



## INITIATIVES BY EMPLOYERS TO CREATE A POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN MANAGERS –AN IMPERATIVE

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### ABSTRACT

In this era of Globalization and the race to surge ahead and win, organizations have to tap every resource they can identify. Women are a valuable Human Resource in today's competitive organizational arena.

With an increasing number of female students pursuing professional/higher education, the number of women in managerial positions in organizations is bound to be higher than before. In such an emerging situation, focus on women executives of India, becomes that much more relevant, both from the career woman's and our national planners point of view.

This article will contribute in highlighting the importance of women breaking through the 'glass ceiling' and reaching top managerial levels. There is a serious hindrance to women managers in career advancement that leads to an innate frustration and affects work drastically. This article attempts to study the problems and constraints faced by them. It is vital that these situations and possible alleviating factors be studied. This Article attempts to draw the attention of Equal opportunity employers and the Government. Women Managers are a small select category of professionals and an exploratory insight into the possible unique initiatives extended proactively by Corporate India is quite fascinating.

### KEYWORDS :

#### Increasing Number of Women in the Corporate World

In a country like India, due to Technological, Social and Legal changes the boundaries demarcating the male and female domains have blurred. The advancement of industrialization and increased education among women have opened up new opportunities or rather, forced organizations to accept that women too have an important role to play in the country's development. In the past few decades, there has been a rapid increase in the number of women entering the workforce in diverse fields and at various hierarchical levels.

Now, women have entered not only into several gainful jobs of different kinds but have also come out to take up jobs and positions in those fields which were traditionally the exclusive preserve of men. Minority status in the managerial cadres combined with the social prejudices against working women in general pose limitations on them in performing their relatively new roles effectively. Thus women face many problems and difficulties while working on higher level jobs as managers.

The current article focuses on women executives working in a dynamic environment coping with a broad spectrum of challenges and problems. An attempt is being made to focus on the possible efforts of employers to hone managerial talent and tap into the latent professional skills of women executives by creating a positive work environment.

#### Unique Place of Women Managers

There is no doubt that due to growing ambitions and changes in our societal norms, young women of tomorrow will be dedicated professionals in their chosen fields. Thus this growing breed is going to form a substantial percentage / chunk of the next generation of managers. There is no doubt that qualified women desirous of climbing the corporate ladder are increasing in number. Since management is a science, it does not recognize gender. Professionally qualified women or women managers are an important and crucial work group that has enormous potential for contribution to the growth of any organization.

In fact in tomorrow's society, women will have an added advantage: management conscience, the need for competent managers in a fast moving and competitive world and pressures from government will all provide a special edge for women with the will and competence to succeed.

The woman manager must show her ability to cope with the four R's – role, risks, relationships, and results. So the trick is to get women to put their *natural organizing ability* to work in management, since the rewards are substantial in hard cash and in job satisfaction. In the coming years, employers will begin to view women employees as not being inferior to males, but rather *acknowledging them as different (not necessarily inferior) and will utilize their unique brand of professionalism to the fullest*. Women will value their hard won equal rights to professional education, as never before. Top management today cannot afford to overlook the significance of an ever-increasing numbers of women joining organizations at levels previously forbidden for them-however tacitly.

#### Role Models

Corporate India is gradually showcasing female managers who have been successful in attaining desired positions in their professions. This select coterie of professionals would have certain characteristics and personality traits, which distinguish them from other women. It is fascinating to study the specific qualities of these managers that have enabled them to gain a foothold in today's male dominated organizations. There are definite distinctive qualities that propel any person forward on the path to success. These qualities need to be identified, so that in the coming years, the new generation of young women could emulate these desirable traits. *Looking up to some ideal figure gives the greatest inspiration and encouragement*. There is an urgent need to reiterate the facets of personality of the women executives who have been successful in attaining chosen milestones in their careers.

These facets and qualities can be cultivated by aspiring women managers of today and tomorrow. By learning about the hurdles and barriers that their predecessors had to cross, these young women can arm themselves better and prepare to take on the challenges of a management career.

This focus of this article is relevant in today's world, because it attempts to understand those women who are *successful* executives. (It is they who can share a wealth of information about their experiences, personal attributes). It is through their experiences that we can glean information about the organizational structure, culture, process and interpersonal relations, etc. Thus, we can determine how far, various

organizations have internal environments which are devoid of gender biases.

### Problems Unique to Women

A multi dimensional model of occupational stress is presented in a Research study by Davidson and Cooper, which comprised of isolated variables in Four arenas-Work arena, social arena, individual arena and behavioral or stress manifestation arena<sup>1</sup>. There is a vital need to provide food for thought in two areas- to bring about a change in attitudes regarding **career breaks** and **flexible working hours**. Women, however well qualified and successful in their chosen professions, still have to share an **unequal portion of the housework and family responsibilities**. Often, due to these reasons they are forced to opt out of work for certain periods of time. **This reinforces preconceived notions on the part of employers about the non-dependability of women, through no fault of the women.**

This is bound to be a stressful period for any employee, when she wonders whether her employment will continue after the break or not. Career breaks could be due to the responsibilities of childcare, sickness due to ill-health / disability or old age of any family member. Stress has a cost for individuals in terms of health, well-being and job dissatisfaction, as well as for organizations in terms of absenteeism and turnover, which in turn may impact upon the quality of patient care.<sup>1</sup>

Besides this, in our country the family as a social unit and women's role as a wife, a mother and a housewife has its own significance. A woman working outside is still considered, consciously or unconsciously as doing something unnatural and unwomanly and society does not encourage the extra interests that interfere in the comforts of the family. Reconciliation between commitment to the career and family responsibilities give rise to many problems and difficulties. Kala Rani (1976) explains that any combination of work and home that requires a woman to opt out completely for paid work is highly inconsistent with success in many high status occupations. The performance of traditional responsibilities from women at home puts an almost intolerable strain on those women who take up professional employment even when their children are at school<sup>4</sup>.

The two roles, those of a successful career woman and a good housewife are very taxing because each is a full time job. Naturally there are many occasions when one has to be neglected in the interest of the other and this gives rise to a sense of guilt and inadequacy. The career woman occupying a position of responsibility is torn between two loyalties, loyalty to achieve success in her career and thus hold her head high among men and loyalty to her family, particularly, to her children. Thus her dilemma becomes really excruciating and she begins to feel as if there is no way out of it. No wonder, this gives rise to tension that adversely affects her dual roles.

In any society, but especially in Indian society it is the woman who is expected to give up/take leave from her job in case of any household contingency. The husband's profession is given precedence. Since these facts are obvious and perhaps immutable, ways should be found to make these career breaks, a part of normal working patterns. Since problems do arise in every home and women are usually the ones to handle them, there needs to be some rethinking about career breaks/flexible working hours on the part of employers. The stigma attached to unscheduled stoppage in work will be lessened if **career breaks/leave are legitimized** and made a part of the system.

**In some cases, a break in career might not be needed if there is a provision for flexible working hours.** Thus, a drastic

change in attitudes is needed to alleviate the problems faced by women executives due to unscheduled career breaks. This article hopes to facilitate a move towards that stage by bringing to light the special qualities of women executives that can enable them to juggle housework/ household responsibilities & the challenges of a management career. Dissatisfied workers are more likely to provide substandard services, the physical and mental status, and the social performance of these workers can be affected significantly by the level of their job satisfaction<sup>2</sup>.

In case of dual career couples, it has been seen that generally the husband's job is given precedence in terms of whether to relocate or not in case of transfers. In such cases, it is the woman's career that suffers. She moves along with her husband & the chances are that she might have to settle for some lower designation/ non-progressive organization. Hence her career suffers a definite setback & career progression is not continued at a normal pace. Companies need to build up policies / programmes regarding the wife's occupation:

- Employment in same company
- Help in scouting in the new area

### Proactive Initiatives

1. The role of Central and Local Government as developers of women managers is important. Promoting good employment practices, especially **Equal Opportunities (EO) Policies** could have the following elements:
  - a. Issuing of an EO policy statement and written code of practice;
  - b. Monitoring procedures to 'audit' the occupancy profile of all levels.
  - c. Advertising job vacancies internally and externally and using standardised procedures to eliminate bias in recruitment and selection.
  - d. Ensuring all staff have access to training, staff development and promotion;
  - e. Providing flexibility in working hours and conditions so that staff with dependents and caring responsibilities are not disadvantaged;
  - f. Monitoring and evaluating policy periodically to measure its effectiveness.

It is reiterated that Equal Opportunity policy should involve a series of strategies to change the composition of the workforce and is **much more than the legal requirement not to discriminate.**

2. Women need to take a period of leave from work when they have a child, even if this break is extremely short. This break creates problems for the employers (providing cover for the job, uncertainty about the woman's return, etc.) and also for the individual (concern about how she will be viewed, the practical problems of childcare, uncertainty as to future job opportunities on return, etc.) Employers should undertake initiatives in the area of managing the career break, enhancing maternity leave and designing longer career break and retainer schemes. Even when the career break is statutory maternity leave or shorter, women need to be able to **discuss the issues arising with someone at work frankly and without fear of prejudicing their career.** Women having their first child also need a good deal of information about their statutory rights, their employer's policies, options for childcare and so on. A second range of initiatives could be in relation to maternity leave whereby rather longer periods of maternity leave or higher rates of pay than the statutory requirements could be facilitated. Employers could require that additional maternity pay be repaid if the woman does not return for a minimum period of employment. A third type of career break initiatives could

involve women (and occasionally men) to take longer unpaid periods of leave from work (commonly of 1-5 years duration). These schemes could either offer previous employees 'preferential reinstatement' or offer the guarantee of re-employment to certain categories of women. ***Preferential reinstatement policies may be an effective means of retaining women with valuable skills and potential.***

3. Existing policy initiatives in India have been primarily concerned with career breaks and maternity leave provisions. Such initiatives effectively address a short term problem of **childcare** for infants by permitting mothers to stay at home for a few years. However, these schemes do nothing to provide childcare for the 'below five's' for those women who choose not to take a longer break. Nor do they address at all the issue of childcare for children of school age. Even for women who can afford the considerable costs of private childcare for pre-school children, finding stable high quality provision can be a continued source of anxiety. Individual employers, the Public sector and some consortia of employers should look at the advantages of setting up crèches and **workplace nurseries. Tax concessions on these ventures may encourage employers.**
4. Another main thrust of initiatives could be concerned with offering more **flexible working arrangements** for women with family responsibilities. The main flexible working arrangements that are suggested are part-time Working job-sharing/job-splitting and working from home. Home-working would not seem to be applicable to managerial work, although it is an important option for some kinds of professional work. It could allow individuals to continue their career and this, in itself, may be important for women who go on to build a managerial career out of their professional work experience. Also, Paternity leave, needs to be given wider acceptance both by employers and their managers themselves, instead of remaining just a concept on paper.

This Article attempts to draw the attention of equal opportunity employers and the Government. The women executives themselves need to know the kind of environment in which their counterparts, in various categories of organizations, are functioning. This could be a springboard for action on the part of the women themselves to alleviate their lot. It could also initiate joint effort among individual executives or even among voluntary associations to solve some common problems of professional women managers. This article also has implications for practicing women managers in as much as that they recognize, that any constraints they face in their work lives or factors affecting their sense of job satisfaction might be faced by other women across various organizations. This could instill more confidence and assertiveness in them by reducing their sense of isolation.

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