

BOSTON COLLEGE

CENTER FOR WORK & FAMILY

EXECUTIVE BRIEFING SERIES

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Work-Life in India

As India continues to emerge as a global economic power, understanding the dynamics between work and personal lives specific to this culture is increasingly important. In India, the work-life agenda is very much aligned with the social and institutional context of the country. This briefing provides background for understanding how work-life issues are perceived and researched in India, and offers recommendations for organizations seeking to implement work-life initiatives there.

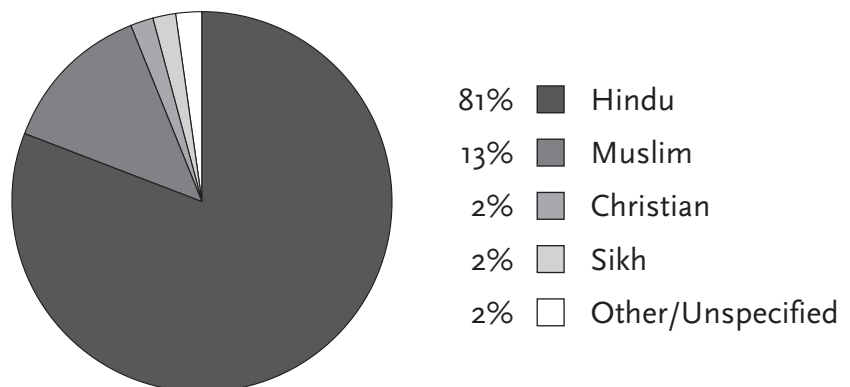
INDIAN CULTURE

Historical and Religious Contexts

India is the world's largest democracy, the seventh largest country in area, and the second most populous country in the world (CIA – The World Factbook – India). Indian civilization dates back more than 3,000 years. The country was largely under the rule of Hindu kings until the 11th – 12th century AD, after which it was dominated by Mughal rulers who arrived from Central Asia. The 16th century onwards saw the country under British colonial rule. As a modern nation state, India is relatively young, having attained independence in the year 1947 (Thapar, 1990).

The constitution of the country declares India as a secular state (The Constitution of India - Preamble), but religion is an important facet of contemporary Indian life. The Hindu population that constitutes a majority at 80% dominates much of India's social, cultural, economic and political climate.

FIGURE 1: POPULATION OF INDIA BY RELIGION



Hinduism is considered to be one of the oldest world religions. Hindus believe that after death, the individual's soul or *atman* is released from the body and is re-born. The ultimate aim of a Hindu is to get forever released from this cycle of birth and re-birth (i.e. attain salvation, or *moksha*). A person's deeds (*karma*) determine where the person is currently placed in this path towards salvation. One way of attaining *moksha* is to ideally fulfill one's duty (*dharma*) in one's present life.

Hindu religion is polytheistic and a wide pantheon of gods and deities are worshipped in different forms and in different sects throughout the country. Some scholars refer to this as the 'little traditions' of Hinduism as contrasted against the 'great tradition' of Hinduism embodied in the Holy Trinity – the three major gods – Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver) and Shiva (the destroyer). It is not uncommon to find colorful shrines dedicated to various gods and goddesses on India's street corners, in people's homes, on vehicle dashboards or in workplaces, sometimes even on work desks.

Within India, on a day-to-day basis, many people engage in ritual actions motivated by religious systems that owe much to the past but are continuously evolving. For instance, the country celebrates holidays and festivals of various religions on which all government institutions including banks are closed for work. Sometimes, members of these institutions (usually the dominant Hindus) take it upon themselves to actively celebrate the holiday at the workplace by performing a *puja* that involves making a ritualistic offering to the gods.

The Caste System in Modern India

Indian society has always been hierarchically ordered through the caste system which is an important aspect of Hinduism and is supported by the principle of *dharma*. Traditionally an individual's caste was determined at birth and governed all aspects of one's life including the professions that could be practiced, the way food was prepared, and whom one could marry. Upper castes enjoyed more privileges than lower caste groups, supporting the notion that India has always had a high 'power distance' culture where differences in status between people are considered normal and acceptable. Traditionally, at the top of the caste hierarchy were the Brahmin priests, who are closest to God and wield considerable power and influence in society. To this day, it is not uncommon to find Hindu households calling on Brahmin priests to sanctify rituals associated with various life stages such as birth, marriage, and death. Because an

individual's caste status is traditionally ascribed rather than achieved, it is virtually impossible to change one's caste. This makes social change in India a slow process.

The curious intertwining of the Hindu principles of *moksha* (salvation), *karma* (deeds) and *dharma* (duty) have largely maintained the status quo of the caste system. Some common manifestations of the modern caste system include advertisements in the classifieds sections of newspapers seeking marriage partners from the same caste group, caste-based social clubs, and urban housing societies and political parties based on caste lines. However, to dismantle some of the effects of the caste system, modern India has abolished 'untouchability' a practice of socially ostracizing and denigrating members of the lowest castes. There has also been a

India has always had a high 'power distance' culture where differences in status between people are considered normal and acceptable.

vigorous effort put forth to correct for social imbalances by reserving seats in educational institutions and in government jobs for members of the under-privileged castes. Because of these efforts, in combination with the forces of industrialization, modernization and urbanization, there is some evidence that caste groups are now serving more as a way for people to assert their cultural identity rather than as a way of establishing their place in the social hierarchy.

Indian Family

The family is the basic unit of India's social order. Traditionally, families in India, especially Hindu families, have been joint or extended in composition, although nuclear families are becoming more common in urban areas (Roy, 2000). Families in India are usually indulgent towards children and the aged. They are patriarchal, with the eldest male member being the head of the household. Women are encouraged to bear (male) children to carry the lineage forward and for the purpose of the eldest son performing funeral rites in order for the soul of the deceased person to attain salvation (Kakar, 1978). Marriages in India tend to be arranged for the young by elders in the family (Uberoi, 2005). Partners are usually found from within the same caste, religion, or social class/status group, making India's culture high on the dimension of in-group collectivism (Chhokar, Brodbeck & House, 2007). Divorce, although increasing, is largely uncommon and generally frowned upon by society.

DEMOGRAPHIC & ECONOMIC TRENDS

Status of Women

The status of women in India has seen many changes over its long history (Pruthi, Devi & Pruthi, 2003). While in ancient India women enjoyed many freedoms, in recent history women have been relegated to a lower status than males in practically all spheres of life, with Hindu widows having particularly low status. This has led to high gender inequality in the country (Chhokar, et al., 2007).

India's sex ratio is heavily skewed in favor of men (933 females for 1000 males, 2001 Census Survey of India). Working women form about 32 percent of the working population. Most of these women are employed in the unorganized workforce, where they are either self-employed or are wage earners without formal employment contracts and ineligible for any social benefits.

The percentage of women in the organized sector increased from 12.2 percent in 1981 to 14.1 percent in 1991 and 17.2 percent in 1999. As per the 2001 Census Survey of India, about 58 percent of the women in the organized sector were employed in the public sector, with the remaining 42 percent being employed in the private sector. This rise in working women is likely to increase the number of dual-income families, some studies estimate by perhaps 2.5 million per year (Hindu Business Line). However, this figure needs to be approached with some caution as there is also a huge dropout rate of women from the workforce as they approach their mid-30s, due to work-family conflict as well as societal pressure.

Although the employment and status of women has been changing due to the forces of modernization and industrialization (Pruthi, et al., 2003) and due to the efforts of the women's movement in India, this change has been slow (Krishnaraj, 2003). Largely the status quo appears to be maintained through the endorsement of and internalization of Hindu cultural beliefs of male supremacy and caste purity, superiority, and chastity. India's value system and demographic statistics explain the absence of research in the work-family area, and also build a case for it, especially since redistribution of work and family roles is critical for empowerment of women in such contexts.

Education

Education in India is primarily the responsibility of the central and state governments, though private educational institutions are prevalent and popular because of concern about the quality of public education. According to the 2001 Census Survey of India, the national literacy rate stands at about 65 percent (approximately 75 percent

of men and 54 percent of women are literate). While primary and secondary education is provided in English and regional languages, higher education is conducted mainly in English. According to the National Council for Applied Economic Research, India had a total of 48.7 million college graduates in 2004, up sharply from 20.5 million in 1991. This has created a large technically qualified English speaking workforce that has supported the outsourcing and call center boom in the country.

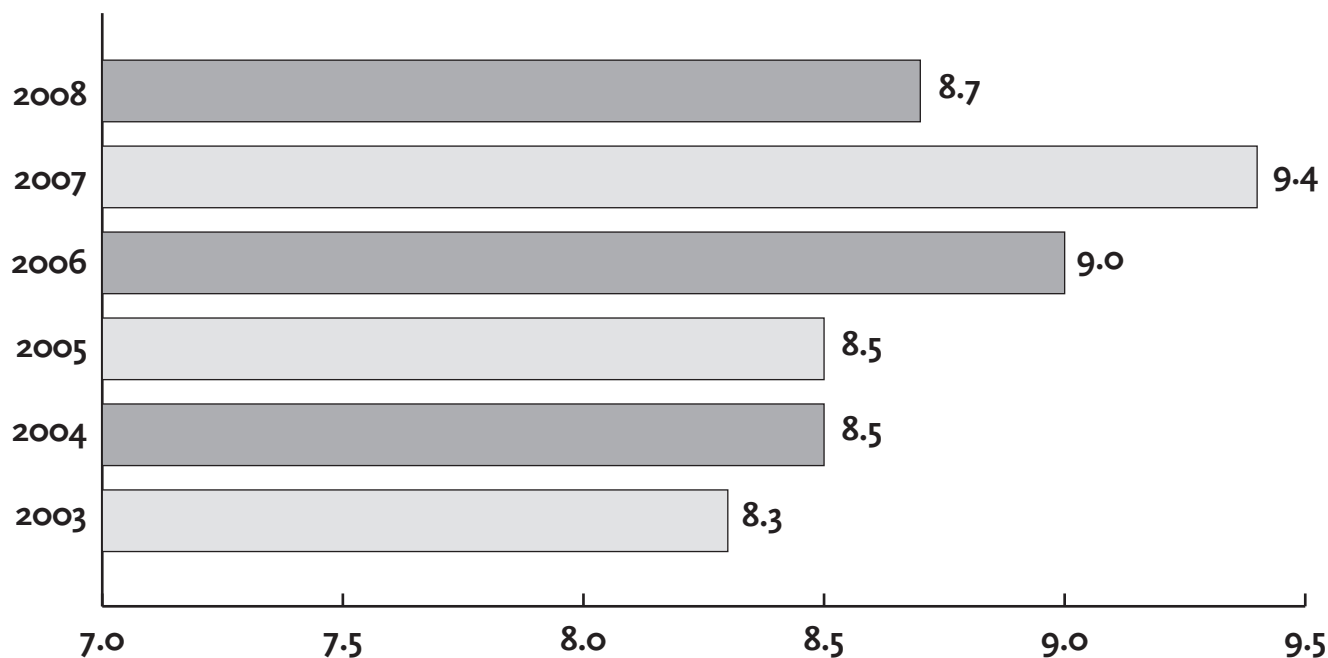
Economic Changes in Modern India

While India is fast emerging as an economic power to contend with, for many years, India's economy was closed to foreign competition. India undertook economic reform and liberalization only in the early 1990s. Since then, many socioeconomic changes have occurred in the country (Ellyn, 2001). India's growth rate has increased dramatically from what was cynically referred to by Indian economist Raj Krishna as the "Hindu rate of growth" of below 2 percent in the 1980s, to a rate of 8-9 percent for the last six years successively. Further, in the revised 2007 analysis, based on India's increased and sustained growth, progressive policies, and more inflows of foreign direct investment, Goldman Sachs predicts that from 2007 to 2020, India's GDP per capita in terms of US\$ will quadruple (Poddar & Yi, 2007).

"In the last few years we have noticed a number of new career opportunities opening up for Indians especially in the service sectors. However better opportunities along with good pay package, growth prospects, brings in a long work schedule leaving individuals with very little time to balance their work and life. Demanding careers have dominated the lives of many young Indians for sometime now and it takes a toll on their family life. It is not a surprise then that most Indians consider work-life balance as their biggest concern."

– SARANG PANCHAL, MANAGING DIRECTOR
CUSTOMIZED RESEARCH, ASIA PACIFIC INDIA,
CHINA AND GREATER CHINA
THE NIELSEN COMPANY

FIGURE 2: INDIA'S GDP GROWTH RATE 2003-2008



Source: Banashri Bose Harrison, Commerce Minister, Embassy of India

India's rapid economic growth has given rise to a burgeoning urban middle class which is slated to grow from about 5 percent of the population (50 million) to about 40 percent (580 million) by 2025, creating the world's fifth largest consumer market, according to a study conducted by McKinsey & Co. Private consumption as a share of GDP is likely to reach nearly 60 percent for India (quadruple the current share), and household budgets will become focused on discretionary items rather than just basic necessities.

Despite these advances, India has to tackle huge social, economic, and environmental problems. A poverty rate of around 25% plagues the country, keeping close to 250 million people earning less than a dollar a day (Poverty - "India at a glance", World Bank, 9/24/08).

WORK & FAMILY

Non-institutional and Institutional Support

Support for work and family balance in India comes mainly from the non-institutional family context. Support is usually provided by members of the extended family such as parents and in-laws (if they are nearby and in good health), paid help (which is relatively inexpensive but unorganized and unreliable), and the husband (depending on his attitude towards work and family roles, and when all other sources of support have been exhausted). Child care centers, though increasing in urban areas, are still uncommon

and not always professionally managed. Centers for care of the elderly, assisted-living facilities, and hospice care are virtually absent as care of elders is expected to be provided by family members and particularly women.

Institutional support for work and family issues is low in India and takes the form of government policies that are progressive on paper but poorly implemented. Some of the important government policies that address work and family concerns include the Maternity Benefits Act of 1961, the Factories Act of 1948, and the amendment to the Indian penal code (1869) section 509 aimed at addressing sexual harassment in the workplace.

The **Maternity Benefits Act of 1961** entitles a woman to 12 weeks of leave with full pay associated with the birth of a child. Under this act, it is unlawful for an employer to discharge or dismiss a woman during or on account of maternity leave, except for gross misconduct. Further, a woman worker must be permitted to take 2 nursing breaks in addition to normal breaks until the child is 15 months old.

As per the **Factories Act of 1948**, an employer must provide child care facilities for children below the age of 6 where more than 30 women workers are employed. A factory, according to the act, is any organization with a minimum of 10 workers engaged in manufacturing on any day of the

preceding twelve months. The Factories Act also provides guidance on minimum and maximum working hours along with lunch breaks and small breaks. In addition, there is provision for annual leave with wages for workers, and conditions to regulate shift work, overtime and night shift work (Bhargava, 1996; Jain & Agarwal, 1995).

Some gaps exist in the Indian government's policy approach to addressing work and family issues. First, work and family issues are rarely tackled directly in policy statements. The approach is indirect, steeped in a patriarchal style of functioning that focuses on overall worker welfare.

Second, there are no laws passed that specifically cover the right to shared family responsibilities, rights of part-time workers, and rights of home workers, nor has an effort been made in this direction despite India being a signatory to the Conventions of the International Labour Organization (Convention nos. 156 in 1981, 175 in 1994 and 177 in 1996 respectively) recommending that national governments undertake measures in these areas.

Finally, many of the laws passed lack teeth, as organizations find ingenious ways of circumventing them. For instance, employers bypass the Factories Act requiring them to provide child care facilities by employing fewer than 30 women as permanent employees and the rest as part-time or contract labor.

Trends in Work and Family Research

As compared to work-family research in Europe and the US that has evolved as a cross-disciplinary study, in India research since 1970 has followed two separate and disconnected paths. One is the route charted by women's studies centers; it focuses on underprivileged women and how the structures of patriarchy contribute to their subordination at work and home. The other path of research, conducted largely from a role theory perspective within departments of psychology, sociology and management, has examined work-family relations within urban settings. There has been little cross-pollination between these two research paths and limited focus on the organizational levels of analysis (Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004).

The decade of the mid-90s to mid-2000s was marked by liberalization of the Indian economy, and work-family research in India continued to develop against this backdrop. Women's studies extended its focus to examining the impact of globalization on female workforce participation (Sonpar and Kapur, 2001). Research from a psychosocial perspective began to distinguish between career and job-oriented women (e.g. Parikh and Shah, 1994; Rajadhyaksha, 1997; Pande, 2000),

and hinted at the possibility of men's roles in transition in the midst of a largely traditional division of work and family roles in society.

During the period 1995-2000 India saw the information technology enabled services (ITES) sector boom. Many organizations in this sector adopted work styles and organizational practices from developed countries in the West. Workers were expected to work 24/7 x 365 days of the year. To prevent such a work style from affecting worker health and productivity, workplaces offered services traditionally associated with the family and non-work domain within their premises such as gymnasiums, day-care facilities, laundry facilities, canteen facilities, even futons to sleep on (Uma Devi, 2002). The Information Technology (IT) sector was meant to have emancipatory potential for women related to the possibility of telecommuting and working flexible hours. However, in reality IT workplaces turned out to give very little room for family time and therefore did not live up to this promise. Also, since family-friendly measures were offered more as an imitation of western organizational practices rather than from a genuine concern to enable (women) workers to handle work and family responsibilities, they have suffered casualties during the recent recession in the IT sector (Poster & Prasad, 2005).

The disconnect between researchers of work and family in India has unfortunately reduced the ability to address and resolve basic dilemmas in Indian society such as the perpetuation of traditional sex-role stereotypes and behavior even in the midst of modernization and change. It has limited the suggestions of interventions to the problems of balancing work and family. For instance, women's studies have worked tirelessly at bringing about policy change at the macro socio-economic level through the instrument of the state. The Center for Women's Development Studies has put pressure on several state governments to provide childcare services and crèches for working women, especially those in the unorganized sector who have little means to pay for such services themselves. Psychologists, on the other hand, have offered a plethora of solutions at the level of the individual – such as learning to manage the stress that comes from the juggling act by practicing yoga, hiring paid help, negotiating help from the spouse and in-laws, using labor saving devices at home, and cooking easy recipes for meals. Scant attention has been focused at the organizational level (Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004), and four decades of research on work and family issues has only now begun to inform corporate practices to facilitate better work-life balance.

Organizational responses to work-life issues in India

In general, the response of Indian organizations to work-life issues has been limited. The reasons for this include a culture that does not empower women, an assumption and expectation that the (joint) Indian family is in a better position to provide support than non-family institutions, and demographic factors including a low rate of organized work-force participation among women as compared to men.

Although Indian government policy on work and family issues has traditionally been patriarchal in nature, the most progressive work-family programs in Indian organizations come from the public sector. Family-friendly measures offered include reduced hours, career break leave, responsibility leave, and parental leave. A 2007 survey by the Management and Personnel Office of the Government of India found that just over 6% of the workforce employed in the public sector made use of such measures. Most of the users, not surprisingly, were women.

In the private sector, most of the companies offering well-defined work-life programs are multinational and in the IT and ITES sectors. The motivation for multinational companies to offer family-friendly measures to their Indian subsidiaries is partly to maintain uniformity in HR practices globally, partly in response to the demands placed on them by younger men and women employees, and partly as a tool to retain talent.

Merck Sharp and Dohme, for instance, openly advertises on its website the autonomy that can be enjoyed in their managerial and sales jobs as a way of attracting and retaining talent. The company offers liberal health and hospitalization benefits, sometimes picking up the balance of an employee's health expenses when the amount exceeds the insurance coverage. In keeping with the government's family planning philosophy however, the company covers expenses for only up to the second child of the employee.

When companies in the private sector have offered work-life initiatives, these have tended to be predominantly in the category of alternative work arrangements and flexible schedules, followed by health and wellness programs. For example **Procter & Gamble** India has been offering work from home for its employees, and reduced work schedules, both of which have been a great enabler in maximizing productivity and helping manage work-life balance.

Other companies, such as **PricewaterhouseCoopers Pvt Ltd.**, offer support for commuting and have programs covering fun at work, health, and stress reduction. Gymnasium facilities are provided at major office locations. The company encourages employees to participate in community

sport events such as cricket matches, marathons etc. As a part of Corporate Social Responsibility, PWC has recently taken initiatives in the area of education and sustainability. NGOs at each of the locations have been identified. In addition to committing financial resources, the idea is to have a structured approach to voluntary participation by employees in such projects. PWC has also put in place a women's network for senior women. This is aimed at empowering them to manage work-life balance better. One of the programs, titled "My Mentor," aimed at self motivation and taking charge of one's work and life, has been very well received by participating women employees.

74% of Indian respondents surveyed said they preferred to be in a situation where work was not the all consuming thing in their lives. A whopping 82% of those in their 20s said attaining a work-life balance was going to be their priority in the new year.

(ACNIELSEN, 2006)

Real pressure to offer unique and relevant family-friendly measures is being faced by local Indian companies in the IT and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sectors. The rapid growth of these sectors during the last decade has resulted in the employment of young women in large numbers with long work hours. In their early years these companies tended to imitate Western work-life practices in form but not in spirit. Today their motivation behind offering work-life programs is a genuine desire to reduce stress and retain talented employees. For instance, one local BPO firm near New Delhi acted on an employee's suggestion that mothers would like to see their children being cared for in on-site day care centers by building glass walls for the day care center and providing electric outlets on the other side of the wall, where women can work while feeling close to their children.

Two examples of well known Indian companies offering wellness initiatives to their employees to help manage stress are Infosys Technologies and Wipro. **Infosys Technologies**, a leading IT service provider, has a wellness initiative called Health Assessment Lifestyle Enrichment (HALE). The initiative consists of a portal for online dissemination of information on various stress-related issues and a hotline whereby employees can directly receive counseling and expert opinions. The data from the portal and the hotline help the HR department to track key indica-

tors like absenteeism rates and link them with causes and resultant billing losses. These data also help to measure the effectiveness of the initiative in terms of improvement in productivity. Based on these inputs, HR takes suitable actions to deal with the prevalent wellness issues in the organization.

For **Wipro**, a leading player in both the IT & BPO sectors, encouraging employee wellness is an integral part of the corporate culture. This is reflected in Wipro's numerous health and safety initiatives which supplement health-related benefits. Some of these are nutrition consulting, health centers, medical camps, and regular well-being events like the annual Wipro marathon. The most successful Wipro project is one called *Mitr* which means 'friend' in Hindi. In this program, 28 employees, all volunteers, were trained to counsel fellow employees to manage stress. *Mitr* signifies to employees that they do have a friend in Wipro and that they should be able to confide and share their problems with a safe ally in the company.

The Tata Group has a culture of investing in several community development programs that have the theme of women's empowerment. In the Tata Motors plant at Pune there are several cooperatives managed and run by the wives of company employees. These cooperatives, called *grihini udyogs*, provide the company with a variety of products ranging from cables for vehicles to chapattis (Indian bread) for its cafeteria. The cooperatives provide extra income for employees and their families. The women are paid the government-prescribed minimum wage and they also receive all statutory benefits. Most of the cooperatives' products are sold to Tata Motors, though some — like pickles, condiments and bags — are also sold in the open market.

In an effort to attract, retain and develop talented women employees, and with a view to developing an inclusive culture, **Cisco** set up the Women's Action Network (WAN) in 2004. WAN India has more than 350 members, who strategize and execute activities with the guidance of executive sponsors and thought leaders. Some of the activities organized by Cisco's WAN chapter include mentoring, the Role Model Leadership Series (RMLS) workshops, community initiatives such as Girls in Technology, adopting charities focused on education, networking events, and 'bring your child to work' day.

IBM India undertakes measures for the advancement of women and for promoting workplace flexibility as part of its global diversity initiatives that are based on the three pillars of equal opportunity, affirmative action and work-life programs. These measures are focused on mentoring and coaching for women, attending internal and external

conferences and symposia, participating in steering committees, emphasizing executive and technical resources programs, regularly carrying out work-life employee surveys, and developing diversity-specific hiring programs.

Johnson & Johnson India established the Women's Leadership Initiative (WLI) in 2002 with the support of top management. WLI is aimed at removing barriers to the advancement of women within the company and at attracting and developing women leaders in the company. The organization is committed to fostering a culture of inclusion by building the much needed sensitivity around the topic of gender inclusion in the workplace. WLI has task forces created to work on areas of work-life integration, policy development, learning and career development, and networking. J&J India also undertakes several community initiatives focused on improving awareness of health issues surrounding diabetes and AIDS, providing support to street children, orphans and tribal girls, and providing maternity and gynecological care to women in need.



One month after Johnson & Johnson launched BabyCenter® India in 2007 (www.babycenter.in) the website became the #1 parenting website in India. Participating in message boards, Aggarwal (right) and Shanker found the support and advice they needed.

RESTART is a program initiated at **General Electric's** Technology Centre in Bangalore (John F. Welch Technology Centre) oriented at hiring women technologists who are on a career break. RESTART contains a detailed flex program and manager training, access to a daycare facility through collaboration with another GE business, and special pre- and post-maternity programs such as a 'Mom to be' relaxation room, 'Mom to be' car park, and a lactation room. RESTART hires are provided with mentors to guide them in "re-learning" the organization. After launching the RESTART campaign, GE has had 1.3 million web site hits, received over 1500 applications, and to date has already hired four RESTART technologists. In 2008, GE won the Smart Workplace Award, which is a national award provided to organizations with effective flex environments.

CONCLUSION: STRIVING FOR WORK-LIFE BEST PRACTICES IN INDIA

Based on the current culture, political climate, economic situation, and societal factors, there are a number of work-life initiatives that multinational organizations might consider for strategically addressing the needs of the business and the needs of their employees in India:

- **Flexibility:** Provide flexibility in terms of when and where work is conducted to reduce employees' conflicts, stress, and work interruptions and maintain or increase their productivity.
- **Commuting:** Invest in transportation resources to assist employees with work conflicts and delays caused by long and difficult commutes.
- **Stress Reduction:** Create a collegial atmosphere at work with opportunities for colleagues to interact informally, such as creating communal and casual spaces for chatting, listening to music, or getting a cup of tea or coffee with friends.
- **Health:** Increase health consciousness by providing more information about good exercise and healthy eating, and by providing health check-ups. Though some companies provide gyms, basketball courts, and other recreational facilities, the climate and culture make it difficult to exercise at work.
- **Elder Care:** Provide medical coverage for parents and a separate form of leave for dealing with family issues (similar to FMLA in the USA). Also, contract with well known hospitals to provide quality nursing care, or compile a vendor list of quality elder care providers.
- **Childcare:** Partner with local childcare providers to develop quality standards and performance guarantees on behalf of employees.
- **Training:** Invest in training for employees to build skills, and to encourage employees to use technology more efficiently.
- **Gender Equality:** Demonstrate that work-life programs are beneficial to the business so that both men and women recognize their importance for talent attraction, retention, and development. Continue women's advancement programs.

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About this Series

Written for an executive level audience, the Boston College Center for Work & Family Executive Briefing Series addresses topical and strategic issues of particular relevance to the current business climate. The series highlights research findings, data trends and best practices in a concise format, aiming to foster action-oriented dialogue within organizations. Each issue features an accompanying PowerPoint presentation that captures key points and includes a section for practitioners to customize and add organization-specific data.

About the Center

Since its founding in 1990, The Boston College Center for Work & Family has been a national leader in helping organizations create effective workplaces that support and develop healthy and productive employees. The Center provides a bridge linking the academic community to the applied world of the work/life practitioner and has three main focus areas: research, membership, and education. The Center is committed to enhancing the quality of life of today's workforce by providing leadership for the integration of work and life, an essential for business and community success.

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