Effect of Glass Ceiling on Women Managers: Issues and Perspectives

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Abstract

The term "glass ceiling" has been thought to have been first used to refer to invisible barriers that impede the career advancement of women in the American workforce in an article in the March 24, 1986 edition of the Wall Street Journal. The term 'glass ceiling' has been used to describe the hurdle that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper hierarchical level in a organization, despite being qualified, efficient and effective. This describes an invisible barrier through which women can see elite positions but cannot reach them ("ceiling"). The present paper aims to offer a brief overview about the phenomenon of glass ceiling, and the consequent status of women in management.

Key words: *Glass Ceiling, women managers, gender.*

Introduction

Historically speaking, in every age and culture, there has been a contradiction and consequent debate about the roles, men and women should play in society. Though the justification provided has underlined the necessity of division of labour (the home-makers vs. the wage-earners), certain cultural value systems seem to be playing a latent role in defining the gender perspective on work and contributions, thereof, in any given society. There are enough evidences to show that women have been economically contributing significantly in various types of activities in societies. However, their contributions have been rendered unimportant, as a result of a traditional notion of role divisions in patriarchal societies thereby, making women's contribution, socially invisible and economically unproductive. This led to the gender-role stereotyping about the significance or non-significance of work which consequently led to biases against women and defined the secondary position ascribed to them in society. A direct consequence of this has been felt on all aspects of status of women and has resulted into a situation where they seem to have to struggle to occupy and enjoy the status they rightfully deserve in the context of gender-based perspectives.

The term 'glass ceiling' which has been used to denote the barriers created for women to reach higher echelons of organizations is an associated phenomenon, arising out of stereotypical gender-based perspectives an socially-created definitions of the positions, men and women should enjoy in the context of career advancement in organizations.

“Glass ceiling”, has been thought to have been first used to refer to invisible barriers that impede the career advancement of women in the American workforce in an article in the March 24, 1986 edition of the Wall Street Journal (Baker & Susan, 2001). The term ‘glass ceiling’ has been used to describe the hurdle that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper hierarchical level in a organization, despite being qualified, efficient and effective. This describes an invisible barrier (“glass”) through which women can see elite positions but cannot reach them (“ceiling”) [Davies-Netzley, Sally A., 1998]. Moreover, this barrier not only can make 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 candidates (Nevill, Ginny, Alice Pennicott, Joanna Williams, and Ann Worrall, 1990).

According to Oakley, the barriers to women’s advancement in the organizational ladder fall into two distinct categories. The first category is related to corporate practices. Often gender imbalance is partially caused by the favoritism of males when it comes to “recruitment, retention and promotion” (Oakley, 2000: 322). The barriers explained by the second category are, as stated in the article, rooted in “behavioral and cultural causes […] that revolve around issues of stereotyping, tokenism, power, preferred leadership styles, and the psychodynamics of male/female relations” (Oakley, 2000: 322).

A 'glass ceiling' inequality represents (Cotter, et. al. 2001):

1. "A gender or racial difference that is not explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee."
2. "A gender or racial difference that is greater at higher levels of an outcome than at lower levels of an outcome."
3. "A gender or racial inequality in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not merely the proportions of each gender or race currently at those higher levels."
4. "A gender or racial inequality that increases over the course of a career."

The present paper aims to offer a brief overview about the phenomenon of glass ceiling, and the consequent status of women in management.

Levels and Types of Glass Eeiling Barriers

The levels and types of glass ceiling barriers are as follows:

Societal Barriers

There are two major societal barriers that cause and reinforce a glass ceiling. The *supply barrier* is related to opportunity and achievement. The *difference barrier* is projected as the conscious and unconscious stereotypes, prejudice, and bias related to gender and ethnicity (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission 1995a, pp. 7–8, 26–29.).

Internal Business Barriers

The following business-based barriers were identified:

- Outreach and recruitment practices that fail to seek out or recruit women and minorities.
- Prevailing culture of many businesses is a white male culture and such corporate climates alienate and isolate minorities and women.
- Initial placement and clustering in staff jobs or in highly technical and professional jobs, that are not on the career track to the top.
- Lack of mentoring and management training.
- Lack of opportunities for career development, tailored training, and rotational job assignments that are on the revenue-producing side of the business.
- Little or no access to critical developmental assignments, such as, memberships on highly visible task forces and committees.
- Special or different standards for performance evaluation.
- Biased rating and testing systems.
- Little or no access to informal networks of communication.
- Counter-productive behavior and harassment by colleagues.

The underlying cause of the 'glass ceiling' is the perception of many white males that, as a group, they are losing control and opportunity. Many middle- and upper-level white male managers regard the inclusion of minorities and women in management as a direct threat to their own chances for advancement. As a result of this "upper- and middle-level white male resistance", business-based barriers are not always being as forcefully addressed as they should (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission 1995a, pp. 8, 3–30).

Other Barriers

- Different pay for comparable work (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission. *Good for Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, March 1995, p. Ii).
- Sexual, ethnic, racial, religious discrimination or harassment in the workplace
- Lack of family-friendly workplace policies (or, on the flipside, policies that discriminate against gay people, non-parents, or single parents).
- Exclusion from informal networks; Stereotyping and preconceptions of women's roles and abilities; Failure of senior leadership to assume accountability for women's advancement; Lack of role models; Lack of mentoring (Catalyst report (2003).
- Requiring long hours for advancement, sometimes called the *hour-glass ceiling Hour-glass ceiling, The New York Times* blogs, April 20, 2010).

Studies on 'glass ceiling' Phenomenon

There have been a significant number of studies conducted in the context of 'glass ceiling' phenomenon and consequent status of women in management roles in management. For example, Arulampalam, Alison, and Mark (2006) analyzed gender pay gaps across the wage distribution in eleven European countries. It was found that the gender pay gaps typically widened toward the top of the wage distribution (the "glass ceiling" effect), and in exceptional cases it also widened at the bottom (the "sticky floor" effect).

Jeavons & Sevastos (2002) found that, 'glass ceiling' prevents upward mobility of women in the organizations. They also stated that even levels of promotions did exist in men and women. The data showed that the women are employed by the organization at a level that was much lower than their qualifications or lower than men, doing the same job.

When it comes to promotions, executives look at all the work that a woman has done, but only looks at the potential that a man has. A woman has to prove herself and her talent in order to be considered for the same job that a man would only have to show potential for (Blumenstein,2011).

It has been noticed that gender inequality is often embedded within the social hierarchy and this affects how women and men are perceived in leadership roles. Different traits are ascribed to females when compared to males that may influence the selection process with bias. If a female does have other traits aside from the gendered traits that she is believed to possess, then she is viewed negatively (Ridgeway,2001). Thomas-Hunt and Phillips (2004) found that, when women possessed expertise, they were actually viewed as less influential by others. However, expertise was positive for males. Therefore, possessing expertise by female leaders has not been viewed as positively, as it is for males. This also suggests that lack of skills is not the only reason why women are not deemed worthy of leadership roles.

Van Vianen & Fischer (2002) conclude that both men and women at the management level reported stronger preferences for masculine culture. Moreover, they found that, women were found to be less ambitious than men, and even ambitious women perceived work-home conflict as an important barrier to career advancement.

The Pipeline Theory (Karsten, 1994) describes the situation in which women are placed on a track that would eventually promote them to a top executive position. However, this process is long, and women sometimes spend 20–35 years in the pipeline waiting to advance to CEO positions (Miller, 2009). While many argue that women in the pipeline are becoming sufficiently trained and educated to compete for top-level positions, others contend that women in the pipeline are being unjustly held back from advancement due to leaks or blockages in the pipe("leaky pipe"). For example, some believe that there are not enough women in the pipeline. Secondly, women make many sacrifices and tradeoffs while moving up the pipeline. Lastly, the environment in many companies discourages women from advancing because they are male-dominated (Blumenstein, 2011). In order for the pipeline to work there must be a desire from women to fill the high executive positions in order for them to even be considered for those positions.

Peter (2003) argues that women themselves fail to understand the shift in focus while moving from the middle to senior and top management functions. While occupying the top positions, they are still performing less strategic and lower paying tasks. Women enter a professional system with lack of job clarity and limited information on formal tasks and functions, that also becomes a growth barrier for them.

Lyness and Heilman (2006) found in the study conducted with 448 upper level employees that women were less likely to be promoted than males, and if they were promoted, they had stronger performance ratings than males.

The current status of women in senior management

Since 1970, the proportion of women in the mature market workforce has risen from 48% to 64% (http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2011/11/working-women). However, whilst male and female graduates are recruited in almost equal numbers by businesses, the proportion of women in the top jobs around the world is very low. Just 3% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women (http://www.economist.com/node/21539928). The regional picture reveals that, 26% of senior management roles in the BRIC economies held by women, compared to just 18% in the G7. South East Asia (ASEAN) has the highest level of female participation (32%), ahead of the EU (24%), Latin America (22%) and North America (18%). At the country level, Russian women hold highest numbers of positions in senior management (46%), followed by Botswana, the Philippines and Thailand (all 39%).At the other end of the spectrum are countries with relatively patriarchal cultures where the proportion of women in senior management is much lower, such as, Japan (5%), India (14%) and the United Arab Emirates (15%) [Grant Thornton International Business Report 2012].

Globally, fewer than one in 10 businesses are led by women, indicating that it is even harder for women to reach the very top of the business world. 9% of businesses have a female CEO, although this ranges from 15% in the ASEAN region to just 6% in North America. In the Asia Pacific region (excluding Japan) and Europe, 13% of businesses are led by a woman, ahead of Latin America, the Nordic region and the BRIC economies (all 9%) and the G7 (8%). Australia emerges as the country with the highest proportion of female CEOs; three in 10 businesses are led by women, ahead of Thailand (29%), Italy (24%) and Argentina (23%). Botswana, Brazil and Japan (all 3%) perform worst on this measure, with the United Kingdom and the United States (both 6%) not far ahead. Women are best represented in finance and human resources positions. In terms of finance, 13% of businesses have female Chief Financial Officers (CFO), and a further 13% of businesses employ women in other senior finance roles, such as, Corporate Controller. More than one in four businesses in APAC (excluding Japan), Nordic and BRIC economies employ a female CFO. At the country level, businesses in Taiwan (48%), mainland China (39%), Sweden (37%) and Finland (31%) are most likely to employ a woman as CFO [Grant Thornton International Business Report 2012]. Based on the Report generated by Deloitte (Deloitte Report, November 2011), status of women in senior management positions in different countries, has been documented in the table below:

Country	quotas	Other initiatives	Numbers (Women Representation)
Australia	No gender quotas for women on board or in senior management positions.	"ASX Corporate Council Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations" 2010 was reissued. Companies listed on the Australian Security Exchange (ASE) in 2011 require to adopt, disclose, and implement diversity policy , with regard to the number and representation of women at various levels.	12.5% of Board Directors on ASX 200 companies (McIntyre , 2011). 10.9% on a sample of 197 listed companies (Governance Metrics International, 2011).

Canada	No gender quotas for women on board or in senior management positions.	The Canadian Board Diversity Council launched in 2009 aiming to improve diversity on Board.	12.9% on a sample of 131 listed companies(Governance Metrics International, 2011).
United States	No gender quotas for women on board or in senior management positions.	From February 2010, a rule was approved which required to disclose the diversity management at the Director's Level.	15.7% on Fortune 500 company Boards (Catalyst, 2010).12.3% on a sample of 1763 listed companies (GovernanceMetrics International, 2011).
Belgium	The Belgian law on gender diversity (July 28, 2011) requires minimum one third male directors and one third female directors on a company Board.	The Ministry of Equal Chances of the Flemish Region, along with specific Chambers of Commerce and The Belgian Institute of Directors established a program to promote women in management (2009).	7.7 % on a sample of 24 listed companies(Governance Metrics International, 2011).

France	In January, 2011, the French Law was modified and quotas were introduced to improve representation of women on Boards of companies.	AFEP- MEDEF amended Corporate Governance Code (CGC) applicable to companies in order to enhance womens' position in management.	20.8% on CAC 40 listed companies(Deloitte France, 2011). 14.7% on SBF 80 listed companies(Governance Metrics International, 2011).
Germany	No gender quotas for women on board or in senior management positions.	The German Corporate Governance Code updated in 2010, recommends greater female representation on supervisory and management Boards.	8.2% on a sample of 600 listed companies(Institut Fur Unternehmensfuhrung,2008).
Norway	First country to introduce Board Gender Quotas (2005) , Norwegian Public Limited Liabilities Companies Act was amended.	Disclosure of the state of diversity is required.	31.9% on largest ASA Company Boards (FTSE Board Report, 2010). 35.6% on 25 listed companies (GovernanceMetrics International, 2011).

India	In the companies Bill (2011) , Ministry of Corporate Affairs, provision has been made to have at least one woman director mandatorily in the prescribed class or classes of companies.	Corporate Governance Code (CGC) Clause 49 of the Listing Agreement and other voluntary guidelines do not contain specific recommendations.	5.3% out of 1112 Directorships of 100 companies listed on BSE (Standard Chartered Bank 2010).4.8% on a sample of over 61 Listed Companies (GovernanceMetrics International, 2011).
China	No gender quotas for women on board or in senior management positions.	Corporate Governance Code (CGC) does not contain specific recommendations.	8.5% on a sample of 97 listed companies (GovernanceMetrics International, 2011).
Singapore	No gender quotas for women on board or in senior management positions.	Corporate Governance Code (CGC) does not include specific recommendations. Board Agender (outreach arm of the Singapore Council of Women's Organizations) aims to provide a forum for women participation in management.	7.3% on a sample of 51 listed companies (Governance Metrics International, 2011).

Malaysia	In 2011,Malaysian Cabinet approved at least 30% women representation in decision-making positions in the private sector companies.	The approved legislation is an extension of a similar government policy introduced in 2004.	6.3% on a sample of 28 listed companies (Governance Metrics International, 2011).

Conclusion

From the above, it is clear that, in the present context, an insignificant number of women seem to enjoy the privilege of occupying the top positions in various organizations, irrespective of the country to which they may belong, globally speaking. Although in some countries, measures have been taken to ensure that women represent themselves in the top most positions in the organizations, however, even in such countries the position does not seem to be very bright. In other counties, where such measures are non-existent or partially existent, socially and culturally created gender-based perspectives seem to act as barriers in creating an environment where women can rightfully rise and reach to the top of the organizations. On the whole, it is a matter of concern and, therefore, the current situation demands a change in the perspective, needs to break gender-based stereotypical notions, based on socio-cultural punctuations that govern most societies. The problem of the 'glass ceiling' is not a matter of only legality, but the ability of a society to re-look at its socio-cultural and traditional norms and to question them squarely, to bring about a change in the mind-sets of people, in order to create a force that would shatter the 'glass ceiling' and give the rightful position to the women which they deserve.

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