

# 'HR will have to play a critical role'

**NAMRATA GILL TYAGI** tells you that it is time that organisations look at every stage of an employee's journey and invest in their career

**W**ith the Government recently approving the Bill to double maternity leave, allowing work from home for nursing mothers and mandating employers to provide crèche facilities for all employees, we have already taken a step in the right direction. To empower them further, HR now must look at every stage of an employee's journey with the company — right from attracting talent, engaging and investing in their development to providing them with the long-term support that their careers may require.

**Creating platforms and policies for returning mothers:** Organisations lose out on an incredible talent pool because they do not have a support structure in place for women who are rearing to get back into work mode post their maternity break. One way in which organisations reach out to returning mothers is through platforms like comeback career for women, where they provide career opportunities to women who had taken a break to devote more time and energy to the demands of their personal lives.

This needs to be supported by a strong policy framework that allows for extending maternity breaks and part-time options as the option to seek exemption from the bell curve. To create a more inclusive work environment and allow men to participate in the parenting process, policies must also allow for and encourage paternity breaks. This empowers couples in the co-parenting process and ensures that women are not the sole care-givers in their families.

**Engaging our women:** There is need to continually seek innovative and creative approaches to engage and develop women employees. They need to align their vision with business and co-create programmes that will help them raise their aspirations, gain greater visibility and support them as they achieve their stretch assignments.

Speed mentoring, especially for women mentees at mid



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management levels and senior male mentors is an interesting strategy that HR can institutionalise within their organisations. It not only gives women the visibility and sponsorship that they will require to work their way up the corporate ladder, but also equip them with the skills, advice and resources that they will need to succeed once they get there.

By mentoring women, the men also get an opportunity to work closely with them, and become champions of diversity thereby creating a cascade effect within the entire organisation.

**Providing long-term support:** For mothers who are back into the rhythm of office life, the next challenge is to ensure their career trajectory is on track. The key to retaining women post their maternity break is providing them a policy framework which acknowledges their concerns and supports them through it all.

Providing maternity counselling, encouraging employees to volunteer as "buddy mothers" who support soon-to-be mothers and gestures like congratulation cards go a long way in building support.

**The push for gender diversity:** Any society that fails to harness the energy and creativity of its women is at a huge disadvantage in the modern world. With 2020 almost here, it is absolutely imperative for HR today to ensure that while they are maximising their talent's potential, they are doing so in ways which are inclusive, empowering and enabling.