CHAPTER-6

Gender Inclusivity Programmes and Retention of Women Employees

6.1 Introduction

To control female attrition, software companies are providing many facilities and have taken several steps and policy measures. Indian IT industry is a frontrunner in adopting such Gender Inclusivity programmes. Relative to ITES sector, software sector offers more flexibility as Babu (2008) explains. Software companies are adopting measures necessary to assure security, flexibility, growth and work-life balance. As the number of female employees is increasing and their importance becoming more significant such inclusivity and diversity measures are viewed as highly relevant. Role of NASSCOM in pursuing more and more companies to adopt such measures in this regard is significant. (See Box 5.1)

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<th>Box 6.1 NASSCOM and Gender issues</th>
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<td>Since 2006 NASSCOM has initiated a separate forum for gender initiatives i.e. NASSCOM Diversity and Inclusivity Forum at Bangalore. For such gender issues and other inclusivity related issues since 2006 it is organizing annual “Diversity and Inclusivity Summit” regularly. During that summit releases annual report regarding gender inclusivity aspects of the Indian IT Industry. Recognizes the special initiatives taken in such inclusivity aspects by companies by rewarding them. And provides an open dais to discuss the different best practices of the companies and the problems in the implementation process. Since 2007 NASSCOM has started “NASSCOM Corporate Gender Inclusivity Awards”. Number of companies participating in such race is multiplying every year. For the year 2010 “Excellence in Gender Inclusivity” had five categories.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Best IT Services and product company won by IBM India, and another special</td>
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recognition award by Wipro

2. Best BPO Company received by IBM Daksh, Special recognition award given to WNS Global for its high security and appraisal system for women

3. Best emerging company (1-5 years in existence) went to Conjoin, Special recognition for ‘Healthy work-life balance’ given to ‘Wells Forgo India’.

4. Best company with less than 1000 employees- Kale Consultants, Special recognition was given to ‘GE India Exports’.

5. Most Innovative Programme – Nokia. But special recognition was given to Infosys Technologies for its ‘Family matters programme’ and to ‘Vindya’ for ‘Inclusion of women with differently abled’.

Among the total eight sections first section is the introduction, second explains objectives, third briefs the methodology and fourth section explains the reasons for the adoption of inclusivity measures. Section five describes the different important measures so far adopted, sixth section presents the opinion regarding the effectiveness of these measures. Seventh section provides reasons for their lack of effectiveness and eighth section finally concludes.

Prime objective of the present paper is to analyze the “Gender Inclusivity Measures” of Indian IT industry. Prominent objectives can be stated as follows,

- Why Gender Inclusivity Measures are required for the industry?
- Which are the important measures so far adopted?
- Whether these measures are effective?
- If not, why lack effectiveness?

6.2 Methodology

This is a descriptive chapter based on qualitative analysis. Participation and Observation method was used for this analysis along with the informal interviews held
with the software employees and HR managers at NASSCOM Inclusivity and Diversity Summit 2009 and 2010. Simple percentages and bar charts are used for data presentation and analysis.

6.3 Why Gender Inclusivity?

Earlier such measures were branded as corporate social responsibility activities but now industry itself accepts that, today it is the need of the day and essential for their survival and growth in the market.

Companies are realizing the importance of women employees. Women employees are considered important to fill the shortage of talent, for cost advantage, for brand building, for better understanding of customer requirements, and as McKinsey (2008) reports, to realize higher profit margins. NASSCOM Mercer (2009) reports that the qualities of women suits best to the industry and reveals some of the inherent leadership and multitasking ability of women. Same report mentions the rewards of addressing gender inclusivity in an enterprise. i.e. Brand building, higher employee productivity and profits, enhanced organization’s creativity, productivity and ability to manage change, reduced attrition, professional orientation in the organization, customer satisfaction/creating value for shareholders and ethical business practices. Hence for some specific functions female are better suited.

But direct participation and observations of the researcher in NASSCOM “Diversity and Inclusivity Forum” Meetings for the year 2009 and 2010 hints another strong reason for such highly publicized policies. And that reason is to ‘keep away government interference’. Whatever may be the cost, Indian IT industry is not ready to accept interference of government. In order to keep government officials, bureaucrats
and labor inspectors away, IT companies at least formally adopting policies of gender inclusivity which may be available to a very small section in reality.

6.4 Gender Inclusivity Measures

Some of the reasons motivating women employees to leave the company may be effectively addressed by such measures of the companies. Few common gender inclusivity measures adopted to attract and retain women in the workforce are;

- Initiation of women forums or associations for example, ‘Vaahini’ of Accenture,’ IWLC’ of IBM, ‘GenWIN’ of Genpact, ‘IWIN’ of Infosys, ‘WOW’ of Wipro and the like.
- Providing extended job-protected leave, Sabbaticals and re-entry programs,
- Offering special incentives to their head honchos for hiring women and same extended to the employee referral program.
- Adoption of Health camps, security, anti-sexual harassment policies.
- Establishing links with the matrimonial agencies to assist their employees to find the suitable match in the same location to restrict marriage related exit.
- For better work-life balance some of the companies are providing childcare and elderly care facilities on their campus. Pregnant and working mothers instead of taking a sabbatical can choose to work and responsibility for a specific time period.
- Counseling and mentors are available to both personal and professional problems.
Some of the companies are taking even minute consideration to provide convenient work conditions for their female employees. For example “Provision of parking lots near office for pregnant employees” etc.

Conducting workshops for their employees to increase gender sensitization.

6.5 Implementation of the Gender Inclusivity Policy

Many of the companies have adopted formal policies for gender inclusivity. Based on which NASSCOM is recognizing companies and rewarding them through the award for ‘Best Gender Inclusivity Practice’ since 2007. Kaul and Gupta(2009) in a case study of IBM Daksh, Ramesh (2009) and Joshi (2009) in their case study of Infosys (IWIN), Sudarshan and Sircar (2009) of Wipro, and Veeraraghavan (2009) of IBM explains the need and benefits of such gender policies. But according to Nasscom-PWC 2010 report there are large differences among companies while adopting inclusivity measures and these Gender Inclusivity initiatives have yielded better retention only in very few instances.

Regarding the company’s actions effect on increasing ‘gender sensitivity’ among employees, about 75% of both male and female employees opined that their colleagues are not gender sensitive.
6.6 Why lack effectiveness?

In spite of all such measures NASSCOM-PWC(2010) reports that these measures worked in only few companies. The reasons for lack of effective implementation can be found in the structure of industry itself, differences among the companies, work conditions and changing behavior of employees. Following are some of the reasons for lack of effectiveness of these retention measures.

6.6(i) Structure of the industry

IT industry doesn’t provide the’ life-time employment’. Depending upon the international fluctuations, industry hires and fires the employees. 2008 global recession made this evident. To certain extent industry accepts ‘attrition’. Babu(2008, 2009) explains ‘push attrition’ where unproductive employees are forced to exit. “if attrition is in favor of them and within certain limits industry doesn’t worries. But if it crosses certain level, that too boom situation then industry cries for strict follow up of the bond period and inclusivity and retention measures” one of the informant ‘Uday’explained.
6.6(ii) Differences among companies

Depending upon the size of the companies their capacity to adopt inclusivity measure varies. For example IBM Bangalore in its office premise providing sophisticated childcare facilities with collaboration of ‘Amelio’ A well known international professional childcare service provider. But for such actions companies of ‘Noida’ are not prepared as ‘Ridhi Sethi’ openly says.

Larger companies can spend more and adopt many inclusivity measures. To encourage such initiatives among small companies, NASSCOM started rewarding small and new emerging companies in a separate category for gender inclusivity. But through participation in NASSCOM’s “Diversity and Inclusivity Summit 2009 and 2010” it has been observed that in the wake of enlarging its scope of diversity and inclusivity, the forum is limiting the gender inclusivity to the submission of annual report and awards.

One of the Infosys employee ‘Asha’ earlier who was working at Delhi explains about the differences in the working environment compared to her experience in Bangalore and Hyderabad. As she explains “ in southern region such initiatives are more compared to northern region. There we have to work like anything whereas we can feel relaxed here in Bangalore”.

Global companies have adopted global measures. Further another respondent ‘Ashwini’ said that work practice of a particular company depends on the ‘original place of the company’. Western companies are more flexible whereas South Asian companies require workaholics. Indian standard working hours are 8 hours per day whereas South Asian based companies (for example China and Japan) expect their employees to work for longer hours as per their standard. Even if they pay more, work
becomes more hectic in such companies. And these companies may not be more inclusive because time is the main constraint for women.

6.6(iii) Not in the reach

Common observation is that such inclusivity measures are for more experienced and middle level managerial staff. But women are concentrated at the ‘entry level’. NASSCOM-PWC (2010) reports 37% of the entry level employees are women whereas their proportion at managerial level is only 11%. Hence in spite of having measures they are not within the reach of the most of the employees.

6.6(iv) Passion for growth

Today passion for growth is increasing among women employees too. In order to achieve faster growth in terms of salary and newer opportunities they are shifting companies. ‘Mahesh’ employee of Wipro says “Today nobody wants to work till retirement most of the IT employees want to earn as much as possible, as early as possible and by the age 40-45 would like to switch over to some other business in which they are interested”. Increasing concentration on ‘growth’ rather ‘stability’, forcing young employees to shift companies. This tendency is gradually increasing among women employees too.

6.6(v) Work conditions

Longer working hours, increased work pressure are common for both men and women. But such pressure affects women more as her time needs to be properly distributed to maintain both family and career. “In spite of all such measures ‘work tension ‘prevails to them as they have to be on for conference calls. Especially for working mothers it adds to the problem. Hence most of them quit when they become mothers.” ‘Mary’ another respondent who works as a consultant replied.
6.6(vi) Are they prime bread winners for the family?

Another argument posed by some of the respondents is that majority of the female employees are not the primary bread winners of the family. If they exit from the job, that will not affect their economic condition. Hence whenever they feel necessary they may take a break. But slowly the proportion of women as primary bread winners is increasing according to NASSCOM-PWC(2010).

6.6(vii) Chance for re-entry

Yet another point highlighted by the respondents is that even if employees take a break there is a chance for reentry to the IT industry. Hence many IT companies are providing ‘training’ programmes for those who want to join back. Number of working mothers is increasing in the industry. Unlike other professions women doesn’t have to worry about loss of employment in IT industry. IT industry even if doesn’t guarantee ‘Life time employment’, provides ‘Life time employability’. If employees concentrate on updating their domain knowledge industry is ready to employ them.

6.6(viii) Lack of information among female employees

As per present primary data, 41.08% of the employees don’t have the idea that their organization had a formal policy for gender issues. Among those respondents many were the employees of giant companies like Infosys, Wipro, TCS, Accenture who received awards for their best gender inclusivity policies. So it becomes essential for companies to not only have a policy but make aware their employees about such policies. Some organizations have special initiatives for attracting women. i.e. maintaining women ratio, reservation of women proportion in teams and provision of extra referral bonus for referring a women and if she gets recruited. Only 20% of the
respondents said that their companies have special initiatives to attract women employees. But majority of the women employees are not aware of this.

6.6(ix) Inclusivity programmes themselves working against women

In certain cases the gender oriented programmes themselves observed to operate against female employees. Some companies have the policy of restricting women from working for longer and late hours in their premises. For security and work-life balance this initiative has been taken up. But some of the female employees view this as reducing their competitiveness and at least they should have an option. Further one of the respondents ‘Aditi’ who is working as a consultant at present but earlier was an employee of Infosys explained how she was called off from her on-site assignment against her will due to her pregnancy. Another participant of the “NASSCOM Inclusivity and Diversity Summit 2010” openly requested companies not to consider ‘pregnancy’ as a ‘disease’. Differences in the implementation of such programmes are experienced by some of the respondents.

6.7 Conclusion

These kinds of inclusivity measures can only reduce but not prevent attrition. But for industry, it gives the image as ‘women friendly’, and these measures are essential to keep the ‘diversity matrix’. Even though the passion for growth is increasing among women, during their age of 30’s, most of them prefer ‘stability’ more. Obviously, companies with more conducive gender inclusivity measures will be preferred by them. Clearly IT industry is front runner in adopting various gender initiatives and policies. However, their proper implementation is also called for awareness and active participation of employees irrespective of their gender. Slowly its impact can be visualized but much remains to be achieved.
References


