

# WOMEN MANAGERS: A STUDY ON EDUCATIONAL PREPARATION AND PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

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## ABSTRACT

*The gender disparity is not only recognized in the board rooms but also in the academic and professional institutes. In an effort to understand the professional issues and educational experiences of women professionals this research paper is contributed. A survey of women managers of Delhi and NCR region was conducted to understand the corporate requirements to prepare the women professionals for board rooms. Survey was conducted to know the extent to which the university/institute helped to the women professional to sharpen the skills and to identify the areas where the skill enhancement is required through changing the academic environment. The findings are discussed in relationship to previous research studies and recommendations are made to improve the curriculum and environment of Business Schools*

## INTRODUCTION

Industrialization, globalization privatization and incremental growth of service sectors have opened number of job positions for women at the workplace. This has resulted in that 40% of the global workforce is made up of women (International Labor Organization, 2009).

However, the close observation reveals that the inequity of male and female in the workforce remains deep-rooted even after aggressive efforts given to create job positions especially for women. The speed of advancement for women professional towards career advancement is uneven and even slow.(Barreto, Ryan and Schmitt, 2009; Burke, 2009; Burke and Mattis, 2007; Helfat, Harris and Wolfson, 2006; Tarr-Whelan, 2009). As far as joining the workplace is considered both men and women are entering the workplace at similar level with comparable expectation and competencies, but their career path begin to differ with a small pace of time.(Burke and Mattis, 2005; Burke and Nelson, 2002).

The most recent research endure of Grant Thornton's International Business Report (IBR) shows that one in five senior management positions in businesses surveyed in Latin America are held by women which is 22% in 2012 down from 28% in 2009.The statistics of Asia Pacific economies also

shows the similar trend 25% in 2009 down to 19% in 2012.Further it is surprising that in India only nine percent of the senior management level positions in country are occupied by the women.

Utilization of available Women Talent: A review

Different reports of progress of women advancement ,compensation and career satisfaction clearly shows that women continue to lag men at the workplace but the question arises is, should organizations be worried about the development and utilization of competencies of women?

At one end shortage of effective managerial talent is acknowledged in the organizations at the senior positions (Burke and Cooper, 2006) and on the other creativity, innovation and out of box thinking is not just a desire of this era but an essential need of the organizations to generate alternatives. In this context availability of women with men offers a balanced and more creative solution to the organization. The diverse and the different perspective that women bring to the board room contributes fresh thinking which further improves the decision making capabilities of the organization (Terjesen, Sealy & Singh 2009).As Brown and the associates opined that the presence of women on the board changes the functionality of the board

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and boosts the board unity which improves the governance (Brown; Brown & Anastasopoulos; 2002).

The presence of women in the board enhances creativity and lessens conflicts (Neilsen & Huse 2010) which improves the relationships, team communication and develops clearer board instructions. Another benefit of availability of the women improves the performance monitoring as women adheres a stricter frame of reference and accountability which is a productive move for the organizational performance (Adams & Ferreira 2008).

The most underutilized natural resource in the world, (according to humanitarian organization CARE) if not timely acknowledged the failures of organizations to nurture the managerial competency (Fulmer and Conger, 2004), and the current “war for talent” (Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod, 2001) will not be resolved. That is why; the available underutilized, competent women talent should be welcomed in the board rooms to contribute and to put forward the perspective of the woman community who is the major deciding factor for the household purchase. If the voice of the women is raised in the board room then the customized and creative solutions will be provided to the customers, which will enhance the productivity of the organization.

The gender disparity in the workplace is acknowledged and at the same time the current wave of globalization and the evolving circumstances like shortage of effective managerial talent at senior positions (Burke and Cooper, 2006), could prompt a “perfect hurricane,” generating significant progress in the advancement of women leaders in senior management positions.

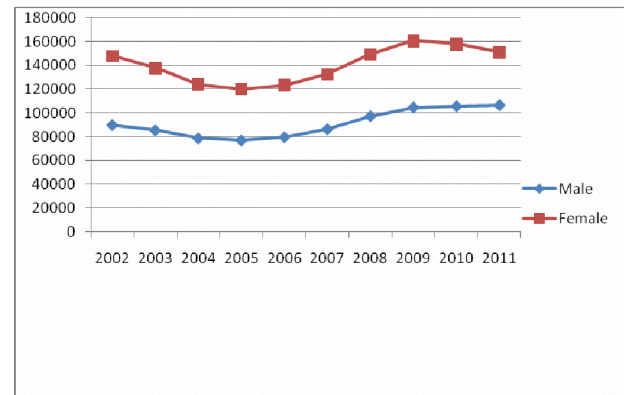
**PREPAREDNESS OF WOMEN WORKFORCE**

Management education plays an important role in shaping the workforce for the business environment and training them for board rooms to handle the challenges of the globalised economy (Ehrensall, 2001). The academia or the temple of excellence produces the future leaders who will take the decisions of the board room and will give a new direction to the business world in handling the challenges of globalization.

In this context, the harsh reality in the words of Jim Turley, the chairman and CEO of Ernst & Young is that the pipeline to fill the talent at the senior position is not ready. The imbalance between the genders in the boardroom has finally been addressed not only in the organizational arena but also in the

temples of excellence.

**Table 1: Graduate Management Tests taken by Testing Year and Gender, 10-Year trend**



Source: GMAC Profile of Graduate Management Admission Test® Candidates, 2007–2011

Of the total 258,192 GMAT exams taken, the number of women was 106,800 and accounted for 41 percent of the global business school pipeline in the testing year ending June 30, 2011 (TY 2011) which reported a 2.1% annual growth rate according to the data over the past 10 testing years (TY 2001 to TY 2011).

The close and the detailed analysis of the database of aspirants for B’school can clearly make out that the ratio of selected women aspirants to the applied aspirants is satisfactory but the problem is that the ratio of woman to man aspirant is very poor that means considerable number of women candidates are not applying for the B’school. This number disparity between male and female candidates further shows that the availability of the women candidates for future leadership roles is less than the male counterparts.

For the lower number of women application we cannot blame to the feeder undergraduate universities as the women account is reasonably satisfactory there. The issue is that at the doorstep of business schools women choose different academic path.

Another issue is most of the existing employed women talent in the corporate has not benefited from the formal, regular professional skill development programs but has joined the organization without professional degrees. This is supported by GMAC Alumni Perspectives Survey, 2012 (Table 2) that out of the currently employed women (alumnae from the classes of 2000 to 2011) the greatest percentage of senior level positions is

occupied by alumnae of executive MBA programs not the full time management education. See table 2. In the nutshell the data speaks the professional talent of women is developed through trial and error method rather than through the systematic experiential learning methods customized for women only. On the contrary the male workforce is exposed to the systematic professional education as well as from the childhood onwards they are groomed for business environment by the family members.

**Table 2: Job Levels for Women Currently Employed Classes of 2000-2011, by Program type**  
Job Levels for Women Currently Employed Classes of 2000-2011, by Program Type

|                    | Full-Time<br>MBA | Part-Time<br>MBA | Executive<br>MBA | Other<br>Business<br>Masters |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| Entry level        | 12%              | 6%               | 32%              | 0%                           |
| Mid-Level          | 68%              | 71%              | 44%              | 53%                          |
| Senior Level       | 16%              | 20%              | 34%              | 14%                          |
| Executive<br>Level | 4%               | 3%               | 22%              | 1%                           |

Source: GMAC Alumni Perspective Survey, 2012

#### **SURVEY DETAILS:**

In an effort to understand the role of universities and institutes to send more women in board rooms this paper is contributed to understand the challenges in-depth. To enhance the functioning of the temple of excellence, a survey of women professional who are the alumnae of various management colleges/institutes is conducted to understand the professional issues which they are facing in their organizations which were not emphasized in their educational curriculum.

A sample of 300 women management professionals from Delhi and NCR region were surveyed who had joined the corporate at various positions and having minimum experience of three years after completing their professional management degree from the university/institute.

A questionnaire containing three parts i.e. extend to which the university/institute helped to sharpen the skills, professional skills which are required to become successful in the corporate world, and recommendations to change the academic environment as per the organizational requirement was given to the respondents. A pilot survey was

conducted to know the important skills required for women professionals to become successful for corporate success.

Most of the respondents were in the age group of 27-33, married and they view themselves as reasonably successful and have received at least one promotion. After joining the organization most of them had minimum five years of professional training experience.

#### **UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE**

In order to know, how much the academia contributes to the professional development of the respondents, they were asked to evaluate the extent to which the university/institute helped to sharpen the skills. The respondents pleased to share that the technical expertise shared by the academia has given them the passport to the employment opportunities of the organizations. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the academic contribution for the development aspects of leadership qualities, strategic thinking, cross-functional coordination and team building.

The respondents put forward the demand for application oriented conceptual knowledge as most of the women students comes from the background where they are never exposed to any business mechanics. One of the outspoken respondent shared that the curriculum of the business schools is more towards the academisation than like a profession. Business is a profession and business education demands the models which can be applied to the real life business. Business is such an activity in which decisions are taken on the bases of incomplete data, incoherent and huge data where the academic tools can help you to know the half of the story but not the climax. Further they shared that the dominant culture in business schools is more masculine than feminine, like majority of professors are males, predominance of citation of male success in classrooms deters the women professional entering in the board rooms. This notion creates psychological roadblock and solidifies the paradigm that "Think Manager – Think Male" (Schein, 1976, 2001; Schein & Davidson, 1993).

The view of the respondents were compiled and tabulated below. The tables show that as far as conceptual contribution is concerned respondents are satisfied with the conceptual knowledge imparted by the academia but on the critical thinking advancement and decision making skills they are not satisfied. Further it was shared the academic sketch of corporate

and the actual professional environment are two different realities.

**Table 3: Satisfaction level for the skills imparted by the academia for Corporate Success for Women candidates**

*Note: Scores -5 very important to 1 - not important*

| Skills                                       | Overall rating (Mean Scores for all respondents) |
|--|--|
| Concept building and Technical expertise     | 4.3  |
| Meeting the deadlines                        | 4.2  |
| Communication skills written as well as oral | 3.6  |
| Leadership skills                            | 3.3  |
| Decision making and creativity               | 3.2  |
| Handling conflict and negotiation skills     | 2.9  |
| Application oriented learning                | 2.4  |
| Managing multiple Priorities                 | 2.2  |
| Working in cross functional teams            | 2.1  |
| Knowing informal organizational structure    | 1.8  |

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

The respondents shared that the skills important for success and advancement in the corporate world revolves around the personal management. The identified skills includes team building, managing stress, assertiveness, handling conflict and negotiation skills, communication skills written as well as oral, decision making and creativity, leadership skills, ambiguity tolerance, technical expertise, work life balance.

Decision making and creativity: Most of the respondent shared that being the part of conservative society and their limited access to the business and other economic activities make them less competent to males to solve the business problems .The rigor to solve the problems includes skills like structured observations, identification of core issues, critical and designed thinking to reach the most feasible solution. Respondent shared that the academia should help

them to understand inter system intricacies and implicit assumptions of business environment to handle the business problems. The respondents accepted their lacking in problem finding and problem framing capabilities.

**Managing Stress:** Respondents shared that more than the work stress the perception of work stress is hampering the performance. Women are less tolerant towards uncertainty and this nature makes them impatient most of the time. The professional environment demands “rest and digest” behavior to accept the business stress as challenge rather than as burden.

**Team building:** The contemporary business environment demands the interdependent and interdepartmental team culture which is possible through emphasis on integrated, interdepartmental cohesiveness amongst the employees. Respondents shared that women are more comfortable in working teams and this competency can be enched by the organizations.

**Leadership:** The contemporary corporate environment requires participatory and collaborative leadership style for motivating and inspiring the workforce. Women are generally team players and inspirational rather than directive they are well suited for corporate leadership roles. Respondent opined that their leadership skills are not enched by the corporate, as the gender biases still consider the women leaders in second pipeline than male members for leadership roles.

**Assertiveness:** In the male dominating corporate world women leaders must understand that to put their opinion emphatically is very important to mark the presence in the corporate where the biases of male dominating society creates the blocks for women. Respondents shared that the aggressiveness is not desired in corporate boundaries but their assertiveness will give them higher place in the organization. In that reference emotional intelligence should be taught with the academic curriculum.

**Handling conflict and negotiation skills:** Organizations are increasingly diverse with number of interdependencies and at the same time this enhances the potential for disagreements and conflicts. Women leaders needs to understand that major portion of the organizational time needs to spend on handling conflicts, as proper handling of conflict encourages diverse perspective, creativity and innovation and creates stronger bonds within the

organization .

**Communication skills:** Respondents shared that in the corporate arena the communication plays an important role in inspiring and influencing. Effective communication helps the professionals to inspire the subordinates to mobilize the efforts towards organization's communication.

Besides the speaking skills (as known as soft skills in B'schools) business schools should also emphasis equally on written communication as business documentation and contracts demand expertise in legal language than the literary language.

**Ambiguity tolerance:** Globalization has opened new vistas for experimentation and innovative business opportunities .For recognizing these opportunities and encasing for profit generation women professional requires different skills and methods for recognizing the opportunities for monetization than the traditional business ideas discussed in the academic arena. But women professionals need to develop the art to adjust in the uncertain environment by developing the tolerance for ambiguity. Academia should help the professional to develop the skills in recognizing innovative business opportunities, innovative service bundling and decision making in ambiguous business environment.

**Technical expertise:** Respondent shared to meet the challenges of globalization more than the academic research actionable technical expertise is required. The gap between the academic skill preparation efforts and industry skill requirement is cited by the respondents as one of the reasons for gender disparity in the boardrooms. The business schools emphasizes more on research related to testing theories and generalization rather than on implementable solutions directly relevant to the concrete problems of industry.

**Work Life Balance:** The conservative and traditional atmosphere of the family instills the notion for the female members that fulfilling the house hold needs is the prime job of women and contribution to the economic growth is the secondary one. When the woman who is convinced and inspired by this paradigm reaches to the B'school, becomes scare to join the corporate world due to the fear of inability to handle the corporate challenges.

In the B'schools lack of discussion of specific women oriented corporate challenges and exemplary women role models solidifies the perception that

women is meant for support jobs and not for line jobs. Respondents shared that the prime responsibility of academics is to change the perspective of women for handling the work stress and creating the balance.

**Table 2: Important skills needed for Corporate Success from the Perspective of Women**

*Note: Scores -5 very important to 1 - not important*

| Skills                                       | Overall rating (Mean Scores for all respondents) |
|--|--|
| Ambiguity tolerance                          | 4.53   |
| Managing Stress                              | 4.51   |
| Decision making and creativity               | 4.02   |
| Handling conflict and negotiation skills:    | 3.85   |
| Leadership                                   | 3.60   |
| Technical expertise                          | 3.54   |
| Assertiveness                                | 3.42   |
| Work Life Balance:                           | 3.32   |
| Team building                                | 3.12   |
| Communication skills written as well as oral | 3.02   |

#### EXPECTATION FROM B' SCHOOLS FOR MANAGING GENDER DIVERSITY

In pushing the women workforce and improving the under representation participation and representation of women in board rooms the temple of excellence can play a major role. Professional education is a training ground and an instrument for social transformation and economic advancement. But the B'schools needs to change the masculine culture (Schein, 1976, 2001; Schein &

Davidson, 1993) and should revamp the strategies to change the perspective that corporate world is only male dominating place where only women who are ready to play the role of 'surrogate male's are welcomed.(Kilduff & Mehra, 1996) .In this direction the following steps are possible solution to this gender imbalance:

**Involvement of Women role models:** Most of the time women have no idea about the independence and pleasures which can be gained through business

education. This under networked community is unaware about the reality of organizational life and their universe moves around the projections of their parents or few informal networks. This indicates that to strengthen the awareness horizon of women about the role models can be a first step for managing the gender diversity. The under visibility of successful women role models has been taken as unavailability of the role models and this myth should be broken by Business schools. So the business schools should use their own alumnae as ambassadors so that women can correlate themselves with these models and can prepare for organizational life. Further B'schools should provide the platform where the women to women networks can be improved. For that, specific business forums only for women can be introduced for richer discussions and better decisions.

**Facilitating Career management Services:** Women are skeptical to join business education as they think that their business education will land up with the career which will disturb their family life and mental peace. Here the B' schools must also understand that ignoring the existence of work life balance issues will not solve the purpose. Therefore, B' Schools should update the curriculum in which real life cases should be included and work life integration needs should be taught by the women practitioners. Those companies, which are providing the supportive culture to their employees to balance the work life, should be invited for placements.

**Make the business education more value driven:** Women are different kind of leaders as they are less motivated by money, status and competition but more by the emotions, interest, content and values. This value driven leadership is required in the business arena to understand the human complexity available in today's business scenario. This different kind of women leadership should be tapped by inspiring more and more women in B'schools. For this business schools must include gender difference leadership in the curriculum. This involves learning to know how women leaders are different, why a new sort of value system should be implemented and how different context enhances better learning and effectiveness.

**Scale the glass-ceiling:** Most of the B'schools curriculum stays far behind in bridging the gap between what is taught and what actually is required in the organization. Generally the curriculum consist of theoretical discussions, which is too distant to

organizational reality, while it should prepare them to adapt, to change or to survive, so that, their perception towards business (as contrast to their value system) is improved and women think out of box and the mental glass ceiling that profession like medical, teaching and law are more value driven (than business), is scaled. In fact, with the prevailing sort of inhibiting academic input, when the young and energetic (but immature) women minds are exposed to business, it is really difficult for them to survive. That is why business schools should introduce different kind of leadership programs which help the minority women leaders to prosper in the organizational life and enhance their confidence to scale the heights.

Therefore, the curriculum should include the courses which can enhance their communication skills, self awareness capabilities and networking skills. Another difficulty to join the Business school comes from the financial resource crunch at family levels for which the scholarships and other grants provided by B schools be sufficiently enhanced, so as to attract the women to the schools.

**Attract the women to join early:** Women generally in the late thirties or early forties realize to gain the skills for improving their career, as earlier they remain occupied with the family responsibilities. This results in that they are far behind in their career from men. So it is better for the business schools to tap their energies just in their twenties or early thirties so that they can later go for their family responsibilities. For this the feeder universities tie ups should be created to tap them straight away from graduate colleges.

**Mentoring clubs and networking opportunities:** The culturally unprepared women for the organizational life reality need a lighthouse to successfully cover the organizational journey. For this women need mentors and specifically the women mentors who empathies with them. That is why B'schools should take the initiative and the mentoring clubs with the women mentors from the senior levels of the organizations, be identified. These mentoring clubs can help in crafting informal network for women where they can freely discuss and can come out with practical solutions.

## CONCLUSION

To facilitate the women candidates the temples of excellence have opened their doors to admit more women candidates by Changing the

selection criteria, extra weight age for the degree level marks, business situation written analysis as selection criteria (instead of group discussion) and a request to admission panelist to remain sensitive towards women candidates are the few initiatives, which has been taken by the premium Indian B'schools for enhancing the gender diversity. But our historical and cultural background necessitates some special proactive measures for managing the imbalance between the genders in the classrooms of B'school.

There are number of reasons available for the low strength of women candidates in the B schools from lack of mathematical aptitude to the family responsibilities (Shellenbarger, 2008; Sinclair, 1995). That's why B'Schools needs to proactively attract the women aspirants by educating them about the pleasures and independence which can result from business education.

So if business schools are really serious to welcome the women, they should first change the mindset rather than the policies and procedures. The talents squeeze and demographic fall has created a strategic necessity for more women enrolment in the business schools which can be en-cashed with different value system. It is expected that business school should generate an environment where they could prepare the women leaders for the reality of organizational life and help them to refine their ideas for creating a better future for themselves and the humanity around.

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