



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT

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STATE OF FLEXIBLE CAREERS FOR THE WOMAN PROFESSIONAL IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The reaction/response to the concept of Flexi-Working from the point of view of two stakeholders of Flexi-Working – 1) Corporates which have/don't have Flexi-Working policy and 2) Individuals, more specifically women, who are beneficiaries/requirees of Flexi-working reveals very clearly the status of this employee welfare measure in India. Women account for 28% of the workforce in India. Almost 18% of these women leave the workforce every year citing work-life reasons, which causes a huge drain on the investment made on their education, training and work exposure. The single most important reason why women abandon their careers half way is due to the Indian cultural milieu which urges the woman to focus more on the home rather than the career. The off-ramping on account of child-bearing and child-rearing by women between the ages of 25-40 invariably creates a huge drain in the talent pipeline. This study which covered the responses of 341 senior women professionals across India as well as the policies and practices around flexi-working followed by 101 organizations, using a self-constructed questionnaire method revealed that 91% of the women surveyed had resorted to flexi-working at some point of time in their careers, but only 25% had availed this through a policy offered by their employers. The remaining had negotiated it informally through discussions with their supervisors and mentors. But a full complement of 100% of all respondents believed that Flexi-Working was essential for women to build sustainable careers. The study also highlights that Corporates realize the need for gender diversity across every level, with over 61% believing that there is robust business case in support of flexible working. But they are apprehensive about instituting a flexi-work policy because it demands change not only in the minds of the managers but also in the very culture of the organization.

KEYWORDS

Career, Women Professional, India, Flexi-Working.

PREFACE

It has often been said that the Indian Woman Professional (IWP) views her career very differently. In many ways the IWP's rationale and criteria for career planning, is diametrically diverse from the career management style of her western and South Asian counterparts. While a majority of women from across the world would choose individual self-actualization as a key criteria in career choices, the IWP looks at creating more intrinsic value for the family and community¹. A few key aspects which complicate career choices for the IWP are the Indian joint Family system, Indian society's collectivist outlook and the fact that the average age at which Indian children leave home² is among the highest in the world. The need to be 'dual-centric' is much more evident in the IWP, leading her to seek out ways and means whereby she can stay true to society's expectation from her of being the real Indian mother, while also pursuing career aspirations which education and exposure have ingrained in her.

By investing time and technology in making the IWP a productive and contributing member of the workforce, Corporate India gains in a hugely significant measure.

Today, Flexibility at the workplace is a universal need for all – men, women, old and young. It is a gender-neutral initiative, the rationale for which is driven powerfully by the changing roles of men and women, of caregivers and of nurturers. However, in the case of women, it is a sustaining force, a panacea which ensures that the pitfalls and speedbreakers in a woman's career journey do not result in permanent damage.

After interviews with over 442 respondents, it is the belief of the author that Flexi-careers if implemented successfully can transform not only the career destinies of women in India, but also address very effectively the talent needs of the growing organization.

INTRODUCTION

In the past 60 plus years when Indian women have begun to populate the workplace, they have grown very rapidly to catch up with their male counterparts.

Facing a myriad of challenges during the course of charting their careers, IWP's have earned their rightful place in the Indian corporate world, becoming synonymous with excellence, professionalism, dedication and focus. Along the way, family values have not been compromised, with Indian divorce rates³ (at 1%) still among the lowest in the world. The strain though, that a double career household places on the IWP cannot be under-emphasised. Sociologists are in the process of discovering interesting decision-connects such as whether a working woman's husband having a blue- or white-collar job leads to significant differences in the extent to which problems are created within the family unit. White-collar husbands with achieving wives are seen as more prone to lower levels of Job satisfaction⁴ than blue-collar husbands, leading to interpersonal conflict and pressure within the marriage.

These and other challenges such as the crying lack of adequate day care, influence the IWP to give up her career aspirations mid way, since she finds it too much of a battle to manage the 3 stakeholders of her position in society – 1) her family, 2) her community and 3) her employer.

While family and community play out the roles with respect to expectations from women that they have been conditioned to in the past several decades, centuries even, the employer too is not without his share of complexity in deciding the future of the IWP. This is mainly because, the Indian workplace is today unprepared to fully integrate women into sustainable long-term careers. The typical career model has been created keeping in mind the male, who with a full-time homemaker to support, can rise in the corporate ranks by working with single-minded focus on his career. The workplace celebrates men and women who have risen to the top by dedicating their lives to the pursuit of success. The new stereotype of a woman who manages both work and home is missing. Infrastructural support which can be provided by the workplace to ease the burden of the working mother is sadly lacking. This leads to an outflow of about 18% of women in middle managerial positions every year out of the Indian workplace⁵.

CURRENT CONTEXT

Organizations while being aware and appreciative of the role which women play both in the workplace and at home, have not yet arrived at a 'Burning Platform' attitude to change status quo. When AVTAR first started India's network of women professionals seeking flexiwork options, it was a revelation to most organizations that there was such a large talent pool of women professionals and managers who had quit their current job not for higher pay, position or prestige, but just because their home responsibilities forbade them from pursuing a long term career.

The HR head of one of India's iconic IT firms has this to say, "The number of occasions I have had a top performing women manager come up to me and say that I'm quitting because my maid has quit and I have no one to take care of my young child are too numerous to be even counted". The guilt which an IWP feels on account of her nebulous commitment to the workplace is usually assuaged by quitting the career never to return.

Flexibility is sometimes negotiated by women professionals through direct dialogue with immediate supervisors and bosses, but it is usually a ‘reward’ for a good performer or a loyal employee. It is not the benefit of a positive cultural mindset which accepts the undulating nature of a woman’s career and allows for a path that meanders around the hurdles.

IWP’s who seek out the Flexi-Careers network of AVTAR are passionate about their work, committed to their roles as mothers and caregivers and take very difficult decisions to make sure they manage their personal and professional lives. This stretch by the IWP to reach her aspirations (which desire in the case of an equivalent male is encouraged and empowered) is an unfair pressure, an unnecessary load which can be alleviated smartly by a few swift and easy measures.

Flexible working is a solution which is universally accepted as a powerful one, capable of changing dramatically the fortunes of women in the Indian workplace. The UN’s Gender Balance agenda mentions Flexible working as a means by which organizations can ensure that equal representation of women is achieved⁶.

In a study conducted by NASSCOM⁷ the following got the top 3 ranks for the best practices to support women at work

- Anti sexual harassment policy
- Flexible work schedules / hours
- Flexible Leave Policy

Many corporates have begun to value the need for flexibility in ensuring that the investments made in women don’t end up creating non-performing assets. “Flexible working for women professionals is very important as an enabler to balance women’s personal needs and professional aspirations. It is becoming increasingly critical for organizations to retain its female talent pool and not lose them to personal obligations that may arise. More flexibility leads to enhanced productivity” says Rajashree Nambiar, General Manager – Distribution and Diversity Champion, Standard Chartered Bank.

In a Outlook Business-AVTAR research report⁸, 68.7% opined that with flexible working, women have a better chance to stay engaged to the workplace and therefore rise to leadership positions.

In an October 2010 survey of 3,300 employees across the globe in, consultancy firm Bain & Company found that effective implementation of a flexible work model can increase the retention of women by 40 per cent and even of men by 25 per cent. Further, 87 per cent of women and 74 per cent of men surveyed expressed an interest in using flexible job options⁹.

With such an unequivocal support of Flexibility, it is indeed surprising that only a handful of organizations in India espouse the cause of flexible working and include it in their employee agenda. Even fewer companies actually put in place policies which empower women to go the flexi-way. A dipstick study revealed a large number of mindset issues which cause problems in implementing Flexi-career solutions.

The objective of this study is therefore to understand how organizations and women professionals in India respond to Flexi-working arrangements as also Flexi-Careers.

The Business Case for Gender Diversity & therefore Flexible Working

There is increasing evidence of link between gender diversity and company performance. According to a Sunday Economic Times study¹⁰, nine listed Companies managed by prominent women promoters fared better than the top 30 firms listed in the Bombay Stock Exchange in year-on-year growth rates for the last five years.

A report by Catalyst, a research and advisory organisation revealed, "Companies that have higher women's representation on their top management teams financially outperformed those companies that have lower women's representation."¹¹

A study by NASSCOM further reinforces the need for gender diversity in the workplace. On the question on what it can mean for business: Rewards for addressing gender inclusivity in an enterprise, the following factors got the top rank¹².

- Build an employer brand
- Higher employee productivity and profits

Top reasons for leaving organisation

Women	Men	Common
Marriage	Better Job Profile	Growth Opportunities
Family / Children	Better Compensation	Education

Source: Mercer NASSCOM Gender Inclusivity and Empowerment Study 2008

There are 2 primary factors which make the workplace more welcoming for women.

- Workplace which is sensitive to their needs, provides them a safe and healthy work environment
- Since women don the twin roles of being professionals and care-givers, the need for accommodating personal priorities during the pursuit of a career becomes critical.

Work-life balance is one of the most critical factors which serves as a powerful engagement driver for women professionals. Hence any Gender Diversity agenda focusing on increasing representation of women at the work-place must begin with the laying of the foundation for organizational change towards Work-life balance.

The two major reasons for the dysfunctional work-life balance at the workplace are as follows:

- Non-availability of alternative work arrangements to pursue a career while also managing family commitments
- Inherent lack of understanding or awareness in managers to handle and tackle the legitimate WLB (Work Life Balance) need of women and thereby inadvertently creating a woman-unfriendly workplace.

In its April 2006 article, The Economist decried the fact that "women remain the world's most under-utilized resource." "To make full use of their national pools of female talent," the article stated, "governments need to remove obstacles that make it hard for women to combine work with having children," such as "parental leave and child care, allowing more flexible working hours, and reforming tax and social-security systems that create disincentives for women to work."¹³

The Corporate perspective towards Flexi-Working

1. Please select the statement that best describes your experience about flexible working		%
a.	No idea about flexible working	2
b.	Understand flexible working conceptually but never worked in any organization which had flexi-working arrangement	33
c.	Understand flexible working since it is / was available where I am working / worked	37
d.	Have very good understanding about flexi-working	8

- **97% of the people are aware or exposed to flexible working**

2. Please select the option with regard to flexible working in your organization		%
a.	Not available in my organization	37
b.	Offered only under unavoidable situations	21
c.	Available as part of organization policy but not encouraged	7
d.	Available as part of the organization policy but not successful due to various factors	7
e.	Available as part of organization policy and effectively used in the organization	26
f.	No response	2

- Flexible working as a policy is not available in 58% of the organisations. Flexible working is available and used effectively in 26% of the organisations

3. How is flexibility negotiated in your organisation?	%
a. Through a direct discussion with immediate supervisor	40
b. Availing a Flex-Working Policy	23
c. Requesting the support of HR	12
d. Dialoguing with CEO/top management	35
e. No response	9

- 23% use the flexi-working policy for negotiating flexible working. Otherwise, it is availed through one on one negotiation with the supervisor, top management and HR in the same order

Will you use flexible working option, if it is offered to you?	%
a. Yes	81
b. No	2
c. May be	16

- Overwhelming response of 81% for are interested in using flexible working

Do you think there is a business case for flexible working?	%
a. Yes	61
b. No	9
c. May be	30

- 61% think that flexible working makes business sense and with 30% saying may be, the case for flexible working will become stronger with time and success stories

If you think there is a business case for flexible working, please choose the business case.	%
a. To reach out to and employ more women managers in my organization	21
b. To retain existing women talent	30
c. To hire people on flexible working basis to meet business contingencies	33
d. To hire people on flexible working since it's a cost effective solution compared to hiring a full-time employee	28
e. Others, Please mention _____	

- The above response indicates that there is more than one good reason for promoting flexible working.

In your opinion, who is / are most likely to oppose Flexible working?	%
a. Male employees	7
b. Female employees	7
c. All employees	21
d. HR Managers	12
e. Line Managers	49
f. Top Management	35
g. No response	5

- The line managers and top management in the same order are the most likely to oppose flexible working as they are directly responsible for business and service delivery and feel that flexi-working professionals might not deliver to the same extent of productivity as a full-time resource

If flexible working is offered in your organization, how many people will be interested in availing it?	%
a. 0 to 5% of the employees	9
b. 6 to 10% of the employees	21
c. 11 to 20% of the employees	23
d. 21 to 40% of the employees	19
e. More than 40% of the employees	28

- The above responses indicate a very strong interest in flexible working and if proved successful will probably become the future style of working in many organization.

Do you believe that more female employees will use flexible working systems rather than male employees?	%
a. Yes	60
b. No	14
c. May be	26

- Women will use flexible working more since they have a pressing need to balance their professional and personal interest as the primary stakeholder of family responsibilities

Performance Change in pursuing flexible working in organisations: Increase in productivity	%
a. Agree	60
b. Neutral	26
c. Disagree	7
d. No response	7

- Positive response to flexible working with 60% feeling that it will improve productivity

Performance Change in pursuing flexible working in organisations: Decrease in productivity	%
a. Agree	9
b. Neutral	49
c. Disagree	40
d. No response	2

- On the question of Decrease in Flexibility, 49% of the respondents do not have an opinion indicating doubts or lack of knowledge about flexible working

Performance Change in pursuing flexible working in organisations: Increase in Supervision time	%
a. Agree	35
b. Neutral	47
c. Disagree	14
d. No response	5

- 35% of the Respondents feel that the supervision time will increase with flexible working and again a sizeable majority (47%) are neutral indicating apprehensions about flexible working

Performance Change in pursuing flexible working in organisations: Decrease in Supervision time		%
a. Agree		12
b. Neutral		42
c. Disagree		40
d. No response		7

- 42% are undecided whether it will decrease supervision time

Performance Change in pursuing flexible working in organisations: Additional work for full-time employee for every flexible employee		%
a. Agree		16
b. Neutral		40
c. Disagree		40
d. No response		5

- 40% of the respondents do not think that flexible working leads to additional work for full-time employees but the same % number of respondents is not sure about this.

Performance Change in pursuing flexible working in organisations: Training provided to manage flexible workers		%
a. Agree		53
b. Neutral		16
c. Disagree		23
d. No response		7

- There is a strong training need for managing flexible workers. The training programs will probably help in removing some of the stigmas and uncertainties about flexible working to relating productivity and supervision

Additional infrastructure (Systems, workstations)		%
a. Agree		47
b. Neutral		23
c. Disagree		26
d. No response		5

- Respondents feel that additional infrastructure would be required for flexible working. This could be secured communication lines and laptops

Where do you think flexible working is easily applicable?		%
a. At senior management level (GM, AVP, VP, Sr. VP)		56
b. At middle management level (Mgr, Senior Mgr, DGM, AGM)		65
c. At junior management level (Team lead, AM level)		37
d. At entry level (Executive, Sr. Executive)		28
e. No response		7

- At the middle and senior management level, the bulk of the work being less transactional and more of strategy and management, flexible working can be easily applicable.
- Having said this, Flexible working can also be applied at the entry and junior management level if job analysis tools are employed for assessing their suitability for flexible working

What do you think is critical for implementing flexible working in your organization?		%
a. Getting top management's buy in		60
b. Line manager's acceptance to flexible working		33
c. Employees' acceptance to flexible working		14
d. Identifying jobs that can be done Flexibly		42
e. Identify the type of flexible working that will suit the organization and the Job		49
f. Integrating flexi-working jobs and flexi-working employees into existing working arrangements		53
g. No response		5

- Top management buy in ever so crucial for any change management initiative is quite evident from the response
- The fact that flexible working cannot be done in an ad hoc method is also reflected in the survey. The need for a systematic flexible working framework is clearly felt with more than 40% of the respondents indicating that Identifying jobs, Identifying type of flexible working and Integration of flexible working in the main stream is critical for implementing flexible working

Do you think flexible working is crucial for women to stay engaged in their careers?		%
a. Yes		60
b. No		12
c. May be		26
d. No response		2

- Again a strong indicator that flexible working is required for women to stay engaged in their careers

Where do you think your organization needs maximum support for implementing flexible working?		%
a. Analyzing and Identifying jobs for flexible working		28
b. Analyzing and identifying type of flexible working suitable for the job and the organization		60
c. Information about benefits of Flexible working, flexible-working policies and practices		44
d. Training on flexible working		21
e. No response		7

- **Organisations need maximum support for analysing and identifying types of flexible working suited for the job and organisation. This is one of the biggest challenge organisations faces when they embark on a flexible working program. In most cases, the flexi-working initiatives fail due to lack of jobs which can be done on flexible basis which is directly related to organisations not investing in doing a job study.**

Do you think flexible working is a viable option in India	%
a. Not sure about the effectiveness of Flexible working	28
b. Convinced that flexible working will not suit Indian working conditions	12
c. Convinced that flexible working is here to stay and will suit Indian working conditions	60

- **60% of the respondents think that flexible work will suit Indian working conditions**

If you think flexible working is not viable in India, please choose the reasons	%
a. Flexible working will affect Employee performance	20
b. Flexible working cannot be applied across all functions, business units, jobs	100
c. Flexible working cannot be offered to all employees and therefore may give room for bias or unfair practice	20
d. Flexible working leads to increase in cost	
e. Other reasons, please mention _____	

- **This is out of the 12% respondents who felt that Flexible working is not viable in India.**

If you think flexible working is viable in India, please choose the reasons	%
a. Better employee performance	54
b. Helps in attracting and retaining talent	81
c. Contributes to overall health of the employee	58
d. Helps in reducing cost	58
e. Other reasons, Please mention _____	
f. No response	11

- **80% of the respondents agree that it helps in attracting and retaining talent. The fact that more than 50% of the respondents agree that flexible working results in better employee performance, improves employee health and reduces cost indicates the overall benefit that flexible working will bring to the organisation**

In the coming years, do you think all employees across levels will require flexibility in their jobs and careers?	%
a. Yes	65
b. No	12
c. May be	21
d. No response	2

- **Strong indication that flexible working will be the future style of working in many organizations**

The Indian Woman Professional's Career worldview

01. Will you use flexible working option, if it is offered to you?

Will you use a flexible working option, if it is offered to you?	%
Yes	100
No	0

02. When did you begin work flexibly?

Life Stage	% respondents
Parenthood (Child 0 to 5 years)	41.38
Bachelorhood	18.97
During and after pregnancy	18.97
Parenthood of young adults	12.07
Other reasons	12.07
Health Reasons	3.45
Courtship period	1.72
Just Married	1.72
Just retirement	1.72
Elder Care	1.72
Studying	1.72

It is not surprising that most women started working flexibly when their child was aged between 0 to 5 years. This is a very crucial period for child's development and this when they need full-time attention. Women move to full time working when the child starts going to full-time school. The other reason could be due to lack of child care infrastructure / Day care facilities.

03. Longest period that you worked in a flexible manner

Time period	% respondents
0 – 6 months	37.93
1 - 2 year	15.52
2 - 5 years	15.52
5 years & above	15.52
No response	8.62
6 months - 1 year	5.17
As and When needed	1.72

Almost every woman needs flexible working. 46% of the respondents have worked flexibly for more than 1 year.

04. Types of flexibility you have used in the past

Types	% respondents
Temporal	80.36
Location	51.79
Career	19.64

Temporal flexibility is the common method of flexi-working. Working from home has some limitations due to Technology / Connectivity limitations, Data Security and face time expectations.

05. Flavour of flexi-working that you have used the most

Types	% respondents
Work from home	68
Flexi-working	32
Staggered hours	28
Part-time working	20
Tele-commuting	18
Compressed work week	8
Term-time working	2

Out of those who have worked flexibly, work from Home was used the most. This is most preferred. There is also healthy usage of other types – Flexible work timings, staggered hours, part-time working and telecommuting

06. How is flexibility negotiated

Types	% respondents
Through a direct discussion with immediate supervisor	79.63
Dialoguing with your CEO/top management	29.63
Availing a Flex-Working Policy	24.07
Requesting the support of HR	18.52

24% of the respondents stated have used the flexible working policy available in the organization, all the rest had to negotiate with their immediate supervisors / Top management / HR Managers for their flexi-working requirement. This can be attributed to 2 reasons – unavailability of flexi-working policy or a fact that flexi-working policy is not available in many organizations shows that either they do not acknowledge their employees need or unwilling to tread the flexi-working path due to their skepticism on flexible working.

07. Problems you faced when working flexibly or attempting a FWA?

Problems	% respondents
Flexible working being perceived as under-performance	49.02
Lack of successful women role models who have worked flexibly and been showcased for their effectiveness	43.14
Lack of a flexible culture within the organization	35.29
Lack of infrastructure in the organization to enable flexi-working	31.37
Resentful attitude of full-time working colleagues	25.49
Lack of support for the concept from top management	19.61
No Problem	19.61
Administering of FWA being seen as 'problematic' by HR Admin	15.69
'Presenteesim' mindset of immediate supervisor	13.73

Only 19% of the respondents expressed that they did not face or foresee any problems while working flexibly. The rest 81% experience or experienced one or more challenges while working flexible. The number one challenged faced by them was perception of equating flexible working with under performance. This is followed by lack of women role models, flexi-working culture and flexi-working infrastructure.

08. Have you taken break in your career?

Types	% respondents
Yes	44.83
No	55.17

44% out of the 341 Women managers surveyed had to take a break in their career due to family responsibilities. The fact that 77% of these women did not join the organization that they were working would further rankle the organizations.

09. How long was the period of the break?

Duration of the break	%
1 year – 5 years	38.46
6 months – 1 year	23.08
0 – 3 months	19.23
5 years – 10 years	11.54
3 – 6 months	7.69

1 to 5 years ties in with the when women need the flexible working the most, parenthood (child 0 to 5 years)

CONCLUSION

The study has thrown up some interesting pointers which will be useful for organizations planning to incorporate flexible working in their work environment. Corporates realize the importance of flexible working, with over 61% believing that there is robust business case in support of flexible working. There is also a very strong message that women require flexible working the most and is important for them to stay engaged in their careers. But they are apprehensive about instituting a flexi-work policy because it demands change not only in the minds of the managers but also in the very culture of the organization.

Only 26% of the organizations surveyed have formal flexi-working policies, others manage to get around through informal negotiations with their immediate supervisors, Senior Management and HR. The study also shows that flexible working has a practice require awareness, job analysis and a systematic process and action plan to make it work. The fact that flexible working may not be offered to all or applicable to all job functions seems to be working on the minds of the decision makers. Coupled with this is the fact that sizable population of the respondents is not clear about its impact on productivity and supervision time. In the study, 48.4% and 35% of the respondents responded that their line managers and top management were the first to oppose flexible working.

Majority of the respondents feel that top management buy in, identifying jobs that can be done flexibly and identifying the type of flexible working suitable for the job and the organization are critical factors for implementing flexible working. Organisations will do well to invest time and effort in this direction with nearly 65% of the respondents feeling that employees across all levels will require flexible working in the coming years.

44% out of the 341 Women managers surveyed had to take a break in their career due to family responsibilities. The fact that 77% of these women did not join the organization that they were working for previously is a significant pointer. They either joined organizations that offered flexible working or joined new organizations when they could resume full-time working.

With the change in fabric of the Indian homes (Nuclear and double income families), the need for working women to spend that much more time at home is no more a desire but a reality and a necessity especially during the child care period.

According to the UN Gender Gap Report, the Nordic economies have made it possible for parents to combine work and family, resulting in high female participation rates, more shared participation in childcare, more equitable distribution of labour at home, better work-life balance for both women and men and in some cases a boost to declining fertility rates. Policies applied in these countries include mandatory paternal leave in combination with maternity leave,

generous federally mandated parental leave benefits provided by a combination of social insurance funds and employers, tax incentives and post-maternity re-entry programmes. By focusing on home and family equality, these countries have managed to improve the status of women and close participation gaps in politics and the workplace.

An important shift for working mothers across the world is what global consulting major Deloitte calls MCC – Mass Career Customization. This is based on the philosophy that not all employees are keen on a linear march to the top. As Cathy Benko and Andrew Liakopoulos of Deloitte, say in their article, *The Corporate Lattice*¹⁴, “The corporate ladder emerged at the start of the Industrial Age as a model for maximizing efficiencies and economies of scale. It proffers a worldview in which power, rewards and access to information are tied to the rung which rung each employee occupies. It defines career success as a linear climb to the top and assumes that employees are more alike than different and that they all want and need the same things to deliver results”. The MCC model avers that based on the 4 dimensions of role, pace, schedule and workload, careers can be customized. As such, each employee can choose a different path – each with its own set of implications in career development.

This type of path is what Carol Evans refers to as the Flex-Track in her book, *This Is How We Do It: The Working Mothers' Manifesto*. Evans, CEO of Working Mother Media, believes in a broad definition of flexibility. “Women are flexing their entire careers, not just their days or weeks,” she says¹⁵.

During the many conversations which the authors of this report had with corporates in India as part of this research, it is evident that employers realize the value that a Diverse workforce plays at many levels in the organization. Even more obvious is the fact that organizations appreciate the fact that the average career is spread across several decades and the long haul is as important as the short one.

When the talent manager considers the knowledge and skills that a professional accrues over a span of between ten to thirty years, and needless to mention, how invaluable all that knowledge capital is to a resource-thirsty organization, it actually seems irrelevant if by the individual's own choice, linear growth takes, say, 3 more years rather than the mandatory fast track time. With this mindset, career breaks become less ‘full-stop’ and more ‘comma’. Women who wish to take breaks in career or seek to work flexi are seen as important repositories of information and future leadership potential. The work world which values this aspect of human capital also recognizes that retaining talent is as important as attracting it.

Hence, the intelligent talent manager understands that different people pursue different career models and the workplace of today demands an additional discretionary effort in creating distinct employee segments.

In simple words it is about breaking old ideologies and allowing creativity and innovation to take the place of moth-eaten policies. It's about valuing diversity and recognizing that our world has changed irrevocably in the past 10 years. Not all employees fit the same mould any more than all customers use the same products. When an organization crosses these ideological thresholds, all kinds of changes start to happen organically. New ways of working are seen as a strategic decision which adds to the top line and not as an accommodation to ‘special’ workers. A culture of flexibility becomes ingrained in a company's DNA unobtrusively and is no longer a largesse provided to a working mother. Flexi-Careers then are seen a tool for improving productivity and work/life balance not just for the present, but well into the future.

GLOSSARY

The following is a list of terms commonly used in the repertoire of Flexi-Career practices. The author wishes to state that not all of them find a place in this report.

IWP : Refers to the Indian Woman Professional who works in white collar jobs in the Indian workplace

Full-time: This refers to an individual working the full complement of 8 hours or 9 hours as applicable from the office premises.

Flexi-time: This refers to an arrangement whereby the individual works flexibly for the same number of hours, but has the option of varying the start/end time as also the location of work (for eg, from home, from a remote location or from a designated third-party office).

FWA : Flexible Working Arrangements – refers to any means whereby an individual works flexibly

Part-time: This refers to an arrangement whereby an individual works either from home or within office premises, but works for a reduced number of hours. This could be 50% or 60% of the full-time working hours.

Flexi-Careers: Careers which demonstrate one of three types of Flexibility: 1) Temporal or Time-led Flexibility, 2) Location or Place-led Flexibility and 3) Career or Skill-Led Flexibility

Home based Non family care giver: a domestic help/maid who looks after the child/elder at home

Home based family member care giver: a family member such as the parents or the parents-in-law of the employee provides child care at home

Day Care Services: a facility in the care of which the employee can leave her child/children

Organization Provided Crèche : A day-care/child-care center provided by the organization either within the premises or outside the premises of the office

Self - initiated skill building programs: Training/Developmental programs initiated and paid for by

ENDNOTES

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