

Paradigm Shift in Accountancy Profession— Towards New Horizons



Today, the Chartered Accountancy profession boasts of nearly 60% of professionals in the age group below 40. These are professionals who are now aspiring to become leaders of business and business influencers. Today, these young professionals come with different aspirations. Some of the key attributes of these young professionals must be recognised and ways to highlight, edify and constantly build on these must be the endeavour of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India. The key attributes which are conspicuous in these young professionals are: 'Willingness and Ability to use technology,' 'Strong need to succeed, with a strong need for speed,' 'Willing to work with others with complementary skills,' 'Mobility,' and 'Desire to create and work in a niche area'..

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) is a statutory body established under the Chartered Accountants Act, 1949 (Act No. XXXVIII of 1949) for the regulation of the profession of Chartered Accountants in India. During its 64 years of existence, ICAI has achieved recognition as a premier accounting body not only in the country but also globally, for its contribution in the fields of education, professional development, maintenance of high accounting, auditing and ethical standards. ICAI now is the second largest accounting body in the whole world.

It is also the single autonomous body which is responsible for regulating, training and setting standards for accounting and auditing which every member is obliged to follow. The ICAI holds complete responsibility to enrich the profession.



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With a total of more than 2,24,000 members and a very large number of students pursuing this course, it is a professional course, much coveted by students and society. Considered to be a “tough” course, it is one of the most “fee-friendly” professional courses in the world today.

“The Growth and Development of People is the highest calling of leadership”

In line with this, the ICAI has been constantly working for the benefit of members and students. It has been growing, in terms of reach, in terms of numbers to whom it caters, also in terms of the services it offers.

Today's World – A Paradigm Shift

What is the purpose of any enterprise? It is to use all resources optimally for the benefit of the organisation, generate profit, wealth, in a sustainable and ethical manner. Therefore, recognising, utilising and where necessary, training human resources for roles which are complementary to their natural skills are actually a no-brainer.

Today, more than ever before, managing resources and getting full value of investments is becoming crucial. In this context, using all human resources to create lasting value is gaining more importance. Women form

an important part of the work force and professional services, so it is becoming extremely necessary to look at gender diversity with a clearer focus.

Why Gender Diversity? Till 30 to 50 years ago, were not businesses being run by men and pretty successfully at that? Why do we now need to talk of women joining the workforce? Why do we need to encourage more women professionals to come up the ladder and take on leadership roles?

Today's world has undergone a paradigm shift. Yesterday's world included businesses where businesses tried to do everything themselves even if it was not their core competency, where loyalty of human resources was considered to be for sale, where communication was essentially external and primarily top down, where services given by professionals were used by businesses to further profits and "stay within the confines of law". Yesterday's world was brick-and-mortar-driven and physical presence was important.

However, look at today's world. Today, competition is more about differentiation and complementing other businesses, everyone is looking to outsource non-core competency areas, professional services are valued for their effect today and in the future, communication is crucial both internally and 360°, human resources have to be "kept happy" and are not only motivated by money *etc.*

In these different times, we need professionals with different skills. We need professionals who are able to multi-task, who are sensitive and empathetic, who can make and regulate effective teams. We need communication which is effective, and humane. We need professionals who can look at things in a different perspective.

Today, businesses cannot work in isolation as there are complex interdependencies. Therefore, the skills of multi-tasking and man-management has become crucial. Women are able to multi-task, and manage difficult teams on account of their innate ability to communicate better, sensitive understanding and empathetic behaviour. Traditionally, a mixed group of workforce, has constantly increased responsible behaviour, higher value systems, and more controlled environments.

Today, Differentiation has replaced plain Competition. Differentiating your product or service from the others is crucial for survival. Women professionals, because of their innate ability to intuitively find ways to create this differentiation, can be a boon to the workplace.

Earlier, communication was primarily external, to the marketplace and to the shareholders. But, today's world demands intense, complex, clear and concise communication within businesses. Women are better at communication than men, both in terms of vocabulary and usage of expressions. This is a fact borne out by many studies. About 80% of the teachers of language studies the world over are women. Creating value within the communication chain in organisations, women can effortlessly work toward creating better workplaces, reducing stress, misunderstandings. Today, HR functions double up as communication centres for internal communication, ensuring that the right message is being sent out to keep the employees constantly motivated and enthused about the business.

The way a woman professional approaches a subject, analyses an issue, puts across a point, and leads a team is different. Women leaders/professionals manage teams better through complementing, encouraging, focussing on strengths, *etc.* In today's world, this approach of being complementary (not only competitive), inclusive (not exclusive), participative (not only aggressive) is becoming a strong need of all industries and services.

Therefore, it is becoming more imperative that we include a larger number of women professionals within various organisations.

The ICAI seems to be becoming aware of this and is planning to bring in effective measures of ensuring that the gender diversity is managed well within the profession.

The ICAI is planning to take measures, which are slow but sure steps towards setting the right environment to encourage Women Empowerment.

1. *Recognition of professional (women) achievers:* Recognition of professional contribution (by women) can be a great example to set, for others



to follow. Recognition of women contributors in various fields can set the tenor for organisations to follow suit. Recognition by professional bodies is a great endorsement and will constantly increase contribution by those so recognised. It is an established fact that women place higher value on such recognition by peers and colleagues.

2. Today, an Institution of leadership and standard setting like the ICAI should look at creating more women leaders by offering specialised training programmes to polish the skills of woman professionals. These focussed training programmes in the areas of Communication, Body Language, Interpersonal skills *etc.*, can be a great fillip, as it would be building on the natural skills of the women professionals.

There was a time when training was given to individuals to “overcome” their weakness areas. However, today behavioural scientists suggest that training should focus on areas of strength, so that the best contribution can be achieved. It is infructuous to offer training in areas where the individual does not have any skills or ability. Innumerable studies have been conducted on both children as well as adults which have established that focussing on strengths along with positive affirmations produces positive results. One such exercise used is the Pat’s Push Exercise.

3. *Women Directors:* The business world today looks at Institutions like ICAI to provide access to professionals who could function as Independent directors. The Institution must train and recognise such women professionals who could function as Independent Directors in an exemplary manner, bringing value to both the Industry as well as the profession.

No woman professional wants to be included in any committee, forum, or professional body only on account of her gender. It is an undeniable fact that women in general and women professionals in particular bring extraordinary value to the workplace.

Young Professionals

Today, the Chartered Accountancy profession boasts of nearly 60% of professionals in the age group below 40. These are professionals who are now aspiring to become leaders of business and business influencers.

These young professionals today come with different aspirations. Some of the key attributes of these young professionals must be recognised and

ways to highlight, edify and constantly build on these must be the endeavour of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India.

The key attributes which are conspicuous in these young professionals are:

1. Willingness and ability to use technology.
2. Strong need to succeed with a strong need for speed.
3. Willing to work with others with complementary skills.
4. Mobility.
5. Desire to create and work in a niche area.

Surely there are many more, but these are the ones which the ICAI should look at catering to, to create a vibrant, focussed, and charged professional body, which can constantly live up to its “nation building” responsibility.

The ICAI has already started on this journey by delivering continuing education programmes. It has active chapters in the regions in brick and mortar form.

Today, it is a matter of pride for us Chartered accountants that we have many avenues of training and updating of relevant statutes and their practical application through digital media.

It has begun as a sure start. It needs to become more robust with a different focus and perspective. Today, we do have webinars, but they need to become more frequent to cover a larger group and diverse subjects. It must include speakers from other similar professional bodies from around the world, so that the young professionals can get an international perspective.

There are many more areas which can further enhance the experience of young professionals. The ICAI must create more leadership cores, focus on research in accounting and auditing areas, foster an environment of interdependent disciplines, create better avenues of employability.

The ICAI also needs to work on creating a better public image, because one of the strong compellers for young professionals is the “pride of association”. Young professionals feel the value when they belong to a body which is socially exalted and globally recognised and respected.

Mentorship

Typically, when a student goes through a good educational institution, he/she has access to senior, seasoned individuals who fill in the role of a mentor. As the Chartered accountancy course is not a

“campus-bound” curriculum, this aspect is sacrificed.

The ICAI must create mentorship programmes where young chartered accountants can be mentored to become highly accomplished, capable and contributing individuals. This mentorship will provide the mentee the ability to dream big, to look at different perspectives, and create a larger canvas for themselves. The mentors could be professionals with years of rich experience, willing and able to mentor young professionals and pass on valuable guidance and tips to create a better working world.

This MENTORING role can be a differentiator in our profession. In a few years, the mentees will become mentors, constantly reviving and rejuvenating the profession.

The axiom, “A society is only as good as it gives”, would surely apply to the Chartered accountancy profession as well.

Practice or employment

When a person enrolls for the Chartered accountants course, they are often not very clear on whether they would like to go into employment or take up practice of the profession.

Of course, both have their own benefits and disadvantages. More importantly, they require different skills and abilities. It will be great to have senior professionals share their experiences, thoughts, and views on each of these areas.

Aptitude Assessment

The Institute can consider having assessment procedures which young professionals can take to help make up their mind on whether their skills lie better in the area of employment or practice. This would have a compounding beneficial effect on the entire profession and the professionals. This would have a great significance by using behavioural sciences and technology to create a future guidance path.

Even at a later date, there must be ways in which a professional can work out a way of getting into practice, if they so desire. By getting involved in this process, the Institute will be able to knit a closer bond with its members.

Let's talk about YOU

There is a lovely proverb: “If you want something different, then do something different”. All of us professionals are fired with the need to succeed, to make a mark, to make a difference. And for that



each of us have to find our niche area and cross the frontiers, forge a way ahead and create our own place in the sun.

Personally, we may all have different goals. Professionally too, we have different objectives. Some of us are leaders, creating more and better opportunities for growth. Some of us professionals are in the industry (employment), with its own set of seemingly dichotomous expectations. Some of us are professionals in practice, battling it day in and day out, working with government departments and functionaries. Some of us are consultants, working in an advisory capacity, calling on high-end abilities of analysis, interpretation and execution.

Today, each one of us has to take responsibility of our future. We, as professionals and members of the ICAI, must work together to create lasting value. We should participate in the various efforts by the ICAI and where necessary, bring about change. A wonderful message comes to mind:

*“There are those who watch and say “what happened”
There are those who do and say “I made it happen”.
It is for each of us to decide where we want to be.....”*

To grow, one must constantly move forward. Progress is to move forward, emphatically, effectively and with purpose. It is not enough to exist or to survive. At a professional level and at a personal level, we all need to move ahead, to grow and more importantly, cross new frontiers.

*“Growth does not mean leaving things behind us...
but finding things within us”. ■*