
Second career of women professionals in India: A corporate perspective

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ABSTRACT

The increasing participation of women in the Indian workforce is a very laudable trend with liberalization, privatization and globalization friendly policies of the Indian Government having worked in its favour. However it has been found that a large number of Indian women employed in the corporate sector find a career break unavoidable due to the impracticalities associated with balancing domestic responsibilities and those at full fledged work. Once their domestic responsibilities like child care, elder care or other variants have been well attended to and they have enough time to dedicate to their career pursuits, many are keen to re-enter the career track. In this paper, an analytical study on the Indian corporate perspective towards such second career women^[1] is presented. The potential threats in a woman professional's second innings in the corporate world are brought to light by the study. The benefits and the challenges associated with the industry engagement of the subjects under study are elaborated in great detail. As a conclusive outcome of the study, a bunch of career re-entry models for Indian women professionals with a career break are expounded. These models need to be supported by the societal career enablers that are capable of catalyzing the smooth transition of second career women from homemakers to confident professionals.

Keywords: Career break, Career enablers, Indian Woman Professional (IWP), Second Career Women

1. Introduction

The last two decades have been witness to an unprecedented technology boom that created a multitude of employment opportunities for women professionals in the Indian corporate sector. With more and more Indian women pursuing technical education and eventually grabbing plum roles in the corporate sector, the percentage of employed women professionals has undergone a steep increase. However sociological surveys reveal that an average Indian Woman Professional's rationale and criteria for career planning is diametrically different from the career management styles of her western and South Asian counterparts. While a majority of women from across the world would choose individual self-actualization as a key criterion in career choices, an IWP tends to be more dual-centric leading her to seek out means by which she can stay true to society's expectation of being the ideal Indian wife, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law et.al. It has been found that a vast majority of IWPs find it impossible to juggle domestic and professional responsibilities and finally take a break in their careers to pay heed to the domestic front. It is heartening to note that many of these women are ready for a career re-entry once the reasons that led them to a career break diminish in magnitude after a period of time. It is here that the Indian corporate perspective towards such second career women assumes importance.

It has to be admitted that the Indian corporate sector is not totally prepared to integrate women into sustainable long term careers. This could be because the typical corporate career model was created keeping in mind the male, who with a full time homemaker to support, can rise in corporate ranks by working with single minded focus on his career. However things are changing and many major corporate houses in India have a bunch of innovative initiatives for enhancing gender inclusivity. All of such initiatives revolve around the central theme of flexi-working^[2] which target IWPs contemplating a career break and also those women who are ready for career re-entry after breaks.

In this paper, an analytical study on the Indian corporate perspective towards women seeking career re-entry is presented. The paper touches upon the corporate engagement patterns of Indian women and the major reasons that lead them to career breaks. After defining the pool of second career women comprehensively, the study methodology and the key findings of the study is detailed. The policies that corporate houses adhere to in order to welcome women back are elaborated. Statistical analyses helped quantify the findings of the study as many hidden correlations between various corporate dimensions were brought to light through this. This helped establish a set of career re-entry models for women professionals with career breaks which when ably supported by their personal and professional ecosystems will help them maintain the momentum of their re-entry. These career re-entry models form the conclusive outcome of the study.

2. Review of literature

In this section, a brief review of global research on women career returners is presented. It is immensely insightful to first study the reasons that lead women professionals to career breaks and then try to understand the means by which they negotiate the career gaps and pave the way for their career return. The proverbial glass ceiling^[3] that prevents women in the corporate sector from advancing beyond a certain point in rank and wages has been extensively researched (Baroudi and Igbaria, 1995; Harris and Wilkinson, 2004; Igbaria and Baroudi, 1995; Kaminski and Reilly, 2004; Upadhya 2006). A model of barriers in the career paths, both social and structural, faced by women particularly in the field of information technology is presented in a detailed study (Ahuja, 2002). Challenges faced by women professionals attempting career comebacks and few corporate initiatives required to support such women are detailed in the case study (Herman, 2011). Another path-breaking study on encouraging women career returners' participation in traditionally male dominated industries was carried out by (Turgoose, Christine et.al, 2006). The need for different types of re-training to be imparted to women returning to higher level occupations after a patch of unemployment was brought out by (Bird, 1999). Yet another research that revealed that women returning to full-time work after becoming mothers tend to be clustered in different occupations, such as teaching and management is (Tomlinson et al., 2005)

Gender segregation profoundly affects earnings. The effects of career breaks on the lives of women and the subsequent wage penalty they need to pay as they prepare for a career return has been studied in depth by (Shoba, Thankam and Vani, 2004). The wage penalty that women had to pay for the career breaks they took to become mothers was holistically researched by (Avellar and Smock, 2003 and Petersen et.al, 2011). Career sacrifice as a penalty to motherhood was projected by (Gash, 2009). Marks and Houston (2003) emphasized the importance of planning and workplace support for women getting back to work after maternity leave. Another study that showed that majority of women resumed work

but not necessarily at a level commensurate with their qualifications and experience, or in their original professional area is (Shaw et al., 2000). Similar studies that showed that women often returned to jobs at a lower level than those which they had left are presented in (Bird, 1999). Although there are many factors involved, the actual reasons as to why high-achieving women often develop a 'poor occupational biography' are not clear according to (Marks and Houston, 2002). An elaborate study on the European perspective towards women returners was done in (Shepherd and Saxby-Smith, 2001). A set of policies that can be followed by a woman's personal and professional ecosystem to aid her career return is discussed in (Caroline and Marilyn, 1994). The various reasons why women seek a career re-entry were analyzed in (Doorewaard et.al, 2004). Different circumstances under which women choose to return to their career tracks and a sociological mapping of the labour market requirement and the skill set of these women returnees is presented in (Tomilson et.al, 2009). Yet another interesting link on career re-entry programmes for women worldwide is provided by (ireLaunch).

The review indicates that though research has been done extensively on a woman's perspective of her career re-launch, the corporate angle of this issue is mostly untouched. As corporate houses are critical participants in a woman's career return, such a study can prove extremely useful in designing the re-entry models for women with career breaks. As for women contemplating career returns, such a study would present them with a checklist that they need to stick to, to keep themselves marketable and industry ready.

2.1 Indian women professionals and their corporate engagement

From the 1990s, when the winds of liberalization started blowing over the Indian Labour market, many corporate houses started investing in India. The technology revolution eased their process of establishment and a horde of job opportunities resulted. With an increase in the number of women pursuing technical and professional education, it was but natural that young women graduates accepted the exciting job offers from the corporate houses that came their way. Thus most companies in the ITES, IT, banking, hospitality, BPOs or KPOs sectors in India boast of a comparatively large workforce of women at the entry level. However studies show that less than 8% of these women are actually successful in negotiating their way up the corporate ladder and consequently only a handful of women are known to occupy senior managerial positions in the aforementioned industries. In the Indian socio-cultural context, career is just one of the many dimensions that define the social entity called 'Woman'. Her aspirations and ambitions are often reshaped and re-molded by the expectations from the various social roles she plays. Furthermore when the responsibilities of a marriage and subsequent child care and elder care are entrusted upon her, her career takes a back seat. The absence of gender sensitive policies that might bestow certain flexibilities upon her at her place of work, prompts her to take the harsh decision of applying the brakes on her career track. In short, an Indian woman's cultural conditioning, societal pressure, structurally inflexible workplace, lack of support systems and other personal reasons make a break inevitable in her career journey.

2.2 Who are second career women?

Woman Professionals who took a break from their high-flying corporate careers but are currently ready for a career re-launch constitute the class of second career women. Majority of these women are those who took breaks to attend to their domestic responsibilities like that of child-bearing, child rearing, elder care etc. A small percentage of them are those who took

breaks due to other personal reasons like relocation, higher studies or ill health. Over a period of time most of these women no longer have ineluctable caring responsibilities in the domestic front or other compelling reasons that led them to a career break cease to exist and they are in search of opportunities to resurrect their careers and relive their dreams of climbing up the corporate ladder. The time, effort and money spent in educating and training these IWPs which were seemingly wasted serve as the driving forces and these second career women emboldened by their commendable career past are ready to re-enter the workforce bandwagon.

The motives for career re-entry vary from a desire to taste financial independence to putting an end to boredom to self-actualization. It has been observed that IWPs ready for a second career unanimously feel that flexibilities at workplaces is a must for sustaining their second innings. This could be because they harbor apprehensions about encountering stumbling blocks along the way that might potentially end their renewed careers. Lack of flexi-time or part time job opportunities and the non availability of flexi options like telecommuting^[4] when the place of work is way too far, coerce them to take up jobs that tend to under utilize their past training (scientific and technical training) and the result is a population of women professionals doing less skilled jobs for which they are over-qualified. Unfortunately many organizations fail to recognize the importance of flexi-work options in enhancing the gender friendliness of their workplaces. Innovative second career programmes are flagged under corporate social responsibility initiatives culminating in them not being accessible to the women they are intended for.

3. Research objectives

The research documented in this paper aims to demystify the current attitude of the Indian corporate sector towards women professionals seeking a career return. Through the survey, the study intends to understand the effectiveness of the current corporate policies to employ women after career breaks. The benefits attached to hiring them can be brought to light as also the concerns and apprehensions that corporate managers harbor about the employability of these women. The need of the hour is to awaken the policy makers in the corporate sector and enlighten them about the huge untapped, unexploited potential of the talent pool of second career women. The career break might have also resulted in many of these women staying away from their professional circles and once they have resolved to make a comeback they realize that contacts that were once 'a mail away' have become almost inaccessible. Training programmes that provide the much needed handholding to these IWPs can bridge the gap that currently exists between them and the very happening corporate sector. Such transitioning programmes can help them feel that the breaks in their professional tracks are justifiable and can help build their confidence levels making them interview ready. The research intends to provide valuable pointers to Indian Inc. for initiating such programmes through its recommendation of ideal/desired career re-entry models for women.

3.1 The corporate perspective towards second career women: an analytical study

The study on corporate mindsets towards women career returners was conducted by FLEXI Careers India in collaboration with Mumbai based MTHR Global (More Than HR Global), a leading Knowledge Community pan India. The survey was carried out to exemplify the need for a defined approach towards the rehiring of women who opt out of the workplace at some point. Survey respondents included people engaged at various levels in the corporate sector starting from junior management to middle management, senior management, CXOs and

board members. The respondent sample was also geographically diverse as the people who took the survey were spread across many major cities and towns in India. In this section, the survey methodology and the key findings of the survey is presented.

3.2 Research methodology

The survey for the research was conducted through means of a questionnaire that addressed the multifaceted issues pertaining to corporate rehiring of women with career breaks. Most of the questions had multiple choices as answers making the questionnaire largely objective. The options were chosen after thorough analysis of the question within the domain. This was intended to facilitate quantitative analysis. Respondents were allowed to choose multiple options as their answers to certain questions in order to accommodate their holistic view on the issue in question. Some of the questions also allowed respondents to prioritize their answers as this would help bring out their relative importance. The comprehensive questionnaire is available in Appendix I.

3.3 Analysis and interpretation

As the survey was conducted online, people working in diverse sectors including IT (ITES/BPO, /KPO), FMCG (Retail, Consumer Goods), telecom industry, banking, financial services, insurance, manufacturing industry, consulting, media, advertising and education took the survey. A total of 388 respondents were surveyed of which the majority were junior managers (35.6%) followed by middle managers (31.4%), senior managers (14.9%), CXOs (13.1%) and board members (4.1%). The survey responses were able to extract popular opinion on the major reasons as to which women actually took career breaks. The survey findings indicated that the number of women who have to leave work due to personal reasons, and then seek a second chance to pursue their careers has increased considerably. Statistical analyses of the responses revealed many hidden correlations like those between a corporate professional's job role, gender, generation to which he/she belongs to, industry experience and his/her perceptions of women seeking a career return. The visibility of initiatives for second beginnings of a woman's career was also scrutinized.

3.3.1 Corporate interest in second career women - Policies, benefits and concerns

In this section, corporate awareness on the existence and utilization of policies benefitting women seeking a second career is discussed. 72.7% of the respondents were proud of the fact that the organizations they worked with were positively oriented towards women returnees. 54% of the corporate personnel who took the survey spoke about the policies for second career of women professionals that their companies had designed under the fleet of diversity and inclusion initiatives. Though 55% of the survey respondents felt that their experience of welcoming women back to the corporate world had been pleasant, 30% felt that the policies needed to be more effective and supportive of such women.

3.3.1.1 Benefits

As already mentioned, the respondent sample consisted of people working at various levels in the corporate hierarchy - junior management level, middle management level, senior management level, executive level, and board members. When questioned about the corporate needs to hire women with career breaks, people at different levels responded differently to this issue. The benefits of hiring second career women according to survey

respondents range from the utilization of an alternate talent pool to the cost benefit attached to this talent pool (sadly, an effect of the wage penalty these women incur due to their career breaks), their career stabilities stemming from their realistic expectations about their workplace, the greater levels of commitment they show due to more matured and balanced outlooks et al. According to corporate leaders, most of the second career women in addition to bringing along with them the benefit of commendable academic excellence would have undergone various industry specific trainings in their earlier stints. This makes them an innately talented pool with an added bonus of being familiar with the corporate working ways, thanks to their past corporate exposure. Also many organizations have woken up to the need of having more women in their workplace and view this as singularly the most important diversity and inclusion initiative. Moreover since majority of these women feel that some form of flexible working arrangement is mandatory for their career sustainability, they are open to work options with lesser pays that grant them the much needed work flexibility. Women professionals who are back after career breaks tend to have more realistic expectations from their workplaces probably because of their higher levels of emotional maturity. They tend to be more committed to their jobs and are more career stable as they are fully aware of the significance of their revamped career tracks.

It was interesting to note that there existed correlations between the corporate role of a respondent and the importance he/she attached to each of these advantages. As respondents were asked to prioritize their options a large number of different combinations resulted. Table 1 lists these outlooks in the decreasing order of their voted importance. The top four reasons for corporate interest in second career women are: to tap into an alternate talent pool (37.11%), Women returnees are more stable (19.07%), to have more women in the workplace as a diversity initiative (13.40%) and because of the cost benefit attached to this (4.64%). Statistical tests revealed that there was a 0.84 correlation between an employee's corporate role and his/her outlook towards the benefits of hiring second career women. Table 2 shows these test results.

Table 1: Benefits attached to hiring second career women (top 5)

Benefits	Board Member	Senior Management	CXO /COO/CEO/CFO/CTO/CMO	Middle Management	Junior Management	Total
To tap into an alternate talent pool - (1)	2.58%	4.38%	5.41%	11.08%	13.66%	37.11%
Women returnees are more stable - (1)	1.03%	1.80%	2.84%	7.73%	5.67%	19.07%
To have more women in the workplace as a diversity initiative - (1)	0.26%	2.84%	2.58%	3.87%	3.87%	13.40%
Because of the cost benefit attached to this - (1)	0.00%	2.06%	0.77%	1.03%	0.77%	4.64%
To tap into an alternate talent pool - (1)To have more women in the workplace as a diversity initiative - (1)	0.26%	0.77%	0.00%	0.77%	1.29%	3.09%

**Option A - (x) means Option A was given a priority 'x'.

Table 1: Statistical measures relating corporate role to interest in hiring second career women

Statistic	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	252.48	276	0.84
Likelihood Ratio	214.15	276	1
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.35	1	0.04
N of Valid Cases	388		

Corporate personnel do have their share of concerns on the employability of women with career breaks. People from different levels of management shared their apprehensions on the sustainability, employability and emotional readiness of women seeking a career return. Some felt that a woman on her second stint might again do the disappearing act. Her industry competitiveness is questionable felt many as she might not be able to measure upto her counterparts with uninterrupted careers.

Yet another concern was about the relevance of her skill set to the organizational needs. Respondents felt that in this age when technology is changing at the blink of an eye, the technical skill sets of women career returnees would be outdated on their career comebacks. This could imply a huge investment on retraining them which according to many survey participants is an unnecessary burden on the organization's shoulder. Furthermore, people felt that though the reasons that compelled her to take a career break initially might no longer exist, she would have moved into a different ecosystem with regard to her priorities during the break. Once she returns, she might find it difficult to break out of these set priorities and divert most of her energy to her revamped career.

Also many feel that some of these second career women have unrealistic expectations of their employers as they might not be fully aware of the rough waters their companies had gone through during their career breaks. Table 3 details the major concerns that corporate employees have about hiring women after a career gap. The most common reasons that work against hiring of second career women are perceived changes in her priorities in life (career was secondary during the break – 24.48%), the probability of taking a break again (16.75%), the loss of competitive edge and inability to measure up to her peers (13.4%), the industry irrelevance of her skill set (12.11%) and the additional costs incurred for re-training her (6.44%). The statistic measure of Pearson's chi-squared coefficient measured 0.5, which signifies the relationship between a manager's corporate role and his/her apprehensions. Detailed statistical results are available in Table 4. .

The study also brought out the fact that even if managers convince themselves about the potential hidden in the untapped talent pool of second career women, many of them are unsure about the performances of these women once they are on board again. While a majority of corporate workers (65.46%) feel that women returnees perform better than men who are back after a career gap, 25.77% feel both the groups perform at par. 8.76% of people who took the survey felt that men returnees outperform women. Table 5 shows the distribution of perceptions. Table 6 shows the results of statistical analyses.

Table 2: Concerns about hiring second career women (top 5)

Concerns	Board Member	Senior Management	CXO /COO/CEO/ CFO/CTO/CMO	Middle Management	Junior Management	Total
She would have moved into a different ecosystem with regard to her priorities and would have lost that cutting edge - (1)	2.84%	4.12%	5.15%	6.44%	5.93%	24.48%
She will again do the disappearing act - (1)	0.52%	2.06%	2.06%	5.15%	6.96%	16.75%
She will not measure up to her pers - (1)	0.00%	1.29%	0.77%	5.67%	5.67%	13.40%
Her skills will no longer be relevant to the organization - (1)	0.00%	2.58%	1.29%	3.35%	4.90%	12.11%
She will require huge investment of training - (1)	0.26%	1.29%	1.29%	1.80%	1.80%	6.44%

**Option A - (x) means Option A was given a priority 'x'.

Table 3: Statistical measures relating corporate role to concerns in hiring second career women

Statistic	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	163.31	164	0.5
Likelihood Ratio	165.69	164	0.45
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.26	1	0.01
N of Valid Cases	388		

Table 4: Performance of women career returnees: perceptions

Concerns	Board Member	Senior Management	CXO /COO/ CEO/CFO/ CTO/CMO	Middle Management	Junior Management	Total
Women's job performance is better compared to men - (1)	2.58%	9.54%	10.31%	19.85%	23.20%	65.46%
No difference in performance - (1)	1.80%	2.58%	2.32%	10.05%	9.02%	25.77%
Men's job performance is better compared to women - (1)	0.52%	2.84%	0.52%	1.55%	3.35%	8.76%

**Option A - (x) means Option A was given a priority 'x'.

Table 5: Statistical measures relating corporate role to perceptions about performances of second career women

Statistic	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	18.04	8	0.02
Likelihood Ratio	17.15	8	0.03
Linear-by-Linear Association	0	1	0.95
N of Valid Cases	388		

3.4 Integrating second career women into their workplaces – the corporate angle

Change is the only constant and this has been the mantra reverberant in corporate offices across the globe. The corporate sector is extremely receptive of the evolution in technology and adapts to newer technology swiftly to scale up performance. It follows that a lot would have changed in terms of techniques and the general work atmosphere, when a career returnee is back. This also necessitates the existence of measures for effectively integrating second career women into their workplaces. Corporate investment of money, time and effort is required for re-training these women and allowance of a lead time^[5] would provide the cementing force to their re-entry. Equally important is a sensitized set of employees who are convinced of the importance of this talent pool and are welcoming of them.

3.5 Up-skilling and re-skilling

The dynamic nature of the corporate sector points to the need of re-training a woman restarting her career after the break. The skills she is equipped with as a consequence of her past corporate training and exposure might no longer be in vogue when she returns. She might have to undergo fresh training to acquire a different kind of niche skills (re-skilling) or might have to polish her existing skill set and upgrade it to meet the demands of her job role (up-skilling).

The survey was taken by personnel from all major subsectors of the corporate sector – IT/BPO/KPO employees, people employed in FMCG, Retail sector, employees of the telecom industry, banks or other financial service firms like insurance companies, people from the manufacturing and engineering sector and those involved in consulting, media, advertising or education. 51.29% of survey respondents attached maximum importance to the need for updating the technical skill sets of women career returnees in knowledge areas like accounting, finance, programming, marketing etc. A subset of respondents (11.34%) felt that such women need to undergo attitudinal training for interacting effectively with peers and supervisors and integrate themselves in their new found places of work. 10.82% of people felt that women back after a hiatus should polish their communication skills and improve their capabilities of being a team player.

In order to catch up with the fast paced ways of corporate work, they might have to put extra efforts to effectively manage time feel a few. Table 7 in presents the relative importance that different corporate leaders attach to the different types of training. Statistical measures are detailed in Table 8.

Table 6: Areas for re-skilling/up-skilling women career returnees

Areas that require retraining	Board Member	Senior Management	CXO / COO/CFO /CTO/CMO	Middle Management	Junior Management	Total
Knowledge areas such as Accounting, Finance, IT, Programming, Marketing, etc - (1)	2.58%	5.41%	6.96%	16.75%	19.59%	51.29%
Attitudinal training for interacting effectively with peers, supervisors - (1)	0.26%	2.58%	2.84%	3.35%	2.32%	11.34%
Skills like Communication/team management/time mgmt etc - (1)	0.52%	2.58%	1.55%	3.35%	2.84%	10.82%
Knowledge areas such as Accounting, Finance, IT, Programming, Marketing, etc - (1)Skills like Communication/team management/time mgmt etc - (1)Attitudinal training for interacting effectively with peers, supervisors - (1)	0.26%	0.52%	0.52%	1.55%	2.06%	4.90%
Knowledge areas such as Accounting, Finance, IT, Programming, Marketing, etc - (1)Skills like Communication/team management/time mgmt etc - (2)Attitudinal training for interacting effectively with peers, supervisors - (3)	0.52%	0.77%	0.00%	0.52%	1.55%	3.35%

**Option A (x) means Option A was given a priority 'x'.

Table 7: Statistical measures relating corporate role to areas for re-skilling/up-skilling second career women

Statistic	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	141.67	120	0.09
Likelihood Ratio	134.05	120	0.18
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.39	1	0.53
N of Valid Cases	388		

3.5.1 Lead time

Potential corporate employers had varying views on the need of a woman seeking a second career to be proactive by undergoing training that would make her ‘corporate ready’. Almost half of the corporate managers (48.97%) surveyed felt that skill development can be done post hiring as this would ensure that the training she takes is tailored to suite her new corporate role. 26.03% opined that it would be best if the woman comes back fully prepared so that the time, money and effort from her new employer’s part to up-skill/re-skill her would be minimal. Another 22.16% felt that training might not be necessary at all. Distributed results are available in Table 9. Pearson’s chi-square coefficient correlating a manager’s level in the corporate hierarchy and the need for re-training second career women is 0.95(Table 10).

Table 8: Need for re-skilling/up-skilling women prior to joining

Opinion	Board Member	Senior Management	CXO / COO/CFO/CTO/CMO	Middle Management	Junior Management	Total
No – it is better that all skill development is done internally post-hiring - (1)	2.58%	7.22%	6.96%	14.95%	17.27%	48.97%
Yes - (1)	1.55%	4.12%	3.35%	7.99%	9.02%	26.03%
Not necessary - (1)	0.77%	3.35%	2.84%	6.96%	8.25%	22.16%
NA	0.00%	0.26%	0.00%	1.55%	1.03%	2.84%

**Option A - (x) means Option A was given a priority ‘x’.

Table 9: Statistical measures relating corporate role to need for re-skilling/up-skilling second career women prior to joining

Statistic	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.13	12	0.95
Likelihood Ratio	6.84	12	0.87
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.46	1	0.5
N of Valid Cases	388		

The survey also carried questions on the importance of lead time in ensuring the productivity of women who have reentered workplaces after a career break. The provision for a lead time will provide the necessary handholding to these women and will make the transition to their corporate moulds easier. While 50.52% of the corporate workers surveyed felt that such women will do better if given a lead time of 1 to 2 months, 26.80% felt that lead time is not necessary at all and the potential of this talent pool should not be under estimated. Longer lead times of 3 to 4 months and 5 to 6 months found lesser favors (16.24% and 3.61% respectively). Respondents also elaborated on the need for lead time for second career women. 35.31% expressed the view that this time is necessary for women who have made a career comeback to adapt themselves to their work environments. 27.58% of people surveyed felt that the lead time provided would help these women manage their work timings better as they would be able to make arrangements to attend to any practical obstacle that threatens their revamped career and which they had not anticipated earlier. Another 25.52% felt that women can utilize this time to get accustomed to their job responsibilities. The detailed distributions are shown in Table 11 and statistical correlations in Table 12.

Table 11: Need for lead time for second career women

Need for lead time	Board Member	Senior Management	CXO / COO/CFO/CTO/CMO	Middle Management	Junior Management	Total
To get used to the work environment	0.77%	4.90%	5.15%	11.86%	12.63%	35.31%
To manage their work timings better	1.03%	5.15%	2.06%	7.73%	11.60%	27.58%
To get accustomed to the job responsibilities	2.32%	3.61%	4.64%	7.47%	7.47%	25.52%
NA	0.52%	0.77%	0.77%	3.61%	3.35%	9.02%
Other	0.26%	0.52%	0.52%	0.52%	0.26%	2.06%
No required its not the attitude that is required	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.26%	0.00%	0.26%
Other - For any new joinee there's a lead time required, this applies to women returning to work after break, but apart from this accustoming to the new technology/ area of work and regaining confidence by means of having a mentor who could steer her way in the career path is a BIG booster	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.26%	0.26%

Table 12: Statistical measures relating corporate role to need for lead time second career women

Statistic	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	24.93	24	0.41
Likelihood Ratio	25.42	24	0.38
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.07	1	0.79
N of Valid Cases	388		

3.5.2 Employee awareness

The survey was able to bring out corporate workers' notions about the need to sensitize the existing employees about the advantages of hiring second career women. While 65.70% of people who took the survey felt that employees should be made aware of this, 34.3% felt otherwise. 44% were happy that managers in their experience have volunteered to work for this cause, 27.1% felt that managers were yet to warm up to the idea of hiring second career women. 29% of the participants chose to 'not comment' on this issue. As line managers^[7] are the ones with maximum interaction with these career returnees, it was important to gather their opinions about these women. 38.66% surveyed felt that line managers are apprehensive about the performance of women returnees. 25% opined that managers are against such hiring probably because of the additional responsibility on them of inducting these returnees to their workplaces. Another set of survey respondents (15.98%) felt that in their experience line managers are interested in going the extra mile and are ready to offer the much needed guidance to them. 13.4% opined that managers in general are upbeat about utilizing this talent pool. Please refer Table 13 for the detailed results. Pearson's chi-square correlation coefficient between the corporate role and the attitude of line managers towards hiring such women is 0.22 (Table 14).

Table 13: Reaction of line managers to hiring of second career women

Reaction of line managers	Board Member	Senior Management	CXO / COO/CFO/ CTO/CMO	Middle Management	Junior Management	Total
They are apprehensive about the performance of women returnees	1.03%	4.64%	5.93%	13.14%	13.92%	38.66%
They are against such hiring	2.06%	4.64%	1.55%	6.70%	10.05%	25.00%
They are interested in helping and guiding women returnees wherever required	1.03%	1.29%	4.12%	4.90%	4.64%	15.98%

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They are upbeat about this, as it is a new talent pool	0.52%	3.09%	1.29%	3.87%	4.64%	13.40%
Other reactions	0.26%	1.03%	0.26%	1.03%	0.77%	3.35%
NA	0.00%	0.26%	0.00%	1.55%	1.03%	2.84%
Other reactions - Mentoring programs	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.26%	0.26%
Other reactions - On-site day care/ Company sponsored Creche -	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.26%	0.26%
They are apprehensive about the performance of women returnees - Diplomatic -	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.26%	0.00%	0.26%

Table 14: Statistical measures relating corporate role to the attitude of line managers towards second career women

Statistic	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	37.94	32	0.22
Likelihood Ratio	39.12	32	0.18
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.73	1	0.39
N of Valid Cases	388		

Another interesting revelation of the survey was that women and men employees had different outlooks towards the employability of women with career breaks. A significant proportion of male employees (35.05%) and female employees (32.22%) felt that women career returnees are no different from others who have joined the organisation. 25.77% of men and 24.74% of women employees empathised, understood and respected the reasons that led to these women stalling their careers at an earlier point of time. Only a minority (17.53% men and 17.53% women) felt that such women are incompetent people who could not strike the right balance between their works and lives. Table 15 and Table 16 in Appendix 2 show the distributed results. Statistical analyses test results are available in Table 17 and Table 18.

Table 15: Reaction of male employees to women career returnees

Reaction of male employees to women career returnees	Board Member	Senior Management	CXO / COO/CFO/CTO/CMO	Middle Management	Junior Management	Total
They are viewed as any other person who has joined the organization	1.29%	4.12%	7.47%	10.82%	11.34%	35.05%
Empathise and understand their prior need for break	1.55%	5.41%	2.06%	7.73%	9.02%	25.77%
Can't Comment	0.26%	2.06%	1.80%	6.44%	7.47%	18.04%
Incompetent people who could not manage their work and life	1.55%	3.09%	1.55%	4.64%	6.70%	17.53%
NA	0.00%	0.26%	0.00%	1.55%	1.03%	2.84%
Other	0.26%	0.00%	0.26%	0.26%	0.00%	0.77%

Table 16: Statistical measures relating corporate role to the attitude of male employees towards second career women

Statistic	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	32.98	20	0.03
Likelihood Ratio	32.58	20	0.04
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.19	1	0.66
N of Valid Cases	388		

Table 17: Reaction of female employees to women career returnees

Reaction of female employees to women career returnees	Board Member	Senior Management	CXO / COO/CFO/CTO/CMO	Middle Management	Junior Management	Total
They are viewed as any other person who has joined the organisation	1.80%	3.87%	6.44%	11.08%	9.02%	32.22%
Empathise and understand their prior need for break	1.55%	4.38%	2.84%	6.70%	9.28%	24.74%
Can't comment	0.52%	3.35%	2.06%	6.44%	9.02%	21.39%
Incompetent people who could not manage their work and life	0.77%	3.09%	1.55%	5.15%	6.96%	17.53%
NA	0.00%	0.26%	0.00%	1.55%	1.03%	2.84%
Other	0.26%	0.00%	0.26%	0.52%	0.26%	1.29%
Total	4.90%	14.95%	13.14%	31.44%	35.57%	100.00%

Table 18: Statistical measures relating corporate role to the attitude of female employees towards second career women

Statistic	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.9	20	0.35
Likelihood Ratio	23.26	20	0.28
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.37	1	0.54
N of Valid Cases	388		

4. Recommendations and findings

The analytical study showed that with the right amount of effort from the corporate sector companies and the society at large, a lot of women who are currently on career breaks would be presented with opportunities that lure them back to career tracks. The study recommends a set of career re-entry models for women career returnees that will work efficiently when placed in ideal professional and societal ecosystems. The creation of these ecosystems might minimize the duration of a corporate woman's career break and speedup the pace of her 'return trip' to her career. The factors that constitute these ideal ecosystems that allow a woman career returnee to sustain her revamped career are together called as career enablers.

4.1 The ideal professional ecosystem

It is to be accepted that though second career women have made up their minds to make a comeback to the career front, they do have some expectations of their potential employers. While job flexibility tops their list of criteria for choosing a job, many of them prefer jobs similar to the ones they were doing before their breaks as this would mean maximum utilization of the tacit knowledge they possess. A majority of such women are also keen about their jobs being less strenuous as they come with the bonus realization of the need for work-life balance evoked from their past experiences. Consequently, they tend to favour part time jobs or jobs that give them flexi options like that of work at home or flexible working hours or other options centered on the principle of telecommuting. Organizations on their part should offer linear or non linear career based training programmes for re-skilling these women to make their switches more stable. Line managers and team members need to be sensitized to positively orient them for the cause of the returnees. Organization provided crèches and day care centers will further reduce the distance between home and work, virtually.

4.2 The ideal societal ecosystem

It is equally important that the society plays its part in enabling the attempt of a woman to restart her career. Reliable and affordable day care centers and nursing facilities will help a second career woman share her domestic responsibilities like child care and elder care with her societal ecosystem. More important is the emotional and practical support from her family that would reinforce her belief in her abilities and convince her of the worthiness of her efforts. While emotional support would ensure that she is a more confident person at work, practical support like the availability of a family based care-giver would help her strike the required balance between work and home in her second innings.

4.3 What have corporates done so far?

Going by the current trends in the Indian corporate sector the prospects for women career returnees look rosy. Many multinational companies have responded to the call for improving gender friendliness of their workplaces and have designed innovative programmes to make their offices more welcoming for women. A list of such corporate initiatives in India for women career returnees is shown in Table 19.

Table 19: Corporate initiatives for women career re-launch

Initiative	Company	Short description
Career by Choice	Hindustan Unilever Ltd.	Aims to bring women, who have dropped off the career path, back to work
Restart	GE	Focus exclusively on hiring women scientists and engineers who have taken a career break and wish to get back to work.
SCIP (Second Career Internship Program)	TATA Group	a career transition management programme for women professionals who have taken a break of 6 months or more for any reason, and wish to re-enter the professional space
Starting Over	Mahindra Satyam	aimed at enabling women who have taken a break, rejoin the corporate world
Springboard	Microsoft	Tries to persuade women techies who have taken a career break for personal reasons such as marriage or child birth to come back to work
Maternity returners programme	Accenture	Helps ease the transition for new parents back into the workforce by providing career guidance and support for finding ideal re-entry roles.
Bring her back	IBM	to bring back qualified women professionals who've taken career breaks

5. Conclusion

It is beyond doubt that Indian women have come a long way with their career ambitions and have broken gender stereotypes they lived by since time immemorial. Many of them have enviable academic records that fetch them much sought after corporate careers. Nevertheless they tend to sacrifice their flourishing careers to do justice to the other social roles they play- of a wife, a mother, a daughter, a daughter-in-law et.al. Many of them secretly nurture a desire for a career comeback and after a period of time when their domestic responsibilities have been well attended to they are on the lookout for suitable, accommodative opportunities. The analytical study discussed in this paper was able to unravel the Indian corporate sector's perspectives towards the second career of women.

The survey reflected that a majority of companies that have policies for rehiring women returnees were very happy with their performances and feel that such women illustrate a higher level of commitment as they have returned on their own resolve. However much needs

to be done to sensitize employees about the bargain of rehiring these skilled women. Initiatives to enhance the gender friendliness of the workplaces should be undertaken with a sense of urgency. This transformation is essential at the macro level in the organization and must be fuelled by the leadership teams. Drawing from the opinions of professionals engaged in the corporate sector this study conclusively recommends a set of career re-entry models for qualified women that would help companies harness this dynamic talent pool of returnees and compensate for the existing skill paucity.

5.1 Future work

Much needs to be done to motivate women currently on career breaks to attempt a career re-entry. Just as the corporate sensitivity on this issue is to be enhanced, women need to be emboldened to break the barriers that prevent them from returning to the career track after a break. In the near future, we plan to work closely with women currently on career breaks to understand the factors that stop them from making a comeback. The inputs from such a study will be extremely useful to the companies in the corporate sector to initiate proactive measures that would make their workplaces much more attractive to career returnees.

5.2 Notes

1. Second career women: Second career women are those women who are ready to re-embark on the career track as the reasons that previously led them to a break cease to exist.
2. Flexi working: Flexi-time work is a variable work schedule in contrast to traditional work arrangements that require employees to work during a standard time wherein place and time of work are entirely flexible.
3. Glass ceiling: Glass ceiling is the unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements
4. Tele commuting: Tele commuting is a work arrangement in which employees do not commute to a central place of work, instead work from remote locations.
5. Lead time: Lead time is the latency (delay) between the initiation and execution of a process. In the context of this paper, lead time refers to the time allotted to women career returnees to integrate themselves to their new places of work.
6. Up-skilling/re-skilling: Up-skilling/re-skilling refers to the additional training to be imparted to a personnel returning after a break for him/her to meet the requirements of his/her current job role.
7. Line managers: A line manager, sometimes called a direct manager, is a person who directly manages other employees and is responsible for the administrative management of the individual as well as the functional management.

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