.
- **APPROPRIATE FACILITIES:**
 - A safe and comfortable workplace is important. Productivity increases when women have access to a crèche/day-care service and do not have to worry about child-care.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory study highlights that even ambitious women are deterred from participating fully and succeeding at their workplace. While women enter the workforce in largely equal numbers, many drop out early in their career, largely due to cultural expectations and socialisation processes. Professionally qualified women in India stand at a place where “pull-in” and “push-out” factors significantly impact their career paths; they are “pulled-in” by their families to perform traditionally defined roles while their individual ambition pushes them out into public spaces.

This uniquely insightful qualitative report based on more than 100 in-depth interview brings out nuances of these cultural expectations and socialization

processes that hold women back. The findings of this study will be critical in recognizing these patterns in corporate workplaces and creating appropriate systems and processes to address them.

While many measures have been taken to address this, a lot of work remains to be done. While the intention to create fair and gender-inclusive workplaces has become stronger, action in the form of policy and mind-set change must come quickly, forcefully and continuously. The time is now.

ENDNOTES

¹Flexi Careers India. 2015. Viewport 2015 - Tracking the Career Trajectories of Men and Women in India to Assess Career Intentionality.

²World Economic Forum. 2015. Global Gender Gap report. Website <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/rankings/>

³*ibid*

SECTION 1

CONTEXT

“A critical issue for women is the possibility to be a mother and the ability to participate fully in the workforce.”

Erna Solberg, Prime Minister of Norway

Women’s limited participation in the workforce has steadily emerged as an area of concern for governments and corporations across the world. Despite a global push for structural reform in the last two decades, women continue to be under-represented, especially at the board, executive and senior management levels. These can be attributed to multiple factors ranging from societal pressure to unsympathetic work environments. While laws and policies can create more equitable work spaces, we need a concerted effort to address other sociological factors such as deep-seated patriarchy, conflicting expectations from women, and lack of opportunities for growth.

Gender mainstreaming is defined by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (1997) as *“the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality”*.

Gender inequality is a pressing global issue with huge ramifications not just for the lives and livelihoods of women, but also for human development,

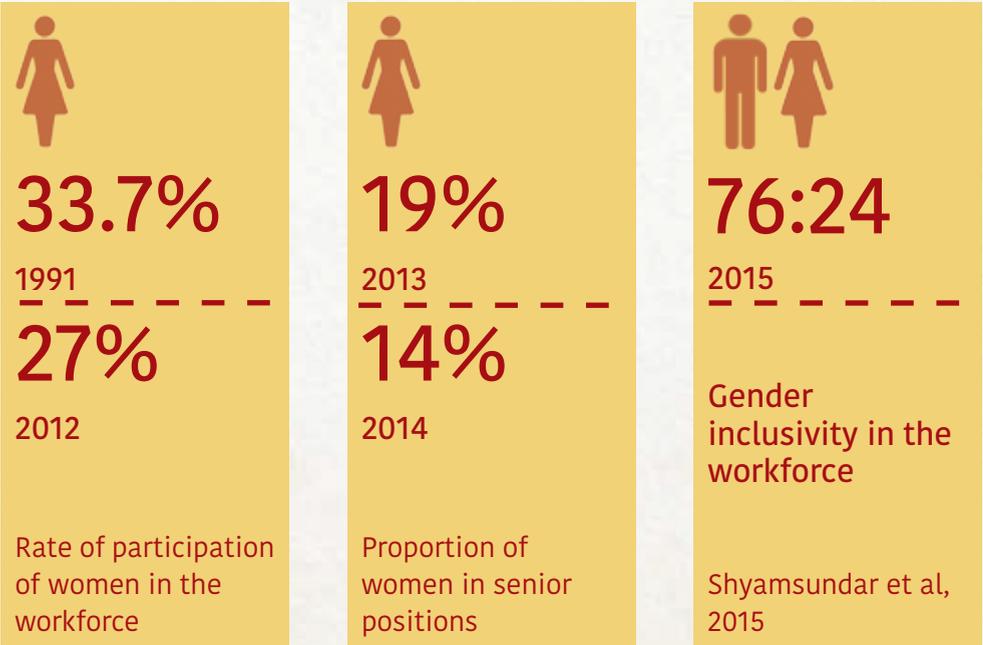
labour markets, productivity and gross domestic product (GDP) growth. If women—who account for half the world’s population—do not achieve their full economic potential, the global economy will suffer. Even after decades of progress, women face many more disadvantages as compared to their male counterparts in the workplace. While gender parity cannot become a norm across all societies, addressing gender bias will go a long way in increasing economic benefits for the world (McKinsey 2015).

A review of existing research indicates the following key emerging issues:

GENDER INEQUITY INCREASES WITH SENIORITY

India ranks the second lowest in the Group of G20 economies when it comes to women’s participation in the workforce (Oxfam Briefing Paper, 2014). In fact, India’s position seems fixed at the bottom even when compared to the entire world and not just the 20 major economies (Flexi Careers India, 2015). India is also one of the countries where the rate of participation of women in the workforce has declined significantly in the last two decades, from 33.7% in 1991 to 27% in 2012 (World Economic Forum, 2015). Sadly, India’s high corporate and economic growth has not seen a corresponding growth in women’s participation; urban women in white-collar jobs constitute a mere 18% of the workforce.

The World Economic Forum ranks India 108th out of 145 countries on the 2015 Global Gender Gap Index, scoring below average on parameters like economic participation, educational attainment, health and survival. India is one of the



20 worst-performing countries on indicators such as labour force participation, estimated income, literacy rate and sex ratio at birth (World Economic Forum 2015).

The International Labour Organisation's "World Employment Social Outlook, Trends 2015" records a high disparity between men and women's participation in the labour force. While men's labour force participation rate is at 79.8%, women's participation stands at a mere 31.2%. With India's increased effort in bridging the gap between educational attainments of men and women, an increasing number of women are entering the workforce across sectors. However, women drop out early resulting in a huge gap at the junior and middle levels. As a result, the proportion of women in senior positions is meagre (Saundarya Rajesh et al, 2013). In fact, in India, the proportion of women in senior positions fell from 19% in 2013 to 14% in 2014 (Grant Thornton, 2014).

According to a Gender Diversity Benchmark-2012 report released by Catalyst, a non-profit organization that works for gender diversity at workplaces, only 30% of all economically active individuals in India are women. As per a report titled India Inc: From Intention to Impact (Shyamsunder et al, 2015), the Indian workforce still stands at just 76:24 in terms of gender inclusivity. As one moves up in the hierarchy, the percentage of women employees starts decreasing. At the manager/director level, the share of women employees is only 21%, followed by 19% at the senior-management level. At the top management level, it drops further down to 14%.

In order to rectify this, India will need to focus on 3 clear trends of women's workforce participation.

1. Women do not participate in the labour force in the same numbers as men.
2. Women work fewer hours than men because many hold part-time jobs; this could be driven partly by choice and partly by their inability to do full-time work due to other responsibilities.
3. Women are disproportionately represented in lower-productivity sectors such as agriculture and insufficiently represented in higher productivity sectors such as business services.

A change in these three areas will result in a significantly higher GDP.

HOW THE GLASS CEILING IS CREATED

An unseen, yet difficult to break barrier as women approach mid-management levels is the "glass ceiling". The glass ceiling represents gender-specific obstacles on the path to seniority irrespective of women's qualifications or achievements. It may be created inadvertently due to a range of factors including unsympathetic work policies, lack of mentoring, responsibilities at

home or societal norms, which lead women to drop out before they are able to rise in their organisations.

Studies show that women are largely offered equal pay at the start of their careers but hit the glass ceiling when they reach mid to senior levels, a stage which also coincides with an increase in domestic demands. As women scale the corporate ladder, issues such as stereotyping and workplace harassment also become serious challenges.

Research on factors or “ethical dilemmas” that create the glass ceiling highlights the role of emotional intelligence and assertive behaviour competencies. For instance, a study in Tamil Nadu found that women who scored high in self-awareness, emotional management, relationship management and assertiveness successfully overcame hurdles at work. Women who got a high score in assertiveness only, managed to continue their job but with compromises. The “ethical dilemma” faced by women at middle and senior management levels was found to be the main reason behind the glass ceiling effect in women’s career advancement. (Shanthi and Mallig, 2015)

Professional women today face far more complex challenges than in earlier times. Discrimination is often masked and hence, difficult to fight. Carol Rivers, co-author of the book, “The New Soft War on Women: How the Myth of Female Ascendance Is Hurting Women, Men—and Our Economy” notes subtle ways in which women are treated differently and highlights the contradictory role expectations from a woman at her workplace. For instance, if women are assertive, they can be seen as aggressive; when women show anger, they are often judged as being too emotional; women are assumed to be incompetent until they prove themselves; women get promoted on performance while men get promoted on potential; men get a fatherhood bonus, and women a motherhood penalty; women are often interrupted or ignored in meetings. Together, these perceptions make it difficult for a woman to assume a leadership role in an effective manner (Rivers and Barnett, 2013).

Other barriers include lack of mentoring and networking opportunities, lack of transparency in roles and expectations, absence of clear career paths, unavailability of relevant platforms to enhance their expertise and exclusion from informal, male-dominated networks.

IS THE CORPORATE SECTOR DOING ENOUGH TO RETAIN WOMEN EMPLOYEES?

‘Gender diversity’, ‘gender inclusion’ and ‘gender mainstreaming’ are the new buzz words for corporates. Several companies have demonstrated their intent through policies that make the workplace more inclusive and encourage women to stay longer.

FINDINGS FROM DATA COLLECTED FROM 42 COMPANIES IN THE IT SECTOR IN INDIA (SHYAMSUNDER AND CARTER, 2014):

- ▶ Men are three times more likely, on average, to be hired and promoted than women at every level.
- ▶ Three of the India-headquartered organizations participating in the study offer women-targeted leadership training programs, compared to 20 (74%) of India subsidiary companies.
- ▶ Just 20% of the organizations with such programs track advancement by gender—despite the fact that the most commonly stated purpose of these programs, especially for women, is advancement.
- ▶ Nearly half the organizations do not offer any family care support options (48%) and lack a formal and standardized approach (41%) to determining fair and appropriate performance reviews for employees who return after taking leave.
- ▶ Executive-level women leave at a rate (28%) double that of their representation (14%). This rate of attrition is higher than that at any other level.

However, a key challenge is retention at the mid management level when women typically take career breaks to raise a family. Initiatives like mid-career counselling for women, fostering employee networks for mutual support, flexi hours and agile working policies have helped a great deal. Most importantly, engagement of the senior leadership is a major factor in ‘walking the talk’.

In 2010, McKinsey’s fourth edition of Women Matter study reported that although a majority of leaders recognize the impact of gender diversity on business performance, this belief does not translate into action. Indeed, gender diversity is not high on companies’ strategic agenda and the implementation of dedicated programs remains limited overall.” (McKinsey & Co., 2010).

Catalyst’s report on women in the IT sector in India titled ‘High Potentials Under High Pressure in India’s Technology Sector’, observed that “Despite good intentions and investments in formal leadership development, organisations that don’t provide women and men equal access to on-the-job developmental experiences, or “hot jobs,” fall short on their goals to advance women (Shyamsunder and Carter, 2014).

McKinsey’s research (Devillard et al, 2014) finds that cultural factors in a company play a huge role in women’s advancement. “Women who are more confident of their ability to rise tend to say that the leadership styles of their



companies are compatible with women’s leadership and communication styles, and that women are just as likely as men to reach the top there. Consistently, the absence of diversity in leadership styles was a challenge for many women: almost 40 percent of female respondents said that women’s leadership and communication styles don’t fit with the prevailing model of top management in their companies.”

“When you put all the pieces together, a new picture emerges for why women don’t make it into the C-suite. It’s not the glass ceiling, but the sum of many obstacles along the way”

Eagly & Carli, 2007

The corporate culture and a lack of purposeful engagement by male executives are significant problems for women (Banerji et al, 2010). In a survey carried out with 1421 global executives, women said that they aim just as high as their male peers and attributed their failure or success primarily to the corporate culture. The prevailing expectation of being available 24/7 “anytime, anywhere” is a particularly severe penalty on female managers (Banerji et al, 2010).

There seems to be a change in the way senior leadership views women; India’s business leaders are increasingly looking at professional women as a crucial untapped economic engine (Shyamsunder et al, 2015). However, there is a gap between organisations’ well-intended corporate initiatives and their impact on the inclusiveness of the workplace.

THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Studies have clearly shown that the work-home balance affects women more than men. These two domains make conflicting demands and women often end up prioritizing their home due to societal norms and expectations.

In one article, Moorthy Uppaluri (Uppaluri, 2015) asserts that the single biggest deterrent for working women is the expectation to compromise on their career in order to fulfil family commitments. A number of women take a break in their professional life or work part-time thereby, slowing down their growth trajectory and the prospect of a salary increment.

In a transitioning society like India, where the traditional roles of women as homemakers and caretakers are deeply entrenched, the work-family balance is a significant challenge for women and their employers. Over the last decade, Indian society has witnessed a surge in the participation of women in the workforce, especially in the software industry. (Valk and Srinivasan, 2011). The mid-career exodus of women therefore, has serious implications, not just for women, but for India as a whole. Companies are losing talent and are generating huge costs in replacing it. (Shyamsunder et al, 2015).

The Leaking Pipeline report showed that across the globe, the percentage of working women in the 30-plus age group is significantly lower than that of women in their 20s, indicating that women tend to leave the workforce around this stage. This is true of India as well, where women who leave the workforce miss the critical step that takes them to the next level of management. When they return to their careers, they find that they have lost leadership roles to peers who remained in the workforce. (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2008)

CHANGING THE REALITY: THERE IS A CASE FOR MORE WOMEN AT THE TOP

Gender inclusivity is no longer a charity deed, it makes sound business sense. With their unique sensibilities and leadership styles, women are important assets to a company. The advantage lies in leveraging the diverse skills possessed by women managers and not force-fitting women in the traditional masculine mould.

Moorthy Uppaluri, CEO of Randstad states, “Gender diversity could be the next big trend in the evolution of the corporate workforce. The last decade has witnessed workplace diversity in both public and private sectors, with human resource leaders waking up to the realisation that this not only helps in creating an unbiased work environment, but it has also had proven business impact. A few companies in India have already demonstrated how women can be integral to their workforce by reducing the ratio between men and women. In general, the Services segment and specific sectors such as IT, Financial Services, Media,



Healthcare, and Hospitality have been torchbearers in bridging the gender divide. Also, with many Indian companies going global and global companies entering India, diversity became a key trend.” (Uppaluri, 2015).

In a key cultural shift in Indian organizations, the basic premise of traditional male-oriented leadership is being challenged. (Manjari Singh, 2011). Singh suggests that mentoring women employees and sensitising men are some of the initiatives that companies can adopt. Mentoring plays a critical role in boosting confidence and developing the right mind-set and skill-set needed to take on more challenges. At the same time, it is vital to educate and sensitise men so that they can differentiate between ‘unique’ and ‘special’ needs of their female colleagues. One of the main barriers to creating more women leaders is that men in senior positions do not appreciate the diverse skills of women and end up promoting women who fit the traditional male-oriented idea of a leader. (Manjari Singh, 2011).

Other key initiatives which can create a more conducive environment for women include flexible work arrangements to overcome socio-cultural barriers; leadership development programs to ensure inclusive growth; employee inclusion efforts to build networks and create an inclusive culture for all employees; employee leave and reintegration programs and foundational approaches to help organisations address issues that set the stage for progressive change (Shyamsunder et al, 2015).

WHAT MAKES THIS STUDY UNIQUE

Over the last decade, a number of large-scale global surveys have been undertaken to document existing diversity and inclusion policies, workforce

representation, attrition, and promotion by gender and leadership levels, including executives/management, senior managers and directors. Large data sets are gathered through online surveys with additional inputs from senior management of the participating companies.

This study is unique as it brings in rich qualitative data gathered through in depth interviews capturing women's stories about their journey in the corporate sector. This report presents findings from in-depth interviews with 93 women from 10 companies across 5 sectors in India (proposed sample size was 100). The sectors included in the study were information and technology (IT); finance and banking; pharmaceutical; Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) and e-commerce. Respondents were, on an average, 35 years old with 12.25 years of work experience.

This exploratory study was undertaken to better understand and identify enabling and disabling factors including obstacles that women face in their workplace and at home that hinder their advancement in their careers (Please find detailed Objectives of the study in Annexure 1).

The following questions emerged as the qualitative data was processed and analysed.

1. Are women ambitious enough?
2. What attributes help women get ahead?
3. Is guilt feminine?
4. Can women do it alone?
5. What can women do to become more visible?
6. Do women know how to network?
7. Does mentoring happen by chance?
8. How can companies show every day feminism?
9. The way forward

Interviews were recorded where permitted, transcribed in English and data were analysed using ATLAS Ti 7. A short survey form was administered at the end of the interview to collect specific information on respondent's perception on gender related issues (Please find detailed methodology in Annexure 2).

This research hopes to make women active participants in their own self-development and not mere recipients of programs and policies designed for them. The report also provides concrete suggestions that will enable companies to champion 'everyday feminism' and address the bottlenecks that women face in their journey from mid to senior level.

SECTION 2

ARE WOMEN AMBITIOUS ENOUGH?¹

“If people are doubting how far you can go, go so far that you can’t hear them anymore.”

Michele Ruiz; President and CEO, Ruiz Strategies

Despite their talent, ambition and performance track record, women drop out in large numbers at junior and mid management levels.

In order to understand this phenomenon, it is important to first understand women’s ambitions, how these ambitions are perceived in the corporate world and whether these perceptions change as they move through different stages of their careers.

Ambition, or its lack thereof, is not gender specific. Gender comes into play as a result of social conditioning which assigns specific roles to men and women. As social norms assign the primary caregiver role to women, they struggle to prioritize their ambitions and careers over their families.

DO WOMEN PLAN THEIR CAREERS?.....

Data show that women, indeed, plan their academic and professional careers in great detail.

“I was very keen to do an MBA from one of the best institutes. I had a clear goal of getting into operations in supply chain. In fact, I was the only woman in my class to go into operations.”

While they chose their sector and organisations carefully, they did not have a clear vision of their next steps to grow within the organisation. This could be

due to a range of factors including social conditioning which drives them to prioritize family, perceived stress of balancing work and home life and the lack of encouragement from their environment.

Interestingly, most women – 62% (N=58) – who were interviewed in this study spoke about their desire to work or continue to work as long as they could. But did they plan their promotions or become passive recipients of the management’s decisions? The study found that there are two categories of women:

1. Women who took charge and proactively planned their careers.
2. Women who wanted to work but did not plan their career growth.

Women in the first category proactively sought assignments, did cross functional roles and continued to upgrade their skills. Some of them made sacrifices on the home front but worked hard or harder than their male colleagues to ensure vertical growth in their organisation.

“Even though my baby was only 5 months old, I came back from maternity leave early to take on a project which could make or break my career.”

Most of these women relied heavily on a strong support structure at home and mentoring at the workplace. This is discussed at length in section 7 which

Rama studied hotel management. She is married and has a 7 year old daughter. Both Rama and her husband had high stress jobs and had to put in long hours at work. They moved in with Rama’s parents when their daughter was born so the child could be looked after by the grandparents. Rama’s husband had a travelling job where he was out for almost 25 days in a month. Rama’s husband always encouraged her to pursue her ambitions and career. When Rama was offered a 3 year assignment outside the country, her husband decided to take a back seat in his career, accompanied Rama and took care of their daughter while she completed her assignment.*

** Name changed*

looks at sharing the workload and section 8 which looks at mentoring. While most women reported that they relied on parents or in-laws for support, there were a few interesting stories where the husband took a back seat to enable his wife to accomplish her goals. Women with clear and strong ambitions

may temporarily take a back seat after marriage or childbirth but bounce back quickly and continue their journey.

“Everything falls into place once you give yourself importance and value your education and experience. The pressure is more internal than societal – my mother in-law is visiting, my child is waiting...”

Some women were proud of their achievements and the pace of their promotion. These women proactively sought exposure to other departments and cross-functional roles so they could build their knowledge continuously. On the other hand, some focused on building a niche role or a particular function. In both the scenarios, there was a certain level of planning and a clear picture of a growth trajectory.

“I have gained so much exposure and learning. I actively picked up special skills, networked with people, understood the dynamics of the company – these have brought me so far in the company.”

Women in the second category were keen to work but had not planned their career path.

“I did want to work but to be honest, I was never very ambitious. I did not have aspirations of becoming a VP or a Senior VP in 10-15 years.”

Some women reported that their career planning was influenced by the restrictions on mobility and other priorities in their lives. A few women were certain of refusing a promotion if it demanded a location change.

“You will get ahead if you have the capability but also the flexibility. You cannot demand career advancement if you are rigid about being in a certain location.”

Women also see notional exit gates at different points in their life. The first exit gate is at the time of marriage. The decision to continue depends on the spouse’s location and whether there is enough encouragement to continue. The second exit gate is at the time of motherhood. The decision at this stage also depends on the support from the family and the workplace. The third exit gate is when children are growing up and are at critical stages in their academic years. There is also a fourth stage where a woman is expected to take care of ageing parents or in-laws.

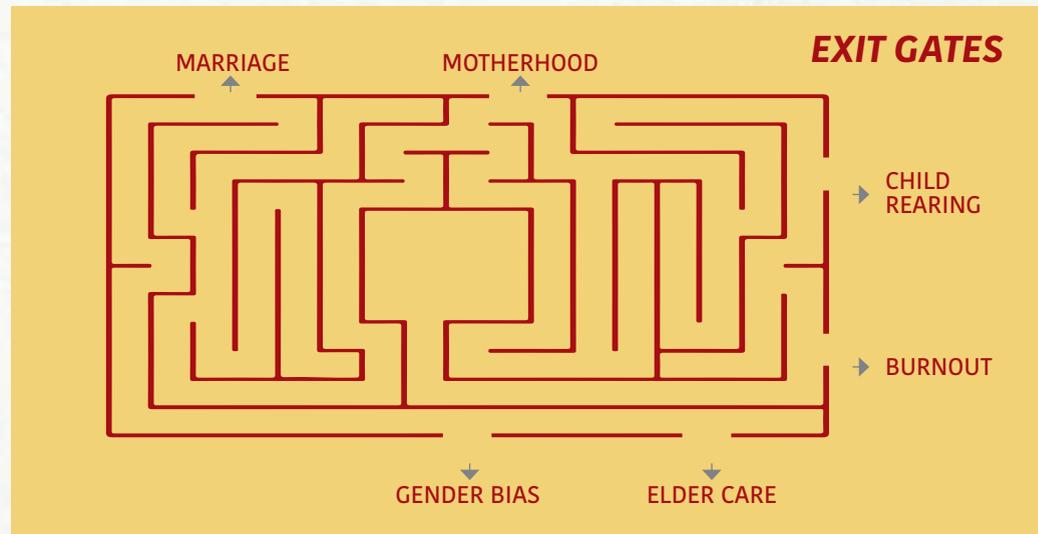
Interviews highlighted two other exit points. One is at any stage when the company exhibited a gender bias and women chose to leave rather than pursue their ambitions. The second was when respondents were burnt out and could not deal with the chronic exhaustion of managing their home and work responsibilities.

“You learn to multitask and balance conflicting needs but at some point, you will burn out. There is only so much you can do.”

ARE RESTRICTIONS TO CAREER GROWTH SELF-IMPOSED?.....

How do women negotiate their work status at different stages of their life? Do they defend their ambitions and desire to work or do they give into the demands of their personal lives? What are their reasons for working? Do they work in order to support the finances of their family or do they aspire to make a career where they could contribute effectively and get recognition?

About half the women – 48% (N=45) – in the sample acknowledged restrictions to career growth, whether self-imposed or otherwise. The respondents in the first category (as explained above) have worked out their career path, negotiated with family, built a support structure and are there to stay. Respondents in the second category are more likely to face restrictions.



As explained by 33 out of these 45 respondents, these restrictions usually stem from societal pressure and family demands. However, a rigid and non-supportive organisation only aids the decision to leave. In instances where they did not get enough support, women decided to continue working but with a different portfolio. In some instances, they left or refused a promotion that would take them to a different location.

“When I got married, my husband and I held the same position and were earning equal salaries. Today, he makes twice as much as I do because he had the flexibility to move and change jobs at the right time. In the process, my career took a backseat.”

Some companies also play an important role in supporting and retaining women; women indicated that they would benefit from counselling by their supervisor and feeling wanted at the workplace. Company policies like flexi hours or work from home options also help a great deal. Respondents narrated their own experiences of returning from maternity leave and how their company's support increased their confidence and efficiency. If these women were received with doubts and biases, they were less likely to continue. While some women stayed the course and fought, others left or moved to a different company.

“I worked till 2 days before my delivery in February. In May-June, my appraisals happened and although my name was recommended for a promotion, my operations head refused as I was not present during the financial year closing in March. My baby was more important so I just let that go.”

Ten respondents highlighted that women need to come out of the victim mode and make their ambitions clear to the organisation.

“I think you have to make a decision about what you are going to prioritize and what is important to you. If it is important for you to leave at 6 and make dinner for your husband, then that is the value you attach to yourself.”

A few respondents felt that women did not negotiate enough and gave up too easily.

“Our own self-restrictions make the management favour men over women. When we were hiring for a position, the top two candidates were women. But we ended up offering the role to a man because these women flatly refused to do night shifts.”

While most respondents said that they were assessed on merit, many recognised that men put in more hours at work. They tend to leave late, carry work home and are willing to travel. Women prefer to leave on time and may or may not be able to carry work home depending on their family situation. As a result, they may lose out in comparison when targets have to be met.

The subconscious beliefs and attitudes towards women at the workplace play an important role in pushing women out or pulling them back. Respondents shared that male colleagues often commented on special privileges such as flexi hours or leaving work early.

“I sense that men feel like you are getting undue advantages and privileges if you have children. I have had male colleagues who say that I can just take the maternity leave and come back to find the exact same position and opportunities.”

Some women have clear ambitions and strong personalities and are able to transcend these barriers. How are these women perceived by their male colleagues? Twelve respondents talked about how they have to tread the thin line between being assertive but not being considered arrogant. Women are judged constantly, for their calibre, their personality, their work styles and often on the way they carry themselves.

“It is unfortunate that an ambitious woman is labelled as ‘aggressive’ and asked to tone down. If a man is being aggressive, he is focused.”

ENDNOTES

¹More quotation from qualitative interviews on each section are cited in Annexure 3

SECTION 3

WHICH ATTRIBUTES HELP WOMEN GET AHEAD?

On being questioned about the vital attributes that enable women to succeed in their professional lives, 63 interviewees shared the following:

MULTITASKING

Most women juggle multiple tasks at home and at the workplace such as replying to emails from home or organising their child's schedule while at work. The ability to remain balanced is a key pre-requisite to multitasking. Some respondents felt that when their approach was balanced and their tasks were clear, they were able to manage both their home and office as effectively.

Some respondents showed increased efficiency after raising a child. This is contrary to the popular belief that women's careers take a backseat once they have a child. Since they have additional responsibilities and they want to perform equally well in both areas, they are able to manage their time and prioritize better.

“After I came back from my maternity leave, I realized my efficiency levels have gone up significantly. The same work which would keep me at the office till 8 pm, I could now finish by 6 pm.”

DEFINING CLEAR BOUNDARIES

In contrast to the above point, some women also stated that it helps to create clear boundaries between work and home. When they are at work, they focus completely on the task at hand and don't like to spend unnecessary time on breaks or informal networking. They finish their work early and once they are at home, they give their complete attention to their family and don't take office calls or respond to emails.

“I am very infamous for keeping my home and work separate. I tell them I don't get my vegetables to office so why should I take my laptop home?”

HAVING SELF-BELIEF

A majority of the respondents who felt successful displayed a remarkable self-belief which helped them battle everyday stress. It is also important for women to develop the ability to deal with all sorts of people, especially those who try to discourage them or hold them back. These women create their own benchmarks for success and hold themselves to high standards of performance and output.

“Over the years, I have realized that it’s important to spend your energy on good people and focus on work.”

DEDICATION, HARD WORK AND MAINTAINING FOCUS

Many women said that it was their dedication and hard work that helped them move up the career ladder. However, this focus sometimes got in the way of informal networking or becoming visible.

Respondents shared that in order to be taken seriously, they often have to be twice as good as men. In a meeting, they deliberate on a point many times in their mind to make sure it warrants attention. So it is important that they work hard and try to become visible.

“For a woman to be successful in the corporate world, she has to be twice as hard working and lucky enough to get noticed.”

PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE

Most of the women were patient and perseverant with tasks and targets but also when it came to waiting for promotions. Whether this attitude is helpful to their careers needs more deliberation. Only a small number of women said that they proactively ask for a promotion or recognition when it is due.

“I never put a time constraint on my boss about my promotion. I was patient; I had asked for a promotion last year and it will only take effect this year.”

UPGRADING SKILLS AND REINVENTING

Some respondents acknowledged that it was important to remain curious, learn new skills and expand their scope of work in order to move ahead in the company. They stressed the importance of staying aware of new developments and opportunities in the workplace for long term success.

“When women enter the professional life, they have to be very strong in addition to acquiring theoretical and practical knowledge.”

COMMUNICATING

Most respondents articulated that clear communication, both at work and home helped them a great deal. At home, it helped to set clear expectations to avoid any conflict. At work, they sought advice from mentors informally (read details in section on mentoring), or cleared grievances with their supervisors.

“I always like to deal head-on with people who are causing a problem. It is only then that people realized that they had to treat me with a certain amount of respect “.

Mentors advised women to speak up and share their opinions and views in team meetings. One respondent believed that it is critical to even share one’s personal ambitions and aspirations with colleagues and supervisors.

LEVERAGING EMOTIONAL QUOTIENT

Respondents indicated that women are more adaptive and intuitive which leads to better relationships with clients and colleagues. They can play the role of an emotional anchor for their team and help strengthen the workplace culture.

On the flip side, a few respondents shared how being too emotional was a deterrent and that they needed a more ‘balanced’ and ‘professional’ approach.

“When you are at work, be logical and assertive. You cannot show your weakness and cry.”

COLLABORATION AND INCLUSION

Many respondents commented on women’s ability to foster a collaborative and non-threatening work environment. One respondent explained how she constantly works with her team to build a culture of collaboration instead of competition.

“I think being over ambitious or over competitive can sometimes destroy people so I try to keep these out of my team culture.”

Respondents strongly felt that women are more inclusive, especially when leading a team, and are driven by a vision of shared success.

DELEGATION

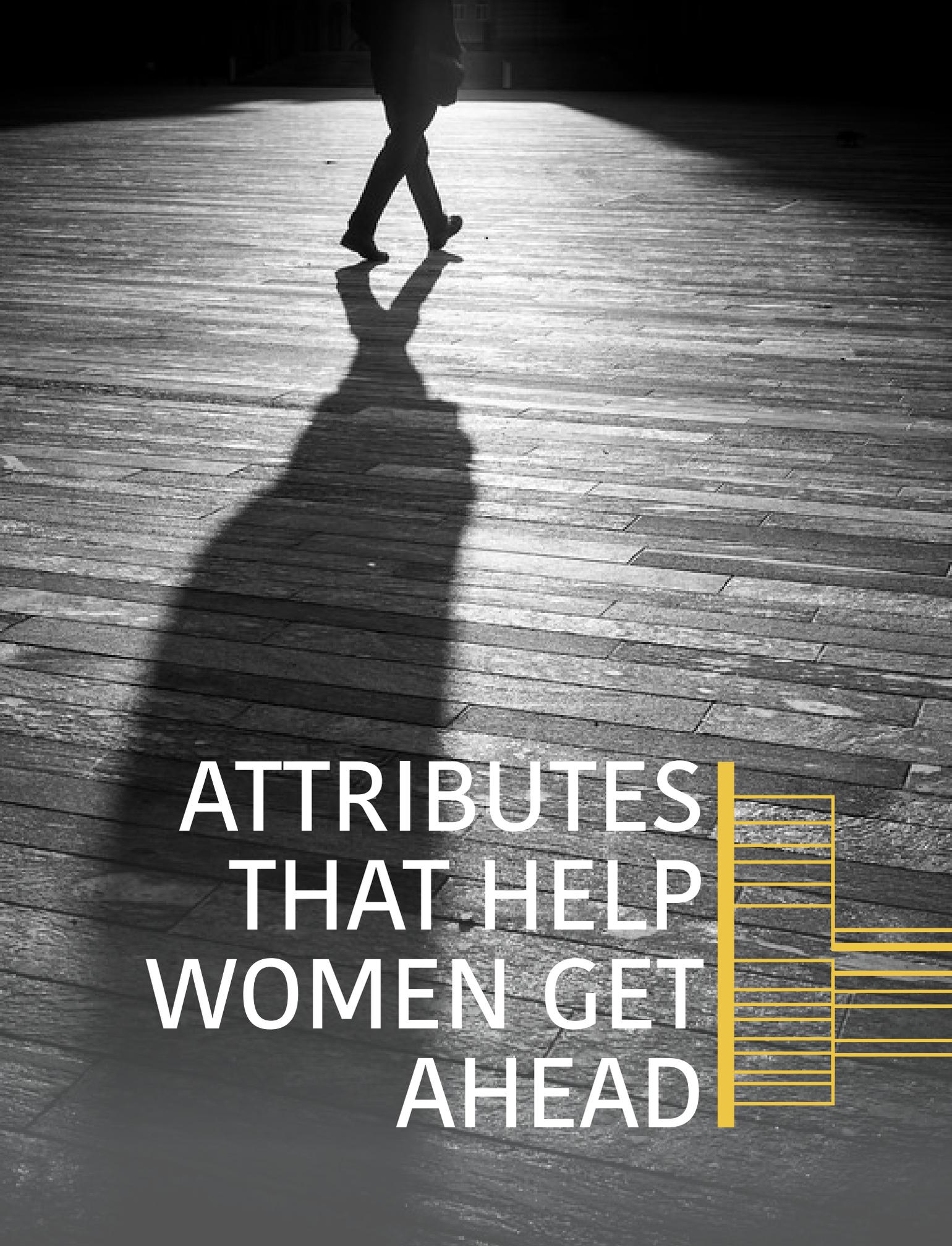
Many women struggle to delegate tasks and prefer to complete all the processes themselves. Respondents identified this as a key area of development for women which could free up their time and mind space.

“Set the expectations right and make it easier for yourself. If you need to take care of your household, make sure you have a maid and CCTV so you can monitor your child on your cell phone.”

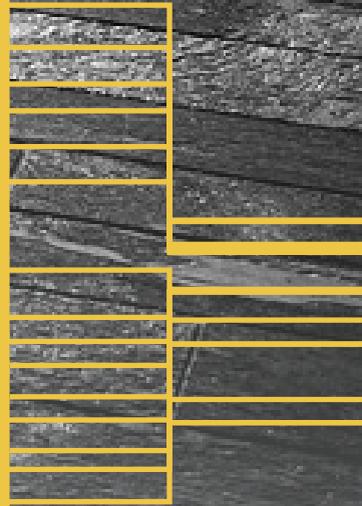
In addition to these, this study helped identify some industry needs which are fulfilled by women’s unique strengths. For instance, in the FMCG sector which caters to a large consumer base of women, it makes good business sense to have women in brand building, marketing, and consumer feedback. Women have a strong sense of empathy and are able to create marketing strategies which would make the product more appealing for customers.

Some respondents felt that given their multifaceted approach, women can add value to all functions in a company.

“Women bring depth and perspective to an issue. They are able to empathize better and can therefore, relate to different segments of clients.”



**ATTRIBUTES
THAT HELP
WOMEN GET
AHEAD**





SECTION 4

IS GUILT FEMININE?

*You wear guilt like shackles on your feet, like
a halo in reverse.*

Depeche Mode

For professional women, guilt management becomes just as important as time management. Although women choose to work for reasons as varied as those offered by men, their social conditioning places an additional burden of being a good caretaker at home. As work pressure mounts, women find it increasingly difficult to shake off feelings of guilt and inadequacy.

As indicated by 22 respondents (24%), a woman's guilt stems from a range of reasons.

“Women work under a lot of constraints. If they are at work, they feel that they are neglecting their children. When they are at home, they feel guilty about missing an important meeting.”

An article published in the Harvard Business Review of March 2014, titled “Manage your work, manage your life” stated that when there is conflict between work and family responsibilities, men think that as primary breadwinners, it is acceptable for them to spend less time with their families. Women on the other hand, are plagued by feelings of **‘missing out’** – whether it is at home or at the workplace. The respondents echoed these feelings.

“After a long time, I took nine days off but by the fifth day, I was already feeling guilty about taking too much leave.”

Seventeen respondents indicated that the source of the guilt could be multifaceted – **neglecting home in favour of work, ignoring their own needs** and health or adopting an aggressive front to succeed at the workplace. Women also feel the **need to do justice to everybody's needs**.

“Even on a holiday I cannot relax. I’m just waiting for my body to give up on me one day. It is the same for a lot of women in managerial positions.”

Mothers, in particular, talked about the guilt of **leaving their children behind and not being good caregivers**.

“As a mother, you understand that your children need you at critical stages in their development. You take the primary responsibility for that and feel guilty. I’m not sure that fathers feel the same way.”

Women expressed some resentment at how easily men were able to shirk these responsibilities.

“I see a lot of women coordinating their children’s lives along with managing their work. If a woman is even a little late in picking up her child, she will torment herself with guilt. I don’t see men being as involved or feeling any guilt.”

In light of the fact that globally, leadership positions are dominated by men, it is disheartening that women still bear most of the burden of home and family responsibilities. While it seems that women have a long way to go, the women in the study had some practical insight for their peers.

“It is important that when you make sacrifices, you don’t live with the guilt for too long because it can weigh you down and undermine all your effort.”

SECTION 5

CAN WOMEN DO IT ALONE?

“You can do anything but not everything”

David Allen

Anita* wakes up in the morning at a quarter to six. Before her husband leaves for work at 6:30 am, she prepares his lunch. She then wakes up her daughter and drops her to the day-care facility by 8 am. She comes back, gets ready for work and leaves to reach office by 9:30 am. Most workdays are quite hectic and leave her little or no time for tea or lunch. Through the day, she feels like she is running against the clock and before she knows it, it is time to leave and pick up her daughter by 7:30 pm. She gets some time with her daughter before putting her to bed. That is typically followed by dinner with her husband, some pending work-related tasks followed by bedtime. Weekends are usually reserved for household chores and family commitments.

Anita’s story is that of millions of working women trying to manage two demanding roles. Most of them aspire to be good wives and mothers along with being productive workers. Some enjoy the financial freedom and the intellectual stimulation while some treat it as yet another exhausting task.

Despite the repetition of this age old story, there have some notable changes in the attitudes and mind-sets of men, be it husbands, fathers or fathers-in-law who help out with chores and childcare.

All of the respondents unanimously agreed that it is crucial to have a strong support system at home. A majority – 56% (N=52) – acknowledged the help provided by husbands and mothers-in-law.



“I travel for three or four every week, both within the country and abroad. Without the support of my family, there is no way I could continue working here.”

Though the idea of a “second shift” was first written about in 1980s, it still holds true for women in the 21st century. Even though more men are helping around the house, women still do twice as much. Sociologists call it the “stalled gender revolution’. This imbalance shows up in different ways.

“Between work and child care, my world is now very limited. I have no time to connect with friends or keep up with industry changes.”

Some women have devised coping mechanisms to deal with these issues. They acknowledge their inability to handle all the tasks and instead, rely on domestic help. Most importantly, they place genuine trust in their husbands to manage the children and the household.

“Decide where you are going to focus your energies and let go of the rest. Delegate at work, delegate at home, especially if you have people to help. Instead of doing everything yourself, give them a fair chance and support them.”

SECTION 6

DO WOMEN KNOW HOW TO NETWORK?

“Surround yourself with only people who are going to lift you higher”

Oprah Winfrey

Networking plays a crucial role in professional growth for both men and women. For the purpose of this study, informal networking is defined as socializing after work hours, taking short breaks during work hours and interacting with different departments.

All 93 respondents talked about formal and informal networking; 51% (N=47) of the respondents talked about informal networking and highlighted its importance in increasing visibility within the organization which may lead to new roles or assignments. Other benefits include building strong relationships and making it easier to get tasks done across departments. Informal networks also provide information about exciting opportunities and new developments either within the company or outside.

“Networks give you access to new opportunities and the requisite skills and knowledge. It also gives you a platform to talk about your career with the right people.”

Several respondents talked about **missed opportunities to network**; a majority of the respondents talked about **cigarette breaks** and **drinking after work** as avenues for networking with colleagues and supervisors. Women mentioned that many important decisions are taken at these times including discussions about promotions.

There are several reasons for women's exclusion from informal networking. A few respondents talked about their **discomfort with conversations at such gatherings** or being around men who smoke and drink. On the flip side, they talked about being **labelled as not being friendly** or as having problems at home if they stay out of these gatherings.

“My male colleagues who smoke can connect better with my supervisor during smoke breaks. Even though I don't smoke, I tried to join them a couple of times but it was awkward and uncomfortable.”

The few women who managed to break into these circles talked about expectations of restrained behaviour or the risk of acquiring an unfavourable reputation. Some respondents highlighted that their presence might make the men uncomfortable as well.

“Despite working in a liberal and diverse environment, I can see that men hold back from discussing certain things, even work related, around women.”

A very small number of women were able to connect with men as friends and colleagues.

“You have to find the people you are comfortable with. I have male colleagues with whom I can joke around and even discuss my personal life. If I cannot have a beer with them after work and hold a casual conversation, I don't think I am creating an enabling environment at the workplace.”

Examples of alternate networks with work colleagues or friends that create an opportunity to interact with other working women were cited by some interviewees.

“I draw a lot of strength from my informal networks. I have two or three overlapping groups of friends and I draw huge strength from these networks as they drive my day.”

SECTION 7

WHAT CAN WOMEN DO TO BECOME MORE VISIBLE?

“Visibility doesn’t automatically translate into value, don’t just be everywhere, be where you are most needed.”

Bernard Kelvin Clive

Networking and visibility are the critical drivers of career growth. Existing socio-cultural norms prevent women from becoming visible and engaging in networking opportunities. As a result, a lot of women miss out on nominations for promotions or growth opportunities.

All respondents (93) talked at length about their perceptions and experiences of visibility and networking within their organisations.

DO WOMEN HAVE TO PUT IN EXTRA EFFORT TO PROVE THEIR WORTH?

Responses from 22 women (24%) indicate that women have to put in extra effort in order to challenge gender stereotypes and prove their competence.

“Women are so conscious about how they are seen and judged that they do not take breaks or go for social outings. They have to work extra hard, be diligent and follow up on every single thing to prove a point.”

Some women talked about their inability to say ‘no’ to extra work in order to gain their supervisor’s trust and confidence.

“I think you can only take liberties once you have proved your worth and gained your supervisor’s trust.”

However, due to the additional responsibilities at home, women often have a strong desire to complete their work in the designated office hours. In some instances, such as when they have to pick up their child from day care, women even end up carrying work home.

“I have to leave early so I can pick up my son from the crèche. While my male colleagues can finish their work and go home, I have to sit through the night in order to complete my work.”

However, seeming productive sometimes becomes more important than a woman’s actual productivity and output. A number of respondents talked about the corporate culture where there is an implicit expectation of staying late, whether the work demands it or not.

“This culture of staying late stems from the top management which believes that if a person is staying late, he or she is doing a lot more work than others.”

ARE WOMEN GOOD AT PROMOTING THEMSELVES?.....

Twenty women (22%) talked about the differences in the behaviours of men and women when seeking new opportunities for career advancement, negotiating perks and salaries as well as making themselves visible. Socio-cultural factors such as differences in upbringing and attitude as well as deeply entrenched behaviour patterns contribute to these differences.

A majority of the respondents highlighted the major difference between men and women: men are persistent and bold in asking for promotions while women are reticent. It was also felt that **women do not value themselves** and their capabilities as much as their male counterparts.

“Women want to be experts at something before they can confidently ask for a



promotion. But even if men have superficial knowledge about a role or the work, they will go out and pursue it.”

Additionally, the respondents expressed that **women are not as vocal about their achievements**, especially if it is needed to accelerate a promotion or a role change. This was attributed to societal conditioning which teaches women to be modest and to make compromises. Men, on the other hand, are good at aggressively positioning themselves as suitable candidates.

“Around promotion time, I see so many men talking to people on the council, lobbying for themselves and highlighting their work. Women find it very difficult to talk about themselves.”

DO WOMEN HAVE TO BE PROACTIVE IN SEEKING ASSIGNMENTS?

Respondents were questioned about their perceptions of what is needed in getting promotions. There was a uniform understanding that women need to be proactive in seeking new assignments or new roles. Fourteen respondents indicated that women should take the lead in asking for a promotion rather than waiting to be nominated.

Women also need to talk about their aspirations as well as their desire and ability to perform other tasks and assignments. As many as 29% (N=27) of respondents mentioned visibility as a key determiner of granting promotions. However, being proactive and vocal about their desires is counterintuitive for a lot of women.

“I advise all my juniors to speak up and share their aspirations. Women are afraid that they will be judged for their ambition or lack of humility. But everybody is so busy and caught up with their own work that unless they make themselves visible, nobody will remember them.”

Decisions about promotions are often made by a panel of senior members and not just by an employee’s immediate supervisor. In some instances, women were not nominated simply because the panel members were not familiar with them or their achievements. In this light, visibility and participation in team meetings becomes extremely important. Women can also gain visibility by sending regular updates on the projects they are working on and discussing it with other colleagues.

“Your immediate boss might be familiar with your work but what about your seniors who do not interact with you on a regular basis? It is extremely important to attend meetings and share updates about your work so that you make your presence felt.”

An employee's appraisal, assessment and role change is largely determined by their immediate supervisor. While some women indicated that their supervisors were fair and granted new opportunities based on merit, some complained about the reticence in granting promotions or acknowledgment of their skills. Respondents stressed the importance of being proactive in asking for role changes or new assignments.

However, being proactive does not guarantee success. In some instances, even when women proactively sought new opportunities, it was denied. A few women asserted that women need to put their foot down and ask for what is due to them. At the same time, women have to develop important skills and stay updated on new technology and other developments in that field.

“If you want to grow, you have to be ready to take risks and new challenges. If you are excited about it and willing to learn, you can really succeed.”

SECTION 8

DOES MENTORING HAPPEN BY CHANCE?

“Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.”

John C. Crosby

A majority of the women underlined the value of mentoring in solving problems, pushing boundaries and forming a strong support system outside of their families. Since a large number of women – 45% (N=42) – were mentored informally, most mentors were their direct supervisors, heads of their departments and in some cases, their super boss. Most women also took the initiative to seek out their mentors. Only a small percentage of women – 19% (N=18) – were part of a formal and structured mentoring process. Out of the 10 participating companies, only two companies had a formal mentorship programme. Even in these cases, mentorship was offered for a short period and a specific function.

Women who did not have the opportunity to participate in a formal programme or were not comfortable approaching mentors on their own felt like they had missed out on a valuable experience. While there was some form of mentoring early on in their careers, most women articulated a need for a formal and structured mentoring programme as they moved up in their career.

“It is important for the organisation to create a formal platform. An informal approach only works for those women who take the initiative and are receptive.”

Respondents discussed both personal and professional matters with their mentors. There were times when they used their mentors as sounding boards and to seek encouragement and reassurance about their abilities.

“When I was considering leaving, my mentor strongly advised me against it. I am very grateful to her because my identity is more than just a mother or a daughter in-law.”

Although a majority of the women felt a strong need for a formal mentorship program, a few women preferred to choose their own mentor.

“My organisation assigned me a mentor which was helpful. But a mentor-mentee relationships is informal and you can only build the comfort over a period of time. So it is best to choose your own mentor.”

Most respondents were more comfortable with a female mentor, especially when discussing personal issues. Women found female mentors more empathetic and their advice more relevant. However, some respondents were able to develop a similar rapport with male mentors as well. For all women, compatibility and comfort were paramount. The unique advantage of a male mentor was that he understood the competitive environment better and challenged their mentees to push boundaries.

Respondents felt that mentoring also helped them hone their skills and build new knowledge which helped them as they grew in their careers. In some cases, mentors helped women identify their core strengths and taught them how to leverage these in the workplace.

“My mentor helped me identify my weaknesses and how I could work on them to achieve my goals. She taught me how to navigate the system and to manager people. What makes a good mentor like her is



knowledge about the system and its loopholes and their ability to help you grow and warn you of the dangers.”

Respondents who were in leadership positions took on the role of a mentor for their team members and junior staff. They were inspired by their own experiences of being mentored. Those who missed out wanted to play the role of an ‘emotional anchor’ for their mentees.

“I spend half my time helping women open up and come out of their shells.”

The interviews indicated that mentoring has been a beneficial experience for women and has significantly shaped their career paths. The general recommendation is to create a formal and structured mentoring program offered to all employees.

Takeaways from Mentoring:

- *Several models of mentoring emerged*
- *Meaningful mentoring happens informally*
- *Women who seek out mentors usually have good outcomes*
- *Mentoring programs should be structured to last over a period of time*
- *Women find female mentors more empathetic and their advice more relevant*

SECTION 9

HOW CAN COMPANIES SHOW EVERYDAY FEMINISM?

“The ceiling isn’t glass. It’s a very dense layer of men”

Anne Jardin

Over the last decade, the corporate sector has taken significant steps to create an inclusive and equitable work environment. These include mandatory provisions such as maternity/paternity leave, safe passage home after late shifts, mechanisms to deal with sexual harassment and bullying either through an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC), an Ombudsman, a Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Committee or a Committee against Sexual Harassment (CASH).

In addition to these, some workplaces offer crèche facilities, extended maternity benefits such as short feeding-breaks, shorter work weeks, work-from-home, flexi-timings and flexi-location. Some companies have set-up programs such as Career 2.0, Returning Moms and Career by Choice, offering flexible/part-time work assignments to women who wish to come back to work in the organized sector after a maternity leave or a sabbatical.

Respondents were deeply appreciative of these measures, and acknowledged their contribution in keeping them in the company. A large majority – 69% (N=64) of the respondents talked about specific policies which had enabled their growth.

“They have a crèche - that is the primary reason I never left this company in 3 years!”

Some companies went a step further in promoting women's leadership. Respondents from certain organisations talked about their company's proactive measures to increase women across levels and departments within the organisation. Respondents made several suggestions to improve this process: ensure that the search process is fair and both genders are presented as probable candidates; and review the appraisal and promotion process to ensure that women are promoted when they are found competent.

“In my company we don't withhold any promotions; when we evaluate, we look at the employee's performance for the year. If she has been on maternity leave for six months, then we evaluate for the six months she has worked.”

Additionally, women were appreciative of policies which ensured their security and provided opportunities to expand their sphere of responsibility.

“The policies in my company are amazing! We are given flexi hours to the extent that line managers are directed to ensure that women leave the workplace on time.”

Despite these policy measures, when asked to classify their company as gender biased, gender neutral or gender sensitive, only 46% (N=43) women reported that their companies were gender neutral or gender sensitive, with a majority clustering around gender neutral.

“We are gender neutral because we have some policies which support women but the sensitivity is largely leadership driven.”

WHAT'S MISSING?

One glaring gap in most of the companies was a lack of women in senior leadership roles. Respondents felt that this was reflective of the company's attitude towards inclusion and women's empowerment.

“We have the policy measures in place but they are not carried out in the right spirit.”

A second gap is the lack of awareness around policies to prevent sexual harassment or misconduct. While 45% (N=42) women talked about how these policies made it easier for women to report misdemeanours at the workplace, they articulated a need for widespread awareness through gender sensitisation workshops and programmes.

“They have done a fair amount of work to educate people about gender sensitivity but these are driven by regulatory practices. I think there needs to be more open dialogue around these issues to discuss what makes effective policies.”

In addition to explicit misdemeanours, women also face setbacks due to biases about their natural strengths. For instance, women in technical fields, logistics or finance often face resistance. Male supervisors acting from a misplaced sense of protection, can also be a hindrance, especially when assigning certain roles and projects. This is particularly true for profiles that require travel or dealing with the shop floor.

“The common mind-set is that men find it more comfortable to communicate with other men and understand their needs and problems better.”

The recruitment process is another area where women openly face a gender bias.

“They will not hire a woman because she has to look after her children, her family and a thousand other responsibilities. So she may not be able to travel as easily. For roles which require ‘assertiveness’ or dealing with outsourced staff, they don’t even consider women.”

One cause for this is that male supervisors often make assumptions about a woman’s ambition, skill-set or interests.

“There was an opportunity to take on a larger responsibility but because it involved frequent visits to a factory, my manager didn’t offer it to me because he assumed I would not take it.”

Even when supervisors are being sensitive, they often overlook a woman’s desire to be included in strategy and decision-making. For instance, one of the respondents talked about her boss who frequently held meetings after office hours. While he encouraged her to leave early and skip these meetings, he failed to understand that he was excluding her from important discussions and decisions about her team. In her words, he was being “helpful not thoughtful.”

REPORTING RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

For all the respondents, their relationship with their reporting supervisor was reflective of their company’s gender sensitivity. Forty four respondents (47%) believed that more than policies on paper, it was important that the spirit of the policies was understood and implemented by senior leadership.

Women narrated some encouraging instances when they were granted promotions even during and after pregnancy.

“After my baby, I would have quit had it not been for the support of my supervisors. They encouraged me to continue with the reassurance that they would not disturb me at home unless it was something urgent.”

Women outlined their own yardsticks to measure the effectiveness of their supervisor. Trust and support in times of need were critical factors.



“Two things are important when you work under a male manager - one is the safety and security and the second is the support he provides. If both are present, you can deliver. The number of hours you need to put in don’t even matter.”

In a lot of instances, these two factors were sorely missing; male supervisors were often reluctant to work with or report to women. Several women talked about senior male colleagues who made taunts about their age or lack of experience.

“My manager would ask my age and say that he has that many years of work experience. At other times, he would dismiss me because I’m a woman and what do I know?”

With this mind-set, men were caught off guard by a woman in a senior leadership position.

“They only address the male members of my team, assuming that I’m a secretary or assistant. They are completely thrown off when they learn that I am the plant manager!”

However, very few women are found in senior leadership positions. Women lose out on promotions because they are not aggressive or candid with their managers about pursuing better opportunities.

“Women don’t fight for themselves the way men do. When it comes to

promotions, men actively lobby for themselves and talk to people on the promotion council. Most women will typically wait to be noticed and acknowledged.”

The process of assessing an employee’s productivity and contribution is also rife with pre-conceptions and biases. Often, the parameters for evaluating a woman’s ability is not her contribution during the regular work day but the number of hours she can stay after work.

“In my experience it is the number of hours after 6 pm that really count. Otherwise, people assume that because you leave early, you do not work as hard.”

As is evident from this study and several others, it is extremely important to be assertive, vocal and visible in the workplace. However, such behaviour, when exhibited by women, is not only counterintuitive but also invites unfavourable labels.

“Since I was single, I always had to deal with rumours about how long I spent in my boss’ cabin, what we talked about etc. It felt like I was always being closely watched.”

The interviews revealed that gender biases are so deeply ingrained that even sensitive and aware men are clueless about how home, family and childcare impact a woman’s career.

“When I came back from maternity leave, I was actually asked if I could do the role. Would they have asked me that if I had broken my leg or was taking care of a sick relative? Why did they assume that I would be less effective after having a baby?”

Often times, a women’s desire to be appreciated and rewarded for her work is treated as unnecessary. In some cases, their male colleagues even question the need for a promotion or an increment.

“I was told that since my husband is already earning, I shouldn’t worry about promotions and increments. Since I was already well off, I could afford to take the financial strain.”

The general belief was that while some realities of the corporate culture can be changed through policies and processes, others will have to be accepted and dealt with.

“Women in senior leadership positions often display high levels of aggression. So the question is, do they succeed because of their aggressiveness or are they conditioned to believe that these qualities can help them succeed?”

Finally, some of the more experienced respondents cautioned against harbouring feelings of bitterness and focusing on their own contribution to the organisation.

“It all comes down to your motivation and your ability to drive your success. Stay focused and develop a practical, objective approach to work.”

SECTION 10

THE WAY FORWARD

“Exclusion is never the way forward on our shared paths to freedom and justice.”

Desmond Tutu

The 10 participating companies displayed a clear intent and commitment to make the workplace more gender inclusive. While their female employees acknowledged and validated this commitment, they also made suggestions for other measures which could open doors for women, especially at senior leadership positions.

This section consolidates suggestions by the interviewees as well as observations made by the research team.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

Environments which celebrate a traditional, masculine leadership style often fail to acknowledge the value of women’s unique attributes and strengths. There is an urgent need to sensitise both men and women to their own biases and privileges which contribute to the creation and sustenance of inequitable systems.

INTEGRATING AND CELEBRATING DIFFERENCES

- Sensitize and educate people managers and change the framework of performance assessment to ensure gender neutrality. This can be done by creating and maintaining transparent systems for promotions and rewards where biases and inconsistencies can be reported and addressed
- Recognize and respect differences between the way men and women perform and communicate.

- Through gender sensitisation programs reiterate the concept that gender-equity at the workplace is no loss to men.

BUILDING CAPACITY

Progressive companies invest in career development and leadership programs to build a cadre of future leaders.

BUILDING EMPOWERED LEADERS

Companies need to re-think their strategy for building women's leadership in particular.

- There is a great need to empower men and invest them in the idea of creating successful women leaders.
- Create special skill-development programs which build key skills such as assertive communication, negotiation, time-management and networking.
- Create forums which provide space for women to share their personal and professional issues including feelings of guilt and inadequacy.
- Involve men thereby, collectively making an effort to move towards a model of leadership which celebrates collaboration, diversity and inclusion.

MENTORING

Mentoring women employees is a critical step in retaining and promoting women at all levels. A large number of women who participated in this study benefitted from mentoring, even if it was informal. An ongoing mentoring program – which includes 'sponsorship' can also help retain women at the time when notional exits outweigh the opportunities ahead.

- Formal and structured mentoring is just as important as informal mentoring. This ensures that women receive adequate guidance, especially when faced with difficult career choices or decisions.
- Mentoring can also help women identify their core strengths and work on their areas of improvement.

ARTICULATING AND AMPLIFYING POLICIES

Most women are appreciative of policies such as flexi-hours, and extended maternity leave. However, there are two areas of improvement in the implementation of these policies. Firstly, companies should understand the spirit behind the policy and create a conducive environment for women. Second, a better articulation of these policies will address gender segregation in sharing the workload both at home and at the workplace.

CLEAR ARTICULATION OF POLICIES

- Ensure that company policies regarding flexi-hours, work from home and leave benefits are clearly explained to everyone.
- It is important that men are encouraged to use these benefits as well so that both feel an equal responsibility for managing home and family life. This will also ensure that men do not view these policies as affording special privileges to women.
- Senior leaders should walk the talk and consistently promote women-friendly policies, providing a signal that is unmistakable and gets picked up by employees. For instance, not calling a meeting just before official closing time or making women feel welcome on their return from maternity leave goes a long way in retaining women employees.
- Companies should articulate policies for working parents and not working mothers alone

PROVIDE DAY CARE FACILITIES

For new mothers in particular, returning to work after a maternity leave is a difficult choice. On one hand, they must deal with physical and emotional exhaustion and on the other, they have to battle feelings of guilt and vulnerability.

- A safe and comfortable workplace is important. Productivity increases when women have access to a crèche/day-care service and do not have to worry about child-care. It not only enables them to monitor their child, but also fosters goodwill and gratitude.

There are a host of factors which prevent women from participating in the workforce and contributing to their fullest capacity. There is a great need to address these issues through policy changes along with mentoring programmes, especially at mid-management levels. These policy measures, combined with the right attitude towards nurturing women's leadership, can go a long way in creating an equitable and inclusive work environment.

In addition to visible and explicit challenges, women face implicit attitudinal challenges in the form of biases, assumptions and gaps in the workplace. Companies should make a concerted effort to make all employees aware of the following biases and assumptions when working with women.

ASSUMPTIONS

- Not offering new roles and positions to women on the assumption that they will not be interested.
- Not offering new roles and positions to single women on the assumption that they will get married.
- That women are not ambitious or lack the skill set for particular roles.
- That young mothers are unfit for roles that demand “toughness”.
- That those who are not vocal or visible are not capable.
- That staying late at work is equal to being more productive.
- That evening meetings work for both the genders.

BIASES

Biases that creep into recruitment, review mechanisms and promotions

- Women lack ambition.
- Assumptions around marriage and children taking precedence.
- Women will prioritize family over professional commitments.
- Exclusion from certain roles due to a misplaced sense of protectiveness.

Biases about women’s capabilities

- Women are unfit for:
 - Technology Roles
 - Shop Floor Roles

GAPS IN THE WORKPLACE AND HOW TO ADDRESS THEM

Questioning special privileges

PROMOTE EQUITABLE ROLES FOR BOTH MEN AND WOMEN

For example

Policies for working parents not just working mothers.

Introduce parental leave.

Increase paternal leave.

Lack of awareness of human resource policies

CLEARLY ARTICULATE AND PROMOTE POLICIES

Lack of senior women in leadership roles

CREATE A MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME BY WOMEN LEADERS & FACILITATE THE RETURN TO WORKPLACE AFTER MATERNITY LEAVE

Lack of visibility

SEEK WOMEN LEADERS OUT AND CREATE UNBIASED REVIEW PROCESSES

Lack of networking opportunities

CREATE A COMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR BOTH MEN AND WOMEN TO INTERACT

While the corporate sector in India has come a long way in the last two decades, organisations need to align their intent and action more closely. The time for change is now.

SECTION 11

WOMEN CENTERED CORPORATE POLICY INDEX (WCCPI)

Gender inequality remains a major barrier to human development. Although there has been a shift in gender defined roles since 1990s, gender equity remains a distant dream. Women continue to face inequity and constraints with appropriate jobs, pay scales, mobility, promotions, education, health, representation in labour force and more.

The proposed WCCPI Index is a composite measure which aims to capture existing gender norms in the corporate sector in India. WCCPI Index recognizes that gender equality is multifaceted – existing social attitudes (social norms among families, gendered role assignments, and others) impact social outcomes (presence of women in senior management positions, treatment of women at work place, etc).

The proposed Index has seven components that measures actual policies and practices as well as efforts to change prevailing attitudes and norms. We include the Index here as a recommendation for companies to review their existing policies. This is a work in progress and we propose to develop this as an actual measurement index in the next phase of GCWL’s endeavours to create a gender-inclusive work environment for women.

DOMAINS:

1. ORGANISATIONAL

- » Percentage of women on company board
- » Percentage of women in senior management team

2. FAMILY SUPPORT

- » Maternity leave¹
- » Special leave²
- » Paternity leave
- » Day care/crèche
- » Nursing stations

3. INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT

- » Flexi hours
- » Work from home
- » Telecommuting
- » Shuttle services
- » Travel support to bring children and family if on long official travel

4. ARTICULATION OF POLICIES TO ALL EMPLOYEES

- » Clearly articulated policies³ and leave benefits
- » Men encouraged to use policies and leave benefits⁴
- » No meeting just before official closing time
- » Welcome women on their return from maternity leave

5. CAPACITY BUILDING

- » Structured Mentoring
- » Peer counseling
- » Professional counseling
- » Workshops and Skills enhancement training programs for women⁵

6. CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

- » Sensitization workshops for men
- » Transparent systems for promotions and rewards
- » Recognition of differences between the way men and women perform and communicate.

7. PLANNING FOR NOTIONAL EXIT GATES:

- » Provision for leave, accommodating to extent possible, for change in location after marriage
- » Provision for maternity leave and post maternity period in terms of leave, flexi hours etc as mentioned in Point 2 above
- » Provision for leave or support during children's examination
- » Provision for leave for family care
- » Provision for support to prevent "burn out" stage

ENDNOTES

¹Maternity leave for more than stipulated 3 months

²Special leave includes leave for miscarriage, illness arising out of pregnancy/delivery, adoption

³Policies regarding flexi-hours, work from home, telecommute and others mentioned in Sections 2 & 3

⁴Ibid

⁵Workshops for women on assertive communication, negotiation, time management, networking

ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE 1

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was focused on understanding women’s participation in the private sector through in-depth interviews with women at mid-level and senior level positions. This exploratory study was undertaken to identify and better understand enabling and disabling factors including obstacles at work and home which prevent women from reaching and retaining senior level position.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

- Understand enabling factors that encourage women’s participation at all levels, specifically at senior positions.
- Understand disabling factors that prevent equal participation at all level, specifically at senior positions.
- Understand best practices that enable women to reach and retain senior leadership positions.
- Understand existing interventions/programs that facilitate equal participation.
- Understand women’s requirements of interventions/programs that would facilitate equal participation.
- Provide recommendations and suggestions for future action based on research findings.

ANNEXURE 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research relies mainly on data gathered through one on one interviews with select respondents. Open ended interview guide was used to gather information on key areas of focus. Responses from interviewees are what forms the data set which is analysed through software designed specifically for qualitative data analysis. Hence the process of data gathering and analysis is rigorous.

For this research data were collected through quantitative as well as qualitative study instruments. While the former helped gather information from the selected sample, the latter provided in-depth understanding of prevailing work environment at the purposively selected corporate organisations.

Five sectors were selected purposively: information and technology; finance and banking; pharmaceuticals; fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) and e-commerce. These sectors have adequate women representation in the workforce. Two companies per sector were identified purposively which fulfilled the criterion of having women representation at all levels, especially mid to senior level. A total of 10 companies were invited to participate in the research. Each of these companies was sent a short description of the research objectives. Once they agreed, they were requested to identify 10 women from mid to senior level positions who would be willing to participate in the study. A total of 100 interviews were proposed. Though there were no refusals, data were collected from 93 respondents as not all selected respondents were available at the time of the interview. Skype interviews were conducted with 2 respondents as they were unable to reach their place of work on scheduled date and time.

The study aimed to gather women's stories about their professional journey. Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with women across mid and senior positions. A guideline for conducting interviews was developed that aimed to better understand the existing environment in the company, best practices, programs and policies that are in place, availability of networking and mentoring opportunities, perceived obstacles and the extent of support received from workplace and home. Interviews also sought suggestions on programs that would enable women to grow and reach senior levels in their organisations.

In-depth interviews were undertaken by the researchers who are experienced in qualitative research methodology. Additionally, in order to build capacity of graduate and postgraduate students of Ashoka University, select students were trained in methods of qualitative research. Once trained, these students accompanied the researchers and observed the interviews. All interviews were taped, if permitted, and transcribed in English.

Quantitative data was gathered with a view to quantify the qualitative information; at the end of the interview, a short questionnaire (5 minutes) was administered. The questionnaire aimed to capture specific information on women's understanding of gender related issues including their perception of gender within their organisation, their understanding on how the organisation views gender and diversity and their experiences in their organisation around gender-related support systems.

Informed consent was taken prior to the in-depth interview and the survey questionnaire. The respondents were informed that their responses will be kept confidential; no details that would identify them will be taken (name, address, company name, phone number, etc.). They were given the option to not answer any question or to stop the interview at any point. It was emphasised that participation or refusal to participate would not have an impact on their employment or their position in the organisation.

Interviews were analysed using ATLAS Ti 7 software designed for qualitative data analysis. A code tree was prepared to ensure that the researchers were uniform in their understanding of the codes. To avoid bias and ensure rigour in analysis, each researcher coded interviews not done by her.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

This study has three limitations that the researchers would like to acknowledge. First, being an exploratory study, 10 companies across 5 sectors were selected purposively. Second, the researchers did not have any control over the selection process of respondents nor were they aware of the selection process. Each company was requested to identify 10 women from mid to senior level positions who would be willing to participate in the study. Any company bias that may have influenced the respondents needs to be kept in mind while looking at the findings.

The third limitation is the place of interview. All interviews were conducted at workplace. While the interviews took place in a separate room and confidentiality was assured at different points during the interview, there is a possibility that respondents may not have been as open and comfortable in sharing details. Interviews conducted outside the workplace may have elicited more frank and insightful responses.

ANNEXURE 3

ADDITIONAL QUOTES

This section provides additional quotes highlighting the findings for each of the sections in the research report.

SECTION 2 – ARE WOMEN AMBITIOUS ENOUGH?

“I was clear that I wanted to be known for not just being a good mother, I wanted to be known for me, as somebody who has done well in her professional life. It’s not the money that is important, it’s how far you have been able to reach.”

“I have been getting promoted practically every 2-3 years! It has been a fast career growth for me and I have no complains.”

“When I had twins, one would think my career would take a backseat. Actually, because of my company’s support, my role expanded and became even bigger. There was a day care facility so I was able to work for 10 years. It has been a terrific journey!”

“I went from being a junior manager to a mill manager and up to being a director in a matter of 6 years! I think that is super acceleration.”

“For me, career has been a means to an end, it is not the career per se that gives me the satisfaction. For me, it is important to work and earn well.”

“Men are far more mobile than women. If you look at men and women who graduated at the same time, you will notice that men have richer experiences and better salaries than women.”

“I had a great opportunity which required me to be in Mumbai. In the financial sector, the maximum growth in is Mumbai. But I could not move due to my family commitments. Had I moved, I would have been at a better position with a higher income.”

“While I have done fairly well and accomplished a lot at work, 10 years in this function has taken a lot more me. I’m not deliberating whether to carry on.”

SECTION 3 - IS GUILT FEMININE?

“Having a baby was my decision. So how I can shirk my responsibilities towards him now?”

“My career goal was to pursue HR but after having a daughter, that aspiration has toned down. I want to be able to give her my time whenever she needs me in the future.”

“Women always want to do right by everybody in all situations. After a while, you just get tired and have to learn to prioritize.”

“For the first few months after maternity, I was always anxious at work. But now when I’m engrossed in my work, I forget about all the troubles and tensions of home. This is something I really cherish about my work.”

“A man doesn’t do as much as you are doing at home. So many small chores that take up your mind space you can’t relax. That is one of the main reasons women are not doing as much as the men at work.”

“If you really want to work and step out of your house, you will have to make some compromises and you shouldn’t feel guilty about it.”

SECTION 5 – CAN WOMEN DO IT ALL ALONE?

“Men don’t realize that women have a bigger workload and additional responsibilities at home. Men can leave a lot of tasks to women – washing clothes, getting the children ready for school, preparing their lunch.”

“I think a lot of women who are able to forget everything and concentrate on work are those who have strong family support.”

“My husband is very supportive and a very involved father; he spends lot of time with the kids. We have clearly divided the chores between us.”

“It is common knowledge for women that by shaving 10-15% off their salaries on domestic help, they are creating an ecosystem that allows them to go after another 20% in increments next year!”

SECTION 6 - DO WOMEN KNOW HOW TO NETWORK?

“Women have to understand that there is no way out of networking. In a leadership position, networking is paramount because leadership is dependent on cross-functional and collaborative work environments.”

“Women miss out on important decisions and feedback because men will discuss these over a smoke.”

“If I have to go out and network at a party after work, I will have to consider many things like my transport, my safety and the environment at the party. Men never miss out on these opportunities because they don’t have to worry about all these factors.”

“Men and women network differently. Men can bond over a smoke or a dirty joke but a woman cannot. If a woman is quite, then she is labelled arrogant but if she tries to participate she is called loose.”

“Sometimes we just go out as a group of women. We discuss our lives and our problems. It is important for women to bond.”

SECTION 7 - WHAT CAN WOMEN DO TO BECOME MORE VISIBLE?

“The reason I never said no to work was to prove that I could take any responsibility and to gain my boss’ trust.”

“Women have to constantly challenge stereotypes and break barriers. It take a lot of hard work, not necessarily work related to your role, to be seen as equal to male employees.”

“If men are putting in 100%, women have to put in 200%. If you are not better than your male peers, you will never get noticed.”

“My boss would give me new challenges and appreciate my effort but stall my promotion. He would say wait for a year, I have to promote other people because they have been waiting.”

“Men do not hesitate in talking about their work. If my male colleagues have done better, it is because very few people know about my work.”

SECTION 8- DOES MENTORING HAPPEN BY CHANCE?

“We had a mentorship program which had nothing to do with our team or our appraisals. I would g to my mentor with all my professional and personal problems, that is the kind of openness we shared. There needs to be somebody at your office who has had similar experiences and whom you can learn from.”

“When I joined, there was nobody to mentor me. So I found my own mentor. He was not from my department but I asked him to meet me regularly and give me advice.”

“I would rather build a comfort level somebody first and then get mentored by them. It’s better than making it very official.”

“My mentor was my boss and I worked with her for 7 years. What she taught me was how to manage people, value feedback and carry your team in highs and lows.”

“My mentor was a big inspiration for me; she was an exceptionally strong woman and shrewd at the same time. She respected my personal choices but also trained and groomed me professionally.”

“One of the things I learnt from my mentor is that if you are passionate about your work, nothing can stop you. He really motivated me and built my confidence when I was 20-23 years old. I have to thank him for helping me develop the skills to be a successful sales person.”

“I have done fairly well and still have a few more years to go. I am happy that a lot of young women come and ask me for support and guidance, which I didn't get when I was younger.”

“I have a team of 35 people and they all know they can approach me any time.”

SECTION 9 - HOW CAN COMPANIES SHOW EVERYDAY FEMINISM?

“I have seen the organization go out of its way to support people. I was pleasantly surprised to find a role waiting for me when I came back from maternity leave.”

“The organisation isn't biased or sensitive, it is blind.”

“No one will look at you as a woman. If they do, it is only to protect you'.

“There are definitely fewer women at the top. In the core business especially, you will not find any women.”

“Of course in a senior role it's always a man. All senior roles have men. We will have women but they will not be heading any functions.”

“With the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act, you have to create a lot awareness in the system. Because of the ordinance, a lot of women employees are coming forward talking to us to report comments or aggressive behaviour from their supervisor.”

“There are differentiated vulnerabilities at different levels within the organization and therefore there needs to be some clarity and reassurance, especially for the men that with zero tolerance there is reason.”

“When a task has to be assigned, the first choice is always a man. They will call women if there is something creative or fluffy.”

“There is a mentality, especially in technical fields, that women are less capable than men. I have overheard interview feedback in which the hiring manager

says 'As a girl, she's ok but otherwise I don't know.' What does that even mean?"

"I actually got one of my critical promotions in the seventh month of my pregnancy. After I came back my boss was welcomed me back and even cut a cake. That made me feel really valued."

"Even in interviews I have candidates who have concerns about reporting to a female boss."

"When people trust you and show confidence in your abilities, it shows that they are with you in your journey of success."

"If men are concerned about their salary, there is a high probability that they will voice their concern. A woman will typically wait for things to happen, for someone to do something about it."

"When they talk about promotions, they feel that men can handle the responsibility better because it will be stressful and require more time."

"If you refuse to attend a late evening meeting or dinner meeting then they say women can't come because they have to go home early. But my question is, you have 9 hours of working time, why can't you hold the meetings then?"

"My earlier boss would hold meetings with my team starting at 5.30 pm. At 7pm he would say, 'you go home, we'll finish this'. This was my team and if we were reviewing our work, I needed to be there. When I brought this up with him, he was responsive. But this had not even occurred to him. He was being helpful but not thoughtful."

"If you could be a little more aggressive, things may work out differently. But that means you either have to be two-faced or go against your natural self."

"Men are just concerned about the job because someone is managing their homes. So even if a random meeting comes up at 7 pm, they can attend without a care."

"If a man raises his voice, he's being a boss but if a woman does the same, she is being bossy."

"So when this international relocation came up, many 'sensitive' colleagues asked about how it would affect my marriage, my relationships and my family. Nobody asks a man those questions."

"After a certain point, you need to be fairly you; you have to be independent and manage on your own rather than expecting someone to keep asking you are you ok/ can we do something for you?"

ANNEXURE 4

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