



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMPUTER APPLICATION AND MANAGEMENT

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ATTRITION VS. MANAGEMENT OF TALENTS: AN ELUSIVE DELUSION - A STUDY ON INDIAN WORKING WOMEN IN BPO AND ITES INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Talent is the critical success factor to any organization. To define talent as well as to acquire and manage it for retaining the employees in the organizations successfully is however difficult. In total 70 respondents were identified for the study including HR managers and ex female employees of Indian BPOs and ITES industry. Women were chosen since they are prone to sacrifice jobs to keep a balance between work life and personal life. Moreover, in the male dominated environment of industry, women in top managerial positions are appraised under more strict criteria than men, earn promotions with difficulty and lack a well-established network back up. But attrition of any employee is always costly for any organization. No universal technique or solution is available to solve the universal problem of attrition and to manage talent, but a proper combination of good HR practices can help to resolve it.

KEYWORDS

Talent, Attrition, Acquisition, Management, Women, Work-life balance, HR practice.

INTRODUCTION

Talent acquisition, transformation and management are critical anchors for the growth of the industry”—

Nandan Nelikeni

Talent is the critical success factor to any organization. Retaining employees involves understanding the intrinsic motivators of them which many organizations are unable to identify. In this information age people's knowledge, skills and their relationship capabilities have become critical assets for organizations. In this context, it has become vital for every organization to attract and retain the best available talent.

TALENT - IS IT POSSIBLE TO DEFINE?

How talent is defined is specific to an organization. Explanations are highly influenced by markets, industries, organizations, geographies, intellectual disciplines, generations, and of course the nature of talent's work. All are dynamic, and so likely to change over time according to organizational priorities. Rather than accepting universal or prescribed explanations, organizations need to find or formulate their own definitions of what talent and talent management are. It should fit the organization's exogenous and endogenous circumstances and particular needs.

WHY WOMEN EMPLOYEES ARE CONSIDERED?

Women have come a long way and today they are no less than "super women" juggling well between their family and professional lives. The Y2K women are ambitious, confident, talented, multi skilled and more in control of their destiny. The new generation working women who are today in their twenties and early thirties represent an important stage in the evolution of womankind. They have tremendous inner drive and the will to achieve.

Organizations need to be possessive about this segment of employees, who are already overburdened with the stress of work-life balance, challenging organizational policies, decisions and continue to prove themselves in the world of men.

WAR FOR TALENT - WHAT IS IT?

In 1997, a McKinsey study coined the term: war for talent. Now in the new millennium, we find ourselves in the talent age. Leading organizations know that exceptional business performance is driven by superior talent. People are the entities who mark the difference. In an age when those who possess knowledge — not land, labor, or capital goods—own the new means of production. Better talent separates high-performance organizations from the rest. It is no surprise that a contest for talent has been raging since the 1990s. Critical talent is scarce (and about to become scarcer, if not managed and handled properly) because of three trends: the ongoing retirement of the "Baby Boom Generation", a widening skills gap, and large-scale social integration (driving rapidly changing lifestyles). Talent management is the strategy through which a company exerts some efforts and undertakes some analyses to determine the nonmonetary interests and preferences of its key employees, and then attempt to meet these preferences in action.

CONCEPT OF TALENT ACQUISITION

Talent acquisition is a combination of resources, process and intellectual property combined with the organization's recruitment practices. Its sub processes include: Find, attract and engage highly talented individuals into the organization for the better achievement of organizational goals.

Organizations have recognized the need for maintaining reserve talent to fill a vacancy as and when it arises. But the whole process of talent acquisition, i.e., how to fix and select talent for the organization remains largely undefined and is often left to the discretion of the individual managers hiring them. Talent acquisition is not a form of art, but a defined process. If the strategies are well-defined, the whole process will be a success.

In the organizations, if the talents are not acquired, the organizations will not be able to function for attainment of their predetermined objectives properly, and if the acquired talents are not managed effectively, the attrition rate will be unnecessarily high, which is undesirable for any organization.

ATTRITION IS EXPENSIVE FOR ANY ORGANIZATION - WHY?

Attrition is defined as a reduction in the number of employees against a base reference date through retirement, death or resignation. (Source: Webster Dictionary).

However, whenever the problem of attrition is discussed amongst organization decision makers, the reference is to the numbers of resignations and forced terminations rather than natural separations like death and retirement.

From an HR perspective, it is one of the areas where, a difference can be made which is measurable in quantitative and qualitative terms. When attrition is not just limited in scope to "human capital" but transformed into "intellectual capital", the problem is even more acute as tacit knowledge walks out every time an employee leaves.

This case is true for male and female employees and to avoid the situation, serious intervention should be made to sustain the talents in the organizations.

Organizations have to bear massive costs associated with attrition or turnover and, while some of these are not visible to the management reporting or budget system, they are none the less real.

The following are the different costs incurred to any company due to attrition-

RECRUITMENT COSTS

- The cost of advertisements; agency costs; employee referral costs; internet posting costs.
- The cost of the internal recruiter's time to plan for future human resources, develop and implement a sourcing strategy, review candidates backgrounds, prepare for interviews, conduct interviews, prepare candidate assessments, conduct reference checks, make the employment offer and notify unsuccessful candidates.
- Calculate the cost of the various candidate pre-employment tests to help assess candidates' skills, abilities, aptitude, attitude, values and behaviours.

TRAINING COSTS

- The cost of orientation for the trainers, trainees and training materials
- The cost of the person(s) who conduct the training.
- The cost of various training materials needed including company or product manuals, computer or other technical equipment used in the delivery of training.

The other costs incurred due to attrition are lost productivity costs, New Hire costs, lost sales cost etc.

POSITION OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN INDIAN ORGANISATIONS - WHERE THE PROBLEM LIES?

Women of this age are in continuous struggle between their family and professional lives. From the tentative beginnings made by the pioneer women in the fifties we saw the emergence of the Y2K women - ambitious, confident and more in control of their destiny. Among the women who entered the workplace in the nineties more rapid career advancement is noticed, particularly in young women who have delayed starting a family or limited the number of children for their careers. Some of these young women are at junior / trainee positions but several others have reached middle management positions. But still women folks all over suffer from certain limitations unlike their male counterparts.

A CII study of 149 Companies showed the incidence of working women across companies at 6 per cent. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most organisations do not consciously discriminate between men and women. Then why are there so few women in most organisations, particularly in managerial positions?

At birth the ratio of female to male is 9.14 to 10, according to preliminary census report of India, 2011. In a population where the women do not face discrimination, Nobel economist Amartya Sen puts the sex ratio at about 10.5 women to 10 men. As the girl child grows up the chances of her education is less than boys. Of the 6 to 11 year-old children not in school, 60% are girls. Also, only 39 % of females (compared to 64% of males) above the age of 7 are literate. Thus, through a process of continuous elimination through the long years of education when it comes to employment only 18 per cent of the formal sector jobs are filled by women.

However, this is three times higher than what the CII study actually found across 149 Companies. It gives rise of the following questions:

“Does the process of elimination of women which starts at birth, followed by the education process continue after her entry into employment in the formal sector?”

“Does that explain why the CII study could find only 6 percent of women (4 per cent in senior management) amongst the surveyed companies?”

Many women are found who have opted out of a full time job to take a break to raise a family. Exact numbers of such talented women opting out of full time jobs is not known accurately, but the number is still growing.

Work life balance challenges can have an impact on women's advancement. These may include lack of flexibility in the workplace, lack of family-friendly workplace policies, parent-track policies, male-trailing spouses, career versus relationship and child bearing conflicts. Absence of female role models and inadequate number of female members at the top ranks add to the disadvantages.

On the contrary, few exceptions also lie in sectors like BPOs and ITES, where not only the number of women employees is comparable but in some cases more. The actual situation tells that, may be in the near future, more number of BPOs and ITES companies would push the percentage of women employees up in our country. Women candidates in new industries like retail (and even older ones like banking) are rarely being asked about when their plan to get married or start a family. When an organization like ICICI or HSBC announces the name of a woman as the CEO they encourage many more talented women to apply for jobs and try to retain the talents in the organization. However, acceptability of women in service industries like health and hospitality sector also reflects this factor.

Historically, the model of a successful manager has been a masculine one. Thus the male managerial perspective is far more operative. Being the number of women in key executive positions low, it is also difficult to accept a mental model of women leaders. Women are more perceived as followers than the decision makers. Women managers are often evaluated less favourably and criticized more, even if they perform the similar leadership roles like men. In our country, as well as throughout the entire world, the picture is more or less similar, which include attitudinal problems of male subordinates towards female superiors, less number of management development initiatives for women employees from the management, conflicts between personal and work life and the organizational culture within which women work.

TABLE-1: GENDER STEREOTYPES—HOW WE INTERPRET BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS

COMMENT	HE	SHE
Has a family picture on the desk	A responsible family man!	She places family before career!
Has a cluttered desk	Is a hard worker!	A disorganized person!
Is talking with co-workers	Must be discussing business!	Must be gossiping!
Is not at the desk	Must be in any important meeting!	Must have gone shopping or in the washroom putting on make-up!
Is getting married	He will be settled now!	Her priorities will change!
Is having lunch with the boss	He is on the way up!	They must be having an affair!
Was criticized by his boss	He will improve his performance now!	She must be getting upset!
Is becoming a father/mother	He needs a raise!	We should look at a replacement as she will most likely leave!

Source: Presentation by Vijaya Sampath at Women Manager's Conference in Bangalore (2007)

It is a well accepted fact that, success is not measured by the bottom line but by the strength of the relationships between workers which holds an organization together. Here the effectiveness of women managers lies. A male oriented culture defines success in terms of profit, market share, status and influence; where as a female oriented culture recognizes the importance of human relationships and communication (Peterson, 2004). According to Kathy Robb, Head of Environmental Practice at Hunton & Williams, USA, “women in business want to bolster sustainability efforts in their companies.”

ATTRITION VS. TALENT ACQUISITION AND MANAGEMENT**REASONS BEHIND ATTRITION OF FEMALE EMPLOYEES - AN ANALYSIS**

An analysis was made using primary data collected across two sectors, namely BPO and ITES where female employees are majorly present and different secondary sources of information. Primary data has been collected and compared from two samples of respondents, ex-female employees and HR managers by using open-ended questionnaire through emails and telephonic calls. The total number of respondents was 70 who had shifted jobs in the last couple of years in the above mentioned sectors. The respondents included 35 from BPO sector and 25 from ITES sector. The HR perspective has been obtained from HR professionals, five from each sector. The respondents were asked about the cause of leaving the previous job, whereas, the HR managers were directly questioned about the reasons for attrition in their respective organization.

RESULTS**TABLE-2 BPO SECTOR (N-35)**

Monotony	10%
Not a serious career option	15%
Skewed timing	25%
Work life balance issues	30%
Salary growth rate not defined	12%
Better prospects	8%

TABLE-3 ITES SECTOR (N- 25)

Better Prospects	12%
Inadequate Training	18%
Work Life balance Issues	35%
Flexi time Options available elsewhere	15%
Locational preference	10%
Power and politics	10%

The reasons given by both the groups of respondents have been compared below in separate tables-

TABLE- 4 COMPARISONS OF REASONS (BPO SECTOR)

Perception of ex female employees	Perception of HR
Monotony	Future prospects
Not a serious career option	Unable to create a work life proper balance
Skewed timing	Communication issues
Work life balance issues	Higher salary offers from other companies in competition
Salary growth rate not defined	
Better prospects	

TABLE- 5 COMPARISONS OF REASONS (ITES SECTOR)

Perception of ex female employees	Perception of HR
Better Prospects	Workload Stress
Inadequate Training	Better Future prospects
Work Life balance Issues	Unable to create a work life proper balance
Flexi time Options available elsewhere	Higher salary offers from other companies in competition
Locational preference	Lack of adequate supply leading to war for talent
Power and politics	

The differential perspective is primarily the reason why the measures to counter the attrition generally fails. But it is clear that, it is not possible to avoid totally the situations of attrition and it is beneficial for the organizations to look after talent acquisition factors and effective management of those talents.

RECENT TRENDS IN TALENT ACQUISITION

According to the talent acquisition strategies Benchmark report by Aberdeen Group, a market research-based organization found that 59% of best in class companies reported that their overall performance was increased after implementation of their talent acquisition strategy compared to 41% of industry average and 33% of laggard companies. The report also offered the following recommendations:

- Alignment of Talent Acquisition strategy with the overall corporate strategic plan.
- Measurement of workforce performance
- Recognizing the factor that strategies are differently applicable in different companies..
- Use of latest technological developments.
- Focus on long-term plans.
- Management of workforce.

The women workforce of India, generally faces different complex problems, when they have to cope up with the organizational situation following different talent acquisition trends because till now, performance is not evenly appraised between the two segments of employees in Indian situation and the lag remains as it is in the concept of acquisition of female employees.

Now if the attrition rate is above average due to different personal and social reasons and the acquisition rate is average or below average, then it is obvious to find that, women employees in the decision making sector will be lower in number.

Nowadays, when organizations though less in number, are thinking about increasing the number of female top level managers, they are somehow trying to adopt the following strategies.

- Identification of star performers in the industry and predetermination of certain targets for success.
- Maintaining a good network of connections with other companies and motivating the employees to interact with them. This strategy helps in scouting for talented people and attracting them to work for your industry.
- Cooperating with managers for developing profiles of high performers. By defining the 'critical success factors' like competencies, nature of activities of high performers and their work methods it is possible to locate potential candidates.
- Developing a talent review process for identifying and developing potential talent within the organization. This can be done by conducting periodical performance review of the employees, providing feedback to the employees regarding the report by highlighting on their strengths and weakness.
- Creation of strategies for development of talent through training, career paths, mentoring and coaching.
- Assigning the top performers with new challenges, responsibilities and the tasks.
- Encouraging employees for further education to develop their talents and skills.

Whatever may be the strategies adopted by companies, but all of them have belief in the concept of "Catch Them Young", i.e., attracting the fresh talent, whether male or female directly on completion of their education so that they can be easily moulded as per the company's requirements in the initial stage of employment itself and in the years ahead can take up the responsibility of decision making on behalf of the organization.

It is an accepted fact that, it is difficult to retain the female employees in the organizations in the long run, but it is more difficult to acquire the talents for effective utilization of the talents for benefit of the organization itself. It is better to design and implement talent acquisition strategies beforehand to avoid unnecessary controversies.

DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING TALENT ACQUISITION STRATEGIES MAY INVOLVE

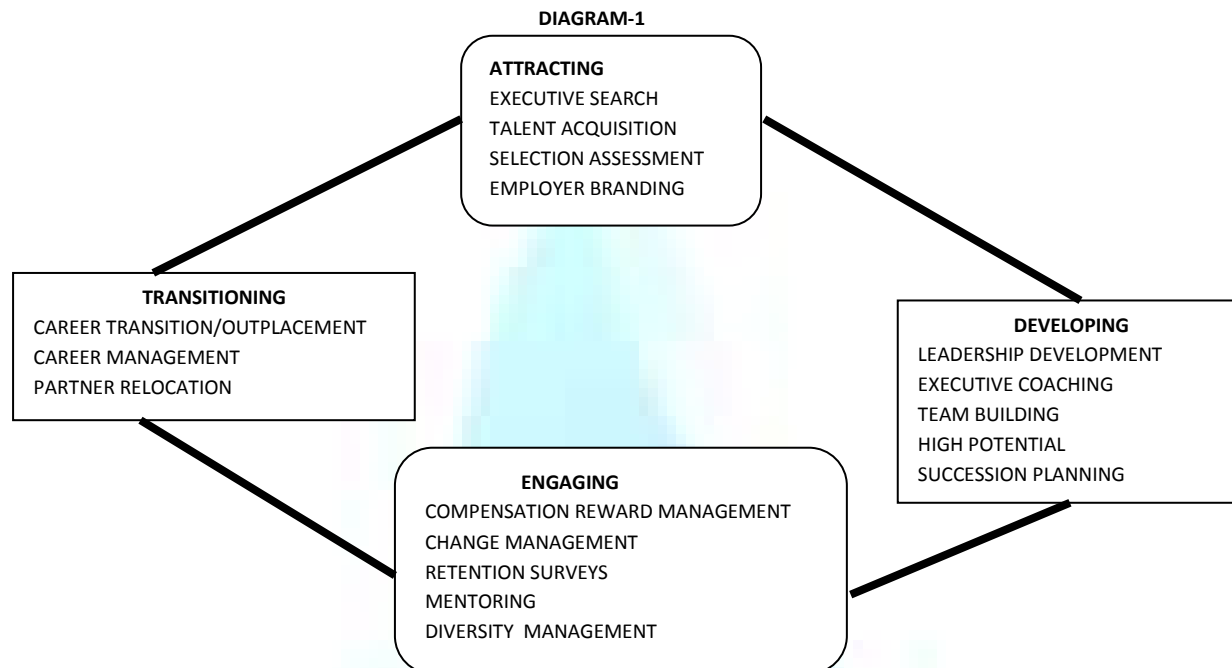
- Identifying the choice of employer chosen by high performers.
- Collecting the views of different age groups on recruitment.
- Evaluating talent acquisition tools and patterns and performance metrics.
- Defining strategic talent acquisition depending on the nature of the organization.
- Evaluating the HR strategies, policies and practices that support and aid Company's strategy.
- Learning from past experience.
- Designing important elements required to be incorporated.
- Continuous learning of current trends and practices in attracting and retaining talent.
- Having a clear understanding about the prospective employees, competencies, profiles, duties and responsibilities.
- Having a clear idea about the perfect profiles of the candidates.
- Conducting meticulous talent review process periodically.

Once the talents are acquired, they are needed to be managed carefully and effectively since the attrition costs high prices from the organizations and too much of employee turnover has an adverse effect on the organization's goodwill.

WHAT IS TALENT MANAGEMENT?

Organizations are made up of people: people creating value through proven business processes, innovation, customer service, sales, and many other important activities. As an organization strives to meet its business goals, it must make sure that it has a continuous and integrated process for recruiting, training, managing, supporting, and compensating these people.

The following model shows the complete process:



The main issues of talent management, which is necessarily required for retaining employees in organization involve:

- 1. Workforce Planning:** Integrated with the *business plan*, this process establishes workforce plans, hiring plans, compensation budgets, and hiring targets for the year. While planning the workforce, serious initiatives can be taken for hiring and accommodating women employees depending on three E's, namely experience, expertise and exposure in top managerial positions.
- 2. Recruiting:** Through an integrated process of recruiting, assessment, evaluation, and hiring the business brings people into the organization.
- 3. On boarding:** The organization must train and enable employees to become productive and integrated into the company more quickly. Women employees can also be trusted with predetermined targets, so that they can feel themselves as a part of the organization and can take proper initiatives to attain the organizational targets.
- 4. Performance Management:** By using the business plan, the organization establishes processes to measure and manage employees. This is a complex process in itself. It has been observed in several cases that the language of performance evaluation differs according to gender (Dominguez, 1992). The percentage of women in the top jobs still remains skewed in favour of men. Pay increases and promotions for females have not kept pace with those of men. In the male dominated environment of industry, women are appraised under more strict criteria than men, earn promotions with difficulty and lack a well-established network back up.
- 5. Training and Performance Support:** This is a critically important function. Proper learning and development programs should be arranged to manage the talents in the organization as well as to increase the productivity of the employees vis. a vis organization. This can be done to all levels of the organization. Special efforts should be given to enhance the skill and motivation level of the female employees in the top and middle management positions since even at senior level positions, female managers continue to be perceived as "women" first.
- 6. Succession Planning:** As the organization evolves and changes gradually, there is a continuous need to move people into new positions. Succession planning, a very important function, enables managers and individuals to identify the right candidates for a position. Women use their differences to add value to the organization in unique ways. A female oriented culture recognizes the importance of human relationships and communication (Peterson 2004). Thus, this function also must be aligned with the business plan to understand and meet requirements for key positions in future years ahead.
- 7. Compensation and Benefits:** Clearly this is an integral part of talent management. Here organizations try to tie the compensation plan directly to performance management so that compensation, incentives, and benefits align with business goals and business execution. However, in recent times, after the world had faced the climax of recession the concept of talent management has taken a new shape and form. Now it is not only responsible for sustaining employees in the organization, but to make their stay in the organization more rewarding psychologically, financially and through different developmental initiations. Today's Talent Management is following the pathway shown by various management experts like Peter Drucker, who wrote in 1973, "Making a living is no longer enough. Work also has to make a life."

TABLE - 5: THINKING ABOUT TALENT MANAGEMENT

	THE OLD WAY	THE NEW WAY
Talent Mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having good people is one of many important performance levers. • Human resource management is responsible for people management including recruitment, compensation, performance reviews, and succession planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having the right talent throughout the organization is a critical source of competitive advantage. • Support for talent management needs to flow from those at the very top. Every manager is responsible for attracting, developing, exciting, and retaining talented people.
Employee Value Proposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We expect people to pay their dues and work their way up the line before they get top jobs and higher salaries. • We have a strong value proposition that attracts potential employees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We think of our people as partners and volunteers and know we have to try to deliver on their dreams now if we are to keep them. • We have a distinctive employee value proposition that attracts and retains talented people
Recruiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment is like purchasing; it is about picking the best from a long line of candidates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment is more like marketing and selling; it is a key responsibility of all managers.
Growing Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development is training. • Development happens when you are fortunate enough to have a good manager. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development happens through a series of challenging job experiences, and candid and helpful coaching and mentoring. • Development is crucial to performance and retention and it can be institutionalized.
Differentiating and Affirming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiation undermines teamwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We shower our top performers with opportunities and recognition. We develop and nurture mid-performers. We help our lower performers raise their game or we move them out or aside.

Source: Adapted from Elizabeth Axelrod, Helen Handfield-Jones, and Timothy Welsh. 2001. *The War on Talent, Part Two*. McKinsey Quarterly. No. 2.

Proper direction from the superiors and organizational authority is required to make the dreams come true of the young aspiring talents of any organization. Continuous, regular and timely feedback in true sense, both positive and negative is required to uplift the enthusiasm as well as the productivity of the employees specially women who sometimes lack self confidence often stems from having to balance home and work in an unsupportive environment, confronting subtle humiliations in an intimidating macho-culture.

For this movement, the seniors should possess the following skills:

- Critical leadership skills include:
 1. Vision – the ability to visualize future business and societal paradigms to guide the organization's future.
 2. Inspiration – the ability to communicate the vision with such passion and conviction that the organization enrolls in achieving it.
 3. Conviction – the ability to prevail in the face of resistance (or opposition) to the change necessary to achieve the vision.
 4. Accountability – the ability (willingness) to hold one's self and others accountable for definable, specific, and measurable results that characterize the milestones and final destination.
 5. Faith – the willingness to recognize that there are often forces beyond one's control that intervenes in one's behalf where there is conviction.
- Critical management skills include:
 1. Delegating – the granting of authority is proportionate to existing and potential competency.
 2. Aligning – the ability to enroll and facilitate others to focus on achieving a common goal.
 3. Coaching – the process of facilitating an individual through a successful (behavioral) learning experience.
 4. Accountability – the ability (willingness) to hold one's self and others accountable for mutually agreed to measurable performance results.
 5. Managing Change – the ability to facilitate self and others through a transformation in mindset to accept a new reality.
 6. Diversity – the ability to facilitate the development and advancement of a diverse, multicultural work force.
 7. Wisdom – an in-depth understanding, empathy, and compassion for the human experience, such as patience, tolerance, and acceptance of the shortcomings of others.

CONCLUSION

The sum and substance of attrition management is that there is no universal tool, technique or solution to solve fully or partially the universal problem. But people who are staying in the organization, the "feel good factor" should be present with them, to make the work environment more comfortable and productive. Technological advances have led to ease of communication and brought the world closer. It is often assumed that bigger groups which are more globalised and better managed, provide a better work life balance for their employees specially females and their attrition rate is also lower. However, it is not the absolute truth in today's technologically sound world. Although the enhanced interpersonal exchanges have resulted in changes in values, gender discrimination remains still a reality in our society.

In our cultural legacy, from childhood, restrictions are not presented to the girl child as punitive measures but as the reality of the world in which she will leave; where she is used to compromise herself to suit the ground realities rather than revolting or standing up against them. Thus Indian women are more adaptive by nature and ready to adjust and learn new things as a part of life and essential for survival.

It is often found that, being highly educated, women managers remain in lower management positions with little access to challenges and power. They are promoted to senior positions but the job content and compensation remain lower than those offered to males in similar positions.

Here comes the concept of good HR practices. It is the ultimate answer for gaining the faith of this section of employees. But there are two pertinent questions still needed to be clarified-

- a. What are good HR practices?
- b. Do they really contribute to the bottom line effectively and retain women employees who are productive and also take developmental steps to make them more productive every year?

A shift towards employee relation's management that focuses on employees needs, aspirations and integrates individual growth prospects to strategic objectives of the organization. A proper combination of recruitment strategies, timely training and development interventions to maintain motivational levels, the rising aspiration levels of the employees, policy initiatives on the part of the HR to build a facilitative work culture would work best against growing attrition of women employees in the industry.

If not facilitated properly, women with high career aspirations often find the prospect of facing role conflict and the pressures that come with it is rather demoralizing. Thus the constitutional dream of gender equality remains miles away from becoming a reality.

But still we can remain optimist because women are the one who nurture the next generation. In whatever role they choose to be as a home maker, a professional, if their vision is broader, their insights are deep and they can create a suitable balance between their work and family life which is a difficult task indeed, they can sustain themselves in the industry despite of all the odds they have to come across, to build their career as well as for the benefit of the organization.

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