

Rehiring women professionals after a career break – The Organisational Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The re-hiring of the women employees has become a major area of study since the number women who opt for career breaks for different reasons ranging from childbirth to self-health or take care of aged elders. But, as a matter of fact, it has been observed in the past that companies used to refrain from rehiring the women employees after the career breaks owing to different reasons. The current study targeted at the Information Technology sector in India aims to analyse, to understand the strategies of the organizations for rehiring women after their career breaks, their success rate and the programs and compensation offered to them. Also, the research aims to assess the potential impact these strategies on an organization's culture, image and functioning. The study is a qualitative research and data has been collected using a questionnaire method in form of interview transcripts from the department heads.

Key Words: rehiring programs, women employees, career break, organisation performance

Introduction

Career break is a period of time in one's life when the individual chooses not to work for any personal or professional reasons and aspirations. It has been, however, noted that the chances of taking career breaks is more common in females as compared to males (Gilchrist, 2017). A research conducted by KPMG for Vodafone found that 96 million women between 30 and 54 are on career breaks worldwide. Also, 55% of these women are those who have middle-manager level of experience and above (Gilchrist, 2017). Conversely, a research by London Business School found that 70% of working women are reluctant to take career breaks due to negative outlook by employers (Burke, 2017). On this note, however, many companies have started rehiring programs, such as Technology Ireland and Software Skillnet's Reboot, Returnships backed by Prudential and TSB, and Vodafone's ReConnect that are run to rehire, place, train women and provide them a second chance at work (Krishna, 2016; News, 2017; Women Restart, 2016). This study is needed to understand how employers are creating processes to help women become comfortable in taking career breaks for important personal obligations, and still feel competent enough to return to a corporate company and work to grow professionally.

Aim

This study aims to assess the several factors that play a role in rehiring women, the initiatives taken by employers and how these strategies have a role in future growth of the company and the employee.

Literature Review

1.1.1 Antecedents of rehiring women professionals after career break

The inherent culture and general practice of refraining from rehiring individuals from career break and assessing the candidature of the employee as per a continuous experience record has led to creation of wariness among the individuals taking a career break and for firm to rehire these individuals (Evertsson, Grunow, & Aisenbrey, 2016). However, there have been many incentives that firms find when they consider to rehire women professionals after their career breaks, including loyal employees, more focused candidates, increased level of work enthusiasm and decreased chances of another long break from work leading to taking up responsibilities of firm's tasks (Ely, Stone, Review, & 2014, 2014). Keeping in line with these antecedents, many companies have started their rehire programs for women on career breaks.

1.1.2 Creative and Innovative Initiatives by Employers

The research by KPMG showing that 96 million women are on career breaks led the Telecommunications company Vodafone to initiate a new program aimed to globally recruit women that were on career break and get them back into the workplace (Gilchrist, 2017). This scheme is known as 'ReConnect' which can be used by women across 26 countries, where Vodafone aims to recruit 1,000 women who are on breaks from their career and are now ready to move back to work. The 1000 slots include half for managerial spots and half for front-line, technological spots. This program is aimed to provide a way of creating awareness on rehiring processes across various countries, and is aimed as an outreach program to women who are facing difficulties in being rehired. The recruitment drive, if successful, aims to provide a financial boost of around \$419 billion in the lives of these women (Gilchrist, 2017).

Another recruitment program for women on career breaks has been pioneered by Julianne Miles, a psychologist who changed careers after a career break. She has co-founded Women Returners, which is a group that helps firms in USA to connect with women candidates that have been on career breaks, but have the essential skillset and experience for the position that the firm wants to hire for (Hoyle, 2017). The process is similar to an internship, as this "returnship" creates placement opportunity for the women for a time period of six weeks to six months, but with the salary and benefits of full employment (Aisenbrey, Evertsson, Forces, & 2009, 2009). This gives a chance to both the firm and the applicant to match their needs with each other and then continue or stop as they wish. The major point of being eligible for this program is that the women need to have a minimum 2 year career gap out of the workplace. The project has gained much momentum since its inception, with the programs that they offer increasing from 3 in 2014 to 27 in 2017 (News, 2017).

A re-hiring pilot project was conducted by Technology Ireland and Software Skillnet, whose success led to an expansion of the same project, Women ReBoot, in Ireland. The program aims to reintroduce technically experienced women who have had a career break back to the employment fold through many programmes that are being offered in Dublin and Cork(Tannam, 2017). The program has around 50 open slots for recruiting women who are interested in working again for the technology sector. Not only this, many programs have come up where companies are trying to engage women while they are still on their breaks, but have some free time on their hands for working from home(Shrivastava & Rajesh, 2017). Schneider Electric, in India, has started an engagement model where expecting mothers are assigned a work buddy before going on leave who keeps them posted on the major developments in the firm and helps the mother come back to work by identifying the right role for her in the organization when they are ready to rejoin. Another company that aims to help new mothers is Genpact through its initiative- Returning Moms Program(Kalysh, Kulik, & Perera, 2016). This program lets the new mothers choose their working hours and shifts in their first year back to office, and also lets these women choose an office location that is nearest to their homes(Women Restart, 2016). These initiatives has created a positive impact in helping women on career break and help create opportunities that would not hinder their professional growth along with personal advancement.

1.1.3 Impact of rehiring strategies as potentials for future expansion and growth

Women who are aiming to return to the professional fold after a career break are mostly those who have had strong educational background, have amassed significant work experience before the break, are with a high energy level due to the break and have increased enthusiasm to work after a hiatus(Chevalier, 2007). The major advantage that these firms have professionals coming who would take in tasks enthusiastically and work passionately to prove their position in the firm(Singh & Narula, 2016). Apart from the work motivation, these people are now those assets that the company knows will not pursue another career break for quite a time, which provides the employers a chance to keep them at a greater responsibility position(Adema et al., 2014). Another aspect where companies can benefit by rehiring women professionals is due to the scientific corroboration of the fact that mothers are better managers as managing home requires the same skillset as the one required by a CEO of a small company(Eagly & Carli, 2007). Also, an experience women acquire during their career break can become very useful for the growth of the company as there are lesser gaps to fill, have more loyalty and can manage effectively without additional intervention(Heinz, 2003). These factors can be vouched for through a survey results that showed that 55% of hiring managers were able to find the job experience or specific skills they were looking for in the women candidates that had applied after a career break. These women were also seen to have a strong desire to work to prove their candidature, along with high engagement levels(Ely et al., 2014). These qualities, if taken into consideration by hiring managers of various

corporations, can help in creating an effective plan to use them for expanding and growing the said organization to newer heights.

Methodology

The present research delves into a qualitative study for assessing the processes that take place in organizations to rehire women who have been on career breaks. The report, thus, aims to assess the results collected through data collection via interviews of fifteen department heads of different industry corporate. The data will be collected via interviews using an open ended questionnaire. The heads were approached through the HR of the organization wherein appointments were taken by the researcher for conducting the interview. The analysis of the collected data has been done through critical content analysis to understand their creative strategies the interviewees apply for rehiring women after their career breaks, their success rate and the programs and compensation offered to them.

Discussion

The respondents for this research report had the following demographic profile:

Demographic Factor		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	7	46.67
	Female	8	53.34
Age	20-29	2	13.34
	30-39	4	26.67
	40-49	6	40.0
	50-59	3	20.0
	Above 57	0	0.0
Tenure	<1 Year	1	06.67
	1-3 Years	2	13.34
	3-5 Years	6	40.0
	>5 Years	6	40.0

1.1.4 Views on rehiring women employees

The section moves forward on the view that women are majorly the ones that take career breaks to have children and care for newly born. Apart from starting a family, a woman may also take a career break to travel, take care of her own health or take care of an elderly parent, amongst others. This career break leads them to a state of inactivity for a period of time that ranges from 6 months to anywhere between 2-5 years. According to respondent A, “a career gap is widely viewed as a lack of experience and decreased seriousness of the work by

companies, and many are not considered competent enough to come back and work.” The notion of not being fit for an organization rises from various reasons that hiring managers, organization heads and executive management decide on. Respondent B is of the view that “*the organization’s greatest fear is that women who go on a career break become technologically obsolete, however, things are moving fast towards a positive direction for women in terms of rehiring processes*”. Respondent C mentions technology obsolescence by mentioning that “*it is a temporary issue which can be remedied with training sessions, self-help through the internet and practice sessions in free time*”. Thus it can be inferred from the above discussion that there exists a mixed review on the matter of re hiring the women employees though the management has now started to think positively in the direction of rehiring.

1.1.5 Impact of rehiring women on organizations

Organizations have realized that women are an essential part of organizations that they work for firm performance along with their personal or professional excellence (Walters, 2017). As respondent D believes, “*Organizations like ours are conducting sessions to stress on the importance of work-life balance, and how performance at both ends can be increased*”. Respondent E says, “*Organizations are becoming more emphatic in understanding that the responsibility of starting a family is on a woman’s hand and this cannot be held against her and are implementing strategies to include them in progressing together*”. Also, a response from Respondent F shows that, “*the rehired individual, when provides excellent outcomes, help organizations is having a positive outlook to rehiring women. Also, women who have been rehired create a positive and progressive outlook and help the organizations achieve their set goals*”. These accounts show that rehiring women are changing the inherent outlook of companies to become more open towards the prospect of hiring women after a career break.

1.1.6 Rehiring Women and strategies being adapted by the organization

Organizations are working to improve their Corporate Social Responsibility by establishing departments to rehire and counsel women on career breaks, along with the help of re-launch societies. According to Respondent A, “*these societies and departments assess the career graphs of those women who have registered and try to counsel and communicate with the individual to assess the best possible position for the said individual*”. Also, respondent D says, “*The organizations have had concerns while recruiting women after a break in their professional career, but have now started working on creating solutions and finding an alternate way to make situation better for these women, and also increasing productivity of their processes through more motivated and focused individuals*”.

1.1.7 Impact of rehiring on potential future expansion and growth

Due to a progressive movement started by some companies and societies, the traditional trend is slowly but steadily losing its prominence, and instead there are many processes and projects that are being launched by

many multinationals that intend to increase the level of hiring of women that have been on career breaks for more than 6 months (Lawrie, 2017). Respondent E says, “The main reasons why these companies should hire women after career breaks is because these women have good credentials and experience that gives them the right to have a great career, and also provide increased outcomes on professional commitments”. Respondent G is of the opinion that, “women who take career breaks are more responsible and loyal, making them good candidates for leadership and managerial roles. Also, their talent does not fade with a career break, and organizations benefit from the same in terms of performance and management.” Also, as respondent C mentions, “Companies recruiting same professional who once worked with them decrease chances of wasting resources for training. Women have real life experience on multitasking, thus prove better administrators.” These instances provide that companies rehiring women after career breaks are not only including diversity and showing CSR initiatives, but is also are enhancing their firm productivity and performance with lesser resources spent along with improved brand image in the eyes of all the stakeholders.

Conclusion & Implication

Returning after a career break is becoming a norm in the present business and professional world, where women are restarting their professional lives with the help of their previous employers or other companies that have started a hiring process for women on career breaks. The programs are being executed by most multinational corporations and in various cities across the world, as well as some return programs that are being run by similar individuals to find an effective way to help women willing to return to work after a break. This process can help enable increased inclusion, create a better CSR profile for the organization and earn the organization better and loyal employees for the future, along with helping and increasing female participation at work. This ultimately leads to improved productivity and performance of the organization.

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