Women Managers and Glass Ceiling Effect

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Abstract

Since the 1970s women have clearly made great advances toward equality in education and in the resultant employment opportunities afforded by an excellent education.Female leaders have emerged over the last forty years and are making their mark in the business world. The paper discusses the problem of glass ceiling in organisational sectorand further about the various hurdles that comes in the way of women in their journey to emerge as managerial leaders. The solutions to all these challenges are discussed so that the position of women can be made better and strong.

Introduction

Leadership is the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of a vision or set of goals (Robbins & Judge, 2008). This ability can be either formal or informal and can be applied to managers and non-managers. Historically, many leaders have been men, and women have struggled to gain respect in the business world as leaders. Throughout the world, women continue to fight for equality in the workforce and to find a place among their male counterparts in leadership roles. By reviewing the status of women in business all around the world, one can have a greater understanding of their struggle (Morrison and von Glinow, 1990).

Leadership itself is a very broad concept, and various theories and styles of leadership exist. Female leadership is just one branch of this concept and can also be defined in different ways. Some understand female leadership as the fact that women can be and are leaders in the organisations.

When talking about working women and women in management, the concept of "glass ceiling" often comes up. In this context, glass ceiling refers to a barrier which women face, or have faced. A glass ceiling comes across in an organization at the top of the hierarchy and prevents women from achieving the same positions as men. (The Glass Ceiling Effect 2001.) Some argue that the glass ceiling has been already shattered and others argue otherwise. Maybe instead of a glass ceiling, women are now facing a glass labyrinth. Women have the possibility to rise to higher positions but they face many obstacles on the way, instead of getting ahead straightforward as men often do. Gender equality is considered far developed. Both men and women are well educated and women can choose to have both; a career and a family. However, there is still a salary gap between women and men's earnings and women who choose a career rather than home life, often face negative attitudes and discrimination. Also, the number of female managers is surprisingly low. The right for women to work, get the same pay as men and be efficient managers is still a very current issue. Even though the situation has been getting better slowly, concepts as the glass ceiling

and quotas for women still exist. The author decided to research this topic as she is a woman herself and has always been interested in the issues of equality.

However, women have attained remarkable success in what was once considered the "male domain", of the working world. Worldwide the number of women in the workforce has increased over the years with a corresponding increase in the number of highly educated women equipped with technical know-how. However, discrimination against women in the workplace has impacted their advancement in jobs that acquire higher societal recognition among men. Gender inequality in the workplace is exhibited in various forms, such as occupational segregation, gender-based wage gap and discrimination. Working women have constantly battled against not only horizontal segregation, but also, the separation of women and men into gender specific jobs.

A few studies that have been conducted on the issue of women representation in management jobs reveal that women are lagging far behind men in managerial jobs. Globally women comprise around 10 percent of senior management positions in Fortune 500 companies (Chadha, 2002). In India their presence is known to range between a high of 5.8 percent (Kulkarni, 2000, p.11) to a low of roughly 3 percent (Chadha 2002, Mehra 2002, and Singh 2003) of all administrative positions. According to the study by Koshal, et al (2006), 2 women per 100 economically active men take administrative and managerial positions in India.Recently the Confederation of Indian Industry released a study "Understanding the Levels of Empowerment of Women in the Workplace in India" covering 149 large and medium size companies across regions. The report highlights that women comprise 16 percent at junior management level, 4 percent each at middle and senior levels, and only 1 percent in organizational leadership positions (CEOs). The worldwide statistics shows that in 2000-2002 women's overall share of managerial jobs was between 20 percent and 40 percent in 48 countries .As far as senior management positions are concerned female representation is much less. Women take 20 percent of senior managerial positions in the US and 19 percent in the world on an average. In US and Europe 25 percent of companies do not have women in senior management at all. Female representation is even less as far as board membership is concerned. According to European Board Women Monitor(2004) conducted by the European Professional Women's Network (EPWN) an average proportion of women board directors in 11 European countries were reported to be 8 percent varying from 2 percent in Italy and up to 22 percent in Norway. This indicator is reported as 13.6 percent for US.10 The International Business Owners Survey (IBOS) 2004 conducted by Grand Thornton outlines that 42 percent (59% globally) of business in India include women in senior management positions, but women occupy 12 percent (19% globally) of the senior management posts available.

Glass Ceiling effect in India and its Contributors

Women in India experience a slower progression compared to their male counterparts. While entry is easier, growth slows and in most situations regardless of their qualifications, performances or achievements, women are prevented from climbing the corporate ladder to the top. Although a few women have made it to the very top in the world of work, the phenomenon of glass ceiling is still very much prevalent in India as well as in other countries. The glass ceiling has proved resistant to affirmative action, sensitization of senior managers and human resources staff, measures to promote work-family balance and a broad recognition that investing in the talents and qualities of both women and men at all organizational levels makes good business sense. The existence of the glass ceiling that retards the progress of women is a prime example of discrimination against women at work through vertical segregation by sex. There are many overt and covert glass-ceiling factors that impede women's career growth in the management sector. These can be categorized under organizational, social and individual level.

Organizational: The organization-centred paradigm advances the view that it is the disadvantageous position of women in the organizational structure such as few numbers,

limited decision making power, which influences women's career growth and progress, shapes and defines the behaviour of women. The underlying principle of this perspective is that men and women are equally capable and committed to assuming positions of leadership. The problem lies in the organizational policies and structures and the remedy is a fundamental change to eliminate inappropriate discrimination in institutional policies and practices. Among structural factors that hinders women's career growth may be listed as: discriminatory appointment and promotion practices; male resistance to women in senior/top level management positions; absence of policies and legislation to ensure participation of women; absence of women in boardroom decisionmaking process to ensure pro-women measures of companies/establishments, absence/nonexistence/non-participation of women managers in forums/unions/bodies within and outside the organizational structure due to various factors, limited opportunities for leadership training and for demonstrating competence as a result of the power structure in the workplace.

Social: Societal approach .links gender-centred and organizational structure perspective. Here the analysis is concerned with the social construction of gender and the assignment of specific roles, responsibilities, and expectations to women and men. These gender-based roles, irrelevant to the work place, are carried into the workplace via their internal structures and everyday practices. The socio-cultural perceptions which .determine the attitudes and behaviours of individual men and women form barriers to the equal participation of women in senior management. Gender relations are kept in place because the actors involved, both dominant and subordinate, subscribe to socialand organizational reality, the clustering of women in the lower ranks, and wage gap.

Individual: Individual-centred perspective in which the paucity of women is attributed to the psycho-social attributes, including personality, characteristics, attitudes and behavioural skills of women themselves. The problem is vested in the individual and she is called upon to adapt herself to the traditional, male concept of management within the academy. Focus is on the need for women to adapt to compensate for their socialization deficits. Among personal factors are lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, limited aspirations in the field of management, lack of motivation and ambition to accept challenges to go up the ladder.; women's orientation to interpersonal relations with peers which could impede their upward mobility; promoted myths regarding women's low potential for leadership, being less assertive, less emotionally stable and lacking ability to handle a crisis. It also include: male managerial styles, discourse and language that shut women out; informal organizational cultures also referred to as the old boys club; women's reluctance to self-promote their achievements and capabilities making them institutionally invisible; the persistence of cultural values and attitudes that strongly support women's childcare, family and domestic responsibilities as priority over career aspirations.

The above discussion shows that there are various reasons contributing to the existence of glass ceiling in Management profession which is extremely complex and varied. They are as follows:

- The stereotypes and preconceptions towards women that they are fragile and lacking in the qualities that are considered useful to be effective managers. Traditional masculine traits having higher value than feminine traits in management world also prevents women managers in climbing the ladder to the top. Top posts are generally characterized by masculine aggressive values and suitability for them is decided mostly according to male criteria.

- The position which an individual hold within the organization shapes the traits and the behavior they develop or posses. Women often secure positions that have titles with little real power or supervisory authority.

- Women are primarily placed in non-strategic sectors rather than in the so-called "line" positions that involve financial decision-making or revenue-generating.
- Responsibilities, like sales and production positions that are critical for advancement to the top are considered „no-woman" areas
- Mentoring plays an important role in the advancement of managers in any establishment into responsible and senior management positions. However, mentoring is often limited to women, which in turn results in a lack of access and training and career development activities.
- Women's career paths tend to be more circuitous and interrupted than those of men which are typically linear, and this impedes women's progress to top positions. Women often have to deal with the complexities of the dual role as working women and mother. Many times they have to make compromises, prioritizing family life over work life which slows down their careers. Hence, women managers with children are often looked upon as less favorable than those without children as the former are viewed as being less committed.
- Women workers still bear more of the main burden of family responsibilities than men and so have less time for the "extracurricular" formal and informal networking essential for advancement in enterprises.
- Inability to stay late at work and a disinclination for jobs involving travel, transfers has been identified as other major factor for women not achieving top positions.
- Lastly, women managers also have their own inner battles, which need to be fought and overcome. Many women do not aspire for higher management positions as that would burden them with greater responsibilities, demand more work time and commitment and onthe other hand disrupt family life. Therefore, women managers need to establish their career goals, aspirations and acquire determination to overcome the obstacles that exist. Women need to develop the confidence, attitude and skills needed to succeed in business and enterprising activities.

Suggestions to remove Glass Ceiling effect
- Companies should be transparent about their polices relating to employment, promotion, training .Organizations should go in for gender audits.
- Companies should orient their recruitment policies to recruitequalnumber of male and female in the entry level in order to bring in gender diversity and inclusiveness.
- Companies should be more sensitive to women situations and need as women generally have to look after family and work.
- Need of male colleagues who are more sympathetic and understanding. Managers should be made more accountable for gender focused results and everyone should go through a gender sensitization process.
- Lack of laws in the private sector, therefore there should be proper laws regarding pregnancies, maternity leaves etc. the Laws should prescribed, so that no one manipulates it.
- More transparency among the staff and the HR department is needed; more employee friendly HR. sensitive to women concerns and situation is needed.

- Clear cut sexual harassment policy should be laid down by the companies. Proper grievance cells need to be formed for women to report about their grievances.
- Promotion should not be linked to transfer as has been the case in public sector banks. Transfer should be need based. Women who are willing to take transfer should be given transfers if the companies have a branch in the location where one wants to be transferred.
- Companies should encourage its women employees to participate in programs that would hone personality development of women.
- Difficulty with child care arrangements was a major workplace issue. Companies should provide facilities like crèches to enable women to give their best in their profession.
- Woman should have clear cut aims and ambitions in life. Goals should be well defined in the start so that women do not lose focus in the midst of their career.
- Companies should establish leadership training explicitly for newly recruited women managers in the recognition that promotion to middle- level and senior –level often entails appointment to leadership positions.

Women representation at the top level of management is proportionately very low compared to men. There is a solid glass ceiling that is existing and that is resisting women's movement in their upward ladder of career growth. This suggests that there needs to be systemic changes if companies are serious about bringing in greater diversity in their management and encouraging competent women to overcome the hurdles that society places in their career path" The study concludes that the major barrier for promotion of women managers comes from insensitivity of the corporate towards women's social roles and responsibilities.

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