EXPLODING THE "GLASS CEILING": A GENDER EQUALITY INITIATIVE TOWARDS MAXIMIZING COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstract

Glass ceiling is one of the most controversial and emotional aspects of employment in organizations. The "glass ceiling" has come to mean an invisible, but virtually impenetrable, barrier between women and the executive suite, preventing them from reaching the top levels of the corporate world regardless of their accomplishments and virtues. The general-case glass ceiling hypothesis states that not only is it more difficult for women than for men to be promoted up levels of authority hierarchies within workplaces but also that the obstacles women face relative to men become greater as they move up the hierarchy. Gender-based discrimination in promotions is not simply present across levels of hierarchy but is more intense at higher levels. Cultural and social attitudes towards what constitutes "male" or "female" type of jobs result in occupational segregation, although the extent of the problem varies from country to country, and from job to job. Women are mainly concentrated in the "feminized" professions subject to horizontal occupational segregation where at the same time they remain afflicted with vertical occupational segregation also.

The research paper identifies specific attitudinal and organizational barriers that severely limit opportunities for the upward mobility of qualified women candidates and expands practices and policies which promote employment opportunities for the advancement of women in positions of responsibility. Finally, this study focuses towards generating feasible suggestions of breaking the glass ceiling and propagating a transparent skill based culture in the organizations.

Key words: Attitudinal and organizational barriers, practices and policies for promote employment opportunities, feasible suggestions of breaking the glass ceiling.

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Introduction

The status of women in India has long been paradoxical. Since 1970s, the role of women in Indian society continues to undergo considerable change. Women are these days becoming more aware of their personal needs and selves, and are demanding greater equality and status both within the home and outside. They have had access to professions such as medicine, teaching, and politics and have the right to own property. Among some social classes, women are extremely powerful. Middle-class women are at the forefront of this change. In the last decade, the increase in the number of females in the paid labor force has been greater than 40 per cent (Jain, 1992). Women are entering the managerial cadre and becoming entrepreneurs - creating a place for them in India's business world. Yet, there is a long history of women being oppressed by men - delegated to playing subordinate roles. India's workforce is changing. Social values and mores, and the increased global focus on women's issues have changed the women's role impacting the career progression of women.

There are formidable barriers of entry for women into professional careers. Those who do gain access, are often segregated in female occupations, relegated to lower ranks in organizations, and barred from moving up the hierarchy because the promotion criteria are conditions they cannot meet. Even ten years ago, multinational organizations in India resisted hiring women for jobs requiring significant travel to rural areas, as the safety of the employees might be compromised. Yet job rotation was crucial for promotion. There are instances of women not being promoted despite successful performance. The concept of the glass ceiling has been used as a metaphor to describe the apparently invisible barriers that prevent capable employees to reach at the top positions.

Glass ceiling is often thought to affect only women or be caused by prejudice. A far more powerful and common glass ceiling affects men just as much as women. Glass ceiling refers to situations where the advancement of a qualified person within the hierarchy of an organization is stopped at a lower level because of some form of discrimination or it can be defined as an invisible or transparent barrier that keeps an individual from rising above a certain level in corporations.

Compared to formal barriers to career advancement such as education, the glass ceiling refers to less concrete hindrances —frequently anchored in culture, society and psychological factors — that impede women's advancement to upper management positions. The concept of "glass

ceiling effects" emerged in social science research in general and higher education in particular over the past 20 years.

Women have come a long way but certainly haven't reached workplace equality with men, especially not in traditionally male-dominated fields, such as corporate management, science and technology. In the largest U.S. corporations, the Fortune 500, only 16 percent of the corporate officers and 15 percent of the members of boards of directors are women. Occupations are still segregated, although somewhat less so than in earlier decades. Women hold only 14 percent of engineering and architectural positions and 26 percent of positions in computer science and mathematics. About 14 percent of those in active military duty and 14 percent of police officers are women.

If we see in Indian context, there is a lot of impact of social, organizational and personal biases on the progression of professional women. Women managers in India have been generally successful in rising to the executive suite in Indian organizations, despite a culture that might suggest otherwise. These women were successful because of the interplay of organizational and familial support, coupled with the individual drive for success each woman demonstrated

Literature Review

The studies have described the impediments that women and people of color encounter in their quest for senior-level positions (e.g., CEOs) in society as glass ceiling effects. Literature, both empirical and non-empirical, has provided broad and varied interpretations of glass ceiling effects. The term 'glass ceiling' was first used in 1986 in a special report in the Wall Street Journal on the status of corporate women (Hymowitz and Schellhardt 1986).

It was coined to describe the corporate traditions, practices and prejudices that blocked women in organizations. The term 'glass ceiling' is now used extensively in the literature and refers to the barriers that keep women and minorities from rising above a certain level in organizations (Davidson and Cooper 1992; Coe 1992; Adler 1993b; Cassell and Walsh1994).

Auster (1993) suggests that the glass ceiling is not one ceiling or even a wall in one spot but rather an amalgam of pervasive forms of gender bias that occur in both overt and covert ways.

Women make up about half of the workforce in most developed countries yet they comprise fewer than 5% of senior executive roles (Tharenou 1999). Ragins, Townsend and Mattis (1998)

suggest that while women are flooding the managerial pipeline, their efforts to attain the more senior levels are being blocked.

Early Research - Examining Gender

The initial research focus has been termed the gender-centered approach:

Jardim and Hennig (1990); **Gilligan** (1982) focused on the role gender plays in determining an individual's preferences, abilities and skills and how this leads to different outcomes for men and women in management positions.

Early research examining women's representation in senior management primarily focused on explaining why there are so few women in senior management (Powell 1999).

Riger and Galligan (1980) argue that the causal explanations for the lack of women in senior positions focus either on the person or the situation. Person-centered explanations suggest that the socialization processes experienced by women encouraged the development of personality traits, behaviors and attitudes that are contrary to the demands of a management role.

Personality traits and behavior differences are also presented as a rationale for low representation. Accordingly women are seen to lack the confidence and assertiveness required for a management role.

Davidson and Cooper (1992) assert that men are viewed as leaders in organizations, while women are seen to be the followers. They argue that women who work in male-dominated environments are less inclined to see themselves as leaders or seek leadership roles.

Ragins, Townsend and Mattis (1998) suggest that women may also need to moderate their own professional style to ensure male colleagues are comfortable. Organizations may still prefer a male-oriented management style where aggressive and direct behavior is the norm (Cooper Jackson 2001). Davidson and Cooper (1992) highlight the incongruity for women, suggesting that when women adopt this style they may be seen as pushy and aggressive but when men use these same behaviors they are regarded as demonstrating leadership qualities. Dominance, aggression, competitive behavior and decisiveness are frequently cited as desirable leadership qualities (Klenke 1996).

Tharenou (1999) agrees that one of the major explanations for women's lack of career advancement relates to the perceived lack of skill and knowledge. This, Tharenou calls, investments in human capital in that the emphasis is on the person and their skill development. Investments in human capital lead to increased remuneration and role status but because women

make fewer investments than men they gain fewer rewards. In this context women are seen to lack the expertise and skill set required for senior management roles.

Cockburn (1991), **Segal** (1987) and **Bacchi** (1996) assert that masculine models of leadership do not allow for the different approaches that women may bring to the organization. They argue that stereotyping of behavior increases the marginalization of women. Similarly Helgesen (1995) and Rosener (1995) suggest that there is an increased call for more feminine leadership styles, which make use of the personal characteristics associated with women.

Cooper Jackson (2001) argues that this perception is further reinforced by women having so few female role models. Davidson and Cooper (1992) assert that where the number of women in senior positions is so stymied it is difficult to develop a model of women as leaders. In addition, women often fail to career plan (Morrison 1992) and to build networks and effective mentoring relationships; they have been socialized to subordinate their careers in favor of home life and family (Fagenson and Jackso 1993).

A Second Approach – Examining Career Development

Whilst the initial research focus emphasized the individual and gender differences, by the late 1970s and through the next decade the research focus broadened to consider how organizations and structures impact on women's career development.

This research focus can be classified as the situation-centered approach and argues that the organizational work environment, rather than individual characteristics, is the cause of women's low representation.

Kanter (1977) was one of the first researchers to consider organizational structures and processes that may hinder career advancement for women. Kanter's structural theory suggests that the gender ratios at upper levels affect interactions between the dominant group (men) and the token group (women). The dominant group amplifies the differences between its members and the token group, resulting in negative outcomes for women including performance pressures, exclusion from interaction with male peers, and being viewed stereotypically as women rather than as managers.

Kanter (1977) argues that the token group experiences pressures that are different to the dominant group, particularly around feelings of isolation, visibility and difficulty accessing usual networks. She suggests that there are three structural effects for women as the minority grouping in organizations. First, female leaders become visible in terms of divergence, resulting in them

becoming invisible as individuals, and those women who are successful are regarded as the exception but simultaneously representative of women.

Wajcman (2000) asserts that women's behavior in senior positions is conditional on their capacity to mould their behavior to suit the dominant culture and therefore modify their behavior to be like men. Being a minority group, women adapt their behavior to present more like the dominant group and in this way minimize the visibility due to their gender difference.

Mavin (2006) suggests that competitive behavior between women may extend beyond professional rivalry to include subconscious elements relating to a number of different factors such as age, weight and dress sense. Schein and Davidson (1993) argue that it is the established gender system, which assumes management to be male that contributes to women's behavior towards other women in senior management.

Barriers to Women's Advancement

Unfortunately, much of the activity undertaken by women's is not well documented, nor is outcomes and the factors critical to success clearly identified. The difference that women leaders make in professional world is witnessed by all. However, we must be more rigorous in defining and understanding the factors that influence the impact that women make, including their leadership style. The challenges that women face are multiple, complex and changing. This discrimination grows out of gender stereotypes that are shared by people around the world. Research shows that people believe that men are more authoritative, assertive and competitive, while women are more helpful, kind and having giving qualities. Although stereotypes about women are highly positive, they can be a handicap when it comes to situations that involve taking charge and being a leader. Therefore, it is suggested to examine the organizational and attitudinal barriers to women's advancement in the corporate world and in organized sectors and find ways to overcome them.

Organizational Barriers in Women's Advancement

It turns out that sexism at work proving to be the most inflexible barriers for women in the workplace perhaps because they are not as vulnerable to legal challenges. The perception and behavior by male do not play fair at the office. There are various organizational barriers that severely limit opportunities for the upward mobility of qualified women candidates:

- Women aren't hired at all, and aren't promoted to higher positions.

- Women are hired today but they aren't necessarily paid as much.

- As women move up the corporate ladder, their relative salaries are actually driven lower. "Women in executive, managerial and administrative jobs earn only 69.2 cents earned by their male counterparts, which is significantly lower than the 75 cents for women generally." Both a wage gap and a gender gap in the upper echelons of management exist.

- Women's may reach to upper level management but rarely to the top level, which is still an almost all male club.

- Women as a group are lower on the company totem pole so they lose out on the prerogative to bestow bonuses, to distribute raises, and to hire, fire, transfer and promote. Such power remains preserved for men.

- Even when women perform exceptionally well, their expertise often goes unnoticed.

- People disregard mistakes when men make them, but women's flaws stand out.

- Women leaders are judged more harshly than male leaders, even when their performance is objectively equal. On the other hand, when people do recognize a woman's competence, they may resist her influence and leadership anyway because they're threatened by her.

- Women who accumulate an impressive record, especially in a man's field, are more likely to be seen as difficult, intolerable.

- Resistance to women is strongest in occupations that have few women. The more men in an occupation, the more harshly women are evaluated, the more they are sexually harassed, and the more men are hired over equally qualified women.

- When a woman holds the same managerial position as a man, the woman typically has less power and authority. Women clearly remain disadvantaged in their access to leadership, although there is considerably more equality than in the past. Because the qualities that are ascribed to men are more or less the same qualities generally ascribed to leaders, women are viewed as less qualified to lead.

- The behavior of staff towards female leaders may be more negatively than males. This is based on role incongruity, in that women are not supposed to prove leadership traits and

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therefore when they do, they are viewed more pessimistically than men exhibiting the same behaviors.

- Jobs may also become gender-typed based on the gender of the previous job holder. Where roles are seen as male gendered type, women may not be considered for the position.

- Women may have difficulty with geographical mobility. Noted that management may think about that women are unwilling to travel or lack the courage to take up international assignments. And a lot of business may be done by going out for drinks after work, a form of networking particularly difficult for busy mothers.

Attitudinal Barriers in Women's Advancement

There are at least several disgusting outcomes for women that can act as career barriers. It varies from women to women what they feel and how they react on that situation. There are various attitudinal barriers that severely limit opportunities for the upward mobility of qualified women candidates:

- Women's opinion towards themselves that, that they do not fit in with the existing or dominating male culture at senior levels or believe that they may need to transform to fit in.

- Building social connections are difficult in organizations dominated by men because women are less likely to be invited to join male networks or to be mentored by men, the burden is on women to make the connections. Women may feel unwelcome in male-dominated networks or reluctant to participate in the activities that male networks often enjoy, such as pickup football, playing cards.

- Women do not merely encounter problems late in their careers when top positions are in their sights, but from the beginning, when they enter the job market.

- One set of challenges that many women face is family care responsibilities, which typically are greater than those undertaken by men. As a result, women often reduce their hours on the job after they have children. Some women quit working outside the home and spend one or more years devoting their efforts to their families.

- Women more often leave their jobs for family reasons than men do. Women who leave their jobs to rear children during their prime career-building years usually face a major career setback.

- Women show off greater stress than their male counterparts because of factors connected with their status, gender stereotyping and male coworkers appearing to be uncomfortable working with them.

- The pressure to be better performer, Female manager's account that they have to perform better than their male colleagues to establish themselves. Women believe that they have to exceed performance targets as compare to their counter parts.

- As women are promoted and achieve senior executive positions, their profile increases and there is a perception of a bigger requirement for them to perform superior than their male counterparts

- In case of higher positions executives' social isolation and their need to rely more heavily on formalized relationships than do male colleagues. As we see female managers rely on qualifications in pursuing promotion whereas males use informal or casual networks for promotional purposes

Viewing the organizational and attitudinal barriers that severely limit opportunities for the upward mobility of qualified women candidates, a gender equality initiative should be taken towards maximizing competitiveness.

Struggling Women: To Break the Glass Ceiling

When it comes to breaking the glass ceiling in the corporate world, there are certain examples of women who have broken the glass ceiling and have achieved success in their careers.

- Meg Whitman (Meg) in 1998 became the President and CEO of eBay, the largest online auction company in the world.

- Carly Fiorina (Carly) in 1999 was announced the CEO of Hewlett Packard (HP). Carly became the first woman CEO of a Dow 50 company and the only woman CEO of a Fortune 50 company.

- Indra Nooyi (Indra) in 2000 become as the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and also President of PepsiCo. Indra had the rare distinction of being the highest-ranking Indian

woman in the corporate world of America. She was also ranked by Fortune as one of the most powerful women.

- Lalita D Gupte (Lalita) in 2001 was made the head of ICICI's global operations. She also ranked 31 in the Fortune's Power Fifty, 2001.

- Patricia F Russo (Pat) in 2002 was made President and CEO of Lucent Technologies.

- Naina Lal Kidwai (Naina) in 2002 became the Vice-Chairman and Managing Director of the Indian investment banking division of HSBC. Naina was also ranked third on Fortune's list of Asia's most powerful women, and she was declared the 47th most powerful women in business in the world.

The trend of women achieving top management positions was not only noticed in the developed countries, but also in the developing countries like India. Indian women achieved top management positions in corporate outside India as well. Others women who got fame in their fields, included:

- Kalpana Morparia, Senior General Manager (Legal), ICICI.

- Gayathri Parathasarthy Head, Development Integration Services, a SBU for the IT services division at i-Flex Solutions.

- Jayashree Vallal, Vice-President at Cisco Systems.

- Radha Ramaswami Basu, CEO of Support.com.

Suggestions for Breaking the Glass Ceiling

The organizations are still unclear as to the most effective ways to introduce an awareness of gender issues into all policies and activities, and women are still under-represented on the most division boards. It is hereby suggested to combat sexism and harassment, enhance women's leadership roles, and identify and address barriers to the advancement of women.

- Women in minority situations should take on a gender-neutral adaptive strategy that is, being more likely to attach greater significance to individual skills and competencies than to gender. The gender-neutral strategy is seen as a way for women to survive their status.

- The association should try to attract more women at all levels and to undertake some important initiatives. These should include annual leadership conferences for women, the publication of Women in Corporate. More research is required on the differences in

practice or behavior patterns between men and women, through longitudinal studies we can determine if these differences change over the passage of time.

- Organizations have an important role to play to increase women in leadership roles. Creating and supporting family-friendly policies would allow women more access to leadership. By stereotypes that women lack the ability to lead. To reduce this bias, organizations can rely on objective evaluation criteria and open recruitment procedures, both of which increase advancement opportunities for women.

- The corporations should apply affirmative action for a short period of time to have an equal playing field for women. Women are qualified but big corporations find it hard to hire women because of its untraditional method. That is why women should be forced into these jobs helping the majority in the end. Women bring many things that a man doesn't bring to the business world including another viewpoint. This alone would help company's compete better in the business world.

- In the workplace, women's slower advancement is due in part to their limited access to powerful male networks as well as to organizational cultures. To discourage such women-unfriendly cultures, organizations can create networking venues where women as well as men feel comfortable.

- The 'queen bee syndrome' is used to identify those women who have reached the top positions normally in a male dominating environment, and who then implement a counter militancy approach that is based on their own professional and social success .

So, we need a regularly updated, centralized source of information to track the progress in addressing the challenges that continue to face women in corporate world.

Conclusion

Women today, are more careers based than ever before. Women are opting not to have kids and are willing to sacrifice them for the good of their careers. The number of single women has increased as well as the number of women on birth control. Women are ready now more than ever to hold management positions. Some might say that women are treated fairly in the workplace. However, women are not paid as well as men in the same positions, and women only hold a small percentage of management positions. 'Some women starting their own businesses

were those who were rejected in the wider world. Starting in business is their only way of using their talents in the way they want to. 'Larger corporations create fewer barriers for women who want to rise to the top. But companies of all sizes often fail to make full use of women employees because of a dominant male culture. At the same time, the glass ceiling metaphor implies that women and men have equal access to entry and mid-level positions. But this isn't the case. Women have more difficulty than men in obtaining those positions outside of the traditional female-dominated sectors of the economy. Once in jobs, regardless of whether those jobs are traditionally masculine or feminine, women don't advance as fast as men and they drop out more commonly at every stage of their careers.

Women fight for everyone but now will have to fight for themselves. Women need to learn to demand more, negotiate better and tougher and walk away when the money's not right.

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