

Are Indian women executives at an advantage?

While joint families and easy availability of domestic help puts Indian women professionals at an advantage as compared to those in the west, companies in India are yet to tread the path to create a more hospitable work terrain for women. Human Capital pitches forth two variations of this very contentious argument.

BY S. AJAY KUMAR

We have witnessed many a failing careers because of motherhood. Several women take a sabbatical while they are expecting, which ultimately becomes an extended work break, becoming a career hurdle. Most women never get back to the same position or drop the idea of working again, as it is hard to get back and the process does not seem very interesting. The present scenario in India is favourable to working women. If not a complete change, we do observe a mindset shift. While women in the west live in nuclear families, and have the responsibilities of the children as well as the daily household chores, Indian women have their mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law etc. to look after their kids, while they go to their offices. Unlike the west, most Indian women move to in-laws' house after marriage, and this turns out to be an added bonus to the working bride. While there could be disapproving orthodox families that would not want their daughters-in-law to work, an increasing number of folks agree with working generation of today. This could be owing to education, status in the society and various other factors. Another factor that eases women participation in the corporate world is the easy availability of house help. A middle class family in India these days can afford domestic help and this definitely constitutes an added advantage. Working women in India surely have a distinct advantage of extended families and house help.



While this may have held true earlier, the last few decades have seen a shift in the family and household patterns. Joint families cease to be the norm, especially in the metros. People move cities for work relatively more often, leaving behind the comfort of their extended family as a support system. The Indian families are definitely more close-knit, and, one can draw strength from this in a case of emergency. However, there is a limit to the support that can be drawn from their respective families on a regular basis. In addition, there is a shift in the mindset of the parents, who themselves had busy careers in their prime. Having raised their own kids, they are looking forward to a retired life, pursuing their hobbies and travelling without the worries, and babysitting grandchildren on a regular basis certainly does not fall within this. Also, let us not forget that expectations from women on fulfilling a lot of other family obligations are much higher in India, even if they have a flourishing career, while this is not the case in the west. Yes, we are little more fortunate with regard to the availability of comparatively economical household support staff, the quality and reliability is not so good. The west does have larger, and more recognized day care facilities, and apart from this many workplaces provide crèches as well as offer flexible timings to their employees. World over, women are confronted with different sets of challenges, which they resolve par excellence. What make women stand out is their grit and determination and above all, the ability to multitask to overcome the challenges and move forward.

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