

Voices of Contemporary Indian Women Leaders Managing and Balancing Emotions Intelligently in Organisations

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The paper seeks to review and discuss recent literature devoted to the tasks of identifying and explaining the importance of emotions at workplace and how contemporary Indian women leaders have made the world acknowledge their excellence in leadership skills by managing emotions intelligently in organisations.

Leading is all about having the ability to motivate. Motivation comes when you touch the emotions of the followers, thus the importance of emotions in leading cannot be ignored. Women are emotional and empathetic by virtue of their nature and theorists have declared that they have a unique style of leading called 'empowering leadership' or 'consensual leadership' which is based on the abilities that a woman is gifted with, more often described as feminine traits like being caring, nurturing, deeply emotional and being more open to discussions while decision making rather than autocratic, which is greatly admired, which further leads to develop closeness and transparency in organizations.

Women Leaders in organizations face the challenges of stereotyping and gender differences. They are generally labeled 'overemotional' and male colleagues sometimes find their emotional tenor 'intimidating and overbearing' and on the contrary if they do not express emotions at all then they are charged with being 'emotionless'. Successful Indian women leaders have managed to bring a balance in expressing their emotions and have developed the capability to handle others emotions effectively as well. The paper will deal with the study of contemporary Indian women leaders from diverse fields and different managerial positions that are trying to break the stereotyping and gender differences in leading by managing emotions intelligently.

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Let's not forget that the little emotions are the great captains of our lives and we obey them without realizing it.

—Vincent Van Gogh, 1889

INTRODUCTION

Emotions in simple terms are believed to be associated with feelings and according to the Oxford English Dictionary the term emotions is defined as “strong instinctive feeling such as love or fear”. A mental state that arises spontaneously rather than conscious effort and is often accompanied by physiological changes, says an on-line Dictionary. There is lot of confusion as to how to define ‘emotions’ exactly and according to Hillman there is “a curious and overwhelming confusion” in the theory of emotion. Some writers emphasise on expressive reactions, others instrumental behavior, some identify emotions primarily as biological processes, others as social processes. Some emphasise the role of the central nervous system, some the autonomic nervous system, some emphasise cognitive processes and others feeling or states (Ashkanasy, Charmine and Zerbe). Thus, emotions can be described as those intense feelings which a person experiences at a point of time as a reaction to some stimulus.

Role and importance of emotions in the organisations success have long been neglected by organizational researchers as the common notion was that workers should leave their emotions behind when they walk into an organisation. They failed to realise that it is emotions that decide how we perceive the world. Monica Sjoonneby, Chief Consultant, TMI Development emphasizes on the importance of positive emotions at workplace. It is these positive emotions that lead to better understanding of information, more flexibility in thinking and more efficiency in our decision making. In the last two decades that is around 1980’s, however, research and studies has revealed that ignoring emotions completely at workplace is not possible and is not desirable (Salaeditor and Mount, 2006). We cannot isolate ourselves completely from what we feel or experience at any point of time.

Studies from various academic fields such as psychology (Lewis and Haviland-Jones, 2000), organizational behavior (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995), Sociology (Ollilainen, 2000), anthropology (Levy, 1984) and neuroscience (Damasio, 1994) have proved the unavoidable influence of emotions on our behaviour and decision making. These scholars have stressed that the emotional dimension is an inseparable part of organizational life and can no longer be ignored in organizational researches (Ashkanasy, Hartel and Zerbe, 2006).

It was Peter Salovey and Jack Mayer who suggested for the first time that individuals differ in their ability to perceive, understand, and use emotion as a source of information. They called this ability as Emotional Intelligence (Salaeditor and Mount 2006). Emotional intelligence can be defined as a set of competencies demonstrating the ability one has to recognize his or her behavior, moods, impulses, and to manage them best according to the situation. Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive, appraise, and express emotions accurately (Salaeditor and Mount 2006). It also involves emotional empathy; where one is not only able to understand accurately one’s emotions but also of others, and is able to manage and control those emotions intelligently.

Leading in an organization calls for knowledge and implementation of a variety of skills and amongst them emotional intelligence is the most important skill. In the present situation, the senior executives of organizations do not demand high intelligence quotient but high emotional intelligence because that determines how well a person will perform on job. But this does not mean that technical skills and general intelligence should be ignored, some studies have indicated that emotional intelligence is twice as important. When it comes to leadership, emotional intelligence is incredibly important.

Leading is all about having the ability to motivate. Motivation comes when you touch the emotions of the followers, thus the importance of emotions in leading cannot be ignored. History is full of leaders who have touched the heart of the followers by giving them emotional support and security. That is those leaders are successful who have appealed to people's feelings of insecurity and fear and inspired, ignited their passions and brought out best in their followers.

Leading involves first to have a worthy vision, then communicating this vision and showing way how to achieve the vision. But in the present situation organizational researchers emphasise that the leader is not only responsible for achieving targeted goals but also for driving collective emotions in a positive direction and avoiding or controlling deadly emotions. This is because deadly emotions like fear, anxiety, anger, hostility, envy, jealousy, greed and selfishness can lead to fatal consequences in an organisation. Thus, we need emotionally intelligent leaders in organisations.

Emotionally intelligent leaders are those who know how to inspire, arouse passion and keep people motivated and committed. They are aware of their own communication and how their style and behavior affects other people's moods and performance. They practice what they preach and are transparent and honest. They are able to generate energy and optimism and give people a sense of clarity and direction even in times of turbulence and crisis. Emotionally intelligent leaders create an emotional climate that fosters commitment, loyalty and above all trust in an organisation.

Early bureaucratic organizations treated men's and women's emotions similarly, if not equally and all emotions and concerns of private life were ruled out as disruptions to objectivity and obstacles to productivity. Assumptions of rationality and impartiality were codified into the formal rules of bureaucracy, which came to imply that, because organizations were unbiased, they were also gender neutral (Witz and Savage, 1992).

The presumption of gender neutrality also was reinforced by the fact that very few women reached to the top positions in organizations and so they were expected to behave like men. In spite of skill, competence and efficiency they were generally segregated and seen as threats to the organisational rationality and objectivity because of their bodily functions (menstruation and pregnancy) and emotions. And so many women at top positions in organisations tried to either appear non emotional or tailored their emotional displays to fit the socially accepted expression norms at work (Thoits, 1990).

Emotions have continued to symbolise men's dominance and women's exclusion from power in subtle ways (Acker 1992; Parkin, 1993) for example through classifying of some emotions as feminine and others as masculine (Ashanasy, Hartel and Zerbe).

SOME REAL LIFE CASES

Most of the research on gender differences in leadership compared women to men on basis of inherent personality traits or socialization. One study concluded that women were less socially oriented in their style of leadership than men (Winther and Green, 1987). Harper and Hirokawa (1988) found evidence that women utilised passive, open-minded, and nurturing strategies, where as men employed communication strategies that connoted strength and power.

Not only this for the past decade Transactional versus Transformational approaches to leadership have been studied and it is found that Transactional style is usually associated with men, involves the exchange of rewards for services rendered or punishment for inadequate performance. On the other hand women leaders prefer Transformational leadership which involves getting subordinates to transform their self-interest into the interest of the group through concern for a broader goal.

Rosener called this style preferably taken up by women leaders as 'interactive' leadership. Interactive leadership involves "attempts to enhance other people's sense of self worth and to energise followers" (Rosener, 1994). This can be associated with the traits women are blessed with often described as feminine traits like being caring, nurturing and deeply emotional.

But unfortunately women leaders in organizations continue to face the challenges of stereotyping and gender differences. They are generally labeled 'overemotional' and male colleagues sometimes find their emotional tenor 'intimidating and overbearing'. And at times also charged for violating appropriate executive behaviour, on the contrary if they do not express emotions at all then they are called 'emotionless' (Lyons and McArthur, 2007). Jamieson (1995) called this as "competence/ femininity double bind" where a woman risks rejection for being themselves and successful (Heilman, 2004).

Indian woman have come long way since Independence when we hardly had women entrepreneurs. Now we have them all over the globe climbing mountains, spinning into space, fighting wars, flying planes and ruling the corporate world. Apart from doing the expected they are up to everything that is unexpected of them. They have made the world acknowledge their leadership skills by obtaining key positions in corporate circles due to their creativity, intuition and multi tasking ability.

Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Indra K. Nooyi, Gitanjali Kirloskar, Manisha Girotra, Chanda Kochhar, Shikha Sharma, Ambika Srivastava, Kalpana Morparia and many more are women entrepreneurs who made it in a man's world. The fact remains that most of them were from high class business families or were exceptionally talented. Unfortunately, the percentage of women who have reached to the highest levels of the corporate world is not encouraging; it's abysmally low in India. But slowly we find the trend is changing in India and we have more and more women executives aspiring for top positions.

Successful Indian women leaders have learnt to balance and manage their emotions and have developed the capability to handle others' emotions effectively as well. They have reached to top positions by delicately balancing home, family and career in the best possible way.

Kiran Shaw, role model for Indian women entrepreneurs, Chairman and Managing Director of Biocon Ltd is a trendsetter, breaking glass ceiling and reaching to the pinnacle of success that is difficult even for a man to reach, with her grit and determination. She started her own business with just Rs. 10,000 in hand and a degree in brewery and today she is one of the richest woman in India. She has been a source of inspiration for aspiring women entrepreneurs. It was her passion and zeal to excel in a man's world. The journey to top was not an easy task and there were many reasons, being gender as one of the most difficult hurdle to overcome. In one of her article she contemplates on the hardships she faced as:

Needless to say there were several obstacles that I had to overcome in my entrepreneurial journey. For instance, I faced credibility challenges: my youthful age, my gender and my unfamiliar business model posed enormous barriers. No bank wanted to lend to me, no professional wanted to work for me, and it proved to be a real challenge to set up a business because women were considered high risk in the business world.

She strongly believes that women can excel as leaders by virtue of special qualities that a woman is blessed called feminine traits such as compassion, sensitivity and an inner strength of honest and untiring commitment and advises young entrepreneurs that with the right mix of skill, experience and resourcefulness they can reach to the pinnacle of success. Kiran has made the Indian woman realize that the responsibilities of family and home are not hindrances in their progress. Though she accepts that Biocon was built when she was single but she highlights the fact that the real growth came when she got married and cheerfully praises her husband for supporting her financially and emotionally.

In one of her articles written on the occasion of Women's Day she praises the increasing number of women entrepreneurs claiming new heights and congratulates Indian women in the corporate world such as Indra Nooyi, Naina Lal Kidwai, Shikha Sharma, Swati Piramal, Anu Agha, Mallika Srinivasan, the ICICI trio and many others who are helping to build a new India where women can hold their heads high. Indira Krishnamurthy Nooyi Chief Executive Officer of PepsiCo is happily married with two kids and tries hard to juggle being a professional and home maker. She has made India proud by being the only Indian woman to have reached to this level. For Indira it has been a both tough and exciting experience. According to the faculty of IIM Calcutta, Nooyi was a very mediocre student, however she surpassed everybody's imagination, when it was announced that she was going to replace the Steve Reinemund, CEO PepsiCo. As a leader Nooyi was always confident about her leadership skills and remained calm and poised even in the most difficult situation i.e (economic meltdown). This was because she firmly believed "leaders must have fundamentally different skills" and that "includes the ability to work closely with public official and to exhibit emotional intelligence towards employees".

In a recent speech she highlighted on the changing roles of a CEO. She suggested that as a leader of an organization you should not only focus on long term goals, but also understand and maintain public and private relationships. She also emphasized on thinking and acting globally and being open minded. And the most important characteristic which she proposed for a leader in the present situation is emotional intelligence. It is because if you do not understand the emotional state of your people and treat them accordingly, in no time they will say " goodbye, we're going to the next job" and the only way you can hold your

employees is by hooking them emotionally to the company. Nooyi is one of the most popular CEOs and most admired leader. This was because she touched the emotions of her employees. She makes them feel that she values them as a person and not as “employee number 4567”. She makes them aware of the fact that she understands that they have a life beyond PepsiCo.

In one of the interviews Nooyi shares her experience when she was in India at her mother’s place. She was shocked to see that her relatives simply ignored her and went in to compliment her mother and said “You brought up such a good kid”. She could feel the joy and pride which her mother experienced. It was then she realized that she should also let the parents of the senior executives in her company know that they too have done a great job. And she wrote to the parents of 29 senior executives and acknowledged their contribution towards PepsiCo by bringing up such brilliant children. This is something which is most touching when a leader is not only concerned about you but also about your family. The effect was unbelievable, she could actually create emotional bond with executives and their family.

Another diva who takes the world in her strides is Gitanjali Kirloskar. This 42 year old Ad veteran and industrialist is multidimensional personality now surprising the world with her acting skills. She makes us ponder on what is the secret of her liveliness and success? It can be found in the upbringing she received from her well educated and cultured parent, followed by the teachings she got mainly from the doyen of Indian Industry and her father -in -law Shantanurao Laxmanrao Kirloskar. A mechanical engineer from MIT Boston, he was the man who taught her the value of living with respect, integrity and courage. Gitanjali is declared to be the president of India’s first professional entertainment company, Litertainment. Starting out in industrial advertising in an agency launched by the Kirloskar group, called Pratibha, she succeeded in bringing in the first brand account, Weekender. Soon Sansui, TVS, and Kenstar followed suit, making her the first lady of advertising. She went on to become the head of Quadrant Communications, the world’s second largest ad agency and later on merged the in-house ad agency Pratibha with the world wide Interpublic group and created media history. Gitanjali got married at the age of 19 and spent early days at her family town in Harihar in Karnataka. She started working at 21 as a trainee at Pratibha and did not care if her move raised a thousand eyebrows. She had decided to prove herself as a professional. Therefore, she worked round the clock and tried very hard to balance home and family as well. It was very difficult and the guilt which most women suffer from i.e neglecting family plagued her continuously. There was a time in her life when emotionally down, she thought of quitting for the sake of family. But the realisation of the responsibilities and accountability she owes to Litertainment and other Initiative Media kept her tied to work. She took the situation as a challenge and determined not to let her ambitions die. She kept on moving with the flow. And with the support of her husband and family she managed to continue even in the most difficult times. In the present situation most women entrepreneurs have learnt to manage their emotions intelligently and strive hard to balance home and profession. Geetanjali has made Indian women realize that the need to be professional to survive in today’s customer-is-the king world. Always being sure of herself, she does not think that being a woman is a hindrance. She believes that being passionate about your work helps you to overcome those stumbling gender issues.

Chanda Kocchar, first woman boss of India's second largest lender ICICI has made among top 20 most powerful women in Forbes list. As the Managing Director and Chief Financial Officer of ICICI she heads the Corporate Centre and is known for her dynamic leadership strategies. A topper from Jamnalal Bajaj Institute in MBA belongs to middle class. She has actually given courage to women from middle class to dream and aim for top positions proving that ultimately it is only hard work and determination that leads to success. She joined ICICI Bank as a management trainee in 1984 and with her determination to excel and passion for excellence, to do better than the best, took her to the place where she proudly stands. The veteran has recently completed 25 years in the bank, is all set to blaze a new trail through hard times. As MD and CFO of ICICI she aims at developing a strong culture of empowering employees, encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation. By following meritocracy, gender neutrality and linking rewards to performance, she is trying to motivate its employees to perform to the best of their abilities while providing them with a platform to realize their full potential. She firmly believes that a woman does not need any special privileges to do well in any field in any particular organization. All that is required is a level-playing field where merit is the criteria for success. Any person who is capable and hard working, irrespective of gender, would then shine through. Thus, it is only merit and hard work that counts and she promotes a culture of gender neutrality in her organization.

In a big and populous country like India, being considered as one of the 25 most powerful women in the country is really a big achievement. Ms. Ambika Srivastava, CEO of ZenithOptemedia has achieved this honour by virtue of her excellent professional ingenuity. An alumna of Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi University, Ms. Srivastava took PG diploma from Indian Institute of Mass Communication in 1979. She joined JWT as Media planner in 1980 and worked there till 1994 gaining immense experience in Marketing and Advertising industry. Then she joined Lintas and worked there as Associate Director, Strategic Media Planning. She took over Zenith Optimedia as CEO from August 2004 and is known as communication and media management specialist. During her long career, Ms. Srivastava has been involved with launch and establishment of brands for several national and multinational companies and in spite of her busy schedule she spares time for being on the technical committee of India's several media research initiatives including NRS, TAM, ORG-MARG. She serves as a guide and mentor for women aspiring a career in media and communication. It is no cake walk to be at the helm of one of the top media agencies, but Ms. Srivastava has been performing this strenuous act with elan and natural felicity.

Kalpana Morparia, CEO of JP Morgan feels it's only work that matters and being man or a woman has nothing to do with efficiency. She directly rejects gender issues in organisations claiming being passionate and committed to your work is only thing that counts. In an interview published in India Forbes (2009) when asked about how do you manage with the most common obstacle in woman's job that is travelling leaving your family behind? She answers in an optimistic manner saying that she loves travelling and makes best possible use of the time available in flight for reading and answering mails. Unlike other busy executives who have appointed secretaries to answer mails on their behalf, she takes care to answer each and every mail herself. Most women give up top positions because they demand lot of travelling and being away from family makes them feel that they are neglecting their

duties. But Kalpana tries her best to manage time for family. Like all women entrepreneurs she too tries to manage family and office in a balanced way. She revealed the secret of her vibrant energy is regular workouts and watching television though only news and programmes with kids and that charges her for the demanding life of a CEO. Like all women she loves shopping and is fond of jewelry.

CONCLUSION

A study of women entrepreneurs belonging to different sectors tend to show something in common and that is they have strong family support system which gives them freedom to pursue their career and utilize their full potential. It is also seen that these women entrepreneurs have managed to use their feminine traits (being compassionate, understanding, sympathetic, and nurturing) in the best possible way and have developed their unique style of leading which offers scope for taking care of emotional aspects of employees, which was earlier neglected on the grounds that emotions weaken organisations and are not good for business. Presently in India the trend is changing we have growing number of vivacious, ambitious, progressive and young women entrepreneurs like Pooja Shetty (Adlabs Films Limited), Devita Saraf (Zenith Computers Ltd), Madhabi Puri Buch (Executive Director, ICICI), Himani Modi (Modi Group), Monisha Shah (Director, BBC Worldwide) and the list goes on, who are continuously breaking down glass ceiling and claiming new heights. While women are no longer the proverbial needle in a haystack in Indian corporate boardrooms, but the fact remains that they are still a rarity. A study done by CII in 2005 proclaimed that only 6% of the total employee comprise women and sadly only 4% reach to senior position. But the equation is fast changing and women are taking giant strides to reach on top positions because Indian woman entrepreneurs are changing from being emotional to emotionally intelligent.

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