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IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER NEUTRAL WORKPLACE ON PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF EMPLOYEES WORKING IN INDIAN SOFTWARE INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Indian software industry is witnessing a rapid growth where the sector is estimated to have generated US\$ 142 billion in revenue during 2015 compared to US\$ 111 billion in 2014, implying a growth rate of 22.43 per cent. From the perspective of labour relations and the workforce, the industry is distinctive in its apparently woman-friendly policies. Major players in the industry boast themselves on their well-designed HR policies, blended with tall claims about equality of opportunity that is supposed to give equal opportunity to women. In reality, software sector is still a male dominated industry which tends to exclude or marginalise women. Although researches suggests a reasonable gender neutral pursuit by this industry, an adequate level of gender inclusivity is yet to be accomplished. Important players claim to have achieved higher levels of psychological well-being experienced by employees through creating a gender neutral environment. Data was collected from 400 software engineers working in three large organizations with the help of online questionnaires. Analysis of data was carried out using one way ANOVA with the aid of SPSS software. It was found that female employees perceived higher levels of psychological well-being compared to that of male employees working in software industry. It was also found that female employees perceived higher levels of the pleasure and purpose dimension of psychological wellbeing compared to that of male employees working in IT sector.

KEY WORDS: Gender neutrality, Psychological well-being, Software industry.

INTRODUCTION

India is a global leader in software industry, accounting for almost 62 per cent of the US\$ 113 billion market. Indian software industry is estimated to have generated US\$ 142 billion in revenue during 2015 compared to US\$ 111 billion in 2014, implying a growth rate of 22.43 per cent.

With the sector emerging as a mainstay for the Indian economy, the contribution of the sector of the country's GDP has reached a whopping 9.2 per cent in 2015 from 1.3 per cent in 1997. The top five companies contribute around 32 per cent to the aggregate revenue of the sector, showing that the market is fairly competitive, with Tata Consultancy

Services (TCS) being the leader accounting for about 10.2 per cent. Being the largest private employer in the country with more than 11 million people employed in the industry, the sector has led the financial transformation of the country and changed the image of India in the global economy. The cutting edge of India in providing software services in the world market is all about its cost competitiveness which is approximately 3-4 times cheaper than the competing countries. With many companies setting up their innovation centres in India, the country is gaining prominence in terms of intellectual capital. The expected growth rate of the industry is a promising 10-12 per cent for the financial year of 2016-17 and will triple its present annual revenue to reach US\$ 322 billion by 2025 (NASSCOM, 2013).

Key characteristics such as nonphysical nature of work, availability of job and flexibility of the work are the main reasons of the acceptability of software firms as woman friendly places to work. These key features of the job has attracted a lot of female crowd into the industry, there are many facets of the work that are still dominated by males. First, the phenomenon of women opting for IT jobs reflects a process of gendering in the work force since women tend to be side-lined into the low end jobs (Rothboeck, et.al. 2001). Second, there is a tendency for women professionals in software companies to get focused in lower rank process jobs rather than highly paid technical functions (Remesh, 2004). Third, the sector is experiencing high levels of attrition rates among women employees mainly due to social and family pressures experienced by them.

The final feature of gendering in the work force is the fact that there is a serious lack of top level women executives. Here, nature of work plays an important role which pressurizes females to exit the company just at the time when they might be poised to occupy a higher position. Often, this happens with experienced women employees at the juncture when they are likely to get married and have children (Singh and Pandey, 2005). Researchers have also observed that female employees usually avoid upward mobility within their firms and remain complacent with their lower level jobs since they want manage work and family responsibilities. Even though the major players in the industry have introduced a lot of new initiatives to ensure a gender inclusive environment, the attitude of employees towards these practices and the effect of the same on their psychological well-being is not studied. The present study tries to identify gender difference in the perception of the two dimensions of psychological well-being of employees working in software industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological Wellbeing:-

Robertson and Flint-Taylor (2008) defined psychological well-being at work as the mental state with emotional and meaningfulness aspects that employees experience while they are at work settings. In literature, the construct of psychological well-being has been conceptualized in two different ways. First, researchers have delved deep into the pleasure aspect of psychological well-being which is usually related to the experience of positive feelings and factors such as overall life satisfaction. The proponents of this approach argue that well-being is all about feeling good. The major drawback of this dimension is that it ignores the importance of life experiences having a purpose. Second dimension of psychological well-being stresses the importance of purpose in well-being. Current studies in the area of positive psychology consider purpose driven well-being as a key factor leading towards organizational well-being (Fredrickson, 1998; Seligman et al., 2005). Experts have identified two factors that lead to the development of psychological well-being. It includes the impact that positive emotional experiences have on the development of psychological well-being and a general sense of purpose that gives meaning to individual's action. From this, it can be deduced that the holistic concept of well-being has a pleasure and purpose aspect.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher has adopted descriptive method since the study tries to describe the impact of gender inclusive work places on psychological well-being of employees working in software industry. Psychological wellbeing of employees was measured using the tool developed by Robertson and Flint-Taylor (2008). Primary data was collected directly from software engineers with the help of structured questionnaire and secondary data was collected from the NASSCOM directory. The population of the study is defined as employees working in software companies with more than one year of work experience in the respective firm. Data was collected from 400 software engineers working in three large organizations and analysis carried out using one way ANOVA with the aid of SPSS software. Out of the 400 respondents, 220 were men and the remaining 180 were women. The research was carried out at Info park, Cochin and Techno park, Trivandrum, the two major techparks in the country. The period of data collection was from July 2015 to November 2015.

DATA ANALYSIS

Influence of Gender on Psychological Well-Being:

One way ANOVA was used for testing hypothesis H₁ which was about the significant difference in psychological well-being across gender. H₁ was stated as:

H₁ - There is a significant difference in psychological well-being across gender.
The null hypothesis that psychological well-being does not vary across gender of IT employees was tested statistically and the results are reported below

Table 1 ANOVA-test results for gender and psychological well-being

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
PW	Between groups	1.335	1	1.335	2.382	.000*
	Within groups	142.673	398	.463		
	Total	141.284	399			

(* indicates items significant at 5% significance level)

The above table shows one way ANOVA results done on psychological well-being with gender. The results showed that the values are significant at 5% level. Thus, there is a significant difference in the psychological well-being with regards to gender of the employees. Hence H₁ is accepted. Also, the mean value of male employees was found to be 1.32 and that of female employees was found to be 2.84. So it can be inferred that female employees perceived higher levels of psychological well-being compared to that of male employees.

Influence of Gender on Pleasure dimension of Psychological Well-Being:-

One way ANOVA was used for testing hypothesis H₂ which was about the significant difference in pleasure dimension of psychological well-being across gender. H₂ was stated as:

H₂ - There is a significant difference in pleasure dimension of psychological well-being across gender.

The null hypothesis that pleasure dimension of psychological well-being does not vary across gender of IT employees was tested statistically and the results are reported below.

Table 2 ANOVA-test results for gender and pleasure dimension of psychological well-being

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Pleasure Dimension PW	Between groups	1.118	1	1.118	2.286	.000*
	Within groups	128.954	398	.434		
	Total	135.986	399			

(* indicates items significant at 5% significance level)

The above table shows one way ANOVA results done on pleasure dimension of psychological well-being with gender. The results showed that the values are significant at 5% level. Thus, there is a significant difference in the pleasure dimension of psychological well-being with regards to gender of the employees. Hence H₂ is accepted. Also, the mean value of male employees was found to be 1.56 and that of female employees was found to be 3.11. So it can be inferred that female employees perceived higher levels of pleasure dimension of psychological well-being compared to that of male employees.

Influence of Gender on Purpose dimension of Psychological Well-Being:-

One way ANOVA was used for testing hypothesis H₃ which was about the significant difference in purpose dimension of psychological well-being across gender. H₃ was stated as:

H₃ - There is a significant difference in purpose dimension of psychological well-being across gender.

The null hypothesis that purpose dimension of psychological well-being does not vary across gender of IT employees was tested statistically and the results are reported below.

Table 3 ANOVA-test results for gender and purpose dimension of psychological well-being

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Purpose Dimension PW	Between groups	1.337	1	1.337	2.398	.000*
	Within groups	137.264	398	.474		
	Total	143.761	399			

(* indicates items significant at 5% significance level)

The above table shows one way ANOVA results done on purpose dimension of psychological well-being with gender. The results showed that the values are significant at 5% level. Thus, there is a

significant difference in the purpose dimension of psychological well-being with regards to gender of the employees. Hence H₃ is accepted. Also, the mean value of male employees was found to be

1.37 and that of female employees was found to be 2.96. So it can be inferred that female employees perceived higher levels of purpose dimension of psychological well-being compared to that of male employees.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis showed that female employees perceived higher levels of psychological well-being compared to that of male employees working in software industry. It was also found that women work in software companies perceived higher levels of both pleasure and purpose dimension of psychological well-being compared to that of male employees. This shows that the gender inclusive practices adopted by firms have created an impact by reducing the marginalization of women at workplace. The hypothesized link between gender and psychological well-being was well supported by data analysis. Therefore, the primary assumption of the study stating the strong influence of gender on psychological well-being as a whole was proved statistically.

Studies have shown that policies related to sexual harassment and flexibility at work emerged as the most popular ones adopted by Indian software firms while day care facilities, sessions on parenting, providing counselling facilities for women employees and starting women forums remain less popular. Team outing was found to be a very effective gender inclusivity initiative which helped to enhance morale of employee and transcend the difference of gender, language or qualification. Wright & Cropanzano (2000) have argued that wellbeing is a stronger antecedent of work performance compared to job satisfaction. A study done by Harter et al., (2002) found an important link between psychological well-being and business unit level outcomes such as satisfaction of customer, financial performance and attrition levels. It was also found that lower levels of psychological well-being resulting from work environment factors is a major cause of health risks for employees (Cohen et al., 2006).

CONCLUSION

Indian software industry is touted as the largest employer in the private sector creating a great deal of opportunity for female graduates to take up attractive and comfortable careers. The main reason for women graduates being attracted towards software jobs is due to the fact that most of the software firms have a set of gender neutral HR practices in a place that focuses on fair opportunity to all. Having really understood the importance of psychological well-being in enhancing individual and organizational outcomes, major players in software industry are taking special care to put in place right kind of inclusive strategies to retain

their valuable employees. This is evident from the fact that the present workforce participation ratio of male and female employees in Indian software industry has reached a promising figure of 75:25. Therefore, we have strong reasons to believe that the gender inclusive strategies have worked for the advantage of the firms and the industry as a whole.

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