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**Women's Cell facilitates Gender Inclusivity: A Case Study from the
Education sector**

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Abstract

This case study discusses the structure and significance of Gender Cell (often referred as Women's Cell) when formalized in an organization. Further to measure the impact of the formalized Women's Cell in nurturing gender inclusive growth and development. This case study narrates the structure and functionalities of the Women's Cell in an educational institution. Additionally, it measures its role in fostering gender inclusivity in organizations. The research study has been conducted at an educational institution where there exists a formalized Women's Cell. In order to understand the significance and functioning of the Women's Cell, data has been collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with the male and female employees, faculty members and students of the institution. Respondents' answers have been further analyzed to measure the impact of the Women's Cell in fostering the culture of gender equality and inclusivity within the institution. The findings of this Case study reinforce the notion that Women's Cell can act as a medium to create a gender inclusive workforce in an educational institution. Additionally, they provide insights into the processes and systems that facilitate establishing and running the Women's Cell.

Keywords: Women, Gender Inclusivity, Education Sector, Case-study

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Background

According to the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) recommendations, about 20 years ago, it was suggested to set up the National Commission for women. This was necessary to address cases of grievances and promote growth and development of women.

First Commission was established on 31st January 1992 and Mrs. Jayanti Patnaik was made the Chairperson by the government. The Fifth Commission was established on February 2005 when Dr. Girija Vyas was made the Chairperson.

Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University (PDPU) Women's Cell has been setup at Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University to promote gender inclusive learning environment in the educational institution. It facilitates a safe place to work and study both for faculty/ staff members and students. At the University there is a constant attempt to provide equal gender opportunities for both men and women, be it faculty staff members or students. The academic working culture promotes safety and security across the campus and promotes growth and development for all.

At the educational institutes that practice gender inclusivity, students, faculty and staff members from different regions and religions work together for growth and prosperity.

The case study narrates the structure and functionalities of the Women's Cell in an educational institution, Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India. Further, it also measures the impact of formalized Women's Cell to encourage gender inclusivity.

Women and Millennium Development Goals

The majority emergent countries are struggling with lack of openness towards gender inclusivity as a significant barrier in achieving millennium goals. The 3rd Millennium development goal aims at gender equality and empowering women. United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) acknowledges that gender parity and the empowerment of women and principally the economic empowerment of women have a noteworthy optimistic impact on continuous economic growth and sustainable industrial improvement, which lead to poverty reduction and social amalgamation. Different needs of gender and creating a nurturing and supportive environment for the growth and development accordingly is significant aspect of development.

Further as stated in A Real Portrait of the Concept: Women Empowerment "With the introduction of the National Policy for Empowerment of Women, the Government of India had declared year 2001 as Women's Empowerment Year. It was said, "Our vision in the new century of a nation is where women are equal partners with men". Many new projects were launched like Swashakti and Stree Shakti for women's empowerment; Swayam Sidha to benefit women through micro-credit programs, Balika Samrudhi Yojana for the girl child and many more.

Clearly, a common thread uniting each of the major international conferences of the 1990's is Women's Empowerment. Furthermore, the international community is now accountable to the world's women for fulfilling the significant commitments it has made to help make empowerment a reality of women's lives. Various efforts are made by Non Governmental Organisation (NGO), media, welfare organizations in this direction. Improvement in the status of women was a solemn pledge made by the founding fathers of the Constitution. Over the years a large number of social welfare legislations have been passed in favor of women”.

Gender Equality and Education sector

An important reason for promoting gender equality is that it can contribute in smooth progress of women and make them independent to manage their own lives.

As stated in Role of Gender Equality in Development – A Literature Review, “With the fundamental understanding that gender equality influences growth and development, its similar impact goes beyond the geographical boundaries. On a global level, women have fewer economic opportunities to improve their lives. They are often restricted in terms of education, ownership of property, monetary return for their work, financial opportunities, and opportunities to influence the decision making at the level of the family and the society. Given that women account for about half of the population and economic potential, it is likely that this individual lack of opportunity is reflected in failures at the macroeconomic level as well. Casual observation indicates that countries where women and men have more equal economic opportunities are also the more affluent countries. There seems to be some association between level of development and the role of women in the society”.

Usually it has been seen that in the Indian context, culture and social norms have created barriers to the equal participation of women in society. The purpose is to support and devise a mechanism through which women representatives can be integrated as decision makers, participants and beneficiaries irrespective of sector.

In literature Women’s empowerment is defined as women ability to make strategic life choices where that ability has been previously denied to them. Another related term gender equality entails similar notion suggesting that it is an institution where both the men and women gain from the identical opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Gender equality can be considered to have been achieved when there are equal opportunities in social, financial and work environment.

The issue of empowerment has been effectively mapped at workplaces. As number of female workforce is rising and their role becoming more remarkable, such inclusivity initiatives are viewed with optimistic light.

Encouragement to strike the balance and encourage participation from both genders fully and equally becomes essential. To produce changes in practice that creates environments in which

women can succeed becomes an essential aspect of importance. Gender Inclusivity framework facilitates gender and race as distinct evaluative grouping and simultaneously connects them to core institutional values and goals. It uses inclusive rather than exclusive strategy to progress women and people from varied backgrounds and relies on gender analysis to hint inequality of institutional dysfunction. It also facilitates the amalgamation of gender equity values into culture of the university.

Understanding Gender Inclusivity at Workplace

Various industry demanding diversity and integration have realized the role of women workforce like never before. Gender equality is another way to understand the same as equal opportunities for both men and women.

The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) Mercer 2009 reports the multi skilling ability exclusively developed in women suiting to current industry development adding to productivity and profit, ability to manage change and creating value for customer satisfaction. It further added certain roles specifically better handled by female due to same skill. Companies following gender inclusive policies like IBM and Infosys have elaborated on both the need as well as benefits of integration of formal policies.

Certain other factors like type of sector and size of sector do indicate the scope and relevance of such formal inclusivity initiatives. Culture and social norms prevalent irrespective of socioeconomic class or educational background becomes important reason for the need of establishment of such formal policies.

Another important aspect is unawareness about information related to gender rights and responsibilities. It becomes essential for all the sectors to have a formal body which can ensure time to time communication and conduct sensitization exercises to do the needful. The whole idea of such initiative is not gender discrimination and reservation but bringing the necessary work culture of equality for the ensuring harmony and motivating environment across all the employees irrespective of values and belief they hold.

The key purpose of this case study is to identify and validate the formalization of gender inclusivity initiative. Also the case study is exploring if the measures are significant enough in spreading the awareness and need of gender equality in the education sector. Education sector though considered to be safest among all other workplaces for women hasn't seen growth in terms of leadership role leading to lack of motivation for involvement.

Women's Cell at PDPU – A Stepping Stone to Gender Inclusivity

PDPU has been established in 2007. It is located in Gandhinagar, the capital city of Gujarat in western India. It offers education in Management, Technology and Humanities. It has several undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral programs to educate students in respective domains of knowledge.

With the growth of the University, there was also the requirement for creating an educational ambience for faculty members, staff members and students that promotes gender equality and growth in a safe surrounding. The PDPU Women's Cell facilitates this effort of the University.

Definition, Inception and Objective of Women Cell at PDPU

PDPU Women's Cell was established by the Director General of PDPU as the requirement of an educational institution for providing safe and healthy environment at the academic institution.

The members of the PDPU Women's Cell constitute a convener, counselor and members from PDPU employees. Nomination of the convener is done by the Director General of PDPU. The director of each school nominates two members from Women teaching and non-teaching staff as members of Women's Cell. The Chief Hostel Warden, PDPU is invited member to the Women Cell, PDPU as his/her views and opinions are of significance for good functioning of the Cell. There is also an appointment of an external member made by PDPU management.

The student members (girls) are nominated by the members of PDPU Women's Cell of respective schools. Four male students are nominated by the Dean of Students to the Women's Cell. Also, five male members from the University are nominated to the Cell by the Director General. This completes the representation from all quarters.

An Internal Complaint Committee is setup by the Women's Cell:

- a. The Presiding Officer is the Convener, Women Cell
- b. Any two members of the Cell
- c. One external expert who has the knowledge in the respective domain.

Objectives of Women's Cell

Cultivate a gender inclusive academic environment and resolve issues on gender related topics, provide knowledge on laws and rights for women and provided equal opportunity to both genders at the University.

Events organised and planned under the Women's' Cell

The following events have been organized over a period of time to generate awareness, educate faculty, staff and students, connect with other institutions for sharing experiences and staying abreast of what others are doing all to create a gender inclusive healthy work environment at PDPU. Although led by core members of the Women's' Cell, all of the events have been an effort at the University level where there has been participation from Management, Faculty, Administrative staff and the students.

1. An Introductory Seminar on Women's' Cell PDPU after its constitution in 2011
2. Women Empowerment workshop in 2011
3. World Cinema on issues related to women in 2011
4. A 2 day free Eye checkup camp in 2012
5. Planner making competition 2012
6. Homage to Nirbhaya 2012
7. Open Forum Debate – Is India a Fractured Society? in 2013
8. Drama: Kaua Chala Hans ki Chal mocking the hypocrisy embedded in aristocracy in 2013
9. Extraordinary Women Lecture Series 2013
10. Workshop on Gender sensitization in 2014
11. Women's Safety Security workshop Police Heart in 2014
12. Defense O Dance (planned) 2015
13. Events such as Lecture series, panel discussion, movie screening, global approach, make in India have been planned for 2015

Methodology:

Open Ended Survey with our stakeholders - University Management, faculty members, administrative staff members and students was executed. Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University has five schools across the campus for education in different disciplines. Undergraduate and Post graduate students have been approached for this survey. The survey intends to capture the awareness about the existence of the Women's Cell at Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University, the Perception about the requirement of a Women's Cell at an Educational Institution, perception about Gender Inclusivity being an integral part of all activities at PDPU, and a Roadmap for the Women's' Cell in encouraging Gender Inclusivity to be a continuing need for the success of the institution.

Data has been collected from 101 respondents which includes University Management, faculty members, administrative staff members and students across both genders. The qualitative data captured has been used to develop a case study. Respondent's feedback to measure the impact of women cell initiative in shaping gender equality and inclusivity culture at PDPU was collated.

Explicit recommendations from stakeholders for future activities of the Women's Cell have been documented.

Findings

A. Attitude toward awareness about Women's Cell Existence at Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University suggested positive response from all the respondents declaring complete awareness. Additionally all validated the significance of Women's Cell.

B. Arguments for consideration or support of observations appear both in cause and effect equations as listed below:

1. It is a mandatory requirement by the Government of India
2. Additionally a human requirement to handle gender issues sensitively
3. Bring sensitization on gender equality
4. Create awareness and safety for women
5. Handle women grievances in a structured way
6. Promote equal participation and empowerment

C. Respondent's sensitivity regarding Gender Inclusivity and its relevance at PDPU can be summarized as follows:

1. University has been successful in having hundred percent gender inclusivity leading to better synergy and better learning experience
2. Attempts are made at the University to promote women participation in all activities and tasks
3. Validation of significance of knowingness and awareness of other gender in an educational institution.

D. Respondents suggestions regarding measures for sustainability and enhancement of spirit of gender Inclusivity is listed below :

- Nomination of women's cell as a Nodal Body to conduct different activities focused on gender inclusivity agenda
- Organize International Conference with collaboration with Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).
- Initiative for competitive events to promote Gender Inclusivity through live and digital media technologies
- Coordination with other institutions and monitor current in-house initiatives
- Augment visibility by putting banners, drills, campaigns at significant locations on the campus
- Promote initiatives through Student led body
- Incorporate special reservations for women candidates

- Women members representative in key positions and important committees
- Self defense training for faculty and students

The case study reflects the structure and the process through which Women's Cell can be formally established in an educational institution. Survey results yielded positive results because both the female and male stakeholders responded to say that the Women's Cell at PDPU made them feel nurtured, guided and integrated in the organization.

Implications: The findings reinforce the notion that Women's Cell can act as a medium to create a gender inclusive workforce and provide insights into the processes and systems which facilitate in establishing and running Women's Cell at an educational institution.

Limitations: The findings are limited to an organization and therefore the results cannot be generalized and are specific to the organization. The Women's Cell process and structure detailed in the case study may not be applicable to other organizations as needs and process should be tailored according to the profile of the organization

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