

# Women Leader: Fulfilling Career Aspirations

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## INTRODUCTION

Life is all about letting go of the past, and grabbing the future. One great man once said, "The rung of a ladder was never meant to rest upon, but only to hold your foot long enough to put the other foot higher". Graduation day is the day when we have to let go of the rung of the ladder and step higher towards our eternal destination. Our problems are rooted in the past mistakes, not our capacity for future greatness.

"Chase your dreams, face your fears, and dare to do the impossible". It is that should accept our limitations, but we shouldn't let them limit us, it is also said that, "we don't always get what we want in life; some time the circumstance don't allow us to. At a time like that, we need to learn how to change ourselves. But it is sure we have our self to conquer the looming challenges and chart our way to a successful future. The leadership challenges that prevail today and the leadership style changes that are demanded of all incumbent and aspiring leaders have prepared women to cope with new challenges better than their male counterparts. In a country like India women as leaders have received far more acceptability due to their style flexibility.

Women have developed a way of life and work which have determined their attitude towards work and home and enabled them to develop a deeper philosophical manifesto. This sort of approach on the part of women will make them outstanding women leaders to develop and sustain in all types of organizations. In every scenario that leads to economic value creation women has been playing a value role. Over the last decade, there has been dramatic change in the number of women who have entered into the Indian corporate world. Women entrepreneurs are setting up business of their own at various stages of life because of a variety of reasons viz., independence, flexibility, and desire to make a difference and making money. As the women is being increasing in the work force, the major challenge that poses a women is the gender diversity. This calls for new policies, new mindsets and new work ethics. Several organizations now have developed women friendly policies with the objective of attracting and retaining women in large numbers.

There is a clear shift from the earlier paternalistic push strategy (whereby career development was the responsibility) to an employer driven pull strategy where

women is being persuaded to take responsibility for managing her career.

In today's external environment, all organizations do not think it is possible and do not want to offer a value proposition that includes lifetime career development in exchange for tenure /loyalty for the society. Organizations believe that the employee value proposition in the "new deal at work" is to give transparent career development opportunities to those with potential and performance in exchange for the optimum application of their skills and knowledge till such time they are with the company.

So, while the focus is on creating a self-development culture, organizations seem to take the responsibility for setting expectations, creating growth paths and communicating the framework to the employees.

Career management and development is hence seen as a partnership between the organization and the individuals, and it is in both parties' interests to collaborate. The organization's responsibilities in this "new deal at work" are:

- To set the right expectations while hiring employees
- To adopt a participative approach to career development
- To develop a career development framework that caters to the high potential/high performance employees
- To articulate the competencies required for different roles for employee self development
- To communicate and be transparent with career opportunities within the organization

## THE INDIVIDUALS 'RESPONSIBILITIES ARE

- To take onus for managing their own careers
- To take efforts to educate themselves on the competency framework and the career development framework
- To continuously assess themselves and make the efforts to consciously develop their competencies
- To use organizational initiatives for employee development to further develop themselves
- To plan their careers for the short term & long term keeping in mind possible opportunities that the organization makes available

By doing this, organizations are conveying a clear message to their employees that they are empowering and supporting

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them in their development, but they are not responsible for their career development.

## **CAREER PROGRESSION BASED ON COMPETENCIES' AND NOT TENURE**

There has been a significant shift to use competencies as the basis for career progress in thereby moving away from tenure or time based promotions.

To do this, organizations have had to define the competencies required at various levels and articulate them with clarity in terms of its behavioral indicators. The competency framework is not just the foundation for career progression but also linked to the many other development initiatives of the organization.

A Competency Assessment Process becoming essential either through assessment centers or the Manager's Assessment.

All organizations in the study have implemented some kind of process to assess employees on competencies which subsequently have been used for career progression decisions.

The assessment is administered by the supervising manager of the employee or by an internal panel or by an external agency through trained assessors.

Some organizations also use performance ratings, peer assessments or 360 degree feedback to corroborate the Assessment Centre result.

In organizations where the people managers assess their employees, the competency assessment forms part of the performance management system focusing on their aspects:

- Goals and objectives
- Job skills the functional and technical skills that one requires to carry out their role
- Leadership competencies the behaviors that are required for the future

The organization uses the performance appraisal discussion for assessing the above three areas and hiring the employee and the manager to understand what experiences the employee needs to go through in order to grow and build a career.

The advantage of this integration is that assessment of performance and competency is completed at the same time. However, there are two potential degrees of merging competency assessment with the performance appraisal process.

1. Firstly the linkage of perceived linkage with rewards makes objective self-assessment by the employee tougher.
2. Secondly, the parameters of assessment for the purposes of development and progression could vary a development objective would require assessment of competencies applicable to the current level, while a progression objective would require assessment of competencies applicable at the next level. Some

companies resolve this issue by assessing employees on additional competencies either through an assessment centre or in a separate discussion with the manager.

## **ORGANIZATIONS ATTEMPTING TO PUSH PROMOTION TIME LINES**

In the early stages of BPO industry there was an urgent need for people at different levels, especially the need for people managers. Employees in their early 20's with just 2+years experience were seen as "veterans " in the industry and were quickly promoted and given people management responsibilities .Similarly, even in the IT industry, many employees became project managers quite early in their careers.

As the industry is maturing and a base level of talent is available, Organizations are increasingly pushing promotion time lines, reflecting the emergence of a more realistic opportunity scenario.

## **MOBILITY WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION THROUGH OPEN JOB POSTING SYSTEMS AND NOT THROUGH TRADITIONAL JOB ROTATIONS.**

Many of the organizations we surveyed have discontinued their job rotation system of the past and have moved to an open job posting system. They seem to have encountered two challenges with the traditional job rotation system:

- It was not benefitting the organization directly since it did not help in filling up existing vacancies
- It was placing onus on the organization in creating opportunities for employees.

Having said this about job rotation, there are mixed trends observed with the Open Job Posting (OJP) since the transformation has not necessarily been smooth.

The successful organizations seem to have good support systems that have enabled the OJP system to work as well oiled machinery. Some others have pursued the profession development path where it becomes a planned movement of employees and is through a consensus of the manager and the employee.

While the OJP has the lofty goal of "providing careers within rather than outside ", its execution has been plagued by some major obstacles:

- Finding timely replacement of talent in place of the employees opting out through the OJP has become a challenge. It requires great planning and effort on the part of the manager to ensure smooth transition.
- Employees working on projects at customer sites especially in the IT industry, have a problem of moving out primarily because of the familiarity with the customer and the customer's insistence on continuity. Given the business sensitiveness, these moves get stalled and the organization is seen as not living up to the commitments of the OJP system.

- The manager is not prepared to let go of his talent and risk his deliverables as finding trained replacements have become a Herculean task given the tight external labour market.
- On the employee's part there entry if unsuccessful is not necessarily a very pleasant experience. This ends up creating a fear of failure.

In organizations where OJP system has matured Managers proactively counsel their employees to apply for internal movements and it is further facilitated by Career Counselors and/or skip-level Managers.

A critical success factor in implementing an OJP is the positioning of lateral career movement as a positive opportunity even as the Broad banding system and the business require the flexibility of moving employees across more frequently as and when the need arises. In all this, there is a phenomenal task for HR to communicate that job enrichment is also a means of building careers for employees.

## **CREATING CROSS-BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE ACROSS THE LARGER ORGANIZATION**

The larger global organization seems to have the benefit of offering global opportunities and is increasingly doing this through the global OJP system. This is a win win as Indian talent has now become increasingly recognized as globally valuable. It also helps retention in a big way.

### **BEST PRACTICES**

We give below some the organization practices that are worth examining closely for adoption:

#### **A well—articulated Employee Value proposition**

An Employee Value Proposition simply stated, is the organization's compelling answer to the question "Why would a talented person choose to work for this organization?"

There are well articulated EVP such as "adding vitality to life." All the communication efforts at every stage emphasise the message. All initiatives, including Career Development, are aligned to this proposition. Another example of an EVP would be offer abundant opportunities across the organization and to make sure that EVP of mobility stands the test of time in the organization. This becomes the core around which HR rallies many of its programme to ensure its success. Organizations with a well articulated EVP seem to have a distinct edge.

### **MULTIPLE CAREER LADDERS TO CATER TO DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS OF PEOPLE**

While the majority of employees perceive that the only way to progress is by taking on people management responsibilities, there are some who value technical specialization.

The approach of creating multiple career ladders caters to the varied needs of people. Multiple career ladders are alternative ladders to the people—management ladder.

Depending on the business, these ladders could be technical, functional domain-related or support to core operations.

Multiple career ladders send a clear message that the organization is committed to creating different and distinct value-added roles for employees based on business needs and

people aspirations. The ability to create technical specialists and experts is seen by many organizations as an important building block towards securing future competitive advantage.

#### **The career counselor role to facilitate career Development**

Some organizations have institutionalized career enabler roles, typically designated Career Counselors, who interface with the manager, the employee and HR to ensure that career development processes are administered effectively.

Employees who aspire to move to a particular role can first discuss with their Career Counselor to get a holistic view of the role and understand the pros and the cons of the move into the role as well as the competencies required to perform the role. This helps employees make a well informed choice.

Career Counselors also network with managers and other career counselors in different parts of the business so that they can promote informal discussions about possible roles and competencies. Individuals who perform the role of career counselor are often selected from within the business and in some cases on a part time basis. The intention of the career Counselor role is to complement the career discussion process between managers & employees and is not meant to replace it.

#### **Tracking of Top Talent**

Some organizations believe that while they are responsible for offering career development opportunities to all, they also need to bring special focus on their key talent by developing career strategies that will help develop and retain this group of employees.

The Top Talent Programme in organizations typically involves:

1. A transparent system of identifying talent
2. Assessments to further identify the strength, leadership potential and so on
3. Focused development programs
4. Identifying opportunities and career progression
5. Retention strategies :Pay, rewards and recognition, ESOPs
6. Attrition risk analysis

The top talent program is constantly reviewed by the senior management team and HR plays a major role in driving this initiative.

#### **Educational Opportunities and competency Based Development Programme For employees**

The BPO industry has created a large number of jobs for people who enter the labour market immediately after their graduation. Through exit interviews and attrition analysis, it has been found that many of these people leave for higher education. This analysis suggests that young graduates consider higher qualifications to be of great value.

Organizations have responded to this need by providing education opportunities to their employees by providing with educational institutions and also by giving the necessary time offs for this.

Organizations are also implementing learning initiatives to develop specific competencies. These programmes have high learning effectiveness as they focus on developing the behaviours associated with competency. This is in contrast to general programs which do not promote the critical behavior that the organization expects.

While most of the organizations run these programs for all people moving to a particular level of responsibility, a few organizations have chosen to make them more aspirational in nature. In the latter cases, the participants are chosen based on a combination of assessment, performance ratings and nominations by managers.

#### Qualifying Development Programme That Are Mandatory Before Promotion

Many organizations have found it necessary for their people to go through structured learning programme and qualify/certify themselves before they progress to the next level. This is a requirement especially for those progressing to people manager responsibilities.

#### Work force planning Systems that Drive Career Development Keeping in Mind Business Needs

Organizations are developing robust systems of workforce planning (despite the vagaries of the market) to ensure that career development happens in the context of business needs. Planning how many people are needed in the next year, by roles /positions and competencies, enables the organization to work towards getting those people through the career development process.

Organizations have established functional resource committees for all key functions. These committees lead discussions to identify the new requirements, vacancies and opportunities in their respective functions. This then gets fed into the career development system and the top talent management system. The OJP system is also integrated into the workforce planning process. Since the OJP depends on vacancies in various processes, workforce planning helps the organization estimate the likely number of vacancies keeping in mind business growth, estimated attrition within the process and estimated career development through and out of the process.

These organizations believe that workforce planning is a critical success factor for the OJP to work successfully.

Our challenge as leaders is to ultimately ensure that people enjoy what they are doing and they own the dream that we may have as leader for the company. We need to assume a facilitators role by assisting the employees in their journey to achieve difficult targets.

To facilitate the process of turnaround, one also needs to put in enabling processes like

a) Award and Recognition Systems

b) Development of Talent and appropriate skills in employees

The Award and Recognition System should be fair, transparent and should necessarily ensure that the awards are given where the Group values have been properly adhered to. We have been stressing on the leadership core value which are as under

- Customer Sovereignty
- Passion for Superior Performance
- People Orientation
- Transparency & Integrity
- Anticipation, Speed and Flexibility
- Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Today has a new dream which is the screen saver on the computer of all the leaders in the society.

World No.1  
  
Achieve Quality  
&  
Service Leadership  
  
It will be done  
I have to do it

The above enables focusing on the criticality of achieving strategic challenges of "Quality and Service Leadership" and maintaining the spirit of "It will be done" and "I have to do it".

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