



IMPACT OF CAREER ENABLERS AND FLEXIBLE WORKING METHODS ON WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY USING PATH MODEL

***Ms. SAUNDARYA RAJESH & **Dr. B. KALPANA**

* Research Scholar, School of Management, SRM University, Kattankulathur, Chennai-603203.

** Asst.Professor and Research Supervisor, School of Public Health, SRM University, Kattankulathur, Chennai-603203. Contact: kalpax4@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Globalization, changing demographics and metamorphosis in the roles of men and women has forced business to transform the way they operate. Strategies dealing with work-life integration are an important implement in this transformation. Women in the workforce pursuing a career and obtaining remuneration for the same are thus part of a modern phenomenon. It is a well-established fact that women have been challenged by inequality in the workforce. O'Reilly and O'Neill (2006) speak about the various factors which impact the career of a woman across different stages in her life. The primary focus on Gender identity propels the thinking that women can stay true to their engendered identity and still be successful in their careers rather than change their behavior to follow male models of workplace norms. Flexibility at the workplace is a universal need for all – men, women, old and young. It is a gender-neutral initiative, the rationale for which is driven powerfully by the changing roles of men and women, of caregivers and of nurturers. However, in the case of women, it is a sustaining force, a panacea which ensures that the pitfalls and speed-breakers in a woman's career journey do not result in permanent damage, i.e, her dropping off from the workforce, never to return.

The present paper is focused on identifying the women career growth enablers and thereby improving the longevity and work place participation of women in the country. Both secondary and primary data sources are used for the purpose of research. 26000 women attended the Hindu Opportunity Job fair for Women, of which 8000 showed interest in flexible careers. From this, every 6th sample was selected systematically. The final sample size, after data cleaning, based on this sampling was 1064. The output of path analysis indicate that the path coefficient for EE against FWB is -0.264 with p-value of 0.033 and the path coefficient for WLB against FWA is 0.204 with significant at one per cent level and the path co-efficient for EE against HBNF is 0.445 with significant at one per cent level.

Key words: Career growth- Workplace participation-Longevity-Career dropouts- Work life balance.

1.1: INTRODUCTION

Globalization, changing demographics and metamorphosis in the roles of men and women has forced business to transform the way they operate. Strategies dealing with work-life integration are an important implement in this transformation. Employee benefit practices such as work-from-home policies, part-time working, flexi-time working, job-sharing, job-splitting etc provide employees with the much needed integration between aspects of work and home. It is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society. Flexibility at the workplace is a universal need for all – men, women, old and young. It is a gender-neutral initiative, the rationale for which is driven powerfully by the changing roles of men and women, of caregivers and of nurturers. However, in the case of women, it is a sustaining force, a panacea which ensures that the pitfalls and speed-breakers in a woman's career journey do not result in permanent damage, i.e, her dropping off from the workforce, never to return.

Women in the workforce pursuing a career and obtaining remuneration for the same are thus part of a modern phenomenon. It is a well-established fact that women have been challenged by inequality in the workforce. Until recent times, both in India and around the world, legal and cultural practices, combined with the inertia of longstanding religious and educational traditions, restricted women's entry and participation in the workforce. Recent decades have seen rapid growth in female employment across all developing nations as well as the industrialized countries. However, in most countries, there is always a significant difference between the workforce participation rates of men versus that of women. Women were largely limited to low-paid and poor status occupations for the past two centuries and earned less pay than men for doing the same work. Even so, inequities in women's workforce participation exist. Women's careers are often non-linear in nature with numerous breaks due to a variety of reasons such as work-life imbalance, spousal relocation, elder-care and childbirth. In many cases this also leads to income inequality (Esping-Andersen, 2007).

2.1: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

One of the major influencers of women's workforce participation in the United States of America was the invention of the birth control pill. The oral contraception pill (OCP) provided women with the freedom to choose when they could become mothers. This was considered one of the key enablers of women's emancipation. The release of Enovid in 1960, the first OCP afforded U.S. women unprecedented freedom to plan childbearing and their careers. Bailey, Martha J (2006) used compiled legal data and population surveys, to prove that early legal access to the pill significantly reduced the likelihood of a first birth before age 22. This in turn allowed women to participate in the labour market well with an increase in the number of annual hours and weeks worked. This proved that birth control may have accelerated the growth in younger women's labor-force participation in the U.S. after 1970. O'Reilly and O'Neill (2006) speak about the various factors which impact the career of a woman across different stages in her life. The primary focus on Gender identity propels the thinking that women can stay true to their

engendered identity and still be successful in their careers rather than change their behavior to follow male models of workplace norms. Here a focus on what women could do to promote their careers is not discussed.

Iversen and Rosenbluth (2006) have discussed about the effect which women's careers have on their representation in democratic politics, both by reinforcing traditional voter attitudes toward women (a demand-side feature) and by constraining the supply of women with professional experience and resources who are capable of mounting credible electoral campaigns. The authors have argued that electoral systems have a strong, systematic effect on the extent to which women's workforce participation boosts female political representation. In candidate-centered political systems, where seniority is an important factor in legislative effectiveness, career interruptions for the sake of childcare and other family work hurts female aspiring politicians more seriously than in proportional representation (PR) systems, where political parties control the policy platform and constituency service is a minor consideration in the careers of candidates.

Weiner (2008) that Diversity across dimensions, such as functional expertise, education, or personality, can increase performance by enhancing creativity or group problem-solving. In contrast, more visible diversity, such as race, gender, or age, can have negative effects on a group—at least initially. However such fault lines can be utilised to a group's advantage too.

Ann Pomeroy (2007) in her study about the careers of women speaks about the reason why women are not found in large numbers even in the HR profession which is considered as one of the most suitable ones for women managers. In the study, she highlights the fact that due to family responsibilities and the fact that women are the primary stakeholders of the home, there is a serious shortage of women professionals as we go up the career ladder.

3.0: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1: Problem Statement

The Career Enablers which allow a woman professional to demonstrate Career Strength were identified by this researcher with the help of Human Resources professionals via 3 Focus Groups conducted in Chennai, Coimbatore and Bangalore. The key challenge with respect to the career of the woman professional is to understand the relative importance of each Career Enabler, so that the same can be included as Organizational policy in companies that seek to engage with women professionals. By providing relevant levels of each Career Enabler, organizations can help control attrition of women in the Indian workplace and thereby ensure enhanced workforce participation by Women in India. There is a serious lack of research in India with respect to Career Enablers. There are hardly any studies which record the perception of women professionals about enablers such as mentoring programs, flexible working arrangements, inspiring peer groups, day care facilities etc.

This study is being attempted by this researcher on the basis of the results of the FGD's conducted and will seek to study the following:

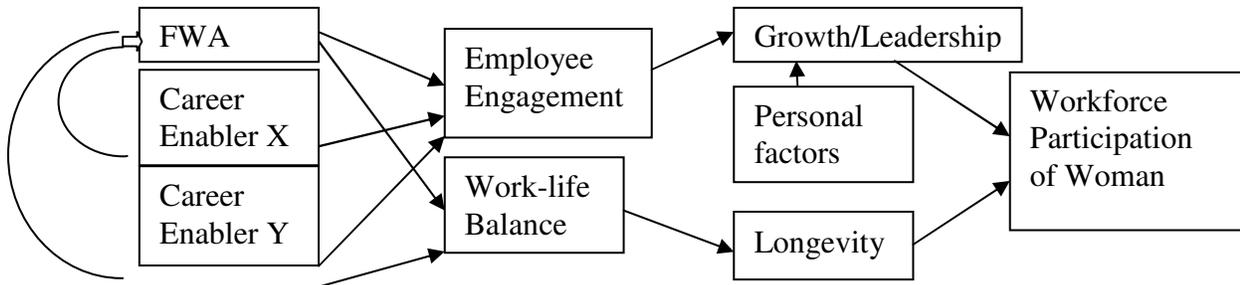
1. Relationship between Age and Seniority of Women professionals in seeking Career Enablers
2. Demographic factors which influence the perception of Career Strength.
3. Perception of different Career Enablers with regard to Career Strength Indicators.

4. The strength of association between Career Growth of a woman professional and her usage of Flexible Working Arrangements

The inferences from this research may be used as inputs for the creation of organizational policies and programs to enable the increase of women’s workforce participation in India.

3.2: Frame Work of the Study

Hypothesized Model:



3.3: Objectives of the Study

1. To examine factors influencing the choice of a career enabler for a woman professional at different levels in the organizational hierarchy.
2. To analyze the relationship between Work-Life Balance, Growth, Longevity and Employee Engagement as Career Strength Indicators of a woman’s career.
3. To find the relationship between the prior usage of a Career Enabler and its importance to a woman’s career.

3.4: Sources of Data

Both secondary and primary data sources are used for the purpose of research. 26000 women attended the Hindu Opportunity Job fair for Women, of which 8000 showed interest in flexible careers. From this, every 6th sample was selected systematically. The final sample size, after data cleaning, based on this sampling was 1064.

3.5: Research Design

The research design selected is cross sectional design based on descriptive methodology. Different abstractions are developed from the details of the phenomena by way of factor analysis and latent constructs are designated with appropriate nomenclature to understand and visualize the phenomena by inductive process. A pilot study is conducted to ensure that the questionnaire and objectives of study are statistically relevant and accurate.

3.6: Sampling Procedure

The Hindu Opportunity fair conducted in Chennai provided the research site. Respondents who attended the fair filled in the questionnaire on the spot, or were administered the questionnaire, which they later filled and submitted. The questionnaire administration and collection time-span pertains to the period between March 2011 and May 2011. In the proposed analysis data is predominantly nominal, categorical and ordinal. Patrick Dattalo (2008) mentions that for social sciences research, alpha level of .05 and the level of acceptable error at 5% is to be considered.

Cochran’s sample size formula for categorical data is used and determined as 880. However, to increase the reliability of data, the sample size is increased to 1064. The period of study was between March and May 2011 This study aims to assess the strength of career enablers, their value-addition to the Career Strength Indicators and more specifically the importance of each in adding to the robustness of a woman’s engagement to her workplace.

4.1: Data Analysis and Discussion

Table 4.1: Showing profile of the sample

Age of Respondents			Marital status		
Age Group	Frequency	Percent	Marital status	Frequency	Percent
Less than 26	312	29.3	Married	624	58.6
26 to 30 Yrs	284	26.7	Single	440	41.4
31 to 35	208	19.5	Family type		
36 to 40	136	12.8	Joint	332	31.2
Above 40	124	11.7	Nuclear	732	68.8
Total	1064	100.0	Total	1064	100.0
Employment status			% of women in office		
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Full Time	762	71.6	10% to 30%	446	41.9
Flexible	229	21.5	31% to 60%	552	51.9
Not Working	73	6.9	61% to 100%	66	6.2
Total	1064	100.0	Total	1064	100.0
Organizations provided flexibility			Work Experience		
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
1	382	35.9	0 to 5 years	578	54.3
2	140	13.2	6 to 10 years	238	22.4
3	56	5.3	11 to 15 years	104	9.8
4	6	.6	16 to 20 years	112	10.5
5	4	.4	21 to 25 years	14	1.3
10	20	1.9	26 to 30 years	18	1.7
NA	456	42.9	Total	1064	100.0

It is observed from the above table 4.1, 56 percent of the women in the sample is belongs to less than 30years age group only 11.7 percent of the women is the sample belongs to above 40 years age group. It is inferred that, the potential working age group of the women is less than 30 years and the work place participation issues will be more among this age group women. It may be due to family and personal demographic variables influence on the work timings and nature of work. The obligations towards family can influence the work place participation of women among the sample. Another significant personal demographic factor affecting the women participation at work is marital status and it is observed that 58.7 percent of the women in the sample is married. Women with full time employment status is observed at 71.6 percent and employees with nuclear family status observed at 68.8 percent.

In addition majority of the women in the sample is having less than five years of work experience and almost 52 percent of the sample work places are occupied with more than 30-60

percent of the work force is women. It is obvious that the flexibility observed in the work place is quite good and the basic barriers for work place participation for the above sample are personal and family demographic variables. The social change happening in the society in the form of commercialism and urbanization are added fuel to the burning issue. It can be resolved only through customized solutions derived by the individual women based on the density and degree of sensitivity of the problem faced by them. Basic work place requirements and the humanitarian consideration on the issues faced by the women is needed from corporate side. In addition, social responsibility and governance practices towards women employees need to be guaranteed at all points of time. This can be a supporting factor to the women’s work place participation and there by career progression in the long run.

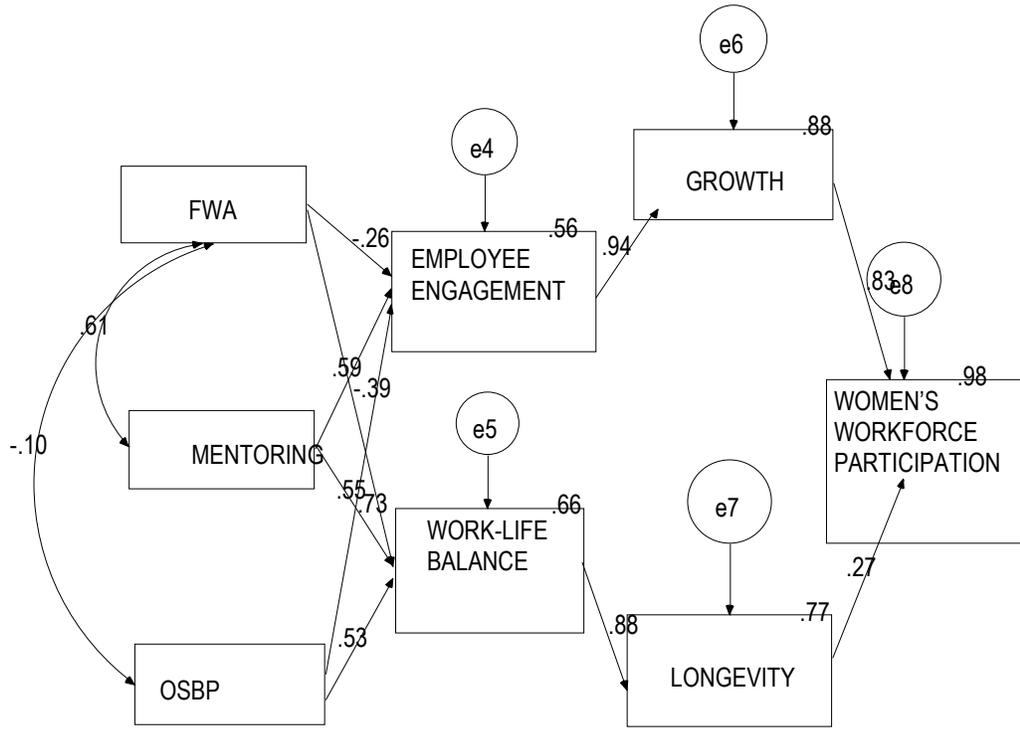
4.2: Correlation between the 4 career strength indicators

The correlation between the 4 Career Strength Indicators, which show that each of the indicators has a positive impact and correlation with all the other 3, is established using Spearman’s Rho. The Spearman Rho correlation elucidates the magnitude and direction of the association between each set of two variables that are on an interval or ratio scale, in this case between all 4 Career Strength indicators. The magnitude or strength of the correlation is established for all 4 variables, with the highest values returning for the correlation between Work-Life Balance and Employee Engagement at 0.813 and between Growth and Employee Engagement at 0.791. All 4 variables have correlation co-efficient which falls between 0.6 to 0.8. Since Spearman’s Rho posits that closer the correlation is to either +1 or -1, the stronger the correlation, in this case, it is evident that the correlation between all 4 Career Strength indicators is high. Also, the direction of the correlation is obtained from the positive values of the variables, in this case, all sets are positive integers, as such, there is a positive relationship (as one increases, the other also increases).

Table:4.2: Inter- Relationship between Career Strength Indicators

Dimension		WLB	EE	Growth	Longevity
Work life balance	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.813**	.714**	.684**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
	N	1064	1064	1064	1064
Employee Engagement	Correlation Coefficient	.813**	1.000	.791**	.711**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
	N	1064	1064	1064	1064
Growth	Correlation Coefficient	.714**	.791**	1.000	.755**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
	N	1064	1064	1064	1064
Longevity	Correlation Coefficient	.684**	.711**	.755**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
	N	1064	1064	1064	1064

4.3: Career Enablers and Career Strength Indicators model



The relationship between the independent variables of 1) Flexible working, 2) Mentoring, 3) Organization provided Skill Building Initiatives and the dependant variables of 1)Employee Engagement, 2)Longevity, 3) Growth and 4) Work-Life Balance were analyzed by employing path analysis and standardized structural path analysis results are presented in Table 8. Their combined effect and relationship with Women’s Workforce Participation was also analyzed.

Table: 4.3: Structural Path Analysis Results

			Estimate	S.E.	P
Employee Engagement	<---	Flexible work arrangement	-.264	.124	.033
Work life balance	<---	Flexible work arrangement	-.401	.110	***
Employee engagement	<---	Home based non family care	.445	.090	***
Work life balance	<---	Home based non family care	.557	.080	***
Employee engagement	<---	Peer group support	.327	.056	***
Work life balance	<---	Peer group support	.317	.049	***
Growth	<---	Employee engagement	.861	.044	***
Longevity	<---	Work life balance	.902	.069	***
Women Work Force	<---	Growth	.803	.022	***
Women Work Force	<---	Longevity	.230	.019	***

Note: *** indicates significant at five per cent level

4.4: Discussion of Path Analysis Results

The output of path analysis indicate that the path coefficient for EE against FWB is - 0.264 with p-value of 0.033 and the path coefficient for WLB against FWA is 0.204 with significant at one per cent level and the path co-efficient for EE against HBNF is 0.445 with significant at one per cent level. Meanwhile, the path coefficient for WLB against HBNF is 0.557. However, EE and Peer group have significant path coefficient of 0.327. Then, the path coefficient for WLB against Peer group is 0.317. The path coefficient for growth against EE is 0.861. The path coefficient for WLB against Longevity is 0.902. The path coefficient for WWF against Growth and Longevity are 0.803 and 0.230. The output indicated good fit with chi-square statistic of 58.264. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) is 0.92 and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is 0.91. These GFI and CFI indicate good fit. The standardized Root Mean Residual (RMR) is 0.04 and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0.04 indicating good fit. Hence, the null hypothesis of there is no significant inter relationship between the conceptual model variable is rejected.

5.1: Summary and Conclusion

It is concluding that from the analysis that, both personal and family demographic variables are having high degree of influence on the women career participation, longevity and growth among the sample. The role of career enablers and growth factors suggested by the scholar plays a substitute role to improve the women's participation at work place and to improve the longevity and growth in the career. Flexi working is a common logic of the corporate today to avoid the logistic issues and to complete the assignments as per the schedules and to satisfy the client needs from time to time. The common solution to improve the women's participation at work is to have a customized analysis of the individual issues and to make up tailor made solutions can have better influence than common and random managerial practices at work place.

REFERENCES

1. Esping-Andersen, G (2008) "Sociological Explanations of Changing Income Distributions" *American Behavioural Scientist*, Vol 50(5) pp639-658.
2. Hussain, Fatima (2012) "Women's Empowerment – a historical profile in India" *International Research Journal of Arts & Humanities (IRJAH)* Vol. 37 ISSN: 1016-9342.
3. Selmi, Michael L. (2008), "The Work-Family Conflict: An Essay on Employers, Men and Responsibility". *University of St. Thomas Law Journal*, 2008; *GWU Legal Studies Research Paper No. 395*; *GWU Law School Public Law Research Paper No. 395*.
4. Selmi, Michael L. and Cahn, Naomi R.(2006), "Women in the Workplace: Which Women, Which Agenda?". *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy*, Vol. 13, Spring 2006 (Symposium Issue); *George Washington University Legal Studies Research Paper No. 181*.
5. Mainiero, Lisa A. & Sullivan, Sherry E, (2006), "The Opt-Out Revolt: Why People Are Leaving Companies to Create Kaleidoscope Careers" *Davies-Black Publishing*, 2006, Pg 88-110

6. O'Reilly, Charles A. and O'Neill, Olivia A.(2004), Women's Careers: The Impact of Sex and Gender Identity on Career Attainment (December 2004). Stanford GSB Working Paper No. 1775(R).
7. Bailey, Martha J., More Power to the Pill(2005): The Impact of Contraceptive Freedom on Women's Labor-Force Participation (July 2005). Vanderbilt University Economics Working Paper No. 04-WG01R.
8. Iversen, Torben and Rosenbluth, Frances McCall, Work and Power (2008): The Connection between Female Labor Force Participation and Female Political Representation. Annual Review of Political Science, Vol. 11, June 2008
9. Arifeen, Shehla Riza (2009), A Biographical Profile of Professional Women Managers in Pakistan's Private Sector, Lahore School of Economics Journal (October 7, 2009).
10. Weiner, Laura (2008). "Companies must set goals for diversity." Crain's Detroit Business Journal 24.15 (2008): Page 16.