Emotional Intelligence and Mentoring in the context of Gender Diversity Programmes

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There are empirical evidences to consider Gender Diversity as a relevant variable to predict group/ organizational effectiveness. Understanding the importance of inclusiveness and the influence women have in the purchase decisions, many organizations are seeking the advantage of having more women at the decision making helm of the company. However the numbers are not that encouraging, especially at the top. Many companies have come up with several initiatives to help secure a pipeline of talented women reaching the top.

Gender based Mentoring is one such initiative. Considering that most of these would be cross gender mentoring, emotional intelligence will play a major role for a successful outcome. This paper, gives a conceptual framework for gender based mentoring, using emotional intelligence as a tool. The objectives of the mentoring initiative are considered to be three fold - Remove Barriers, Sustain and Raise the Bar. The mentoring relationship is seen in three phases and the framework helps identify the role of the mentor and the mentee in each of the phases.

INTRODUCTION

In reply to the question of why he replaced half of the company's top management, Alan G. Lafley, chief executive officer of Procter and Gamble, remarked: "*Our management should have a broader basis – more women, more cultures and nationalities.*"

Women start careers in business and other professions with the same level of intelligence, education and commitment as men. Yet comparatively few reach the top. Although the

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number of women in the workforce has relatively increased, women are particularly underrepresented in management and decision making roles. In Europe, they represent an average 11% of the membership of the governing bodies of listed companies.

The percentage of women in management in India is roughly 3% to 6% with approximately 2% of Indian women managers in Indian corporations. (SHRM, 2009) The March 2009 report, *Women CEOs of the Fortune 1000*, published by Catalyst (the U.S. firm working to expand opportunities for women and business), identifies the women CEOs of the *Fortune* 500 and 1000 companies. Of the *Fortune* 500 companies, 15 CEOs are women, including one Indian woman, Indra K. Nooyi, PepsiCo, Inc. Of the *Fortune* 501-1000, there are nine women CEOs. The statistics at the CEO level of these large companies clearly show that there is much progress to be made for women worldwide at this level of management. (SHRM, 2009)

The question is whether it makes any business sense, to drive this on priority. Why should women reach the decision making forums of organisations? Companies where women are most strongly represented at board or top management level are also the companies that perform best. Egalitarian considerations apart, there are business reasons why women should be playing a much bigger role in the corporate world. Companies started to be conscious of the number of women in organizations when they realised that there was clear shortage of talent and a major pool of talent was lying unnoticed. Companies also consider it necessary to integrate more women into the decision making processes of their companies, since women now have a major influence on purchase decisions in homes. Gender diversity also helps in building the corporate image for the organisation. (Desvaux, Devillar and Baumgarten, 2007) Heterogeneous management teams tend to create greater innovative power than homogeneous groups. Corporate flexibility is increasing, also because homogeneous decision-making structures, which are under greater pressure to conform, tend to react less flexibly to external changes. (Tilker)

BARRIERS AT WORK

Any strategy for increasing diversity on higher levels of corporate would need us to first understand what the barriers are there at work, which comes in the way of women growing in the organization. These barriers can be external, where by the culture of the organization is not compatible for women to grow or internal, where certain beliefs of the women themselves can come in the way of their growth.

The most common barrier for women is the commonly known, double burden of work and domestic responsibilities that women generally have. The current business model equates leadership with unfailing availability and total geographical mobility at all times, and this model is not very compatible with this double responsibility. This is much more commonly seen at times of motherhood, when childcare becomes a problem, and when they are expected to compromise on time spent with their children. Another dilemma which working mothers face is their constant guilt of their performance as a mother and as a professional.

There are other barriers, related to perception. There are extreme perceptions of woman which exist today. At one end, women are perceived to be overtly aggressive and at the other

end, women are perceived as not being able to assert their talents and gain recognition in the company. As is well known, an informal mentor and general perception of individuals plays an important role in people moving up in the organization. (Desvaux and Devillar and Baumgarten, 2007) Either of the above perceptions can come in the way of women climbing the corporate ladder.

Women also have some psychological barriers like an acute awareness of the barriers, which further pulls them down. Only 15% of highly qualified women aspire to positions of power as against 27% of men. Women also do not have many role models in the organisations, which further leads them to have lower ambitions for themselves. There is also a perception that it is the "male code of working" which rises through the ranks. This requires further adaptation from the woman's side. (Desvaux and Devillar and Baumgarten, 2007) Finally, women often exercise the choice to *opt out* - this being a result and an additional cause for shortfall of women in corporate executive bodies.

Responding to this, several organizations have initiated several Gender Diversity programs like Flexible working times, career break options, mentorship and part time job opportunities. In this paper, we evaluate how EI can play a role in mentoring initiatives for developing leadership.

MENTORING

Most formal mentoring programmes in the USA are designed to replicate the benefits of informal mentoring. The benefits of informal mentoring are clear: a number of studies have found that employees with informal mentors advance faster and farther in organizations than those lacking mentors. In a national study of 510 protégés with informal mentors, 104 protégés with formal mentors and 548 non-mentored individuals, it was found that employees with informal mentors were more likely to advance in organizations than non-mentored individuals, but employees with formal mentors did not advance further than those lacking mentors. However, there are certain advantages of formal mentoring, especially for the sake of diversity.

First, formal mentoring programmes not only provide women and minorities access to mentors, but they also increase the future pool of diverse mentors. One of the best predictors of being a mentor was prior experience as a protégé. The second diversity benefit of formal mentoring programmes is that they sanctify cross-gender mentoring relationships and help dispel discrediting sexual innuendoes and destructive rumors about cross-gender mentoring relationships. This advantage extends to both formal and informal cross-gender relationships. The third benefit is that more diversity may be obtained in formal as compared to informal mentoring relationship. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this diversity not only fuels the effectiveness of the relationship, but it also raises the awareness and consciousness of its members Clutterbuck and Ragins, 2002).

Considering that most of the mentoring would be of cross gender scenario, it is important that the mentor and the mentee are sensitive to each other's prejudices, much beyond a normal mentoring relationship. Emotional Intelligence has a major role in helping develop this sensitivity, and that would be the premise of this paper. This particular model,

concentrates mainly on how the mentoring relationship, over different stages can help the woman to either cope with the barriers or remove them.

EI BASED MODEL FOR GENDER BASED MENTORING

Some barriers for women entering into the top management of organisations, was discussed in the beginning of this paper. Mentoring programs help in managing some of those barriers.

This paper suggests the following model for mentoring programs specifically, initiated for enhancing women's participation in management. Mentoring relationships would continue to have all the other benefits. However, in order to address, gender based development, the following parameters would be considered.
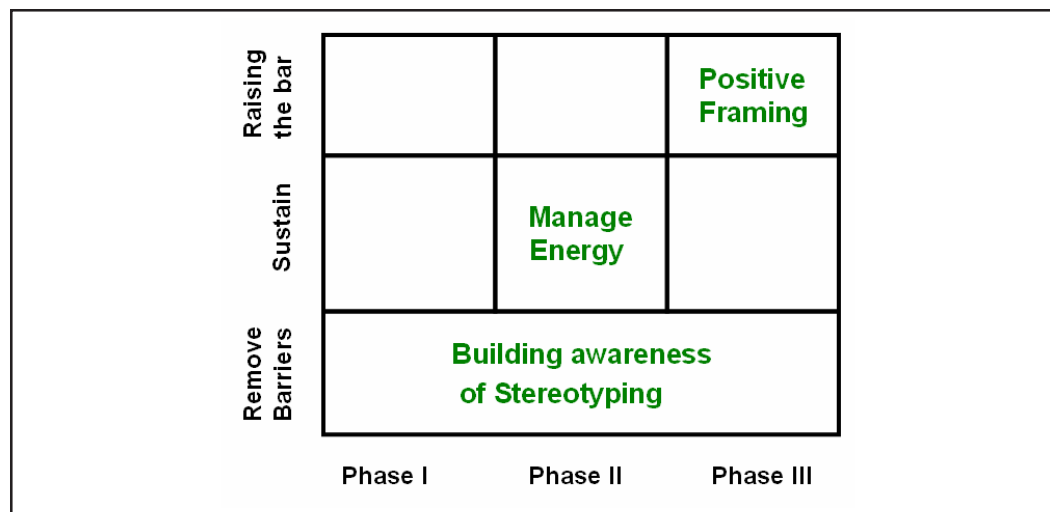
The x-axis consists of the different stages of the mentoring relationship. In this model, the mentoring relationship has been considered in three phases. Phase 1 is the *rapport building* phase between the mentor and the mentee, where they get to know each other and understand ways of working. Phase II is the *progress making* phase, where they actually start working together towards the objective of the relationship. Phase III, the *winding down phase* is equally important, where the mentor helps the mentee to "fly" on her own. (Clutterbuck and Ragins, 2002)

Earlier in the paper, we had identified some barriers which come in the way of women rising to the top management positions. The model, will specifically look into how, the mentoring relationship can help overcome those barriers.

Remove Barriers - Building awareness about Stereotyping

Initially we spoke about how there are psychological barriers for women while growing in the organization. These include, women not being able to identify with success for lack of a role model, women perceived to be either too aggressive or too demure and low ambitions. Therefore a mentoring relationship should be a two way process where both the mentor and the protégée are aware of their own stereotypes. The mentor should be able to clarify

his own assumptions about the other person. Sometimes, these assumptions are conscious and can be clarified right in the first phase of rapport building. Like in any mentoring relationship, the mentor is not expected to provide solutions but would only facilitate the discussions such that the mentee is able to see possibilities. It is also critical to be empathetic towards each other's view. However, some assumptions could be unconscious and both parties should be constantly in touch with their thoughts to be able to recognize these assumptions at all stages of the mentoring relationship.

Help Her Manage Her Energies

It has been acknowledged several times that one of the major barriers in women moving up is the double burden syndrome. The Mckinsey study states that work life balance is a myth and that the only hope is to balance their energy flows. (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2008) This means basing one's priorities on the activities, which energize the person, both at home and work. Sometimes, women *opt out* of working life, because of the double burden. The mentoring relationship is a good place to help women identify the conditions and situations that replenish their energy and those that sap it. Self awareness can make the woman deliberately make the choice to incorporate the restorative elements into their day. (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2008) The mentor could play a very good role in helping her identify the same. The mentor would also then need to be empathetic to her situations. This role of the mentor would help her sustain her stay in the organization.

Raising the Bar

Another barrier that we said about women is their lack of ambition and their choice to *opt out* at times of stress. Studies show that optimists see life more realistically than pessimists. Optimists are not afraid to frame the world as it actually is – they are confident that they can manage its challenges. Positive framing accepts the facts of adversity and counters them with action. The key to positive framing is also self awareness. (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2008) Once the mentor has helped the protégé to sustain herself in the organization, he could help her to positively frame her situation and thereby build her confidence in reaching for higher stars. This is the most crucial aspect of the mentoring relationship, where the mentor prepares the mentee for critical leadership positions.

CONCLUSION

Gender diversity, is a concept which is discussed widely in organizations today. However, the emotional responses to the initiative would vary even among women. Organizations advocate gender diversity to encourage a diverse set of views on the table. However, a study by Mckinsey suggest that in a male centric model, women who are today carving out prime positions for themselves follow the same path as men, and make the same choices imposed by the dominant model, which may not necessarily retain their diversity of views. Keeping aside all assumptions, women should be able to choose their life priorities without compromising on their career. Along with gender based initiatives like flexible timings and careers, it is critical that the organization is sensitive to the context in which women work. Formal Mentoring initiatives can contribute to creating this sensitivity throughout the organization.

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