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CURIOSITY POTENTIAL OF FEMALE EMPLOYEES IN INDIAN IT ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract:
According to the analysis published in global research papers traits like curiosity, creativity and innovation are not gender based. That means there is similar potential theoretically available with male and female employees. Yet, when we quickly look around ourselves, we cannot easily remember the names of outstanding Female innovators. Why is so?
Using the data that was captured for the doctoral research, a secondary analysis was conducted about the Curiosity potential for male and female employees across 2 generations i.e., Gen-X and Gen-Y. The observations indicate that Female employees have higher or same level of curiosity potential as their male counterparts. However, the female employees also believe that the organizations do not provide enough support to their potential. This is rather unsurprising finding. Historically, it has been seen that due to family responsibilities, many talented female employees take a career break or accept administrative roles not aligned to their natural talent. We have seen changed outlook by IT Organizations in last 5 years to provide opportunities for Female employees to balance their family life and work. This paper tries to provide some additional recommendations to nurture and utilize the curiosity potential of Female employees in an enhanced manner.
Keywords: Female, Women, Curiosity, Creativity, Innovation, Diversity, Organizational Culture

Curiosity Potential of Female Employees in Indian IT Organizations

For the doctoral research, the topic selected was about curiosity of IT Organization employees. When the survey questions were framed, initially the question about gender of the survey participants was not included. As per the literature review, it was clearly cited in multiple research papers that curiosity and creativity are not gender based, and hence it was felt that there is no need to capture this information. However, one of the survey respondents provided candid feedback about what additional information can be gathered by adding this question in the survey. The strong argument was that although curiosity is not dependent on gender, the organizational environment has different impact on curiosity of Male and Female. Hence this question was included in the survey.

When the survey link was published on LinkedIN®, many respondents from the Indian IT Industry community across the world responded positively. Some of them also mentioned that they will be looking forward to the survey observations. Total 131 responses were received with 25% Female and 75% Male. The initial analysis was more focused on the specific doctoral research questions, and the gender question was not considered in the preliminary analysis. Much later, when additional data analysis was being conducted based on types of organizations and years of experience, this data analytics emerged. While diving deep into the data based on gender, the observations came out so starkly that the feedback given by the respondent justified itself vehemently.

I would like to profusely thank the respondent who insisted to add this question and present herewith the perspective of untapped Curiosity Potential of Female employees in Indian IT Organizations based on the survey data.

[A] Background:

Throughout the literature on Curiosity and Creativity, it is mentioned that there is no specific evidence of higher potential towards any single gender.[1] In fact, highly creative personalities show a combination of masculine (autonomous, self-confident, tough) and feminine (sensitive, intuitive, responsible) traits.[2] Thus, it is widely accepted that there is consistent lack of gender difference in creative test scores and creative accomplishments. This was the main cause of reluctance for me to review the survey data according to gender.

Although, there is no gender advantage to men, we can also observe wide differences in the creative achievements of Male and Female in IT organizations across the world. Hence, the organizational environment must be one of the factors that influences this disparity over the years. Today's IT Organizations have embraced Diversity and Inclusion wholeheartedly.[3] This is also being measured as one of the KPIs for senior leaders and often published openly. Inclusion needs to be end-to-end and not just from hiring the headcount perspective. The IT Organizations should provide equitable playing field by giving equal opportunity, making them feel heard and providing equal support. It is easier said than done. The survey results points to some of these areas which IT Organizations start looking proactively to provide level playing field, support, and opportunities.

[B] Data Analysis:

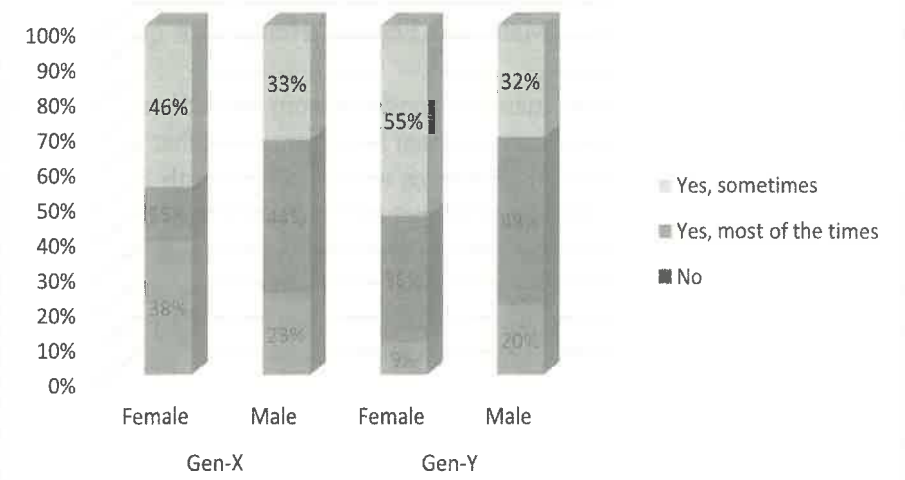
Without further ado, let's deep dive into the data analysis of specific survey questions and the responses.

The data analysis for every question is carried out at 2 levels; first is by gender i.e., Female and Male; and secondly by age. The survey population is classified into two categories of Gen-X[4] (born before 1985) and Gen-Y[5] (born between 1985 to 1995) as per their age. This will provide us a perspective of Female who possibly entered IT Organizations at different era and their interpretation about the Organizational environment over the years.

[B.1] Individual Perspective responses:

In this sub-section, we will look at 5 different questions and the responses which provide us insight about the individual perspectives of Female and Male under Gen-X and Gen-Y.

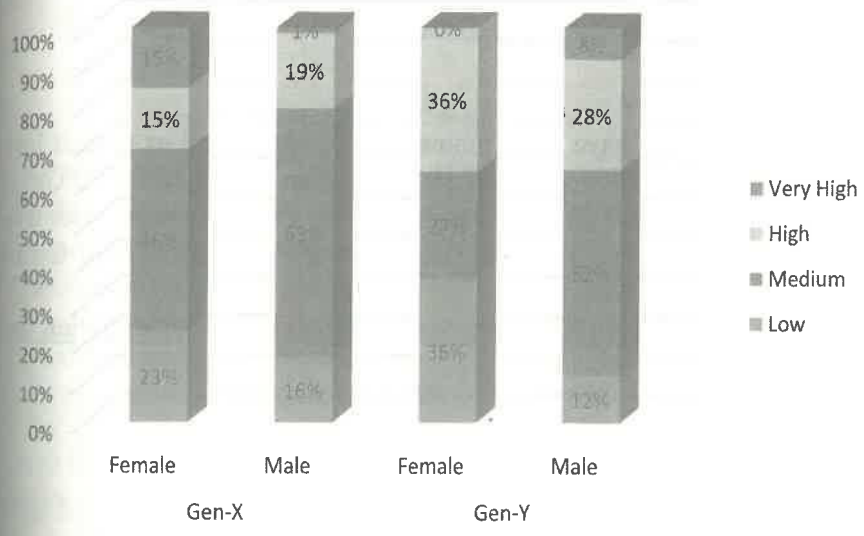
Q. 1} Do you think your curiosity depends on your surrounding environment?



Across the population, only 23% employees believe that their curiosity is not dependent on surrounding environment. Yet, 38% Female in Gen-X population believe that they are not dependent on surrounding environment. This population is significantly higher than any other category. On the other hand, only 9% Gen-Y female are independent. For Males across Gen-X and Gen-Y, the percentages across the responses are very similar.

We can surmise that for Gen-X Female it was always tough to get into engineering jobs. Hence, many of these would have opted for IT jobs because of their own passion and high level of self-motivation. Those females would have gone through lot of doubts raised by the society, as they were treading an unfamiliar career map heavily dominated by Males at that time. That upbringing might have given them additional boost of independence which is reflected in the responses.

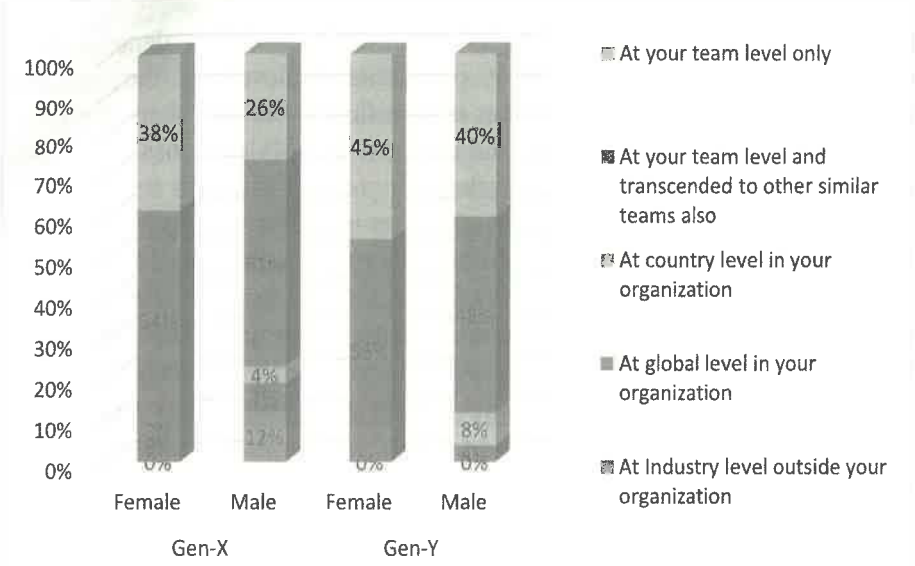
Q. 2} What is the level of Curiosity you observe in your present professional environment?



80% of Gen-X Males believe that the professional environment exudes only low or medium curiosity around. However, only 70% Gen-X Females believe the same. Surprisingly, 15% of Gen-X Females believe they observe very high curiosity around. Across the population only 4% people believe so. Hence here again, we see that Gen-X Females are swimming against the tide.

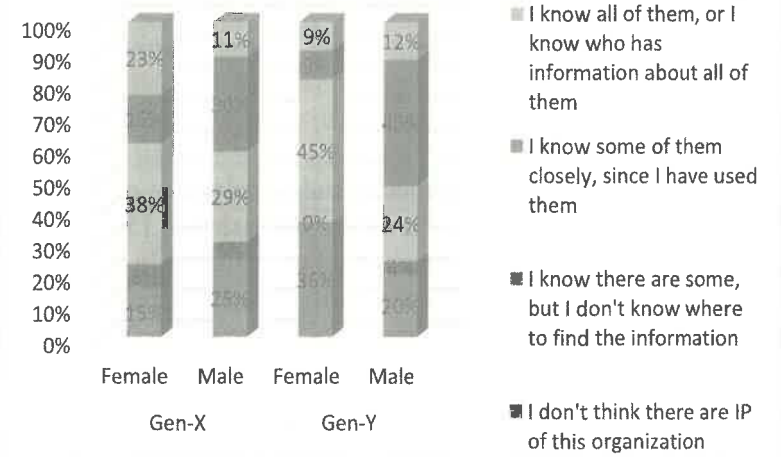
There is not much difference between Gen-Y Females and Males; with 36% Gen-Y Females honestly responded that they see low curiosity in their professional environments.

Q. 3} What was the highest impact of your innovations in your professional environment?



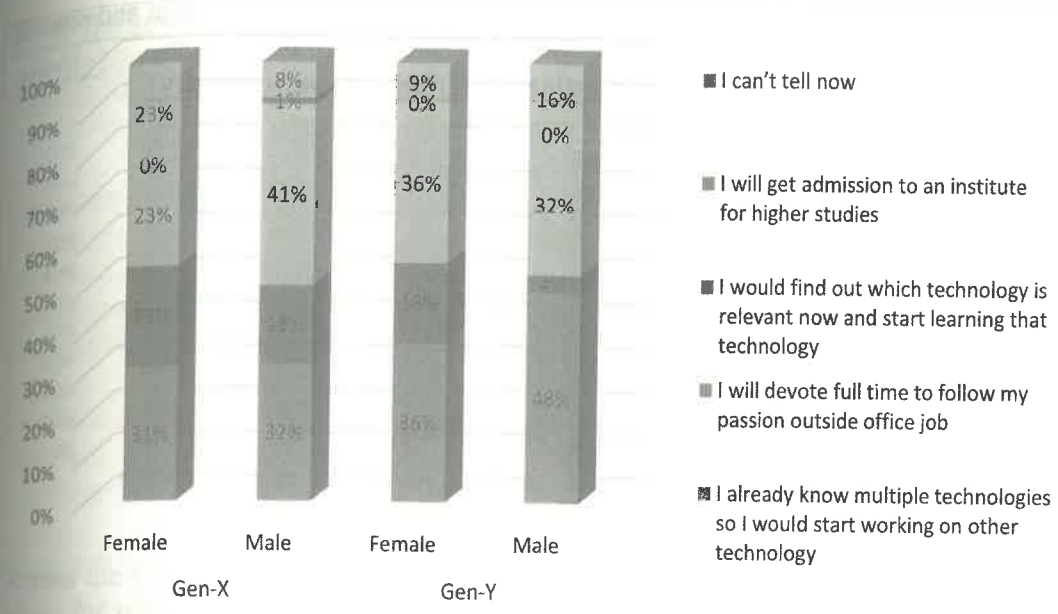
Across the population, ~83% participants have done innovations at team level or project level. However, for females the numbers are much higher, viz., 92% for Gen-X and 100% for Gen-Y. While some % of males (12% of Gen-Y and 23% of Gen-X) created innovations at wider level, the population of females doing so is far lesser. Under Gen-X category, at least 8% of females contributed at larger levels by their innovations.

Q4} Are you aware of Intellectual Property (IP) products or solutions your organization has?



Here, there is less difference between Gen-X males and females. But it seems Gen-Y males are way above others, whereas Gen-Y females are lagging drastically. Gen-X females top the charts here as well with 23% picking out the top option. This is the highest % across all the categories.

Q5} If the technology you are working on today cease to exist one day suddenly, what is the first thing you would do?

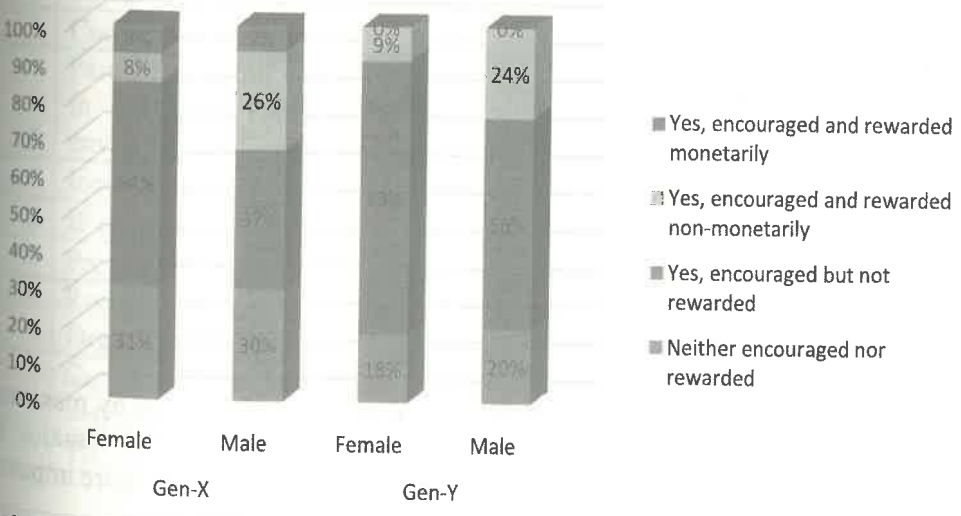


Highest number of Gen-Y are aware of multiple technologies; thus, they don't fret over one technology getting outdates suddenly. Gen-X males and Gen-Y females have almost same distribution across the options. Gen-X females stand-out with the highest number in any category mentioning that they would rather devote time to follow the passion outside the office jobs. Also, 23% of these are not sure what they would do if this impact happened suddenly. This % is considerably lower in other categories.

[B.2] Organization Environment related Perspective responses:

Now, let's look at the questions related to perception of the participants with regards to support provided by organizational environment to their curiosity or innovations.

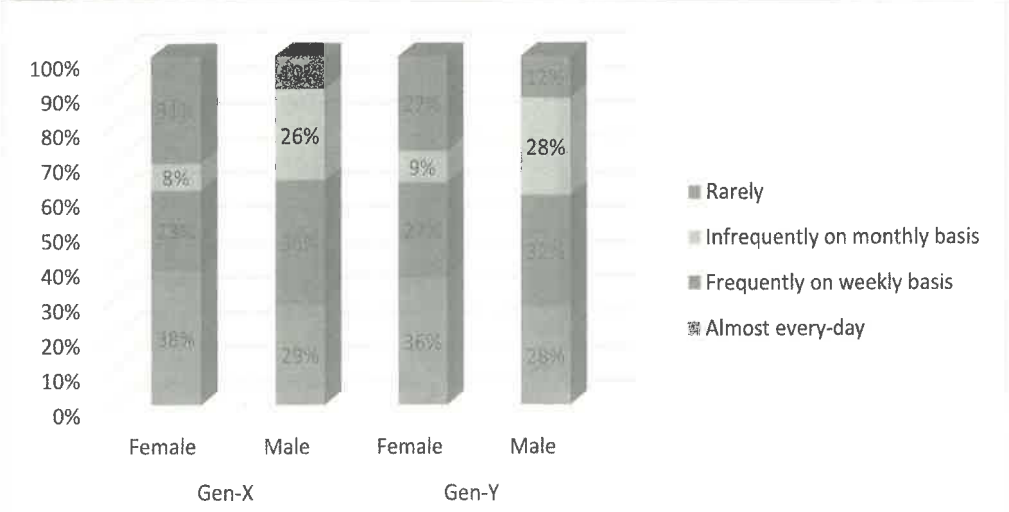
Q. 6) Is your curiosity encouraged and rewarded in your professional environment?



Under this question, females under both categories perceive that they don't get enough encouragement and rewards in their professional environments. Although good percentage of

males are also not happy, there is ~25% who believe they get some encouragement and rewards. This can be a one of the reasons where females could not contribute to innovations.

Q. 7} How frequent is the impact of Organizational barriers on your curiosity?

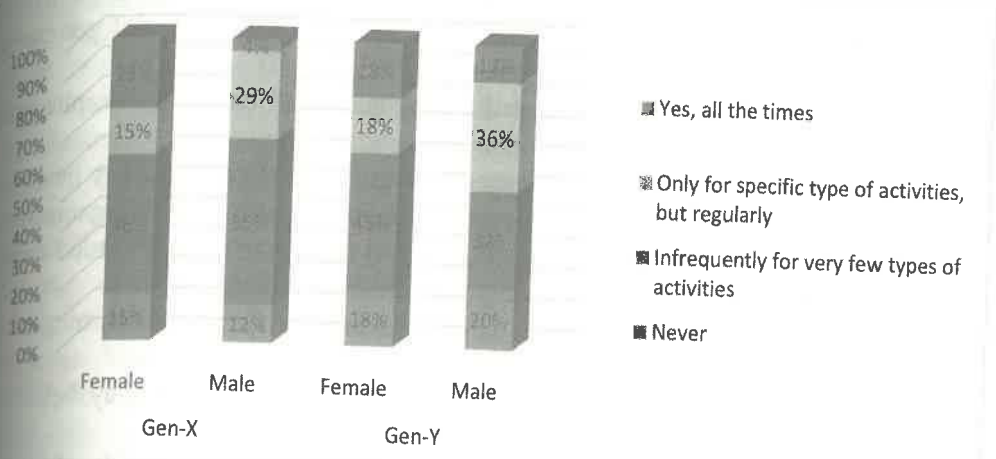


Across the population, more than 60% participants are impacted by the barriers on daily or weekly basis. However, more than 25% females mention they are rarely impacted by the barriers. On the other side, around 10% males can ignore the impact of barriers. This depicts that more females are self-motivated to overcome the barriers and continue their innovations.

Q. 8} What is the highest impacting factor by which your curiosity is restricted in day to day work?

With no surprise, 'Timeline pressure' is identified as the highest impacting factor by maximum number of participants across the population. However, more than 60% Gen-X females are impacted by this factor. This is a concerning area. Another observation is males are more impacted by 'Monotonous work' than females. This is across the generations.

Q. 9] Do you get enough time to do research and development before you take up any activity?



Across the population, the perception is there is never enough time given or very infrequently given for research and development. Although, good number of females believe that they get enough time for research and development all the time. This number is much higher than males.

[C] Observations:

Following is the comparative analysis of 4 categories based on the responses in a tabular format:

High – Highly Positive, Score the highest across 4 categories
Medium – Positive, At median level across 4 categories
Low – Negative, Lower than median level
Very Low – Highly Negative, The lowest across 4 categories

		Female		Male	
Q No	Category	Gen-X	Gen-Y	Gen-X	Gen-Y
1	Curiosity Potential	High	Low	Medium	Medium
2	Perception about Curiosity in Professional environment	High	Very Low	Very Low	Medium
3	Innovation Contribution	Medium	Very Low	High	Low
4	IP awareness	Medium	Very Low	Medium	High
5	Professional Diversity	Low	Medium	Medium	High
6	Recognition by Organization	Low	Very Low	High	Medium
7	Can overcome impact of barriers	High	High	Low	Low
9	Time for research	High	Medium	Very Low	Low

Based on above, following observations arise.

- Gen-X Females have highest Curiosity potential and outperform Males in their generation with the earnest fight to succeed against all odds.
- Despite of having highly positive approach towards organizational environment and being self-motivated in overcoming barriers, Gen-X Females believe they do not get enough recognition and rewards for their curiosity potential.
- Gen-X Females have the least Professional diversity across all categories despite being consistently at par or above average in all other areas.
- Gen-Y Females appear at exactly opposite spectrum of Gen-X Females. They have least Curiosity potential and have highly negative responses in 5 areas out of 8. Organizational environment also does not help them as they do not feel recognized and rewarded enough for their curiosity. In a way, it becomes a vicious circle with no way out.
- Gen-X Males are short of Gen-X Females slightly; however, Gen-Y Males outperform Gen-Y Females by a long distance.
- Gen-X Males have the highest contribution through Innovations; and they believe in Organizational recognition the most.
- Gen-Y Males are highly aware of Organizational environment and have utilized it to the best of their abilities and hence have highest professional diversity.
- Males in both the generations have medium Curiosity potential, easily get distracted by organizational barriers and believe they don't get enough time to research and development.

[D] Recommendations:

As per ISO-56002 standard for Innovation Management System[6], the organizations should maintain a culture of Curiosity to cultivate Innovations systemically. One of the essential factors for harnessing Curiosity culture is the diversity of the team composition. Like the characteristics of highly creative people given above, a highly creative team should have gender-based diversity. A well-rounded diverse team combines masculine and feminine features in healthy way to devise creative and innovative solutions.[7]

Indian IT Organizations have been receptive in employing in Female engineers regularly throughout last 3 decades. Initially, the numbers might be lower as the number of Female engineers was itself lower than Male engineers in India. As the century turned, many Female engineers graduated and found their career calling in IT Industry.[8]

As the above survey observations depict, IT Organizations are not able to tap the Curiosity Potential of Female employees rigorously so far. This is highly evident for Gen-X Females, wherein the category showed highest Curiosity potential, yet felt that they were not enough recognized or rewarded. Without enough recognition or reward, this self-motivated group delivery positively innovations and believe in the organizations. Although, as Gen-Y Females started joining the IT Organizations, they observed that their predecessors are not getting enough recognized and rewarded. This would have set-up wrong precedent in their minds and resulted into them going into their own shells.

It is evident that the growth of IT Organizations in future is heavily dependent on Innovations.[9] With infinite amount of technology changes happening around, the IT Organizations need best of their employees to be fully motivated for innovations. For the same, there needs to be specific exercise conducted to provide encouraging environment to Female and enable them to bring out their Curiosity potential to the fullest.

So, below are the top 4 aspects that the Indian IT Organizations can consider improving the situation.

(1) Recognize the Personal Creativity:

Most of the Female employees are adept at multi-tasking, especially the ones managing career along with family. They follow hobbies passionately in their outside-office hours. IT Organizations seem to have a negative bias for this outside-office creativity. There are many organizations which used to conduct talent show competitions in pre COVID era. Many Female employees were rewarded during these as well as some of them competed in Inter-Corporate tournaments as well. Even Google's internal survey found out that idea of work-life balance is flawed.[10]

It seemed that the organizations are treating these as amateur activities to be conducted and give a break to the associates from their work. This is one of the perspectives that the organizations need to change. Remember, that creativity in any form can be transcended to other form.[11] It's like Law of Conservation of Energy[12] which states that energy can neither be created nor destroyed; rather, it can only be transformed or transferred from one form to another. Hence, IT Organizations are required to understand that the creativity that Female employees have in their personal hobbies can be easily transcended to their professional work as well. The organizations need to recognize this personal creativity to utilize the benefits of these. The character of Vidya Balan shown in Mission Mangal movie smartly depicts transcending her cooking skills to build fuel injection system for Mangalyaan. That is the best example to ascertain this aspect!!

(2) Hybrid Work Model

One of the advantages of COVID era is that IT Organizations created an environment of trust wherein employees can work from home peacefully, and in some cases, it resulted in higher productivity. The biggest productivity gain happened for Female employees. In earlier era, Female employees had to travel to office and had restrictions working late due to family constraints or personal constraints.[13] Many Female employees had to take less challenging role to sustain work-life balance. COVID era allowed them to prove that they can work efficiently from home handling the challenges of office and home equivalently. IT Organizations need to understand the requirements of Female employees more empathetically, especially for Females with family responsibilities, and provide hybrid working options accordingly.

Hybrid Work Model will provide the Female employees an option to handle their family and office commitments as per convenience ensuring the highest attention to right responsibility at right time with no compromises. Female employees can take care of their family commitments from home whenever necessary; and be in office for critical milestones of the projects and events, meeting colleagues and managing the teams. This is certainly a win-win situation for Female employees and the Organizations. This enables Female Employees continue in their progressive career roles without compromising their family commitments. The Organizations also get the best out of the talented female employees and long-term commitment.

(3) Mentoring by Role Models

As observed in the survey responses, there are certain Gen-X Females who have created innovations at wider levels against all odds. Their passion for their work has motivated them towards excellence overcoming the barriers effortlessly. These Females can mentor the new age Females to derive best out of them. Other Females when they see their role models getting recognized for their great work will be motivated to contribute more openly. They would love to

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