Management Of Occupational Stress And Work-lifebalance Among Women Managers In Indian Industries - A Contemporary Issue

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ABSTRACT While change is slow for Indian women to gain top executive positions, they have made progress in management in a relatively short time. The key challenge for women managers is managing both their traditional role as housewives and their career. Women managers experience great pressure to work hard to prove them in the workplace. Balancing work and family roles has become a key personal and family issue for many societies. This paper focuses on what are the facets in women manager's lives that subject to stress, how can be managed stress and work-life .This paper highlights the coping strategies that can be accepted and viewed as a condition of success so that women are encouraged to come forward and embrace managerial positions and contribute their efforts to build a developed and a civilized nation.

INTRODUCTION

Stress and work-life imbalance are intertwined, and the latterhas been documented as both a cause and an outcome ofjob stress. Stress is one of the more commonly documentedoutcomes of demanding work. Job stress is increasinglyrecognized as a determinant of employee health andproductivity.The experience of chronic stressors (or strain)is used in theoretical models as a predictor of increased riskof mental and physical health problems.Managers and professionals, in particular, have experienced increasing work hours while less-skilled workers have had a decline. The paradox is that managers and professionals in knowledge-intensive industries—whom American analyst Richard Florida calls the 'Creative Class'—may work the longest hours and experience high stress levels. This article focuses on women who are in top management in Indian organizations with special focus on their management of occupational stress and work life balance. The key challenges for women managers is managing both their traditional role as housewives and their career. Women managers experience great pressure to work hard to prove them in the workplace. Balancing work and family roles has become a key personal and family issue for them. Thereforemanaging occupational stress and work-life imbalance among women managers in India is a contemporary issue to discuss and cope up with this problem.

Situation of Women Managers in India

According to a study by Koshal (2006), for every 100 men, only two women will gain administrative and top executive positions in India. Recently, the Confederation of Indian Industry released a report indicating that women comprise only 16 percent of junior managers, four percent of middle and senior managers and a mere one percent of organizational leaders. Thus, while women are adequately represented in the workforce at large, they remain barely present in managerial positions. Recently the Confederation of Indian Industry released a study "Understanding the Levels of Empowerment of Women in the Workplace in India" covering 149 large and medium size companies across regions. The report highlights that women comprise 16 percent at junior management level, 4 percent each at middle and senior levels, and only 1 percent in organizational leadership positions (CEOs)

Occupational stress in Women Managers

Occupational Stress is stress involving work. According to the current World Health Organization's (WHO) definition, occupational or work-related stress "is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope.

Women in management are having financial security but their stress is due to promotions and competing is this man managed world makes them stressful. They are mostly stressed managing home and work. All the money they make pales in the kind of stress they endure.The stress is due to issues like traveling from work when they have small children, coming home to cook and clean the house and be expected to perform the same as a man at work. The biggest stress for these women is when men consider them not capable of doing the job

Social expectations often conflict with the work related expectations that causes stress.Domestic fights in this type of women are surprisingly high in spite of all the resources andflashy cars. The stress is high because of increased responsibilities at work and decreasing heath from the support system due to change in lifestyle.

Kaila (2002) studied 120 managers in metropolitan Mumbai and found that 80 per cent of them experienced the most common workplace stresses and challenges such as:meeting deadlines, working in a competitive industry, managing finances, exhausting working hours, and rotation work in addition to handling regular tasks (such as sales,marketing, training, research and development,and accounts of core clients).

Reactions to stress

Stress result in development of defensive behaviour such as denial, illusion, and xenophobia. The women executives experiencing stress may preoccupy themselves with routine work and pretend to be busy. Some of them opt for early retirement or due to their inefficiency, the management may ask the executive to leave. Some people resort to alcoholism and drugs to escape from the ill-effects of high levels of stress. It is bound to have an adverse effect on performance. (Vaz Michael, 2006).

In a study conducted on stress (Sahni Ashok, 2006) the following results were found: Managers with high stress tend to be lower in their commitment towards their job. They

experience more anxiety, indecisiveness and worries on the job as compared to executives with low stress. They also derive very little satisfaction from their work. They perceive the organizational policies to be unfair, working environment inadequate, salaries and job security also inadequate. They do not have very good relations with their peers, subordinates and superiors. They are also low with respect to growth on the job and are less competent with respect to utilization of their time. They are less flexible in their attitudes and values.

Occupational stress and work-life balance
The well-researched aspect of extra-organisational stress outcomes is work-family conflict as work-life imbalance. This work-life discordance is identified as a form of inter role conflicts where the fulfilment of role demands from one domain (i.e. work obligations) interferes with the performance of other role demands like family responsibilities or social life activities. These inter-role conflicts could result into time-based conflict (i.e. appropriateness in time devoted to each role demand), strain-based (i.e. strain originating from one role makes it difficult to meet the expectations of another role) and behaviour-based conflict that refers to the idea that patterns of behaviours required in one role may be in dissonance with the desired characteristics of another role.

The study on Women Managers in India by Central for Social Research (CSR) found that almost all women managers, on all three levels, stated that their family has supported them throughout their careers. However, the majority of the respondents said that clashes between their domestic duties and professional commitments have impacted their career. This is in particular the case for women who work as middle level managers. For entry level women managers work generally did not interfere with family life. At the senior level, respondents said that they did experience clashes but they successfully tried to make adjustments. As a result work-home interference was no longer an issue.

(H.L. Kalia 2007) Women managers who faced the problemsof meeting deadlines due to time constraints,working night shifts and insecurity anduncertainty regarding ones job reported thatpersonally overwork was causing a strain ontheir families and relationships as it robbedthem of time, energy and attention needed tomaintain healthy relationships with partnersand children. They also reported missing outon important social events such as weddingsor outings with families. Feelings of insecurity anduncertainty regarding ones job created a lotof anxiousness and stress in women managersbecause they were constantly bombarded withthoughts about their future in the organization.

They also remained tensed, as they wereunclear regarding their job function in theorganization. Many of these women alsoreported a spill over of tensions about oneswork to home and from home to work. Thisspill-over resulted in conflicts between themand their spouses. It must be recognised that in Indian society, where a woman's role in relation to herself, her family and society is being redefined, the new and expanded role of women with a strong occupational identity is putting a lot of pressure on women's time and energy. Indeed, balance was one of the commonly cited challenges of IT work in a study on women in IT.

Coping Strategies for occupational stress and work-life balance among women managers
(H.L. Kalia 2007) It wasseen that many women managers workedactively towards eliminating their problems bymediating, going on holidays, taking shortbreaks and having appropriate medications.Other common coping strategies reported bywomen managers included, discussingproblems with colleagues and seeking advisefrom superiors, spending time with friends bygoing for movies and holidays, planning andorganizing ones schedule.Many women managers were spiritually inclined as a result of which they participatedin different kinds of religious activities to relaxtheir minds such as singing bhajans, visitingtemples or saying prayers. Other interesting ways of copingwith problems included pampering oneself bygoing for shopping or having a good meal.Many women managers joined N.G.Os wherethey generously donated gifts. Many of them indulgedin giving gifts to relatives and friends in orderto feel better. But the unanimous votes went inthe favour of spending time with one's familyespecially ones children.

A few common solutions are suggested tomake a woman's life easier in organizationssuch as compressed working week, crèchesat the workplace, employee counseling atworkplaces, flexitime, compulsory periodicalmedical examinations, providing the facility ofworking from home, yoga for improved physicaland mental health (Kaila, 2004; 2004a; 2005)

Indian women managers can achieve the work–family balance by setting priorities in their work and personal lives and by having support systems both at work, formally through HR policies and programmes, and informally through co-worker support and at home.

Present HR interventions
Indian industries have begun to understand the challenge for women to manage both office and home together. WLBPs are those institutionalized structural and procedural arrangements, as well as formal and informal practices that make it easier for individuals to manage the often-conflicting worlds of work andfamily lives .WLBPs can be organised into three major categories, policies, benefits and services. Policies cover the formal and informal ways by which employees' work and leave schedules are handled, including part-time work, flexitime, and parental/family leave. Benefits cover different forms of compensation that protect against loss of earnings, payment of medical expenses and sponsored vacation. Services include on-site or near-site childcare centers, medical facilities and counseling. WLBPs also include government mandated statutory policies such as maternity leaves and benefits as well as discretionary policies and benefits offered by various organisations such as flexitime, telecommuting and employee assistance programmes such as stress management programmes.

Recommended HR interventions
Mentoring Programs
Today working women are battling with the concept of super mom and the world's best wife and also same time fulltime career women. But maintain balance between all these roles is a challenge. Thus Mentoring sessions must be designed and run by experts to advise about time – management at home and office. Importance of time management must be taught to them.

Senior Leadership Engagement / Building Women Leaders
This is management responsibility to change such environment in the firm and opportunities must be provided to the women to perform as a successful leader. Though professional / leadership skills of womenneed to upgrade, thus training must be organized by management, Women must accept that if they want equal opportunity with men,they need to perform equally.

Multiple communication Channels

There must be various internal and external communication channels for the employees. This will help to convey the company's policies about gender inclusion and the empowerment of women in the organization.

Recreational / Cultural program

Recreational activities is more of a fun embodied in the form of activities to refresh one's body and mind .It is an excellent medicine for ailments which cannot be cured by any other manner. Facility like employee activity club,special telecast of a program in cafeteria, sports tournament, special Friday menu, special lunch arrangements & dinners of good performer of the month with CEO of the firm must be provided by the management to rejuvenate their employees' efficiency.

Social Work interventions in Management of occupational Stress and work life balance

Social Work interventions in Job stress can be categorized in to the two general types relaxations skill development and stress prevention skill development In relaxation skill development the social worker have to explain the rationale of the skill, instruct the person relaxation techniques and teach to practice relaxation techniques.A woman manager cannot eliminate stress full situation in her job but can manage the situation more effectively using this techniques. Stress prevention skill development intervention strategy includes cognitive component to proactive planning for problem resolution. Other than these social work interventions include coping strategies like redesign the job, career planning,counselling and training the women managers to balance work stress and their family life.

Conclusion

In high pressure environment the women managers experiencing role conflict, role ambiguity, every day hassles and work/family conflict. These stressors produce occupational stress among them.To advance women in managerial role, support by top management is essential by taking up proactive human resource policies and programmes.This paper is just an attempt to set the base for further research in this area in the Indian context.

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