COLLOQUIUM

Gender and Workplace Experience

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INTRODUCTION

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"Men are dominant, women are subservient;" "Men are aggressive, women are passive;" "Men are agentic, women are communal;" "Men are power-centric, women are person-centric;" "Men are single-focused, women are multi-focused;" "Men are bread winners, women are home makers." The list of differences identified by researchers is seamless. Similarities have, rarely if ever, been recorded or found their space in research journals. Questions that readily come to the mind are: Does biological difference transcend all boundaries and get reflected in attitudes and behaviours clubbed under binary heads as "male" and "female?" Or is it that when the "difference" hypothesis yields null results, interest in the research topic wanes?

Questions gain higher significance when we attempt to understand and analyse them in the context of organizations. The battle often in organizations is not on what are the differences or similarities between men and women but on how to retain women employees despite differences/no differences. Retention measures centre primarily on providing a more conducive work environment for women. In these attempts, noteworthy are the changing mindsets in proposing and handling issues of diversity and inclusivity. Undoubtedly, promotion of gender diversity has yielded multiple changes in the behavioural and working styles of men and women with the work environment becoming more inclusive. An oft-repeated phrase in the "inclusive cells" is, "We must ensure gender equality." Sure, it is essential given the changing economic scenario. However, I argue that procedural attempts to attain "gender equality" by attempting an equal proportion of men and women within organizations are mere tactical measures to satiate a strategic objective. My question to the readers is: Can this achieve the strategic objective of "gender equity" as distinct from "gender equality?" Almost all management gurus opine that strategy formulations cannot be an outcome of tactical measures. If diversity is to be used as a tool for organic growth, procedural implementation should result from laboured, structured, and strategic thinking which deliberates on both similarities and differences between

men and women.

In this section of the Colloquium, I will focus on three basic questions:

- Why gender?
- Can an appropriate understanding of gender enhance workplace experience?
- How do we embed the concept of gender in the workplace environment?

Why Gender?

To put it simplistically, a definition of gender would begin with the biological sex of men and women (broadly speaking). Hence, in a study of gender, the research focus should ideally be on both, men and women, their behavioural traits, attitudes, skill sets, and competencies. Why gender within the organizational context? To combat the pressures of work, greater number of hands and minds are required. Gender diversity is just one of the ways of ensuring that growing work requirements are suitably addressed. However, with the recent advent of women within organizations, the work culture and ethos have either undergone a change or are in the process of undergoing a change. Hence it becomes important to study "gender" as an important determinant for ensuring harmonious work relationships and superior performance.

Arguably then, the focus of "gender" should be on an understanding of men and women. Unfortunately, the concept has undergone a change with a synonymous linkage of gender with women, women empowerment, equality for women, and initiation of policies for retention of women. A cursory analysis of the causative factors reveals that the "muted sex" (Marshall, 1993) hails from a different logical zone in which the dual roles and responsibilities of home and work front have embedded them in a spatial and cultural zone which is different and "feminine."

> A natural development of the gender concept requires focusing on women as most organizations and institutions are embedded in a culture, ideologies, practices, and social norms which are typically masculine and in which women have so far been assigned a lower status. Noteworthy then is the attempt to provide an equitable climate for women and tip the balance in favour of them, or at least attempt to view the "gender issue" from a feminine lens.

Within this framework, a probe in the organizational context reveals that a natural development of the gender concept requires focusing on women as most organizations and institutions are embedded in cultures, ideologies, practices, and social norms which are typically masculine and in which women have so far been assigned a lower status. Noteworthy then is the attempt to provide an equitable climate for women and tip the balance in favour of them, or at least attempt to view the "gender issue" from a feminine lens.

Can an Appropriate Understanding of Gender Enhance Workplace Experience?

Workplace experience can be from the perspective of the organization and the employees. Addressing the first point, research on women within organizations attempts to link the presence of women with the bottom line of the company. A study by Catalyst (2007) states that companies with more Women Board Directors have higher Return on Equity (53%), Return on Sales (42%) and Return on Invested Capital (66%) than those with minimal representation of women on board. Arguably, then it makes business sense to discuss the role of women within organizations.

While the organizations stand to gain with the presence of a higher number of women in senior leadership positions, studies reveal that there are only a handful of women who have broken the glass ceiling – few women featuring in the list of Directors or in the role of CEOs. Interesting is the finding published in *Harvard Business Review* (2005) and *FT Magazine* (2005) (cited in Cormier, 2006), that dissatisfied with the workplace experience, many women decide to quit their organization after reaching the zenith of their career. Initial response by organizations to the exit/"opt out" revolution (Belkin, 2003) of talented women was to provide a conducive work environment by introducing crèches, flexi-work hours, etc. However, the unidentified root cause was deeper. Inability to continue at the workplace resulted from dissatisfaction faced

by women at the workplace. Most of them were of the view that their inability to fit in with the "masculine" work culture and bond through social networking had pushed them to a lone position in which pressures mounted without providing opportunities for a release mechanism.

I propose that if we are to begin an understanding of gender in the workplace context, the question to address should transcend from "Why are there few women in senior leadership positions?" to "What factors prevent women from experiential satisfaction in the workplace environment?" Logical transition of women from being a "home maker" to a "home maker and comfort provider" can be a good beginning point for deliberation on the topic. Transitioning of women from one role to a dual role is a recent phenomenon (almost a decade old). As is the case with any new initiative, it is time-taking and heralds a change in the cultural milieu and mindsets of the people in and around home and work front. Some may argue that a decade or a little over a decade is a sufficiently long period for the transition to happen. If we were to buy this argument, my worry would still manifest in the following questions: After trudging along in an environment created by and for men and achieving great heights, women are still entangled in the revolving door and are on most occasions in the exit position. What can be the causative factors? Reticence after success? Weariness after achievement? Have they opted out or been pushed out? (Williams, Manvell, and Bornstein, 2006)

While in the preceding paragraphs, I did cite research on women in leadership positions, the problems faced by them are not typical to their status. In fact, it is a problem faced by almost all women entering the male-dominated bastion. They often face the "double bind" (Hinze, 1999; Adams, 2000). To perform well they must behave like "men in skirts"/

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"conceptual men" (Snitow, 1990), but cannot lose their feminine qualities for fear of being ridiculed by peers, superiors, and subordinates alike. If they deemphasize and downplay gender or feminine qualities, they may succeed in breaking the glass ceiling. But for how long can they continue with the strain of operating with qualities and attributes expected but not embedded within them?

What is it that women expect? What is it that men expect? What is it that the organization expects? These are some of the questions that come to the mind when we try to understand gender in the context of workplace experience. Can the three questions be merged to develop a framework for harmonious work relationships or is it that one question gains precedence over the other two?

In a study on communication, Aries (1998) found that speaker style, irrespective of gender, is situation-specific and conforms to the dictates of both the situation and the context (Krauss and Chiu, 1998). Extrapolating the finding to behavioural styles of men and women within organizations, I submit that gender (read, biological sex) should not be a determining factor for deciding what should be done and what should not be done. Can there be organizational or situational requirement for a mixed gender of employee workforce? For this, what is needed is a revamp of the existing policies by redefining job profiles which highlight differing competencies and skill sets.

How do we Embed the Concept of Gender in the Workplace Environment?

The workplace culture has been created by men and is naturally "masculine" with a language competency and ethos typically favouring men. For instance, insensitivity to language usage or partying into the wee hours of morning are some of the typical methods of bonding and reducing

workplace stress and pressures. Most women, because of familial or societal pressures, may find it difficult to continue in the same strain. The question is not whether this workplace environment is right or wrong but what can we do to make it favourable for both men and women? Where and how do we begin the process?

The beginning point of the process is the organization with its rapidly changing cultural milieu. To give the process the desired impetus, men need to step to the fore and initiate processes and policies which promote gender equity. A good strategy can be to begin with the following questions: Wherein lie the similarities and differences between men and women? Is it that men and women are born different or is it that their life experiences force them to view life in a different perspective? While seeking answers, organizations and employees should bear in mind that the different fields that men and women traverse force them

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to cross two different zones with absolutely different "fields of logic" each of which has a different "organization and time rhythm" (Hochschild,1997; Smith, 1990 cited in Demaiter and Adams, 2009). If the concept of gender is to be embedded in the workplace environment, gender equity as distinct from gender equality should prevail. Culmination of the process can only be achieved with a comprehensive grasp of the differing "fields of logic" rather than a demarcation of workplace culture and environment as "masculine" or "feminine." All these steps mandate changes in the thinking styles, methods of operation and implementation. Men and boys can act as gatekeepers of gender equality (Connell, 2005) and equity. If they are willing to change the established practices and norms to make the environment more inclusive, changes will stem. Resistance to change has been evidenced, more so in the category of older men who are more critical and suspicious of their women colleagues (Connell,

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2005). However, if there is awareness on the benefits stemming from a gender inclusive environment, all arguments can be dispelled and paradigm shifts initiated.

The good news is that the initiation process has commenced… many organizations are attempting to embed the concept of gender in their workplace experience. In this Colloquium, we have made an attempt to draw the attention of the readers to the concept of gender from the perspective of the theoreticians and the practitioners. What is it that research brings to the table and how is it applied in the organizational context? We have Richa

Saxena and Deepti Bhatnagar, Neharika Vohra, Dileep Mavalankar and Vipin Gupta presenting the academic perspective of gender in the workplace environment.

To be able to present a holistic perspective, we have tried to capture the views and reflections of senior employees from different sectors: Geetha Kannan, Aditya Narayan Singh Deo, Rahul Dev, Ian Gore and Chandrani Chakraborty, Sebati Sircar, Srimathi Shivashankar, Vibha Gupta, Reema Nanavaty, and Ashok Bhatia, from Banking, Consulting, Financial, ITeS, NGO, and Pharmaceutical sectors.

Gendered Career Patterns within Dual Career Couples

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The growing presence of professional women at workplace in India, as in other countries, is leading to a noticeable increase in dual career couples who try to manage work and non-work domains simultaneously. The challenge in the work domain for dual career couples is pursuit and enhancement of two careers, each with its demands on the commitment, time, and energy of individual members. The non-work domain includes multiple-role commitments from the family making demands on the emotional, cognitive, and financial resources of members as well as time and energy for personally meaningful pursuits such as leisure, self care, community work, social, aesthetic, spiritual interests, etc. The increasing number of professionally-trained dual career couples at the workplace is stepping up pressure on employing organizations to recognize the needs of such couples to balance their work and non-work lives. Since attraction and retention of talent is a key human resource management challenge for organizations today, understanding and addressing the special needs of dual career couples can provide a competitive edge to retaining talent.

In a recently concluded study of dual career couples, we explored the underlying dynamics for career mobility decisions of twenty-nine couples in different phases of their life cycle. Our findings revealed some of the major

drivers for career mobility decisions of such couples.

Workplace Issues

Our research showed that workplace issues often triggered or facilitated mobility decisions of dual career couples. *Work context,* which includes *dissatisfaction with superiors*, *dissatisfaction with the work environment*, and *organizational support*, emerged as a critical dimension influencing one's decision to move or stay in the organization.

Sometimes strained relationship with superiors and peers forced our participants to look for other options. However, organizational support, especially when a couple had young children, emerged as a decisive factor for women's stay or quit decisions. *Gender* emerged as an important individual differentiator among participants for their career transitions.

A few women respondents with young children, who fortunately worked in supportive organizations could continue with their careers. But many young mothers had to take a career break during the child-bearing and child-rearing stages as they found it difficult to manage the work and family fronts simultaneously without organizational support. Such career interruptions were a setback to the careers of professional women. Loss of

talented women employees with proven track record due to their child-rearing requirements was a setback for organizations too.

In most organizations, the employee-related workplace policies and practices rest on the age-old assumption of male employees having a dependable support system back home, run presumably by their wives to take care of their familial responsibilities and also personal needs, allowing them time and energy to focus exclusively on their professional contribution and growth. In the traditional perspective of life roles, husband was the provider and wife was the homemaker and enabler. But in today's changed context, when many wives are engaged in equally demanding professional roles, the Indian joint family, the traditional bedrock of family support, has become almost extinct. Many organizational assumptions and practices need to be revisited to keep pace with the changing times. Trapped in organizational assumption of employees as males, and an organizational mindset not particularly family-friendly, a vast majority of women professionals face an intense dilemma and constant struggle to balance conflicting demands of work and family, where they often need to choose one over the other.

The agony of women professionals often emanate from a need to make either/or choices or suboptimal trade-offs between career and family, though both are equally important to them. In our study, most women reported to have put their careers on the back-burner during the child-rearing phase so that they could discharge their maternal and filial responsibilities satisfactorily. Several male participants also acknowledged in their interviews that their spouses made compromises on the professional front for the sake of their husband's career. The feelings of one of the women participants of our study are presented as follows:

> *I am a career woman, but I am also a family woman. The beauty or the agony…whatever you may call it…*

> *for a woman is that it is not easy to decide between the two. It is like the left hand and the right hand –Can I survive without one….?. Sometimes it does hurt that people [unmarried female colleagues] have moved up….but sometimes what also hurts is that housewives can also take care of their kids [which, I am not able to do fully due to my parallel professional commitments]. I would say, satisfaction with present circumstances is completely 50-50.*

As a result of their childhood socialization, women reported to have compromised again and again on their professional front in the form of either intermittent break in their careers or making suboptimal choices of work roles, so that they could take care of their various familial responsibilities also.

Our study found that men had predominantly uninterrupted, mostly linear, career trajectories. Career, for professional men, meant a continuous growth in their profession; it was more important than almost everything else in their life. Interestingly, professional women in our study also reported to have begun their career journey on a similar note, but due to familial reasons, their career trajectory got interrupted. The finding of our study is in consonance with literature on gender and work. For example, Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) categorized men's careers as linear, whereas they used the metaphors of *'river of time'* and *'kaleidoscopic careers'* to describe women's careers. These findings suggest that for women, the concept of 'career' is part of the gestalt of their life, which includes, besides their work, their family, friends, community, responsibilities of care-giving and nurturing others. Hence, presumably, due to strong social expectations and the influence of early-age socialization process, women and men start giving different meanings to their 'careers.' For men, career is viewed as life's dominant priority with vertical professional growth in almost all the cases, whereas for women, the gestalt of life includes dual commitment to professional career as well as to their famil-

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ial responsibility as care provider, especially in the maternal role.

Interrupted Career and Changing Meaning of Career for Women

A significant finding of our study was that except for the first life cycle stage, when they launched their careers, women participants in all other life cycle stages had at least one interruption in their career. After the first career break due to child-birth, it seems the purpose and meaning of career changes for women as their priorities in life change. After career interruption, most women reported to have re-entered the professional domain gradually, not disturbing their familial role. After this break, work for most women was not a continuous linear progression, but a series of sporadic professional engagements which helped them make constructive use of their available time, thereby providing them with an occasional feeling of satisfaction and self-fulfillment rather than being just a means of earning money. On the basis of sequencing of *challenge, balance,* and *authenticity,* Sullivan and Mainiero (2007) have termed the career patterns of men as *alpha* and career patterns of women as *beta.* Here, the researchers defined the three concepts as follows:

- *Challenge:* Engaging in activities that permit the individual to demonstrate responsibility, control, and autonomy while learning and growing.
- *Balance:* Making decisions so that the different aspects of one's life, both work and non-work, form a coherent whole.
- *Authenticity:* Being true to oneself in the midst of con-

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> In *alpha* career patterns, people - typically men - first focus on challenge, then authenticity, and then balance. On the other hand, in *beta* career patterns, people - typically women - first focus on challenge, then balance, and then authenticity.

stant interplay between personal development and work and non-work issues.

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Results of our study support the dominant prevalence of *alpha* and *beta* patterns in men and women professionals respectively. The study also highlights the importance of organizational support for women's career growth particularly during the child-bearing and child-rearing phases.

Role of Organizations

One of the key challenges before modern organizations is to understand what they need to do in order to reduce the avoidable loss of their talented women employees. Organizations can consider options like creating unconventional career paths with flexible work schedules, job-sharing, imaginative use of IT to allow telecommuting, facilitating re-entry of women through crash training programmes, providing dependable child care facilities, etc. However, the foremost requirement is to acknowledge the changing gender profile of the employees, and modify their basic assumptions about work and non-work aspirations and commitments, and their needs, not only to balance, but also to enjoy multiple life roles. Such an understanding and consequent action steps can enhance an organization's ability to retain its talented employees, especially women.

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Gender Inclusivity: Nurturing Unique Talents

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A First of Sorts

We have lately witnessed many 'first of sorts' in the country — the first woman President of India, the first woman Speaker of the *Lok Sabha*, the first Indian born woman to lead a major American university. Indian woman, being singularly referred to as a good daughter, a dutiful wife or a loving mother is today a myth, an acceptable departure from the current avatar of the Indian woman. Women of today have moved ahead and by accepting diverse challenging roles and achieving the impossible, have given us justifiable reasons to be proud of.

It is indeed surprising that four in 10 businesses worldwide have no women in senior management positions while the number of Indian women in senior positions has risen to 14 per cent. With more and more women joining the corporate world, the workforce in most organizations is becoming increasingly diverse. The success and competitiveness of these organizations are highly dependent on their ability to manage this diversity effectively.

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Do Women Make Better Managers?

I am often asked this controversial question: "Do women make better managers?" I would like to link this question to one of my observations – One day, my two daughters asked their grandparents' choice on the colour of socks that would go with the outfits they had planned to wear for the day. Their grandfather's prompt response was to tell them to wear what they liked! On the other hand, their grandmother stepped in and asked more questions, assessed the situation, and helped them decide. This is just a common everyday example, but it brings home the widely acknowledged fact that women bring in great intuition, exceptional relationship building skills, and an inclusive approach to decision-making.

Organizations worldwide recognize this and as a result have dedicated departments focusing on diversity and its implications to the business. In my work experience, I have witnessed organizations that have come to realize the benefits that gender differentiation offers and count them as a blessing!

Praxis

On the Internet, I came across a significant word that described how diversity should be viewed by any organization. It is a medieval Latin word — *Praxis* — that means "*action, custom, behaviour.*" Understanding the underlying differences in individuals is a *praxis* that unites our thoughts on diversity, our strategies for diversity, and the many scenarios we negotiate as managers, leaders, and members of society. All our diversity programmes, initiatives, and interventions rest on *praxis*. Adapted to the individual organizational needs, it could actually become a critical tool for the organizations and help them bring about a paradigm shift to valuing differences, which in turn could result in enhanced corporate performance. It is a well recognized fact that there is a link between women board directors and corporate performance across industries. Differences in vision and mission can help us identify what would work best for an organization.

Top Management Support

One of the important aspects of effectively managing gender diversity at the workplace is to have complete support of the top management. To have a gender inclusive work environment, it is important that this busi-

ness priority is endorsed and propagated by the leadership team. Take ANZ, for example. The ANZ Diversity Council is a decision-making forum of senior executive members across the Group, working together to build a diverse workforce and an inclusive culture to contribute to high business performance. It is chaired by none other than the CEO, Mike Smith!

We all need common diversity goals to work for irrespective of whether we are the Head of Human Resources or the business unit. I have also learnt that at the beginning, we may not have all the answers and so would need to permit evolution of the diversity story and at times redefine our diversity priorities.

Social Factors affecting Gender Inclusivity

A top performer in one of the previous companies I worked for, quit the organization because her mother-in-law wanted her to be a "good housewife who took care of the husband and children." No amount of cajoling and reasoning worked with her mother-in-law and we lost a great performer.

Working women still continue to have the primary responsibility of taking care of the children and household needs. They are expected to sacrifice career progression for their family life and also have to deal with the glass ceiling that prevents them from moving upwards in the organization. The good news is that we

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have seen many organizations, governments, and individuals break these norms and barriers and help the women in their career path.

Make Uniqueness a Blessing

One individual who has made a lasting impression on me is Ms. Muthamma. She is known for her successful crusade for equality of women in the male-dominated Indian Civil Services of her time. She filed a petition against the Government of India on the ground that she had been overlooked for promotion, arguing that the rules governing the employment of women in the service were discriminatory. Her case was upheld in 1979 in a landmark judgment by a three-member Bench, headed by Justice V R Krishna Iyer. The court impressed upon the Government of India "the need to overhaul all service rules to remove the stains of sex discrimination, without waiting for *ad hoc* inspiration from writ petitions or gender charity."

While these are just a few thoughts and reflections based on my experience, we need to continue on our travails of increasing diversity at the workplace. A good beginning point will be to ponder on the thoughts of the philosopher, Barbara Marx Hubbard, who felt that an enlightened society ought to ask each group or culture to contribute what it considers its unique gift. She said, "Make uniqueness a blessing." Isn't that what gender diversity is all about?

A Multi-level Model of Workplace Gender Experience

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The purpose of this paper is to investigate how workplace influences the gender experience of men and women, and to examine the role of gender and institutions, of organizational and societal cultures, and of organizational and national leadership.

The paper starts by identifying a single level model of workplace experience, as given in Figure 1, showing the roles of gender and institutions. Then, a multi-level model is constructed, including the role of organizational and societal cultures (Figure 2). Finally, the implications

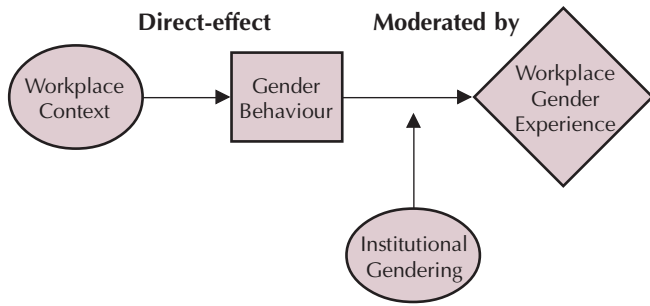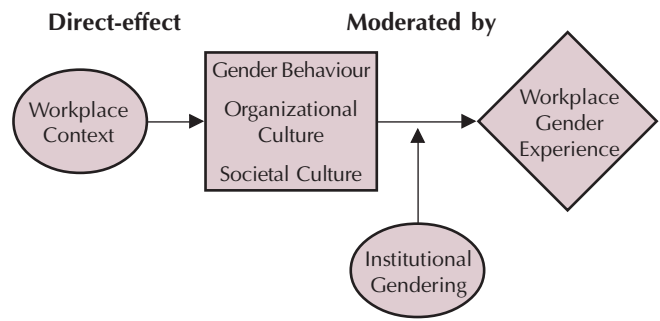**Figure 1: A Single-level Model of Workplace Gender Experience**

Figure 2: A Multi-level Model of Workplace Gender Experience

for organizational and national leadership are noted, and future directions are suggested.

Direct Role of Gender

First, in different workplace contexts, men and women tend to enact different sort of behaviours (Osland *et al,* 1998). For instance, in some contexts, women may find themselves "doing gender" and be less assertive than men, and in others, they may have to try "negating gender" and be as assertive as men. This doing or negating gender has a direct influence on workplace gender experience – assertive women may be seen as too pushy, while non-assertive women may be seen as too soft (Valian, 1998).

Moderating Role of Institutions

Second, different workplaces have different degrees of institutional gendering – i.e., the degree to which "advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control,

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action and emotion, meaning and identity are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine." (Acker, 1990: 146) The institutional gendering tends to be low, for instance, when the institutions have greater exposure to women in leadership roles.

Institutional Gendering and Workplace Experience

The degree of institutional gendering moderates how men and women experience the effects of their gender behaviours in the workplace (See Table 1).

When institutional gendering is low, women doing gender tend to have positive workplace experience, where perceptions of female leader effectiveness are strong and stereotypes about gender roles are weak (Beaman, *et al,* 2009). Moreover, negating gender while being emotionally challenging, does

Table 1: Propositions on How Institutional Gendering Moderates Gender Behaviour

Institutional Gendering	Gender Behaviour	Workplace Experience	Consequence
Low	Doing gender	Positive	Men and women can behave naturally and be happy.
Low	Negating gender	Neutral	Men and women may negate gender, if they are happier that way.
High	Doing gender	Negative	Men and women enjoy different advantages for doing gender, so women need to decide what they value more – doing gender or negating it.
High	Negating gender	Double negative	Women must strive not only to negate gender, but also learn to ignore and live with the negativity of their masculine stereotyping.

GENDER AND WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE

not offer any advantage. Therefore, women experience no pressures for negating gender, and for behaving like men.

Conversely, when institutional gendering is high, doing gender produces negative experiences for women, e.g., being offered less challenging assignments and perceived as too emotional for the leadership role. In such cases, women experience pressure for negating gender and behaving like men, and then find that their enactment of masculine behaviours is seen differently (and even more negatively) than men doing masculine behaviours – contributing to what is referred to as "double binds" (Ely and Rhode, 2010). Thus, my interviews of women leaders in Central and Eastern Europe suggest that women behaving like men are perceived as being bitches, bad mothers, and untrustworthy.

A Multi-level Model: Adding Organizational and Societal Cultures

A single level model puts the burden of the workplace experience outcome on how men and women behave. It is their choice of doing or negating gender that has positive, neutral, negative, or double negative workplace experience for women.

However, it is constraining to focus on only gender behaviours as the factor anchoring workplace experience for men and women. Irrespective of gender behaviours, organizational and societal cultures also have a critical influence on workplace gender experience. Moreover, institutional gendering also moderates these work cultures.

Organizational and societal cultures have several elements. Performance orientation or meritocracy is one salient dimension of organizational culture. Meritocracy implies that same set of opportunities are offered to both men and women, based on the same set of performance evaluation criteria. When institutional gendering is high, the organizations tend to socially construct a façade of "neutral meritocracy" (Hatchet, 2003), where the performance evaluation criteria conform to the male norms such as working long hours and being assertive (Korvajärvi, 1998). Men consequently get more oppor-

tunities, greater compensation, and more positions of power and leadership (Kelan, 2009).

Similarly, gender egalitarianism is an important dimension of societal culture. GLOBE research suggests that the US, for instance, is more gender egalitarian than India (House et al, 2004), though both are gender non egalitarian in absolute sense. While there is lower disparity between men and women in the US than in India, yet in both societies, the opportunities for women are more constrained than for men.

When institutional gendering is high, a societal culture of low gender egalitarianism would yield even fewer opportunities for women – the female advantages are minimized, and the female disadvantages are amplified.

Leadership for Institutional and Cultural Change

To ensure positive workplace gender experience, it is imperative for the leaders to strive for positive institutional and cultural change.

In the single level model, one obvious solution is to de-gender the institutions, so that the women are not disadvantaged. However, institutional gendering tends to be invisible, and the voices that suggest that institutions are gendered often get suppressed for a variety of reasons (Kelan, 2009). For instance, if the leaders acknowledge that the organizational institutions are gendered, then they may subject the organization to discrimination lawsuits and deter women from joining or continuing with the organization.

Another possible solution is to train women to negate gender through mentoring and role modeling, and to train men and women not to negatively stereotype women who negate gender. Many organizations pursue this solution, and research suggests that it is common for successful women to enact masculine behaviours and for some organizations to make it politically incorrect to negatively stereotype such women. The latter can gradually help to de-gender the institutions, and mitigate the need for training women to negate gender to be successful.

> When institutional gendering is low, women doing gender tend to have positive workplace experience, where perceptions of female leader effectiveness are strong and stereotypes about gender roles are weak.

The multi-level model can offer additional promising solutions. The leaders may pursue opportunities for changing organizational culture. For instance, when a meritocracy performance orientation culture is impeding the ability of the organization to benefit from the female advantages, then it would be worthwhile to complement meritocracy with focused initiatives for recruiting, flexing, networking, mentoring, and advancing women in domains and positions where they receive low performance evaluations (Wittenberg-Cox and Maitland, 2007).

The leaders may also pursue opportunities for changing societal culture. For instance, when a low gender egalitarian culture constrains the pool of qualified – technically as well as mentally – women in the workplace, they should strive to make interventions that help qualify more women. For instance, they may work with the academic institutions to ensure that women get appropriate educational access, and are not constrained, as families constrained for finances choose to support their sons, instead of daughters. If the organizational leaders do not intervene,

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then the national leaders may have to step in – for instance, in Nordic European nations, legislative force has made it obligatory for the organizations to have a representative proportion of women in their boards (Sarfati, 2008).

Future Directions

A fruitful future direction for research would be to explore another possible solution – i.e., changing the features of the workplace context. For instance, if one compares urban *vs.* rural contexts in India, gender experience is often more positive in the rural than in the urban contexts. Thus, micro finance/micro entrepreneurship initiatives in the rural areas have involved predominantly women. This suggests possible opportunities for identifying the features of the rural workplace that are sensitive to the values of women, and to incorporate them within the urban context. Similarly, by identifying the features of the urban workplace that are sensitive to the values of men, and fusing them with the rural context, both types of gender equity could be realized in either of the contexts.

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Gender and Workplace Experiences:
A Comment from Health Perspective

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In the last hundred years, the human society has drastically changed. The participation of women in formal paid work has been rapidly increasing, bringing in a new gender dimension in the workplace. In the last fifty years, the workplace has also shifted from factories requiring hard manual labour to offices requiring brain power. Computers and micro electronics have taken this transition to a new level. All of these have made women's participation in formal work much more possible. This is not to suggest that women's drudgery has vanished especially in the developing world. Much of the women's work still remains low-skill, underpaid or free, and thankless. But here we focus on formal work environment and its relation to health and social welfare.

Current Scenario

Sectors such as health, education, craft, and software have a large number of women employees. In many of these domains the supervisors are men and the top management still remains dominated by men. One of the reasons posited by researchers for fewer women in senior leadership positions is that women face difficult situations because of competing demands between job and family life and are unable to compete on level playing field. Some of the responsibilities of women at the home front get multiplied with lack of support for child care and elderly care, clean water, and sanitation facilities. This stress of home responsibilities may get aggravated if there is gender discrimination, sexual harassment or gender violence at the workplace. Given the patriarchal Indian society and the hierarchical nature of the workplace in many organizations with very little transparency or grievance redressal mechanism, women may be subjected to more suffering. Within the job hierarchy, women in particular oc-

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cupations such as nursing, domestic work, and manual labour, may have to undergo more difficulties because of the nature of the job, poor socio-economic levels, and the exploitative environment in which they work. This is not to say that everybody in these categories of work would be experiencing problems but there is some evidence that women suffer more in such occupations.

Health and Workplace Hazards

The difficulties at workplace may start because of women's need to take off for various reasons including child care, elderly care, pregnancy, etc. This may be compounded by gender biases and unhealthy gender relationships within the workplace. The final result of such accumulated stress and worries could be, initially, psychosomatic problems (loss of sleep, headache, backache, etc.), which could ultimately result in serious medical problems and chronic diseases (high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, etc.). The other possibilities are lack of self-confidence, fear, and loss of motivation to work. It is estimated that almost 40 per cent of the Indian nurses are not working due to non-conducive environment at home or work front. Women's workplace difficulties may reflect on their status in the workplace, remuneration, and family circumstances. Our country's laws and the way they are implemented have not kept pace with the rapid change in workplace situations. A large majority of women workers do not have medical coverage through the employer and even if such facilities are available, they would not be including stress-related and psychosomatic problems.

Very few workplaces have preventive strategies and adequate response mechanisms for gender-related work-

place problems (discrimination, sexual harassment, and violence). Counseling, psychological and psychiatric help are neither readily available nor easily acceptable to the workers and the society. Strict implementation of guidelines for main- taining harmonious gender relationships are not widely prevalent even in large corporations or major public institutions. Fortunately, some of the Indian traditions may protect women at the workplace. But with the growing westernization of the society, we may witness a cultural change in which none of these practices are prevalent.

Way Forward ...

Occupational and industrial medicine was developed as a specialty after the industrial revolution to deal largely with the physical problems of workers. As the profiles of work and the workplace are rapidly changing, there is an urgent need to look into the health problems of the new workplace. These problems may be less physical and more psychological, psychosomatic, and social. Thus not only the medical specialists but psychologists and HR specialists would also have to jointly study such workplace issues and develop preventive, promotive as well as curative strategies for solving them. In this effort, we have to specially keep in mind the gender issues, particularly the gender dynamics, which is rapidly changing. Unfortunately, while the costs of these strategies can be easily seen in the balance sheet of the company, the short- and long-term benefits of good workplace health and gender policies do not get reflected in profits. New ways of capturing the benefits of harmonious gender relationship at workplace may convince and motivate the top management and the stakeholders to adopt them for improved workplace health and productivity in general and women in particular. ⌄

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Gender Sensitivity in Corporate Environment

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Look at the cute little girl playing with her doll house… There goes that young brat with his guns chasing the rabbits…Every facet of our life is replete with examples of gender differentiation. Yet, when it comes to work, it still surprises us—how the same thoughts start manifesting in the working relationships. Our minds find it difficult to accept a non-stereotypical role of a woman and look at it with a template of gender neutrality.

In my experience of working with varied cultures and work environments across countries, one thing that I have consistently noticed is that women and men almost unknowingly and unwittingly become victims of gender stereotypes — almost every time, and everywhere they work or interact.

Inclusiveness is the Worst Casualty

A few years back, I came across a case of a woman manager who was brilliant in her performance and was a critical part of organization succession planning for key positions. As we worked to groom her for higher assignments and development plans, she almost stunned the team by dropping the bombshell of resignation. It was impossible to think that she would ever resign, since her career was flying high. I asked her, Why? And, once again I heard the same old story that I had heard from hundreds of other women. Her husband was to go to Europe for higher studies and she was to accompany him. Anxiety was writ large on her face, as she would have to forgo her career even though it was for a couple

of months. What intrigued me was that the decision was arrived at almost with a preset expectation from her as well as her husband.

Somehow, even the freedom of career and an overdose of the Western influence in our lives have not been able to erode the invincible and invisible glass ceiling from our minds. I have been conducting several programmes around gender issues in various organizations and one thing that has been more often than not, highlighted by women is that many times, they feel a highly non-inclusive work environment. The most common frustration expressed by women in corporate sector is that many critical decisions often happen over a smoking break or in a drink party. Surely, they are diligently conveyed to the women team members later on. For women it is not important if the decision is in line with their thought process or not; what is more important is how much they have felt involved and whether they have been a part of the overall decision-making process or not. Has the decision just been communicated or have there been attempts made by their male counterparts to convince them of the decision? Rarely, if ever, does it happen that men make an attempt to convince women for they harbour a universal belief that convincing women is easy.

Decisions are Made with Gender Typecast

The second issue that I have experienced in my interactions with various people on this subject is the "gender-specific appropriateness" of the roles that are assigned to different people. A thinking based on what is good and what is not good for either of the genders is bound to end up compromising our quality of interactions and colouring our inferences. This stereotype gets more pronounced when it comes to making crucial decisions, whether in personal or professional life. One area where women seem to be disadvantaged is, decision-making. While men almost instinctively take upon themselves the role of the prime decision-maker, this decision

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is more by acceptance than agreement of the women.

There was another case that happened in my team a few years back, when I was heading Leadership portfolio in a large American financial company. Here was a lady manager, who was in the firm for three years and located at Delhi. Since the company was headquartered at Bangalore, most of the positions of higher growth were available at Bangalore. As we offered her a position in Bangalore, she took a few days to discuss with her husband and finally accepted it. When she joined in at the new location, the story that was on top of the minds of everyone was that her husband had to resign his "well settled" job in Delhi and move along with his wife to the new location. It was outlandish to give priority to a woman's career over her husband's. In fact, the woman manager did not have difficulty in persuading her husband about relocating, but surely had a tough time convincing others on how this "bold decision" could be taken.

There are many more experiences that I can recount on how gender stereotypes shape up our way of thinking.

Is Excellence Gender-Specific?

There was an interesting exercise that I did in one of the sessions that I was conducting. I asked the participants to write about what behaviour traits came to their mind when they thought of a "Man" and later I asked them to write the same when they thought about a "Woman."

What came out was interesting—"macho characteristics" for men and "feminine" characteristics for women. Next, I asked them to think of one female and one male personality whom they admired and write all the traits associated with those two personalities. When we extrapolated the behavioural characteristics of the two persons on the male and the female traits earlier listed, we discovered that the differences among both personalities were not that of gender, but that of leadership traits, which actually were gender neutral. The ques-

tion then was: How did the terms — male leader or a female leader emerge?

The answer lies in the socio-cultural fabric of our mind. Our conditioning by the socio-cultural environment from which we come forces us to start slotting people in gender-related perceptions which are part of our personal experiences. So, we end up creating general theories of gender, based on personal thinking and then superimposing those theories as the principles guiding our interactions. Seldom does it occur to us that, a leader is a leader—and can not be slotted as a man or a woman.

Factor of Social Desirability

There is another behaviour that I have come across among men and women that guides their social and professional interactions. This is the factor of "Social Desirability." In Carl Jung based "Self Awareness" sessions that I have conducted for employees, one of the dichotomies that people get slotted into are, "Thinking" and "Feeling" types. Both the genders can have preference for either of the two styles. There is nothing good or bad about it. Yet, very interestingly, I have come across men making special efforts to somehow justify why they are not feeling-oriented and how their decisions are based on thinking preference. Women, on the other hand, many times end up overly justifying how they are feeling-oriented as they need to understand, care, and nurture home, etc. What the theory says is, whether you have feeling or thinking preferences, you still will end up making a balanced decision using both thinking and feeling traits. You can take a very "humane or an empathetic decision" using a feeling or a thinking style. It is your maturity that will guide the quality and fairness of the decision and not your preferred style. Sometimes, social desirability is imposed on us, by the environment we live in.

I had a woman lead joining my team from the US. She was an expatriate and had come for the first time to India. Surely, she was made to feel very comfortable about the facilities and the amenities, but again the question that

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was on top of everybody's mind was, what would her husband be doing in India? What made people around her most astonished was when her husband came with a novel idea of engaging all the wives of expatriate men working in India in a cultural network and create a shared bonding among them. They were surprised that this role was being led and executed by a husband of a working woman.

In this case, it was not perceived as a socially desirable role for the husband of the expatriate lady.

Intent *vs* Behaviour Dilemma

I made an interesting psychological discovery while handling and teaching the subject of gender sensitivity. This is the intent *vs* action dilemma. Almost every time when a case of gender insensitivity comes up, I have seen that the intentions are always correct and genuine but the behaviour and action measures are inversely proportional to the intentions. Once in a gender session, we had organized a debate on what made men uncomfortable about women and *vice versa.* A woman in a training programme, openly spoke on how uncomfortable she felt about the physical proximity when her supervisor came close to her; she felt her personal space being intruded. Immediately, I saw a few other fellow women participants acknowledging the same and generalizing the issue as oft repeated occurrence at workplace. When I turned to the male participants for a response, most of them instantly termed it as causal, unwarranted, unintended, and non-serious. On several occasions, while handling gender issues of concern, I have heard the same sort of answers from different people.- "That was not my intention" or "It was just a casual remark/act, without any thought or intent." The environment that we work in always provides us with adequate safeguards to make the environment conducive to the working of either gender; however, this unintended action almost all the time results in unwanted consequences. A lot many times, the consequences have been harsh and unwarranted, because the

"unintended" actions were not acceptable to the other gender.

There was a peculiar case in the same light, that I came through, a few years back. A high performing woman employee who had been on late night shifts went on maternity leave for a few months. The supervisor changed, after she had proceeded on leave. The new supervisor was gender-sensitive and in all good faith decided to change her nature of job as well as the shift time to day time so that she could take care of her new born baby. After a few days, I heard that she had put up her resignation. On further enquiry, it came to light that this woman employee was de-motivated, because her project was changed, in spite of her good performance and secondly, because her duty time was changed to day shift, even though she had changed her residence closer to office and had made all arrangements at home to manage the night shift working. The manager was being sensitive to her needs but it completely boomeranged. What went wrong? The problem was that based on his understanding, the manager had "visualized" a problem for the woman with a small child and assumed that she would need help. That is where things

went wrong. His visualization, though well-intented, was stereotypical. She, on the other hand, perceived it as a decision made due to her fall in performance standards, which in reality was not the case. Such incidents are common in our routine life. Yet every time it happens, we find someone reciting a familiar phrase – "that was never my intention."

The problem in hand is not an issue of right or wrong intent; it is actually a case of "perceived intent," and there is no methodology other than the interpretation of the behaviours by which the so-called perceived and honest intent can be gauged by the recipient. When the behaviours belie the spoken intent, the disconnects emerge. This is far more manifested in gender inequities, since the communication connections between genders are not very well-established. The communication pattern between opposite genders is more based on assumptions and intuitions rather than hard data facts, giving rise to misinterpretations. What is needed is the sensitivity to understand the effects of the right-intentioned actions executed in a wrong manner. As it is said, we judge ourselves by our intent but others judge us by our behaviour. ✾

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Gendered Behaviour of Men and Women in the Workplace: Time to Move On

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When a dual career couple engages in a job search and the wife waits for the husband to get his best job and then starts her own search; or when a woman decides to take a career break for caring for the twin babies the couple has just had; or the high performing woman refuses to take on a demanding role because she chooses not to be ambitious; or when a woman chooses to go home after work to take care of her ailing mother

rather than attend a party to which the global head of the company has invited her among few others, the individual woman appears to be making voluntary choices. The boss understands; her friends while privately calling it a sheer waste of talent may publicly support her; her family is very sympathetic, and the society applauds her. If similar decisions were taken by men, the reactions of all around them would be very differ-

ent. Even the woman who was by implication being supported in her career, etc., may be apologetic and at times feel guilty and try to justify her actions to herself, her husband, her friends, and family.

On a case to case basis, it may be possible to say that it is a matter of individual choice. What is the big deal if a woman decides to take care of her home and family? What if a man decides to further his career while a woman decides to not be a part of the dog-eat-dog world! However, when these decisions repeatedly get taken by members of the same sex, it becomes a pattern and an employer may naturally wonder if he/she is making the right choice by investing in employees of a particular sex. With fewer women being chosen in the beginning, with fewer women going up the ladder and with more women taking a decision of opting out of the career race or taking it slow, the impact of these individual choices multiplies. This possibly results in the number of women in top management positions being small (less than hundred in India) and making women's intention and seriousness towards their work suspect.

Paucity of women at the top and at middle levels especially in the decision-making roles is one challenge that organizations of today face. This is of concern not because it is politically incorrect to have fewer women but because there is a loss of contribution from the diversity and natural strengths that women bring to the table.

Another challenge that the organizations of today face is that in encouraging women to rise in the organizational hierarchy, they unconsciously encourage them to become like men. If the women who rise to the top are seen to behave, think, and react like men, then the same kind of behaviour is encouraged in those women who aspire to get there. In such cases, the diversity that women bring into the organization and the decision-making table is reduced. Thus, it is important not only to hire and retain people who are diverse but also to

nurture them to think and behave in ways that are natural to them.

To meet the challenges of under-representation of women and under-utilization of their talent in organizations and the society at large, the way we think and expect men and women to behave has to change. And, for this change in mindset to happen, some understanding of the process by which sex roles and stereotypes are encouraged and preserved would be necessary. In this piece, I will present some of the findings that explain the formation and sustenance of sex roles.

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Evolution of Sex Roles

Sex-related attitudinal differences and stereotypes emerge from sex-typed occupational and family roles and cultural shared expectations that apply to men and women in general. Roles that are typically occupied more by one sex lead to sex-role stereotypes. Characteristics that are required to carry out sex-typical tasks lead to stereotyping of women and men. For example, the stereotype that men are tough, aggressive, insensitive, and uncaring, probably arises from the disproportionate number of men employed in defence, police, etc. However, these qualities may only apply to the individual occupant (men or women) of the role rather than all men. The power of sex roles is so strong that even when men or women are in sex-atypical jobs, they are still expected to conform to their sex roles. For example, a female police officer is not expected to be tough and callous like her male counterpart, but rather be soft and nurturing even though her role requirements may be different.

Personal factors such as what one likes to do and what one excels in, get shaped by what is expected, encouraged, or reinforced from early childhood. Research in the field of women in science has shown that there is a systematic self-dumbing-down phase that young girls go through in their early teens. In this phase, girls start lowering their self-efficacy beliefs in Maths and Science and thus do not pursue careers involving skills in these

subjects (Steele, 1997). Similarly, it is not uncommon to hear women in the workplace say that they do not enjoy negotiation or are not so interested in social networking. Over the years, those are the messages they have internalized and those are the scripts that have shaped their expectations; they thus start behaving in consonance with the beliefs and expectations of self and others.

Modelling at home and of noteworthy personalities outside also leads to learning of sex roles. Young boys and girls emulate the models available around them and thus encode sex roles very early on in their lives. Sex roles are also maintained by continuing lower status of women relative to men in various domains and under-representation of women in roles that are more powerful such as politics, bureaucracy, and heads of corporations. Social role theory of sex differences and similarities (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Diekman and Eagly, 2000) postulates that differences in the status of men and women are supported by a variety of mediating processes that make the sexes psychologically different and capable of performing their typical roles. The process though not simple is very robust and has universally supported the inequality.

Research shows that men consistently value status, prestige, and high income more than women and women value altruism and equality more than men. Pratto, *et al* (1997) have shown that hierarchy roles are gendered and men are over-represented in hierarchy enhancing roles (defined as serving the interests of the elite) and women are over-represented in hierarchy attenuating roles (serving the interest of the downtrodden). However, for any organization and in any society, both roles are important but gendering leads men/women to aspire for one kind of role more than the other, leading to an implicit judgment of one being better than the other. Hierarchy-enhancing jobs generally benefit those who hold them in terms of compensation, social status, and power. Over the course, power begets power and the differentiation among role holders widens. Such deep-rooted perpetuating processes cumulatively increase the gender gap in

organizations (Pratto, *et al*, 1997) and influence attitudes towards policy (Eagly, *et al*, 2005).

Gender gaps and sex roles are reinforced by self-selection, value-matching, and sex/role discrimination in an inter-related way. Self-selection for a particular occupation or role is driven by values learnt in childhood; these values in turn influence the decisions men or women make about themselves and others ensuring that occupants in a role continue in positions that they traditionally have been. In fact, stereotypes and social beliefs and values justify and perpetuate the existing order in a self-fulfilling manner. In another set of studies, it has been shown that cultural orientation of social dominance and acceptance of perpetuating gender stereotypes lead to greater acceptance of stereotyped self-construal (Pratto, Sidanius and Levin, 2006).

> Self-selection for a particular occupation or role is driven by values learnt in childhood; these values in turn influence the decisions men or women make about themselves and others ensuring that occupants in a role continue in positions that they traditionally have been.

These findings and in-depth studies show that both adult men and women in their various roles (parents, partners, managers, and mentors) have to consciously challenge the ever-pervasive stereotypes, values, and beliefs they hold about themselves and others based on the biological sex of the person and have to nurture more gender-neutral values and beliefs. In a system of rich inter-relations, changes will have to be made at all levels and in all contexts.

How to Weaken Sex-Roles?

According to the social cognitive theory (Bussey and Bandura, 1999; 2004), there is a complex three-way reciprocal causation between personal factors (cognitive and affective patterns), behaviour patterns, and environmental factors (social influences exerted in daily lives). The relative contribution of personal, behavioural, and environmental factors will depend on the situation. In a context, where there are low environmental constraints, personal factors will play a greater role in the cognition or behaviour of the person concerned; in those situations, where social roles and structures are rigid, personal factors will have limited role in influencing an individual's behaviour. By implication, if attempts are made to reduce the structure that is prescribed to men

and women about accepted behaviour, less stereotyped responses may be manifested.

It has been shown that enactive experiences, direct tuition, and role modelling can help change self-sanctions about appropriate behaviour and beliefs about self-efficacy in handling and excelling in a variety of contexts. Using these as pointers for actions that may lead to change, it is suggested that managers can be mindful of the reactions shown towards same beha- viours among men and women, can coach women or men to work towards exploring the reasons for their choices, and consciously highlight non-gender consonant choices or actions of men or women in the organization. Story-telling is known to be a powerful way of shaping behaviour. Having men and women try out non-stereotyped behaviours and thus learn the inaccuracy of the stereotype is one way of using enactive experiences as a source of change. Managers must consciously encourage their employees to try out different roles (especially those that are heavily stereotyped). When several male senior managers take time off to teach their children through their tough years, they are role modelling that caring and nurturing are not the prerogative of only the women managers.

> The behaviour and reactions of men and women in the workplace and outside of it are indicative of the strong impact of socialization, stereotyping, expectations, and learned values. Rather than legitimizing male-female inequality as natural and inevitable reflecting their unconditional buy-in and shaping of thinking, it may be better to tease out the interactive processes and change our own reactions and expectations about roles and skills men and women prefer.

Acceptance and understanding of three-way reciprocity between personal factors, behavioural patterns, and environ- mental factors help us to move away from the belief that humans are like dolls in the context of social forces acting on them and move towards the belief that people contribute to their own learning and development and can be agents of change within the richly intertwined systems of influence.

Way Forward ...

The behaviour and reactions of men and women in the workplace and outside of it are indicative of the strong impact of socialization, stereotyping, expectations, and learned values. Rather than legitimizing male-female inequality as natural and inevitable reflecting their unconditional buy-in and shaping of thinking, it may be better to tease out the interactive processes and change our own reactions and expectations about roles and skills men and women prefer. This would include questioning gender role consonant behaviour among men and women and challenging our established norms about parenting and nurturing. It is important to engage in a dialogue with all men and women to unearth the learnt so that there is room for change.

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The Balancing Act: Juggling Roles and More

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Following the divestment of the brand she single-handedly nurtured, Rashmi was left in a quandary. A proficient brand manager for a Mumbai- based pharmaceutical company and a devout wife, Rashmi could not fathom the prospect of leaving the brand, she had so passionately developed. Driven by the emotions attached with the brand, she offered her services to the acquiring company (Zydus) and relocated herself to Ahmedabad. With rejuvenated vigour, she continued working for the next four years until the brand achieved enviable market share. The only thing that made her stop was her family situation compelling her to move back to Mumbai.

A complicated partum involving serious medical complications left Sarita, a senior member in the marketing team of the same company, reeling with a pre-term baby girl (1.1 kg), who had to undergo two high-risk surgeries within six months and was in desperate need of utmost care and caution. After six months of hospitalization, during which Sarita and her husband exhibited tremendous power of resilience and commitment as parents, baby Prishtha was brought back home safe and healthy. Four months later, Sarita rejoined the organization at the same position. She travelled extensively as per the demands of her job, carrying her child and the maid along, without letting her performance get affected.

These are a few of the many examples where modern day women have displayed unprecedented passion, grit, and determination both in life and work situations, surpassing their male counterparts. The corporate world is replete with such illustrations where women have made personal sacrifices in order to meet a professional goal or carry out special responsibilities entrusted on them.

> Women's attitudes were influenced by the family environment. She developed skills of a good planner and organizer, people management and hospitality coming naturally to them. Innovation, compassion, loyalty, and resilience were the traits which they honed.

Changing Attitudes

The good news is that many forward-looking organizations have started respecting the latent potential of women and have made radical changes in their HR policies to encourage them and provide them with a more conducive work environment. The examples of Rashmi and Sarita also speak very highly of the nature of organizational support provided to women employees.

Today we hear of Tatas considering one-year maternity leave and inviting women who left their jobs due to family pressures to rejoin the company if they so desired. Infosys, Wipro, and many others have also introduced flexi-timings.

Way back in 1985, we at Cadila (Now Zydus), inspired by Celia of Arthur Hailey's fiction, 'Strong Medicine,' pioneered the recruitment of part-time detail (equivalent of medical representatives) women in order to give opportunity to those women who had to sacrifice their jobs due to marriage, child care, and other family pressures. These women were specially trained to promote the company's products in hospitals or clincis that were located close to their homes and at times convenient to them. In many cases, they were even relocated if transfer of their spouses took them to another city. The trend continues to date.

Gender Equality: A State of Mind

We all know that both genders should get equal respect and opportunities in all spheres. What we need to explore is why this process has been so slow and localized in some parts of the society.

Traditionally, in our society, men were the bread-earners and women were expected to provide moral sup-

port and inculcate values in the family. These roles were complimenting and not competing.

It was natural for men to get influenced by their work environment and develop skills in the areas of sourcing, production, sales, distribution, defence and the areas that demanded traits like aggression, resourcefulness, entrepreneurship and even ego to some extent. Likewise women's attitudes were influenced by the family environment. They developed skills of a good planner and organizer, people management and hospitality coming naturally to them. Innovation, compassion, loyalty, and resilience were the traits which they honed.

Like in any happy family, these skills and attitudes are complimentary. While creating happy and successful organizations, teams could be created using the above basic instincts and both genders could possibly get equally important yet complementary roles. Women, for example, could be preferred by design to lead positions in the areas of research, planning, HR, IT, finance, etc., while men could occupy positions in the areas of production, sales, marketing, supply chain, legal, etc.

The family culture could very well be transformed to work culture with women and men working together like the right and left hands of the body. Imagine the confusion created if both hands tried to compete for the same activity.

> As a process of evolution, better education, exposure, and changing mindset, women have started getting a lot more space in the so-called men's world.

Paradigm Shifts

As a process of evolution, better education, exposure, and changing mindset, women have started getting a lot more space in the so-called men's world. Is it not a matter of pride for us to note that India, a country which historically has been the epitome of male dominance and feudalism, is led by women quite successfully in the roles of Hon. President and the Chairperson of UPA? Sonia Gandhi has exemplified as to how one can shape the destiny of a nation without occupying the position of power.

We are observing that the roles are crossing over the gender barriers in many walks of life. We have Indira Nooyi as a global CEO of PepsiCo on one side and Sanjeev Kapoor, a celebrity Chef, Rohit Bal, a dress designer, and Habib Javed, a female hair stylist, on the other.

The need of the hour is to see these examples in abundance and in all sectors of the society and not in isolation. We need to create a seamless society where talent is valued irrespective of gender. We need to build confidence amongst the less-privileged women by aptly projecting their attitudes of endurance, reflected through their performance.

The Gender Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity (GEDI) Dialogue initiated by the Gender Resource Centre, IIMA, is one such movement towards this endeavour. Let me appeal to all the readers to contribute to this movement in their best capacity.

Gender Sensitivity and the SEWA Experience

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Women as a category of workers need special focus and analysis. In our society, the contribution of women is systematically undermined. They are relegated to subordinate roles. Women are concentrated in the low end of the spectrum, in low paying and insecure jobs. Ninety-six per cent of the women workers are in the informal sector. Their work is insecure, irregular, and often unrecognized. They balance children, home, and work, and more often than not, their income is not commensurate with their work.

Concern for poor, self-employed women from the un-

organized sector was the trigger for the birth of Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA). Throughout its existence, SEWA has nurtured this concern. Over the period, SEWA has built its vision that encompasses income, security and gender balance through empowerment and capacity building. Knowing the pervasiveness of livelihood creation, SEWA has modified its approach and made it integrated in scope as well as in the process.

SEWA of, for, and by Women

SEWA is a member-based organization of poor self-employed women workers from the informal sector of the economy, where they do not have any employer-employee relationship. It has a membership base of 1.1 million women workers in seven states of India, majority of them (700,000) belonging to the State of Gujarat. SEWA's main goal is to organize the women workers for full employment and self-reliance.

SEWA organizes these women workers through the strategy of struggle and development. The struggle is against many constraints and limitations imposed on them by the society and the economy. The organization's strategy of development activities strengthens women's bargaining power and offers them new alternatives. In practice, both strategies are carried out through the joint action of unions and cooperatives.

Facilities for Women at SEWA

What is unique about SEWA is that all its members are women, who gradually rise to the cadre of organizers. Our experience of working with women as workers, owners, and managers, shows that if we want productive inputs from women, we should provide basic facilities to them like access to child care services which is also their basic right. Since women also shoulder many responsibilities at home, they should be given flexible working hours to allow them to be in the mainstream. In addition to this, the women are pro-

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to the women.

For women, it is extremely important to get the appreciation of the family because it is only then that they can comfortably go to work. We at SEWA view the entire family as a unit under the leadership of women. On the other hand, women working at SEWA see it as their family and therefore create an environment and space for sharing their struggle to cope with dual responsibility and thus reduce their stress.

As Gauriben Rambhia Brhaman, Vice President of SEWA says, the organization and its members remain organized and true to its cause because it is a women's organization. It is women who best understand women and their issues. Gauriben also adds that since the organization is an all-women one, the members and their families enjoy a sense of trust and comfort. This is one major reason why women are willing to work with SEWA. This is also the reason why women who have never stepped out of their villages are allowed to travel abroad.

> SEWA thinks that true development will not be possible if a large number of poor people remain marginalized and isolated from the economic mainstream.

vided with a crèche at the office premises so that they can work while their little children are looked after. They are also provided maternity leave for a period of 45 days over and above the paid leave of 30 days. Furthermore, the organizers are also paid an amount of Rs.150 per month for a period of three years after the child is born to ensure that the child remains healthy and has access to nutritious food. Also SEWA has its own insurance which provides maternity support

Mission of SEWA

From SEWA's experience, the reality of the informal economy is that the workers are poor. Amongst the poor, the poorest of poor are the women workers. In fact, women are not even recognized as workers. Therefore even though they put in long hours of work, the returns are very low. The women workers in the informal sector need to recognize their contribution to society.

Similarly, working with women as employees, one needs to understand the issues faced by these women. They have to balance their work, children, and family. The organization should understand the burden that is being shouldered by these women.

At SEWA, women from the grassroot level are encouraged and absorbed as organizers (employees) within the organization. The organization maintains a rapport with the women, understands their issues, and also offers them space to share their problems to reduce the stress levels. The women also feel comfortable working and sharing their problems with their women colleagues. This is perhaps one of the most important reasons for a low turnover of employees in the organization.

Vision of SEWA

Given this backdrop, SEWA's vision can be described

> Income generating activities and programmes, though relevant, will be able to contribute only to a limited extent. It will be necessary to address factors affecting the abilities and willingness of the poor people to rise above the poverty line.

as under:

- SEWA thinks that true development will not be possible if a large number of poor people remain marginalized and isolated from the economic mainstream. In a society where women are more affected by poverty, their issues must be resolved through global, national, and regional policies and strategies.

- SEWA believes that income generating activities and programmes, though relevant, will be able to contribute only to a limited extent. It will be necessary to address factors affecting the abilities and willingness of the poor people to rise above the poverty line. This implies that employment-focused initiatives will have to be supported by steps towards strengthening services in water supply, health, education, micro-finance, insurance, capacity building, marketing and other aspects of rural infrastructure.

Gender Diversity and Leadership Inclusion: The Keys to Workplace Success

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For many today, the term—'Diversity'—refers to a British dance troupe that won the third series of 'Britain's Got Talent' show. And I can't think of a better definition of Diversity than this troupe. Formed in 2007, the troupe comprises school and university goers, three sets of brothers and four of their friends, an IT systems engineer, a bathroom installer, and a telecom engineer. Little wonder that they had that extra edge in their performance that appealed to everyone.

Today, if an organization aspires to have as much appeal in its products or services as the troupe Diversity's performance, it needs to put in place a rich and diverse team together through a unique set of Hardware (workforce policy) and Software (culture), one that sets it apart and clearly differentiates it as an 'Employer of Choice.'

Background

Two years ago, when Naina Lal Kidwai, then CEO, HSBC India, gave a mandate to her Top Team to make HSBC 'The Best Place to Work for Women,' the Bank already had the best gender diversity ratio across all MNC Banks in India — a 50:50 gender ratio at the top and a 35:65 F:M ratio at the frontline levels. However,

the problem remained at the middle levels, where the ratios were not as good as at the frontline. In addition, since the overt signs of discrimination were non-existent, it made the task at hand more challenging. For example, you would not find a female staff being passed over for a promotion because she was back from her maternity leave. The key levers at play were more subtle and required identification and development of an alternative approach.

Identifying Change Agents

We started off by building diversity in our in-house Diversity Committee by restructuring it (from having representatives of the members from the Top Team) to one that now has self-nominated representatives from all business groups, bands, age-groups, and regions in the country (in all 88 members) and meets every quarter to review progress and discuss challenges. It was apparent from the discussions in these forums that a good number of managers and employees in HSBC believed that diversity was a topic for affirmative action and that led us to our first task of changing the mindset around diversity from being a 'cause' to a 'business-led' initiative.

Cause → Business-Led

Diversity and Inclusion: Two Sides of the Same Coin

With help from our UK-based group diversity consultants, we conducted a workshop for the top team to discuss ways of positively impacting gender ratios in middle management. We challenged them to come up with their own business case for Diversity by arriving at a three-year action plan with one-year milestones on Gender Diversity as well as Inclusive Leadership. 'Inclusion,' we felt, was the key to managing 'Diversity.' In fact, the two are inseparable if one has to create an environment in which employees from diverse groups and cultures can perform to the best of their ability. From that time on, each business head's performance objectives carried annual diversity and inclusion outcome targets as a key metric.

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Private Banking

An example of a business case was the private banking team which had a client base comprising a healthy mix of male and female clients. However, the team composition did not reflect the required levels of gender diversity. Same was the case with the SME sales force. Benefits of having a relationship team reflective of the customer base were self-evident from several in-house and global case studies and hence required little convincing with the stakeholders.

Putting Enablers in Place

Once the business case was established, we moved on to the next level of putting in place the hardware and the software that would take us further ahead in our journey. However, first, we needed to identify our areas of focus. After meetings with groups of people across levels, conducting exit interview analysis and holding candid conversations with new joiners on their experience, the trend was clear. For the first time in the history of HSBC, we were in a phase wherein our workforce comprised all four generations, with 70 per cent of all employees belonging to the Gen X and Gen Y categories for whom the need to work was as important as retaining their independence or pursuing their special interests.

Conventional Work Model → New Age Work Model

Flexible Working Policy

To address the diverse needs of each category, HSBC launched its flexible working policies to establish a 'New Age Work Model' at the workplace. Care was taken to ensure that none of the initiatives became positive differentiators, but were more of enablers towards building an environment that would allow flexibility so long as the work objectives were not compromised. Success stories were shared on a monthly basis about how teams enhanced their productivity after opting for Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA). The most recent story was that of a Commercial Banking Team, one of the first sales

teams in HSBC to go on Telecommuting, for which the first cut of the productivity analysis indicated a 63 per cent increase in team productivity for the first month on FWA; and, needless to say, the employees also experienced a healthy work-life balance.

Positive Differentiators → Enablers

It has been my experience that workplace policies for women benefit men as well. Hence the branding around flexible working included explaining the diverse set of requirements it addressed. In fact, today more men than women opt for FWA.

Women's Internal Networking Forum

In addition to FWA, we launched a Women's Networking Forum as a solution-oriented platform for women to discuss challenges on a common business theme linked to education/leadership development/mentoring/career development. Chapters were launched across the four regions in the country to ensure maximum reach. A needs analysis survey was conducted for 800 women across the Bank in May 2009 and the results showed that after a year of launching the above initiatives, 80 per cent of the women rated Gender Diversity practices at HSBC as 'extremely good.' Others identified Work-Life Balance, Career Guidance and Mobility and Inclusion as their key challenges. Based on the results, the leads of each chapter formulated their action plans coupled with story-based communication programmes and proceeded to make a positive culture change. At this forum's launch, one of the women employees was quoted saying, "I truly love working here because of the deep-rooted focus on people, strong ethos, and great people policies. Now with the focus on Gender Diversity and with initiatives like Women's Networking Forums, we will move a notch up to become the most preferred employer for women in India."

Diversity External Networking Forum

The next step was to benchmark and learn from what

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was happening in other leading organizations. With that in mind, we launched the first Diversity Networking Meet in India where organizations across sectors participate and come together every quarter to discuss best practices and challenges on a common Diversity theme. We have completed three meets comprising over 35 organizations and the benefits are beginning to show.

Impact on Employee Engagement

Results of our recently concluded internal Employee Engagement Survey, where Diversity and Inclusion are being measured as dimensions, reflect these dimensions as the key employee engagement drivers across the employee population. We believe, this positive and upward trend in scores on these dimensions is due to a paradigm shift in Line Managers' perception about diversity-related programmes and the subsequent sensitization around 'Inclusion' measures to create a work-place where individuals manage and leverage difference in ways that allow people from all backgrounds to hear and be heard, understand and be understood, and work together productively.

External Recognition

Diversity and Inclusion were the key reasons for HSBC India being selected for the prestigious Best Employer Awards by BT-Mercer-TNS Survey on 'Best Companies to Work for in India, 2008' and the Hewitt Best Employers' Study, 2009. In addition, *People Management Magazine* (UK), profiled HSBC India for introducing differential payments for recruitment consultants working on conversion of women resumes for various middle roles.

Way Forward ...

In the coming year, the focus would be on 'customer value generation' by driving the 'Diversity Agenda.' We shall ensure that our workforce mirrors the customer base and we concentrate on all pillars of Diversity and on building Inclusion to achieve greater success for our customers, employees, and stakeholders.

The Story of Sudha Raviprakash, VP Sales - USME, Chennai

Sudha manages the SME Sales teams in Chennai. When she opted for staggered hours in August last year followed by a two-month long telecommuting arrangement for helping her son in his preparation for board examinations, she knew that the receptivity and cooperation from her team members was critical to the success of her new work arrangement. She had at hand a challenge of managing her performance targets and team productivity.

As Sudha avers, right from the beginning, it was important that her team of six team leaders was aware of her work arrangements. She says, "My team members were briefed about the very reason for and the duration of my new work arrangements and my day-to-day plan of carrying out my work responsibilities. This provided me with the necessary support and comfort and also helped in developing confidence in the team members which together enabled me to continue to deliver consistently."

Sudha went about doing this quite methodically and divided her role into three dimensions:

• External customer visits/calls – She informed her team and her business counterparts (especially during her telecommuting days) that she was available at all times of the day for such customer visits.
• Team briefing – She organized morning huddles and de-briefs for the week and ensured that the team members were aware about them well in advance.
• MIS/Routine Lotus Notes work – She segregated the routine work to be completed in the latter half of the day when her interactions with the team members were usually less.

This helped her streamline her work, and manage her time and the team's productivity effectively.

Here is what some of Sudha's team members have to say about her new work arrangement:

Pallab and Karthik, who work with Sudha, are emphatic about the success of their line manager's work arrangements. In Pallab's words, "Sudha's new work pattern ensured that sole dependency on the line manager was reduced. It led to better networking within the team and also with the other teams. In fact, I feel that work is much more streamlined now and we are managing time quite efficiently and as a result the work environment has also become stress-free."

Karthik agrees with Pallab and further adds, "We have always had a sense of comfort with Sudha. Even when she was on telecommuting, we knew that she was available for us whenever we needed her support, be it for MIS or for customer calls. Karthik also shares,"the number of client calls/visits has increased since she started her FWA. Delegation to team leaders on priority issues on a daily, weekly, and fortnightly basis has helped us immensely in sharing additional responsibilities at work and has given us the freedom to work without too much monitoring."

Sudha concurs with her team and says that, "The trust levels within the team have been very high. Micro management of the tasks in the team was consciously averted. I ensured that I was available to them at all times – be it over the phone, LAN or in person. Though they were requested to schedule client meetings only in the morning, I never refused emergency/otherwise important visits at other times in the day."

The team has adapted to this work style very well and with minimal adjustment problems. In fact, post this experience with FWA, they are all confident that even the sales teams can opt for Flexible Work Arrangements as that would help them manage the core and non-core activities successfully within the framework.

The Story of Basab Majumdar, Head Factoring and Receivables Finance, INM

Amongst the many challenges faced by a business head, one of the most important one Basab set for himself was to see how to make FWA a success in his unit. As a first step, he identified suitable jobs which could get covered under the policy, especially for skilled roles such as credit. He wanted to explore ways by which he could offer appropriate options to his teams to make FWA a way of life!

Recently, Rashmi Jalan, SVP – Credit, joined Basab's team in a part-time role in FTG Credit. Rashmi moved from a full-time role in LDV to the current one to better balance her work and personal priorities. Basab was extremely supportive and en-

couraged the new work arrangement in his team by providing Rashmi with all the necessary support in terms of suitable work hours, IT support, and defined work objectives.

As Basab says, "In the current scenario, when we are all asking ourselves questions on how to increase productivity and how to improve employee morale and engagement, FWA provides some key answers. It gives us the opportunity to create a more productive organization, retain talent, encourage diversity, and give us an edge over our competitors. It perfectly blends with our strategy of being the "Best Place to Work In." The current part-time arrangement is working extremely well for both

Rashmi and the Bank, as the job has been tailored to a part-time arrangement and it gives Rashmi the opportunity to continue with the development of her career and talent, while ensuring that her personal priorities are not compromised. Flexibility has been built in at both ends so that Rashmi can attend all important meetings and events and is involved in the department matters. Encouraged by the success of this initiative, I am extremely keen to extend FWA to other FTG functions such

as MIS, Audit and ORC, CARM support and select operational roles, for which I will be closely working with the HR Relationship team for formalization. I would strongly recommend all managers to make FWA a way of life in their units and encourage its use for managing the current priorities of the Bank – increased employee morale and as a result, increased productivity!"

The Story of Mayur Singh

Forty-five kms away from Udaipur in Rajasthan, the villagers of Kemri have an increasingly frequent visitor. He is a 44-year-old HSBC employee, Mayur Singh, on a six-month stay to give shape to his dream project, 'Kemri Conservation,' which has two focus areas of Ecological Restoration (includes reforestation, freshwater conservation, habitat protection) and Community Outreach (includes sponsoring education and creating environment awareness in the community). This Senior Vice President at HSBC is spearheading what is so far a purely private effort. "A lot of effort is required to convince the villagers about the importance of protecting habitat," says Singh.

Mayur has been pursuing the project for the past 10 years, but this is the first time he has been able to take a long break from office, courtesy the bank's Flexible Work Arrangement, launched two years ago, based on feedback from employees.

FWA has proved to be an innovative platform to help the bank retain top talent. Today, almost 30 per cent of the bank's workforce in India has some kind of arrangement for flexible working hours. And the innovation has not come from the top or HSBC's global headquarters.

Tracking Support: Developing a New Index

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As I sat down to pen my thoughts on the subject of 'Gender,' proposed by the IIM team, I found that two major global reports had already hit the headlines – "The Global Gender Gap Index 2009" by the World Economic Forum (WEF)[2], and "Embedding Gender in Sustainability Reporting- A Practitioners Guide" by GRI-IFC.[3]

I found some very interesting perspectives on gender matters and status of women in these reports. On one hand, while global companies are trying to create an inclusive workplace, the gender gap in many countries seems to still continue with no improvement at all.

If you take Asia as an example, the Philippines and Sri Lanka top the list and are among the top 20 countries worldwide for closing the gender gap on various parameters such as education, equality, empowerment and health. India is placed at the 114th position in the list of 134 countries and continues to hold one of the lowest positions globally. India seems to have done relatively better in political empowerment (ranked 24th) but has lost out on creating enough economic opportunities for women to participate in (rank 127th). The female to male ratio of legislators, senior officials, and managers in India as per the study stands at 0.03 .

The GRI report titled "Embedding Gender in Sustainability Reporting - A Practitioner's Guide" studies gender equality in the business context and its impact on the organization values, supply chain, community, investors, and consumers in detail. Organizations

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[1] The ideas expressed in the article are those of the authors and not of the company.

[2] *The Global Gender Gap Report,* World Economic Forum, 2009.

[3] *Embedding Gender Sustainability Reporting - A Practitioner's Guide,* Global Reporting Initiative and International Finance Corporation, 2009.

continue to see gender inclusion both from the business imperative and corporate social responsibility angles. They try to communicate their commitment and be inclusive in recruitment and retention practices, but accountability at the senior management levels and the diversity metrics still seem to be at a nascent stage. Organizations are struggling to create gender inclusion as a culture and not just as an HR practice. The various stakeholders involved in creating this report have been very vocal about what companies should do, and I believe that only when companies start discussing their gender issues openly will the recommendations given in this report become meaningful.

While there are companies like Infosys committed to promoting an equitable and inclusive work culture, the WEF Report indicates that most companies in India do not monitor even wage gaps. There is one observation which is common in both the reports – While there are more women joining the professional workforce, the number of women in senior management is very few compared to many other countries. There are no exact figures provided in any of these reports, but this concern is being raised in all forums including the GEDI (Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity) Dialogue organized by the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA) in June 2009.

"Family priorities" is the reason most commonly quoted by researchers, companies, and women themselves for not pursuing a career as well as for not reaching the senior management levels in India. I am not sure if this reason should any longer be seen as a barrier against women pursuing their careers effectively. Progressive companies are sensitive to women's issues and have started establishing policies and support systems to help women balance life and work priorities. Indian women are also probably

> We do not have world class infrastructure to support e-mobility which enables women to work from home. There are still cities that are unsafe for women to travel late in the evenings. We still live in neighbourhoods that gossip about women returning late after night shifts.

> It is important for us to create a new index called the "Working Women Support Index (WWSI)" which will track the level of support systems that the government, corporate and communities provide women and enable them to balance their career and family.

becoming better planners, more career-oriented, and proactive in creating a support system before starting a family.

But, is the eco-system ready to support women enough to sustain them in their career? In my view, we still have a long way to go in terms of child care support such as certified day care centres or nannies or even domestic help. We do not have world class infrastructure to support e-mobility which enables women to work from home. There are still cities that are unsafe for women to travel late in the evenings. We still live in neighbourhoods that gossip about women returning late after night shifts.

So, while we have multiple indexes such as gender gap index, gender equity indices, gender equality index, gender empowerment index, etc., do we have a common thread that connects the needs of the women with those of the corporates and the government for supporting women throughout their career life cycle? Well, I have a few points to raise here and will be glad if readers can share their views with me.

I believe, it is important for us to create a new index called the "Working Women Support Index (WWSI)" which will track the level of support systems that the government, corporate and communities provide women and enable them to balance their career and family. The enablement should begin at a very early stage when women start their education. The index could include parameters such as society being educated on the need for women to pursue a career, the government introducing gender sensitivity courses at the senior school level itself and also policies for child care and day care centres, institutions providing career and life-related counseling services, corporates initiating work-life balance programmes, besides the safety and health initiatives both by

corporates and government, governance bodies for monitoring workplace harassment, and methodologies followed by companies for board level recruitment and promotions, legislations, etc.

Whatever may be the approach, in my view, it is time that we focused specifically on working women enablers; major stakeholders such as corporates and the government should work together on a common thread. It is time we moved beyond women empowerment and equality issues! ❧

When Diversity Differentiated for Success

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1980s: "*Space. The Final Frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship 'Enterprise'. Its … mission to boldly go where no* **man** *has gone before.*"
2000s: "*Space. The Final Frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship 'Enterprise'. Its … mission to boldly go where no* **one** *has gone before.*"

Taken from the Paramount Pictures' cult classic, 'Star Trek,' these two statements were the predominant thoughts that ran through the head of Mitali, a 26-year-old finance professional (and an avid science fiction fan), when she walked through the doors of IBM Daksh on her 366th day at work. The office reception bore a new look with the just completed office branding job. Staring her in the face was a colourful poster on diversity, which was the most striking feature of the otherwise sober office reception.

As she finished reading the message on the poster, these thoughts from Star Trek entered her mind. The two statements essentially had one word as the prime differentiator. Though having a very subtle difference, it held enormous significance and exemplified how perspectives had changed over a span of two decades. From a strictly male-oriented approach, the focus shifted from 'man' to 'gender (and even species) inclusivity'.

> The Gender Diversity Strategy at IBM Daksh, though defined at the highest echelons of the organization, permeated down to the lowest levels within the organization. The focus of this strategy was two-fold: one, to deepen and widen the reach of any diversity initiatives taken, and two, to enable growth and development of the women leadership pipeline.

It was exactly a year today since Mitali had first walked into this office, yet, she still remembered her selection interview, when she had been told about the DNA of IBM and how diversity and inclusivity were ingrained in it. That was right after she had told the interviewer her background – she was from a simple teacher's family in a small town in Punjab. Having a penchant for learning, she had gone through school, college and then an MBA, often having to work part-time alongside. From a global food chain outlet, where she worked as a cashier-cum-server to a multinational bank, where she worked as a teller, she had a wide range of experience.

She also had the understanding that the two things that mattered most in professional life were – education and qualification – and had therefore worked hard to improve both. Her work experience, however, had taught her that there was a third factor as well – her gender. Time after time she had seen her male co-workers rise through ranks, get raises, etc., whereas her work was (and she truly believed so) far more exemplary than theirs. Her raising these concerns with her management had elicited unsatisfactory answers. When she had shared these thoughts with her interviewer here, she was told how diversity was viewed at IBM Daksh and how performance was judged purely on merit. The interviewer had then given her an in-depth briefing

on the subject, talking about the various initiatives and interventions on the gender inclusivity front.

After joining, Mitali had learnt that all that she had heard during her interview was not just talk. She was convinced that IBM Daksh, not just in its thought, but also in its actions, truly believed that workforce diversity was an asset to be leveraged as it brought with it diversity of thought resulting in increased potential for innovative solution-finding and enhanced performance.

Memories of her joining day and orientation flooded through Mitali's mind as she remembered how she had been welcomed by the HR team and introduced to the organization, its values, culture, policies and practices and the IBM Daksh way of life. IBM Daksh, an integral part of IBM's Business Process Outsourcing/Business Transformation Outsourcing delivery network around the world, had been a part of the IBM family for over five years and one of the many reasons often cited for this successful integration was the amalgamation of policies and programmes of the two organizations.

Diversity-Focused Company

Another poster in the reception area that caught Mitali's eye was that of IBM values:

- Dedication to Every Client's Success
- Innovation that Matters—for the Company and the World
- Trust and Personal Responsibility in all Relationships

Her experience over the past one year had shown that these values shaped everything that IBMers did, every choice they made on behalf of the company. At IBM, diversity was seen to offer a clear competitive advantage as diverse teams helped get the best results for their clients. Given that 50 per cent of the talent in the world is female, IBM recognized the advancement of women as a cornerstone of its Diversity strategy. Since IBM hired its first woman employee in 1899, it has remained a pioneer in its commitment to women both in and out of the corporation. As the number of women entering the workforce has increased continually over the years, so has IBM's commitment to understanding their needs and

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providing services that make it possible for them to be productive while fulfilling family and personal obligations.

In her introduction to the company, Mitali had been told that a critical success factor for IBM Daksh was the conviction of the organization that there was a business case for leveraging the vast talent pool of women in the workforce and the key role that women were playing as customers, investors, employees, and producers. This belief ensured that senior management reflected this highly visible and articulate aspiration in each business initiative – both internal and external to the company.

The Gender Diversity Strategy at IBM Daksh, though defined at the highest echelons of the organization, permeated down to the lowest levels within the organization. The focus of this strategy was two-fold: one, to deepen and widen the reach of any diversity initiatives taken, and two, to enable growth and development of the women leadership pipeline. The commitment to addressing the special needs and requirements of women employees through focused efforts had resulted in the creation of a holistic organization-wide culture.

When Mitali joined a year ago, the world had just begun to see the first signs of an economic downturn and her fears were whether all diversity initiatives that she was being introduced to during her orientation would be adversely affected by the economic challenges that the environment was bound to pose. As a finance professional, she was all too aware of the impact of the recessionary environment on global companies. But, in the one year, Mitali realized that IBM Daksh viewed the downturn as a set of opportunities. The organization had not only sustained but had actually increased the focus on and investment in diversity initiatives. It had also modified its Diversity and Inclusivity strategy to meet the dynamics of the prevailing economic environment.

IBM Initiatives

Mitali's diversity experience of IBM Daksh had actually begun even before she had joined the organization. At

the time of her interview, she had been surprised to know that her selection process was part of a 'women only' recruitment drive. In one year, Mitali had experienced it all first hand – receiving a leadership theme book signed by the CEO himself and a welcome mail from the diversity team when she had joined, attending numerous *Iconnect sessions* (round-tables with senior IBM women leaders from across the world) which gave her the privilege of learning from the experience of senior women and being part of the 'Diversity Network Group' and multiple training and learning programmes for developing her skill set.

In fact, it was only a week before that Mitali had been informed about her selection as one of the women leaders to be part of a new initiative called *Elevate*. This programme had been specially designed to accelerate professional growth of high potential first line women managers by developing their professional and leadership skills. Having been nominated for *Elevate*, she felt proud that her efforts had been recognized by the organization.

Diversity Network Groups (DNG) was another area where Mitali had actively participated in the past year. DNGs consist of IBM employees, who voluntarily come together with the ultimate goal of enhancing the success of IBM's business objectives by helping their members become more effective in the workplace. In the last one year, DNGs had been refreshed with the induction of senior women leaders nominated by the business, with the aim of enabling them to 'stretch' beyond their business roles and facilitate their own personal branding. This had brought a fresh perspective to DNGs, injecting them with increased passion and energy to find solutions and effectively implement them for the members.

Noteworthy among other initiatives actively followed by IBM Daksh were the identification of women with executive potential and initiation of global mentoring programmes thereby impacting the overall goal of strengthening the women leadership pipeline. Senior leadership was encouraged to mentor women employees. They were also accountable for their mentoring efforts. Mitali had also been privileged to be a part of group mentoring sessions addressing specific women-oriented issues like work-life integration, adapting to change, breaking the glass ceiling, and taking charge of their careers.

As a woman manager, Mitali had also been exposed to how IBM Daksh focused on attracting women talent through 'Women only' recruitment drives, payment of higher referral bonuses for referring diversity candidates, and an enterprise-wide focus on growing women leaders from within. Programmes such as *Mindset, Diversity and Inclusive Leadership (D&IL),* and *Shades of Blue* helped educate managers about the importance of diversity employees.

What impressed Mitali most, however (from a personal perspective), were the initiatives on recognizing and facilitating the special needs of women through effective policies and practices to enable *work-life integration*. Mitali was aware that a substantial number of former women employees chose to rejoin IBM Daksh and the key factors stated by these 'homecoming' employees were work-life balance and flexible work options, which enabled them to perform more effectively. In fact, women employees could avail of flexible work option schemes to meet sudden exigencies, simply by discussing with their managers. These were elements that were unheard of in their previous jobs.

Gender Diversity and Leadership

Mitali had also witnessed first hand, how IBM Daksh senior leadership played an active role in diversity initiatives as executive sponsors. She had seen how the business leaders demonstrated active leadership and knowledge of business imperative and were routinely involved in the creation of an environment that promoted and encouraged inclusion. This was an organization where the CEO and his direct reports partnered with Diversity, Talent Management, Talent Acquisition and Training leaders to formulate the Diversity Strat-

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egy for the organization. They also reviewed it periodically to ensure effective implementation. Senior leaders, including the CEO, also actively participated in all major diversity events/celebrations and training programmes.

All these thoughts and memories flooded Mitali's mind during her short walk through the reception. With a spring in her step, a song in her heart, and a little smile on her face, Mitali stepped through the doors of the inner sanctum of IBM Daksh, having completed her first year with a company whose values she related to and respected – in fact had done so even before she had joined it. ❧

Gender and Workplace Experience – Wipro Technologies

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I recently came across a debate on whether "corporations are designed for male workforce," which set me thinking. While most of today's organizations may not align with such a concept, it is indeed worth exploring how women experience their work-place in today's context. In recent times, the number of working women has drastically increased and organizations too have adapted in various ways to ensure a friendly work environment for women employees. As the workplace becomes more gender neutral, men too find their familiar surroundings changing.

Segmented Life Stage Approach for Women

We, at Wipro, realized that the workplace experience is not similar for all women, across life stages and positions. In fact, they can broadly be categorized into three stages where the concerns, expectations, and challenges are uniquely different. The organizational responses too need to be different at each stage, and can be broadly classified in terms of *exposure, flexibility, and empowerment.*

Exposure

In the initial 4-5 years of a woman's career, the percep-

> At Wipro, we constantly endeavour to provide women employees with industrialized and tailored support keeping in mind their needs and concerns. All these efforts are consolidated under "*Women of Wipro,*" which is a platform to bring together women executives across business units in Wipro, who have the passion for extraordinary personal and social transformation, and are working together for better causes and common goals.

tion of gender inequalities is not very apparent. They see equal responsibilities and opportunities being provided to their male and female colleagues. However, not all women necessarily enter the workforce with a clear ambition of continuing for the next two decades to build their careers. At this stage, Wipro helps by providing women employees with critical exposure, higher responsibilities, mentoring by senior leaders which can fuel their ambition and spur them on to continue their career.

The situation is appropriately handled by the sensitivity and nurturance of the immediate manager which makes a huge difference. Wipro has dedicated sensitivity trainings for the same. In the words of a woman engineer, "*Wipro has a very friendly work environment and has provided me with many learning opportunities. My supervisor has been great and has always understood my career aspirations!*"

Flexibility

After a few years, most women employees get married and begin a family. At this juncture, though they are certain of their professional capabilities, they also need to balance their familial responsibilities. Time suddenly

becomes the most important and scarce resource as the women employees juggle child care, elderly care, and household duties along with giving their best in their office hours. It is a strenuous phase, and many women drop out of the workforce, either temporarily or permanently, during this time. Here, Wipro plays a pivotal role by providing *flexibility* and support such as extended maternity leave, crèche/day care facilities, half-day working, loss-of-pay leave, and role changes to help women balance their professional and personal priorities.

Empowerment

A few years later, the questions faced by the women employees are rather different. Their children are going to school and do not require their extended presence. Professionally, they have established themselves through long years of hard work and are comfortable with their capabilities. However, the roles ahead of them involve longer hours, higher degrees of collaboration, greater accountability even if the basic deliverables are not too different. They might find themselves in a situation where their male classmates and peers have moved ahead somewhat, while they have been in a similar role for a while. At times, they may question the value they are truly adding and how their contribution is making a difference. In this context, Wipro aims to provide greater *empowerment* – be it through workshops and coaching, networking opportunities, or through challenging and different roles which engage them. As one of the senior women employees shares, "*At Wipro, I was given the freedom to take decisions and not compelled to do anything without a solid underlying logic. I was given a choice of work and encouraged to experiment with different roles.*"

Women of Wipro

At Wipro, we constantly endeavour to provide women employees with individualized and tailored support keeping in mind their needs and concerns. All these efforts are consolidated under "*Women of Wipro,*" which is a platform to bring together women executives across business units in Wipro, who have the passion for extraordinary personal and social transformation, working together for better causes and common goals.

What the Men Say ...

No anecdotal records on "gender and workplace experience" can be complete without understanding how men are experiencing a changing workforce where they are equaled by women in every realm of business. We are fortunate to capture some of the men's experiences through their posts in the **Women of Wipro** blog, where all employees, including men, debate and discuss gender concerns. Most men whole-heartedly support this transformation and realize that their enhanced role in family responsibilities is critical for women to succeed. Others also point out how some women deliberately seek advantages for their own gender, which is not appropriate in an equal opportunity context for both genders.

Conclusion

Finally, though the work experiences of women do vary considerably from those of men, we are steadily working towards alleviating those differences and making our organization inclusive for all – be it men or women, where their collective, complementary strengths can truly enrich the workplace.

Dimensions of Diversity through the Eyes of the Stakeholders

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Talent is blind to gender, ethnicity, caste or any other segment of the population one may care to name.

For Citi, it is about bringing in, growing, and providing the best of environment and opportunities to excel.

Our approach will differ slightly across grades/levels

in our company but we are determined to make a meaningful positive difference. Metrics such as new hires, attrition, promotion, etc., will be closely monitored over a three-year horizon to ensure progress.

Ultimately, we will know we have succeeded when our senior management team represents the community in

which we have the privilege of serving.

The following chart will help in understanding the transition from the current to the future scenarios at Citi from different stakeholders' point of view.

Dimensions of Diversity through the eyes of the Stakeholders	Scenarios		
	Today : Current Scenario	Transition : Issues or Actions we have Undertaken/Roadmap for Tomorrow	Tomorrow : What Works for Us at Citi
The External Client	No specific demands from this stakeholder or biases. However, in some segments, there appears to be an unwritten preference.	Internal biases for external customers. Lacks clarity operating show that some roles are gender-specific. More women in staff functions than line roles. Transition in mindset on Diversity and Inclusion. Also attempt to accelerate women careers and support more women in line roles. Gender diversity and awareness/ sensitivity begin at the top; so, focused diversity sessions for senior management.	An appreciation that focusing and enhancing gender diversity is GOOD business sense.
Internal Environment	Challenges of work-life balance at mid-management when women attempt to balance family, children, and home along with their careers.	Internal support programmes to cater to generic concerns around hygiene factors like maternity, flexi-time, work-from-home, and role preferences upon return. Be aware within the organization that middle management is a "soft zone." Citi is vulnerable to losing talent at the mid-level and therefore the need to structure specific interventions to discourage them from leaving. Also, identify top talent and ensure that retention plans are in place for "stars." Eliminating perceived biases within the organization that stems when women employees make use of support systems like maternity/flexi-time, etc.	Women employees are an integral part of the organization and talent loss at the mid-management level is an investment loss for the organization. Talent is gender-neutral and organizational spend on support systems for women is a natural part of our talent investment.
	Lack of equal gender representation at senior management.	Targeted cross-franchise talent moves/ strategies and early spotting of stars among women to provide acceleration.	A (gender) balanced senior management team.
The Community: Includes job market (including talent pool on campus), Indian government, etc.	Conflicting pressures of Indian society/culture *vs* Citi's global commitment to diversity.	To instill and work at every opportunity through organization system of reward, recognition, benefit and ethics policies that "Citi is an equal opportunity employer."	To be an employer of choice in the local market providing equal opportunity to all employees.
	Very low gender ratios at premier campuses from which we can hire.	Positive reinforcement of our commitment to diversity to campus. To engage academia of leading institutions of the country to incorporate and strengthen gender diversity at the institutional level. Be viewed as an organization that encourages and supports diversity through specialized programmes/offerings (eg., scholarships, senior women leader interactions, etc). Take the opportunity to introduce senior women leaders who can be role models to students and help them navigate their careers in the corporate world.	Citi brand as a leading equal opportunity employer on campus and marketplace generally.

Concluding Remarks

Citi values a work environment where diversity is embraced, where employees are promoted on their merits, and where people treat each other with mutual respect and dignity. Around the world, we are committed to being a company where the best people want to work; where opportunities to develop are widely available; where innovation and entrepreneurial spirit are valued; and where employees are provided tools to help them meet the challenges of their work and personal responsibilities. ⩔

Connecting the Dots: The Way Forward

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In the previous pages, fifteen authors with varying work experiences and educational training have illuminated myriad issues associated with gender diversity in the workplace. While some authors emphasize the need to challenge gender stereotypes and celebrate women's natural talents, others highlight the importance of getting organizational support for female employees so that they can better balance their professional commitments with their child-raising responsibilities. Several contributors have also drawn our attention to cases where balancing demanding work schedules with increased familial responsibilities have taken a heavy toll on women's physical and mental health. Some have effectively pointed out the importance of making men an intrinsic part of the process of making organizations more gender inclusive. The following lines seek to connect the dots and discuss the way forward.

> After a career break, women are more disadvantaged in their job searches than men as they are less integrated with professional networks, especially in male-dominated organizations.

Balancing Families and Careers

The study conducted by Richa Saxena and Deepti Bhatnagar shows that women suffer more career interruptions while the career trajectories of men show mostly linear progress. Geetha Kannan details how balancing family and work pressures can adversely affect a woman's career progression. Several authors have included anecdotes that describe how women sacrifice their careers to take care of their families, a decision that is often taken under pressure from relatives and society at large. Little wonder that few women hold senior management positions today.

Scholarly research suggests that after a career break, women are more disadvantaged in their job searches than men as they are less integrated with professional networks, especially in male-dominated organizations (Zikic, Burke and Fiksenbaum, 2008). Family responsibilities may leave women with less time to devote to networking and job searches (Zikic, Burke and Fiksenbaum, 2008).

Scholars argue that it is important to consider cultural attitudes about maternity, child care, parental care, etc., while addressing issues such as under-representation of women in specific sectors (Trauth, Quesenberry and Huang, 2008). The specific socio-cultural context and local interpretations of women's multiple roles in society needs to be kept in mind while formulating solutions to problems associated with gender inclusivity. For instance, Vipin Gupta brings out the differences between U S and Indian workplaces in terms of gender issues. He also delineates the distinctions in the nature and degree of gender egalitarianism in urban and rural India respectively. In the case of India, Richa Saxena and Deepti Bhatnagar's study also elaborates how Indian women put their careers on the backburner during the child-rearing phase so that they can fulfill their responsibilities at home better.

Women's Health, Work-Family Conflict and "Workplace Uncivility"

Research on work-family conflict indicates that it is often associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, hostility, etc. (Livingston and Judge, 2008). In his article, Dileep Mavalankar describes how stress resulting from increased responsibilities at home when combined with unhealthy work relationships can cause psychosomatic problems such as loss of sleep, headaches, backaches, etc. While stressing the need for creating a healthy work environment for women, Mavalankar laments that few organizations have adequate preventive strategies and response mechanisms to address issues of sexual harassment, violence, and discrimination at the workplace.

While much of our attention is justifiably focused on overt forms of discrimination and aggression at the workplace, we also need to recognize the harmful effects of more subtle forms of psychological aggression and "workplace uncivility," which can cause great psychological distress in an individual (Cortina, *et al*, 2001). Cortina, *et al.* (2001) define workplace uncivility as rude, disrespectful, and degrading behaviour, which can take a serious toll on those with less social power within an organization, specifically, women and those in the lower rungs of the organizational ladder.

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Supervisors and colleagues may combine multiple forms of interpersonal mistreatment – such as general misbehaviour along with sexualized forms of harassment – causing major psychological damage to the targeted employee (Lim and Cortina, 2005). While organizations may take steps to both prevent and curb sexual harassment, they often do little to curb bullying and other forms of inappropriate behaviour at the workplace. Lim and Cortina (2005) recommend that organizations should strive to eliminate "all elements of a hostile work environment" rather than take a "dual path in combating either sexualized or generalized mistreatment" (p. 494).

Doing Away with Same-Gender Bias

Another important point we need to remember is that both sexes might misbehave and mistreat a co-worker or subordinate. In fact, Warning and Buchanan (2009) write about the "Queen Bee Syndrome," a term coined to describe a woman who is highly successful in a male-dominated workplace and displays "male assertiveness characteristics in order to meet the expectations of her leadership role". Furthermore, Warning and Buchanan (2009) emphasize that "Queen Bees" are rarely supportive of female subordinates due to fear that the latter's success would jeopardize their own careers: "The queen bee does not see herself as a prototypical female in her success in a male environment. She resists other women's intrusions, having herself crossed over from organizational level outgroup to ingroup".

Warning and Buchanan's study also showed that both genders prefer male bosses. The results of their study indicated that "although females may believe that other women are good as managers, they do not want to work for them" (2009). We need to inquire why female subordinates hold such perceptions and what can be done to get women to support one another in a leadership role. Warning and Buchanan (2009) correctly emphasize that a thorough understanding of women's work relationships is critical for the advancement of female leadership.

A recent *New York Times* article titled, "Backlash: Women Bullying Women at Work," asked the following question: "How can women break through the glass ceiling if they are ducking verbal blows from other women in cubicles, hallways and conference rooms?" (Meece, 2009). Additional research on same-gender bias can also help in the development of training programmes that encourage women to better understand each other's needs and goals at the workplace.

Challenging Gender Stereotypes and Celebrating Women's Natural Talents

Rahul Dev offers excellent examples to demonstrate how the biases and prejudices we hold can prevent us from supporting women who take bold decisions in their professional and personal lives. One of the examples he of-

fers is that of a female manager who succeeded in getting her husband to relocate to the city where she worked but then became the topic of discussion amongst her colleagues for her seemingly unconventional move. The challenge today is to fight such biases and stereotypes we ourselves hold. Women and men who are going against the tide need our empathy and support more than our criticism and judgment.

Neharika Vohra suggests that an excellent way to fight gender stereotypes is to resist them in all our social roles and not just in our professional roles. As parents, partners, managers, and mentors, we can challenge stereotypes in our multiple interactions. Her suggestion that managers must encourage their team members to try out different roles can prove to be very effective in combating gender stereotypes at the workplace. Geetha Kannan further elaborates how women bring natural talents to the workplace such as great intuition, exceptional relationship building skills, and an inclusive approach to decision making. On a related note, Ashok Bhatia also argues that instead of trying to become more like men, women employees can contribute more if they let their natural skills of people management contribute to their productivity at the workplace. However, it must be noted here that it is important to let women decide what their natural talents and skill sets are. Their supervisors, relatives, and society should not be taking such decisions for them.

The Way Forward ...

Several authors have made concrete suggestions on ways to improve the experiences of women at the workplace so that we not only have more of them in the workforce but also have more of them holding senior management positions. Reema Nanavaty gives an account of concrete measures SEWA takes to provide support to its all-women employees. On a similar vein, Aditya Narayan narrates the steps taken by HSBC to promote gender diversity and inclusiveness. While detailing ways in which women can opt for

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> It is only when both men and women at all levels of the organizational hierarchy are passionately involved in creating a diverse and inclusive work environment that we will move closer to our goal.

flexible work arrangements without compromising productivity, he also points out that flexible work policies benefit men as much as women.

Srimathi Shivashankar suggests that it is important to track the level of support women get from various sectors including the government, the corporates, their families and larger communities. Based on her experience as a senior manager at IBM Daksh, Vibha Gupta emphasizes the importance of women-only recruitment drives and the advantages of policies that promote work-life integration at her firm. Richa Saxena and Deepti Bhatnagar drive home the importance of organizational support for women employees, especially those with child-rearing responsibilities. They explain well why organizations today should address the special needs of dual career couples who are constantly juggling duties in the work and non-work domains.

Sebati Sircar writes about how both male and female employees share their experiences of being part of a changing workforce in the Women of Wipro blog. She argues, what could be a better starting point than getting a dialogue started between men and women where men take responsibility for their roles in the transformation process. In fact, making men equal partners in the process of ensuring gender diversity is of paramount importance (Catalyst, 2009).

Some of the ways in which organizations can get men to support gender initiatives is by appealing to their sense of fairness, providing male employees with female mentors, and exposing men to male supervisors who believe in gender diversity and inclusion (Catalyst, 2009).

Sircar also emphasizes the importance of getting senior leaders to mentor women employees. Geetha Kannan stresses the need to have complete support of the top management for the goal of sustaining a gender-diverse workforce. Tellingly, research shows that both informal and formal mentoring of women managers can prove to be very effective: "Different mentoring relationships that women managers can

cultivate with peers, supervisors, significant powerful others and subordinates should be encouraged for the impact they can have on their personal, social and career development" (Ehrich, 2008, p. 479).

With the help of a chart, Ian Gore and Chandrani Chakraborty depict various dimensions of diversity at Citi South Asia from different stakeholders' point of view. They explain how important it is for the organization to help employees meet both their professional and personal responsibilities. In conclusion, it may be said that we need to create organizations that adopt flexible work schedules and provide multi-layered support to employees. At the individual level, each one of us needs to relentlessly strive towards creating mutually-supportive relationships in the workplace. Importantly, we need to work on our goals continually and review our progress periodically. It is only when both men and women at all levels of the organizational hierarchy are passionately involved in creating a diverse and inclusive work environment that we will move closer to our goal.

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