

An investigative study of the glass ceiling effect in relation with gender bias on the career development of women in organizations

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ABSTRACT: Growing opportunities for women are less when compared to men which shows that there exists significant gender bias for developmental opportunities in organizations. Also, there is the evidence that employers are beginning to promote women more comprehensively and to introduce family-friendly policies in order to attract and retain them, in spite of all these benefits, women found it difficult to break through an effect generally termed as 'glass ceiling.' The glass ceiling is a strong narrow hindrance of transparent nature intercepts women from hiking up the corporate ladder. The study is aimed at achieving the facts and guidelines in working environment that promises that the equal employment opportunity for the employees' especially female employees should prevail. The study is an investigative one focussing the problem of the effect of glass ceiling on women career development based on the theoretical framework built up using the information from literature survey. The paper attempts to identify factors which contribute to the glass ceiling in turn affect women career advancement and targets at finding out which factor from the identified factors contribute more hindrance to the career advancement opportunity for women. The real purpose of this study was to investigate the reasons for the lack of promotion of women to top management levels in the society and to break the glass ceiling by fixing the gender bias in an organization.

Keywords: Glass ceiling, diversity, bias, career growth, gender stereotypes

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I. INTRODUCTION

Women constitute half of the world's population, and greater number of women are entering the workforce every year. Although women are being recruited from associate level to earning promotions, they face barriers throughout the workplace. Regardless of the discussions about diversity and inclusion in organizations, women in leadership roles are still in the minority and they are getting fewer opportunities than their male counterparts to portray their full potential. They have to work harder and prove themselves continuously as they work their way up to senior levels in organization. There exists a widespread issue of gender bias with respect to career progression of women in big corporations. Growing opportunities for women are less when compared to men which shows that there exists significant gender bias for developmental opportunities in organizations. Also, there is the evidence that employers are beginning to promote women more comprehensively and to introduce family-friendly policies in order to attract and retain them, in spite of all these benefits, women found it difficult to break through an effect generally termed as 'glass ceiling.' The glass ceiling is a strong narrow hindrance of transparent nature intercepts women from hiking up the corporate ladder. It can be described as a pseudonymous peak in organizations, and is difficult to overhead or even impossible for women to achieve the highest ranks. "Glass ceiling" is a widely used analogy for the unachievable informal barriers that halts women from getting promoted or gaining further opportunities in leadership positions. As of Report on the Glass Ceiling Initiative, it is defined as "those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevents qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions. "This invisible barrier continues to exist, even though there are no direct obstacles keeping low level employees from acquiring advanced job positions. The "glass ceiling" is differed from formal barriers to advancement, such as education or experience criteria. As compared to men, Women have also played a remarkable role in the human resource development. Women with a job are still possessed to be a challenge for them due to their family responsibilities. Formerly Indian women had been home makers but with proper education and better awareness, in addition to the increase in cost of living have made them to go out and opt their careers. There is a general belief that gender biasness against working women starts from the stage of recruitment. Majority of Indian men are not ready to accept the fact that women are capable enough to work side by side with men in all the sectors and their capabilities are generally under evaluated; as a result of this, Indian women have a tendency to choose for less demanding jobs even if they are highly qualified. This is reason of having a few women at the top levels of organizations. Glass ceiling block the career progression of employees in the organization and it must be eliminated or reduced to ensure the work engagement of employees and their

commitment towards the organization. The study is aimed at achieving the facts and guidelines in working environment that promises that the equal employment opportunity for the employees especially female employees should prevail. The study is an investigative one focussing the problem of the effect of glass ceiling on women career development based on the theoretical framework built up using the information from literature survey. The paper attempts to identify factors which contribute to the glass ceiling in turn affect women career advancement and targets at finding out which factor from the identified factors contribute more hindrance to the career advancement opportunity for women. The real purpose of this study was to investigate the reasons for the lack of promotion of women to top management levels in the society and to break the glass ceiling by fixing the gender bias in an organization.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As per the definition from Wall street journal, 1983 "Glass Ceiling" is defined as the barriers that prevent women from ascending to senior management positions in organizations. Women are rarely achieved at the higher level of managerial jobs as per Kelkar et.al 2002 and Upadhy 2006. Individual are evaluated according to the consonance between their characteristics. According to Bruckmuller et.al, 2010 and Ryan et.al, 2011 organizations suggest female leadership when the organization performance is of low standard. Studies prove that in order to perform successfully in such situation, leader requires feminine attributes. Leadership roles in IT sector are considered as masculine than feminine as per the review of Gutek, 2001. Career development is arising with self-realization and self-assessment. Employee need to be trained, in order to acquire the skills which they are lacking to excel in their career. Several studies now revealed that there exists "Glass ceiling" or feminization in every industry and due to this effect more women are at the lower level of job in every organization. Some studies illustrate that there has been an increase in the number of women at entry and middle-level management positions. However according to Meyerson and Fletcher, 2009 there are rare number of women at the highest levels of business. They consist of only 10% of senior managers in Fortune 500 companies; less than 4% of the top ranks of COO, CEO, President, Vice president and less than 3% of top corporate earners. The study of Bombuwela and Chamaru, 2013 in their paper "Effects of Glass Ceiling on Women Career Development in Private Sector Organizations – Case of Sri Lanka" showed that the factors of Glass Ceiling and Women Career development have a negative relationship, and also detailed that individual factors, organizational and cultural factors have a significant effect on career development of women whereas factor relating to family has effects on the glass ceiling considering the response of female employees working in private sector companies in Sri Lanka. In order to study the effects of glass ceiling, many studies have tried to assess the various hierarchical positions in organizations. Cotter, Hermsen, Ovidia, and Vanneman (2001) in their research stated that gender or other demerits are stronger at the top of the organizational hierarchy than at lower levels and it indirectly affects badly in the career of an individual. They arrived at a conclusion that glass ceilings was a diverse gender phenomenon. Moreover, Baxter and Wright, 2000 in their studies stated that the hypothesis based on glass ceiling stated that women find it very difficult in promoting to top levels as well as the barrier they face relative to men is higher as they move up the career ladder. Therefore, women are mainly disadvantaged relative to men when changing from lower to middle management levels globally. Smith, 2012 in his research paper found that, with respect to the glass ceiling hypothesis, the white men are taking more advantage over women. In addition, there prevails a constant gender inequality between lower and upper levels of authority.

Elements contributing the Glass Ceiling effect:

It is clearly evident that women are facing a lot of barriers to break through the glass ceiling and achieve the highest leadership position throughout the ages. Prohibiting both women and organizations from reaching their full potential, the invisible "Glass Ceiling" refuses all the maximal benefits of gender diversity in leadership. Some of the major barriers are underlined below:

Job segregation- Women are offered the same kinds of job roles and duties like the staff, public relations or sometimes finance specialties that seldom lead to the more powerful management positions. Over time, women are finally excluded from jobs in the mainline of business, the route taken by CEOs and Directors.

Old-boy Network- There are many occasions when men get the managerial powers in an organization who manages more numbers of people, enjoys greater freedom of hiring and dismissing, and controls the company's resources directly while women are impoverished of such authorities and powers. It is the "Old-boys" phenomenon of the organization that makes all the policy; where the women are kept absent in practical terms.

Sex Differentiation - The greatest barrier which working women had to overwhelm to attain success is the gender discrimination. The most frequent response based on this differentiation is the simple fact of being a woman. A lot of surveys gave the report that the women leader explained the most serious hindrance in their

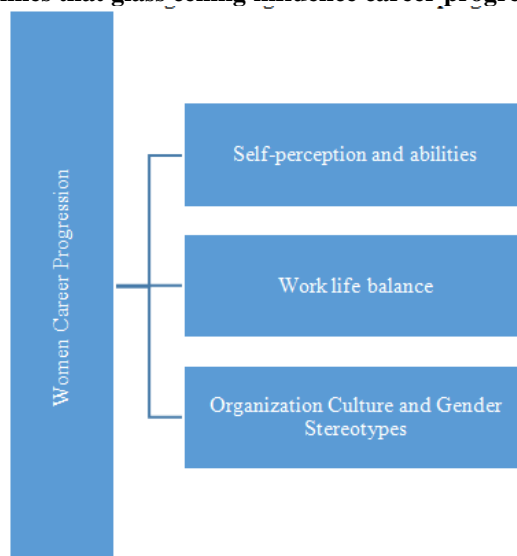
business path to be male racism, perception toward a female boss, slow progression for women and these are the factors to prove the extensiveness of sex discrimination in the work place

Sexual Harassment: It is one of the biggest barriers for women in managerial roles. A corporate entity that allows sexual harassment discourages and demoralizes women executives, but there happened the acquisition and enforcement of numerous laws against sexual harassment. Even though the laws came into picture, women do not feel completely encouraged and empowered to speak out for fear of compromising their work.

Invisible barriers women face in Organisational Environment



Theoretical framework underlines that glass ceiling influence career progression of women.



Benefits of Women in Leadership:

Research studies found that participation of women in business leadership has significantly improved various factors such as organization value, financial performance, economic growth, innovation and social responsiveness and conscience. The additional benefits of women in corporate leadership include close monitoring and supervision and fewer legal infringement such as fraud and theft. A good balance among women in leadership positions can generate a more variant team of leaders with different attitudes and a greater ability to contribute new ideas and thus enhancing the profitability. The reformation leadership style often used by women tends to be a good option for modern organizations, as it encourages employee self-esteem, motivation, and performance.

Strategies to break the Glass Ceiling Phenomenon in Organization

There are some situations where gender bias is affecting women in the workplace today. In specific, women at work are (a) 18% less to be promoted than their male counterparts at entry levels (b) seeking promotions in comparison with men, but are not promoted at the same level (c) getting less advice from managers and senior leaders on career growth and of course employees who do well in their profession are more

likely to be promoted. (d) Getting less access to senior leadership team (e) Showing less interest in getting top roles as they see the pros and cons of senior leadership team in a different way. It is not a surprising fact that women are underrepresented at higher levels of the corporate sector and this worse situation between male and female employees regarding the progress in career along the corporate ladder is the most significant matter in financial and technology sectors. Only a less figure of around 5% women are occupying the CEO role when compared to male employees due to the effect of glass ceiling. There are several ways to freeze the gender difference in the organization by breaking the Glass Ceiling. Some of them are mentioned below

1. Keep workforce aware of gender bias

The first and foremost step is for your employees to become self-aware of their unconscious differences and how these may affect their decision-making power. All employees need to be trained to overcome these gender stereotypes. It is also important to remind that gender bias affects negatively on both men and women in the workplace. Gender expectations based on parenthood can also have an effect, with women prefer to work from home or have flexible hours to balance childcare problems, while men are not getting flexible working practices.

2. Evaluate for bias across the whole talent management process

HR processes and practices are reframed to correct bias. Unfortunately, leaders express an interest to increase diversity and gender equality, but when they do hiring and promotion decisions, they are prone to make unconscious biases in people selection. So there comes a need to review and alter in writing job descriptions and determining compensation package to eliminate bias. Internally, audit practices for leadership succession planning and development, need to make sure women have equal opportunities. Apart from reforming HR processes, the next step is to set targets, track metrics report, and build accountability. The ultimate goal is to providing equal strength in management team and review progress in order to improve HR functions.

3. Creating accountability on hiring managers

It is necessary to train managers to watch for bias and encourage them to mentor and nurture women on their team and make them accountable for reaching gender targets at the time of hiring and promoting people. Achieving these gender and diversity targets should become a point in evaluating managers' performance.

4. Develop a female mentoring program

Majority of organizations have formal mentoring programs for women, as per the recent survey. Also, mentoring is a powerful weapon to mould employees and make them advance within organizations. In fact, studies show that mentoring programs can make organizations' managerial grades more diverse and it must be done in an effective manner. It should be well structured program irrespective of gender; also builds in events for networking and regular email communications.

5. Introduce women targeted programs

Recruitment of freshers especially females really make a difference. Other programs like focusing high performing females to participate in leadership programs or career internships that boost the number of women at top by contributing more rather than switching back to their child rearing role.

Grant Thornton report, 'Women in Business: Beyond Policy to Progress', states that around 75% of businesses had at least one woman in a senior management role in 2018, compared to 66% in 2017, but women still hold only 24% of senior roles globally. In India, the senior roles held by women is only 20% presently, even though it has increased from 17% in 2017. Last year, the business sector has made significant progress to make sure women are represented at the top. Globally, the percentage of businesses with at least one woman in senior management has proven a marginal growth from 66% to 75%, which means far more businesses have attained some level of gender balance.

representation in senior management over past four years



Source: <https://www.grantthornton.ie/globalassets/1.-member-firms/ireland/insights/publications/grant-thornton-women-in-business-2018.pdf>

Strategies of an Individual to Fight the Glass Ceiling Effect

Keep a good relationship with the supervisor a level up from your own by doing an extra assignments and document all of your achievements and present them at each review. Become a part of the managerial network and prove that you are not only highly qualified, but also have the capability to undertake huge responsibilities. Alternatively, consider working for a female owned company or start your own and there are a lot of programs that are specifically designed to help female-owned businesses In brief, even though the company is dominated by men or women at the top ranks, an individual need to cope up with every situations.

Strategies of an Employer to Fight the Glass Ceiling Effect

Boost a space for equality at every level of the company. Ensure that women and low level employees are fairly represented in any existing employee development programs. Proactively recruit women if it is male-dominated sector and provide career oriented training. In short, fostering a gender blind and colourblind solidarity throughout the company can help in the long run by removing gender stereotypes and biases.

Strategies to overcome the barriers

Progress in career of women up the corporate ladder is still rounded by the glass ceiling despite the multitude of Government policies and programs which have been put forward to ensure that their talents and skills are recognized and accepted. It is recommended to help women to overcome this career hindrance by:

- Gathering appropriate business skills and know how;
- The action of taking up line- management positions rather than management service functions and roles;
- Gaining the necessary experience through training period
- Pursuing career counselling;
- Volunteering for leadership and low level employees
- Acquiring the ability to measure their operating efficiency in the workplace.

It is important to consider an awareness of the emergence of new barriers to their progress. The present socio- economic situation is creating different glass ceilings in various means such as downsizing of organizations, newly differentiated and self- directed career paths, the invasion of the contractual worker, and the family care especially old parents.

III. CONCLUSION

Currently women have made great paces in increasing their representation in the workforce. However, a considerable gap remains in the achievement of leadership positions across different sectors of organization. Men and women should be on equal path in every areas of workplace, Apart from cracking gender barriers in work place, Indian women also have to fight against social and cultural barriers as there exists a deep-rooted internal belief system which prevents most female employees from exploring their potential. Even organizations can play a major role in practicing gender-free policies by giving flexible working hours which will benefit both men and women. Organizations need to accept the fact that diversity at the top leads to better decision making and business outcomes. In effect, women should break the glass ceilings in their mind set, maintain self-confidence, and make open communication with their peers. Progression of equality in women is advancing gradually that parity could take more number of years at current pace. Going beyond unconscious bias training, organizations will need to implement new HR processes and accountability targets to change behaviour.

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