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## **MANAGING THE INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUAL ASPIRATION IN INDIAN IT WORK ENVIRONMENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Rapidly growing individual aspirations are distinctly visible among Indian IT workforce. In such an industry where more than 60% workforce are relatively young and mostly under their thirties has shown the trend of cultivating multidirectional aspirations over a very short span of time. It has dual impact in work environment and qualifies for further study of this subject.

Profiling and subsequently classifying the aspirations and their immediate and further time-bound impact analysis in relation with their work environment would help to manage the workforce better.

Human psychology and their socio-economic conditions also would be in the context while deriving the conclusion of this paper. This paper eventually aims to come up with a management framework to address the influence of such individual aspirational aspect in work environment along with the value propositions out of the framework.

**Keywords:** Indian IT Industry, Workforce, Aspiration, Management, Project Manager, Empirical Approach, Resource Fitment

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the course of time, with the knowledge based industry revolution that started in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the meaning and importance of human resources have changed the usual management practice significantly, especially in the software industry. This change leads to a different paradigm of management practice, where human resource management has become one of the important subject areas.

Prior to the Information Technology (IT) revolution, all other industrial revolutions were mainly driven by the invention of machinery that also acted as the main resource for the production process. However, with the IT revolution, the software production process has changed the scope of human resources involvement in software development or maintenance, and hence, there is a change in the management approach.

Indian IT industry is unique among other industries in India. Though country's oldest Software Company, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) was established in 1968 but the actual journey of Indian IT industry started in late 1980s when "India's economic liberalization was also well under way. Around this time, the information technology revolution in the developed world had begun to take root and shortages skilled programmers and IT professionals were beginning to develop" [1]. Therefore, Indian IT industry is not even half a century old and its majority of the workforces are young. In 2012, Indian IT industry added 1.8 lakh jobs net. This industry is still the largest employers of white collar sectors of the country which has 3 million young people at the age of 27<sup>[2]</sup>. TCS, the country's largest Software firm has the average employee age is just 28 years among its 270,000 employees [3] and its mostly export based business model (software export from India accounts for more than 65% of the total software revenue [4]) has created influence among

young educated Indians to fast-track their career resulting the development of various individual aspirational aspects. Along with it, the individual socio-economic background also contributes to elevate her aspiration level.

Out of 1.21 billion (as per 2011 Census Statistics) people in India, more than 50 per cent of its population below the age of 25 and more than 65 per cent below the age of 35 and along with this statistics, Indian middle class is growing rapidly and current size of Indian middle class is estimated above 300 million. The Indian IT industry has been the witness of the fact that most of the workforce that join the industry every year, a lion share is from typical middle class or lower middle class families. They join the industry with great hope and aspiration to achieve many or very specific extraordinary goals of their life within a very short span of time. "The very high standards of management practice in Indian IT firms and the tremendous employment opportunities offered by the industry have had significant effects on the confidence, aspirations and work ethic of young professionals in India. The leading software firms have pioneered a movement to modernize Indian management practices, adopting practices of creative organizations with less hierarchical structures and strong work ethics. In order to comply with international norms to participate in international capital markets, IT firms have set new standards in accounting and corporate governance. They have offered unprecedented high-paying employment opportunities for the young and educated labor force, particularly for women professionals"<sup>[5]</sup>

In this paper, we will see how this aspiration varies in ranges of work experience in industry and also for most of them, how their socio-economic background drives them to have such aspirations.

For Project Manager, it is important to understand his/her team member's aspirations and could derive the probable impact of individual commitment level due to his/her conflicting or aligning aspirations with project or organizational goals. If there is any interest of conflict detected early, the Project Managers would have upfront control to address this risk to his/her project. Establishing control through confidence rather than confronting with resource in software development or maintenance is the key for the successful manpower management and execution of the project. Project Managers also need to understand individual psychology and background of such conflict because unlike any machinery resource, this underlying invisible force if gets unnoticed or unattended then the performance of the individual could create serious impact in the project execution.

## MOTIVATION

"What individuals want for themselves, or what parents want for their children, is conditioned by society in fundamental ways. One such pathway is the creation of individual aspirations.... they are also profoundly affected by her social environment.....At the same time, while social outcomes affect aspirations, those very aspirations influence - via the aggregation of individual decisions - the overall development of a society."<sup>[6]</sup> However, this conclusive statement has been made in grater context and can be squished into very specific way in the scope of IT Project Management. There are quite a few in-depth research happened in Human Resource Management aspect across the globe but hardly one can find any comprehensive material specific to the aspirational aspects of India's young IT workforce who played the pivotal role to build nations \$108+ billion Software and IT industry.

## CONTEXT OF RESEARCH

In this paper, we will focus on typical IT and Software firms that are operational in India and their workforce having experience from entry level to 10 years. Considering experience level up to 10 years should address the multidirectional aspirational aspects and this experience band also covers majority of the workforce population. The individual aspirations could be professional, social or personal or it could be someone else interest that gets penetrated into the driving force of individual decision making process. All would have some amount of immediate or time bound impact in the organization. Since, this typical experience band mostly involved in direct Software production or IT service delivery process, the immediate concerned person should be the Project Managers.

An IT Project Manager would always love to have happy workforce. Any surprise is not desirable at least from his/her direct team members during the peak of production/service delivery process. In India, "54% of all workers are seriously considering leaving, and 66% of workers under age 24 are looking to leave, despite being highly satisfied with their organization."<sup>[7]</sup> The average attrition in Indian IT Industry in FY12 was estimated from 17-25 per cent<sup>[8]</sup> which is a serious concern across the industry. Though not necessarily unmanageable individual aspirations lead towards attrition but surely it is one of the key contributors. The Project Managers would be more concerned about the immediate impact, the delivery and also sometime customer reputations. It takes lot of Project Management time if gets discovered at the later stages to address the risk which would be very high at that time.

Identifying one's aspiration at the early stage of the project could also impact positively if both can realize the mutual interests.

Usually, an IT Project Manager spends more than 25% of his effort to address Human Resource Management aspects. In IT service delivery industry, where team size is high, the average spends on people aspects is much higher than this number. In this paper we will also look for a framework through which Project Managers can address this issue at the very early stage of the project so that they can also reduce Human Resource Management effort significantly especially during the critical stages of the production/delivery cycles.

Following are some of the assumptions of this research:

- ◆ India is extremely diversified country; local lifestyle and cultural view get varied among different states, and regions. This paper does not include cultural variance in the consideration; however, this factor could be considered in future scope of studies.
- ◆ Indian Software/IT industry also has many non-technical support staffs. This paper does not include them in the consideration.
- ◆ The target companies are restricted only within Software development and IT services firms. The BPO, and other Software/IT Service associated firms (like Consulting, Training Institutes etc.) are not considered here, however, in India, these associated organizations are mostly evolved around the Software/IT Service revolution and individual aspirational influences are actually flown from the core part i.e. Software/IT Service industry to other associated industries.

## APPROACH AND DESIGN OF ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

The empirical approach has been used based on sample surveys and observational data from multiple sources. The overall approach is divided into three sections.

1. Collection and Presentation of Data
2. Data Analysis
3. Interpretation of the analysis outcome

A fundamental question to be considered here is whether the collection of data should be done by complete enumeration or by sampling. "In the former case, each and every individual of the group to which the data are to relate is covered, and information gathered for each individual separately. In the latter, only some individual forming a representative part of the group are covered, either because the group is too large or because the items on which information is sought are too numerous."<sup>[9]</sup> In our case, the volume of target data source is too huge; therefore, few samples have been designed to get the feel of the larger population.

The sources of the data have been divided into following two categories:

1. Representatives of the workforce - Though a relatively small sample (around 40 representatives) is used but they have been chosen quite carefully based on their wider representativeness within the group. The direct open discussion and specific questions were asked to collect the data.
2. Representatives of the group of Project Managers who directly deal with this workforce – The method of direct observations are used to collect the data from this group.

It is also important that we classify the target firms. The tiered approach can be considered here for the classification as shown in Table 1.

We also need to consider how the overall workforce can be grouped under different levels to identify their representativeness for the surveys. We considered the years of experience and various stages of life are the two primary criteria along with some other parameters. There are standard roles across the industry but these are mostly years of experience driven.

The target workforces are chosen from the region where sample density is high as shown in Figure 1. Also, from the selected region, other factors also considered like gender, marital status, economic and family background etc. The Table 2 shows the further break-ups of sample with diversified attributes.

To collect the observational data from Project Managers, sample size as mentioned in Table 3 is used across firms. More focus is given to Tier-1 firms since more than 60% of the work-force comes from such firms.

Table 1: Classification of Indian Software/IT Service Firms <sup>[10]</sup>

Classification Name	Remarks
Tier-1	They are the big Software/IT Service Companies. These companies have very strong processes including delivery and employee training and performance appraisals. A company having total head count more than 5000 can be considered under this category. Usually they support multiple industry verticals and have many horizontal service units which actually helps to provide diversified portfolios for an individual
Tier-2	They are mostly focused on 1/2 industry verticals and developed strong expertise in those areas. These companies typically have employee strength between 300 – 5000+. There are many captive companies of US/UK based firms also can be considered under this category.
Tier-3	“This is where the companies really start becoming a company. The size typically range from 75 to 500 and they rely on the individual brilliance of a handful of people rather than the processes” <sup>[10]</sup> . Employees of such organizations get ample of opportunities to explore their skills in multiple directions including niche skills but the Human Resource management process is perhaps not very structured and long term vision for any junior level associate is not clearly defined since most of the time, the sustainability of the organization itself is under question.
Tier-4	These are usually the entry level startups. “Every founding member will be involved in active project delivery and the company has not even got a chance to think about the processes. They are struggling to find people, retain people...” <sup>[10]</sup> .

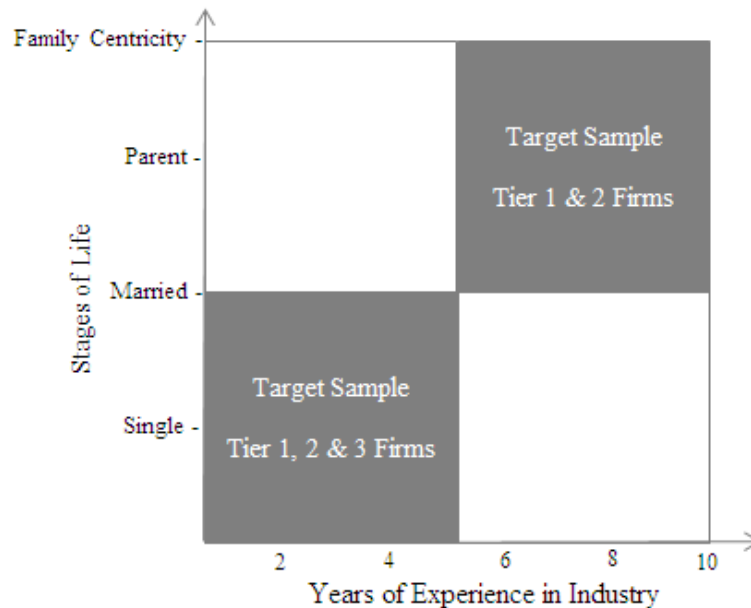


Figure 1: Sample Workforce

Table 2: Diversified attributes of samples

Experience Band			Stages of Life			Other Demographic Attributes					No. of Individuals
0-5 Yrs.	5-8 Yrs.	8-10 Yrs.	Single	Married	Parent	Gender	Single earner in the family	From well-established family in the society	From Rural India & 1 <sup>st</sup> generation in corporate world	From Nucleus Family	
√			√			M	√		√		3
√			√			M		√			2
√			√			M				√	4
√				√		M	√		√		2
√			√			F		√		√	2
√			√			F	√		√		2
√				√		F		√			4
	√		√			M	√		√		2
	√			√	√	F				√	2
	√			√	√	M	√		√		3
	√		√			M		√		√	2
		√	√			M		√			2
		√		√	√	M	√		√	√	4
		√		√	√	M		√			2
		√		√	√	F				√	2
		√		√	√	F		√			2

Table 3: Number of firms, Project Manager and Associates covered in this study

Firm Type	No. of firms covered in this study	No. of Project Managers targeted for direct observational data.	No. of representatives of workforce for direct discussion and specific question & answer
Tier-1	5	10	25
Tier-2	3	6	10
Tier-3	2	4	5
Tier-4	1	1	0

## DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT INTERPRETATION

The IT Project Managers who deal with the workforce used to capture their experiences in structural forms. The observations came in two areas – Top 3 priorities influenced by personal, social and professional aspirations of the majority of the workforce for a specific experience range, and the other observation is mainly the factors that they think are reasons for choosing any particular aspiration(s) by the individuals (Table 4). The human resource management experience of the selected IT Project Managers varies from 5 to 10 years and some of them manages diversified workforce like male, female and from different parts of the country with different social-economic background.

experience range, and the other observation is mainly the factors that they think are reasons for choosing any particular aspiration(s) by the individuals (Table 4). The human resource management experience of the selected IT Project Managers varies from 5 to 10 years and some of them manages diversified workforce like male, female and from different parts of the country with different social-economic background.

Table 4: Direct observations of Project Managers from selected Tier-1, 2, 3 & 4 firms

Experience Band	Top 3 Priorities observed	Factors affecting individual aspiration		
		Social	Personal	Professional
0-5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High mobility leads to strong onsite aspiration</li> <li>Challenging role but with flexible and enjoyable work environment</li> <li>Moderate to high salary aspiration with inclination towards tier-1 &amp; 2 type of Firms</li> </ul>	-Firm Name -Friends & Peers -Role Models -Media	-Aptitude -Attitude -Age -Gender -	-Expertise -Security -Freedom -Balance -Career Values
5-8 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher salary aspiration than role</li> <li>High to moderate mobility leads to onsite aspiration</li> <li>New learning if gives visible alignment with career growth</li> </ul>	-School & College environment -Family	-Passion/Hobbies -Knowledge -Skill -Educational attainment -Value Systems	-Career success
8-10 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aspiring the role that gives long term visibility and career stability</li> <li>Aspiring the role that mostly comes from experience (or natural learning) rather than new learning</li> <li>Work-Life balance</li> </ul>			

The other data source is from IT professionals other than Project Managers within 0-10 year's industry experience band. A formal discussion along with direct question and answer session conducted with the individuals. The response is recorded in terms of the magnitude of the aspirations under his/her experience band for very specific areas like Money, Onsite, Challenging Role, New

Learning, Stability in Professional Life, Working in Reputed Firm and Designation. Considering Indian socio-economic structure and its influence in gender, two spectrum of the magnitude of aspirational level is drawn – one for male and another one for female professionals (Table 5).

Table 5: Magnitude of aspirational level against experience band

Male Workforce				Female Workforce			
	0-5 Yrs.	5-8 Yrs.	8-10 Yrs.		0-5 Yrs.	5-8 Yrs.	8-10 Yrs.
Money				Money			
Onsite				Onsite			
Challenging Role				Challenging Role			
New learning				New learning			
Stability				Stability			
Reputed Firm				Reputed Firm			
Designation				Designation			

**Aspiration Level:**

Low
Medium
Strong

## Interpretation of the Results

- ◆ Irrespective of experience and gender, aspiring to earn money takes highest priority. There could be exceptions but majority are within the normal distribution.
- ◆ Onsite relocation or going abroad is clearly a visible aspiration among 0-8 years' workforce. This aspiration is not very strong among seniors because mobility could be challenging due to increasing level of personal commitments in life or they would have already achieved this goal earlier. It is a strong aspiration especially among single and newly married male workforce. This aspiration also can be seen as integrated with money since it gives opportunity to earn higher amount of compensations
- ◆ Challenging role and new learning also come with additional stress in life and might impact individual's work-life balance. This aspiration is not very much appreciated by most of the senior female workforce. Reason could be social where a married and being a mother has many more personal commitments and balancing both personal and professional commitments become a challenge.
- ◆ Stability takes priority from 5-8 years' workforce onwards and majority tries to get into some stable firms, mostly tier 1 & 2 categories.
- ◆ Working in reputed firms and tagged with senior level designation also gives social respects. It appears to be a strong aspiration for male senior workforce.
- ◆ Aspirations are driven by individual needs and changes over the time. In Indian socio-economic environment, gender factor also influence one's aspiration.

For Project Managers, it is important that there are proper mappings between role expectations and individual aspirations. Most of the time, resource selection happens only based on technical expertise for the immediate need, however, this is anyway needs to be investigated but enquiring about individual aspirational aspect gets ignored due to fulfillment urgency. It could be manage-

able for short-term roles but becomes real issue for long-term assignments.

“Indian software industry is aspiring to get integrated in a big way with the global software industry. It has many global customers and the number is increasing at a real fast pace. Indian software industry is considered to be a success story till date and its future success will depend upon its ability to understand and adopt what is being valued by global customers. However, it is feared that many of the values of the global customers are in conflict with the traditional values of Indian society.”<sup>[11]</sup>

IT Project Managers can use this result as guideline while analyzing any individual performance and motivational level for the assigned role.

## Framework for IT Project Managers to identify the right resource fitment

Unfortunately, not always an IT Project Manager can get the best resource fit for his/her requirements considering skills, experience and alignment with individual aspirations. However, for Tier-1 Service based firms, where resource pool is more along with good bench strength (average 15-20% including trainees), IT Project Managers might get some room for detailed profile evaluation before confirming anyone for his/her project.

To take early advantage, Project Managers can design a matrix with the job profiles of his/her projects against compatible aspirations govern by any specific experience band as shown in Table 6.

Table 6 should be considered as indicative guideline, further study could include other attributes like skills and aptitude to derive the mappings. Project Managers can consider deriving such matrix for his/her projects by analyzing project and organizational ability to fulfill any particular aspiration mentioned in Table 5. Upfront development of such table would help the Project Manager to save the effort at the later stages of the project.

It is also the fact that among three distinct fundamental areas of life likes Personal, Social and Professional, the aspirations associated those get changed along with the change in life's phases. From Table 5, it is clearly visible that IT workforce are more focused towards their professional aspirations at the early phases of their career but the priority gets rapidly shifted towards Personal and Social after getting married or becoming parent.

Table 6: Sample Job Profile VS Aspirations of the workforce

Sample Job Profile	0-5 Years	5-8 Years	8-10 Years
Execution complexities on standard technologies where learning happens mostly through experiences		√	√
Niche technologies with self-learning ability	√	√	
Long running Production Support role at offshore under streamlined process		√	√
Development in new domain & technology where tight delivery timelines are expected	√	√	
Complex solution design in new domain from offshore		√	√
Role comes with senior designation			√
Onsite position for longer duration	√	√	
Domestic mobility with strong and quick issue fixing skills	√		
Stressful assignment at offshore, need experience but with onsite commitment	√	√	

## FUTURE ROADMAP

Given the diversification of Indian society, it is important that this study covers more attributes along with rapidly changing IT business environment. The new visa law in US if gets mandated then surely would have impact in most of the workforces' onsite aspiration. IT industry in India mostly concentrated in few cities but majority of the workforce come from different parts of the country, they also bring different cultural flavors and mindsets. "In many castes in India, number of visits to foreign countries made by a boy substantially defines the amount of dowry he can command in his marriage." [11] Therefore, more detail analysis with demographic details also would help the IT Project Managers to make more accurate predictions about his/her team members' aspiration upfront and necessary correction at the early stages of the project execution.

## CONCLUSION

Each IT project has unique nature and needs different commitments from its resources, however, at longer term, individuals join IT industry with certain perceptions and buildup their aspirations in personal, professional and social aspects. It has been the common observations that Indian IT industry has given tremendous opportunities to its young professionals to realize their aspirations within very short span of time. The rapid shift of aspirations from one aspect to another impacts associates' motivational level for the job that he/she is performing currently and

very often creates conflicts between individual and project goals.

For IT Project Managers, Human Resources are the key to deliver the services or solutions. At every level of project life cycle, workforce commitment brings extra value and ensures the success of the project. For the Project Manager, it is important that he/she brings the right re-sources in the project where project goals have no conflict with individual aspirations. This ideally brings naturally committed and motivated workforce.

The guideline and framework presented in this paper for IT Project Managers should be taken in greater context of the Indian IT Industry but the same principle can be used to derive very specific situational framework at project or any firm level.

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