

PERSISTENCE, THY NAME IS WOMAN



under the  
bonnet

MARCH 2019

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

A N D W H A T I T T A K E S



**tatus**  
consulting  
building organisations around great ideas

**CFI** COACHING  
FOUNDATION  
INDIA LIMITED

## Persistence

**noun:** the fact of continuing in an opinion or course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition

**synonyms:** perseverance, tenacity, determination, resolve, resolution, resoluteness, staying power, purposefulness, firmness of purpose, patience, endurance, application, diligence, sedulousness, dedication, commitment, doggedness, persistency, pertinacity, assiduity, assiduousness, steadfastness, tirelessness, indefatigability, stamina



**Under the Bonnet** is a highly respected research-based quarterly journal that has been published by totus consulting since 2000. Beginning 2019, Under the Bonnet (UTB) will be published jointly by totus consulting and CFI.

**totus consulting** is a strategic Human Resource Consulting firm that has been working closely with entrepreneurs, business leaders and HR leaders to address their Organisation Development and HR needs for over 18 years. totus has worked with over 150 clients across 275 client engagements.

**CFI** (Coaching Foundation India) is a highly respected and sought after destination for coaching led leader development solutions, coach education and certification. With a community of over 200 certified coaches, CFI has been a coach provider of choice for well over a decade.

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## EDITORIAL

A few months ago, we were invited by a client to design and deliver a “Women only leader development program”. Around the same time, we were also invited by a business school to evaluate the impact of one of its “Women only programs” it had been running for three years. These two invitations got us interested in thinking deeply about what it will take for more women to make it into leadership. We asked ourselves several questions including:

- Is there merit in a “Women only” leader development program?

- Do such programs focus on leadership competencies or on other success factors that women need to be supported with?
- Are there factors beyond development that merit attention?
- Is the lower participation of women in leadership a symptom of a deeper problem that exists elsewhere?

When totus consulting decided to partner with CFI to re-launch Under the Bonnet, a highly respected quarterly thought leadership journal, this theme seemed the most natural subject for the first issue.



Vaishnavi Chella led the research efforts for this edition and came up with some fascinating insights.

The first and rather simple conclusion we came to was that ***"There aren't enough women leaders because we do not have enough women staying in the game!"*** So, the problem begins much earlier.

The second conclusion was that ***"Staying in the game" goes beyond development and calls for large scale changes at multiple layers"***

The third conclusion was that for such a change to happen, we need to ***"Get the whole system into the room"***. All change management experts concur that for any sustainable change to happen, all the stakeholders need to be involved and included. Enough women not staying in the game cannot be viewed as a women's problem.

Our research helped us get in touch with some deep-seated beliefs, biases and prejudices that everyone in the system needs to revisit, reframe and re-evaluate.

For example, while there are many ideas and suggestions offered to women, I am yet to see "gender diversity" finding a place in the leadership competency frameworks of organisations.

Years of work with coaching has led us to conclude that coaching outcomes depend to a good degree on the positive support and sponsorship of the immediate manager. To that extent, we believe that leader development programs and other development experiences for women can succeed only when the "system around them" also supports and enables their success.

This edition of UTB certainly promises to be thought provoking and action inspiring. I hope you enjoy reading it and get propelled into some actions.

I compliment Vaishnavi for executing her research and analysis on the subject with passion.

*Ganesh Chella*



## WHAT'S GOING ON?

The past few months have been quite a revelation for us. We have been speaking to a large number of women at various ages and stages of the corporate trajectory and have been trying to identify the answer to the billion-dollar question ***“What does it take to increase representation of women in leadership?”***

We learnt that several organizations, professional bodies, even nations have been hard at work trying to decode this complex phenomenon. They have been attempting to unearth the secret formula to increase representation of Women in

Leadership. As it turns out, the under-representation of women in leadership is as true for parliament, as it is for the boardroom. It is as true for law firms as it is for professional bodies and large educational institutions. It is as true for India, as it is for many a developed nation. However, in our research our prime focus will be on the Indian Corporate context.

Our research efforts included 27 in-depth interviews with women across various life and career stages, experts in the field, a survey covering 30 millennial women and a fair amount of secondary research.

When we began our research, we began with the intent of identifying the road blocks that inhibited women from rising to leadership positions and the possible solutions to address these road blocks. However, as we delved deeper into our research, we discovered that the problem is much more layered. The heart-breaking, yet simple truth that we discovered was:

***"There aren't enough women leaders because, we do not have enough women staying in the game!"***

While most women begin their corporate careers with great fervour and are represented in good strength at the entry-level, this strength begins to dwindle as they approach middle-senior management level. This is really where the leadership gap begins, and the pipeline leaks the most. Research shows that 48 percent of Indian women drop out of the pipeline before reaching mid-career

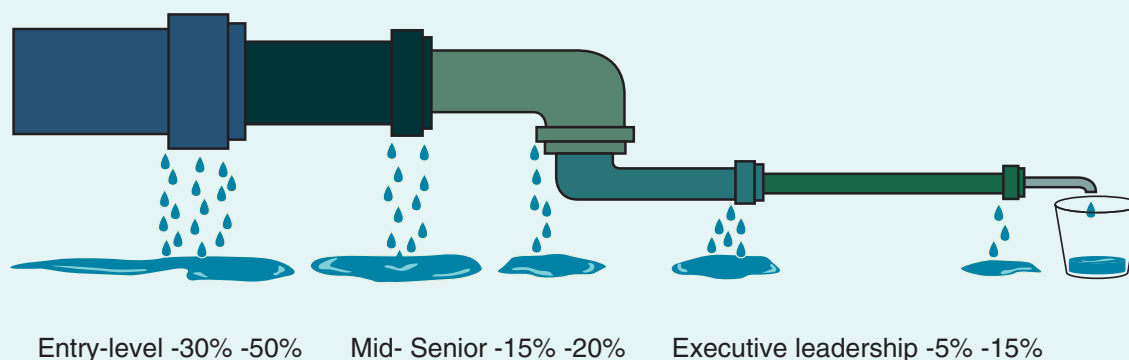
(compared to the Asia average of 29 percent).<sup>1</sup>

We discovered that this happens not only because of the hesitation to "Lean In", but also due to the onset of competing personal commitments including marriage, maternity, child and elder care.

***The women who do manage to surmount personal roadblocks are confronted with other challenges in the form of deep-rooted social norms about the role of women and hard-wired prejudices and bias against women at the workplace.*** All this has resulted in a situation where women tend to drop out of the game in large numbers.

We would like to propose that in order to have more women leaders, organizations need to start early, catch them young and most importantly, help women stay in the game.

*How many are staying in the game?*





***In order to be sustained and truly effective, change needs to begin from the very heart of the issue- the hard-wired societal belief systems which form the genesis of all gender related challenges at the workplace, and society in general.***

Through this edition of Under the Bonnet, we hope to demystify the phenomenon of missing women in Leadership, get to the heart of the challenge and identify possible solutions to address the leadership gap.



## WHY DON'T WOMEN STAY IN THE GAME?

There are several reasons why fewer and fewer women stay in the game over time.

Some are more obvious and others less obvious. We can categorise these reasons into three layers.

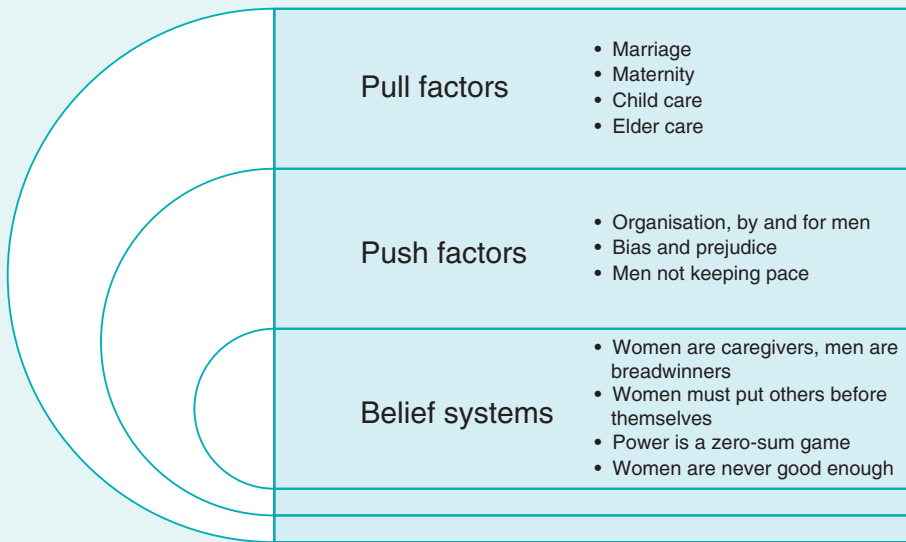
1. Women don't stay in the game because of competing personal commitments which put huge demands on their time and energy. In other words- ***"The pull factors at home"***
2. Women don't stay in the game because the rules of the game appear

to be stacked against them. In other words- ***"The Push factors at work"***

3. Women don't stay in the game because, of the collective societal belief that they cannot. In other words- ***"The societal belief systems that shape these actions"***

The diagram about the career graph of women is quite telling.<sup>2</sup> While 30% to 50% of the workforce at the entry level are women (depending on industry) this shrinks to around 15% to 20% at the mid to senior management level and further

### *The three factors*



shrinks to 5% to 15% at the leadership level.<sup>3, 4</sup>

As one can see, there are three layers of reasons for this situation. We will explore each of these in some detail.

## **The pull factors at home**

Richa, 33 is a finance professional with a global accounting firm. She is also a young mother with a three-year-old daughter. Her husband is a consultant with a 6-day work week. While she has been trying to juggle home and work to the best of her ability, this has come at the cost of her health. Unable to take the stress of having to do it all single-handedly, she decided to quit her well-paying job with no intention of returning to a 9-5 job.

Mangala, 27, is a bright MBA graduate from a renowned institute in India. She married her long-time boyfriend who is an engineer posted in the USA. She was confident that given her credentials and pedigree she would easily secure a job in the USA. However, strict visa regulations coupled with a less than favourable job market resulted in a situation where she could no longer work, unless the couple returned to India.

Preeti, 28 delivered a baby six months back. She is a software engineer in an IT company and her maternity leave ends in a week. She is overcome with a sense of fear and apprehension at the thought of having to return to work. Preeti is yet to completely recover from her delivery. She still feels weak and tired. Moreover, having lost six months on the job she feels that she might not

be up-to-date with the latest technology. Additionally, the thought of having to leave her new born baby at a day care facility is not very comforting for Preeti. She is in a serious dilemma about whether she must return to work or not.

As per NSSO 2011, close to 80% dropouts among the Indian work-force are among women less than 35 years. According to a research study conducted by Ashoka University's - Genpact Centre for Women's Leadership- 48% women dropout within four months of returning from maternity leave. Additionally, 50% dropout mid-career before the age of 30 because of childcare.<sup>5</sup>

Marriage, maternity, childcare and elder care are three competing personal commitments or pull factors which force women to not stay in the game.



*"Women are always juggling multiple responsibilities at work and at home. The sheer mental load of having to manage both roles effectively takes a toll on us. The price to pay is often a compromise in personal time and health"* – **Aarthi Sivaramakrishnan, Independent Consultant and Founder- The Colour Company**

## Marriage

While there seems to be significant positive change in societal perception about working women, much remains to be done.

Despite being as, if not more qualified than their spouse, women are often expected to play second fiddle to their husbands when it comes to their careers by relocating or putting a pause to their careers based on their husband's job location.

According to a report, though women expressed their willingness to work post-marriage, preferences such as location of the job, timings of the job, work industry etc. started to set in post marriage, which otherwise were not vividly seen.



*"I am looking for a girl with height of above 5ft 5 inches, who is fair, caring, humorous, calm and open-minded person. Qualifications with any degree/b tech would be preferred. Working is not an essential factor for consideration. Hope the traditional and cultures of our community are well maintained within our family"*  
– **Bridegroom on a matrimonial site about requirements from his potential bride, Age-27 years, Qualification- MBA**

## Maternity and childcare- the largest exit gates

Maternity, as it turns out, is the single largest reason for the loss of women talent in corporate India. Despite the government mandate of six months paid maternity leave and additional flexibility offered by various organizations, many women find

it hard to return or to stay put once they have returned. This is often attributed to:


- Lack of infrastructure such as safe creche facilities, feeding rooms or reliable nannies for infant-care
- The lack of support systems or family support at home
- Lower energy levels and recuperating health of the returning mother
- Low morale and motivation to return after having lost six months on the job
- A smaller or compressed job description which often feels like a demotion
- Various prejudices at the workplace about the commitment level of a woman who has returned from maternity
- Losing touch with workplace advancements/changes/colleagues and managers during absence
- An overriding sense of guilt towards the child and the feeling of not being able to give a 100% towards either home or work
- Lack of flexible work arrangements after returning
- Being set back by a year or two for promotions and losing out on career advancement
- Family pressures to quit and focus on childcare

As children grow up, there continue to be pressures on the mother, who is still

considered the primary care giver. A research study shows that even women who continue after their first child often drop out after the second delivery. This is due to anxiety about managing two children and the guilt of not having been there the first time.

A 2018 report released by the World Economic Forum indicated that the global gender gap across a range of areas will not close for another 108 years and that it would take some 202 years to close the workplace gap. Saadia Zahidi, head of social and economic agendas at WEF stated that in 2018, fewer women were working than men and a main reason for the discrepancy was the lack of childcare. This factor has kept women from jobs or from advancing to senior roles.

"Most economies still have not made much progress in providing better infrastructure for childcare," Zahidi said,



*"We had a policy at my previous organization where a woman had to inform her supervisor and HR when she was pregnant. We would then assign special chairs and tie pink bands around her chair to ensure that she was assigned a comfortable seat. This also gave the Project Manager the opportunity to plan her work and assign projects of an appropriate duration"*

**– Viji Rao, Advisor & Co-founder of Empowering Women in IT (eWIT)**



emphasizing the fact that women are more often responsible for unpaid work, including childcare. "This continues to be a major source of why women don't enter the labour market at all or aren't able to progress as much as they should, given the talent that they have."<sup>6</sup>

## **Eldercare**

Eldercare is increasingly emerging as a reason for women in India off-ramping their careers. According to a study by Centre for Talent Innovation, 80 percent of Indian women off-ramp for eldercare (compared to 30 percent in the United States and 18 percent in Germany).<sup>7</sup>

There is very little that organizations are doing to plug this gap. Just as in the case of childcare, women tend to be the primary care givers in this case as well.



*"My observation...is that the biological clock and the career clock are in total conflict with each other. Total, complete conflict. When you have to have kids, you have to build your career. Just as you're rising to middle management your kids need you because they're teenagers, they need you for the teenage years.....And that's the time your husband becomes a teenager too, so he needs you. They need you too. What do you do? And as you grow even more, your parents need you because they're aging". – excerpts from an interview of former Pepsi CEO, Indra Nooyi with David Bradley- Owner Altantic Media*

## **The push factors at work**

The reasons for women staying at home seem obvious, but the reason they do not stay at work has to do with the next layer – the way the rules of the game are framed.

## **Men are not keeping pace**

While a lot is being said and done to make women more assertive, network better and aspire to have it all, very little is changing for men. Men are continuing to be told that they are the primary breadwinners and need to be ambitious and career focused. They are rarely, if at all taught to strike a balance between work and home. They seldom consider "Care-giving" and household work as a shared responsibility.

In most countries across the world, women continue to be primary caregivers and continue to do majority of the housework. The burden of having to manage everything and the need to be perfect at both, yet unable to measure up, often leaves women in a perpetual state of guilt!

A World Bank study suggests that just two hours less housework a week could bump up female employment by ten percentage points<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, many of the women we spoke to also revealed the inability of men to accept or come to terms with women

who are ambitious, or careerfocused. The lack of close women role models who have strived for a career might be one of the reasons for this phenomenon.

Therefore, if the rules of the game are defined and implemented mostly by men who have not kept pace, these rules are likely to be less empathetic to the needs and realities of women.



*"The narrative for women has changed tremendously, where they have permission to dream big, make a choice to manage career with family responsibilities and harbour aspirations to reach leadership roles. As a result, women have metamorphized to taking charge of their career growth. On the flip side, the narrative has not kept pace with this changed expectation for men, to play a more supportive role and partner their spouse in sharing responsibilities at home. In fact, even if men wish to make the choice to step back on their career and support the woman in her career growth, society has not reached a stage where we would accept a less ambitious man"*

**– Suchitra Bhaskar, Senior HR Leader**

## **Organizations created by and for men**

A common theme that emerged when we spoke to our network of women, was the allusion to a workplace that seemed to be shaped by and for men without

being cognizant of the realities faced by women.

This was communicated in different ways- Like the need to be available for an overseas call in the middle of the night, the need to be mobile, the need to be available 24/7, the need to be seen more often at office parties, the "Bro culture" coupled with bonding over gym talk and drinks, the need to stay back late and stretch beyond regular working hours and the overriding importance of face time over performance!

What these covert requirements did not seem to factor in was, that it is probably difficult for a mother with a four-year old to be available after working hours, a young woman professional might not have much to contribute to the "Bro gang" which bonds over smoke breaks and drinks and, while no job description explicitly mentions the need to be available 24\*7, a man who does make himself available, is more likely to be considered for the next promotion or special project than a woman who is constrained from doing so!

**Networking** appears as a stereotypical competence needing development among women. Unfortunately, the competence is defined from the vantage point of men and therefore, women appear wanting. In reality, when it comes to being resourceful to make everyday life smooth, women will score extremely high and men will find it hard to measure up against those yardsticks.


Leadership consultant Sally Helgesen and Executive coach Julie Johnson, ran a study that later became part of the research for their book ***The Female Vision***. They sought to identify similarities and differences in how men and women perceive, define, and pursue satisfaction at work.

They found many overlaps between what men and women found satisfying including- Leading successful teams, motivating others, building relationships and the chance to exercise their skills and talents to the fullest.

A significant difference they found was that women tend- to assign value to their work based on the quality of their daily experience rather than where the job might be leading in the future.

Sally mentions that she was first tipped off about this when interviewing several dozen women who had left high-level and high-reward jobs. Over and over, these women told her that their jobs “were just not worth it,” even though the positions they’d left were perceived to have high worth in the marketplace in terms of the money and status they conferred.

Therefore, what clearly emerges is that organizations in their current shape and form are not necessarily keeping the values, life realities, motivations and aspirations of women in mind while designing their jobs and career paths.<sup>9</sup>



*“If you study women in the workforce, you will realize that how women make meaning is often different from how men make meaning. Joanna Barsh talks about this in her work. In short, how women lose energy because of the additional responsibilities of childcare and household is different from how men lose energy. A woman would go to office, come back, cook a full meal, oversee her child’s homework and then fire up her laptop again at night to work- Where and how you use the energy might also result in burnout”*

**–Supriti Bhandary, Talent Advisor and Executive Coach**

## ***Bias and Prejudice at the workplace***

### ***Affinity bias***

When a person meets someone with a similar personality or a common experience, they tend to connect more readily with them. The individual feels like she/he can see herself/himself in her/him. This phenomenon is also referred to as the “similar-to-me” or “Mini-me” bias. A recent study<sup>10</sup> shows that managers are more likely to dole out raises and promotions to people of their gender. It is also likely that this form of bias plays out during hiring decisions. One tends to hire people who are similar to them. Given that leadership positions are largely dominated by men, it

should then come as no surprise that the presence of this bias results in the hiring and promotion of people who are more like them, in other words other men who fit into a similar mould.

### **Confirmation bias**

In psychology and cognitive science, confirmation bias (or confirmatory bias) is a tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions, leading to statistical errors.

At the workplace, confirmation bias manifests in the form of bias associated with the life stage that women go through or the notion that certain tasks cannot be performed by women. For instance, we have heard of hiring managers expressing reservations about hiring young/ newly married women who might eventually have to take a break for maternity, or about recruiters being wary of hiring

women for night shift roles or jobs in remote locations.

Such notions are often shaped by preconceptions and bias rather than fact, logic or quite simply, the woman's preference.

### **Battling the Double-bind**

When a woman makes hard decisions, she is labelled as aggressive. When a man makes those same decisions, he is perceived as a competent individual. Alternately, when women act according to their true nature, they are considered passive or soft. This often results in a Catch -22 situation often referred to as the "Double-bind".

The natural qualities that women bring (Being outspoken or being intuitive) are required to be toned down or modified, as a result their true nature ends up being diluted.

*"We rarely find women in mainstream business roles that are the feeder pipelines for leadership roles. Unconscious gender biases that women are suited for more "service" or "support" roles make them a preferred choice for roles that often don't have direct P&L responsibilities. And, this then, unwittingly becomes a hurdle as handling P&L roles is important experience for C-suite roles."*

**– Nirmala Menon, Founder and CEO, Interweave consulting**

*"We're aware that when a woman acts forcefully or competitively, she's deviating from expected behaviour. If a woman pushes to get the job done, if she's highly competent, if she focuses on results rather than on pleasing others, she's acting like a man. And if she acts like a man, people dislike her. In response to this negative reaction we temper our professional goals"* – **Sheryl Sandberg on success and likeability among women in her book Lean In**

## Mansplaining; manterruption; hepeating

These three new terms now give women a language to describe some of the common biases and prejudices they are subject to at the workplace and hopefully make men aware of it.

**Mansplaining:** The act of a man talking condescendingly to someone (especially a woman) about something he has incomplete knowledge of, with the mistaken assumption that he knows more about it than the person he's talking to.

The assumption or bias is that men know more than women.

**Manterruption:** Is defined as a social phenomenon present in small group conversations (including dyads) when men chronically and intrusively interrupt women when they are speaking.

When women protest being interrupted, they are accused of being bossy, bitchy, and emotional. In a small group setting, such as meetings, the more men present, the more likely it is that the women in the group will be interrupted.

Now, there is even an app to measure the extent of manterruption!

**Hepeating:** Is defined as the act where an idea or opinion that has been stated by a woman is ignored but then greeted with enthusiasm when it is repeated by a man. It describes the act of a man appropriating a woman's comments or ideas and then being praised for them being his own. The word was recently coined by a friend of astronomer Nicole Gugliucci, whose tweet explaining the term has been retweeted over 67,000 times so far.

## Beliefs that lead women to leave the game

During the launch of her new book "Becoming", America's former first lady Michelle Obama, made a public statement that "For women -Having it all is a myth and it's not always enough to "Lean In"." She mentioned that marriage still isn't equal.

We received similar responses when we spoke to many women during our research

interviews. The popular view was that we should stop placing the blame squarely on women.

In line with these views, we decided to further investigate the genesis of the phenomenon and tried to get to the heart of it.

Through deeper introspection about the barriers that women face and with the help of the conversations we had with



our network of women, we gathered that most of the current challenges stem from hard-wired societal belief systems that are universal among men and women across life and career stages. These belief systems are socially constructed and deeply impact both sexes. They are often internalized and nurtured over the years and get in the way of women staying in the game and assuming leadership roles. These are societal belief systems about the role of a woman.

We believe that in order to help women stay in the game, there is a need for men and women across all cohorts of society to challenge these belief systems and replace them with more balanced ones.



*"There is a buy-in at every level of the organization to increase representation of women. We are also continuously relooking at some of our policies and practices to improve the gender balance across all levels. However, the biggest hurdle that we face are mindsets of both men and women. Unless there is a change in mindsets coupled with consistent efforts, progress will remain slow and time consuming" – Atul Sahgal- Vice President- Talent Acquisition, Infosys Limited*

There are four important belief systems that we identified.

## **Women must always be the primary care givers and Men must always be the primary breadwinners**

At the heart of the phenomenon lay socially constructed gender roles. These gender roles continue to be reinforced in our everyday lives in seemingly small yet significant ways. They found frequent mention during our research interviews.

Whether it was about women's income being viewed as a supplementary source and women not seeing the economic rationale of actively pursuing a career. Or the child needing only the mother's attention as an infant, or the men not chipping in with housework. Or whether it was women being taunted for not being able to cook.

Whether it was about organizations offering 6 months of paid maternity leave and no paternity leave, whether it was about "diversity" hiring instead of inclusive promotion and retention strategies, or whether it was about acting like a man by being aggressive or being less of one by being a house husband, all the challenges seemed to be deeply rooted in gender roles that have been socially constructed. They deeply impact the behaviour of both men and women and shape their attitudes towards each other. It is these gender roles that women and men are forced to not just fulfil but also excel at,

even if their preference or competency lies elsewhere!



*"Many people have asked me how I manage to juggle a full-time job with a toddler at home. Surprisingly enough, no one asks my husband the same question"*

**– Shruthi Srikanth, Associate, Multi National Corporation**

## **Women must always put others before themselves**

It is not unusual for women to put everyone ahead of themselves. They are conditioned from a young age to be nurturing, caring and compassionate. A recent study of the male and female brains by the university of Zurich found that women's brains respond more positively to prosocial (Selfless) behaviour while male brains respond more positively to selfish behaviour. Behavioural scientists have signalled that this is also because of the cultural expectations placed on men and women and this behaviour is equally a learned one.<sup>11</sup>

This might also explain why there are far more women than men in the social sector which is built on the principle of altruism and caring for others.

In their book "How Women Rise"- Sally Helgesen and Marshall Goldsmith, explain that - While the need to please everyone may serve women well at the

earlier stages of their career, it will impede them as they move higher, eroding their capacity to demonstrate leadership and serving as the ultimate tool for giving their power away. Hence, while this altruistic tendency is beneficial to many including the organization and the family, the price to pay is often the woman's own progress and aspirations.<sup>12</sup>

This need to put others before themselves manifests at the workplace in many ways - women are less likely to accept overseas assignments that might require their family to relocate, they are more likely to be strong advocates for their organizations and teams than of themselves. Women are less likely to take credit for their success and are more likely to attribute this to a solid support system or a great organization. They tend to see maternity as their own problem instead of asking for help. Women take up part time or less consuming work in order to attend to the pull factors at home and very often this belief is the reason why women drop off and don't aspire for the higher echelons of leadership.

The words sacrifice, compromise, prioritize seem to figure much more frequently in women's vocabulary than for men! Women's health is also increasingly emerging as an area of concern. Something that gets neglected in the process of doing it all and putting everyone before themselves.



*"My grandmother used to say, "Women should be like needles and not like scissors-they should bind and not cut." It was a very subtle message, but it was so deeply entrenched in me that many years later, when I had to fire someone, I found it so hard and could not sleep at night. It hit me after a lot of introspection that the saying was probably the genesis of this feeling. All of us have grown up with certain sayings at home. And in each of these messages lies our universal belief!"*

**– Anita Gupta, Executive Coach,  
Managing Partner, My Persona**

## Power is always a zero-sum game

In her latest book titled "Chup"- social scientist Deepa Narayan describes how power unfortunately is a most misunderstood word. It is mostly construed as control through force. However, power can also mean persuasion, inspiration, motivation and collaboration to realise one's dreams. She also describes how the biggest misunderstanding is that if I am powerful, you have to be powerless. Power is not a Zero-sum game she says.<sup>13</sup>

Having more women in positions of power, does not necessitate men to abdicate their power. It simply means that there is more balance in decision-making. It gives all cohorts an opportunity to influence the world for the better. It gives rise to a more balanced perspective in

decision making not just at work but also at home. This is something that not only women but more importantly, men need to realize and internalize.

This misnomer about power manifests itself in many ways at the workplace- Sectors and jobs dominated by men, sexual harassment at the workplace, men being unable to accept a strong, opinionated or ambitious wife and sadly sometimes women feeling threatened by other women. All these are merely manifestations of a power struggle.

If the #metoo movement gave women the power to be heard and the power to raise their voice against mostly powerful men, the response from men was to avoid women at all costs, another way of keeping the power balance.

## Women are never good enough AKA the Guilt trap


According to a survey by baby care product company NUK, 87 per cent of mothers feel guilty at some point, with 21 per cent feeling this way most or all the time.<sup>14</sup>

This might not seem like a belief system at first, but a closer look might reveal that it stems from a practise of setting unreasonably high expectations for women in every sphere of their life. Whether it is about being the "ideal daughter", or "ideal mother", or the "ideal wife". In the process of

trying to live up to too many “ideals” women end up stewing in guilt often believing that it is their shortcoming, that they are alone and everyone else has it figured out.

Not to say that men aren’t under any pressure. They are also under increasing pressure. However not only are the pressures far lesser, men also tend to be less affected by them.

According to Marshal Goldsmith, both men and women derail themselves by focusing on the past. But they often do so in different ways. While men tend to blame others for what they believe has gone wrong in their own lives and careers, women are more likely to turn regret inward, blaming themselves and dissecting their own mistakes. He coined the term “Ruminating” to describe the act of routinely mulling over one’s mistakes, regrets, and negative experiences. According to psychologists, women are more prone to this behaviour. Marshall states that he has seen even women at the pinnacle of success who constantly go over



*“The biggest thing that trips up a woman is her own guilt. We have all been there and done that. Children are very quick to pick up on that guilt and play it to their advantage. However, past a certain age, children respond to honest and transparent conversations. Parents need to use these conversations to help set ground rules and help children become more independent. It is also important to help women realize that nothing adverse will happen if they are not available to their children 24\*7.” – Saroja Kannan, Executive Coach*

their mistakes and take responsibility for events over which they had little control, which diminishes their ability to reap the benefits of their superb leadership skills!<sup>15</sup>

The ability to promote oneself, the ability to negotiate adeptly are all seen as competencies where women score poorly. Now viewed against their own view that they are not good enough, it is not hard to imagine why.



## THE MILLENNIAL ADVANTAGE

As we began to look at solutions and ideas for the future, we thought it useful to understand how millennial women were approaching the issue. And we were very pleased.

We asked 30 millennial working women between ages 25 and 30, a simple question:

"Who would you consider your role model and why?"

- **50% of the respondents named their mothers** as their role models. They mentioned how their mothers struck a balance between work and home and made things seem so effortless. They also used adjectives such as empathetic, kind, hard-working and quietly brilliant to describe their mothers. Surprisingly, all these women had working mothers
- **20% of the respondents named their fathers** as their role models. They



admired their fathers for being self-made and for their strong moral fibre. They admired how their fathers had built their careers from scratch. It was interesting to note that most of these respondents had mothers who are home makers

- **10% of the respondents named other relatives** including grandmother, elder sister and brother as their role models
- **Only 10% shared the names of celebrities or professional mentors** as their role models.

The power of role models in helping young women be intentional about their career became very evident to us and held some clues about what needs to be done.

We followed this up with personal conversations with some of these millennial women. These conversations sparked a lot of optimism about the future of women in leadership. These conversations were infused with a lot of zest and ambition. Here are a few of the sound bites that we gathered

*I wish to be the founder of my own enterprise someday. I would like to enter the area of public investing in equities. – Gayathri Devi, 27, Student, Harvard Business School*

*I wish to be a director on the board of a listed company where I can analyse*

*the financials and make a productive contribution. There is a surge in the demand for women leaders to occupy seats on the boards of many organizations today – Gayathri Vaidyanathan, 27, Chartered Accountant*

*I do foresee some challenge in my career trajectory when I plan a family. However, I am confident that it can be surmounted with planning and finding the right balance. If you will it, you can get where you want to be. I don't think there are any other differences between men and women – Divya Abhishek, 26, Partner-Sukumar and Associates*

*I don't think leadership comes with a title. I want to take up a role which empowers me to take up more responsibility both as an individual and from a people management perspective and be involved as well as formulate & implement impactful decisions" – Kavya Bhaskar, 26, Assistant Manager at a Multi-National Corporation*

If these conversations are anything to go by, then we believe that the future is in safe hands.

A few contributing factors emerged from these conversations.

## **Ambition**

We have gathered that not only are millennial women aspiring for leadership,

they are also unafraid to state the same explicitly. They are keeping pace with men in education and at the workplace. They are planning their careers and are being more intentional about the life choices that they make to support this ambition.

### ***Awareness***

Millennial women are aware of the possible barriers that they might face in their career trajectory (External and internal). They are making conscious efforts to work on these and are more vociferous in calling out bias at work and at home. Technology and the internet have also given them a lot of exposure to the global discourse on the subject of- "Women and leadership".

### ***Blurring gender differences***

Millennial men are more comfortable with the idea of a career woman and have been exposed to mothers or female

relatives who have had a career. Although this cannot be generalized across the board and progress is still slow, it is beginning to happen.

### ***Supportive policies***

Millennial men and women rank flexibility and work-life balance as top parameters while weighing job opportunities. In order to attract and appeal to this burgeoning generation that constitutes the largest chunk of the workforce, organizations are also trying to embrace technology to offer telecommuting options to their employees. This is a positive development for the future of women who stand to benefit enormously from a flexible workplace and more involvement of men in the household. Moreover, trends such as gig economy, flex working models etc are emerging as new ways of working and add to the narrative of women changing the rules of the game and playing an active role in it.



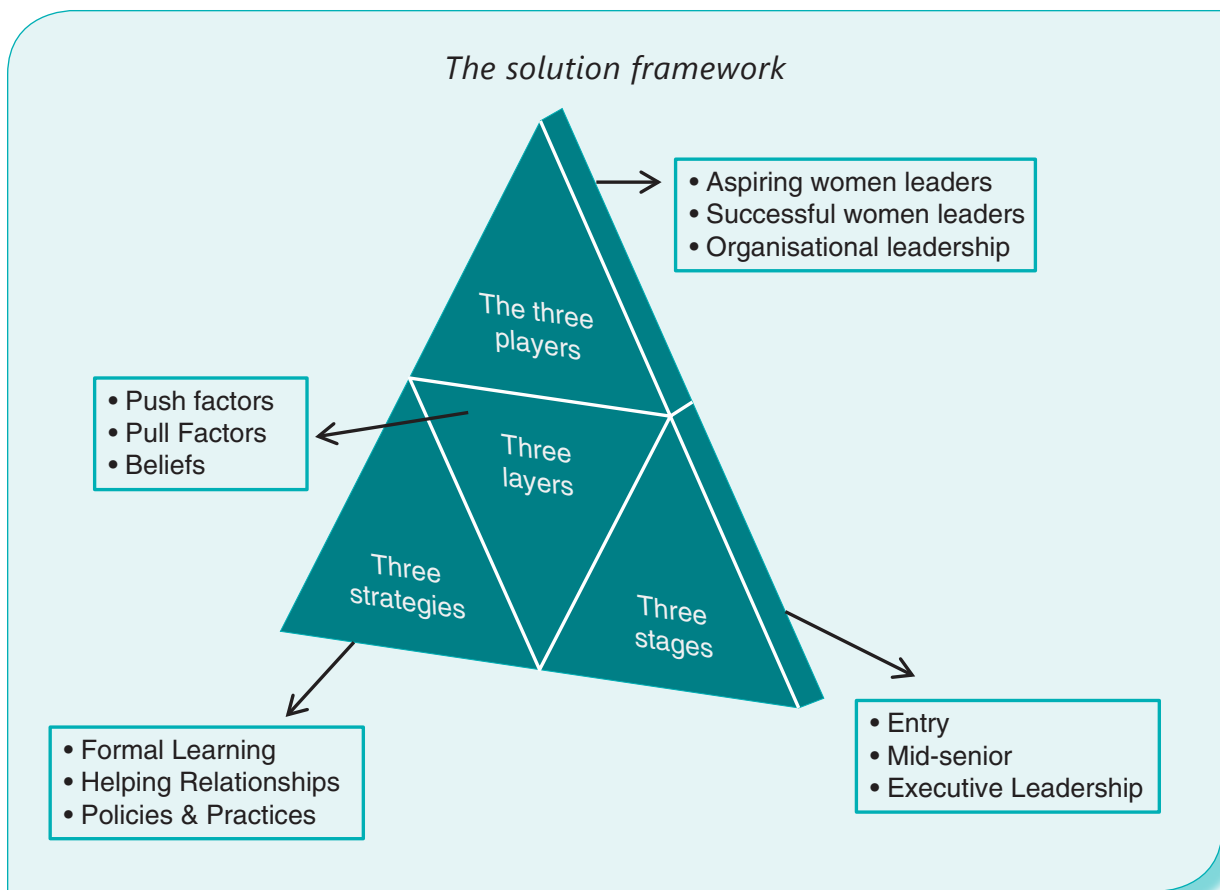
## ||||||| **HOW DO WE HELP MORE WOMEN STAY AND WIN AT THE GAME?** |||||||

When it comes to making recommendations, we run the risk of being simplistic or too global and thereby appearing to be trivialising the issue which as you can see is rather complex and layered.

In this issue of UTB we would like to limit our exploration of solutions to the confines of organisations. In other words, we would like to explore all that can be done within an organisational framework because that is the most appropriate unit of influence and action.

Beyond these recommendations are several critical actions that need to be taken by parents, spouses, siblings, men in general and others in the society.

A solution framework may need to factor in the multiple dimensions that impact and influence any potential solution. As you can see, around the three layers to the problem are three players, three stages and three potential strategies. Let's understand this better.



## The three layers

The three layers of pull factors, push factors and beliefs have been elaborated quite extensively. This needs to form the basis for crafting any potential solution. Below are the best solutions to address gaps in each of these layers:

- For the layer of pull factors - organisational policies and practices seem to have the greatest impact
- For the layer of push factors - helping relationships and formal learning and organisational policies and practise have equal impact

- For the layer of beliefs - helping relationships seem to have the most impact

## The three strategies

All potential solutions at a micro level can be grouped under three possible strategies:

1. Formal Learning
2. Helping Relationships
3. Policies & Practices

Let us explore each of these in some detail.

## **Formal learning**

### **For women**

A lot of “Women Only” programs seem to be offered to women in the executive leadership levels. This in our opinion is too little and too late.

If the largest percentage of exits are before the Mid-senior levels, that is the stage at which formal learning should play a significant role.

“Women Only” programs can be designed to help women develop the life skills required to plan their careers, take sound decisions, have the ability to solve the inevitable emotionally filled problems that they are likely to encounter and also have the skills to negotiate and communicate their needs and preferences clearly.

### **For men**

Men most certainly need a lot of formal training to understand how they might be

unconsciously and inadvertently triggering many of the push factors.

Men will also benefit from exposure to the impact of their words and actions on women. They will of course need exposure to the boundaries from an ethical and legal perspective.

### **For policy makers**

Those in Human Resources will most certainly need specialist training to design and implement the right policies while also being aware of the subtle organisational processes and practices that are causing roadblocks to women. (including cultural dimensions)

## **Helping Relationships**

The place of helping relationships in supporting individuals to solve problems and realise potential has been very well established.

For women who need to deal with an array of near insurmountable problems, the huge value of helping relationships cannot be overemphasised.

In the book titled **Creating a Helping Organisation**, five layers of help were presented in an organisational context as can be seen in the model below.

In the context of supporting the needs of women employees, each of these layers of help have a huge relevance and value.



*“Given the history of patriarchy in our culture, humanities and gender sensitivity training should be imparted and put into practice right from schools and colleges to challenge socialized beliefs. At the workplace, there should be investment in infrastructure to create a more inclusive and flexible environment. Finally, job roles and the rules of the game should be redesigned to be more gender neutral” – Sai Kumar Mahadevan, Manager, Swiggy*



### The layers of help

Layers	Nature of help	Role specific helping relationship	Key dimensions of help
Layer one	Community help	Colleagues as friends; supervisors as guides; forums; self directed work teams; resource groups as support networks	Relationship, information, know-how, physical assistance, problem solving
Layer two	Barefoot help	Manager as barefoot coach	Relationship, purpose, support to succeed, support for development
Layer three	Qualified help	Leader as development coach and mentor	Purpose, support to succeed, support for development, transition & development coaching, mentoring
Layer four	Professional help for executive Coaching	Executive coach in a formal coaching relationship	Skills, behaviour change, new perspectives in an organisational context
Layers five	Professional Employee Assistance	Counsellor and therapist in a referral helping relationship	Problems of living, mental health and well being

- *Community help* in the form of support groups for women can be of huge value in dealing with pull and push factors.
- A coaching-oriented manager can certainly offer *barefoot help*.
- *Leaders trained to be internal coaches* and mentors can be of immense value to women, especially in dealing with the push factors within organisations.
- *Executive coaches* can help women revisit some of their belief systems as well as develop some of their leadership competencies.
- Beyond all this, in situations where women have psychological problems that need attention, *professional employee assistance* can be of value.

### Policies and practices

The right organisational policies and practices can have a huge positive impact on the ability of women to stay in the game.

Here is a sample of some of the practices and policies of organization as published in the public domain:

#### Valuing Performance over face time- Westpac Group

Research conducted jointly by Bain & Company and Chief Executive Women (CEW) in 2011 showed that, along with “visible and committed leadership,” women believe “creating working models that support men and women with family responsibilities” to be the most important

action to overcoming barriers to women's progression into leadership roles.<sup>16</sup>

In line with this finding **Westpac group**, Australia's oldest bank launched its "All in Flex" campaign in June 2015, which ensures all 40,000 existing roles globally are considered for flexible working, as well as any new roles created.

To support this journey, Westpac instituted the WorkSMART program which is both a way of working that empowers people to choose how, when and where they work, and a transformation program charged with overhauling Westpac's corporate environment, technology, tools, systems and policies to create a culture where work is no longer a place you go—but something you do and achieve.

As a result, today- 74% of Westpac Group employees work flexibly, 83% of employees support flexible working in their teams and 73% of employees who are carers work flexibly.

Given the advancements in technology, working remotely has become more

convenient than ever before. There is also a strong business case for working from home, since organizations save on real estate and transport costs.

If we want to create a more balanced workplace and leadership team, making flexibility the norm and valuing performance over face time is paramount.

### Moving away from Maternity towards "Parental leave"- Google

In order to do more to challenge gender stereotypes in **Google's** workplace they have made parental benefits gender-neutral. New parents, regardless of gender, receive up to 12 weeks fully paid leave to bond with their child (birth mothers receive an additional

*"Women are gifted with a strong intrinsic sense of intuition and a "gut feeling" which is often very beneficial for decision making. Organizations which value, encourage and harness this sense of intuition in women stand to benefit tremendously"* – Swapnil Srivastava, Associate Director, EY-GDS

*"If we are looking to break gender norms, we need to introduce paid "Parental Leave" instead of paid maternal leave. Parental leave where men and women are required to take time off to care for a child - not only helps women make more time for their careers but also helps men develop empathy towards caregiving and potentially develop their own empathy skills. This would help both men and women to succeed at home and at work. Wouldn't all organizations and society wish for that? We can benefit by looking at the Nordic countries which have progressive policies on "Parental leave".*  
– Alamelu Dev, Co-founder & Principal Consultant, RISE

10-12 weeks of pregnancy recovery time)  
In addition, all new parents benefit from a 2-week gradual return policy (ramping back to work part-time at full-time salary).<sup>17</sup>

## Fighting Unconscious bias

- Ingersoll Rand, an engineering and innovation company, has chalked out a training programme that seeks to combat unconscious bias, especially in the area of talent management. The course helps participants introspect and find out how unconscious bias impacted team dynamics in the past and how employees can modify their behaviours.<sup>18</sup>
- To date, 84% of Google's people managers have taken Unconscious Bias training, and Google has also introduced Unconscious Bias workshops into all "Noogler" (new Googler) orientations.
- PepsiCo India conducts gender intelligence workshops to sensitise both men and women and bring out the importance of having a gender-balanced organisation. It also runs in-house workshops on building core inclusion skills among employees and inclusive leadership skills among managers and leaders.<sup>19</sup>
- Facebook launched its website- <https://managingbias.fb.com> with resources to impart tips on managing bias at the workplace.<sup>20</sup>

## The three stages

We had right at the beginning outlined the three stages across which women tended to drop out of the game – the entry stage, the mid-senior stage and the executive leadership stage.

It is useful to summarise the specific needs across these three stages.

### Entry stage

- The largest drop happens between the entry stage and the mid-senior stage. The biggest reasons are to do with the pull factors of marriage and maternity.
- Clearly, organisational policies and practices will need to be the primary strategy to address the needs at this stage aided by formal learning and helping relationships to deal with the push factors and the beliefs.
- As suggested by our research the largest leak in the leadership pipeline for women is before they reach mid- management level. Moreover, research suggests that most senior leader development programs do not even end up reaching women. Hence, it is important to create avenues to address high- potential women during this crucial juncture of their career and groom them for senior leadership
- It is at this stage that their personal commitments often coincide with

their career trajectory leaving them vulnerable and perplexed about their career choices and progression

### **Mid-Senior**

- The drop from this stage to the next is not as steep but is significant from an organisational impact perspective, given their expertise and depth of experience.
- At this stage, pull factors continue to be impactful. However, the push factors become as important along with beliefs. Helping relationships are likely to be the primary strategy aided by formal learning and organisational policies and practices.

### ***Executive Leadership***

For those who have reached executive leadership, the challenge is around effectiveness and sustained success. The primary strategy is likely to be helping relationships supported by formal education and then organisational policies and practices.

### ***The three players who can influence solutions***

There are three players who have the ability to shape solutions across the three layers and stages:

- Aspiring women leaders
- Successful women leaders
- Organizational leadership

### **Aspiring women leaders**

Many consider it somewhat unfair that a lot of the onus for finding solutions is often left at the door steps of women who are aspiring to stay in the game. It is believed that it should be everyone's shared responsibility to make the change stick. While this is true, women do have a significant role to play.

- Their ability to define their problems and challenges and seek appropriate sources of help would be critical
- Their ability to develop their life skills in order to be intentional about their career and navigate their challenges would be critical
- Their ability to leverage all available formal learning opportunities would also be critical

### **Successful women leaders and the idea of paying it forward**

Women leaders in any walk of life who have managed to break the glass ceiling and establish their careers have a huge role to play in paying it forward – to pass on to the next generation the gifts they have been beneficiaries of.

For this to happen, they will need the intention to help as well as the skills and tools to do it well.

Organisations as well as professional bodies and forums are well placed to

nurture this intent to pay it forward and equip them with the skills to do it well. Such women leaders can be great role models at home and in their communities. They can be great advocates at their work place and can engage in dialogues when they see push factors at play. They can engage in helping relationships like informal mentoring and formal coaching. They can also influence policies and programs.

### **The place of role models**

Role models are often personal. They are in our homes. They are people we can aspire to be like and emulate. They are not always celebrities, politicians, millionaires or CEOs. They are people we see every day soldiering on against all odds and succeeding on their own terms.

For working women, they are often working mothers, grandmothers or mothers-in-law who have strived to strike a balance. They have not necessarily become CEOs or leaders, but they haven't stopped trying!

We believe that there is no greater reason to stay and play hard at the game! To be a role model to generations to come. To stay in the game long enough to one day hopefully change the rules. To ease the way for other women and men to make our homes, marriages, jobs, career trajectories and organizations more inclusive. For men to be able to choose being a homemaker if they wish to without being viewed adversely and for women to be able to pursue a career without harbouring any guilt or being judged for it.

### **Organisational leadership**

Leaders in organisations are well-placed to constantly shape policies and practices that will make their workplace conducive for women to participate and reduce the impact of the push factors.

This can include business leaders and HR leaders as well as D&I professionals.<sup>21</sup>





## ||||||| IN CLOSING |||||||

As part of our research, we were curious to hear what men had to say about the agenda of Women in Leadership. The men we spoke to were fairly quick to get to the heart of the issue. However, they were equally quick to acknowledge that there are miles to go before we can achieve a level playing field.

It is important for more men to be part of the solution and to advocate


the change. As one of our contributors remarked- Any large social change must be driven by the majority.

When more women stay in the game, they will also begin to change the rules of the game and create a more level playing field. When women stay in the game they will begin to win and help others win. We need to set in motion a virtuous cycle.

The radical ways in which work is being redefined and the people portfolio is being reshuffled augurs well for women because the underlying theme in all these changes are flexibility and that is what women need.

Finally, the millennial women seem to be somewhat liberated from some of the baggage of the previous generations and offer a strong ray of hope as far as staying in the game is concerned.

India has a lot of catching up to do and hopefully, the decade to come will be the time that this catching up will happen.<sup>22</sup>



*"We see very talented and high potential women dropping out at critical junctures of their life including marriage and maternity despite organisations having policies in place to support them through these phases. It is a choice they make because they are wired to see careers as secondary to home, family and children. What we need is a mindset shift. Women need to start believing that it is ok and immensely possible to do both with a little adjustment from all around. What organisations can do is have interventions that focus on this aspect. Help them build both the will and the confidence to succeed despite their dual responsibilities."*

**– Savita Mathai, Group Chief Talent Officer, FCB India & IPG Mediabrands**



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