GENDER INCLUSIVE TALENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES

A Thesis in
Human Resources and Employment Relations

by
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to explore the effect of gender stereotyping and sex-related discrimination on gender-inclusive talent management practices in multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in India that impede the growth of the female talent. Through the questionnaire designed by the researcher and by interviewing twenty-three female participants working in MNCs operating in India, the effects of gender stereotyping on managerial roles and career path as well as the effects of sex-related discrimination on informal networks were explored. Only one proposition was partially supported and other four were not supported. The results showed that only a few women were exposed to some kind of stereotypes regarding women managers or women in general, otherwise, most of the participants agreed that they were equally treated and respected. The women having responsibilities at home were also supported by their organizations by providing them access to the talent development programs. New mothers who return from maternity leave were also treated well and got the required support from their companies. Majority of women agreed that organizational practices for getting selected for these talent programs is not gender biased and they received the information about these programs at the same time. These results indicate that professional Indian women working in MNCs operating in India are respected and given equal opportunity to grow.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

In recent years, the Indian economy has witnessed an incredible growth. After the implementation of economic reforms and globalization in the 1990s, India experienced changes at macro and micro levels (Datt, 2003). These changes witnessed the opening of various subsidiaries of multinational companies (MNCs) in India. In the sustainability of these MNCs, emerging economy such as India plays a crucial role (Harvey et al., 2000).

There are several reasons why foreign multinationals want to invest in India. India is known for its diversity, inclusiveness of its people and suitability of its geography for business. It is also the fastest growing economy in the world with English-speaking populace base and robust financial system.

These MNCs created a competitive environment which eventually led to a demand for the highly qualified workforce (Budhwar & Boyne, 2004). To fulfill the needs of the current business environment, multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in India are looking for talented employees (Budhwar & Boyne, 2004). The process has also created employment opportunities for women in India (Das, 2003). Although women make up 48.5% of the total population (Catalyst, 2015), the representation of women in India, particularly in the managerial context is quite low. Also, the talent pipeline for women in India continues to shrink (Catalyst, 2015).

Previous studies show that out of all administrative positions in India, the presence of women in senior management positions ranges from 3% (Chadha, 2002; Mehra, 2002;
Singh, 2003) to 5.8% (Kulkarni, 2002). According to Fortune 500, there are only 10% of women who are in management positions globally. In India, women are usually seen working in the human resource (HR), information technology areas and service activities. A study of forty-two companies in India (Catalyst, 2015) shows that there is a vast gender gap at each level in the organization and it further widens as women move upward on the career ladder especially to the management and chief executive level. This hints at a disconnect between talent management (TM) practices followed by organizations and the level of gender inclusiveness in these practices. According to Meyers and Woerkom (2014), TM has various existing definitions (e.g., Blass, 2007; Tarique & Schuler, 2010). They referred it as appropriate utilization of human resource management activities to attract, identify, recruit and retain individuals. Further, many organizations find it challenging to develop and implement the TM practices (Vaiman, Scullion, & Collings, 2012). Due to this, many scholars are looking for the factors that impede the effective implementation of TM Practices. These factors are the challenges which include a general shortage of talent especially in global markets like India (Meyers and Woerkom, 2014).

To conduct a successful business, MNCs need effective TM practices in such economies. Major multinational companies around the world apply different TM practices to attract and retain their employees. Various research works have explored trends in TM in countries such as USA, UK, Japan, China and India (Yeung, 2006; Ruppe, 2006; Dunn, 2006; Chugh & Bhatnagar, 2006; Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Branham, 2005; Bennett & Bell, 2004). However, the conceptual and the empirical knowledge of TM practices with regards to the inclusion of the diverse workforce, especially women, is limited (Warren 2009; McCartney and & Worman 2010; Dickinson Shepard & Betof 2011). Gender
inclusion has become a new buzzword in recent years in the field of human resources (Khosla R, 2014). This concept provides all employees with equal opportunities so that they can contribute to their full potential (Khosla R, 2014). Gender inclusion permits access to a wider pool of talent (Khosla R, 2014) including females. Gender inclusive TM practices suggest helping female talent to grow in organizations by providing them with equal opportunities. Gender inclusive TM practices were first discussed in the German context (Festing et al., 2015), and it needs to be explored further through the lens of different environments, especially in the Indian context where the number of women is increasing at various organizational levels in MNCs operating there.

India is a diverse nation and MNCs operating there have a diverse workforce. Other small and large developed countries have been working on creating diverse and inclusive workplace through various human resource management (HRM) practices, Indian organizations do not feel the urge to focus on diversity inclusion (Vohra et al., 2015). However, this does not mean that the issues of inclusion and exclusion, discrimination, and stereotypes do not exist in Indian organizations; they appear merely to be ignored.

Nevertheless, organizations are realizing that they cannot ignore the concept of gender inclusion as it can help them achieve a competitive advantage. Additionally, the traditional positioning of women in India has hindered the passion of their hard work towards realizing the benefits of the globalization process (Budhwar et al., 2005). Issues such as gender stereotypes and sex-related discrimination have influenced the position of Indian women professionals as seen by their male counterparts (Budhwar et al., 2005).

The term stereotype was first introduced by Walter Lippmann (1922) to represent a typical picture that first comes to the mind when we think about a social group. These
social groups can comprise people of any caste, color or gender. It is a natural tendency to
categorize people according to their membership in certain social groups. Subsequently,
when an individual is under consideration, we attribute these perceived characteristics of
the group to that individual (Basu, 2008). According to Basu (2008), stereotyping is a
pervasive phenomenon that helps in reducing information processing time. However, the
negative aspect of stereotypes also exists as there are widely held inaccurate stereotypes
about individuals. These inaccurate stereotypes tend to generalize people and, in this
process, we miss out on respecting and assessing the individuality of a person under
consideration.

Negative stereotypes play an important role when evaluators try to judge the future
performance rather than evaluating the past performance. Women executives, despite
having an excellent track record, may be subjected to the expectation that they will not
perform as well in organizations as their male counterparts do (Basu, 2008). Many studies
have also explored the impact of gender stereotypes on women in management. In studies
conducted by Heilman et al. (1989) and Broverman et al. (1972), male managers were
asked to describe the style of both male and female managers. The female managers were
described as less confident, less analytical and having poorer leadership qualities than male
managers. Similarly, sex-based discrimination arises due to the skewed distribution of men
and women at the workplace (Kaushik et al., 2014). Due to this distribution, one sex that
dominates a particular profession is highly valued and have better job or talent development
opportunities (Glick, 1991). For example, if men dominate the managerial positions in an
organization, the first image of a successful manager that comes to the mind is that of a
male applicant (Glick, 1991). Thus, the selection of a female applicant for a particular
position or particular talent development programs may be affected by the presence of this sex-based discrimination.

These issues have prevented women from achieving high organizational levels in MNCs operating in India (Pichler, Simpson & Stroh 2008; Seet, Ahmad & Seet, 2008). These deep-rooted gendered value systems work at various levels starting from individual perception and extending to organizational practices (Tatli, Vassilopoulou, & Ozbilgin, 2013). The organizational practices comprise of various talent management practices including attracting, developing and retaining talented employees (Meyers and Woerkom, 2014). But many organizations are unable to implement these practices effectively due the gendered thinking, leading to ineffective utilization of talent (Vaiman, Scullion, & Collings, 2012). One such example is the talented female employees in India, who are not fully able to explore their potential due to gendered TM practices.

The need to analyze inclusive TM stems from the fact that a lack of gender inclusiveness could result in an incomplete development of female talent and therefore, a suboptimal harnessing of companies' talent may arise (Tatli et al., 2013). My research thesis analyzed gender stereotypes and sex-related discrimination issues in MNCs operating in India and what impact they have on the TM practices. Based on this my research question is:

**Research Question:** How are gender stereotypes and sex-related discrimination affecting gender inclusivity in TM practices in MNCs operating in India?

This research studies and contributes to the knowledge of gender inclusive TM practices in MNCs operating in India with the help of key variables such as gender stereotypes and sex-related discrimination and their impact on TM practices. The thesis
consists of various sections including Chapter 1 which introduces the topic of gender inclusive TM practices in MNCs operating in India. Chapter 2 provides the literature review of the research thesis. Table 1 in Chapter 2 provides various definitions of inclusion. Chapter 3 includes proposition development, and Figure 1 gives a summary of the entire discussion. Chapter 4 focuses on the research design and chapter 5 consists of the results and discussion. Table 2 describes the demographics of the participants. Figures 2, 3 and 4 depicts the results of propositions 1, 2a, 2b, 3a and 3b. The empirical contribution of this research thesis is that it will provide a qualitative study of the experiences of female employees in MNCs operating in India. The research question on how gender stereotypes and sex-related discrimination are affecting gender inclusivity in TM practices in MNCs operating in India will also be explored in sections below. This research will contribute to the theoretical knowledge base in the field of human resources regarding the gender inclusive talent management practices in which literature is still scant. This thesis also adds to the body of knowledge for the organizations in India which are looking to recruit more professional female talent. There are many factors that can help in retaining female talent in the organizations. Gender Inclusion is a crucial TM practice to achieve this, however, it may get affected by gender stereotypes and sex-based discrimination.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Inclusion and Inclusive Talent Management

The literature of inclusion is still in development, and there has been limited acceptance on the conceptual groundwork of the construct (Shore et al., 2011). Table 1 below provides various definitions of inclusion by different authors.

Table 1: Definitions of Inclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miller (1998)</td>
<td>&quot;the extent to which individuals are allowed to participate and are enabled to contribute fully in a group&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schein (1971)</td>
<td>&quot;the degree to which an employee is an `insider' in an organization&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Hara et al. (1994)</td>
<td>&quot;the degree of acceptance one has by other members of the work system&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holvino et al. (2004)</td>
<td>“equality, justice and full participation at both the group and individual levels so that members of different groups not only have equal access to opportunities, decision-making and positions of power, but they are actively sought out because of their differences”. It represented the fairness perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberson (2006)</td>
<td>In order to achieve fairness perspective, the author said, &quot;the removal of obstacles to the full participation and contribution of employees in organizations&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barak, Cherin &amp; Berkman (1998)</td>
<td>&quot;a continuum of the organizational processes where individuals have access to information, they feel connected to supervisors and co-workers and have the ability to participate and influence decision making.&quot; In this study, the authors argued that women are excluded from the informal networks and decision making.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The major theme in these definitions is belongingness and valuing employees by giving them equal opportunities. For this research, I focused on inclusion as being defined as the extent to which women are accepted and empowered in the organization while exploring the various obstacles they face regarding their full participation (Roberson, 2006). Over the decades, the term TM has had different meanings reflected in the development of the field of human resources (HR). In this research, I explored the ‘inclusive approach’ to TM with respect to gender. This approach considers every employee in the organization as ‘potential talent’ (Iles et al., 2010). It assumes that in an organization, by offering little guidance or support, every employee can contribute to the firm. It is also called the ‘whole workforce’ or universalistic approach to TM (Iles et al., 2010). From field psychology, this approach is based on all positive aspects of life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In brief, this approach allows employees to realize their full potential at work and aims at capitalizing on an extensive variety of different talents (Meyers, & Van Woerkom, 2014) especially women.

However, women working in organizations face stereotypes and gender discrimination which prevent them from inclusion and moving upward in their career ladder (Eagly & Heilman, 2016). For example, stereotypes based on lack of fit between women’s characteristics, aspirations and skills are major reasons why women are not seen in the top management positions (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). These stereotypes also have severe consequences on acceptance and participation of women at work (Heilman, 1983). The most prevalent stereotypes associated with these positions describe that “women should take care” and “men should take charge” (Dodge, Gilroy & Fenzel, 1995; Heilman, 2001; Hoyt, 2010). Women, in general, are associated with communal qualities that
indicates concern for others, whereas men as believed to possess agentic and rational qualities which emphasize confidence and dominance (Deaux & Kite, 1993; Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000; Williams & Best, 1990).

But recent increase in the female leaders and contemporary approaches to leadership have labeled women leadership as interactive, collaborative and employee empowering (Eagly et al., 2003). Previous studies have also shown that female talent brings along with them a unique style of leadership, participative decision making and conflict resolution as they possess the quality of being empathetic and nurturing (Khosla, 2014). Therefore, it can be assumed that female employees are an important part of the talent pool along with men as they can add different experiences and values to the decision making.

However, female talent has not been utilized in the Indian context to their full extent. This can be due to the various barriers (like stereotypes and sex-based discrimination) to the retention and development of women in organizations. The basic idea of this research is that talent management will be considered gender inclusive if it allows the potential of female talent to be fully explored. This idea is in sync with the discussion that suggests that women can be an important solution to the talent shortages faced by MNCs operating in India. Based on this idea, I will explore female talent in the Indian context and potential barriers to inclusive TM practices.

2.2 Female talent in India and the barriers they face

The amplified participation of women in the workforce offers a golden opportunity for organizations to attract and retain female talent and to fill their talent gaps (Beechler,
S. & Woodward, 2009). In emerging economies like India, a substantial number of women have entered the organizations that were traditionally male-dominated (Elliott, 2007). Also, the global trend shows that more women are seen in the management positions than ever before. According to Grant Thornton International business report (2013), women constitute 35 per cent of the average global workforce. Asia leads with 29 per cent of women in senior management positions compared to 25 per cent in European Union and 21 per cent in the North American region. Country wise, women in China occupy 51 per cent of senior management positions, Vietnam has reported 33 percent of female representation in these positions. While India had 19 percent of women working in managerial positions. A survey of 70,000 job seekers was conducted by Kelly Services, a global staffing provider in 2006 (Kaushik, Sharma & Kaushik, 2014; Kelly services, 2006) in 28 countries including India. Their results showed that gender discrimination is quite high in India when compared globally where India stood fifth out of 28 countries (ENS Economic Bureau, 2006).

There is an extensive gender gap in India which is defined by the set of social and economic indicators such as economic empowerment, education, social and political trends. Out of 136 countries, India’s gender gap is ranked as 101 (Bekhouch et al., 2013). The Indian government has also enforced equal opportunity and affirmative action to abolish discrimination faced by weaker sections of the labor market such as women (Ratnam & Chandra, 1996). The Indian judiciary has played a crucial role in eliminating gender-based discrimination at workplaces and ensuring equal employment opportunities (Ratnam & Chandra, 1996). Nevertheless, although equal opportunity laws are in place, discrimination remains a pervasive issue in Indian society (Batra, 2007).
Despite all the challenges faced by the organization, Indian women are being viewed as a unique talent that can add value to the organization. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) (2009) recognized Indian women as an important pool of talent that was not fully recognized. SHRM (2009) suggested an increment in "female managerial employment as a force to change the status of women in India." As per Budhwar (2005), women have an elevated level of commitment, can multi-task, they tend to share power and seek feedback (Budhwar et al., 2005) from organization. One of the potential ways to improve gender inclusive TM practices in MNCs operating in India is to increase the number of women at various level. To do so, these companies may focus on the issues of gender stereotypes and sex-based discrimination and how they affect TM practices.

Gender Stereotypes and Sex-based discrimination

Before analyzing a range of gender issues faced by Indian women, the below paragraph intends to familiarize the reader with the definition of ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ and its relevance in the Indian context. The organizational behavior school of thought considers the terms ‘sex' and ‘gender' as individual biological characteristics and uses these terms alternatively (Ely & Padavic 2007). The term sex can be described in terms of biology, anatomy, hormones and physiology while gender is more concerned with sociocultural factors (Ahl, 2006; West & Zimmerman 1987; Unger, 1979). While sex, "male and female," refers to what people are born, gender, on the other hand, gender is concerned to what work people "do" when they describe the characteristics of male and female (Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004). To further analyze the concept of ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ in the Indian context,
it is important to examine the historical, socio-cultural and economic factors related to women in India.

Historically, women in Indian society did not enjoy equal status to men; these roots of female suppression can be traced in ancient times where males were considered as breadwinners and female were restricted to household chores and family care (Budhwar et al., 2005). Regarding female subordination, the great Hindu writer Manu in 200 BC said, ‘be a young girl, be a young woman, or even be an aged one, nothing must be done independently even in her house’ (Natarajan, 2001, Budhwar et al., 2005). This philosophy still prevails in most of the Indian families and girls are raised in a culture where it is presumed that their duties and capabilities are different from boys (Budhwar et al., 2005). Women acquire these cultural and traditional inhibitions from their childhood and society plays a significant role in reinforcing them. They are socialized to be submissive and this patriarchal attitude has resulted in a sparse number of women in employment (Budhwar et al., 2005).

These attitudes towards women’s role in society have also resulted in gender stereotypes and sex-based discrimination in the Indian society (Budhwar et al., 2005; Kaushik et al., 2014). These issues are passed through generations and are associated with the cultural and institutional context of the country. These gender stereotypes can result in bias and inaccurate valuation of a person under consideration (Koch et al., 2015). For example, Indian women are stereotyped to work in ‘soft field’ such as human resource, public relation, fashion and clothing (Budhwar et al., 2005).

The effect of gender stereotypes can be analyzed through women who are faced with the challenge of interrupted career pathways. Many women in India have child rearing and
parental responsibilities. The study conducted by Buddhapriya (2009) in India showed that due to the influence of the patriarchal value system, women with children and parental responsibilities tend to restrict their career aspirations. Due to high family involvement and devoting less time to their jobs, the career prospects of these women seem to be negatively affected. Many organizations tend to stereotype these women and believe that their primary role is of the caretaker of the family and therefore they might not be able to concentrate on their jobs fully. Due to this belief, the organizations may not give them more responsibilities and opportunities to develop their talent.

Another reason for employment bias in India is due to sex-based discrimination arising from the disproportionate distribution of male and female in various occupation and activities in the organizations (Koch et al., 2015). It has been only three decades since Indian women have started entering all types of occupation and branched out to diversified professions which were earlier considered in the male domain (Budhwar et al., 2005). The presence of a male in most of the managerial positions in India is considered to be a great hurdle for the career progression of women as their work is not acknowledged and thus it is difficult to achieve higher managerial positions (Khandelwal, 2002).

Sex-based discrimination can also lead to the exclusion of women from informal networks (Budhwar et al., 2005). These informal network forums are a great way to enhance a career. Budhwar et al. (2005) found that in India these informal networks are seen as in the male domain due to the greater number of men working in organizations. The exclusion of women from these networks due to cultural and personal inhibitions may prevent them from developing their talent.
Based on this discussion, I will analyze how gender stereotypes and sex-related discrimination are affecting gender inclusivity in TM practices in MNCs operating in India. It includes: (i) gender stereotypes in TM practices and managerial positions, (ii) gender stereotypes in TM practices and interrupted career paths (iii) sex-related discrimination of TM practices and access to informal networks. The next chapter focuses on the development of the propositions.
Chapter 3

Proposition Development

3.1 Gender stereotypes in TM practices and managerial positions

The collection of beliefs about the apparent qualities of men and women are defined as gender stereotypes (Kaushik et al., 2014). These beliefs are prevalent, widely shared and are resistant to change (Heilman, 2001; Dodge, Gilroy & Fenzel, 1995; Leuptow, Garovich, & Leuptow, 1995). Kaushik et al. (2014) found that according to these traditional role stereotypes there are different appropriate roles for men and women in society. These stereotypes portray men to be the breadwinners, strong, security providers, entrepreneurs and responsible, whereas women roles are homemakers, family caretakers, and emotional persons (Kaushik et al., 2014). It is evident that the society uses these stereotypes all the time and due to this, women are perceived as having a lower status than men. At the workplace, these stereotypes affect the advancement and development of the women.

Historically, there is a difference between seeing a woman at work compared to their male counterparts. The men are attributed to have ‘agentic’ qualities and believed to have achievement-oriented traits (Heilman, 2001). They are thought to have characteristics such as being aggressive, forceful, independent and decisive (Heilman, 2001). On the other hand, women are attributed to have ‘communal’ qualities and believed to have service-oriented traits such as being helpful, sympathetic and concerned about others (Heilman, 2001).
These traditional beliefs about men and women are predominant in work settings as well as non-work settings (Heilman, 2001). The study conducted by Heilman, Block and, Martell (1995) on managers from various industries, revealed that in general women managers are competent, potent and active compared to men. But the jobs that require traveling, overnight shift or to be a tough supervisor are believed not to be meant for women (Kaushik et al., 2014). Previous studies have shown that the way women handle the senior managerial roles is different from men (Kaushik et al., 2014). It is suggested that women perceive and address business requirement differently than men (Brush, 1991). They have shown that there are significant differences in skills, business goals, management styles and business characteristics of men and women (Kaushik et al., 2014). The image of an ideal manager is related to more masculine stereotypes such as assertiveness and competitiveness rather being caring or nurturing (Festing et al., 2015). This thinking is prevalent in today's organizations (Koenig et al., 2011).

A study conducted by Gupta, Koshal & Koshal (1998) found that Indian men feel comfortable in managing and administrating women rather being juniors to them. Haynes &Ghosh (2012) in their research found that Indian male traditional beliefs are spread throughout their personal and professional lives. They fail to accept women in leadership roles at work as they have not ever seen their mothers, wives and daughters leading them in their families. These predisposed cultural beliefs in Indian males have made them think that women have inferior business skills. They perceive that women understanding human relationships and having caring nature is a sign of weakness instead of strength in making the business decision. They believe that Indian women in any organization have let go of
their feminine traits and adapt masculine traits to be successful in the leadership position (Gupta et al., 1998). A similar study conducted by Gulhati (1990) confirmed that men believed that women are not qualified to hold senior managerial positions. It is quite evident that patriarchal Indian society has an influence on the definition of an ideal manager in any organization (Gulhati, 1990). The qualities of an ideal manager are perceived to be of a man that is, firm, ambitious and aggressive and women are expected to take submissive roles to him (Gulhati, 1990). In India, where mostly men dominate the senior leadership and managerial positions, the prevalent male thinking in organizations is loaded with stereotypes about women in managerial roles (Bagati & Carter, 2010).

A study conducted by Khandelwal (2002) in India, with a sample of 230 respondents working in the field of marketing, sales and production, considered men as good leaders and decision-makers with the ability to do ‘hard’ fieldwork and challenging assignments. On the other hand, female managers were stereotyped and were not given challenging assignments or risk-taking jobs during the allocation of jobs (Budhwar et al., 2005). According to the response by female respondents, these above-mentioned beliefs were due to various prejudices and stereotypes which impeded the growth of female talent in the organization (Khandelwal, 2002). The definition of manager in the organizations is associated with masculine traits (Shrank and Kanter 1994). This is also called as ‘male-manager’ syndrome (Chugh & Sahgal, 2007) ‘Think Manager-Think Male’ phenomena (Schein 1973, 1993, 2007). My analysis of gender stereotypes in TM in the Indian context is based on this notion and considers that stereotyping of management positions and
considering it to be a male domain is a major obstacle for the talented women who are qualified and skilled for these positions. Based on this, I propose:

Proposition 1 - Managerial positions are gender-stereotyped in favor of men in MNCs in India.

3.2 Gender stereotypes in TM practices and interrupted career path

Another important reason that inhibits women’s rise to a top management position in India is the interrupted career path for the women who have children and parental responsibilities (Buddhapriya, 2009). There is a vast amount of existing literature that suggests that these responsibilities inhibit women’s career progression as they can devote less time to their jobs (Buddhapriya, 2009). Also, traditional role stereotypes suggest that women are portrayed as homemakers, and family caretakers (Kaushik et al., 2014). In certain cases, these women want to invest more time in their career progression, but high involvement in family affairs can have a negative impact on their career prospects. Many organizations in India tend to stereotype these women (Buddhapriya, 2009). The organizations assume that women, especially with children and parental responsibility, should primarily play a role of caretaker of their family (Rosen & Jerdee, 1973; Schwartz, 1989). Due to this stereotyping, these companies exclude or invest less in capacity-building activities of this female talent through talent development or learning programs, which can reduce their chances of gaining managerial positions in organizations (Buddhapriya, 2009).

According to SHRM BOCK (2014), talent development and learning programs play a significant role in enhancing the competencies of the employees and thus leading to the advancement of their goals. Based on this thought, I propose:
Proposition 2a- Women in MNCs in India who have interrupted career paths or family responsibilities have very limited access to talent development programs.

The gendered-distribution of work and family roles in emerging economies like India also affects the inclusion of women who return from their maternity leave. According to Bharathi and Baral (2014), maternity leave is seen as a form of interrupted career path and women in India despite having various job opportunities find it difficult to regain their career momentum. This is because they face various demands at home and workplace. Further, formal and informal support from the organization helps to retain talented women employees in the organization and create an inclusive environment for the women returning from their maternity leave. This social support is referred to as the protection of individuals from the effects of stress with the help of interpersonal relationships and social interaction (Kessler, Price, & Wortman, 1985; Nielson, Carlson, & Lankau, 2001). For the well-being and good health of any individual, social support is an important asset (Aycan and Eskin, 2005). It is also perceived that availability and receiving of social support is related to higher job satisfaction, lower job-related stress, thereby reducing the probability of an employee to quit the organization (Bedeian, Mossholder, & Touliatos, 1986). Many organizations offer their social support to these women who return from maternity leave in the form of schemes and policies such as flexible working hours, equal opportunities, childcare provision, career breaks, the option to work from home and mentoring. Alimo & Metcalfe (1993) in their research showed positive effects of these policies for organizations who implemented them. These family-friendly policies when implemented effectively for new mothers, have shown results in an increment of their population in any organization.
(Bharathi & Baral, 2014). In the absence of these policies, women who return from maternity leave, may face various problems in their career growth. Based on this, I propose:

**Proposition 2b** - Women in MNCs in India who return from maternity leave do not get support from their organization.

### 3.3 Sex Related Discrimination in TM and access to the informal network

When an employee or an applicant is treated in a different way because of characteristics that are not related to their merit and job requirements, it means there is a discrimination in employment (Kaushik et al., 2014). These characteristics comprise of race, color, sex, religion and political opinion (Kaushik et al., 2014). Discrimination based on these characteristics is in violation of human rights that can lead to the waste of human talents with a damaging effect on economy and efficiency (Kaushik et al., 2014). Many studies have shown that one of the reasons behind sex-based discrimination is due to a disproportionate number of men and women in a different level of organizations (Koch et al., 2015). An economic survey conducted by the government of India in 2003 showed that the female-male ratio was 0.319 or there were 319 women per one thousand males working in the private sector including MNCs. This figure represents the true picture of sex-related discrimination prevalent in the society (Kaushik et al., 2014).

Gender discrimination may also include visible biases such as being alienated from an informal network of communication (Catalyst, 1996, 2001b, 2004). By keeping female talent out of the informal network, hinders them to become the central players within the firms (Welle & Heilman, 2007). Since their input may be considered less valuable, it is likely that they are being omitted from key discussions (Welle & Heilman, 2007). They are
left out when there is critical information sharing about talent development programs. If organizational TM practices are gendered, women encounter more difficulty in forming a social network at work than men do (Welle & Heilman, 2007). Only a very few women are able to reap the benefits from the relationships they form at work as they may find it more difficult to establish a relationship with male colleagues than men do (Ragins & Cotton, 1991).

TM practices play a key role in providing an inclusive work environment for women by providing them access to informal networks. But the presence of sex-related discrimination prevents them from doing so (Festing et al., 2015). Recent works suggest that access to informal networks can influence the career trajectories by regulating access to jobs (Ely et al., 2011), opening avenues for the flow of information and referrals, provide emotional support, feedback and political advice which further increase the chances of promotion (Burt 2004; Granovetter, 1985; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Ibarra, 1993; Podolny & Baron, 1997; Westphal & Milton, 2000). These talent development programs such as external conferences and workshop events, internal knowledge sharing events and in-house development programs are great platforms to build informal networks (Festing et al., 2015; CIPD 2010) and to open gateways to leadership opportunities (Ely et al., 2011). In India, these networks are considered as male domains and virtual exclusion of female talent prevents them from developing the necessary acumen to handle organizational politics (Budhwar et al., 2015). These practices are prevalent in Indian society (Budhwar et al., 2015) and they increase the chances of sex-related discrimination risk. Based on this thought, I propose:
**Proposition 3a**- Women in MNCs in India perceive that their access to informal networks in organizations is more limited for women than for men.

Furthermore, information and knowledge about talent development programs can increase the chances of identifying talent (Festing et al., 2015). The exclusion of female talent from informal networks (Budhwar et al., 2005) and a lack of information about the selection process, however, suggest the prevalence of sex-related discrimination. Based on this, it is proposed that:

**Proposition 3b**- Women in MNCs in India believe that a lack of access to informal networks in organizations reduces the opportunities for women to gain access to talent development programs.

Figure 1 provides a summary of the above discussion. In summary, extant literature suggests that gender stereotypes and sex-related discrimination, whether they are real or perceived, exist in Indian society and organizations. It is proposed that they contribute to reducing opportunities for women in the organization because the TM practices are not gender-inclusive.
Figure 1 Summary of the literature review and proposition development
Chapter 4

Research Methodology

The aim of this study was to explore gender inclusive TM in the Indian context. This study was qualitative and used in-depth semi-structured interviews. Since there was limited literature available on gender inclusiveness in TM practices, especially in the Indian context, a qualitative approach was selected. This technique was appropriate as it helped in investigating unstudied population. The descriptive and the exploratory nature of this approach helped to understand the experiences of female participants in Indian corporate environment (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2009). The research was conducted by combining the conceptual knowledge from the various literature streams (TM, gender, and inclusion) and applying these to the Indian context. The data collection was done by interviewing women working in multinational companies operating in India. The objective of this research was to gain insight into how employees inside these companies perceive the idea of gender inclusive TM practices. The qualitative nature of this study helped to analyze the individual experiences of talent in the Indian context with special focus on gender inclusiveness. The following paragraphs include the data collection, interview instrument and sampling and analysis of the collected data.

Data collection

Data collection for this study used semi-structured interviews. This method helped to understand the different perceptions of women working in MNCs operating in India.
Secondly, these interviews helped to confirm information regarding the effects of gender stereotypes and sex-based discrimination on gender inclusivity in TM practices in MNCs operating in India. The sample consisted of a mix of female participants working in managerial and non-managerial positions in the respective companies. The male participants were excluded in order to focus on female perspectives on the points in question. The objective is not to compare male and female participants but to understand women’s experiences in these organizations. A total of twenty-three women were interviewed for this research.

*Interview instrument and data sampling*

The interview instruments used for the data collection are specifically developed for this research and are based on the literature review (see Appendix A). The interview questions were divided into four parts: 1) demographics, 2) Gender stereotypes in TM practices and managerial roles, 3) Gender stereotypes in TM practices and interrupted career path, and 4) Sex-related discrimination in TM and access to the informal network. These questions also reflect the research question and its aim. The snowballing sampling technique was used to secure and locate the interviewees. Female participants from 11 multinational companies operating in India were interviewed. The companies in which these participants worked were service firms, telecommunication and software providers, global management consultants, financial service providers, research and advisory, health care providers, distributors of information technology (IT) products, oil company, IT security providers and IT products manufacturers. The selection of the interviewees was based on personal and professional contacts. The announcement for semi-structured
interviews was made with emails, phone calls, and Skype calls. The interviewees were asked the same set of questions.

After receiving ethical clearance from Institutional Review Board (IRB), telephonic interviews were conducted. Each interview was conducted at one point in time over the course of one week. The length of the interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 35 minutes. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, upon completion of the interview, each participant was given an alphanumeric code.

Analysis Methods

Interviews were recorded with the help of speech dictation device with the permission of the interviewees. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed with the help of qualitative analysis software Nvivo 12 Pro. Interviews were transcribed manually. Since the interviews were based in India, a translator was used to avoid any error or if the interviewee did not understand the question in English or answers in another language. The translator was used in only one case for this research.

Further, common themes were identified and analyzed separately. The propositions were explored for agreements and each proposition was either supported, partially supported or not supported. For supporting a proposition, all twenty-three participants agreed to the statement. For partially supporting the statement, the minority of the sample agreed to the statement. Lastly, for not supporting the statement, zero agreement was found among the sample.
Chapter 5

Results

The data collection was done with the help of semi-structured interviews which are largely open-ended questions. The interviews were conducted with twenty-three female employees working in MNCs operating in India. None of the interviews were discarded. Table 2 shows their demographics. Appendix B gives further information on their years of experience and field in which they work. The age of the participants ranged from 20 years to 50 years. All the women were well educated. Fifteen out of twenty-three women had a master’s degree such as MBA or master’s in engineering. Eight women were bachelor’s in engineering and three were master’s in engineering. Most of the women did not have parental or children responsibility (N=17). Ten out of twenty-three women had managerial experience working from mid-level to the senior level positions in the organization.

Table 2: Demographics of the participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>20-25-N=4</th>
<th>25-30-N=9</th>
<th>30-35-N=5</th>
<th>35-40-N=2</th>
<th>40-45-N=3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managerial Experience</td>
<td>Yes- 10</td>
<td>No-13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women with parents or Children</td>
<td>Yes-6</td>
<td>No-17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women with a bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women with a master’s degree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question: How are gender stereotypes and sex-related discrimination affecting gender inclusivity in TM practices in MNCs operating in India? This is one major research question provided in the introduction of this thesis. This question further helped to explore the perception and experiences of these working women who were interviewed with the help of propositions followed by a thorough and analysis of the collection of responses. The results are as follows:

Gender stereotypes in TM practices and managerial positions

The first set of questions analyzes the gender stereotypes in TM practices and managerial roles.

Proposition 1 posited that the managerial positions in MNCs operating in India are gender-stereotyped in favor of men. Each interviewee was asked about the characteristics and abilities that their employer looks for in the managerial positions. Most of the women answered that their company was looking for leadership qualities (N=20) and people management skills. One of the women stated, “The company looks for the manager who is a decision maker, can manage conflicts and is flexible. The expectations are the same for male and female managers” (female talent,21). Eight women mentioned work experience and approachability as an important skill to be a manager in the company. Regarding this one participant stated,

“the prerequisite will be the number of years in the company plus the current band level experience. We have a different type of band level in which an employee has worked for a certain period. We also have to give interviews to the Human resource department in which they give different
scenarios of employee issues. You need to have the knowledge of the company's policy and understand employee needs” (female talent, 18).

Another woman stated that,

“A manager should be a person who is approachable. The person should be quick in resolving issues or problems and is able to work with different kinds of people. He/she should be able to handle clients in adverse situations” (female talent, 2).

Six out of twenty-three women stated that communication skills were necessary for being a manager. Seven women said that the knowledge of process or domain knowledge was important skills that an employer looked for. Participants also expressed their expectation from leaders in senior management positions, for how they perceived their leaders in senior management positions. Fifteen out of twenty-three of the participants agreed that their leader or manager should have the domain knowledge or the technical knowledge as well as people management skills and the ability to work in teams. Twelve out of twenty-three female participants also said that their ideal manager should be a good mentor. All the qualities desired by their employer and expected by the interviewees did not indicate any specific demand for masculine-trait leaders. In other words, as per these women, the managerial qualities or competencies demanded by their employer were non-gender specific.

The responses also analyzed the perception of women managers in their workplace. Seventeen of twenty-three women agreed that women managers were treated equally and respected as men. Four participants from this group of eighteen also said that they had women managers or women leadership teams. One of the participants happily stated that,
“Fortunately, I am part of the women leadership initiative in my firm. We as a group are trying to have more leaders in the company. To do so, we are helping every woman to feel good about themselves and make sure that they have the right infrastructure and the support from the company to become future leaders. Women are perceived well in the company and company supports more women being a part of the leadership” (female talent 13).

The remaining five of those twenty-three agreed that women managers were not considered equal in terms of salary, traveling and competence. One of them from these five participants said, “The women managers are not treated as equally as men. People think that a female manager cannot give more working hours to the required senior management post compared to their male counterparts” (female talent, 16). Amongst these five women, three women were from the same company. This company is the distributor of IT products in India. These three women were working in purchasing and sales department. Other two female respondents from this group of five said that there is a disparity in terms of income and promotion. According to them, male managers had a slightly higher income compared to women, and for promotions, males are preferred first. Only one female said that women managers are bossy and dominating as there is a smaller number of female managers in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry she works in. In her view, women managers are supposed to behave like their male counterparts. She also mentioned that in her team, topmost leaders are women and gender balance is maintained (female talent, 9).
Eleven out of twenty-three women were exposed to some type of stereotypes regarding women managers and women in general, which partially supports Proposition 1. Out of this, ten women said that they had seen or heard negative stereotypes about women managers. One participant who was a manager herself mentioned that “There are many stereotypes and salary inequity in all the positions” (female talent, 9). Additional female interviewees said that there were stereotypes about female manager mood swings and their monthly cycles and they are not competent (female talent, 4). Three participants, out of which two were senior managers from the same company, claimed that there were stereotypes that women cannot travel or work late night. One woman also commented that women were stereotyped for coming to and leaving the office at a fixed time. There was one female participant who said that women in her company are aggressive. She also stated,

“The stereotype is that women managers are considered not to be hardworking as compared to men managers and they don’t have time as they have a lot do apart from work and they are not as approachable as men. If women managers are strict, they are being bad-mouthed more than male managers” (female talent, 13).

On the similar note, another woman said,

“My perception is that in certain instances for senior management positions, women are asked to adapt the manly qualities. She is asked to be rude, authoritative and unfriendly to the people. On the contrary, if there is a male manager who is friendly to the people, it is completely fine for them
to act or behave as they want. But for females, there are some restrictions."

(female talent, 3).

There was one female who provided a sympathetic response regarding perception of women in senior positions in her company. According to her, they have a little more responsibility in terms of their work at office and home. Rest of eleven the participants said that they did not see and hear any stereotypes regarding women in senior management positions.

When the participants were asked about the stereotypes that women face regarding their capabilities at the time of promotion in Indian corporate environment, eighteen women said that they had not faced this issue. Most of the females agreed that it was based on performance and men and women were given equal opportunities. Remaining five females had a different opinion. According to them, women are stereotyped when it comes to promotions or advancement opportunities. One of them stated,

“During promotions, preference is given to male colleagues in my current company. In sales and marketing departments, preference is given to male employees during hiring and promotion. They ask if a woman will be able to handle the senior position. It is a general stereotype there. The sales and marketing department is more male-dominated. Otherwise in, HR, IT and Legal departments, their head is female. Accounting, sales and marketing departments consider males to be better leaders” (female talent, 11).

Hence, Proposition 1 was supported partially after reviewing the responses of these participants. Figure 2 below represents the summary of results for Proposition 1. It shows
whether the participants agreed, not agreed or had mixed reviews about their equal treatment, stereotypes for women managers and stereotypes regarding capabilities.

![Results: Proposition 1](image)

**Figure 2: Results for proposition 1**

**Gender stereotypes in TM practices and interrupted career path**

The proposition 2a expected that working women who had family responsibilities would have limited access to the talent development programs that their company sponsors. Six out of twenty-three women had children or parental responsibilities. Firstly, all the participants agreed that they had talent development programs in their company. One female said that in her previous organization, which was also an MNC in India had many talent development programs. According to her, they also had women network development programs which helped women to grow in the organization (female talent,7). Most of the people said there was some mandatory training for skill building for growth in the company. Everybody also agreed that these programs were essential for the career growth except one interviewee. In her company, projects are essential for career...
development (female talent, 23). For the response regarding whether their boss refuses or is skeptical to send them for training as these participants have too many responsibilities at home and at work, twenty-two of them responded in the negative. In fact, five of them said that their boss or managers asked them before sending them to any training. Only one female participant said,

“There is no restriction like that in terms of training but for project allocation there are biases. But I have observed that for some projects that require traveling, some senior managers assume that I cannot travel being a woman” (female talent, 23).

This was the only outlier in this case. Hence, Proposition 2a was not supported.

Proposition 2b stated that women who return from maternity leave, do not receive the required support from their organization. Participants were asked how inclusive their organization is when it comes to women who had returned from the maternity leave. Out of twenty-three women, sixteen said that females who return from the maternity leave are treated well, although they have to make up for the lost time by putting in the extra effort by relearning or getting retrained on the processes they used to work on. Otherwise, there is no reduction in their salary, and it does not affect their career growth. One of them said,

"The women who return from maternity leave are also treated equally and they have to put in the same amount of effort as men do. The company expects you to work equally. There is no change in their pay or performance rating once they return from the leave” (female talent, 14).

Another female added,
“In my organization, the female employees are treated pretty well. There are two programs dedicated to the special needs of women employees. I believe that females have more personal and professional responsibilities. These programs offer them flexibility and ensure that their issues are heard. For example, women employees who come back from maternity leave and who are newly married may have the option of work from home or relocation so that they do not leave the company. These programs are offered so that the company has a good male to female ratio. The company right now has a good male to female ratio and it is also encouraged to have more women in the organization. I never felt that I am less capable than men employees or that I was not offered the opportunity to grow. Regarding, women who return from the maternity leave, I have not heard any case of pay reduction or yearly evaluation being affected by this. (female talent, 21).

One participant who herself experienced this kind of situation said,

“We get fair opportunities as women in my company. I had an equal chance and there was no gender discrimination. Regarding maternity leave, the company is very supportive of pregnant women and who return from maternity leave. I had the flexibility to work from home in this situation. These women are made comfortable and the company provides facilities like medical rooms for them to take rest. There is no discrimination towards them and the company is really sympathetic towards them. In my case also, the performance is not affected by this maternity leave and I was reinstated
on the same position after returning. There was no disparity in term of pay scale or promotion” (female talent, 2).

Four participants did not face any situation themselves related to women returning from maternity leave. Three others believed that these women are not treated equally as compared to men. One participant complained,

“I have not gone through this situation. But if a women colleague who gets married, has children and takes a break, it hampers her career. These women have to struggle hard to reach an upper level. These responsibilities may impede the growth of career-oriented women” (Female talent, 12).

She also admitted that many women set priorities for themselves and her company makes sure that all male and female colleagues get equal opportunities. According to her,

“Some women may prefer to spend their time with their family and they may understand that this may affect their career growth. In my firm, the average age is between 25-27 and many women are not married, and, in my view, everyone is treated equally.” (Female talent, 12).

Another female participant added to this thought that a company tries to encourage these women, but it is some people who create problems for them. She said,

“For women who return from maternity leave, the company encourages them but people in the company may form an opinion regarding them. I would also like to add that such opinions for male managers who go on paternity leave are also formed as they may not be able to give more working hours” (female talent, 23).
Overall females agreed that women who return from maternity leave get the required support from their company. Additionally, majority women in this sample did not have any child or parental responsibilities. Hence, proposition 2b was not supported. Figure 3 shows the results for propositions 2a and 2b. The figure depicts whether the female participants agreed, not agreed or were not aware of approval for trainings/talent development programs and support after maternity leave from their respective organizations.

**Results: Proposition 2a & 2b**

![Figure 3: Results for proposition 2a & 2b](image)

**Sex-related Discrimination in TM and access to the informal network**

Proposition 3a theorized that women in India perceive that their access to the informal network is more limited to them as compared to men in their company. When they were asked about how they receive the information about the talent development programs, eight of them said that they receive emails from their talent development team or they have an
online portal or intranet on which such information is posted. Nine of them said that they also receive emails from their HR team. Among them, one of them stated,

“The information is trickled down through emails by the higher management. If there are limited seats for a particular program, the company asks for volunteers and asks the employees to sign up for these programs. If there are too many volunteers, the managers check for employee’s application and employee’s role. The best application sent for these training programs and senior persons are given preference first” (female talent, 21).

Another participant said that they have talent development projects and consulting projects that help them to climb up the career ladder. According to her,

“The information for talent development projects is sent by the HR department through emails. The consulting projects are decided by the business leaders like a senior manager” (female talent, 23). Another female added to this discussion, “The information for talent development is sent through emails. Any person interested can nominate himself/ herself for the training. If there are high-level programs, then the person is evaluated on the basis of performance, interviews and test as lots of money is spent on these high-level training. Irrespective of gender, the person needs to clear the test for these training. There are equal opportunities for male and female employees” (female talent, 2).

The participants were also asked if they have to make any special efforts to get selected in these talent development programs. Twenty out of twenty-three mentioned that
they did not have to make any special efforts to get selected in these programs. One participant very excitedly said, “If you are talented enough, the company always reach you” (female talent, 10). But another woman mentioned that although she did not have to make any special effort to get selected into these programs, males who have good networks may have an edge over the others. She stated,

"The information about these programs is available to all at the same time. There are e-learning programs and for other programs, the information is available through transparent channels like emails. Also, an employee can reach out to the senior managers if they want to undergo special training essential to their work. Also, the company looks at this selection in an unbiased fashion in terms of gender and sees it in terms of ROI (return on investment). But sometimes male employees may get the information about these programs over a smoke break or during informal networking from their senior male managers. Sometimes, male employees share a close bond with their senior male managers due to this informal networking as compared to women. This may be a little disadvantageous for women who are not part of this informal networking and may lead to biases in terms of promotion” (female talent,21).

On the same line, another participant added to it that a male colleague of her company was sent to do a project in a location outside the country (female talent, 23). It was the same participant who had mentioned that projects are important for their career development in an earlier section. According to her, both the employees were equally capable of handling the project. The third participant who agreed to the fact that they have
to make special efforts to get selected, said, “…it was the part of the job” (female participant, 2). Participants were also asked if the selection process is competitive. All of them said no except female talent 21. According to her, everybody can volunteer for some training, but if there are more people or volunteers, the selection is based on performance. Therefore, the proposition 3a is not supported.

Proposition 3b was along similar lines. It postulated that women in MNCs in India believe the lack of access to an informal network in their organization reduces their chances to get access to these talent development programs. To explore this, participants were asked whether they receive the information about these talent programs at the same time as the male counterparts do. Twenty-one out of twenty-three said that everybody gets the information at the same time. One of them said, “All the colleagues whether male or female receive the information at the same time. The company is very professional about it and never leaks information about these programs” (female talent 12). Most of them said that male and female employees get equal opportunity to get selected as they receive the information at the same time. One interesting point was made by female talent 18. She said, “All the employees receive information equally about these training from the company's intranet site at the same time. Additionally, training regarding emerging technology is circulated to everyone and we have to enroll and finish the training online by ourselves, or we can take classroom training as well” (female tale, 18).

Another participant stated that in their company one could approach their manager and ask them about the upcoming training (female talent, 10). But another participant from the same company said that everybody does not receive the information about these talent
development programs at the same time (female talent, 22). She also said “For every grade or level there are different types of training programs. Sometimes it depends on bosses regarding nomination for these training. You can always ask them if you want to go for any training” (female talent, 22). The second participant who disagreed on getting the information at the same time said,

“We get the information about these programs through emails and through other teams and colleagues in the company. Sometimes male colleagues go for informal networking like a smoke break or tea break with managers, due to which their chances of getting promoted to a senior level increases (female talent, 5).

These female participants were also asked whether informal networking further helps in getting selected in these programs. Sixteen participants agreed to this fact that informal networking helps in getting selected in these programs and building further contacts. Only seven females denied that informal networking does not help in the selection and relation building. A female participant who added in favor of this argument said, "The informal networking helps you get recognized, but it’s the work that helps you to grow in the organization. The informal networks create a perception about you in the leader’s mind, but ultimately it’s the work that has to speak for you “(female talent, 13). One female participant enthusiastically said,

“It is not part of the job. But the more you interact with your seniors, the more they get to know about your interests. During work hours, you only discuss work-related problems and there is no time to discuss your career plan. Informal networking accelerates your chances of being selected. If
you build rapport with your manager, you may also receive the first-hand information regarding upcoming projects even before you receive the emails. The manager can recommend or consider you for this kind of projects or can guide you for it. Informal networking is an added advantage which you can do it over your coffee break but not a requisite and it is not based on gender. It helps both males and females” (female talent,2).

Another female participant said, “Informal networking does not help in the selection. It is based on performance” (female talent 19).

Female participants were also asked a whether women in their organization get equal chance to be recognized as a talent. Twenty-one women agreed to this. One participant said, “In my organization, women get equal chance to be recognized as talent. My organization promotes fair work culture and diversity” (female talent,2). Another female also said, “I am from a human capital domain and women are much more in number than men in this kind of roles. Therefore, I haven’t faced any real challenge in this area” (female talent,9). Only one female had a negative review with regard to an equal chance. She said,

“In my experience, for many projects, my male colleagues were chosen over me. Time and again, it has happened with me that for good business development projects, my male colleagues were chosen. In my view, there are gender biases present in the company in terms of project allocation. The reason for these gender biases is that it is perceived that women cannot travel. For married women, it is believed that they may not be able to give that much time or she might go on a break. In some cases, if there is a new
training opportunity, the company is always ready to invest on a male employee rather than a female employee. The senior managers automatically assume these factors and many times they give projects to male employees” (female talent, 23).

Another woman had mixed reviews about this. According to her,

“I feel that there are two parts to it. One is recognition and other is remuneration. The boss can say that this female employee is really doing well and recognize her. But at the time of promotion or getting a performance review, things take a different shape” (female talent, 22).

By reviewing this, proposition 3b is not supported. Figure 4 represents the responses of the participants who either agree, not agreed or had mixed reviews about efforts for selection, competitiveness of selection process, receiving information at the same time, informal networking and equal recognition.
The purpose of this study was to discover how women working in MNCs in India perceive gender-inclusive TM practices in their organization. This study intended to determine whether these women faced any challenges and gender-based barriers in terms of selection or career growth. Three perspectives were used to examine these professional women: Gender stereotypes in TM practices and managerial positions, Gender stereotypes in TM practices and interrupted career path, and Sex-Related Discrimination in TM and access to the informal network. These professional women working in the Indian corporate environment were believed to face gender biases in terms of stereotypes and sex-related discrimination based on extant literature. These biases were argued to further impede their growth in the organization and the companies may not fully utilize their female talent. The major findings were as follows.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to discover how women working in MNCs in India perceive gender-inclusive TM practices in their organization. This study intended to determine whether these women faced any challenges and gender-based barriers in terms of selection or career growth. Three perspectives were used to examine these professional women: Gender stereotypes in TM practices and managerial positions, Gender stereotypes in TM practices and interrupted career path, and Sex-Related Discrimination in TM and access to the informal network. These professional women working in the Indian corporate environment were believed to face gender biases in terms of stereotypes and sex-related discrimination based on extant literature. These biases were argued to further impede their growth in the organization and the companies may not fully utilize their female talent. The major findings were as follows.
Proposition 1: Managerial positions are gender-stereotyped in favor of men in MNCs in India.

Proposition 1 was partially supported as there was evidence regarding negative stereotyping of women managers. Eleven out of twenty-three women faced some type of stereotype regarding the women manager. There was an instance in which a female participant said that women managers have to adopt manly qualities for senior management positions. The competence of women managers was also questioned in one case. There were three cases where women were not offered higher positions due to the demand for late-night working hours. As mentioned by Kaushik et al., (2014), there is a perception that late night shift and traveling are not meant for women. However, women managers in terms of their capabilities in comparison to their male counterparts were considered equal. Twelve out of twenty-three female participants believed that women managers are treated equally. Most of them agreed to the fact that men and women are given equal opportunities at the time of promotion. Further, the evidence was clear that the employers were not looking for managers who had masculine traits as twenty female participants agreed to it.

Contrary to Gulhati (1990), the results do not indicate that employers desired leaders with masculine-traits. This is an interesting and provocative result. This could mean MNCs operating in India are doing a good job in addressing challenges that women face and meeting their needs. Further, this research shows that these women are not necessarily disadvantaged by traditional beliefs such as patriarchy and prevalent male thinking. This change in attitude can also be attributed to the influence of family on life choices. According to Valk and Srinivasan (2011), family influence plays a major role in the life
choices on work and family for all females. Family influence can be defined as the extent to which family members play a role in value creation and meaning around work and family for a child (Valk and Srinivasan, 2011). The family influence can range from setting goals for higher education, relocating from small towns to big cities for higher education and work and ultimately getting the dream job. By looking at the demographics, most of the participants were engineers and MBA graduates. According to one participant, the family members had played important role in shaping her career. Also, these companies may put extra effort in to retain these highly educated professional women.

Proposition 2a: Women in MNCs in India who have interrupted career paths or family responsibilities have very limited access to talent development programs.

Proposition 2a was not supported. In this case, the majority of the women (twenty-two out of twenty-three) denied that they have limited access to talent development programs. Everyone agreed that their senior managers asked them before sending them on any talent development programs or mandatory company training. Although the number of women with parental or child responsibilities was small in this sample, these participants did not face any challenges regarding getting into a talent development programs or receiving required support from the company they were working in. It could be possible that women in this sample having children or parental responsibilities were given more attention by the organization they were working in. These organizations in which these participants are working may have work-family supportive policies that may help women in overcoming the inherent challenges simultaneously taking caring of their family and performing well in their jobs. Based on the information on the company’s websites in
which these participants are working, they had such supportive policies that encouraged female talent to pursue their career. Due to confidentiality reasons, the website addresses of these companies are withheld. These supportive policies included flextime, work from home policy, leave of absence policy, maternity leave, childcare facilities, and sabbaticals. Many women in the above sample mentioned these policies. According to Roy (2003), these flextime policies are supportive for new mothers or with small children.

Proposition 2b: Women in MNCs in India who return from maternity leave do not get support from their organization

Proposition 2b was not supported. Out of twenty-three women, sixteen agreed that they received the required support from the organization, however, they stated that they had to put in the extra effort in terms of extra work when they return from the maternity leave. The extra effort here refers to the re-learning and revising the processes the individual used to work on as they may be out of touch. Only three participants believed that women who return from maternity leave receive an equal chance compared to what their male counterparts receive. Four women did not face this kind of situation as they were not married or aware of maternity policy of their company. As stated above in proposition 2a, most of the companies in their website mentioned about the organizational policy support to women who return from maternity leave. As mentioned by Aycan and Eskin (2005) in their research, the organizational family- supportive policies such as flextime, childcare facilities, career break and option to work from home help these employees to make arrangements to balance their work and family responsibilities (Thomas & Ganster,
This organizational support also helps in greater job satisfaction and less employee exodus from the organization (Bedeian, Mossholder, & Touliatos, 1986).

Proposition 3a: Women in MNCs in India perceive that access to informal networks in organizations is more limited for women than for men.

Proposition 3a was not supported. Twenty women out of this sample suggested that they did not have to make any special efforts to get selected for these talent development programs. These talent development programs are a gateway for informal networking. This networking further helps women in their career to grow. It was believed that if the organizational TM practices are gendered, women face more challenges in forming social networks as compared to men (Welle & Heilman, 2007). Due to the sex-related discrimination, women are believed to be excluded from informal networks as mentioned in above discussion. Twenty-one women from this sample mentioned that they get equal chance to be recognized as talent. This means organizational practices in term of getting selected for these talent development programs is not gendered biased and these participants have equal opportunities for informal networking.

Proposition 3b: Women in MNCs in India believe that a lack of access to informal networks in organizations reduces the opportunities for women to gain access to talent development programs

Proposition 3b was not supported. The majority of the women agreed that they received information about these talent development programs at the same time as their male colleagues. As per Festing et al., (2015), transparency of information about the existence of talent development programs increases the chances of an employee to be
identified as talent. Also, the presence of company’s intranet where the information about these programs is available to all has increased the chances women to get selected for these programs. These women in this sample said that informal networking further helped them to get selected in the talent development programs and built further contacts or relationship building. Looking at their demographics in Appendix B, twenty-one women have two years or more experience as a professional. Their current work experience may have widened their social networks. These social networks are already helping them to get the required information about their career growth.

Overall, all the propositions were only either partially supported or not supported at all. In this sample of women, most of them did not face any kind of problems like not being treated equally or not getting opportunities to climb up the career ladder as described in extant literature (Kaushik et al., 2014; Budhwar et al., 2005; Heilman, 2001; Gupta et al., 1998; Gulhati, 1990). The reason for this may be that this group was privileged. Privilege as a social concept is defined as a special advantage which is not earned and is enjoyed by members of one group excluding others (Black & Stone, 2005). Privilege comes in multiple forms, including race, gender, socioeconomic status, and age (Black et al., 2005). As can be seen from the sample demographics, this sample was privileged in term of educational status and socioeconomic status: Fifteen out of twenty-three women had a master's degree in engineering or had pursued bachelor’s in engineering and the remainder had a bachelor's degree in another fields. Higher education is a privilege as many people do not get a chance to go to college. Further, in India getting into a college again is not an easy task as one should get good marks, clear an entrance exam and have money to pay for tuition
Another privilege that these females had was that they were working in urban cities like New Delhi and Pune where demand for educated women professionals is more as there are large number of MNCs in these cities (Bushwar et al., 2005; Shaw & Satish, 2007). Due to the advent of globalization, the urban societies in India have become more progressive that support these women personally and professionally. Budhwar et al., (2005), in their research mention that women with higher education in India are striving for independence, are career focused and are eager to move up in the career ladder. The future research can include women of different education status and privilege to explore whether this factor affects the findings of this thesis.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study. First, it was a qualitative study in which only twenty-three participants were interviewed. Further, all women were from only two cities in India, that is, New Delhi and Pune. Hence, the experience and opinions shown in this research may not be applicable to other female participants working in different MNCs and cities. Also, results this study may not be applicable to women working in other Indian companies. Further, all the female participants were well educated. As fifteen out of twenty-three women had a master’s degree such as MBA or master’s in engineering, it is possible that these organization may not want to lose highly educated professionals and hence, may give special attention to these women. The sample does not represent participants who have graduate degrees in other fields. Also, most of them were unmarried, and so this sample may not be a good representation of large women population in India.
The study may also have limited perspectives. All the participants in this sample were working in MNCs whose headquarters were in United States of America (USA). It is a well-known fact that managing diversity is becoming an important area in strategic HRM today in USA (Woodard & Saini, 2006). There are large number of MNCs from USA that are operational in India (Woodard & Saini, 2006). The HRM practices related to diversity and women empowerment in these companies may be seriously considered. A number of companies have mentioned in their websites in India that they are working towards inclusion and women empowerment. The perspective of participants from MNCs from other countries was missing in this sample. This research may not have taken into account other factors that could further enrich the analysis. For example, the male employee perspective was not considered. It is possible that they may feel different about the female colleagues and opportunities that are given to them. Analysis of gendered perspectives could have provided a better understanding of stereotypes and sex-based discrimination. It is also important to note that the majority of the women in this sample did not have parental or child responsibilities. This is not typical for women working in MNCs India. This sample also does not represent women working in other sectors such as government institutions and Indian enterprises. Finally, it is also possible that my limited experience in qualitative research may have led to the omission of additional variables.

**Future Research**

Due to a wide range of responses generated, this study has opened various avenues for further research. Various elements that can influence females in the working environment in India especially in MNCs in India can be investigated in separate groups. One of the groups can include a full description of the demographics of female employees
and how this factor relates to their experiences. Another factor could be their marital status and number of children they have. Women with varied educational backgrounds can also be considered. These factors can be further explored in-depth as a number of married women were less in this sample. Also, there were very few women who had managerial experience. More women managers can be included to widen the horizon of this research. Since the major limitation was the number of participants in this study, the large-scale investigation is required to replicate these findings. This can also help in exploring research questions such as: Can increasing the number of women in a leadership position help in reducing sex-related discrimination and stereotypes or vice versa? Will providing work-life balance approach to the working mothers help in the inclusion of female talent?
References


Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Personal Questions and Job-Related details

What is your age? You may specify a range, e.g., between 25 to 30, 30 to 35 and so on.

What is your educational qualification?

How long have you been working in the company?

In which department do you work in?

What is your business title?

Do you have managerial experience? If so, how many employees do you direct?

Do you have any children or parental responsibilities? You may specify ‘yes’ or ‘no’

Gender stereotypes in TM practices and managerial roles

What kind of ability and characteristics does your employer look for in managerial positions available in the company?

How do you personally see the senior management positions? According to you what are the characteristics or definitions of an ideal manager or leader in your company?

If you have a women manager or leader, what kind of qualities and characteristics you see in her?

Do you feel that there are general perception and stereotypes about women who hold senior management positions in your company? If yes, what is it?
Do you think there are stereotypes that question a women employees’ professional capabilities in the Indian corporate environment when it comes to promotion/ elevated job responsibilities?

**Gender stereotypes in TM practices and interrupted career path**

Are there any talent development programs in your company? If yes, can you provide the description of them? (For example- executive development programs, non-executive development programs, mentoring, skill building for managers, etc.)

Do you feel by taking these programs, it could benefit your career growth?

Have you ever felt that your superior does not send you for training as you have elevated responsibilities at home or outside of work?

**Sex-related Discrimination in TM and access to the informal network**

How do you receive the information about the talent development programs in your company?

Do you feel that getting selected for these talent development programs is difficult for you as compared to your male counterparts?

How competitive is the selection process for these programs?

Are there any networking forums in your company? Does networking help in the selection in these programs?

Do you think females have the same chances of getting selected to these programs? Or do you think women in your company get equal chance to be recognized as talent?
Do these programs help to build further contacts and help in career progression?
### Appendix B

**Demographics**

Demographics of the participants, \( N=23 \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Managerial experience</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Recording Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female talent 1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Project Management</td>
<td>31:05 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female talent 2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Learning and Development</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female talent 3</td>
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<td>2 years</td>
<td>E-learning Content Development</td>
<td>20:00 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female talent 4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>E-learning Content Development</td>
<td>21:00 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>No</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Finance and Pricing</td>
<td>16:40 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female talent 6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2 years 7 months</td>
<td>Management Consulting</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5 years</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2.3 years</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female talent 9</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Human Capital</td>
<td>25:00 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female talent 10</td>
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<td>18 years</td>
<td>Logistics, Procurement, and Buying</td>
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<td>10 years</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>20:00 min</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female talent 13</td>
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<td>5 years</td>
<td>Sales and Marketing Consulting</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10 months</td>
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<tr>
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<td>6.5 years</td>
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<td>9 years</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female talent 18</td>
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<td>14 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female talent 20</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female talent 21</td>
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<td>5 years</td>
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<tr>
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