Gender Diverse and Inclusive Ecosystem: Behind Successful Women

Dr. A. Bharathy
Assistant Professor, Department of Management
Pondicherry University Community College, Lawspet, Puducherry

Abstract--- This paper analyzes the gender diverse and inclusive ecosystem existing currently and building a more favorable ecosystem that fosters women to continue work. The key parameters examined in the survey were career ambition, leadership roles, work life balance, organizational environment, welfare measures, learning and development, empowering women, friendly work place facilities and demographic profiles. Some of the key findings in the areas of interest are presented in this paper to foster a better balance of women in industries not only in Puducherry where the study is initiated, but in other regions of our country to build a more diverse team with different perspectives and with greater ability to contribute for a progressive and more inclusive India.

Keywords--- Gender Diversity, Ecosystem, Gender Gap, Successful Women, Empowering Women.

Introduction

Modernity, capitalism and globalization have seen more number of women leave the confines of domesticity and find paid employment. It is heartening to see that they comprise 40% of the global workforce; however, there is a dire need to be aware of the gap in our workplace ecosystem as it is not reflecting this growing gender diversity. World Economic Forum (2016) reports that India is making significant progress over the last 10 years to reduce gender gap, but still lags behind and is in lower ranking. Other Asian countries such as Vietnam, Thailand and Bangladesh have fared much better.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>Top ranker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India’s rank on Global Gender Gap index</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>87  Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic participation and opportunity</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>136 Burundi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education attainment</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>113 Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and survival</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>142 38 countries including Nicaragua, Namibia and South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political empowerment</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9 Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total countries ranked</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Economic Forum’s The Global Gender Gap Report

The report also warns us of the low Gender Gap Index and its four sub-indices where India ranks low - it ranks 103 out of 135 countries in wage equality survey, and women in parliament is 112 out of 141. In this regard, this study is an evaluative work on ecosystem at workplace for the growing female workforce employed in various organizations in Puducherry, and also certainly gives a picture of women being ambitious and assertive about their abilities to become top level managers just like their male counterparts. It also brings forth the findings in a very lucid style explaining various factors operating in the corporate culture that surely acts as stumbling blocks to their career path, and as such threatening gender diversity and inclusivity.
Review of Literature

Studies succinctly have found that women are under-represented in key decision-making roles not only in Indian politics, where the fight to implement 33% reservation (not 50%) is still pending, but also in corporate India. It is not uncommon for them to face gender bias, stereotyping and be paid lower compensation. Egon Zehnder report (2017) finds that gender bias, stereotyping was acutely felt by women in C-suites in India than in countries such as US in spite of the greater percentage of women (11%) at CEO levels in India than in advanced western nations. Monster India in its report highlights that there remains many barriers to join the big leagues and boardrooms. Another research points to the fact that 62% of men have mentor at CEO level or senior executive level versus 52% of women. Further, men are more likely to affiliate with other men than women with other women. Also the dual responsibilities of women dissuade them from spending more time with their mentors unlike their male counterparts like going for a dinner, cricket match and the likes. The articles reviewed highlight the exclusion of women in our system be it at workplace or family space. This calls for an understanding of key parameters present at workplace, and how men and women discuss among them like career ambition, leadership roles, work-life balance, organizational environment, welfare measures, learning and development, empowering women, friendly work place facilities and demographic profiles. An analysis of these parameters will be able to address the various workplace positives and negatives thereby sharing the best practices to other industries, while on the other hand it will enable the identification of policy initiatives which will foster a healthy work ecosystem for bringing about a gender diverse and inclusive work place and bridge the low gender gap ranks.

Research Methodology

An effort has been made to understand the nature of various workplace variables that influence the ecosystem of working women professionals in Puducherry Region. A survey was conducted with the help of a structured checklist covering 10 parameters and also information relating to their demographic profile. These elements are career ambitions, organizational cultural factors, leadership roles, work-life balance, organizational environment, welfare measures, learning and development, empowering women, friendly work place facilities and demographic profiles. The sampling plan adopted for the study was stratified sampling, and 200 respondents including male and female from various industrial sectors like IT, ITES, Manufacturing, Hospitality and Retail were included for an unbiased opinion on the topic being studied. This survey result will present an excellent guide book for industries to develop a favorable ecosystem for women employees at work places so that women can spread their wings and soar up.

Findings & Discussion

Career Ambition: The female respondents to the survey have reported that their career ambitions are just as high as those of their male peers, and that they are willing to do what it takes to achieve their goals and ambitions. Based on the result generated by SPSS, the significant value is greater than 0.05 on all parameters used to measure career ambition (table 1), and so we accept the null hypothesis. Hence, there is no significant difference between the two means, i.e., career ambition between male and female.
Organisational Cultural Factors: An analysis of the opinion of male and female respondents with reference to various other corporate cultural challenges using Independent sample t test showed significant differences in opinion on the parameter “Even with equal skills and qualifications women have much more difficulty in reaching the top”. The significant value is lesser than 0.05 (see test table 2), so we reject the null hypothesis, and also the mean score of female is higher (4.23) than the mean score of male (2.34). This shows how the male respondents feel that workplace gender issues are less in comparison to women.

Leadership Roles: The male dominated ecosystem existing in work places is very much visible on analysis using Independent sample t test (see table 3). It again reveals fewer men only do seem to understand the workplace challenges faced by women.

Work-Life Balance: The survey data shows no significant difference in opinion among men and women employees in terms of this parameter. However, in case of certain factors like fitness activities - exercise/walk/yoga atleast 3 times a week, the agreement of women respondents is 50% while that of male respondents is 60%, and this also shows women find less time for these fitness activities when compared to men. This may take a toll on their health in the long run. Also, on spending long time...
commuting to office the agreement is more among women which is 71% than compared to men which is 62%. This is also to be considered in a town like Puducherry which has a less favourable public transportaion facility connecting the different locations. Further, it is reported by the respondents that women feel more tensed often (70%) in comparison to men (51%), and the percentage point difference is about 19% which is significant and not a healthy condition.

**Welfare Measures:** The welfare facilities provided in various organizations, though may be different, plays a role in maintaining an ecosystem that can foster and retain talented workforce. In the survey data, it is observed that women seem to be satisfied to a larger extent with respect to maternity leave (71%) , action taken by their organisations against women harassment at work place (81%) and with child care leave (69%) when compared to satisfaction levels of men which is 66%, 73% and 59% respectively. Though this indicates an ecosystem favourable to women, it cannot be ignored that the lesser satisfaction of men in terms of child care leave facility might be a hurdle to their working spouses.

**Learning & Development:** The respondents to survey have rated their satisfaction levels with various learning & development variables as 71% by men and 70% by women; this is almost similar.

**Empowering Women:** With respect to the variable “women have more workplace challenges to reach the higher levels”, it was agreed by 75% of men and 93% of women respondents. This verifies that men too agree to this statement, but with a percentage point difference of 18%.

**Friendly Workplace Facilities:** Women respondents of the survey give an overwhelming 78% agreement to various workplace-friendly facilities. A low percentage of 53% is seen in the availability of reading/indoor sports to relax.

**Demographic Profiles:** The study had women respondents from different age groups; 45% of the respondents in 26-40 years of age, 39.4% in 18-25 years of age and the rest above 41 years of age. The educational profile of respondents includes 33% with ITI/Diploma, 33% with UG degree, 23% with PG degree and other qualifications were 11%. Different income groups’ opinion was also included in the survey ranging from less than Rs.10,000 to over Rs.50,000 per month. Further 44% of the women’s family type was joint family and 56% were nuclear family. The respondents also were from diverse industry types like IT/ITES, manufacturing, hospitality and other industrial sectors.

**Looking Beyond the Survey - What Needs to be Done?**

**Correcting Workplace Disparity Through the Paternity/ Maternity Leave:** Paternity leave would encourage men to participate in caregiving, i.e., “involved fatherhood”. This would speed up women’s recovery after pregnancy and would also lead to lower rates of postpartum depression. Further, when providing the same benefit to both people and encouraging to take leave, there is no room for bias. This would also help us to verify whether male employees will experience a career stall if they take this break.
Extend Maternity SOPs to private sector: The maternity benefit (Amendment) Act 2017 has increased the paid leave to 26 weeks from 12 weeks. Also providing flexible work hours to these women after joining the organization will enable smooth transition into their work place.

Male mentorship to help women reach top levels: This would change the game of power and provide a level playing field for women to rise to top levels.

Tailoring loans to career growth: Education, vehicle loans and other loans to meet the career development and productivity goals of women employees needs to be looked into.

Health Clubs can be established: Here awareness regarding health can be disseminated on current topics of interest so as to motivate the health & fitness conscious levels of women.

Connecting Diversity and Inclusion at work place: This will enable equality between genders in the social sphere. Diversity and Inclusion can also be measured through including variable in the organization’s score card.

Government support for working women’s hostel: As more jobs are being created in the MSME sector, these jobs call for diverse skills and talent crunch. In this case, MSME sector cannot ignore women work force that are eager to make their contributions and build a career for them. Thoughts of safety and relocation costs may discourage many parents from sending their daughters to work; this can be met by setting up of hostels for a particular company or for women from a particular region. These hostels can be partly funded by the government to offset their cost of living and increase savings.

Quality child care facilities: This would increase their availability for work.

Tax credits for women: This may also encourage more women into work force and also help to retain them.

Conclusion

The survey data reports a critical need to create a favorable ecosystem for gender equality so that woman can spread their wings and soar. This study finding comes at a right time when the government of India took a decision of inducting women fighter pilots into the Indian Air Force. This is in line with the aspirations of women to serve the country as equal as men, and in line with the trend of a developed nation. However, “no matter what they say at the podium, men may not hand over the roles to women, so women have to push hard if they want what they seek.”

References


Mc Kinsey Global Survey Results, Moving mindsets towards Gender Diversity, 2014

DOI: 10.9756/BP2018.1012/14
Gender Parity and Women Empowerment-Challenges and Way Forward


