Enablers for Advancement of Women into Leadership Position:

A Study Based on IT/ITES Sector in India

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ABSTRACT

Women in a leadership position has been a matter of concern the world over especially in information technology (IT)/ information technology enabled services (ITES). However, for the advancement of women in leadership positions, individual characteristics are not enough. Besides individual factors, it is the detection of organizational factors that enable the advancement of women into leadership positions. The present article develops a multidimensional scale on the perceived enablers for the advancement of women in leadership position in the IT/ITES sector. The scale considers both individual factors (characteristics) and organizational factors, such as welfare schemes, career development support, and training. The article also reveals that individual factors, such as self-confidence, ambition, and perceived competency are also enablers of advancing women to leadership positions. Researchers could examine the considered dimensions of the proposed scale in other sectors and with respect to other constructs related to women's work-life balance.

KEYWORDS

Advancement to leadership position, Career Development Support, Training, Welfare Schemes, Women Leaders

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, Indian companies are focusing on recruitment, development, and retention of talent to gain a competitive. While India has no labor shortage, talent is in demand and in very short supply. Recently, Infosys reported that of the 1.3 million recent job applicants only 2 percent were qualified or even employable. This shortage is predicted to get worse. The report, India's Demographic Dilemma predicts that there will be a shortage of 750,000 skilled workers over the next five years. During this same period there will be a surplus of 1.3 million unskilled and unqualified workers. Because of the projected annual GDP growth of 7 percent and this projected talent gap, it is essential for companies to engage a key component of economic growth— the skills and talents of women. 67 percent of employers in India are struggling to fill jobs—double the global average of 34 percent. Of those students enrolled in higher education, 40.3 percent are women. Even so, women continue to have trouble moving up the ladder and are stuck at the junior and middle management levels. (Catalyst, 2012). The Catalyst 2012 report highlighted the Gender Gap in Leadership layers of India Inc. low representation of women in decision making roles in corporate India (see table 1).

Table 1. Gender gap in leadership ranks in Indian industry (Catalyst, 2012)

Women Board of Directors	4.9%
Women in Senior Management	3% to 6%
Women employed by Organizations	22.6%
Women in the Labor Force	36%

So if the clear need is to fill this leadership gap by leveraging the skills and talents of women, organizations surely need to find ways to enable advancement of women into leadership positions. Equally, women need to strive at an individual level to leverage opportunities and advance themselves to the senior decision-making layers of the organization.

India's Information Technology and Business process management (IT-BPM) sector has contributed significantly to the Indian economy and its contribution relative to India's GDP is more than 9.3 per cent. This sector is projected to grow 8.5 per cent in 2016 from USD 132 billion in 2015 to USD 143 billion. The industry landscape consists of more than 16,000 firms and India is also maturing to become the Silicon Valley of the developing world with more than 4,200 start-ups thus being the 3rd largest start-up community in the world. This sector claims to have the highest volume of diverse, employable talent and is estimated to employ nearly 3.7 million people in 2016 which makes it the largest private sector employer. By 2020, India's IT-BPM sector total revenue is projected to reach USD 200- 225 and between USD 350-400 billion by 2025. (Nasscom Report 2016). These projections would need continuous focus on building talent pool and quality leadership with the IT and ITES sector. Yet, IT abandonment is emerging as a key issue among young IT professionals. The main reasons of abandoning IT careers are effort reward mis-match, perceived workload and emotional exhaustion (Colomo-Palacios et al., 2014). Companies to survive should be able to tap talent of both genders would stand to gain from a people capability perspective. In the IT-BPO industry, the participation of women in the workforce is seen as a critical enabling factor for continued growth of the industry. (Dutta Gupta et al., 2015).

Organizations in this sector are beginning to recognize the influence of women and are gearing up to act as a catalyst in their development This industry itself has been a beacon in championing diversity and gender inclusivity initiatives.(NASSCOM, 2009). However, the problem is that there are still too few women as directors on the boards of Indian companies. The percentage of women employees at the managerial level is also less. Thus, there is under representation of women at decision-making processes. Further, reasons of role stress among women in IT/ITES sector are attributed to resource inadequacy, role overload and personal inadequacy (Aziz, 2004). Another study by Bharathi et al. (2015) reveal that the main challenges for maintaining work-life balance for the women in IT/ITES sector are extended/odd working hours, travel time between home and workplace and participation in additional jobs and assignments which is further aggravated by the feeling of guilt of not being able to take care of self and elders at home. Social media interaction was found to be stress busters for most women. Most women were found to prefer flexible timing, and supportive spouse, family and friends as well as an environment conducive for work at the office. These issues need to be addressed. Despite the number of initiatives taken by the companies and the government, the issue of gender inclusivity still remains unresolved (Nasscom 2010).

There is dearth of literature about the enablers in the career path of women who have advanced up the ladder and broke through the glass ceiling to pursue their career (Moody et al. 2003). In Asia, the interest around the topic has deepened in the last decade. Most studies in the Indian context, however, have been more inclined towards changing socio-cultural environment and status of women, linking gender issues, sources of diversity or challenges and barriers women face to persist in their careers. Few exploratory studies in the recent years have been conducted with the view to profile successful

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