

Ethics and Values in Dealing with Issues of Women at Work Place

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ABSTRACT: A major shift in participation of women in workforce has occurred over the last decade in organizations and institutes across the world. Also for effective corporate governance, the top management in various organizations has understood the need to possess flexible and improved ways to motivate and empower the employees. This article illustrates the need of well formulated ethics and values in context of issues pertaining to this gender, to boost work-personal life balance and provide them with supportive emotional well being. Their successful reinforcement would promisingly ensure organizations to embark upon their mission effectively.

Keywords: Gender biasing, organizational values, value based management

I. INTRODUCTION

India is 10th largest growing economy of the world today (Wikipedia, 2013), yet it appears that the women have an uphill task to change their image from ‘the nurturers’ to decision taking higher management roles (Rai, 2012) and take a leap in their career progression. The conflict arising from need to balance work and personal life, gender discrimination, certain social restrictions for blue collared jobs, biological limitations, relocation and marriage prospects are some pulling factors and have resulted in more or less stagnation at around 18% in proportion of urban female participation in workforce. (Refer figure 1)

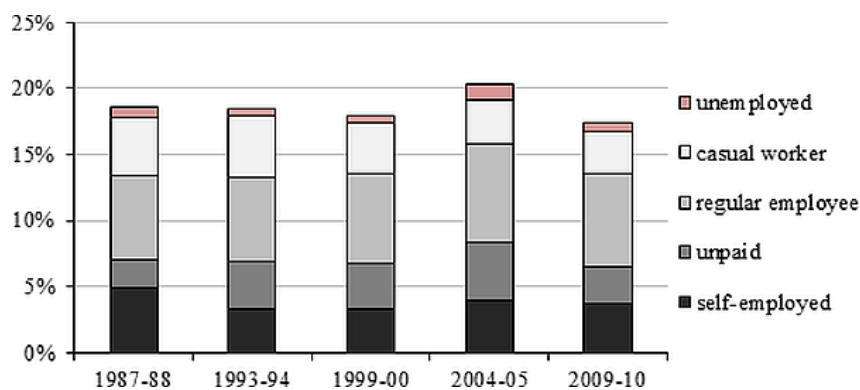


Figure 1. Indian Urban female labour force participation rate

Note: Sample comprises married women aged 25-54. Self-employment includes employers and own account workers. Unpaid refers to unpaid family workers. Source: National Sample Survey Employment and Unemployment Survey. (Klasen, 2012)

However a survey (Singh & Vinicombe, 2005) finds out that Indian women at senior positions disregard the general notion about gender bias and believe in their capabilities. Gender budgeting in union budget by Indian government for fiscal year 2013-14 also highlights upon inadequacies on various fronts. As per news release of world economic forum 2013 the gender gap across the world has lowered however India still stands 101st in list of 136 countries reviewed, stressing upon the need to think of human capital in a different way and integrating women into leadership roles. This blending is more likely the “next frontier of change” and attainable through reduced gender bias, increased investment in women’s education (Zahidi, 2013). This segment of workforce needs a dedicated and systemized culture in organization to blossom and deliver which is foreseeable through adoption of proper ethics and values by organizations.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF VALUES AND ETHICS FOR ORGANIZATIONS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

The organizations have mission statement for which it needs a vision and in order to adhere to vision the company formulates values and ethics which are in turn supported by executing and monitoring plans at base level. The Vision and mission statements provide direction, focus, and energy to organization to accomplish the shared goals. The relation between these can be illustrated as in figure 2 (Mc Farlane, 2013)



Figure 2- Relationship between ethics, values, vision and mission for organization.(Source **Mc Farlane, 2013**)

So ‘values and ethics’ are prime and central to all organizations, as they guide the conduct of employees in a variety of ways by forming a “moral compass” for work practices and express “integrity as believed by all individuals” (**Wikipedia, 2013**). These in turn guide ‘quality’, ‘team work’, ‘behavior’, ‘continuous improvement’, ‘accountability’, ‘safety awareness’ as exhibited by the workforce while supporting for mission of organization. The company’s ethics dictate its response to all external and internal stimuli irrespective of governmental or other regulatory laws. Organizational values determine “what is right and what is wrong” and ethics address “doing what is right or wrong”. To behave ethically is to behave in a manner consistent with what is right or moral.

The Organizations which mandatorily lack ethical practices in their business structure and corporate culture are virtually found to fail. The recent corporate downfalls of ‘Enron’ & ‘World-com’ scandals are two such examples of unethical business practices. Indeed ethics and values would help in promoting higher standards of practices, give employees a benchmark of self evaluation, setting up framework of professional behavior and responsibilities and mark occupational maturity. Accordingly, in order to provide a knowhow of what is ‘acceptable’, what is not, what are the shared moral values viz. ethical principles defining culture and code of ethics viz. set of virtues to be encouraged towards guiding individual’s behavior, interpersonal harmony and performance expectations are all written down in ‘an employee handbook’. Apparently the best way to communicate these ethics is through training of employees on company standards. **Sivakumar & Rao (2010)** explain detail guidelines as provided in Indian ethos pertaining to various aspects of ‘value based management’ which help in developing welfare oriented policies towards stakeholders and promote ethical behavior. Such a framework aids value based decisions at corporate level. In a study **Cundiff & Kommaraju (2008)** examined and found that women by virtue of their higher levels of ethnic and cultural empathy are preferred in leadership and authoritative positions in comparison to male counterparts. Similar difference in affinity and inclination of women towards ethics when responding to dilemmas was experimentally found viable by **Kennedy and Kray (2013)** in their research. **Gill (2010)** infer from their research using variance analysis that women would promote ethical environment on basis of their higher ethical disposition as compared to men. Also, **Bajdo & Dikson (2001)** findings suggest that in organizations where members reported shared values of high humane orientation, low power distance and gender equity they also reported higher percentage of women employees comparatively. These hint upon having increased opportunities for women in management in order to cater to better organizational culture. However comparative study of **Rai (2012)** regarding lower number of empowered women in Indian corporate level is suggestive of need to pull on gender equivalence and reduce the prevailing

bias in organizations. Apart from gender empowerment, **Rao, Jaireth & Seethamma (2008)** find that high index of achievement in education and high per capita income also influence growth of professional women workforce. **Ghosh (2002)** emphasize upon role of social policy towards providing work and survival security to women through state level agencies and argue upon the need of having macroeconomic perspective for improving employment conditions of women in India.

III. ISSUES PERTAINING TO WOMEN AS WORKFORCE

Of late women in India have ventured out to more challenging fields including armed forces, aviation, manufacturing, marketing, electronics, software engineering, physicians, surgeons, lawyers and many more against their earlier penchants teaching, banking, human resource and hospitals. They have by far broken four wall barriers of house wife and by large raised to top management positions in big organizations. They excel in sports, venture in space, climb mountain peaks, become successful analysts, give media coverage and list is almost endless. More to this there has been decline in female foeticide rate with awareness and changing times.

Still women as a part of workforce face different types of issues. Many of the biggest workplace challenges facing women revolve around their gender. Some of the questions to be sought after are-Why do females still earn less than males holding the same job? Will the glass ceiling ever be shattered? Is a balance between family and career attainable? What will it take to establish a work environment where gender is a non-issue?

Women face different workplace health challenges than men, partly because men and women tend to have different kinds of jobs. Women generally have more work-related cases of carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, respiratory diseases, infectious and parasitic diseases, and anxiety and stress disorders. These generally limit them from certain physically more demanding fields. Social, economic, and cultural factors also put women at risk for injury and illness. For example, women are more likely than men to do contingent work part-time, temporary, or contract work. Workers in traditional job arrangements have comparatively more incomes and benefits than contingent workers. Sexist treatment and gender discrimination in the workplace can affect a woman's physical and mental health.

Women are now marrying later in life, earning higher educational degrees, delaying childbirth, and having fewer children than in previous years. More women are choosing to continue working while also balancing the traditional parenting responsibilities. The proportion of some these issues can be summarily illustrated by mapping them against the employment age (on approximate basis) for Indian working women as shown in Figure 3 (for purpose of illustration) below:

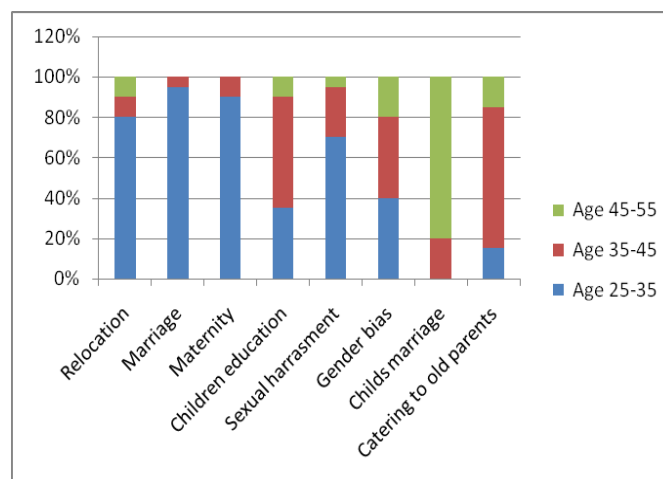


Figure 3- Typical issues of working women in India (an approximate illustration)

Apparently most of peculiar issues affecting women are in the first phase from 25 to 35 years of their life where chances of relocation, marriage, maternity, sexual harrasment and gender bias loom large. It is in this age slot when balancing professional role along with personal life issues sprout intense and multi-dimensional difficulties. In the second phase from 35 to 45 years of age on an average they deal with softer issues like children education and taking care of aging parents. In the third phase primary issues revolve around children marriage which is not so interfering with organizational working.

IV. FINDINGS TO SUGGEST FORMULATION OF VALUES AND ETHICS IN THE ABOVE CONTEXT

The framework for ensuring embedding ethics and values in organizational context would require the ethics to be defined with clarity and not vaguely which could leave a scope for misinterpretation. They should be concise, carry an implication of possible penalties in case of non-abidance, be communicated through periodic training sessions and vigorously accepted to gain overall trust of employees, customer, market share & allied domains. This would enable an employee empowered positive environment suitable for flourishing the company.

In an Indian scenario a majority of issues pertaining to women as mentioned below have been summarized and possible suggestions for ethics and values have been illustrated in Table-1 below:

S.no	Issues faced by women in workplace	Suggested ethic/value/measures
1	Disparity in pay structure in comparison to male counterpart.	Equal wages for same post.
2	Relocation/ post marriage.	Provide optimum exit period (flexible for an extreme case). Option to join again based on subsequent options/ feasibility. Weightage in relocation (suitably through mutual transfer options)
3	Pregnancy	Maternity leave benefit of minimum 180 days Authorized LWP (Leave without pay) for critical cases. Make provision for crèches /child care facilities in nearby locations. Setting up good medical facility.
4	Sexual Harassment	Stringent rule for misconduct against women employees. Deploy CCTV for sensitive locations
5	Gender discrimination	Stiff penalty for any such surfaced issue after detailed investigation. Offer sensitivity training (possibly through outside experts)
6	Female leadership	Promote equal opportunities for training/ higher studies. Unbiased promotions as per appraisals and evaluations.
7	Overstay/ Overtime	To be avoided beyond regular office time. Offer suitable allowance at par with best existing in country (when shift/overtime a requisite) Transport facility for above category.
8	Demotivated /stressed	Counseling through experts for root cause and its elimination
9	Immigrant women vs local women	Provide township if possible around/ in vicinity to factory to facilitate mixing up. Have clubhouse activities and events to revitalize the synergy levels.
10	Misfit in assigned job	Appropriate appraisal and conducting mentor feedback sessions.

Table 1 –Illustration of ethics, values and measures while dealing with women issues at workplace in Indian context

Time and again women have shown their abilities to excel in their role efficiently. The benefits like maternity leaves, joining back after marriage or relocation should not be looked upon or commented as a favour by their counterparts. Rather women should be respected upon exhibiting great virtue of collectively taking

profession and family together, based upon their inherent potential. Indeed they righteously call for the ethical and moral support from both the fronts.

V. CONCLUSION

The study above suggests upon the importance of values and ethics embraced by an organization towards accomplishing its mission and some of the criticalities while dealing with issues pertaining to women as workforce. The suggestions for formulating such policies on values and ethics would commit its employees to act honestly, professional & in responsible ways, possess greater job satisfaction, family satisfaction and also influence the perception of external stakeholders of the company. In a way intrinsically they will be motivated and empowered to create a favorable organizational climate and also improve women's workforce participation rate and help India to take handsome advantage of its upcoming demographic dividend.

"Ultimately, the quest for organizational transformation must begin with a personal commitment within each individual to pursue moral excellence"-O'Brien

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