

## **Empowerment at Workplace: A Perception of Women Employees from the IT Sector**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*For long the society has been discussing about empowerment of women. Empowerment, in its truest sense refers to the right and ability to make one's own decisions and choices, be it in one's personal or professional life. All the organisations nowadays claim to have women friendly policies but it's the right implementation of those policies and programmes which makes all the difference. The objective of this paper was to analyse the perception of women employees working in the IT sector about their empowerment at workplace. The findings suggested that though the mindset in the society is changing towards favouring and supporting women, still a lot needs to be done in terms of trusting women with leadership positions and taking their career progression seriously to translate idealistic theories about empowerment into practice.*

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Implementation, Leadership.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The concept of empowerment flows from the word power. Empowerment of women means equipping women to be economically independent and self-reliant so that they have a positive self esteem, to enable them to face any difficult situation and participate in economic and social developmental activities. An empowered woman should be able to participate in the process of decision making and implementation.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

Empowerment allows individuals to reach their full potential, to improve their political and social participation, and to believe in their own capabilities. Empowerment can be referred to as "strategic life choices" which refers to decisions that influence a person's life trajectory and subsequent ability to exercise autonomy and make choices (Kabeer, 2001). The idea of power is at the root of the term empowerment. Power can be understood as operating in a number of different ways: power over, power to, power with, power within. The feminist movement has emphasized collective organization (power with) and has been influential in developing ideas about "power within." Power within refers to self confidence, self awareness and assertiveness. (Kantor, 2003) Empowerment of women is the key device which enables them to resurrect their status multifariously in the society and reconcile them to share virilities of the fast development world. This device is significant in view of the role that women can more effectively play in all vital areas (Thota, 2012). Participation of women in decision making and empowerment will promote a change in their behavior and lifestyle. Empowering women through education, ideas, consciousness, mobilization and participatory approach can enable them to take their own decisions, make them self-reliant and self-confident (Dheepa & Barani, 2010). Empowerment of women is a necessity for the very development of a society, since it enhances both the quality and the quantity of human resources available for development. There are several vital reasons for evaluating, promoting and monitoring the level of women's empowerment. Enhancing women's status and their empowerment can play a decisive role

in the success of many development programmes and bring about positive social changes. Women's empowerment is necessary for ensuring not just their own health and welfare but also the well-being of the entire household. They are the primary means by which social norms are transmitted to their children and thus are placed in a critical position to inculcate attitudes in favour of gender equality among their children and households (Gupta and Yesudian, 2006). The subject of empowerment of women has become a burning issue all over the world including India since last few decades. Many agencies of United Nations in their reports have emphasized that gender issue is to be given utmost priority. Empowerment itself has been measured by a woman's relative physical mobility, economic security, decision-making ability, freedom from domestic violence, and political awareness and participation (Dyson & Moore, 1983).

IT is a multi-billion dollar industry where women have been occupying important positions since long. Workers in information technology field design, manufacture, operate, maintain, and repair information technology products and provide related services across all industries. Over the years, people have effectively adopted and embraced information technology in all sectors and works of life, and it contributes a significant quota to the development of the economy of most countries. Furthermore, it is quite remarkable to note that the foundation and practice of Information technology around the world is a contribution of both the male and female counterparts, which is quite evident in most of the developed countries such as the United Kingdom and the United states of America. The same can not be said for seemingly developing and under-developed countries as the statistics show that women are still significantly under-represented across the field. An article by J.Cohoon and W. Aspray, says that "Information technology/ computing remains a heavily male dominated area even after twenty-five years of extensive efforts to promote female participation" (Joanne & William, 2012).Efforts have to be made to attract more women into the IT industry, so as to reduce the dominance of the male gender who have taken up more jobs and have made better careers in the industry.

#### **OBJECTIVE AND MAJOR FINDINGS:**

The objective of this study was to analyze the perception of women employees in the IT sector about their empowerment at workplace. The study was conducted in Delhi- NCR and took 87 women employees working with few reputed organizations in the IT sector as a sample using the technique of convenience sampling. The data was collected through structured questionnaire and focus-group interactions with the respondents. The study focused on certain parameters which among others included perceived gender discrimination during hiring, providing increments and promotions or offering developmental opportunities, the support received at the workplace, safety concerns for women, the perceived freedom in decision making, women as leaders in the workplace and the necessity of financial security for empowerment. The major findings are summarized in the table below (all figures in percentages):

<b>Parameter</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
No gender discrimination in my organization while hiring	0	14	5	40	41
No gender discrimination in my organization during increments/Promotions	8	25	25	26	16
Superior's attitude towards me is dominating.	22	21	15	26	16
Constant support from the management	0	16	6	48	30
Men and women getting equal remuneration for same work	2	11	3	48	36
Men and women getting equal opportunities for growth in workplace	0	9	6	52	33
Management ensures safety of women	8	2	8	38	44
Gender puts an additional pressure to prove worth to higher authorities	2	8	8	40	42
Freedom to make own decisions regarding career choices	0	5	14	29	52
Husband's occupation has not adversely affected career goals or growth.	2	34	8	23	33

Parameter	SD	D	N	A	SA
People more judgmental of character and behavior because of one's gender	0	34	9	29	28
Women are still not adequately empowered	0	14	13	33	40
Marriage necessary for happiness or for living comfortably in society.	14	34	20	21	11
Being financially independent empowers women	9	23	14	29	25
Job is important to make women empowered	9	23	14	28	26
Legalizing women rights will empower women	0	0	23	34	43
Conducive environment will enhance women empowerment	0	0	14	34	52
women can be better leaders than men	2	3	11	34	50
I prefer to report to female than male bosses	44	39	13	2	2

**SD:** Strongly Disagree, **D:** Disagree, **N:** Neutral, **A:** Agree, **SA:** Strongly Agree

The major findings which emerged after analyzing the data included:

- Majority of the respondents think that at the time of hiring employees there is no gender discrimination in their organization, but a notable number felt that gender based favoritism may play a role during increments /promotions.
- Majority of the respondents feel that they receive constant support from the management at their workplace which helps them fulfill their professional requirements.
- An encouraging finding is that most of the respondents said that in their organization both men and women are getting equal remuneration and almost all respondents think that in their workplace both men and women are getting equal opportunities.
- Majority of the respondents believe that they are free to make their own decisions at their workplace.
- Almost all of the respondents believed that being financially independent empowers women and therefore having a job and career is important to make women empowered.
- An interesting finding was that while a majority of the respondents believe that woman can make better leaders than men, most of them prefer to report to male rather than female bosses.
- It was also noted that around half of the respondents believed that people judge their actions and reactions more harshly because of their gender.
- Almost half of the respondents think that there husband's career priorities have adversely affected their own career goals.
- It was also found that though there are women friendly work life balance policies in majority of organizations, not many employees are using it due to the lack of awareness or perceived adverse consequences of availing such benefits on career growth.
- A significant finding of the study which reflects the changing mindset of our society is that a majority of respondents did not believe that marriage is necessary for happiness or for living comfortably in society. It shows the rising sense of self worth and self reliance/dependence among young women which is an encouraging trend.
- Despite the changing scenario, the respondents felt that the working environment needs to be made more flexible and conducive for women employees to feel truly empowered and happy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD:

First things first. Women themselves have to get over their restricting mindsets and learn to take charge, both at home and in work. Instead of always complaining and walking with problems, they have to learn to walk with solutions. Another need is that of changing the attitude of a majority of men and some women who think that women cannot handle positions of leadership in work. There is no use of believing that women can be better leaders on one hand and then not willing to report to a woman leader on the other which clearly shows a difference in a person's thought process and actions. By bringing change in this attitude, women's economic

participation and promotional prospects can be increased. In order to change the patriarchal mindset of men, certain attitudinal awareness training programmes and interactive sessions have to be arranged.

Secondly, women friendly policies like flexible working hours and work from home should not just be framed on paper but publicized and implemented properly in organizations so that female employees do not hesitate to avail such benefits. Moreover the perception that availing such benefits might have an adverse impact on future career prospects has to be tackled by setting good examples and supporting women employees who take sabbaticals or work from home. Facilities like Job Sharing and part time work can go a long way in motivating and retaining valuable women workers. Going by the World Bank data, women occupy less than a third of India's overall workforce which is the lowest among BRICS nations. China is at 64 percent, Brazil at 59 percent, Russia at 57 percent, and South Africa at 45 percent. Trade body ASSOCHAM has stated in one of its reports that "lack of flexibility in working conditions tends to dissuade women from joining the labour force as they turn to their domestic duties." Hence, it is necessary for a large job-creator like the IT sector to set the right trends which can eventually wipe out the gender disparity in India Inc.

The organization should ensure that when it comes to hiring and promoting, equal opportunities are offered to deserving candidates, irrespective of their gender. The capability of employees should be judged on the basis of their performance in the organization rather than their gender. Organizations need to ensure gender parity in pay, promotions, policies and programmes. In addition, IT companies should be open to the idea of a parallel yet distinct growth trajectory for men and women.

Organizations should encourage participative management and good communication within the organization, and any issues or grievances of women workers especially if it concerns their being judged or harassed because of their gender, need to be looked into and tackled with urgency and sensitivity. It will help in nipping in bud some serious problems which in turn would create trust and commitment. There should be employee feedback surveys in organizations after regular intervals so that information from employees on areas like personal health and wellness, workplace relationships and a healthy workplace culture can be collected and appropriate steps may be taken. It should be ensured through such feedback sessions that measures for women empowerment are being practically implemented.

It also has to be realized that providing equal opportunities to women employees would be of use only when they are capable and willing to take up those opportunities. For that it is also necessary to build self-esteem and confidence in the women employees and prepare them for leadership positions by customized training, counseling and such programs. Women who are already holding good positions in the field need to be vocal and supportive of other women and help their junior colleagues feel more confident in moving up the ladder. Organizational Culture should reinforce successful women and top management should encourage and support independence in women employees.

## **CONCLUSION:**

A growing body of evidence demonstrates the importance of having a gender balance in management and leadership which leads to improvements in organizational performance and corporate governance. An increasing number of girls are taking up studies in the field of Information technology and are desirous of making a career in this field. Hence, there is the need to establish practices that would attract and retain more women into the industry and increase the overall output from the technology sector of the economy. What also has to be realized is the fact that though women are slowly ascending to leadership positions in almost all sectors of the economy; every woman who makes it to the top of her field usually feels alone once she gets there. Most of the issues for such women are more or less the same, from concerns of male domination to secret dialogue and gossips and from general discrimination to pay inequalities.

Though it is encouraging to see the changing mindsets and increasingly positive perception of women employees about their empowerment which shows the gradual change in the scenario, a lot still needs to be done to translate idealistic theories into practice.

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