

GENDER EQUALITY AT WORK PLACE - IMPLICATIONS FOR INNOVATIVE HR PRACTICES IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

Due to the liberalization and improvements in telecom infrastructure, Indian information technology industry has seen tremendous growth since 1995. This is evident from the fact that India has become a key player in the global software outsourcing business, with a compounding yearly growth rate of about 50 percent during the 1990s. This sector is the face of liberalized Indian economy with the total exports revenue reaching a whopping \$ 80 billion in 2011-12. The most important resource required for the survival of software production and service industry is the availability of educated technical workforce and this gives India the cutting edge advantage of difference in cost of labor compared to the U.S or Europe. From the perspective of the work force, software sector has created a friendly platform for young women graduates because of its gender equality oriented practices. According to the NASSCOM figures, women constitute about 23 percent of the total workforce in the sector. Companies have taken extra effort to put in place employee friendly rules and regulations to ensure that they could retain the small pool of well qualified employees. Even though many organizations are coming up with women friendly practices such as options for part time work, working from home or provision of crèche, women is still underrepresented in the industry. This study tries to examine whether gender has any influence on perception of innovative human resource practices of employees working in the sector. A sample of 400 employees working in 15 IT firms was chosen for data collection and data was captured with the help of structured questionnaires. Data analysis was carried out with the help of one way ANOVA using SPSS software. It was found that gender has an influence on perception of innovative human resource practices of employees.

Key words: gender equality, innovative human resource practices, information technology industry.

I. INTRODUCTION

The growth of information technology sector can be mainly attributed to the globalization phenomenon and the industry and the industry has captured 51 percentage of the world market (Kumar, 2001). Gender issues in the information technology sector have to be understood within the setting of the distinctive work culture and system of management that have developed in the industry. Software firms appear to have highly enlightened managements, human resource professionals and other top managers who are well aware about the importance

of women friendly workplace and providing equality of opportunity. But, there is a visible gap between formal company policy and real practice which leads to rampant gender inequalities experienced by women at all levels. There are many factors that restrict women from putting in their full potential at work. First, women are unwilling or unable to spend as many hours as their male colleagues because of marital commitments and family pressure. Research has shown that women put in fewer hours compared to men working in information technology sector (Rothboeck et al., 2001).

The demand for continuous travel is another problem faced by women working in information technology sector. Apart from this, breaks in women's career as a result of child bearing were found to be having adverse effect on their growth. Women continuously struggle to balance professional and domestic responsibilities with little help from their family or male counterparts (Kelker & Nathan, 2002). These are the main reasons why IT firms struggle to maintain their valuable women employees to retain their competitive advantage. Research done by Shankar (2008) has found that women professional tend to concentrate at entry and intermediate level compared to middle and upper positions, thus, creating an invisible glass ceiling. Many of the multinational software companies are facing serious dearth of talented and resourceful female employees in their board rooms leading to lop sided decisions. For example, the senior management of Infosys consists of 2% women employees. The study tries to find out whether gender has any influence on the perception of innovative human resource practices experienced by employees working in IT industry.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Innovative human resource practices (IHRP)

Success is the outcome of an effective organization. Studies have shown that only 16% of the firms have proper strategies in place to survive in a competitive environment. High performance organizations are characterized by five important characteristics such as visionary leadership, accountability, talented labor force, frontline execution and high performance work culture (Rogers & Blenko, 2006). If an organization wants to maintain a high performance culture, it has to introduce innovative human resource practices. Innovative HR practices can be referred to as the purposeful introduction and application of any previously unexplored concepts or systems built to influence the behavior of employees with the objective of achieving enhanced organizational performance, identified and introduced by HR practitioners. These practices will lead to better financial performance when employees possess the right kind of skill are motivated to apply them for organizational success (MacDuffie, 1995).

Researchers have found out significant linkage between innovative HR practices and organizational performance (Inchinowski et al., 1996). There are many practices that come under the umbrella term innovative HR practices which include employee acquisition strategies, employee retention strategies, compensation and benefits, rewards and recognition, technical training, management development, career planning and enhancement activities, performance appraisals, potential development, succession planning, employee relations with a human face and employee exit. A study done by Ashok Som (2006) suggested that innovative HR practices contribute in a great way to ease the change process. Many researchers (Arnett & Obert, 1995; Dessler, 1999; Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999) have argued that innovative HR practices help in enhancing effectiveness in

organizations and retain talented employees. Innovative HR practices in the present study are operationalized as the extent to which the importance, introduction and satisfaction of these practices are perceived by employees of an IT firm obtained using the tool developed by Tanuja Agarwala (2003). Talukder and associates (2007) included demographic variables like gender, age, educational level and training level as factors affecting employee's perception towards organization and innovative human resource practices.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the study falls under the category of descriptive design. The study is descriptive in that it tries to describe the distribution of employees who have different perceptions regarding the importance, extent of introduction and satisfaction levels in respect to the innovative HR practices in their respective organizations. A sample of 400 employees working in 8 software firms with an experience of more than one year in their respective firms were selected for data collection. A tool developed by Tanuja Agarwala (2003) was used to measure perception of employees towards importance, introduction and satisfaction of innovative HR practices. Out of the 400 employees, 350 of the returned the questionnaire of which 330 were found to be useful. One way ANOVA test was carried out with the help of SPSS software to do the data analysis. Data collection was done during the time period spanning from September 2015 to December 2015.

3.1. DATA ANALYSIS

Influence of gender on perceived importance of innovative human resource practices

One way ANOVA was used for testing hypothesis H1 which were about the significant difference in perceived importance of innovative human resource practices across gender. H1 was stated as:

H1 - There is a significant difference in the perceived importance of innovative human resource practices across gender.

ANOVA-test results for gender and perceived importance of innovative human resource practices

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
IHRP - Imple	Between groups	1.762	1	1.762	2.385	.001*
	Within groups	132.263	328	.395		
	Total	137.194	329			

The one way ANOVA results done on perceived importance of innovative human resource practices with gender showed that the values are significant at 5% level. Hence, there is a difference in the perceived importance of innovative human resource practices with regards to gender of the employees. H1 is therefore

accepted. . The mean value of male employees was found to be 3.56 and that of female employees was found to be 3.71. So it can be inferred that female employees perceived higher levels of perceived importance of innovative human resource practices compared to that of male employees.

3.2. Influence of gender on perceived introduction of innovative human resource practices

One way ANOVA was used for testing hypothesis H2 which were about the significant difference in perceived introduction of innovative human resource practices across gender. H2 was stated as:

H2 - There is a significant difference in the perceived introduction of innovative human resource practices across gender.

ANOVA-test results for gender and perceived introduction of innovative human resource practices

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
IHRP - Intro	Between groups	1.311	1	1.311	2.923	.004*
	Within groups	135.424	328	.319		
	Total	139.653	329			

The one way ANOVA results done on perceived introduction of innovative human resource practices with gender showed that the values are significant at 5% level. Hence, there is a difference in the perceived introduction of innovative human resource practices with regards to gender of the employees. H2 is therefore accepted. The mean value of male employees was found to be 3.33 and that of female employees was found to be 3.73. So it can be inferred that female employees perceived higher levels of perceived introduction of innovative human resource practices compared to that of male employees.

3.3. Influence of gender on perceived satisfaction of innovative human resource practices

One way ANOVA was used for testing hypothesis H3 which were about the significant difference in perceived satisfaction of innovative human resource practices across gender. H3 was stated as:

H3 - There is a significant difference in the perceived satisfaction of innovative human resource practices across gender.

ANOVA-test results for gender and perceived satisfaction of innovative human resource practices

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
IHRP - Sat	Between groups	1.119	1	1.119	2.627	.008*
	Within groups	146.824	328	.348		
	Total	148.104	329			

(* indicates items significant at 5% significance level)

The one way ANOVA results done on perceived satisfaction of innovative human resource practices with gender showed that the values are significant at 5% level. Hence, there is a difference in the perceived satisfaction of innovative human resource practices with regards to gender of the employees. H3 is therefore accepted. The mean value of male employees was found to be 3.22 and that of female employees was found to be 3.39. So it can be inferred that female employees perceived higher levels of perceived satisfaction of innovative human resource practices compared to that of male employees.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the data analysis, it is clear that perception of innovative HR practices is influenced by gender. It was also found that there is a significance difference in the perceived importance, introduction and satisfaction of innovative HR practices among gender. Further analysis showed that female employees perceived higher levels of the perceived importance, introduction and satisfaction of innovative HR practices compared to that of male employees working in IT industry. These results show that practices promoting gender equality adopted by major IT players have been effective. Castells (1997) found out that Network enterprises give more autonomy to employees by decentralization of work tasks, splitting work and managing it in an interactive network of communication in real life. Beck suggested that woman with equal educational opportunities and increased awareness of their position has great expectations of more equality and partnership in professional life.

A lot of software organizations have done much for the cause of gender equality and the key to success is to create a platform for women to realize their potential and pursue their dreams. For example, IBM has trained young girls from rural background in mathematics and sciences so that they could enter into the glamorous and lucrative profession of software engineering. Apart from organizations, Government of India takes special care to acknowledge women who have succeeded and forwards congratulatory messages encouraging girls to become like women role models such as Indra Nooyi. A study done by NASSCOM – Mercher (2009) revealed that software companies are yet to adopt mentoring and sponsorship programs effectively. Almost 80 percent of participating firms feel that the best measures for developing women employees are exclusive training and development programs. For instance, Infosys coordinates conferences and seminars exclusively for women and

built special portals as a part of their gender equality programs. These initiatives are communicated from the top management to creative visibility and steer the initiative.

V. CONCLUSION

Within the last two decades, software industry in India has become the largest private sector job provider in the entire country. Due to its policies promoting gender equality, the industry has attracted thousands of women to become a part of the software community. Due to the high turnover rates suffered by software firms, companies have put in place employee friendly and gender equality promoting human resource policies to ensure that they could retain their valuable employees. Moreover, emphasis on equal opportunity for women and meritocracy has encouraged many women who get into the technical and managerial positions where they could prove their mettle. NASSCOM has affirmed that the practice adopted by software firms to promote gender equality has worked well. This claim is evident from the fact that male: female ratio in IT industry has improved from 70:24 in 2005 to 70:30 at present.

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