Is Information Technology an equal opportunity employment sector? A study with special reference to Kerala

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ABSTRACT

Information Technology (IT) industry is considered as the highest paying industry. The present study is intended to find out whether IT industry is an equal opportunity employment sector as it often claims. It is done as part of a larger study, descriptive cum explorative in nature to understand the general characteristic of the work environment of IT organization in Kerala, the socio-cultural and familial background of professionals and their family issues related with work. India is expected to become a global leader in manpower especially in the technology segment and IT is considered as the highest paying industry across the world. Thus, this study is significant in finding out current status and suggesting possible interventions.

KEYWORDS : Job, socio-cultural, socio-economic, software, information Technology, career,

Introduction

The socio-economic profile of the employee has strong causal implications on the employment environment. Information Technology segment often claims it as an equal opportunity employment sector. This paper examines this claim by while presenting the socio economic profile of the IT professionals in Kerala. The present study considers age, sex, educational level, religion, caste, marital status of the employees and arrive conclusion based on the analysis of collected data. The data collected have been processed, tabulated and presented in this paper.

Research Methodology

The present paper is the outcome of a larger study mostly descriptive cum explorative in nature to understand the IT work environment and its impact on the family of IT professionals. A mixed method study (a medley of qualitative and quantitative analysis) was adopted to identify the issues and conditions among professionals working in the IT segment such as work culture, job stress, family environment, marital quality etc. The study has been conducted in three phases; phase-1 of the study was conducted on a small subset of IT workforce– the coterie of pregnant women working in the IT, while qualitative study in phase - 2 takes a deeper look into the problem, and quantitative study in phase - 3 helps evaluate the hypothesis formulated after phase - 2 and validate the inference derived from the qualitative study. Phase – 2, being qualitative, covers a broad range of issues. While Phase - 3 uses structured questionnaires and statistical analysis to evaluate the hypothesis formed after phase - 2. The current paper evolves out of phase-3 study.

The researcher developed hypothesis based on the qualitative analysis of the data acquired from the software professionals, HR Managers and from the key informants in Phase -2 of the study. These hypotheses were tested against the analysis of the data collected from 270 software professionals and their spouses using closed ended questionnaires. A pre-test was conducted to test for ambiguities and confusing terminology, to determine if response choices provided adequate item variance, and to obtain overall reactions to the questionnaire. Ambiguous, confusing items and directions for filling up the questionnaire were altered on the basis of feedbacks from test participants. Prior to the pre testing, the questionnaires with couples were examined by an expert panel of three faculty members who affirmed that the questionnaires had both structural validity and content validity. Content validity was shown through an agreement of a positive relationship between the questionnaire items and the literature reviewed. A pilot test was done before finalizing the tool. Pilot test is meant for fixing the time limit of the test and for determining the ambiguity if any in the item construction. The test was therefore pilot administered to 30 IT professionals. Sufficient instructions were given to the professional to ensure an appropriate and optimum response to the test. The investigator was able to correct the items and to find out the difficulties faced by the individual in answering the test. After the pilot test

the necessary modifications were effected in consultation with the subject expert. Moreover the internal consistency of the dimensions related to family environment was determined using alpha reliability. Internal consistency of the statements in some of the dimensions related to family environment and marital quality were done using alpha reliability. Worked out Alpha reliability is found to be greater than 0.5 for all except active recreational orientation which indicates, the statements are a reliable measure to gauge that dimensions. Content validity of the tool is checked against careful examination of related factors objectives and the judgment of subject matter experts. The expert panel and pre test group of IT professionals and their spouses responded to the questionnaire, indicating unclear, ambiguous items leading to confusions. Fuzzy areas were reviewed and necessary changes effected.

The snowball technique was deemed an appropriate sampling technique for this specialized population because of the difficulty of locating professionals working on a very busy schedule using random sampling methods. This process continued until the list of participants expanded to 279 couples. The data requirement was stratified as follows.

1) Both the partners are working in IT Sector
2) One of the partners is working in IT Sector and the other in Non IT Sector
3) One of the partners is working in IT Sector and the other is a Home Manager Care was taken to include equal number of couples from each group.

The theoretical model for the third part of the research study is developed on the basis of 'Total Design Method' developed by Don A. Dolman in Social and Economic Sciences Research Centre and Departments of Sociology and Rural Sociology in Washington State University, which improves the response rate of the quality and quantity in mail surveys by applying the principle of social exchange (Dillman, 1978). He argues that the response rate can be increased by creating a positive social exchange situation. Social exchange theory posits the formation of human relationships by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis and comparison of alternatives. For example, when a person perceives the costs of relationship to outweigh the perceived benefits, the theory predicts, the person will choose to opt out of the relationship. Rational choice theory is a way of looking at deliberations between a number of potential courses of action, in which "rationality" of one form or another is used either to decide which course of action would be the best to take, or to predict which course of action actually will be taken. Social exchange theory deals with the notion of reciprocity, that is, what you do for me may entice me to do something for you. When designing surveys, it has to be kept in mind how social exchange theory can play a role in increasing survey response rates.

Tell survey participants how they will benefit from completing the survey (e.g. how will the survey form be used so that they will provide advice or receive benefit)

• Provide information about the survey in advance
• Include a cover letter with mail questionnaires
• Follow-up to thank people for participating and/or provide additional opportunities to give feedback.
• Minimize the effort required for survey participation like using easily understandable language, minimizing the number of questions, avoiding redundancies.
• Create a sense of trust; a sense of personal interaction within the survey's design can encourage people to participate in surveys and to provide more thoughtful answers.

The researcher contacted the professionals who co-operated with the researcher in the unstructured interview and whose case is listed in this paper to get the information about their married friends working in the same profession. This modification of the snowball technique of selection (Smith, 1981), in which a small number of potential participants identify other potential participants, who in turn identify other participants (Stanfield,1998), was used to obtain names, e-mail ids and cell numbers of IT professionals satisfying the criteria of selection.

Request mail was designed according to the Total Design Method (Dillman, 1978) and sent to the professionals asking the candidate's and spouse's willingness to participate in the survey. Any clue to the identity of the particular professional is deliberately avoided to keep the confidentiality of the process. The candidates who conveyed their willingness to participate were contacted over phone; their spouses' telephone numbers collected and were interviewed. The candidates whose spouses were not interested in this survey were excluded. Then questionnaires were sent to husband and wife separately to their respective email ids. The objective of the study is highlighted as an innovative effort to develop a new model in work culture to improve work-life balance in IT segment. The professionals were promised that the suggestion will be submitted to the government without any delay. This was included deliberately as a motivation factor as suggested in Dillman's Total Design Method.

Socio-Economic details
This sections deals with the socio economic details of the employees.

Age and gender wise distribution
Table 1 below shows the age wise distribution of the respondents. There were 270 families who participated in this study. Highest number (42.6%) of male respondents belong to 34-39 age group and least number (2.6%) belongs to 40-45 age group. The highest number (38.9%) of female respondents belongs to 22-27 age group and least number (1.5%) belongs to 40-45 age group.

Table 1
Age wise distribution of the respondents

Age group	Male		Female		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
22-27	89	33.0	105	38.9	194	35.9
28-33	59	21.9	99	36.7	158	29.3
34-39	115	42.6	62	23.0	177	32.8
40-45	7	2.6	4	1.5	11	2.0
Total	270	100	270	100	540	100

Religion
Religion wise distribution of the respondents shows that highest number of respondents is from Hindu religion while the least number is from Muslim category. It is also observed that about 26% marriages are inter-caste marriages. This point is discussed in the qualitative analysis. It has been observed that in most of the inter-caste marriages the affair starts early i.e. right from the college days and both the boys and girls involved get well placed very young in life, somewhere between 22-23 years; financial independence gives them the confidence to plunge right into marriage. The quantitative analysis also

agrees with it. Upadhya and Vasavi (2006) also observe that about 28 % marriages in software are love marriages.

Caste
Caste wise distribution shows that a major percentage of respondents belong to the general category. Among the 540 respondents, 309 (57.2%) belong to the general category and 199 (36.9%) belong to the OBC category. SC/ST representation is only 5.9 %. In Phase-2 of the study the lower caste representation in IT workforce is found to be negligible and that was taken up at the HR Managers level. The main point raised by the HR managers is that the communication skills of SC/ST candidates are found to be very low in general. These findings coincide with observation of Upadhya and Vasavi (2006) that IT industry excludes lower caste candidates, not deliberately but as a general fallout of its recruitment strategy.

Occupation wise distribution of respondents
Since this research study concentrates on the family of IT professionals, three different classes of families have been selected. In 90 families out of 270 families chosen for study both the husband and wife work in the IT segment, while in another set of 90 families either partner works in the IT segment. In the remaining 90 families husband is an IT employee and wife is a home manager. Of the 270 male respondents 231 work in the IT sector while 39 work in Non IT segment. Among 270 female respondents, 129 work in the IT sector, while 51 work in the Non-IT segment. The remaining 90 are home managers.

Only in 39 families out of 270 there are men working in the non IT sector and women working in IT. In phase-2 study a question has been asked to interviewees whether they would like to make their girl child software professional. Majority of the interviewees responded in the negative citing the reason that even though it is a lucrative career, it leaves them with little time for the family. Reading this together with the findings of low number of IT women-Non IT men families, the inference reached is that men working in Non IT segment are not very keen to marry women working in IT. This picture is summed up in tabular form

Table 2
Occupation wise distribution of the respondents

Occupation	Male		Female		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Home manager			90	33.3	90	16.7
Employed in IT	231	85.6	129	47.8	360	66.7
Employed in Non IT	39	14.4	51	18.9	90	16.7
Total	270	100	270	100	540	100

Table 3
Classification of family according to the occupation of either parents

Occupation	No	%
Male in IT & Female Home manager	90	33.3
IT male and non IT Female	51	18.9
Non IT male and IT Female	39	14.4
Both are in IT	90	33.3
Total	270	100

Conclusion
IT professionals veer away from the traditional socio-cultural practices of life either due to their work schedule or due to the cultural shift. Professionals above the age of 40 are found to be very less. Hindu and Christian representation is almost evenly balanced, but Muslims are found to be lesser in number. Representation of scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe in the IT work force is found to be negligible. The claim of companies that they are equal opportunity employers is to be examined in detail in this context. Inter-caste marriages are seen to be common among IT professionals in Kerala which is expected to be the outcome of financial independence at a relatively younger age.

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