Chapter 2
Gender Diversity in IT Organisations


Diversity in IT Organisations

Today it is common for IT companies to announce a major expansion or setting up new operations in India. Companies are investing valuable time, resources and have even deputed key managers to manage things on the ground. Top management at the headquarters often do not have a complete picture of the challenges that needs to be conquered to succeed in India. Expatriate managers are often tied up grappling with the enormous challenge of setting up operations: Legal challenges, Location choices, recruitment challenges, managing workforce effectiveness etc.

Often times these challenges are not accounted to in the initial planning. As a result, the operations in India will have a series of false starts – which causes anxiety, stress and frustration throughout the organization.

It has been observed that the most common challenges facing American/European firms when expanding in India are:

- Office Infrastructure Challenges
- Recruitment Challenges
- Employee Training & Skill enhancement Challenges
- Team Coordination Challenges
- Maintaining Service Level Agreement

The term ‘diversity’ has a very broad connotation and includes many facets of differences, apart from disparities in race and gender. In the context of a workplace, diversity gets manifested in many forms such as – age, gender, ethnicity, physical attributes, sexual orientation, educational background, income, marital status, geographical location, spiritual practice, parental status, work experience, job classification and the like. With the advent of globalization, diversity in workplace is getting increasingly pronounced. All the same, an organization’s success and growth rate are also determined by its ability to welcome, understand and manage diversity in an effective manner. Below are the advantages of diversity in workplace and the managing issues related to it.
Advantages of Diversity in Workplace

• When employees come from diverse backgrounds, they bring individual talents and experiences with them. This invariably contributes to an organization’s overall growth.

• Embracing employees with different skills and cultural viewpoints helps in understanding the needs and requirements of the customers, on a global scale.

• Diversity in workplace leads to a wide variety of viewpoints and business ideas. This helps an organization to formulate the best business strategy, with its large pool of different ideas and solutions.

Managing Diversity in Organizations

• An organization should keep a check on perceptual, cultural and language barriers related to diversity and see that they don’t give way to confusion and low team spirit.

• Proper steps should be taken to involve every employee while devising and executing diversity initiatives in the workplace.

• An organization should provide an atmosphere of openness and candor. Employees should never be dissuaded from voicing their opinions and ideas regarding any matter.

• An organization should always see that it promotes diversity in managerial and leading positions.

• Organizations can also arrange training in order to improve policies and procedures related to diversity.

Challenges:

“A diverse workforce bringing different people together, with different views, ideas experiences and perspectives can bring real benefits for business performance. But managed badly, efforts to improve diversity can have the opposite effect – creating conflict and tension in the workplace”.
The benefits of a diverse workforce include:

**Customer focus** – matching internal employee diversity to population diversity can provide performance benefits which enhance awareness of consumer needs.

**Business process** – recruiting diverse talent will help inject new ideas and challenge the organisational mindsets and ways of doing things that can hinder change and organizational progress.

**Innovation** – the flexibility, creativity and ability to innovate are enhanced by the existence of dissimilar mindsets (constructive conflict supports ‘out of the box’ thinking).

**Learning** – employers have more choice from a greater skills base, improved employee satisfaction, reduced internal disputes, greater workplace harmony, improved retention and more effective and fairer promotion of talent. Knowledge is retained in the business and shared more effectively.

Managing diversity is about achieving a balance between different forces and challenges therefore employers should also consider the areas that prevent diversity generating benefits to the organization. These include the following:

- Ensure diversity is not blocked by rigid systems or regulations.
- Do not adopt the just in time approach – this will allow little opportunity to change team structures without opposing existing structures.
- Ensure diversity talent is not cloned into the existing culture.

Debate continues over whether or not there is a business case for diversity despite the huge amounts of anecdotal evidence indicating the benefits. Measurement will enable employers to move forward and help them understand what characteristics their employees possess. The new CIPD report suggests using a diversity-balanced scorecard as one form of measurement – it looks at both the positive and negative impact of diversity, as a model for measuring the success of diversity within the workforce. CIPD research suggests that measuring the contribution employees make to a business significantly improves management decision-making.

Managing diversity is an on-going process that unleashes the various talents and capabilities which a diverse population bring to an organization, community or society,
so as to create a wholesome, inclusive environment, that is “safe for differences,” enables people to “reject rejection,” celebrates diversity, and maximizes the full potential of all, in a cultural context where everyone benefits. Multiculturalism, as the art of managing diversity, is an inclusive process where no one is left out. Diversity, in its essence, then is a “safeguard against idolatry” — the making of one group as the norm for all groups.

But it is an imperfect solution for it aims only to manage the problem, not solve it. The essential element of the political programme to which the various constituents swear allegiance is that it is at best, common and minimal. It does not begin to address the task of bringing a diverse nation together, obsessed as it is with a limited objective - the sharing of political power - and bound as it is to a limited time-frame - the tenure of the legislature. Such management of cultural diversity, though, faces its greatest threat under pressure. India's quasi-federal set-up ensures that the administration of territories is largely the preserve of regional parties that attain power locally and are as a consequence a part of the national coalition. When one of these parties deviates within the territory from the common programme for managing diversity, while adhering to it nationally, the strains become evident as they did in the western state of Gujarat a year ago, and reverberate countrywide as they have done ever since.

From the perspective of management of diversity, India remains the greatest challenge. If the collective will and wisdom of the Indians can overcome this challenge, it would help make one-sixth of the world a better place to live in.

I) DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE

- Language Diversity

There are several implications of India’s vast array of languages that are worth taking into account from a practical business standpoint. Most IT companies offer a multilingual work environment and attracting human capital from almost every region of the country. Most India companies have customer all over the world. Usage of English is a common demand from the customers. But their different accents, speech patterns, and sentence structures could mean that they are not always well understood by non-Indians.
- Regional Diversity

Regional diversity becomes a challenge where employees from different regions are asked to work on the same team but in a location or region which they don’t belong to. Indians are very proud of their regional or state identity. Indian companies are facing major challenge in deciding the right region for establishing itself. Regional comparative advantages are changing rapidly, so it is best to avoid decisions based solely on generalizations about a particular city, state, or region. Beyond the immediate questions that a foreign firm is likely to ask about workforce availability, infrastructure development, and incentives for setting up operations, it is also wise to look closely at other factors such as the broader economic climate, likely employee retention rates, changing government regulations, and political corruption.

- Religious Diversity

India is one of the most religiously diverse countries in the world, with significant Hindu (80.5%), Muslims (13.4%), Christian (2.3%), Sikh (2.1%), Buddhist, Jain and Parsi populations. Indian workplaces embrace religious coexistence as well. Companies observe certain common practices in order to avoid religious conflict in the workplace. For example, because beef is forbidden for Hindus and pork for Muslims, most employers do not serve any form of beef or pork at the company cafeteria or for company functions.

Religious affiliation affects the way that employees arrange their workspaces as well as their own personal dress and appearance. It is common in Indian offices and private cubicles to display pictures of favourite gods or goddesses; these images may also be used as screensavers on computers.

India’s complex holiday calendar reflects aspects of its religious diversity as well as key secular events. Indian employees may request unplanned or sudden leaves because of an religious ‘Puja’ at their place. Muslims are allowed flexible office timing during the month of the Ramadan and for Friday prayers.
- Socioeconomic Status

It is impossible to talk about India without mentioning caste, a social kinship-based system that has been continuously evolving over many centuries. This includes Brahim, Kshatriva, Vaishya and Shudra.

India’s socioeconomic environment, including the enormous gaps in living standards that persist as well as the impact of post-independence reforms. Example: Job reservations in the private sector for so-called backward classes and scheduled castes and tribes are mostly opposed by the private sector management because of serious concerns regarding their global competitiveness. If hired under pressure of the political agenda (or the feel-good factor), the favoured employees are likely to be put in non critical departments to fulfill a job reservation quota, thereby minimizing the impact on the business.

- Others
  - Homosexual, Disability, Older workforce

Some part of India’s population comprises of Homosexuals, disable and older workforce. All these have not been able to make their hold in the country and are mostly looked down upon. This lot comprises of people at different age groups that hold a significant stake in the country. Offering jobs to these people and getting them accepted by the majority is a huge challenge in itself.

II) GENDER INEQUATION

The gender gap between Indian men and women, as well as disparities between urban and rural women, is not likely to disappear anytime soon. Indian women were historically treated as second-class citizens. India has traditionally fostered a male dominant society, but expected behaviours for male-female roles in the workplace as well as in other segments of life are starting to shift. The status of women in India within the family, extended family, society, and the workplace varies greatly between rural and urban areas,
and is often influenced by the level of education. Women in the workforce today are often caught between traditional expectations and modern realities.

Many hindrances still exist for female employees with limited skills. Some of the issues are less pay for the same work, lack of childcare facilities, unsafe working conditions in construction and farming jobs, and daily wages with no guarantee of entitlement to statutory benefits, including medical benefits and maternity leave.

III) MULTI CULTUAR HUE

India companies are not only facing diversity issues within the country but also facing these issues at an alarming rate from the diverse group of customers they cater to. Customizing services as per customer’s culture, origin and expectation is a great challenge in itself.

- Office and Infrastructure challenges

India’s Infrastructure has always been in the making, but never complete and thus Indian companies are facing a major challenge in establishing a suitable workplace. The demand for offices is too huge and the space is too less, thus the offices are scattered all over the city (and country) and this creates a major coordination headache. Location choices are also restricted by the fact that Internet Connectivity and utilities are not available in all areas of the country.

- Recruitment Challenges – Equal Employment Opportunity

Recruitment Challenge is a more recent phenomenon. India has the largest pool of English speaking professionals in the world. The recruitment process is so competitive in major cities (Bangalore, Delhi, Hyderabad, Mumbai etc.) that companies often have to interview 50 potential candidates before getting one employee on board. Attrition rates in India are far higher than in US/EU.
- **Employee Training and Skill Enhancement Challenges**

A trained workforce is a more productive workforce. This implies that the company must have a planned training program. One needs to have a planned training program. Many employees in India may be good in written English, but they may need training in verbal communication skills. Software engineers have to be trained in basic business etiquette and the standard business communication skills.

The training programs have to be tailored to address the deeper cultural issues that enable new employees in India to communicate effectively with their US/EU counterparts. The training programs must be tailored by experts who understand the local Indian work culture and work culture of the parent organization.

- **Team Coordination Challenges**

Teams working across geographies working across different time zones, drawn from different cultures will take time to integrate. During this time, there will be lots of coordination issues. Teams will spend lot of time “storming” rather than performing. In this phase, management has to ensure that it minimizes mistrust, miscommunication, and minimize work stress among team members. The challenges of coordinating cross-cultural teams are complex and cannot be easily dealt with company policies. Often, companies need to resort to cross cultural consultants – to help build more productive teams.

- **Maintaining Service Level Agreement**

Companies have built their reputation with their customers over the years and have established processes and standards to measure and maintain customer satisfaction levels. Adding an “India” centre has the potential to upset this carefully crafted customer relationship. During the process of team integration, there is a possibility of dropping service level agreements (SLA’s). Moreover, there will be cultural differences – which tend to give different interpretation to SLA.
- **Building a diverse workforce**

MNC’s in India have opened new gates for growth, however with the white leading the race it is still a big challenge to create leaders and position them at the global level. Getting acceptance for these leaders at a global platform and building a diverse workforce under them is what most India companies are still struggling hard with.

- **Changing Perception**

Someone once said that breaking perception is one of the most difficult things in the world. India companies face a big challenge when they get into deals with the global partners outside India. Humans are the most resistant to change and to interpersonal barriers. Breaking mental boundaries amongst the westerns is what most IT companies and leaders are working on.

- **IV) MIGRANT**

- **Challenge of virtual workforce**

With the advent of multiple offices in a single location, it has been observed that the teams get distributed. Under such circumstances, delivering services at par and excellence is a big challenge. Keeping the team motivated and together, making them perform and keeping a check on their output is a difficult task at hand.

- **Increasing talent and its storage**

Most employees in India are aware of the fact, that they must constantly upgrade their skills for better growth opportunities. Brain drain in India is increasing at a very alarming rate. RETAINING a talented employee is another big challenge that India companies are facing.
Managing Gender Diversity in IT Organisations in India

Over the last few decades, the face of the Indian working population has changed. Not so long ago, workplace demographics were predominantly tilted towards the male population. Post-liberalization, in the last one and a half decades, things have changed on this front quite a bit.

India is moving from a talent-rich country to a talent-scarce country, creating a war for talent. This has had a beneficial impact on gender equity as the accent is on talent acquisition irrespective of gender, background, etc., so long as the talent is acceptable.

Obviously, women are entering the workplace in much larger numbers as they are participating in higher education in larger numbers. Further, with the spread of liberal ideas in a growing economy, the norms governing employment have changed. The mantra, now, is ‘inclusive growth’ where everyone is enabled to participate, and be benefited by the collective progress we are making.

Society has had its own role to play in increasing the diversity of our workforce. Through the past few decades, the thought process has changed, particularly aided by government and private involvement in focusing on education for the girl child.

Also, the Indian middle class has, to a large extent, realized the virtues of inclusive education - and the need for self-dependence among women through sustainable careers over this period. This has resulted in improvement in gender ratios in our higher and professional education institutes, from about 10-15% women about 20 years ago, to about 27-32% at present.

Considering the gender ratio of 944 women to every 1,000 men according to the 2001 Census, and the relatively easier access to education, the percentage of women in the workforce is only going to increase further.

Indian industry has also had a role in encouraging workplace gender diversity. This was predominantly led by the opening up of multiple sectors across geographies, and increased demand for skilled and professionally educated personnel. This ensured the
hiring of an increased number of women employees across both public and private enterprises.

The IT industry in India has thrived primarily due to the abundant availability of skilled talent. In the future, this would also be its biggest challenge, primarily due to the tremendous growth across all industry segments and the increased demand for talent from all quarters.

Considering the current talent pool comprises about 30% women, it has become imperative to tap this population, and then work towards retaining it.

In an organization such as Infosys, and in others of a similar scale, the gender ratio of women to men is about 35:65 at the entry level, increasing from 18:82 about seven years ago. However, we see that at the higher roles, it drops quite a bit—and the drop is very significant at the leadership level. This is mainly attributed to multiple reasons, one of which is the non-availability of experienced women managers since their increasing presence in the workforce is a recent phenomenon.

Our attrition rate in the female workforce is not very different from that for men. To ensure that women stay on while raising a family, several policy initiatives have been undertaken. At Infosys, a special “women’s initiative” has been started to focus on the needs of the women in our workforce.

Policies such as flexible hours, telecommuting, sabbaticals and additional infrastructure such as childcare centres and a dedicated office for expecting and new mothers can go a long way in addressing some of the needs of women employees, and can help in arresting attrition. Given that a lot has been invested in an employee in the initial years, losing her at a stage when she brings additional value to the table is something we should be concerned about.

With the increase in the share of women in the talent pool and that, too, with good academic performance, the essence is to have a focused approach to tap this pool and ensure sustenance in the workplace for a longer time to unlock value.
Considering the IT industry can provide women with relatively better benefits and a more inclusive environment, in the war for talent, the ability to hire and retain women would definitely give an organization the edge.

The jury is back on this one. Fortune 500 companies with a higher representation of women board directors attained significantly higher financial performance than those with the lowest representation of women board directors, according to Catalyst’s recent report, The Bottom Line: Corporate Performance and Women’s Representation on Boards.

Business women awards are crowded affairs; there are many women in business scripting success stories. And for women in the corporate and business worlds, things seem to be going up and up.

Or, are they? Statistics continue to show a sharp fall in the proportion of women employees from the entry level (50%) to the middle (30%) and senior management (8%). The funnel seems to be definitely sifting out women en route to the top. So, why are companies now falling over themselves to hire senior women?

Plain and simple: Talent is short - across gender, culture, race, and experience. The funnel is widening: Studies done by an IT multinational show that only 30-40% of the leadership talent will come from the traditional male manager of the present.

Diversity across the workforce helps the company respond better to business reality and be more agile and responsive, as a representative workforce truly represents the market. Decision-making is far more global, more thorough and inclusive, and this positively impacts profits.

Opportunities are staggering—both as an offshoring destination as well as a domestic market. The entry of multinationals such as Microsoft, Google, IBM Corp., Cisco Systems Inc., Motorola Inc., Xerox and General Electric Co. has meant more opportunities for women, besides the adoption of the best global practices in Indian workplaces.
Companies are also discovering that women leaders have a higher degree of loyalty and traction, in addition to multitasking.

MNCs in India, and now Indian companies too, are rapidly internalizing best practices to stay ahead in the talent race. In quite a few firms, hiring executives are rated on the diversity ratio during annual assessments. They are expected to also provide adequate mentoring, career opportunities and internal options to women employees.

For global search firms too, things have changed. Not only have hiring companies become more empathetic about career breaks, they expect the searches for senior positions to adequately cover women candidates.

Many times, companies specify a preference for a woman candidate. They have started looking at breaks in career as part of a life exercise, rather than a lack of seriousness or commitment. Certainly, all these steps point in the right direction.

The glass ceiling appears to be shattering - at least in the information-technology sector. Among companies facing an acute talent crunch, recruiting and retaining women through special programmes, flexible schedules or family-friendly policies has become more than a good human resource practice. It is now a matter of survival.

For example, IBM India Pvt. Ltd, the fourth largest employer in the Indian IT industry, sends recruitment teams to suburban residential complexes for a woman-only hiring programme that seeks to bring experienced women back into the workforce. Services firm Infosys Technologies Ltd, which set up a Women’s Inclusivity Network in 2003, offers connectivity at home and part-time working options to retain women at work. Vaahini, a networking forum at Accenture India Pvt. Ltd, offers mentoring and counselling options for women employees across all levels of the company.

**Binding ties:** A balanced gender equation helps retain top talent, says Accenture’s Rekha Menon. The results of this concentrated focus on women are fast becoming evident across cubicles and meeting rooms in most IT companies. By the end of fiscal 2008, the IT and IT-enabled services sector, which includes business and knowledge process outsourcing industries, employed 35 women for every 65 men. By 2010, women
made up half of the workforce in these sectors, up from a fourth of the total employee base currently, according to a survey by the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM).

Much of the strategy is driven by the understanding that diversity within a firm is essential if companies are to compete effectively in a global marketplace. Companies today sell products and services to people whose needs and preferences vary. “If the workforce and leaders (belong) predominantly (to) one gender and have never had to understand different needs, they will not be able to succeed in this new environment”, says Ranjani Ranganath, senior managing director at the global development centre of Cisco Systems Inc.

Hiring more women is also seen as a way to bridge the talent crunch that the IT industry is facing. By 2015, NASSCOM estimates, the industry will face a shortfall of at least 800,000 professionals.

By focusing on bringing more women into the workforce, the IT sector is hoping to bring the gender ratio closer to the overall mix in the country’s population. “Forty-nine per cent of Indians are women, so there is no reason why women must account for just 26.4 % of the workforce in IT companies,” says Shalini Sethi, who heads the talent scouting firm, Emploi Globale Consulting Pvt. Ltd, in Bangalore.

This ratio was even lower in 2005, when women made up just 24% of the IT workforce; the gradual increase is attributed to the concentrated effort by the IT sector to woo more women. “Nobody is doing women a favour, there is a talent crunch in the industry and women are a very valuable talent pool that needs to be tapped”, says Pradeep Narayanan, chief delivery officer, 24/7 Customer, who heads the recruitment function. 24/7 Customer, a Bangalore-based outsourced contact centre and BPO services provider, has a total employee headcount of more than 5,000 of which 1,350 are women.

Companies hiring more women also find that after marriage and motherhood, women tend to be more stable and loyal employees. And, that counts for a lot in an industry where attrition rates hover between 30% and 35%. “Once a company provides a safe work environment with need-based flexibility as well as growth opportunity, women
rarely feel the need to change jobs”, says Kalpana Margabandhu, director, IBM India Software Lab, who has switched jobs just once in a 25-year career. Since joining IBM India in 1993, Margabandhu has balanced a fast-track career with raising a family, and now heads the Women Leadership Council in IBM India. “Women who take a break for family reasons are valuable resources that can be hired back with focused mentoring and counselling” says Margabandhu, who initiated a woman-only hiring programme, across age groups, to woo such women back to IBM.

“Seven years ago, when I tried to re-enter the workforce after a break to raise a family, I met a lot of resistance, as I was viewed as someone on the slow track,” says Nirmala Menon, who founded Interweave Consulting, a 3yr old firm in Bangalore that helps companies structure gender inclusion and diversity management programmes.

IT companies are looking to change that image and assure women that flexible schedules won’t mean they are off the fast track. At Infosys, the belief that diverse groups are more innovative than non-diverse groups, and that women bring a unique style and attitude to the workplace, has been fostered mainly by N.R. Narayana Murthy, founder and chief mentor of Infosys Technologies. It employed 35 women for every 100 men in 2011, up from about 22 women for every 100 men just seven years ago.

In fact, employers now seek out women for the unique skill sets that they bring to work. “A high emotional quotient helps women managers reach out better to their teams and perform better at hardcore negotiations with customers,” says Meena Ganesh, chief executive officer of Tesco Hindustan Service Centre, the global services arm of Tesco Plc., the world’s third largest retailer. In a 22-year career, Ganesh has worked with blue-chip companies such as NIIT Ltd and Microsoft Corp. before co-founding Customer Asset.com.

Women employees’ abilities to build teams and handle crises have also been highlighted at the three-year-old Microsoft Corporate Challenge Series, a high-end simulated stress test that runs over three days and three nights, where India’s top companies compete for honours every year. Every seven-member team must include two women to qualify for this competition.
“Women are a stabilizing presence in a high-pressure situation and tend to be the glue that binds teams together,” says Prem Bhatia, chief executive of Sports Media, the organizers of the event. 3 years back, of the 40 teams that participated at the event, five teams were led by women.

To reinforce the image of Accenture India as a woman-friendly place to work, the company offers flexible working hours as well as telecommuting options for employees who can work from home and extended maternity leave. It also allocates shifts taking families into consideration.

“Kids-at-Work Day is a way the company gets employees and families together to bind with the company,” says Rekha Menon, executive vice-president, India geographic and human capital and diversity, Accenture India, who feels a balanced gender equation helps retain top talent and brings diverse points of view to the table.

Women also boast skill sets that are regarded as vital when dealing with new customers across borders. “I think of the time my dad bought our first TV. He bought what he liked and brought it home. Something like that is a family decision today. I drive a car, buy different clothes suited for countries I travel in, things my mother never did,” says Cisco’s Ranganath. She adds that companies which do not employ people who practise and understand the preferences of women will not be able to design, build and sell what women with spending power actually want.

New environment: Diversity is essential, says Cisco’s Ranjani Ranganath. Globally, a quarter of all new hires at Cisco Systems are women, while 19% of the Cisco India workforce currently is made up of women. The company’s Women’s Action Network invites women in engineering colleges to spend a day at the firm learning about technology, touring Cisco Labs and speaking to top executives. “The idea is to spread awareness and make Cisco a natural choice, when they finish education”, says Ranganath. Women at Cisco can also bring along a friend to spend a day being mentored and coached by Cisco’s senior male and female executives, a form of referral hiring.

All this focus on women is clearly working well at entry-level positions at most IT majors. In Infosys, the gender ratio is 35 women for every 65 men at the entry level,
against a general company average of 30:70. “However, we see that at the higher roles, it drops quite a bit, and the drop is very significant at the leadership level.” says T.V. Mohandas Pai, member of the board for human resources for Infosys Technologies Ltd. He feels losing women at senior levels when companies have invested a lot in training them is a cause for concern.

According to IMRB International, a market research firm, of the total 25-30% women employed by IT companies, less than a tenth are in middle management, while a tiny 5% occupy senior-level positions. However, in smaller companies such as 24/7 Customer, women do occupy senior positions, heading critical functions such as operations and client interactions.

Says Rajesh Kurup, associate vice-president and research services director, eTechnology Group, IMRB International: “While the IT and ITeS sectors have been more successful in attracting women at entry to junior levels, they have been as good or as bad as other sectors in building women leaders.”

Women account for 26.4% of the total India-based workforce in the IT industry (excluding BPO) in 2007, up from 24% in 2005. This is when about 49% of the population in the 18-55 age group comprises women.

It’s a firm belief that gender diversity can bring a competitive edge to IT companies. I have seen intra-team communication improve, competitive spirit among team members increase, attrition rate decrease, and customer satisfaction improve with the addition of women to a team. Not to mention that geeks are better groomed with women around them.

As more women occupy role-model positions, an increasing number are entering the education stream and, subsequently, various echelons of the industry. Professionals like Neelam Dhawan (Microsoft), Villoo Patel (Avesthagen), Sangeeta Singh (Wipro) and others are helping the cause tremendously by the sheer weight of their achievements.

In an industry likely to see an increasing shortage of professionals, a gender diversity programme that would increase the percentage of women to above 40% is a worthwhile
focus area for IT companies. The effort, however, does not require special pay or perquisites for women. Women prefer to come in on merit. But, is there a need for special policies to retain women?

To ensure the success of a proactive gender diversity programme, it is essential to recognize that at the workplace, women’s needs are different. These include on-campus childcare facilities, flexible work-timings, lower mobility, etc. However, it is the responsibility of the organization to make all its employees aware and to keep them from feeling threatened by the increasing number of women in their teams.

The rapidly growing IT industry will see the women’s workforce rise to 35-40% in the next five years; younger women will enter and stabilize/lower attrition rates; the entrance of an increasing number of women will further improve organizational team dynamics, communication and competitiveness. Should organizations proactively follow a gender diversity programme? The answer is a big yes. But, it has to be followed intensely for the organization to benefit.

**Details of Few IT Organisation’s in INDIA**

**IBM**

From hiring first woman employee in 1899 to naming Fran Allen as the first female IBM fellow in 1989, IBM’s commitment to diversity is rooted in the philosophy of its founders. They have a rich repertoire of innovative, unique programs and initiatives supporting their gender diversity. Also, they are pioneers in some of the best acknowledged practices in creating a diverse and vibrant workforce.

**Focusing on gender diversity through IWLC**

At IBM India, they believe that gender diversity is a compelling business imperative and hence they value women employees as a core component of our business strategy. To reiterate IBM’s senior management commitment to the workforce diversity agenda, they have set up India Diversity Council. Indian Women’s Leadership Council (IWLC) is a part of this Diversity Council and it brings in the required focus on gender diversity for
the entire organization. And the programs are driven to ‘attract, retain and grow’ women
talent – to create a strong accountability mechanism that ensures adherence to the gender
diversity focus in India and South Asia.

**Empowering women at work**

IBM extends support system to its women employees, which is perhaps unparalleled in the industry. From one of the best of childcare/dependent care services to a range of work-life flexibility options (work from home, flexi-timings, part-time options, etc…) to multi-city Diversity Network Groups (DNGs) and very robust issues and grievance addressal system, they have successfully created a work environment that is extremely friendly for women employees, helps them enhance their productivity and achieve a greater work-life balance. IBM has a wide set of development programs, mentoring programs, and a comprehensive set of leadership development resources that help promising women employees develop their careers and leadership skills at IBM.

**CISCO**

Its Women's Action Network invites girls in engineering colleges to spend a day with Cisco. And Cisco women can bring along a friend to spend a day being mentored by senior executives. Through its Role Model Series, top executives talk to employees, allowing women in and outside Cisco to interact with senior leaders. Even newly recruited campus graduates who work on teams with a global span have access to Cisco's technology network, and are equipped with laptop and voice-over IP capability at their homes. Employee-friendly policies such as flexitime and working from home are available to all.

**Accenture**

More Women @ Accenture is a recruitment campaign based on a metrics-based hiring process, referral programme, a link with colleges dedicated to women’s education and a tailored advertising campaign. More Learning @ Accenture includes roadshows to educate employees about company policies on discrimination and harassment. More
Networking @ Accenture allows women to network among peers and senior management and ensure visibility of women achievers. Vaahini, a women's networking forum, organizes guest lectures. More Support for Women @ Accenture includes a set of women-friendly policies, including flexible working hours, telecommuting options, extension of maternity leave benefit.

MICROSOFT

Women Employee Resource Group (ERG)

Women Employee Resource Group is the women's employee resource group at Microsoft. The Women ERG was originally founded in the fall of 1990. More than 12,000 women employees worldwide are currently members of the Women ERG. Women ERG maintains chapters worldwide, including in Washington, New York, California, Texas, North Carolina, Europe, and Asia. Jeanne Sheldon, Corporate Vice President, Information Worker, serves as the group's executive sponsor. The organization is run by an elected board of volunteers.

Women ERG and the Community

This resource group is committed to actively contributing to the growth and development of local communities, with a particular focus on educating youth and exposing them to emerging technologies and career opportunities in the information technology industry. An example of Women ERG’s activities is: DigiGirlz Day. In 2006, Women ERG introduced the DigiGirlz Day for young women in high school. Designed to provide young women with an opportunity to discuss their college plans, the annual event features guest speakers and networking sessions focused on enabling young women to explore the opportunities available in technology and business careers. These events now occur annually at Microsoft offices around the world.
Women ERG and Employee Career Development at Microsoft

The Women ERG works within the Microsoft corporate environment on a number of initiatives and programs. These include:

Diversity Initiatives. Women ERG partners with Microsoft's executive leadership teams to influence the corporate diversity strategy and to implement corporate diversity initiatives companywide, such as Women's History Month celebration.

Employee Development. The Microsoft Women’s Professional Development Series is a service of Women ERG. This series hosts employee development focused speakers, networking events, global webcasts, and a bi-annual women's leadership and development conference for more than 3,700 Microsoft employees from around the world. The events are designed to provide women employees with an opportunity to learn, discuss common goals, and connect with one another. The multiday conference features speeches and breakout sessions focused on leadership as well as career, professional, and personal skills development.

Information Sharing and Connection. Women ERG manages a number of distribution lists and information web sites for Microsoft employees to help women share information and build connections across organizations and geographical locations. In addition, Women ERG manages a web site that provides Microsoft employees access to more than 150 hours of development content from the Women’s Professional Development Series—available via video-on-demand.

TCS

This company has extensive diversity programs for women such as mentoring programs, career counseling, company-sponsored support groups, financial support for women to travel to conferences, executive shadowing (attending to a ‘day in the life’ of an executive), female employee caucus groups, personal leadership coaches for women, special network functions for women to meet upper management, evaluation systems that hold upper-level managers accountable for developing female candidates for promotion, and incentives for increasing the number of suppliers that are owned by women.
CSC

CSC India (CSCI) as an organization has recognized the importance of handling diversity at workplace and has formulated a Global Diversity Program which:

- Fully embodies CSC India Management Principles and Values.
- Links diversity program to strategic business goals and objectives.
- Encourages an environment where employees are respected for their creativity, innovation, skills and talents.
- Supports employees to reach their full potential.
- Embeds diversity into CSCI culture.
- Is sanctioned by executive leadership and recognized as a cornerstone of CSCI’s business strategy.
- Incorporates community initiatives where CSCI does business.
- Provides for annual review of program results to determine where enhancements may be incorporated.

CSC value’s the diversity of its employees and the unique perspectives they bring to CSC India. Diversity at CSCI not only includes age, race, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, and ethnicity, but also jobs and functional roles within the company, the markets and clients it serves, its geographic locations, educational background and whether one joined CSCI independently or through an acquisition or outsourcing arrangement. By valuing these differences, CSC demonstrates its commitment to treating everyone with fairness and respect.

CSCI as an organization is committed to being an "Equal Opportunity Employer" and supports diversity of all types. **Given the Indian Socio-cultural context - CSCI India's Diversity Program's focuses primarily on Gender diversity.** The overall program focuses on affirmative action and the aim has been to roll out macro and micro level programs for women under this platform.
1. Managing Gender Diversity:

CSCI India HR took this challenge and launched an initiative on March 8, 2007, the International Women's day, for developing the women in this organization. The objective of the initiative is to create a work culture that gives everyone including women an opportunity to demonstrate their competency and realize their potential. A program that aims at increased attraction, retention of women, more effective problem solving and teamwork, enhanced productive working relationships, increased understanding, respect and trust between men and women.

2. New communication channels for women employees

Helpline @ PlanetW: A helpline where women employees are able to give suggestions or raise their grievances and concerns in utmost confidentiality and their issues are immediately addressed by the council members of the respective location.

3. Mentoring Program for the Women Employees

This initiative is focused on helping women employees in identifying and enhancing their skills and potential. The target is to see more and more women in the leadership roles by providing them a platform where they get career guidance and support of their mentors – a brain to pick, an ear to listen, a shoulder to lean upon, a person to trust, and when needed, a guiding hand to point the right direction.

The initiative is supported by the senior leadership at CSCI and it is evident from the fact that all the 20+ mentors are from the senior management group.

4. Theme of the Month – Special Programs for Women Employees

A calendar has been worked out for the entire year with specific themes for months. One of the months is dedicated towards the health of the women employees. In this month, the focus is on conducting trainings on wellness and self defence, a health Camp and Gynae Consultation is also organized at all locations. The statistics show that approx 50% of the women population attends this camp.
Theme: Corporate Etiquette and Personal Grooming
Objective: With the focus on empowering women in their personal and professional life, CSC organizes workshops and trainings on regular basis for women employees. One of the workshops recently organized is on Corporate Etiquette and Personal Grooming.

Theme: Stress Management
Art of living (being in sync with your inner self). Art of Living program called IBM (Introduction to Breath and Meditation) was organized for the women employees. This program of 2.5 hours duration introduces the participants to the power of the mind and how it can be enhanced through breathing. It trains the participants in breathing processes that help eliminate stress, meditate and relax the mind, thereby improving productivity.

Theme: Positive Parenting
A month is dedicated to positive parenting where the focus is on issues faced by working parents. In today's world where both parents are working, PARENTING is a big challenge and at times brings a sense of guilt to the parents as they struggle to strike a work-life balance. The idea of this program is to help them understand the issues and find solution to it.

This day long program is split into three sections
- Lecture by Prominent Personalities on positive parenting.
- A Panel discussion addressing queries from the employees.
- The panelists other than the working mother will be available for one-o-one consultation for employees who wish to discuss their parenting issues with any of the specialists.

Theme: Fast and healthy cooking for busy executives
Managing a balanced palatable and healthy diet along with a busy work schedule is a challenge for most of the people today. CSC created an opportunity for its women employees to learn some quick to make and at the same time good for health recipes from renowned cookery experts at each location. Renowned chefs such as Nita Mehta addressed the women employees in the past.
5. Articles relating to daily life:

'1to1 help' is a group of counsellors providing counselling to CSC India Employees under a program named SPARSH (The Touch). Every month CSC publishes an article for its women employees under the same branding on subjects like:

- Women@Work
- Relating with Men at the Workplace
- Relationships @ work
- Strengthening your marriage'
- 'Superwomen syndrome',
- Getting Fathers Involved, etc.

6. Employee Referral Drive: - Special referral drive is launched to hire more women employees.

7. CSCI Women in Leadership Forum also popularly known an WILF- A CSCI global forum aiming to provide information and guidance which supports the development and growth of women leaders at CSCI.

8. Women of Color Awards – For the last several years CSCI globally have sponsored the Women of Color Awards Conference as part of the diversity program. This program has done much to recognize the significant accomplishments of CSCI's women on the broader stage.

- **Technology All Star Award (TAS)** - The Technology All Stars are accomplished women of color at an advanced stage of their careers that have demonstrated excellence at work and in their communities.

- **Technology Rising Star Award (TRS)** - The rising stars are young women who are helping to shape technology for the future.

March has always been an important month at CSC India for its women’s empowerment Program, as thousands of events are held across the world to inspire women and celebrate their economic, social, cultural, and political achievements.