

Retaining Women Workforce

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Abstract:- The purpose of this paper is to provide a deeper understanding of why women choose to take a career break for various reasons and provide an analysis of all those women-friendly initiatives that are being taken up by various organizations in order to retain efficient women workforce.

The representation of women in the country's workforce has rapidly increased. The immense growth has attributed to socioeconomic and cultural shifts taking place in India. Improved employment access, education, fall in fertility rates and delayed fertility are all feeding into the structural change and increasing the number of women entering the workforce. There is also a big push amongst urban families to have two incomes, and cultural changes are reflecting this because there is now more acceptances towards women working. Despite all this, the number of women leaving work to be home with their family, children is on the rise.

Women earn a degree, enter into a profession at a very early age and begin to prove themselves in the job. But few years later they come across those important stages in life where they are forced to take the decision of quitting the job for personal reasons. This decision is taken especially on three occasions – When she gets relocated, when she gets married, or when she gives birth to a child. Quitting a job cannot be an impulsive decision as it affects her family security, independence and most importantly her future career and prospects. But most of the times it is becoming inevitable for a women to take the painful decision of quitting the job. She is forced to have few career breaks. Many women rejoin work. However, women who have taken a mid-career sabbatical struggle to get it right the second time.

This work tries to analyze the various measures and steps which can be taken to address such situations.

Keywords: Retention, women workforce, glass ceiling, gender bias, flexible hours, crèche, organizational culture, women empowerment, family, diversity, professional, education

INTRODUCTION

“Life is about everything, not just a certain aspect of it –not just the work.”

The world witnessed a boom in the engagement of women in the labor market in the last two decades. The increasing rates of women contributing in the work force has led to a more equal disbursement of hours worked across the regions of the world.

However, higher rate of attrition can be seen in women workforce. Restrictions on women's access to and participation in the workforce include the wage gap and the glass ceiling, inequities most identified with industrialized nations with nominal equal opportunity laws; legal and cultural restrictions on access to education and jobs, inequities most identified with developing nations; and unequal access to capital, variable but identified as a

difficulty in both industrialized and developing nations. Women are prevented from achieving complete gender equality in the workplace because of the “ideal-worker norm,” which “defines the committed worker as someone who works full time and full force for forty years straight,” a situation designed for the male sex (Williams 100). Women, in contrast, are still expected to fulfill the caretaker role and take time off for domestic needs such as pregnancy and ill family members, preventing them from conforming to the “ideal-worker norm.” With the current norm in place, women are forced to juggle full-time jobs and family care at home.

It is important to retain women workforce in order to promote ethnic and gender diversity, for better decision making, to enlarge and enrich the talent pool, empower women.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

This paper is aimed at providing an insight into the challenges faced by women to participate in labor employment, the various factors responsible for the high attrition in women. It also highlights the women friendly initiative taken by the organizations to retain the efficient women workforce.

Retention of women workforce is beneficial to both the employees and the employers. For this purpose, this paper has been chosen to analyze the ways the retain the potential women talent.

OBJECTIVES

To study the importance of retention of women workforce

To find out the difficulties faced by the women employees in career growth

To identify the unique measures taken by various companies to retain its women workforce

To offer suitable suggestions to improve the retention policies of the organization

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last two decades rates of women's participation in paid labor market has greatly increased. There are a lot of women who are extremely career driven and many who manage to build both their career and raise a family, but they fail to get the right support to go higher up the ladder to make a successful career.

Debbie Salas-Lopez (in 2011) has mentioned the article ‘Women leaders – Challenges, Successes and other insights from the top’ that “Attrition in women is an issue for many reasons, including traditional gender roles that may affect how women are perceived and the choices they

have available (or they make), a lack of role models, the undervaluing of women's traditional communication and leadership styles, and organizational culture."

A study, (Towers 2008) on gender bias and discrimination, found that women have to develop more socialization than men in order to be equally successful.

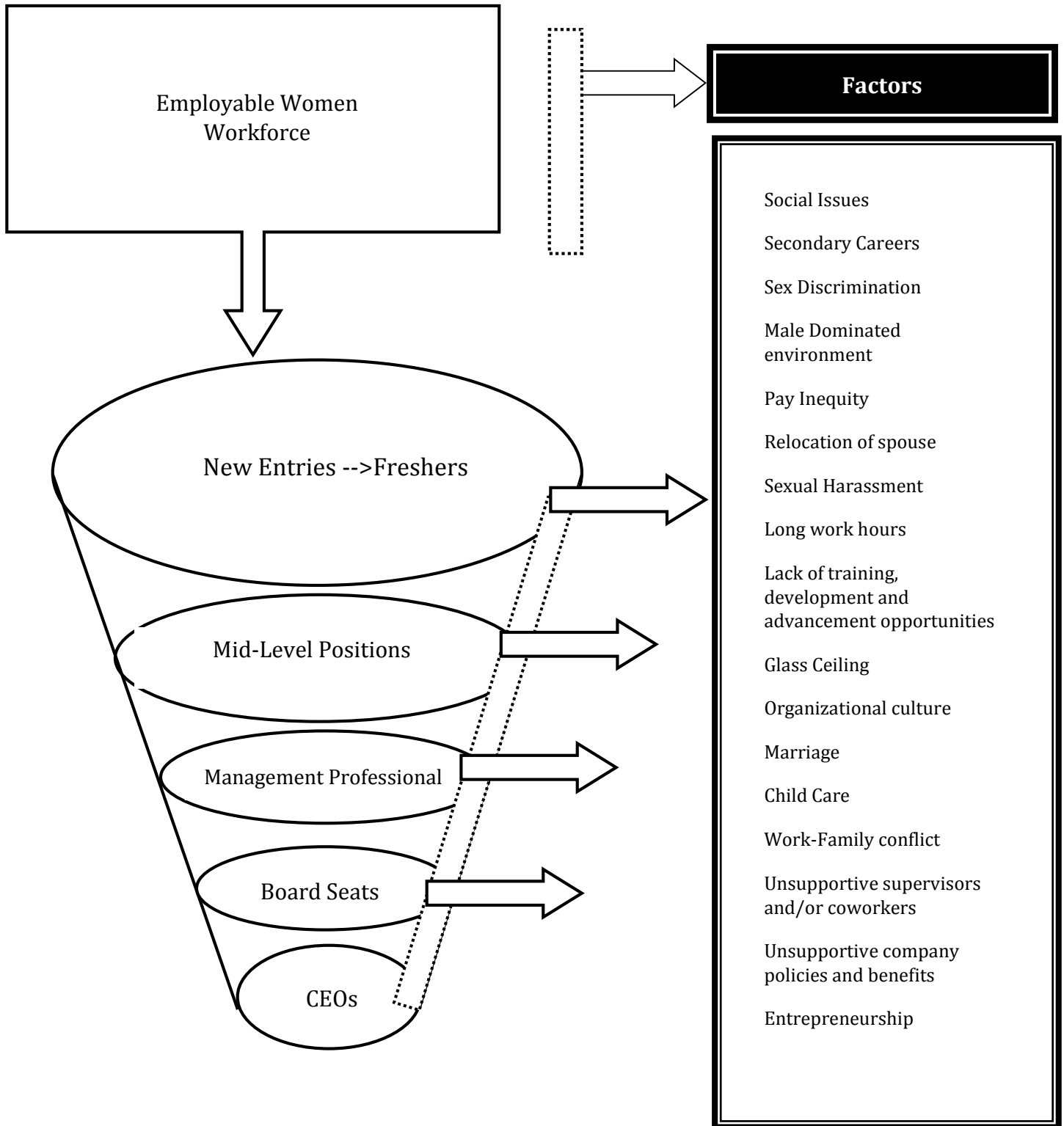
Becky Barrow(2007) in the article "Women high-flyers quit to see more of the children" has opined that "The pressures of combining family life with a demanding job are forcing increasing number of women to abandon successful careers. More and more women workforce are considering not returning to work from maternity leave – not through choice, but because of inflexible working and corporate culture issues. Flexibility matters to women. They want flexibility in those arrangements –the chance to make choices that enable them to be successful throughout their career and their personal lives. Few others are changing direction because their earning even as senior managers leave them unable to afford childcare. The increase in the cost of child-care is forcing more mothers to quit jobs. To see so many women withdraw from the job market is a woeful waste of potential. Many are choosing to set up their own businesses where they can dictate their working hours."

McPherson, John R (2008) - "The challenge of hiring and retaining women". In this article it's mentioned Beth Axelrod (Head HR eBay) opines that "It's important for a company's workforce to not only reflect the diversity of talent available in the world today but also mirror the diversity of its customer base. A family-friendly working environment and an optimal work-life balance are crucial to retaining women in the workforce.

To effectively retain women, a company has to put in place certain foundational processes or systems. Some of them are –ensuring that the basic conditions of a meritocracy are in place, ensuring there is no gender bias, employee engagement, promote the presence of women in higher positions to build a more supportive environment."

Lisa J.Servon and M. Anne Visser (2011) "The other important measures to motivate and retain women include providing flexible hours of work, provide crèche facilities, adopt family friendly policies, people systems and processes must be fair."

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



DISCUSSION

Through the study it was possible to understand the fact that the women are an underrepresented community in all fields of work and profession. In an organization this underrepresentation is very evident as the gender diversity statistics show. There have been a lot of attempts to address the issue of under representation of women and the solutions that few organizations have come up with and implemented have not yielded the desired result for both, the organization as well as the women workers. Policies like flexi timings and work from home, though seemed promising, did not counter the problem of women workforce leaving the organizations or work.

The recent developments in this arena seems a little more promising than any other schemes that have been earlier formulated. The fact that the drivers of the change are women themselves makes us believe in the promise. This was evident when Ms. Arundathi Bhattacharya became the first women chief of SBI. In one of her press release she said, "Being a women myself, I think women employees have special problems. I will try to be more sensitive to that."

The organizations, should now concentrate more on identifying and understanding those policies, which are acting as impediments for advancement of women at the profession and work place and identify and share the best practices and policies that can lead toward sustainability of successful interventions.

Entrepreneurship is the new buzz word amongst women who are looking for a second employment. There are a lot of initiatives taken up by a lot of women leaders to help women who are looking for a second employment or aspiring to be entrepreneurs. "Women entrepreneurs swim against the tide in a male dominated workplace. But now a new wave of initiatives is helping them forge ahead." Ms Kanchana Banerjee writes thus in The Hindu, under the column Boardroom blues. Initiatives like FITE (financial independence through entrepreneurship), which provides microfinance loans for women who want to be entrepreneurs has helped more than 30000 women across 68 countries. Ruche Mittal, who is a designer entrepreneur, has started a network by name HEN (her entrepreneurial network), for women to collaborate on projects and help each other with contacts, share knowledge and inputs. An initiative by Pearl Uppal, with the name Founders in Heels, acts as a networking and

mentoring platform for women to support them primarily in tech based industries. Companies are leveraging networks for high potential women executives as well as in house programmes to nurture women within organization for leadership positions writes Ms Kanchana. Cadbury recently introduce the 'My Mentor' programme to encourage women to aspire to senior leadership roles. Other companies like Accenture, Boston Consulting Group and Coca Cola are recognizing formal women networks as a critical retention tool for women leaders at mid career levels. Arun Duggal of ShriRam has roped in 24 senior leaders to mentor competent women to go on to become independent directors. A good sign is that organizations are facing a lot of public demand in the AGM's demanding better representation of women.

With such schemes and programmes in place we can hope to see the change in numbers of gender diversity at work place.

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