*Driving Work-Life Effectiveness Through Employee Empowerment at Infosys*

## Organizational Information

Infosys Technologies Ltd. offers consulting and IT services to clients globally. With more than 75,000 employees worldwide, this 25-year-old organization provides software development and engineering through a network of development centers. It also provides data management, systems integration, project management, support, and maintenance services. Headquartered in India, with 70 percent of its operations based there, Infosys also has offices throughout China, Australia, and North America.

## History and Launch of Activity, Program, or Policy

India has a strong family-oriented culture, which affects both women and men. In particular, it is often expected that a woman's first priority is her family, which may include a spouse, children, parents, and/or extended family. At times, this cultural expectation may conflict with work priorities: commutes can be very long and extended work hours are often the norm. In addition, systems for childcare and eldercare, such as daycare centers or nursing homes, are not prevalent, which can increase the burden on any employee with family needs.

As a rapidly growing global company, Infosys recognized the need to employ talented and diverse individuals who reflect their global clientele, as well as provide these employees with multiple career supports. Thus, in 2003, Narayana Murthy, Chief Mentor and Co-Chairman of Infosys, launched a global council of six internal, senior women of varying nationalities who were tasked with conceptualizing and implementing an initiative that would create a gender-sensitive environment to attract, hire, and retain top talent, including women. Most of this council's resulting programs and policies directly address the challenges employees face when trying to balance work and family priorities.

## Strategy of Activity, Program, or Policy

A central component of Infosys' strategy was the creation of the role of global counselors, who ensure that women and men are effectively supported in their careers and personal lives. Global counselors are female project managers and above who are trained to sensitize and educate other employees on gender-related matters, including topics such as managing work and personal situations, childcare concerns, managing conflicts at home, harassment in the workplace, and personal safety and security. In addition, the counselors focus on career management at Infosys and are instrumental in helping individual women seek flexible work arrangements and alternate roles and map out frameworks and mediate with managers.

The Diversity Office, created in 2006, ensures that the counselors are trained and provides courses and workshops for re-education and to cover new topics. Infosys has found that empowering employees as counselors and sounding boards for others has made women and men more open to discussing their concerns and challenges.

Through these counselors, Infosys has learned about many work-life issues that affect its employees and worked to develop solutions that give employees a voice and options for addressing their work-life challenges. The resulting programs, policies, and interventions include the following:

- **Community intervention:** The traffic in India can be severe, and a two- to three-hour commute each way is common. While long commute times affect both women and men, they are especially troublesome for women who are the primary caregivers to the rest of the family. To exacerbate this situation, many positions at Infosys require women and men to work long hours.
  To address this issue, Infosys has taken an active role in changing local legislation. One of the most senior women at Infosys spearheaded an effort to lobby the Chief Minister of India to improve to the roads and systems in Bangalore, where Infosys is headquartered. Knowing that a reasonable commute time is critical to the retention of talent—especially that of women who have significant family demands—she presented the Indian government with a petition signed by 40,000-50,000 people, including employees from across the company, asking to improve various modes of transportation in Bangalore.
- **Security escort:** Infosys provides a security escort for any employee leaving after 9 p.m. If a female employee is traveling home at the same time as a male employee, the female employee is always dropped off first. If she lives significantly farther than the male employee, two guards will escort the two employees, ensuring that the woman is not traveling with only one person in the car for an extended period of time.
- **Sabbatical/Maternity leave**: Infosys allows women to take a one-year sabbatical in addition to legally mandated maternity leave for caretaking of a young child or to assume responsibility of any family-related priority.
- **Stay Connected**: During the time a woman goes on maternity leave or takes a sabbatical, it is important for her to "stay connected" to her projects (or have the option to do so). Employees are able to securely log on to workplace networks. They are also offered access to complete technical and quality certifications during their leave, as well as additional certifications that can assist with the on-boarding process when they return to work. The "Stay Connected" program" supports employees on leave and encourages their return.

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- **Alternate roles:** On average, one woman a day applies for a three-month maternity leave at Infosys, and almost 98 percent of these women return to work. Some new mothers choose to transition into alternate roles in areas such as quality or pre-sales, which are related to core project management. These roles are preferred by women who seek an environment sensitive to their need for flexibility in their daily schedules as well as during a particular career or life stage. Infosys has worked with every business unit to identify alternate roles for women who requested them for maternity or other personal reasons. While these roles are aligned with mainstream project management, they are often on stable or less complex projects, enabling women in these positions to more easily balance the demands of home and work.
- **Childcare centers**: Infosys offers childcare centers, which are not prevalent in India, at each of its locations. Infosys either assists vendors to arrange day care centers close to Infosys or identifies centers in close proximity to Infosys. The first day care center was arranged in Electronic City, near the Infosys headquarters; employees in Pune and Chennai preferred to use existing day care centers identified by Infosys.
- **Satellite Office**: Infosys has piloted a model satellite office in Bangalore where approximately 50 percent of Infosys women who are mothers work. The office is situated in the heart of the city, making it more easily reachable from residential areas than the Infosys headquarters in Electronic City. The satellite office has all the facilities of a development center for prospective and new mothers and ensures data security as well as the productivity measures required by customers.
- **Telecommuting**: Working from home is approved for select positions, as well as any women with special medical needs. Because of cultural norms, usage of telecommuting in India is growing, but still low compared to companies in the United States.

**Success Factors**

Noteworthy elements to the success of this program include:

- Guidance from senior leaders, such as Narayana Murthy, Chief Mentor and Co-Chairman, who champions this initiative, providing strategic support, as well as influence to senior individuals and the board. S.D. Shibulal, COO & Board Director, and Mohandas Pai, Head HR & Board Director, also sponsor many of these efforts.
- Providing individual employees with a voice and a role in these efforts has increased buy-in from all managers, especially men. It has also accelerated the dissemination of knowledge about the new programs and policies.

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- An advisory council consisting of internal and external women and men meet quarterly to advise and influence management policies and efforts to improve the culture.

**Challenges**

Becoming aware of gender-sensitive issues and then building specific programs, policies, and accountability systems is ongoing at Infosys. In particular, ensuring consistency around these efforts among all managers, particularly at the mid-level, is often a challenge. The company has increased efforts to disseminate information among its large workforce through an intranet portal, quarterly town hall meetings, events, and workshops to address these issues. Additionally, Infosys turned examples of low awareness into opportunities for learning by creating case studies for use in training sessions of actual situations women and men managers have faced when dealing with maternity leave and flexible work arrangements.

**Catalyst Change Drivers**

**1) Business Rationale**

Many women employees would have left the company if balancing work and family responsibilities was too difficult, resulting in Infosys missing an important source of talent. Additionally, Infosys aims to have its workforce reflect its customer and client base, making the attraction and retention of all top talent critically important.

**2) Senior-Level Leadership/Involvement**

The Non-Executive Chairman/Chief Mentor, Co-Chair, and COO continually demonstrate their high level of commitment to work-life at Infosys through frequently talking about these issues at town hall meetings and internal and external forums. They are often credited with highly visible participation in the initiative.

**3) Communication**

Since increasing communication, Infosys has seen a heightened level of awareness, especially among male managers, around work-life issues and the variety of programs and policies available to employees.

**The Impact of the Activity, Program, or Policy**

The retention rate for women from 2003 through 2006 increased, which Infosys credits in part to the programs and policies it has implemented. Prior to these work-life efforts, many women employees would express the need to leave if confronted by serious work-life challenges, and men employees often would not even bring up challenges or concerns. By combining programs and policies with the voices of individual employees,

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Infosys has been able to achieve a number of goals related to attracting and retaining top talent. It recognizes that these elements are critical to being a leader in the global marketplace.