Enhancing Women's Leadership in Corporate Sector

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Abstract

Glass ceiling is invisible but real barrier through which the next stage or level of advancement can be seen, but cannot be reached by a section of qualified and deserving employees. Such barriers exist due to implicit prejudice on the basis of age, ethnicity, political or religious affiliation, and sex. This paper is an attempt to illustrate the factors affecting in women's participation in leadership. Glass ceiling is one of the factor which keeps women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements Glass ceiling prevents women, ethnical minorities from obtaining a higher-level position. Women feel that they are worthless in the company to obtain a management position. The glass ceiling is another "hot" topic in the business environment. Today individuals discuss about consequences of glass ceiling. Some individuals argue that glass ceiling is an umbrella for women that cannot get to a highest position and it is used as an excuse to blame a man that took the position instead of a woman. Most women and minorities will never be able to shatter the glass ceiling. Some women have made progress; however, few have made it to the top of the corporate ladder.

Key words: *Glass ceiling, Women, Organisation, discrimination, leadership.*

Introduction:

The modern society is often characterized as highly democratic, humanistic and advanced. At the same time, the arguments, concerning the real equality of all people regardless their race, gender, or social position, still persist. In such a situation, the arguments concerning the position of female in the modern society are among the most contradictive since on the one hand, there are people who sincerely believe that women have eventually managed to get an equal position in society compared to men and, at the present days, they have really equal opportunities as men do. On the other hand, there is a totally different view on the position of women in the modern society. According to which the glass ceiling still remains an unsurpassable barrier women regularly face in their life. The latter position is more realistic and corresponds to the actual position of females in the modern society since their leadership is still rather an exception than a norm.

Objectives of the Study:

1) To understand the concept and nature of glass ceiling

2) To identify the barriers to women's leadership

3) To suggest the ways to enhance women's participation in Leadership

4) To examine the role HR in women's empowerment

5) To highlight the profile of some women managers who broke the glass ceiling

Methodology of Study:

This paper is based on secondary data which consist of reviewed articles from journals, research paper, books and websites. This is a conceptual paper.

Review of literature:

1. Siri Terjesen, Ruth Sealy and Val Singh(2009): The evidence shows that gender diversity on corporate boards contributes to more effective corporate governance through a variety of board processes, some of which do not show up as a direct influence on the firm's bottom line, as well as through individual interactions. As well as governance outcomes, women directors contribute to important firm level outcomes

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as they play direct roles as leaders, mentors and network members as well as indirect roles as symbols of opportunity for other women, and inspire them to achieve and stay with their firm. More recognition is needed for their valuable contribution to firm value.

2. Merida L. Johns: Studies show that companies that have the best records for promoting women outstrip their competition on every measure of profitability. Yet women disproportionately are failing to attain high-level positions. Reviewing current data on women in the workplace, findings of studies on the relationship between gender diversity in senior management and company performance, and the literature on gender behavioral differences and the workplace.

3. Michelle K. Ryan and S. Alexander Haslam(2005): In a leadership position, the women fails (as they are more likely to than men because their positions are more precarious), they may be singled out for blame and humiliation, at the same time that the unpropitious conditions of their appointment are overlooked. Ironically too, it is apparent that, if overlooked, these factors can easily promote the very inequality that women's advancement is intended to redress.

4. Menaha Shanmugam, Amaratunga & R.Haigh: Women adopt democratic and participative leadership styles in the corporate world and in education. From this it could be said that the women have the capability to manage the educational sector. This democratic participative style can fall under the major category of 'transformational' leadership style which is the preferred leadership style used by women. Socialisation and stereotyping could be said as the barriers for women seeking a senior position in education. Also some internal barriers such as one's lack of confidence lack of competitiveness and fear of failure have been identified for women entry into educational leadership position.

5. Pounder (2001), An array of leadership style which has both masculine and feminine characteristics is required for an effective management. The study will be a supportive resource to any reader interested in identifying the women's leadership qualities

to manage the educational sector and in finding out the ways to remove the barriers of women's entry into managerial positions.

Meaning:

In HR term glass ceiling refers to an artificial barrier based on attitudinal or organizational bias prevents qualified women/ other minorities from advancing upward into senior management level positions or 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, most commonly sexism or racism.

Invisible but real barrier through which the next stage or level of advancement can be seen, but cannot be reached by a section of qualified and deserving employees. Such barriers exist due to implicit prejudice on the basis of age, ethnicity, political or religious affiliation, and sex. This situation is referred to as a "ceiling" as there is a limitation blocking upward advancement, and "glass" (transparent) because the limitation is not immediately apparent and is normally an unwritten and unofficial policy.

The "glass ceiling" is distinguished from formal barriers to advancement, such as education or experience requirements. Mainly this invisible barrier seems to exist in more of the developing countries, in whose businesses this effect is highly visible. However, this glass ceiling tends to cripple working women the most. This barrier prevents large numbers of women, ethnic minorities, and sexual minorities from obtaining and securing the most powerful, prestigious, and highest-grossing jobs in the workforce. This barrier makes many women feel as they are not worthy enough to have these high-ranking positions, but also they feel as if their bosses do not take them seriously or actually see them as potential candidate.

Origin:

The term glass ceiling was used in article by two women at Hewlett-Packard in 1979, Katherine Lawrence and Marianne Schreiber, to describe how while on the surface there seemed to be a clear path of promotion, in actuality women seemed to hit a point which they seemed unable to progress beyond.

The term "glass ceiling" has been thought to have first been used to refer to invisible barriers that

impede the career advancement of women in the American workforce in an article by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt in the March 24, 1986 edition of the Wall Street Journal. However, the term was used prior to that; for instance, it was utilized in a March 1984 Adweek article by Gay Bryant. The term glass ceiling was used prior to the 1984 article by two women at Hewlett-Packard in 1979, Katherine Lawrence and Marianne Schreiber, to describe how while on the surface there seemed to be a clear path of promotion, in actuality women seemed to hit a point which they seemed unable to progress beyond.

Barriers to Women's Leadership:

One would like to imagine that the glass ceiling effect is something that is easily reversible by women as long as they know the proper ways to fight it. Unfortunately, the glass ceiling is embedded within our society through a variety of barriers that can both indirectly and directly affect a female's ability to obtain management positions across the country. It is no secret that the glass ceiling is an issue faced by women all over the world, likely for many of the same reasons. Below are some of the barriers woman faces as outlined by the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission.

1. Societal Barriers (may be outside of the direct control of a business):

Some women may find it hard to obtain the education and training required to advance into management positions. Women may be limited by the conscious or unconscious prejudices of other people regarding race, gender or ethnicity.

2. Internal Structural Barriers (Direct control by business):

● Recruitment or outreach programs that do not seek to recruit women
● Corporate climates. Cultures that alienate women
● Lack of mentoring, management training and opportunities for career advancement
● Biased rating and testing system

3. Governmental Barriers:

● Lack of consistent monitoring and prevention programs
● Lack of follow-up and maintenance of prevention plans that have been put into place
● Courts not taking complaints seriously
● Inadequate reporting systems that address the glass ceiling

4. Gender -based Barriers:

● Corporate policies and practices
● Training and career development
● Promotion policies
● Compensation practices
● Behavioral and cultural explanations
● Behavioral double binds
● Communication styles
● Stereotypes
● Preferred leadership styles
● Power in corporate culture

5. Other Barriers:

● Lack of family oriented programs within the workplace
● Negative assumptions of one's abilities and or commitment within their organisation
● Lack of support from female co-workers when a management position is achieved
● Lack of support from upper management to address and eliminate gender issues from company culture
● Exclusion from networking

Guidelines to Enhance Women's participation in Leadership:

Whatever the reason, you have a choice. You can accept your situation and be happy with looking up and not being able to touch what you see, or you can smash the glass with purpose and determination.

If you do, indeed, want to break through that glass, here are some steps to take.

1. Identify the Key Competencies within Your Organization:

Key competencies are the common skills and attributes of the people in your company's upper levels. These skills are often tied closely to the organization's culture and vision. Companies that value innovation and strive to be leaders will probably promote individuals who are outgoing, risk takers, and not afraid to "tell it like it is." However, if you work for a conservative company

(such as a publicly owned utility) chances are that top management are analytical thinkers, with a reputation for avoiding risk and making careful decisions.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What are the values of your organization?
- What behaviours does your company value and reward?
- What type of person is promoted?

Understand what sets your company and its leaders apart. This is the first step toward discovering how to position yourself for a top leadership role.

Two universal competencies for top management are effective leadership and effective communication. Each of these is complex.

- Read everything about leadership skills, styles and attributes.
- Communication skills will help you, regardless of the level you want to reach in your career. Start with the introduction to communication skills, and learn to use as many of these tools as possible.

2. Set Objectives to Align Your Competencies with Top Management:

Once you know your target, set goals to get there. You're responsible for determining your own career direction. Be proactive and go after what you want, because it probably won't be handed to you.

Do the following:

- Let your boss know that you want to work toward a higher-level position.
- Ask your boss what skill areas you need to develop.
- Work together with your boss to set goals and objectives, then monitor and measure your performance.

Remember to concentrate on areas of your performance that you can improve. Don't set a goal to achieve a certain position by a certain time. This can be discouraging if it doesn't happen. For example, set a goal to consistently demonstrate assertive and clear communication. If you achieve the goal, no matter what job title you have, you have succeeded.

3. Build Your Network:

You should also build relationships with other people in your organization. You never know who may be in a position to help you or provide you with valuable information.

It's important to network in all areas and levels of your company. Many people tend to think it's best to make friends at the top. However, to be effective and actually make it to the top, you'll need the support of colleagues at other levels as well.

Try these tips:

- Reach out to new people on a regular basis.
- Get involved with cross-functional teams.
- Expand your professional network outside of your organization. If you can't break the glass ceiling in your company, you may have to look elsewhere for opportunities.

4. Find a Mentor:

Having a mentor is a powerful way to break through the glass ceiling. The barriers that you face have likely been there for a long time. Past practices, biases and stereotypes, and old ideas are often long established at the top of many organizations.

Is upper management reluctant to work with certain types of individuals? Do they exclude certain people from important communications? A mentor can help you learn how to get connected to the information and people who can help you. A mentor can also be a great source of ideas for your professional development and growth.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Is there someone in upper management you can approach to help you?
- Will your boss be able to provide mentoring support?
- Are there people with strong political power who can offer you assistance?

5. Build Your Reputation:

Ultimately, the way to get ahead is to get noticed. You want people to see your competence, leadership abilities, communication skills, technical knowledge, and any other competencies that are typical of people at the top.

Develop your skills and network with people so that your name becomes associated with top management potential. To do this, you need to

build a reputation as the kind of person who fits the description of top management. Visibility is very important. Remember, while you can see up, those at the top can see down. Make sure that what they see is you.

Follow these guidelines:

- Seek high-profile projects.
- Speak up and contribute in meetings.
- Share ideas with peers as well as people in higher positions.
- Identify places where your reputation is not what you want it to be, and develop plans to change them.

6. Know Your Rights:

Finally, watch for discriminatory behaviour. Sometimes biases and stereotyping can cross the line into discrimination. It's unfortunate for both you and your organization when situations like this occur.

Don't just accept frustration and failure. Know that you're doing everything right, and arm yourself with a good understanding of your rights regarding official company policies and local laws.

Role of HR in empowering the women's leadership:

HR professionals should take a proactive role to identify whether the glass-ceiling phenomenon is operating within their organization and should lead the way to find solutions to overcome it. Understanding the organization's culture, values and norms is the first step. Change, however, will only successfully occur with the commitment of the organization's top management. Key to organizational change is education-of management, women and the overall workforce. Finally, measurement is critical to map the path for change and chart the results.

1. Examine the Organizational Culture:

- Review HR policies and practices to determine if they are fair and inclusive (e.g., pay differences, hiring practices, history of promotions to senior positions, affirmative action plans).
- Examine the organization's informal culture: look at subtle behaviors, traditions and norms that may work against women.
- Through surveys and focus groups, discover men's and women's perceptions about the organization's culture, their career expectations and what drives their intentions to stay or leave.
- Identify the organization's best practices that support women's advancement.
- Map the strengths and weaknesses of policies and programs.

2. Drive Change through Management Commitment:

- Support top-management commitment to talent management, including women in senior positions.
- Ensure that diversity (including women in senior positions) is a key business measurement for success that is communicated to all employees by top management.
- Require line management accountability for advancement of women by incorporating it in performance goals.
- Train line managers to raise awareness and understand barriers to women's advancement.

3. Foster Inclusion:

- Establish and lead a change-management diversity program for managers and employees.
- Affirm diversity inclusion in all employment brand communications.
- Develop a list of women for succession planning.
- Develop and implement retention programs for women.

4. Educate and Support Women in Career Development:

- Emphasize the importance of women acquiring line management experience.
- Encourage mentoring via informal and formal programs.
- Acknowledge successful senior-level women as role models.
- Support the development and utilization of women's networks inside and outside the organization.
- Create and implement leadership development programs for women, including international assignments, if applicable.

5. Measure for Change:

● Monitor the impact of recruiting strategies designed to attract women to senior levels of the organization.

● Track women's advancement in the organization (hiring, job rotation, transfers, international assignments, promotions)

● Determine who gets access to leadership and management training and development opportunities.

● Evaluate differences between salary of men and women at parallel levels within the organization.

● Measure women's turnover against men's. Explore reasons why women leave the organization.

Women managers who broke the glass ceiling in India

Women do not have proportionate representation in companies, and yet they are better off than women in other parts of the world when it comes to top positions.

Eleven per cent of 240 large companies -- Indian-owned as well as multinational, private as well as state-owned -- have women CEOs, according to a study carried out by executive search firm EMA Partners. By contrast, only 3 per cent of the Fortune 500 companies have women CEOs.

Still, most experts say women are under-represented in corner offices across the world. "Given that roughly about 50 per cent of our population is female, that about 50 per cent of staff is female in most markets, the gender is hugely unrepresented in boards and at the CEO level," said EMA Partners International chairman James Douglas.

Chanda Kochar:

Chanda Kochhar is among the leading women in India's financial services sector. She took over as managing director and CEO of ICICI Bank from May 1, 2009. According to Chanda Kochhar Head of India's largest public sector bank with 10,000 plus employees now a days companies are considering merit and not be biased to any gender and women should not expect to be treated differently in any field

Indra Nooyi:

Indra Nooyi is the newly appointed CEO of PepsiCo-the world's second-largest soft drink maker. She joins the select band of women who head Fortune 500 companies. Presently, there are only 10 Fortune 500 companies that are run by women, and Indra Nooyi is the 11th to break into the top echelons of power. Prior to becoming CEO, Indra Nooyi was President, Chief Financial Officer and a member of the Board of Directors of PepsiCo Inc.

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw:

Eleven per cent of the Indian women CEOs are in the media and another 11 per cent in pharmaceuticals. Thus, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw is the chairman and managing director one of the largest pharmaceutical company in India she also reached in the lime light of corporate world when she decided to fill majority of the vacancy in the organization with womens.

Shikha Sharma:

Shikha Sharma heads Axis Bank. Shikha Sharma worked with the ICICI group for 28 years. Sharma is credited for the bank's growth in personal financial services.

"Amongst private and foreign banks, women almost outnumber men. This has been helped in no mean measure by women from ICICI Bank who have joined other financial institutions in recent times.

Rajshree Pathy:

Manufacturing has traditionally not attracted too many women because of the nature of the business and the location of factories in the interiors. Thirty-five per cent of the women CEOs, according to EMA Partners, are also promoters of their companies. This includes Rajshree Pathy who runs Rajshree Sugars & Chemicals and Meher Pudumjee who is the chairperson of Thermax.

Meera Sanyal:

Meera Sanyal was appointed as CEO of ABN Amro Bank in December 2007. Sanyal was working as corporate executive vice president and head of services (Asia) of ABN Amro. She was earlier the chief operating officer of the bank.

Findings of the study

1. Women today share the workspace with men in almost all functions and areas.
2. But women in top management positions are still a rare species.
3. Globally, according to the Fortune 500 companies, less than 4% of the women are in the upper most ranks of CEO and less than 3% of the women are top corporate role holders in India.
4. Gender is no longer believed to be a career limiting factor
5. Internal support mechanisms like mentoring and coaching are not tailored to women's individual needs
6. Female executives believe that companies are doing a better job than society in general to promote equality

Suggestions:

●   Diversity management programs should be followed in organizations.
●   Cross cultural training as well as Executive Training Program should be planned.
●   Right person should be appointed at right position irrespective of stereotype effect.
●   Skill Based Diversity Training should be provided to women so that they can compete within the organization.
●   Awareness Based Diversity programs should be provided so that workforce can understand each other and work cordially.
●   Managerial support should be provided as per need.
●   Recruitment process should be given a thought.

Conclusion:

Thus, taking into account all above mentioned points, it is possible to conclude that nowadays the glass ceiling syndrome is still a serious problem. In fact, the position of women has not changed or improved substantially. In stark contrast, the life at the top is still white and male and the arguments in favor of the existence of equal opportunities for men and women seem to be not very convincing. At least statistics perfectly illustrates that women are not only underrepresented at the top positions, but they are also often discriminated and are not considered to be potentially prospective workers. As a result, the current leaders prefer to develop men as future leaders instead of developing women whose potential may be equal or even higher than that of some men that occupy high positions. Obviously, such a situation cannot remain unchanged and the problem of the glass ceiling still has to be solved in such a way that women can get a real opportunity to fully realize their potential and become leaders.

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