

## Women find it hard to make it to the top

While India's IT industry has created business leaders who are among the best, the fair sex is yet to make its mark in the top management of tech majors.

A diversity study by Nasscom and PricewaterhouseCoopers published last year pointed out that the promotion rate for women executives was the lowest in IT companies compared with other categories.

Experts say only a few organisations in the IT/ITeS sector have improved their executive and senior managerial mix, a situation that IT giants such as Infosys and Wipro are now trying to reverse with leadership programmes and policies. Industry experts feel while they may be far from catching up with processes introduced by MNCs such as IBM, Cisco, HP and Accenture, Indian companies have started actively identifying women who can be groomed into leaders of the future and are putting them through workshops and career programmes that equip them to take on both personal and professional challenges in the largely male sector. Infosys and Wipro have started leadership programmes and workshops dedicated towards its women taskforce. Mid-sized companies like MindTree and even smaller organisations like Mindteck are conducting training programmes to encourage women to take on leadership roles.

Two years ago, Infosys started to evaluate the ratio of male to female eligible managers, and the male bias in that ratio pushed them to investigate the causes and bring about changes in policy, such as including at least one woman representative in promotion and hiring panels.

The company found that the move increased the number of eligible female managers. In the past three months, the company introduced two new policies, one of which would groom first-time female managers on job-related competencies and educate them on behavioural differences from their male counterparts.

The second was aimed at providing formal mentoring and counselling.

"We have found a dramatic increase in the number of women eligible for management roles since we introduced these programmes. Family counseling, letting women know that there are other women who go through similar problems, creating a support environment, policies such as work from home twice a month and part-time options are all helping us retain the best of female talent," said Nandita Gurjar, head of human resources, Infosys.

Last year, Wipro started a nine-month mentorship programme aimed at top-performing women at the mid-level rank. For the first batch, 130 women were selected, and this year, it plans to have a batch of about 150 women. The IT major also conducts a two-day leadership workshop for women, focused on enhancing their leadership skills. Wipro started the programme four months ago with each batch having about 40 women. In the last few months, the company has conducted five such workshops.

“It is all about exposure to a corporate culture that women can thrive. There is certain amount of handholding organisation has to do,” said Sunita Rebecca Cherian, vice-president, HR, EcoEnergy, and head, gender diversity committee, Wipro.

Of the overall workforce at Wipro, 29% are women. At the entry level, 40-45% are women. At Infosys, currently women form 25% of the company’s first-time managers, 12% of mid-level managers, and 6% of managers at higher levels. Through 2008-09, Infosys had seen a 50% increase in promotions among women. Mindteck has more than 27% female employees and a sizeable number of them as managers. “There is a strong desire and enthusiasm among women to surge ahead and the organisation motivates and mentors this to create more women leaders among us,” said Usha TN, vice-president, legal and company secretary, Mindteck.

About 30% of the participants in Mindteck’s leadership programme are women.

For these programmes to show tangible results, experts feel there is a requirement to start the process early. “To scale up from manager to a leadership role, there is a requirement to groom women. Companies have realised that women need to be mentored and trained for such roles. There is a level-playing field where companies now consider women for a top position and the trend is catching up fast,” said Sangeeta Lala, senior vice-president, TeamLease Services. Industry experts feel there is still a long way to go. Besides workshops and counselling, women require greater opportunities for networking, participating in top-level business meetings, more motivation, policies that are sensitive towards their needs to step on and off from work and a lot more thrust on both formal and informal mentoring.

“We have started seeing genuine ownership of these processes and active interest from top management now. Women are being included in top-level business activities, besides being in traditional roles that women have been performing over the years. While companies like Infosys, TCS, HCL, Cognizant and even Wipro have been doing their bit, they are young companies learning on the fly, and there is still a long way to go,” said Priya Chetty-Rajagopal, principal consultant (vice-president), Stanton Chase International.

<http://www.financialexpress.com/news/women-find-it-hard-to-make-it-to-the-top/820574/0>