



**NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY
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FACULTY OF COMMERCE, HUMAN SCIENCES AND EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

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DURATION: 3 HOURS	MARKS: 100

SUPPLEMENTARY EXAMINATION	
EXAMINER(S)	DR. CHRIS VAN ZYL MR. MOSES SHUUYA
MODERATOR:	MR. ERNEST MBANGA

INSTRUCTIONS
1. Answer ALL the questions. 2. Write clearly and neatly. 3. Number the answers clearly.

PERMISSIBLE MATERIALS

1. Business calculator
2. The case study

THIS EXAMINATION PAPER CONSISTS OF 2 PAGES (Including this front page and case study)

QUESTION 1

- (a) Analyse the attached case study “**IT.INTEGRATOR**” and present a detailed case analysis report containing references to all the relevant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The recommendations should include suggestions of how the current innovation strategy could be adapted to provide **IT.INTEGRATOR** with an alternative successful innovation strategy. The suggested changes to the current innovation strategy(s) must be well justified and motivated. The recommendations should furthermore be very specific about how the strengths and opportunities that were identified are to be utilized to improve or eliminate the identified weaknesses and to minimize the effect of the identified threats on the enterprise’s performance.

The following report headings need to be included in your final answer:

- | | |
|---|------------|
| (a) Executive summary | [10 marks] |
| (b) Introduction | [5 marks] |
| (c) SWOT analysis | [30 marks] |
| (d) Problems/Challenges identification and discussion | [15 marks] |
| (e) Proposed Action Plan | [20 marks] |
| (f) Conclusions | [10 marks] |
| (g) Recommendations | [10 marks] |

TOTAL MARKS: 100

Making IT.Integrator a woman-friendly company

Oksana Kukuruza, Natalia Golovkina and Nadia Omelchenko

In early 2021, Nadia Omelchenko, the Vice President of IT.Integrator, the largest Ukrainian system integrator and a leader on the Ukrainian IT market, faced an unexpected challenge. Her executive team members started questioning her thus-far successful programs and initiatives aimed at women's career advancement. They were worried that resources invested in those programs were an unaffordable expense given the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, many women in the company seemed to be following the stereotypical path of prioritizing family over work, as they were under the pressure of intensified caregiving caused by the pandemic.

In 2020, lockdowns were being imposed and lifted, and distance working practices were evolving. In the IT sector, most employees adjusted easily to the situation. Most women opted for working from home and infrequent attendance at in-office, face-to-face meetings because of increased family responsibilities. However, for managers and high-level professionals, regardless of gender, remote work was practically impossible.

This situation gave male executives grounds to challenge the existence of initiatives aimed at women's development. Sales director Oleksandr Pilipchuk stressed that the whole idea of women's promotion was a waste of time because in critical situations they prioritized family obligations and neglected their managerial responsibilities.

One of Omelchenko's main tasks was to secure the company's ability to recruit and retain the best talent and reinforce the company's position in the market. This was not an easy task, even for a company that was an IT leader in the country. As in many emerging economies, a serious skill shortage was the common refrain in Ukraine. Many employers were facing the need to offer more than just monetary remuneration, which was a new experience for them. Moreover, many Ukrainian IT companies were competing with international companies with more financial resources and policies in place for retaining talent.

She saw that, in the medium and long terms, the company would limit its access to the available talent pool and lose its own human resources unless women's career problems were tackled. Such disregard for HR policies could have jeopardized the company's medium- and long-term business objectives.

Omelchenko once again had to put her career at risk as in 2017, when she became vice president of IT.Integrator and set out to implement the first-ever development programs for women. This time she had to secure her initiatives and make them part of the company's culture and fabric.

Omelchenko reflected on how to keep women career advancement programs in place without compromising the company's performance. Winning back her peers from the top management team support was her other concern.

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Disclaimer. This case is written solely for educational purposes and is not intended to represent successful or unsuccessful managerial decision-making. The authors may have disguised names; financial and other recognizable information to protect confidentiality.

IT.Integrator

IT.Integrator was founded in 2000. By the time Omelchenko was appointed vice president, the company had become the top leader of the system integration segment of the Ukrainian IT market. In 2019 and 2020, the TOP 100 publication ranked the company as a top system integrator in Ukraine. *Networks & Business*, the most reputable national industry publication, has ranked IT-Integrator as the leading nationwide system integrator since 2017.

The company targets large and medium private and public sector organizations operating in Ukraine. Metinvest, an international steel and mining group, ABInBev Ukraine, Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, Ukrainian National Railways and Sumy National University, just to mention a few, are among its clients. On the other side of the operations, IT.Integrator has forged partnerships with such international vendors as Cisco, Microsoft, DellEMC and HPE.

Unlike the majority of firms in the industry, the company has diversified its revenue streams. Its main areas of business are IT infrastructure, network infrastructure, information security, data centers, management and monitoring centers, engineering infrastructure, service support, IT outsourcing, solutions for education, smart city solutions and cloud services.

Of the 280 employees working at IT.Integrator in 2017, only 73 were women. Although they were represented at various levels of the corporate hierarchy, most of them held junior positions. Only 10 women were line managers, while one woman held the position of regional director in Dnipropetrovsk province in central Ukraine. The ratio of men to women varied depending on age group. In the most economically active group aged 31–50 years, 72% were men and 28% were women. However, in the youngest age group of employees under 30, the ratio of men to women was more equal, with 59% men and 41% women. Most of the women have been recruited since 2017.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a mostly negative effect on the company; although like many IT companies, IT.Integrator has been growing after a brief dip in early 2020. However, the workforce has reported difficulties caused by the lockdowns and working from home. An in-company survey in 2020 showed that 72% of female employees suffered from anxiety; 40% could not perform because they needed to take care of children; 80% had to do homeschooling and so could not leave their children unsupervised.

The company has followed the strict requirements laid out by Ukrainian legislation, which is employee-protective. In particular, parents are entitled to four months of maternity leave, one year of paid vacation to take care of children younger than 12 months. Parents may also take childcare leave for up to three years without risk of dismissal. Parents with school-age children are entitled to additional holiday time.

Although the legislation reads “parents”, it is women whom Ukrainian society usually expects to stay at home with their babies for at least a year. Very few, if any, fathers sacrifice their careers to stay at home with their children. The situation was similar at IT.Integrator. No men took parental leave, but five women did.

When Omelchenko took up the post of vice-president, it was clear that although legislation provided a range of protection instruments, those instruments did not facilitate the development of women’s careers. Long breaks in career development impeded professional and leadership growth. Family obligations were viewed as career obstacles that excluded women from informal professional networking and participation in professional development programs. Lack of women in leadership positions meant a deficit of role models for ambitious female professionals. The situation needed to change.

Nadia Omelchenko

A happily married mother of two, Nadia Omelchenko is an excellent role model for women pursuing careers. She is a Vice President at IT.Integrator, a market leader.

She started her career path in a manner typical for women of her generation. After earning a degree in English from Kyiv National Linguistic University, Omelchenko took a job as a personal assistant in the IT-Service company. She worked in HR, climbing up the corporate ladder and moving horizontally as well. She has worked for startups, real estate companies and professional services in HR management and general management functions.

Her previous experience confirmed that women's career failures tended to result from their limited access to development programs and promotion opportunities, lack of role models and advocates of female advancement in management, gender stereotyping and attempting to balance family and work obligations.

When Omelchenko joined IT.Integrator in 2017, she was the only woman executive. Moreover, the top management team suffered from unconscious bias against women. When promotion issues were considered, women candidates were rejected because they were believed to prioritize family obligations over managerial responsibilities or take career breaks for having children.

It was opposite to global trends. Unlike IT.Integrator, the world was moving towards inclusivity and increased representation of women in top positions.

Omelchenko also understood that the situation in the company required a comprehensive approach that deals more with cultural issues rather than regulatory challenges. First, women were not represented on the executive teams. That led to situations whereby women were seen as unsuitable candidates for managerial positions because they were believed to prioritize family obligations. The risk of women-managers taking long parental leave or even exiting the company's workforce was considered to be too great for women to be promoted. When Omelchenko joined the leadership team, she became a role model and advocate of ambitious female employees. She introduced systemic programs aimed at unlocking women's potential.

Second, women needed access to development programs. This was a relatively easy challenge to overcome because Omelchenko herself introduced a comprehensive system of professional development. She designed the system in such a way that provided access to professional development programs for all employees through mandatory attendance of the in-company seminars followed by testing and screening of participants.

Third, many ambitious women were not always ready for senior positions. They needed to be mentored to face the challenge. Therefore, Omelchenko designed special programs on leadership for women.

Fourth, combining family and working obligations has always been a challenge. Omelchenko addressed the issue by designing a special program aimed at helping women to adapt at the workplace after their maternity leave ended and a program designed to promote the value of family obligations for men.

Fifth, Omelchenko tackled the problem of gender stereotyping by launching relevant initiatives.

Not everyone approved of her activities. Some executives belittled her efforts. Even the CEO of the company once referred to her initiatives as "Nadia's new toy". Many regional directors resisted silently by blocking women's promotions and their access to the development programs and succession pipeline.

To combat this resistance, Omelchenko "fine-tuned" the company's bylaws on management development and presented the changes as an improvement to the management development policy. This turned out to be a good way to get executive team members on board.

To change the prevailing dismissive attitude toward her initiatives, which was critical, Omelchenko transformed the initiatives themselves into working instruments. She tried to

foster a willingness to change behaviors rather than applying coercive measures. In some cases, internal communications were enough. Sometimes, more active steps were needed, like checking regional offices for compliance with the competencies approach in selecting candidates for management development programs to stop sabotaging women's participation in career development programs because of them having babies.

Eventually, the male CIO and CFO came to realize that her actions had value, since the company was suffering from a talent drain, as women were leaving due to the lack of career prospects. Both men actively participated in executing and promoting her programs for women. The HR and Administration director together with the new PR director joined the in-company campaign.

Toward equal opportunities in the IT sector

The Ukrainian IT market is very attractive to young people. According to The Global Innovation Index (2017), Ukraine joined the top 50 most innovative countries in the world. IT is one of the fastest-growing industries in Ukraine. According to the IT Ukraine Association, the sector is growing at a rate of 11%–26% annually, well above the global average, in terms of financial results and number of specialists.

The Ukrainian IT industry is globally very competitive. According to Ukrainian IT Industry Report, most of the industry's customers are located abroad. Some 50% of revenues are generated by US- and UK-based clients, while the rest comes from Germany, Canada, Israel, Sweden and Switzerland.

Remuneration levels that are comparable with its neighbors and low tax rates for the self-employed make Ukraine an attractive place to work. Although other countries may be perceived as having better living conditions or social security, they often fail to offer a better net personal income for IT professionals.

The Ukrainian Tech Market Report (2021) mentioned that as of 2021, a quarter of all tech professionals in Ukraine were women. In 2019, the Ukrainian Venture Capital and Private Equity Association reviewed the gender situation in those startups, which had raised capital, finding that some 26% of those companies were co-founded by women. At the same time globally, only 20% of IT startups were founded or co-founded by women (Teare, G., 2020).

According to a gender study made by GlobalLogic, the number of women in the IT sector has quadrupled from 9,000 to 40,000 over the past five years. At the year-end 2019, women held 24% of the jobs in the sector.

Both men and women in IT are attracted by the considerable career opportunities, high salaries, flexible work hours, good teams and the chance to work in other countries. And while IT professionals on the whole are happy with their salaries, according to a DOU survey in 2011–2017, men were overwhelmingly paid more than women. According to the report Information Technology Average Salaries in Ukraine(2021), male IT employees in Ukraine earned 8% more than their female counterparts on average in 2020.

Women are often impeded on their way to the top positions (Klasen *et al.*, 2015; Singh, 2017). Men dominate software development, business operations and systems administration, holding over 90% of those jobs. More than a third of designers, QA specialists, business analysts and project managers are women. Nearly one third of women have a "junior" title, whereas only 12% (or half that of men) hold a "senior" title.

Specific actions taken

In her interview for this case study, Omelchenko explained why she decided to embark on a path to unlocking women's potential in the IT sector.

She said that she had been very aware of the gender imbalance in the Ukrainian white-collar sectors since the very start of her career. Women were mostly rank-and-file employees in service functions such as HR, administration and PR, whereas men tended to be managers. When she was promoted to managerial positions, she would often hear denigrating comments about women's managerial or professional abilities. She mentioned that even now she sometimes hears such talk.

In her opinion, spending money on developing female employees looked like an unnecessary expense only at the first glance. In the mid- and long-term perspectives, it has proven to be an investment with healthy return. Her actions are supported by numerous studies, which show that companies with diverse representation, especially with balanced gender representation, tended to perform better than their rivals.

She well understood that regulatory mechanisms were good for protecting employees, but not good enough for promotion. It was a question of fostering a cultural shift.

Omelchenko mentioned that her background in education, psychology and languages was very helpful in deciding how to proceed with her programs. In her opinion, education was an essential tool she used to solve many problems, and this was why she launched several educational initiatives, which evolved into a comprehensive program.

Transformations require not only great effort and many resources (Kanter, R.M., Stein, B.A., Jick, T.D., 1992) but also the support of top management. It was only after she secured support from the CIO and CFO did Omelchenko launch her initiatives.

She also understood very well that unless, as a leader, she enlisted strong agents of change, her efforts would not have amounted to much. Thus, the PR, HR and Administration directors served as the program ambassadors.

Omelchenko launched in-company programs for women aimed at securing equal career opportunities and professional development for men as well as women and leadership programs for women.

Since 2017, the following in-company programs for women were implemented:

Professional development program (2017)

This annual program was designed to develop the company's succession pipeline. The program consisted of two parts: external and internal. Internally, the company's rank-and-file engineers and representatives of administrative functions were screened, and talent was selected and tested via workshops on managerial skills and the latest trends in the IT sector. Each workshop series ended with an assessment that, when combined with standard reviews, helped to identify talent and determine how to use it. At the external stage of the leadership and professional development programs, future executives and engineers were offered educational programs at other companies.

Those selected for managerial careers embarked on programs at respected Ukrainian business schools. Those interested in an engineering career path took courses held by other prominent vendors – the partners of IT-Integrator. IT-Integrator covered 100% of tuition fees. Both engineers and managers were encouraged to participate in conferences and training held by industrial associations and regulators.

In redesigning the program that existed only formally, Omelchenko incorporated a clause banning the rejection of candidates who qualify for participation and promotion because of their gender. There had been cases where qualified female candidates were rejected because it was felt that their family commitments would outweigh their work obligations.

Leadership program for women (2017)

Although this program was designed for both women and men, Omelchenko added a special component: annual workshops dedicated to issues important to women. These workshops were conducted by leading experts and always had a women-oriented approach. The course in female leadership run by melchenko was an integral part of the program.

Tailoring programs to suit women's needs highlighted women's opportunities for promotion (Sandberg, S., 2013). Men were also encouraged to participate in these workshops, as the program was also focused on combating gender stereotypes.

Out of the 19 participants who also took managerial programs at MIM-Kyiv, 30% were women. Among the program participants who were starting careers in engineering, the share of women was the same.

As the result, women started applying for promotion. Out of 13 newly promoted women, five applied for the promotion themselves. Iryna Nazarenko, who was promoted to client support director in 2019, said that she had been thinking about finding a new job in a company that offered more career opportunities because women who were interested in promotion to managerial positions at IT-Integrator were being ignored. When Omelchenko announced that women were welcome to apply for the new opening, Nazarenko did so and stayed with the company.

Managerial career promotion program (2018)

Executives-to-be were expected to have a solid management education background. Therefore, every two years prospective and current managers were given the chance to study at MIM-Kyiv, the most highly regarded national business school. Those who already held management positions took the MBA or Senior Executive MBA program. Those expecting to be promoted to management took non-degree, nine-month, functional pre-MBA programs. Since 2018, four out of ten MIM-Kyiv graduates were women.

Work-wise, future executives were expected to have hands-on experience in the various functions of the company. All candidates for managerial positions ran projects or worked as first-line supervisors in at least two areas. This approach allowed candidates to acquire a comprehensive picture of IT-Integrator's business.

Adaptation program for women returning from maternity leave (2018)

In Ukrainian society, women are expected to take maternity leave when they have children. However, returning to the workforce is not always easy. Launched in 2018, the adaptation program complemented the measures required by Ukrainian legislation. Under this program, returnees were encouraged to put in 40-hour work weeks but were offered flexible schedules so that they could keep up with family obligations and be paid their full salary. In addition, new mother-members of the promotion programs continued to participate in those programs and were entitled to promotion, regardless of maternity leave.

Olena Masliy-Shishova, HR director for IT.Integrator, explained that, unlike many companies that avoid employing women after maternity leave, IT.Integrator acted differently, hiring women even after long breaks taking care of their young families. Maternity leave did not compromise career opportunities at IT.Integrator. In fact, one employee who returned from maternity leave was promoted in less than half a year.

Life and career balance program (2018)

Ensuring a life-career balance helps to maintain high performance. IT.Integrator launched the HBO (HealthyBalancedOffice) mentoring program to prevent burnout or the departures

of talented women who had trouble balancing their families and careers. This annual program consisted of classes led by well-being experts, group sessions with psychologists and meditation. The cost of the program was covered by the company. So far, 45 women and 45 men took part in the program. The mix of genders ensured equal access for women to corporate benefits and helped to secure steady performance.

Program against gender stereotyping (2019)

The program against gender stereotyping fell into two categories: public education activities and administrative measures. For the public education part, IT.Integrator incorporated topics promoting workforce diversity into their in-house workshops and seminars. In addition, employees were encouraged to join an initiative that supports girls' participation in STEM programs providing academic supervision of students' research on gender and diversity issues. Moreover, IT.Integrator participated in gender equality and HR diversity research, and disseminated the results of this research by uploading the reports on its intranet.

Both men and women have been entitled to take maternity or paternity leave since 2017, one year before this option was added to the national regulatory framework. In addition, IT.Integrator implemented a procedure for reporting cases of gender-based violations. Anyone who witnessed or suffered from a gender-based violation could file a complaint with Omelchenko, who then launches an investigation.

According to Stanislav Yablonsky, PR manager of IT.Integrator, the company supported any activities aimed at promoting female talent. He also said that he was proud of what the company was doing to keep up with the latest global trends. He noted that they sometimes envied Western companies that had well-established rules and policies that support women's careers. As a pioneer, IT.Integrator had to deal with not only male bias but also female bias. His career in PR was an example of the reverse breaking of stereotypes, as Ukrainians tend to assume that PR is a woman's domain.

Mentorship programs

These programs were designed to nurture leadership and managerial skills. Some 64% of mentors and 60% of mentees have been women. These numbers revealed the considerable leadership potential among women working in the company.

Experience exchange program (2020)

This program was launched to encourage horizontal career movement. Within this program, women can spend time in other departments to upgrade their skills, improve their understanding of what the company is doing, and enhance cross-functional cooperation. During the pilot program, HR staff updated their understanding of finance, while marketing people improved their understanding of purchasing and logistics.

Changes to existing practices

Omelchenko also launched a clear and gender-balance targeted promotion system. The requirements for promotion were clearly explained in the company's bylaws. The HR committee considered promotions every quarter. Employees usually had to wait from six months to three years to get promoted. According to the company's remuneration system, employees holding the same position were paid the same salary.

Achieved results and future challenges

The mere fact of discussing gender problems openly was a big step for the company. Agreement on the launch of development programs for women and programs against gender stereotyping was another important result. Thus, the number of women recruited, retained and promoted without compromising the company's performance was considered to be one of the success indicators.

In early 2021, the retention rate among women employees was 88.5%. Four women now hold executive positions, compared to just one when Omelchenko joined IT.Integrator in 2017. The number of women in middle management and engineering increased from 36 in to 49 over the same period. Although the 33% attrition rate of women was still high, it was lower than the 41.5% registered in 2019. Some 80% of the women who left joined other companies, 5.7% moved abroad, and 5.7% were dismissed. In their exit interviews, the women mentioned that they were leaving for better salaries and the opportunity to work outside Ukraine.

In 2018, the Technology Pact for Women in the STEM initiative recognized IT.Integrator as the first female-friendly technology company. It assessed such women development and career advancement drivers as loyalty programs, development activities, social security and gender balance.

In 2019, IT.Integrator was among the 12 companies and 2 business associations that signed the Pact for Gender Equality and against Domestic Abuse. The signatories announced their intention to implement gender-sensitive approaches to business operations and gender equality in the workplace.

Women development programs proved to be successful. Not only have they facilitated women's careers and helped retain staff – against the odds during the pandemic – but they also helped to establish other valuable practices. One of those was the Mentoring Program launched in 2020. This program offered all employees the opportunity to upgrade their skills. Female employees particularly appreciated this program, and today, 64% of the mentors and 60% of the mentees are women.

IT.Integrator's reputation as an employer was solid. It was considered to be female-friendly and ageism-free.

Business wise, development programs also proved to be successful. The company was ranked #1 nationwide in 2019 and 2020, after the women-oriented programs were launched.

However, Omelchenko had a feeling that the journey toward equal opportunities was not finished. The COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdowns, coupled with increased economic and social pressure, proved her concerns. The very first disturbance triggered doubts from the executive team. Her male counterparts doubted that her efforts were good for business. They pointed out that women were ready to abandon their career aspirations to take care of their families.

Omelchenko was convinced that excluding women from career opportunities would help neither the IT.Integrator's immediate financial results nor its future business successes. Her challenge was to find instruments that secure equal opportunities for women under any circumstances.

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