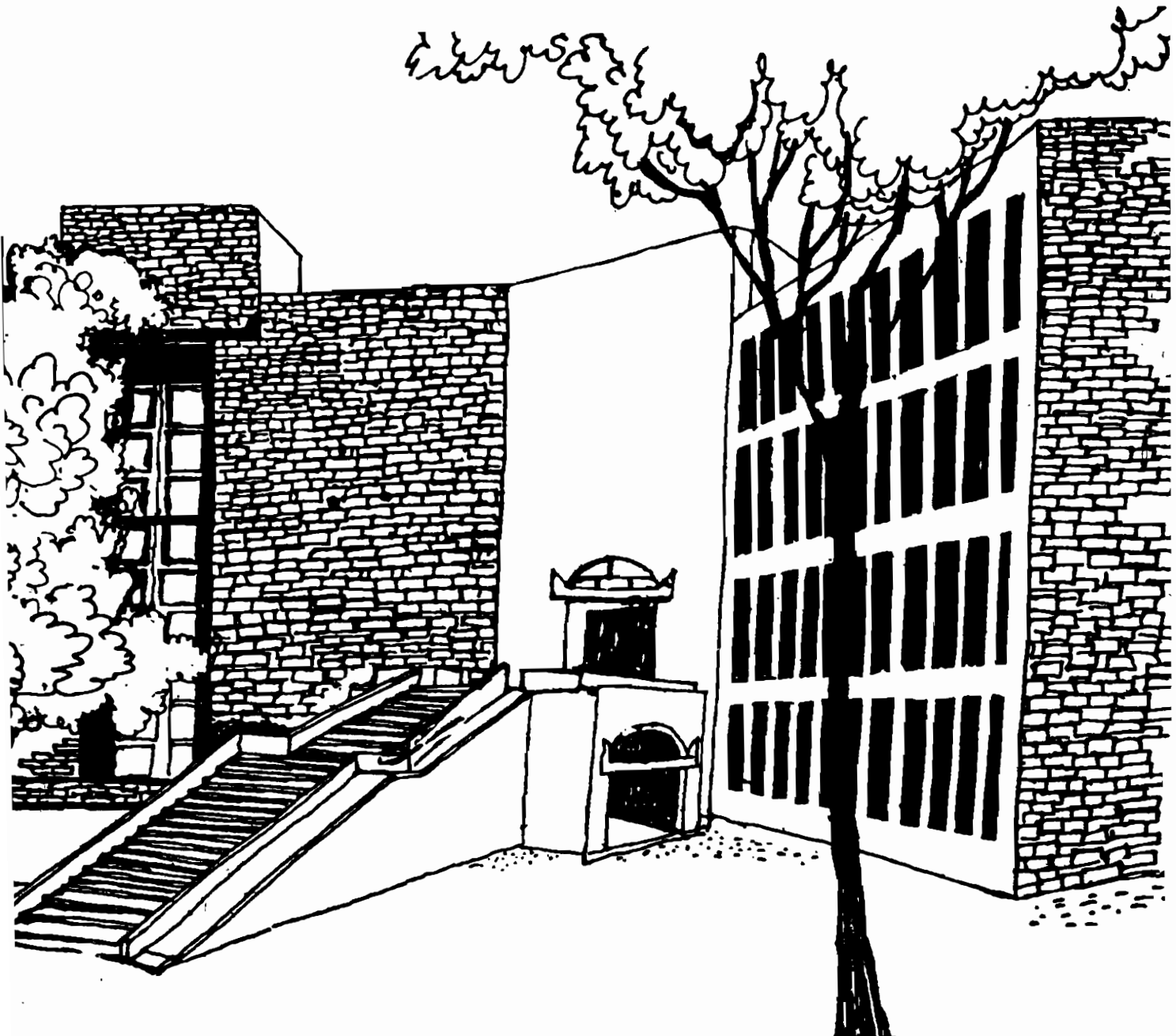




# Working Paper



**Women at the Workplace - The Journey of  
Three Generations of Women**

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***Women at the Workplace - The Journey of Three Generations of Women***

**ABSTRACT**

***'Women at the Workplace- The Journey of Three Generations of Women'***, is based on interviews conducted by the authors of a broad cross-section of women in leadership positions, middle management levels as well as women beginning their careers and those making a second start after some years of motherhood. Face to face interviews, each lasting several hours, with 32 women was the main source of information. In only 2 of these 32 cases, a questionnaire was employed. A broad framework was provided to the participants and used as a template for brainstorming. The person's early background, role models, dreams and aspirations, career achievements and the interplay between personal and professional lives was explored. The participants were asked to introspect and explore what success meant to them. A road map for the future for women in organizations was examined. The survey provided a fascinating insight into the minds and hearts of working women. Different women had different motives for working, different dreams and aspirations, different perceptions of the future, different support systems and different hurdles, however, there was also a deep rooted commonality. Looking beneath the surface many common themes and trends emerged for women with different backgrounds, different personality types and varied levels of education, seniority and experience. The human spirit wanted to achieve, to explore and to succeed - only the manifestation of this spirit was different in different cases. An equally strong parallel theme related to fulfillment beyond the realm of professional achievement was prevalent. An underlying need to fulfill maternal and societal roles was observed. The major challenge was to balance these seemingly contradictory aspirations and to achieve happiness. Paths traversed by these 32 women were different, each path equally valid for each person. However, these paths had many crossroads where each individual meets others and then continues on their own path. Till the next crossroad.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Women at the Workplace : The Journey of Three Generations of Women**

#### **Introduction**

In the first chapter we discussed the movement of working women in India from the fifties to the new millennium. We saw distinct phases in their development and in environmental settings during each phase of such development. From the tentative beginnings made by the pioneer women in the fifties we saw the emergence of the Y2K women - ambitious, confident and more in control of their destiny. These findings were based on our experiences in teaching, research, numerous workshops and case studies. The present chapter will explore this theme further by discussing a survey conducted by the authors specifically for the purpose of receiving first hand the views of working women of different generations who lived through the development phases explored earlier. This will hopefully, help us to gain individual perspectives of women experiencing the world from different vantage points and to run a reality check on the conclusions drawn in the previous chapter. Experiences shared by the interviewees will better help us understand the dynamics of the movement that women have experienced during the last half century. With examples, we will explore the factors and influences that shaped different generations of women who lived through this period and who helped to shape this era. Their upbringing, their adult experiences, their experiments in managing multiple roles and their quest to find a meaning in life, will be brought forth using real world examples. Commonalties as well as differences among different generations of women during the period under review ( 1950's to 2001), will be analysed.

To achieve the above objectives we conducted a survey of 32 women, 29 of whom were met personally for interviews each lasting for approximately 2 hours. The objective of the survey was a qualitative assessment and therefore candidates were chosen and interviewed in considerable depth and detail. Rather than asking people to fill out a form and analysing the results thereafter, we chose a different approach. Each participant was requested to present their thoughts and views using a common frame. The participants were sent a brief outline describing the type of information we were seeking prior to meeting with them. We asked for their personal and educational background,

influences of role models and their dreams and aspirations during their formative years. We also asked them about their career, motivating factors, achievements and future plans. We asked them to introspect and attempt to answer "What is my personal mission?" "How do I define success?" We queried the interviewees about potential synergies and conflicts in terms of balancing their career and personal lives. We discussed interfacial issues with colleagues at the workplace and with family members at home. We finally discussed where working women of today were going and wanted to reach. We also looked at future opportunities and challenges related to working women. We attempted to chart a road map for tomorrow based on past learnings, present experiences and future opportunities.

The sessions were meditative and emotional with minimum interference from the interviewer. Most participants went back in time, reviewed and reflected upon their priorities and in many cases found this to be an enriching and cathartic experience. Therefore the methodology largely relied on one-on-one interviews with participants who had earlier been supplied with an explanatory project brief. The personal interviews were conducted in three different cities and involved a significant investment in terms of time and emotional energy from the participants. This was a fascinating experience for most interviewees, since the personal discussions evoked early memories, revived past traumas, brought back happy memories and in some cases were quite therapeutic. The sincerity and involvement of most participants was touching. The interviewees allowed the authors access to very private spaces in their lives in the true spirit of a joint exploration. Arguably, the interviewers benefited even more, gaining new insights and a sense of deep gratitude towards these wonderful women who gave so much of themselves. In summary, this chapter will provide a qualitative view of how today's women view the world from different vantage points.

We interviewed three generations of women. Generally, each "generation" represents an age group and usually also a certain level of seniority within organisations. There is of course some overlap, as well as atypical examples in terms of senior women occupying junior posts or increasingly in the nineties, youngsters progressing to senior positions rapidly. In atypical situations, the individual is grouped in a particular generation based

on age. A notable feature of all the women participants was their high level of education. Although their personal backgrounds varied from lower middle class families to the affluent and privileged classes, all these women had significantly invested in their own education. The majority of these women had post graduate qualifications and many had professional degrees in medicine, social sciences, architecture, management, etc.

The **first generation** represents women who started their careers in the fifties and sixties. They are today in their sixties and seventies, many retired, some on consulting/Board positions, some involved in philanthropic/educational work and a few fully active and at their peak of their careers. The **second generation** started work in the seventies and eighties and largely occupy middle to senior level management positions today. There are some exceptions in terms of women of this generation who have risen to top positions due to exceptional career orientation. The second generation women are largely in the middle stages of their careers although some are at earlier stages having chosen to make a later beginning due to motherhood. Still others have chosen jobs instead of careers and have determined the suitable mix of job-related satisfaction and personal life.

The **third generation** largely consists of women who entered the workplace in the nineties. More rapid career advancement is noticed, particularly in young women who have delayed starting a family or limited the number of children for their careers. Some of these young women are at junior / trainee positions but several others have reached middle management positions sooner than their counterparts in earlier times. Increased opportunities, competition, increased acceptance of working women and a growing culture of meritocracy appear to be key drivers for this phenomena. However, compared to fast track career men who have reached CEO levels or have been successful entrepreneurs in their late twenties and thirties, women still have a long way to go. However, there were encouraging signs in terms of women displaying drive and determination, starting entrepreneurial ventures and performing well at the workplace. We believe that the time is ripe for young women to reach leadership positions. The new generation women are fortunate in having more choices. They appear to be less 'programmed', are less burdened by the baggage of the past, do not feel victimised by

the system and are more inclined to analyse legacy issues dispassionately. There are more opportunities, a significant increase in educational levels, enhanced media access and availability of enabling technologies that have re-defined the workplace. This is not to say that these women will necessarily make more aggressive career choices. Rather, the choices they make are more informed, more self-chosen and more creative. One also notices a blurring of boundaries between personal and workplaces leading to a more holistic approach to life and living. From our perspective it became apparent that although modern techniques were an enabling influence, a less appreciated aspect was the pioneering role played by women of generations past. We hope that young readers gain a perspective of this important legacy and historical debt to the pioneer women and indeed become catalysts for change for their daughters and grand daughters.

The authors have attempted to examine the thoughts of women interviewees across three generations, but would like to alert readers that boundaries between generations are necessarily arbitrary. There is indeed some overlap. However we believe that on balance, a temporal view serves to provide interesting perspectives. The following are the three generations of women who participated in our explorations:

**1. The First Generation**

- *The first entrants at the workplace*
- *Blazing new trails*

**2. Second Generation**

- *Walking the path*
- *Defining a new identity*

**3. The New Generation**

- *Synergising multiple life roles*
- *Shaping the future / tomorrow*

Given below is a grid, where we explore the three generations of women defined earlier across three stages of life:

- 1. Early Coding:** Upbringing, role models and early dreams and aspirations
- 2. Adulthood:** Balancing different roles and interfaces at home and at the workplace.
- 3. Exploring new meanings:** Defining success and shaping the future.



S T A G E S O F L I F E	Exploring new meanings			
	Adulthood			
	Early Codings			
		I	II	III

GENERATIONS OF WOMEN

The above grid allows exploration across generations for a particular life stage or alternatively allows comparisons across different stages of life for a particular generation. We have chosen the former approach to allow temporal progression of perspective across generations.

Let us first take a look at working women across three generations from their childhood till date. Then let us explore in detail the similarities and the dissimilarities across three generations to find out how the pioneer women blazed new trails, how the second generation women walked the path and how the third generation will shape the future.

**1) Early Codings of Different Generations of Women : Upbringing, role models, early dreams and aspirations.**

Parental influences were strong across generations but the type and impact of codings derived from parenting in the formative years was different. First generation women looked upon their fathers as achievers, and looked to their mothers for softer values. The professional role model was anchored in the man since most of these women did not have working mothers. In future generations strong parental influences continued, however male gender specificity in terms of 'work role models' got diluted. New female role models - aunts, working mothers, professors, etc. emerged. It was noticed across generations that role models for women were rooted in the family, school / university and workplace. Most women did not refer to successful men or women who were out of their immediate sphere of contact as role models. The male role models were primarily father, teacher, husband and boss at the work place. Few women mentioned male colleagues as role models indicating projection of the 'all powerful father figure' into later stages of life. The fixation with the male authority figure appears more dilute in the younger interviewees. Female role models begin with the mother. The senior generation look to her for softer values. Later generations perceive her as a more complete person performing multiple roles. Female bosses and superiors are infrequently mentioned. Perhaps this is because senior levels at the workplace are predominantly staffed by males in most industries even today. All interviewees regardless of generation had role models anchored in people they had dealt closely with - father, mother, boss, husband. Surprisingly no one mentioned people they had not known like olympic stars, political figures, etc. It is difficult to read additional meaning into this without a corresponding male survey for comparison.

Among the first generation women, parents were seen to encourage the girl child to stand on her own feet. The focus was on the girl growing up to be 'independent' presumably from societal exploitation as well as undue exploitation from the husband's family- post marriage. There were virtually no female role models that parents of these girls could have drawn upon and this was a bold and unusual stance for its age and time. This is possibly one reason why career women in high positions of the first generation are few and far between. The second generation had greater opportunities to draw upon the experiences of working women in their families. They therefore did not need to overcome the first threshold and break the entry barrier. In their world, it was acceptable for a woman to work, if not for a career, at least for a living or for mental

stimulation. Therefore, the seeds of reform which the first generation had sown were beginning to bear fruit. This by no means implies that there was a level playing field for women, it only means that there was a small but significant population of working women who could be identified with. The first generation women were influenced professionally and academically by their fathers, whereas softer values were inculcated by their mothers. This reflected a typical dichotomy of the times, where the father was learned in the ways of the world, whereas the mother was a home-maker by convention and not necessarily by choice. The element of choice particularly in the case of educated women was noticed in the families of second generation women, whose mothers could choose whether to work and where to work. In young girls of this generation, grandparents were found to exert strong parental influences, since in some families both parents were working. The reactive stance of the first generation i.e "my girl shall be independent when she grows up" mellowed. The emphasis shifted to facilitate the daughter's choice, her birth right to chart her own path and to achieve her own type of happiness was acknowledged by the more enlightened sections of urban society. These were daughters of mothers who themselves had career ambitions, therefore the image of the ever sacrificing women made way for a more complex and more human image.

The urge for self-expression had first been given a voice by the pioneer women. The second generation women now had the possibility to explore what 'self expression' meant for their own existence. The objective of the pioneer women was to enter the world of freedom, choice and self-expression. In other words, the mere act of donning the man's mantle was an achievement - crossing of the first threshold. Therefore, paradigms had forever changed. The pioneers had shown that women could work if they chose to. The second generation women could now tread this new trail that had been made possible and could dwell upon which choice was best for them as individuals. This is not to imply that treading the path was easy for the second generation of women. The path was unpaved and full of pitfalls. Many of the pitfalls were created by a confused society. Sure, some women could now work but who would look after the household? Who would raise the children? Who would look after the elders? Although working women were tolerated, societal expectations on the home-front did not relent easily. The male child, perennially pampered, did not easily yield his

chauvinism's. Therefore the legacy of pioneer women was not an unmixed blessing for the second generation. This generation now had to deal with the societal paradoxes that the pioneers had brought into focus. The male chauvinists, the resentful elderly women who had scoffed at the pioneers of their own age, of their own era, the jealous women of the same generation who had not the opportunity to work, all had to be dealt with by the working women of the second generation. The paradigm had been changed forever by the pioneers, but the social infrastructure and the societal transformation necessary to support the new paradigm was not in place. In summary, the changes brought by the first generation women represented a bolt of lightning, a jolt to the existing order, whereas the second generation women lived through an age of contradictions where modernism had to necessarily coexist with conservatism.

In the case of the second generation women, a significant influence of the 'working mother' - a new phenomenon for its time, was noticed. These women were deeply influenced by their mothers or by working women in their families during their formative years. For many of these women the predominant aspiration was to become a 'successful working mother'. The fact that a woman could be a successful home maker as well as have a reasonable career was in and of itself an achievement. Many had high goals and strong ambitions and had indeed reached high positions among the very first women in India to do so. However, the working mother role models and the aspect of balancing home and work were predominant themes for the second generation of women. The first generation women offer an interesting contrast. Here the recurring theme was achievement of self dependence - 'women should stand on their own feet'. This was a rebellious phase in which bold initiatives were needed to do the unprecedented. Without the benefit of role models anchored in the women, working women of this generation drew inspiration from encouraging fathers and supportive mothers. The fact that a woman could go into a man's world and be his equal was in and of itself an achievement. Some of the interviewees of this pioneer generation mentioned that they had always endeavoured to do well in a given situation rather than dreaming about special achievements in future. These women strove for excellence and made the best of opportunities as they came. Multiple roles came much more naturally to the new generation women who took this as a given, therefore the dreams and aspirations of the second generation women was seen to become the baseline

expectation of the new generation. The new generation women's dreams were now more clearly projected in terms of both external achievements and personal fulfilment.

The new generation working women who are today in their twenties and early thirties represent an important stage in the evolution of womankind. They are relatively less burdened by the baggage of the past, less steeped in legacy, with less need to rebel and adopt reactionary stances. Their trail blazed by women of their grandmother's era has now been paved and the new woman is at the second cross-road. Let us explore this further. By trying to break societal barriers and in paving new paths, women of two successive generations had primarily been driven by external factors. Their careers represented a cry for self-expression. They were catalysts for social transformation and architects of the emerging gender equality in the society and workplace. The young women of the third generation now have the possibility to look within. They have tremendous inner drive and the will to achieve. There was no longer the need to work as a form of rebellion or as a means to make a point. It was now possible to examine inborn aptitudes and find conventional and unconventional methods of self-expression. These women today question, "what do I want from my life? How do I want to shape my destiny?" The importance lies not so much in the type of choice but the fact that these women have the possibility to choose. We would like to caution readers that these observations are relevant to a small section of privileged, educated, urban women in our Indian society and are not generally applicable. Nonetheless we believe that these trends are important and relevant given that rural India is urbanising. It is interesting to note that less privileged women today are at a stage, the pioneers were five decades ago. This diversity is unique to developing countries given the glaring inequities that exist. The new generation, the third generation women, have the benefit of much greater exposure. They are well travelled, have benefited from secular education and modern training. The more affluent women have been educated and trained abroad. There are also increasing examples of women from middle-class families availing of scholarships for higher education in India and abroad. Also women of this generation have significant exposure to the media and are children of the information age. Information is not the exclusive domain of the privileged male child. In the modern context information is power. The new internet age has therefore changed power equations and have broken down exclusive "clubs" that had been set up for self-serving purposes. The authors

would like to observe that third generation women have a tremendous responsibility, a fact that they are not necessarily cognisant of. The pioneer women shouldered the responsibility of shattering myths and fighting the establishment and thereby became trail blazers for today's youngsters. It would behove the educated urban younger women of today to take upon themselves the responsibility of opening new avenues for their less fortunate counterparts. Sadly, the sense of social responsibility towards the oppressed section of women is found wanting in the generation of today. The sense of mission displayed by the pioneer women is now replaced by self-centred attitude to life.

When asked about their dreams and aspirations new generation women were the most explicit. Their aspirations were largely centred around the self. It was also noticed in other context described earlier. These women aspired to high professional positions, and making a mark in their careers. Many had a fascination for a foreign education or for working abroad. The new generation women also had personal dreams and aspirations which they were able to enunciate clearly unlike most women of earlier generations. It is interesting to note that these women want fulfilment in both their working lives as well as their personal lives and are clear as to what they want. A certain hesitancy noted in earlier generations - hesitancy to demand for oneself, need to be seen as sacrificing rather than demanding was nowhere in evidence in the new generation. Perhaps older generations had projected the classical image of the ever sacrificing Indian woman to their working lives as well, whereas this stance does not seem to be adopted by contemporary women who were experienced to be assertive, demanding and largely self-focused. It was noted that gender specific aspirations seemed to have made way for more universal aspirations of personal and professional fulfilment and achievement.

We noticed in the first two generations a tendency towards societal service. Several participants expressed interest in the betterment of society and had made significant contributions in the field of education, healthcare, human resource development, etc. Although personal goals were important, social responsibility also came across as a dominant theme. In the new generation women the focus was more on personal

achievement and self-actualisation perhaps due to the fact that the interviewees were quite young. The authors hope that this book makes a small contribution towards informing today's women of their legacy, of the sacrifices and struggles of generations past and hopefully encourages them to have a sense of mission and responsibility of those who are less fortunate.

### **B) Adulthood: Balancing different roles, interfaces at home and at the workplace.**

The stage of life described here is adulthood where potentially complex challenges, new interfaces and indeed new responsibilities have been introduced. Womanhood, marriage, familial ties, motherhood, job, career are juxtaposed in the life space at this age. The need to balance different priorities, the need to draw inspiration from the inner self as well as other people and a necessity of synergising different interface had now come to the fore. The participant's rich experience spanning over five decades across three generations during this phase –of being home makers as well as career women is a fascinating story of courage, will, joy and tears. Let us compare and discuss the experiences and views articulated by participants for three different generations. The interviewees described sources of strength and inspiration that helped them face challenges and difficulties.

We begin with the first generation, the pioneers. We asked the question "how do you synergise home and work?" The majority of interviewees drew inspiration and courage from their inner self. An underlying desire for self improvement and self-actualization was evident among the participants. In many instances an external effort towards self-improvement through philosophical study and self-help workshops was evident. But more importantly there was an inner drive to 'shake off the straight jacket of the past' and experiment with different roles. What was most important during this period of life was the support and encouragement received from the family. These women had encouraging husbands and other support systems within their own and their husband's families. In latter years, supportive children also helped them, children who took pride in their mother's achievement. It is pertinent to note that most interviewees chosen for this project were successful working women and these women are not necessarily

representative of the generation. Rather they are representative of the torch bearers of this generation. One conclusion that we can draw is that in the case of these successful women, a positive cycle of familial reinforcement was perpetuated from one generation to the next. This is not to suggest that there were no obstacles. The pioneer women were born in a societal frame where working women were an exception rather than a norm. They had to draw upon inner inspiration and courage to fight the odds. A firm determination was a major character trait common to participants of this generation. The dilemmas and conflicts faced by these women had different origins. Some originated from their upbringing where the paradoxes inherent in Indian society gave them conflicting messages. On the one hand they were encouraged by parents to educate themselves whereas on the other hand they were overprotected and denied certain opportunities by virtue of their gender. This created confusion and a rebellious streak in these women and prevented wholesome self-development.

The traditional workplace consisted of men who were not used to interfacing with working women. The codings of men particularly those of the earlier generation were inconsistent with gender equality at the workplace. Their interface with women at the workplace passed through several stages - first of non-acceptance, then of acceptance but either as a subordinate or at most as a colleague. The idea that women could surpass men at the workplace and become supervisors of men was unacceptable. When women did well at the workplace, which was often the case, some men particularly those in parallel positions experienced insecurity. Some of the women participants of the first generation reported that a woman's success in an organisation was not always perceived as merit based. Malicious rumours were spread by male colleagues who felt insecure and jealous. Single women, particularly those staying alone, were suspiciously viewed by the society. In other words, the society had yet not come to grips with the working woman and could not fully comprehend her normal and legitimate role in a merit-based, gender-neutral professional environment.

Instances where women tolerated hurts rendered to them either by their colleagues at the workplace or the husband and in-laws at the home-front were quite common. The



inner strength to fight back or raise their voice was suppressed. The lessons of life taught by their parents were based on compliance, tolerance and patience. Interestingly one of the participants mentioned that women themselves might be contributing to the self-fulfilling prophecy of gender discrimination at the workplace. She related instances of women entering organisations expecting to be discriminated against and therefore presenting an aggressive stance to their colleagues. Some later realised this and introspected to find that the problem was more within themselves. This is a good example of societal codings related to gender discrimination affecting not only the male gender but also in a subtle manner the female gender.

Examining the responses of women participants representing the second generation showed interesting similarities and contrasts. The conflicts and issues of the second generation women were centred around the social role, challenges of balancing home and work, household duties and fulfilling the expectations of motherhood. Many women of this generation pursued a career, in some cases postponed marriage and in certain instances ultimately remained single. It is not that these women necessarily opted out of matrimony but rather feared losing their new found independence, financial and otherwise. However, after attaining a reasonable level of comfort and satisfaction from work, they were open for marriage, but felt that either time had passed by, or that a suitable match was not available. Many of these women who played the role of single working women were the products of a transition phase. In trying to reach for a new shore, some lost connectivity with their familial moorings. Sometimes the baby was thrown out with the bath water. It was difficult indeed during this transition phase to achieve the right balance and the best of both worlds. There was the realisation within women of this generation of the need to explore and fulfil different aspects of their personality. There was also a grudging acceptance of this phenomenon within the urban society. However, both the women and the society did not quite know how to make conscious choices and to build negotiability between different stakeholders. There was a tendency among many women of this era to be reactive, to perceive unreal as well as real oppression by the system, and to achieve financial independence at all cost. Clearly, independence cannot exist in a vacuum and some women isolated themselves from the system rather than becoming agents of change. Societal attitudes fluctuated between grudging acceptance of the work role for women and unreasonable reactions to

the natural consequences of this new order. Neither the individuals nor the society had fully grasped the revolutionary nature of the churning that was taking place and the fundamental social transformation that was underway.

We see greater clarity in the new generation women about what they want from life both professionally and personally. Many of the new generation women did not have to rebel against the system. The women of this generation are trying to find spaces of their own. Rather than professional achievement *per se* they are focussed on self-actualisation and finding happiness in different life roles--working woman, mother, wife and member of society. The interviewees of this generation were women in their twenties and thirties typically married and mothers of one or two young children. They valued and enjoyed their role as a wife and mother and also had significant career ambitions. Most were facing significant challenges in achieving both goals primarily due to recent motherhood and inequitable sharing of domestic roles by the husbands. Most had begun careers and showed significant progress. However, the pace at which their careers are progressing is slow and does not allow them to reach their fullest professional potential at this juncture. Most hoped that once their children grew up they would be able to build their careers more easily. Most participants lacked clarity that their present circumstance was a conscious choice they had made and this lack of perspective led to frustration in many cases. A dentist said, " I have the ability and capacity to open a dental clinic, but in doing so my children would be neglected as my husband works from 9 a m to 9 p m." An architect, an interior designer, a fashion designer, a gynaecologist, a human resource professional, a placement agent, an artist—all echoed the same theme. They had slowed down temporarily and were working part-time due to demands of motherhood. All these women exhibited a deeply felt sensitivity for their children, their welfare, safety and development. They were willing to sacrifice their professional ambitions for their children but did not completely want to give up their careers and erode the value of their education. They are therefore today at a stage where they are juggling both roles facing the challenges that this multitasking creates. They are trying to find solutions for the inevitable problems that arise. Comments made by the interviewees pointed to the need for a more enabling environment at home and at the work place. Well run crèches, flexitime and infra-structural support are facilitators at the workplace. Greater familial support and encouragement, as well as participation by the husband in child-rearing are

enabling factors at home which women of this generation are in need of.

Although challenges faced across generations were different, the underlying personality trait was that all these women were highly ambitious. They had the power of sustenance and a burning flame within, which kept sustaining their inner drive. With each hurdle, a lesson was learnt, resilience was built and with a 'never say die' spirit they moved forward. If the pioneer generation proved to be brave, positive and spirited, the second generation displayed an ability to manage multiple roles and subtly affect social transformation, whereas today's generation is more self-centred, focussed and willing to experiment with new ideas.

Women made different choices under different circumstances across generations. There was an underlying spirit of exploration. The ability to manage multiple roles was a common trait. Some chose to perform one role at a time, some were able to master the art of simultaneously juggling multiple roles, whereas many prioritised roles during different phases of life. It is worth noting that balancing multiple roles was not a dominant feature of the first generation women. These women were highly educated and ambitious. Working women of this generation generally started their career once their children grew old enough to manage on their own. Due to support systems at home, including the joint family structure, the upbringing of children was easier. The whole family was involved in child-rearing. The child was not alone and had siblings, cousins, uncles, aunts and grand parents if their mother was working. The women still had to struggle as the path was yet uncharted. Women of this generation were hard working, sacrificing and in their later years, philanthropic.

However, the family structure started changing towards a nuclear family structure in urban areas. Typically both husband and wife worked for a living. Hence prioritising roles became essential for the working woman. The role of a mother continued to be very prominent. Second generation women, who had a job-oriented approach, working mainly for a second income did not find balancing very stressful as they did not bring

along with them the stresses experienced on the job. They were better able to separate their work space and their personal space due to clear and unambiguous separation between the two. However, career oriented women were stretched between the cognitive and emotive facets of their personality. They desired a fulfilling family life on one hand and had a vision of reaching considerable heights in their career on the other hand. In such situations it was difficult to 'switch off' after reaching home from their office and a 'nine-to-five' routine was impossible. The new generation women or the 'jugglers' as they called themselves had a totally different perspective as far as balancing multiple roles is concerned. The quest for 'perfection' in every role and the determination to get the best out of life are dominant characteristics of the new generation. These high expectations relating to all aspects of life sometimes lead to frustration and guilt feelings. Moreover, the task of balancing Eastern culture, traditions and values with Western modernism is not without its contradictions.

Building an effective interface with professional colleagues across levels in the organisation was a different kind of a challenge faced by working women. Among the first generation women, issues related to insecurity and jealousy experienced by male colleagues were pertinent. This was because women were very few in organisational set-ups. If these women held high positions the male ego was hurt. Therefore the focus was more on preservation of the prevailing status quo rather than on capability or merit. Men in those times just could not imagine reporting to a woman. These feelings of resentment by male colleagues was also experienced by the second generation women. The emerging female workforce was often not taken seriously by men and often aspirations were cast upon women who progressed in the organisation. On the positive side senior women were well accepted by male subordinates. Here the female boss was perceived as a mentor at the workplace and was often projected as a mother figure. In general, working women of the first two generations had positive relationships with their male colleagues in situations where there was a gap of two to three levels of the hierarchy either upwards or downwards. In other words, whenever the woman could be projected as a mentor or a mentee, men were comfortable. This is not unsurprising given that this was a transition phase at the workplace and working women could only be experienced through the prism of the home setting i.e., as a mother figure or as a daughter. The second generation women also experienced interfacial challenges with

female colleagues. This was hardly an issue for the previous generation since women at the workplace were few and far between. As time progressed, women at the workplace assumed significance in terms of numbers and had therefore to deal with each other in different roles. Women experienced jealousy and insecurity about others of the same gender and often withheld information at the workplace to protect their much cherished turf. These women were clinging on to professional positions which they and the generation before them had struggled hard to acquire. Therefore, paradoxically one sees few examples of women who owe their success to other women. Although women could be effective mentors of young subordinates, both male and female, they experience difficulties with lateral linkages in the organisation. It was still premature for effective formations of working women to emerge. Moreover, highly successful women in the organisation did not necessarily endeavour to transform the system for the benefit of female colleagues. In a different way one sees a continuation of this trend among the younger generation women. The authors believe that this is an opportune time for women to form self help groups, become catalysts for systemic change and form effective lobbies to fight for their rights.

### C) Exploring new meanings: defining success and shaping the future

It was seen that when women defined success, they defined it as per its relevance to a particular stage of life. The first generation defined success in terms of deriving satisfaction out of contributing to the society and taking social responsibility. They also saw success in terms of learning and utilising their education and keeping abreast of fast changing times. The second generation were at a stage where the challenge was co-holding roles at home and work. Therefore, the definition of success revolved around attaining balance and gaining satisfaction from achieving multiple goals. The new generation women described success in personal terms. Achieving mental and emotional happiness, financial independence, leading a balanced life, evolving, growing and striving for self-actualisation were priorities for this generation. Thus it was seen across generations that differences in priorities were related to the stage in life the participants were. The definitions could therefore undergo a change depending on the participant's quest for achieving whatever they desired as life progressed. Overall the underlying theme portrayed a picture of achievement orientation, ambition, vision and

optimism for the future.

The first generation women were asked to reflect upon 'where they had reached and where did they want to reach?' Although many had reached significant positions, they did not define success only in terms of climbing the corporate ladder. The fact that they have acquired mastery over their weaknesses or had changed their perspectives in accordance with the changing paradigms, the fact that they had contributed at national or state level and were part of social organisations was something they cherished. They did not want to reach a particular formal position in an organisation but felt that they could contribute more time to social issues. Some wished to shape policy matters at the government level. Being part of the global revolution gaining international recognition was also their aim. Some wanted to meditate and spend time with their family including grand-children. The second generation women had reached high positions in the organisational context. However, they also discovered that in addition to climbing the corporate ladder it was also important to evolve as a human being. A certain level of clarity about their goals had been attained. However, when questioned as to 'where would they like to see themselves at the end of their career journey?' Most participants emphasised the importance of overall peace and happiness in life. Reaching a high designation was important to them, but was not their ultimate aim. Being good mothers to their children and leading a happy family life were priorities.

The new generation women had a well-defined mission for the future. These women wanted to turn their dreams and aspirations into reality. They aimed at reaching the top in their chosen profession on the one hand, and also desired a happy, contented family life. Both goals were considered equally important. These women are not very satisfied with the progress of their career but have developed tremendous awareness of their future mission. The initial hurry in pursuing a career and then a 'slow down' due to family responsibilities, is prevalent in women of this generation. These women are ambitious and hungry for growth, both personal and professional. Their ambition is both their strength as well as the reason for their stress and frustration. There is a craving to achieve perfection in familial roles particularly motherhood as well as the desire to excel

at the workplace. The desire to achieve both objectives simultaneously in the shortest possible time frame leads to high stress and occasionally to catastrophe in one or both endeavours. Due to the impulsiveness of youth these women find it difficult to prioritise and plan their seemingly conflicting ambitions. Although women are blessed with the possibility of achieving fulfilment, both as a mother and as a career person the downside for women who start a family is that their careers come to fruition later than those of men who are otherwise no more competent. We believe that these women have unprecedented opportunities ahead of them, since they have to deal less with legacy issues of the past and traditional societal issues which shackled earlier generations of their gender. Moreover, the advent of new industry sectors such as IT as well as the possibility to grow as knowledge workers in a networked environment should serve to boost the careers of working women. Another heartening observation from our interaction with young interviewees was that these women had the ability to introspect and were interested in investing in their family life which would allow them balanced growth and a strong platform to realise future career ambitions.

In a recent article "family before career" Singh V., 2000, talks about "the growing breed of working professionals who want to accord to their families the same degree of attention that they would to their work". The article describes instances, wherein a successful lawyer, an MBA working as an HR executive, a teacher and a private banker opted out of a career for the sake of spending time with their children. These women felt that after leaving their jobs, the overall confidence, growth and sense of emotional security in their children has increased many folds. They were of the opinion that there was no substitute for mother's love. Support systems such as crèche facilities were insufficient to inculcate the right values in a child. It was believed that a rapport developed between a mother and a child changes the child's outlook who in turn learn to be confident, motivated and feel secure. All these women do have an ambition, but they have made a choice keeping certain priorities in mind. They felt that it was utmost important to be present with their children in their growing years in order to build up a better future for them. They were clear that once their children are big they could start all over again.

Most interviewees seemed more concerned with doing justice to both their personal and professional lives, rather than achieving a coveted title within an organisation. Indeed it seems reasonable to re-evaluate the traditional concept of organisational hierarchy after the emergence of women as a significant part of the work force. A simplistic concept within the 'all male' organisation of achieving a title, reaching a good post or becoming the most aggressive hunter is not entirely relevant to a work force which has both genders. We found that many women defined their professional achievement, not in hierarchical terms but in more human terms. Many women from the first generation saw the senior organisational positions they had achieved as a means to do good within the organisation and in the societal context. Some happened to be spouses of owner managers whereas others had carved out their own career path. Interestingly, younger women defined their career more in terms of self-actualisation, self-development and learning as opposed to hierarchical ambitions. This is not to suggest that these women do not have career ambitions or they do not want their just rewards. These are highly ambitious women who take pride in their achievements. However, they define success in a broad and holistic way. The authors are unsure whether these young women will encounter significant resistance at the workplace in terms of reaching top positions. Probably, some will, some won't and for many it would not matter.

We believe that the issues of the future will focus on defining success in human terms, fulfilling and synergising different aspects of life in addition to creating value for the organisation in today's inter-connected and web-enabled world.



## Annexure:

## UNIQUE CONFIGURATION OF WOMEN ACROSS THREE GENERATIONS

First Generation Women	Second Generation Women	New Generation Women
<p>Awareness among parents of the need to bring up their daughters in a manner that they can stand on their own feet.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many women had working parents. Grand parents assumed importance in child rearing. Some women had working mothers and the first female role models emerged.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These women had unprecedented opportunity to learn and grow. They had significant exposure to the world due to media, travel and IT.</li> </ul>
<p>Women had educational opportunities although there was some discrimination compared to male siblings. Parents over protected and sheltered the female child. The child struggled for freedom.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mothers increasingly encouraged their daughters in terms of education and in terms of pursuing a career.</li> <li>• These women had open minded parents and gradually gained opportunities for overall development. They often asserted their right to choice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expectations of parents and society from female and male children were not as different as in the past.</li> <li>• Parental influences continued to be important. However, these women had early exposure to other sources of inspiration and ideas. They are children of the information age.</li> </ul>
<p>Female children looked to their fathers for professional guidance and to their mothers for softer values.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In their fathers they admired ambitiousness and qualities of the support and encouragement given to them from early age. In mothers, the art of balancing two roles –house and work, the power of acceptance and adjustment were some of the qualities they looked for.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admiration for qualities in people of being self-made, independent, ethical and fair were prominent in these women. Parents of these women were open-minded and sensitive to the needs of their children.</li> </ul>
<p>At the workplace the first generation women had only male role models - Boss, Professors, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both male and female role models were now possible at home and at workplace. However the mentors were primarily men and were usually projected as the father figure. Encouraging husbands started becoming the norm rather than exception. However the hangover of a male dominated system persisted in extended families as well as at the workplace. Male colleagues at the workplace had yet to come to grips in relating with working women and usually tried to relate to them using social frames i.e., as father figures, brothers, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the workplace enabling technologies and more flexible attitudes within the organisation facilitated the professional progress of these women. The shift in business towards services and the growing importance of knowledge workers created new opportunities for working women.</li> </ul>
<p>These women sought higher</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggressive women were often</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These women knew their mind</li> </ul>

education but the fullest opportunity to all round personality development was unavailable. These women were strong, ambitious, patient and resilient, but lacked assertiveness.

The aspirations of these women were not properly understood by their own families as well as by in-laws. Even when families were supportive of the women's career they refused to compromise on what they perceived as the woman's familial duties.

There were conflicts at the identity level, interfacial issues with other people and the desire to rebel.

Most of these women settled for late careers after their children grew up.

The experience of brazing a new trail at the workplace and overcoming significant obstacles was a cathartic experience for these women. They grew mentally and emotionally.

In later years they were imbued with a sense of mission and a desire to contribute to society. Although they achieved a sense

resented and denied merit based promotions. Women started assuming male stances in order to survive in a man's world.

- Working women gained respect due to their professional excellence as well as the ability to contribute a second income to the family. However, societal pressures to conform persisted.

- These women experienced complex interfacial issues with other women including female colleagues. Empathy for others of their own gender was often polluted by jealousy and insecurity.

- Stress levels increased due to inadequate support systems for working women within organisations and at home. Multiple balances, seemingly conflicting roles continued.

- These women learnt to rebel and assert themselves. They increasingly assumed male stances at the workplace and a rebellious stance at the social level. These women represented a transition phase.

- Reaching top positions with respect to designation was not important for these women. They wanted to achieve peace.

from an early age. Globally they had travelled and experienced multi-cultural diversity. There was no need to rebel against people either at home or at workplace but they perhaps felt the need to rebel against the inefficiencies in systems as they had a comparative reference from the West.

- A lot of awareness was there from experiences of the former generations. Therefore synergising was much easy. Mostly the families were neutral and if joint set-ups were there, socialisation skills, tact, supportive husbands, and in-laws have eased their life roles, letting them enjoy career and motherhood both.

- These women were confident and assertive and had less need to assume a reactive or rebellious stance. However, these women also experienced instances of rivalry, jealousy, back-biting from female colleagues.

- Many women started their career early and deferred marriage and/or postponed motherhood. These women are highly career oriented rather than job oriented. They have a desire to fulfil both their personal as well as professional dreams. They have a zest for life.

- Their issues revolve more around juggling roles and in a quest of being a perfect mother, wife and a professional, they experience guilt if either of their roles is neglected due to time constraints. Also some kind of hurry is experienced in achieving everything too fast.

- Goal clarity, both personal and professional is apparent. They are also learning to manage anxieties through yoga,

of satisfaction from professional success their goals were not only hierarchical unlike their male counterparts. They strived for inner growth, social responsibilities and had a strong desire to contribute to social welfare.

happiness and satisfaction from being good mothers, providing support to their families and also continue on the path of learning, growing and evolving themselves to a stage of perfection in whatever they undertook.

meditation, etc from an early age. They are inclined towards self-realisation, self-introspection and are also in turn achieving patience, resilience, empathy and maturity quite fast.

**PURCHASED**

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