Breaking the glass ceiling

Politics andhuman rightspolicy have changed significantly throughout the second half of the twentieth century, notably in relation to attitudes about race, gender, and sexuality, and although they have nurtured a particular vision ofsocial justice. Unfortunately, not all the problems of equal opportunities at the workplace have been solved. For female employees, glass ceiling proposes great opportunities to be equally treated and protected (to some extent).

During half a century, " breaking glass ceiling" policies have proved their effectiveness, but cannot " abolish" gender and racial inequalities. For this reason, training and promotion activities as a part of " breaking glass ceiling" policies are vital for successful organizational performance. The significance of " breaking glass ceiling" policies is that it gives women opportunities to be promoted and highly paid, occupy high administrative posts according to their skills andprofessionalism.

Findings were provided by Federal Glass Ceiling Commission and revealed that " 95 percent of senior level managers are men and of that 95 percent, 97 percent are white. And of the five percent of these managers who are women, only 5 percent are minority women" (Redwood, 1996). In spite of the fact that equal opportunities policies have implemented for decades and women occupy " 44 percent of the total persons employed in executive… this category is extremely broad, and women are grossly underrepresented at the top executive positions of Fortune 500 corporations" (Jackson, 2001, p.

30). To over come these possible threats organizations should conduct programming of specific human resources activities, based on personal

development and human capital policies. The problem is that many women are deprived their right to occupy high administrative position. The necessity of breaking glass ceiling is caused by dominance by white males in American workforce. At the beginning of the XXI century they occupy the majority of managerial positions and many of the more important blue-collar jobs. The role of women is to occupy lower-paying positions.

On the other hand, women racial minorities found considerable barriers to entering the labor market at the higher paying levels. Following Chaffins et al (1995) glass ceiling is " the form ofdiscriminationhas been depicted as a " barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women and minorities from moving up in the management hierarchy (Morrison & Glinow, 1990 cited Chaffins et al 1995, p. 380). The glass ceiling has been evident in both position and pay within organizations (Frieze et al. , 1990 cited Chaffins et al 1995, p. 380).

In general, glass ceiling means the invisible barrier for women and minority groups that prevent them to be appointed to high administrative and managerial positions. Glass ceiling is a symptom of a big problem of equal opportunities and discrimination at work, and a part of diversity management. Equal opportunities policies play a major and continuing role in the lives of people, especially with the growth of large-scale business organisations and thedivorceof own¬ership from management. Organisations of one form or another are a necessary part of a society and serve many impor¬tant needs.

The decisions and actions of management in organisations have an increasing impact on individuals, other organisations and the community. It

is important, therefore, to understand the role of equal opportunity policies and the perva¬sive influences which it exercises over the behaviour of people. Heated discussions concern the role of glass ceiling in organizational development and its impact on HR management. Discrimination on the grounds of sex or national status is unlawful, and has to be overcome in the work place (Morrison, 1994, 72).

The necessity of breaking glass ceiling policies is an issue of the day, because women and minoroties are discriminated in many aspects of our life and work. The selec¬tion process in particular directly discriminates between people in order to offer the reward of a job to one but not the others. Certain forms of discrimination are acceptable but others are not, and have been made unlawful. Topical Area Legislation, voluntary codes of practice andequalityinitiatives have resulted in some progress towards equality of treatment for women, but there remains inescapable evi¬dence of continuing discrimination.

More recent approaches of the business case for breaking the glass ceiling, the economics of equal opportunities, the valuing and managing of diversity in organisations, and the mainstreaming of equal opportu¬nities are a response to the insufficient progress made so. The main problem is that women do not have a chance to rich high management and administrative positions in some organizations that deprived them from challenges to achieving recognition, promotion and resulted in discriminating policies. The article by Thomas R. Miller and Mary A.

Lemons " Breaking the glass ceiling: lessons from a management pioneer" describes a personal example of Lillian Gilbreth (1878-1972), and difficulties

based by this woman based on gender discrimination. This article shows that there is a necessity of breaking the glass ceiling strategies because there are always certain groups in any society that are discriminated against unfavourably due to the prejudices and preconceptions of the people with whom they have to deal. Lillian Gilbreth was one of the woman faced by " glass ceiling": at the beginning of hercareer.

The authors explain that preconceptions were sometimes verbalised, and the male managers and executives holding these preconceptions were unaware of the way that they saw and judged things and people, especially women employees. Lillian Gilbreth had to prove that she was worthy high managerial position working hard for years and had to complete more work than male employees had to do. The authors portray that this glass ceiling policies within organizations went deep, and in relation to women concerned challenging a system of institutional discrimination and anti-female conditioning in the prevailingculture.

The another article " Designing Women: A Qualitative Study of the Glass Ceiling for Women inTechnology" written by Mary A. Lemons , Monica J. Parzinge represent an interesting problem concerning the role of women in engineering and technology management, and dominant role of men in this sphere. The statistical results from IT industry suggest that: " In 1971, the female portion of computer systems analysts and other specialists was only 9%. By 1990, this proportion had jumped to 35%. In 1996, the Department of Commerce noted a decline in the proportion of females to 30% (Foster, 2000, cited Lemons, Parzinge, 2001, p.

4). The authors explain that males culture is important in two ways in glass ceiling - first, inrespectof the whole range of approaches tocultural diversity, organisational culture is a determinant of the way that organ¬isations treat women. Breaking glass ceiling tended to concentrate on behaviour and, to a small extent, attitudes, whereas management recognise a need to go beneath this. Glass ceilings for women in IT results in lack of understanding between male and female employees and prejudices towards the role of women in information technology field.

However, these preconceived ideas influence the actions of the people who hold them, and the way they deal with others. The effects of this can be seen in the employment arena, as this is inextricably linked with discrim¬ination in the rest of society. These offer some useful perspectives and practices, although the underlying concepts also raise some issues and concerns. In the article, " The glass ceiling: are women where they should be" Stephanie Chaffins et al raise a question concerning biased perception towards women and stereotypes that influence decision making of executives.

In essence, women are working in occupations which reflect their perceived role in society, and are generally found servicing and caring for oth¬ers. It is recognized that many organisations are adopting breaking glass ceiling policies and are seriously examining whether they are fulfilling the potential of all their staff. The interrupted pattern of women's employment therefore decreases the incentives for both women and employers to engage in their training. Although this may explain the position for some it does not explain the posi¬tion of women who do invest their time ineducationand training.

Neither does it explain the disparities in earnings which exist between men and women where neither have committed themselves to education and training The article " Breaking the glass ceiling: African-American women in management positions" by A. Mitra the author unveils another important issues of double glass ceiling policies: gender and racial discrimination. This article reveals disturbing results and shows that " among supervisors with a high school and college education, black women earn lower wages than black men even after controlling for detailed background, personal, and human capital characteristics.

The lower earnings of black female supervisors can partly be attributed to the fact that they are segregated in predominantly female jobs" (Mitra, 2003, p. 67). These facts help to understand the causes and reasons why women cannot achieve high managerial position at the same as men employees and factors that prevent them. From the managerial point of view, disadvantaged groups, who have already been iden¬tified, are women, people from other racial backgrounds, disabled people and older people, and in the USA there is legislation protecting the employment rights of the first three of these four groups.

Causes Taking into account the information mentioned above, it is evident that glass ceiling has deep roots and requires special programs and policies in order to provide equal opportunities for women and racial minorities at work. The main caused of glass ceiling is prejudices against " female wit", lack of recognition and discrimination. The fact that prejudices has been taken seriously by organizations despite initial ridicule, especially in the

popular press, suggests that feminist concerns have become more publicly acceptable.

There are other signs of responsiveness to feminist criticism - for example " female wit". Though there is disturbing evidence that only a small minority of women feel able to report discrimination at work based on low recognition and appraisal. It should, however, be framed so that it is easy to derive from it policies on these and other aspects of conduct at work. It should also provide a basis on which to build training on such problem themes in a way which is convincing even to people who might otherwise consider them to be matters only for campaigning special interest groups.

Cultural values and traditions supported by years of discrimination policy towards women is other cause of glass ceiling. There has been a significant shift in attitudes towards greater acceptance of equality, despite abundant evidence of continu¬ing prejudice, inertia and discrimination; and there are indications of a greater willingness to respond sympathetically to women suffering sexual harassment or physicalviolencefrom men. But the role of groups and individuals committed to achieving equal rights and fair treatment is clearly still essential.

" It translates into a syndrome that people who do the hiring feel most comfortable " hiring people who look like them. " (Redwood, 1996). The other important facts represent by Rene Redwood who suggests that: " the underlying cause for the existence of the glass ceiling is the perception of many white males that they as a group are losing - losing competitive advantage, losing control, and losing opportunity as a direct consequence of inclusion of women and minorities" (Redwood, 1996). The image of women

as a weak member of society and housewife creates a negative image of an employee able to manage effectively.

In addition, economic position of many women has deteriorated, some being forced to accept lower wages and many losing protection of their rights at work. High unemployment, changing job patterns policies have meant that the position of working-class women has tended to worsen. This cause Rene Redwood calls " societal barriers, which include a supply barrier related to educational opportunities and the level of job attainment" (Redwood, 1996). Lack of training and promotion is also a cause of glass ceiling. Performance deficiencies can result from lack of women training which is closely connected with lack of skills.

Many companies do not propose equal training facilities for female and male supposing that women are more likely to leave job for looking after the children than men, so they see investments in female employees unnecessary and ineffective. Solutions If organizations do not take actions and do not implement appropriate policies aiming to break glass ceiling they can face with strong feminists movement and equal right movement. Also, female employees can organize antidiscrimination campaigns in order to protect their rights and equal opportunities.

Also, glass ceiling deprives organizations from highly skilled work force and high qualified professionals. Women can leave an organization if they do not promote for a long time and face with discrimination policies. Today, the debate concerns the action that should be taken to alleviate the disadvantages of women. One company supports legislative action, while the other argues that this will not be effective and that the only way to change

fundamentally is to alter the attitudes and preconceptions that are held about women. However, there have been some efforts to change attitudes directly in addition to this.

The major reason for breaking glass ceiling can be explained by the fact that discrimination against various groups in an organization has been made unlawful and legislation designed to avoid discrimination have been introduced, but they cannot solve all the problems arisen at the work place, and glass ceiling exploited by managers is the only possible way to manage diversity. Also, it was found that " Female ways of managing life are much better suited to tomorrow's business than is traditional male behavior. " (Lemons, Parzinger, 2001, p. 4). The concept of the learning curve is important in breaking glass ceiling policies.

It ascends quickly, showing increasing proficiency. There are various levels in the curve, where a woman is consoli¬dating and developing her knowledge. Where a group of persons is trained, the group may set 'norms' which may stop individuals from moving ahead, and therefore it is important to ensure that the group norms are the same as the objectives of the trainer, so that individuals can progress. For managers, it is important to propose equal opportunities for males and female at the workforce avoiding violation of human rights and dignity.

A policy for promotion is needed and its contents may be: all promotions to be made, as far as possible, within the firm; the main basis of promotion to be merit and ability. Seniority (often the number of years' service) to be considered but not to form the sole reason for promotion; opportunities given to all employees to reach the highest grades; vacancies be advertised

and be kept open to all employees; accurate personnel records must be kept and these must include grading and merit ratings and other relevant details.

These occur from one department or job to another or both and may solve a number of problems. Clear records are essential to obtain knowledge of the new job's requirements and the qualities needed for it. The employee, or department head, may have requested the transfer. Care and tact are needed in these situations. After identifying the development needs of the individual the choice of course must be made. Some firms have noted the waste ofmoneyon affirmative action. Nevertheless, this policy deprives individuals to be given an opportunity to use the knowl¬edge gained.

" The evolution of today's organizations " requires a different emphasis on attributes in developing future managers. These attributes include team working, high interpersonal skills, negotiating, consensus management, and the ability to handle several issues or projects at one time" (Lemons, Parzinger, 2001, p. 4). Breaking glass ceiling policy cannot be considered in isolation from the remuneration policy. Wages may account for up to 80 per cent of total costs in some industries.

The objects of a policy of remuneration are: to attract and retain sufficient staff of the required calibre to meet the orga¬nization's objectives; to provide staff with incentives for better work; to have a policy which is logical and consistent, easily understandable and flexible. After objectives, policies and priorities have been determined, the methods of remuneration to be used to achieve them should be considered, i. e. job evalu¬ation, merit rating, incentive schemes and fringe benefits. Reflection

Women with a high achievementmotivationmay perceive that successful performance is caused by their own internal forces, and their ability and effort, rather than by the nature of the task or by luck. An employee (and woman as well) may expect promotion as an outcome of a high level of contribution in helping to achieve an important organisational objective. They determine the perceived equity of their own position. Feelings about the equity of the exchange is affected by the treatment they receive when compared with what happens to other people.

Today, breaking glass ceiling covers a range of approaches and emphases, some closer to equal opportunities, some very different. In reality, there remains the question of the extent to which approaches have really changed in organisations. Equal opportunities in may just be a way of making it more palatable in today's climate, may be used to revitalize the equal opportunities agenda. In professional activity and personalleadershipthese strategy will help to overcome possible difficulties and help to sustain strong position within the company.

Foracademicpurpose breaking glass ceiling can be seen as reflective as it deals with people already in the organisation, rather than getting people into the organisation -managing rather than expanding diversity. Many organizations prefer not to invest in women, because they are not sure that it will be repaid with interests. Nevertheless, knowledge of these facts will help to find appropriate solutions and consensus in training and promotion activities. For leadership policies, breaking glass ceiling should play a major and continuing role on the organization-employee relations.

The decisions and actions have an increasing impact on individuals, other organisations and the community. For HR manager breaking glass ceiling policies will help to have a clear understanding of the following concepts of indi¬vidualism and membership in a group, impor¬tant of apersonalityin the group, important to held meetings privately and in public. For a manager and a leader, breaking glass ceiling should involves set¬ting policies, formulating plans, and trying to make the best deci¬sions possible.

All this is done in a context of how the organisation as a whole, and the HR manager in particular, see the role of glass ceiling, theenvironmentof the business, and the situation in which it operates. The importance of breaking glass ceiling can be explained by the fact that these policies create an environment which encourages the creativity of all, and enables everyone to work without feelings of insecurity, and with¬out insult. Equal treatment of all employees and absence of glass ceiling is vital in every organization.

For future manager nn important priority is to create an environment of trust and shared commitment, and to involve staff in decisions and actions which affect them. References 1. Chaffins, S. , Cangemi, J. P. , Forbes, M. , Fuqua Jr. , H. E. (1995). The Glass Ceiling: Are Women Where They Should Be, Education, Vol. 115, p. 380. 2. Jackson, J. C. (2001). Women middle managers' perception of the glass ceiling. Women in Management Review. Vol. 16, Iss. 1, pp. 30 – 41. 3. Lemons, M. A. , Miller, T. R. (1998). Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Lessons from a Management Pioneer. SAM Advanced Management Journal, Vol. 63, pp. 4-5.

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