

Women and the glass ceiling concept



In 1990, the concept of glass ceiling pervaded the literature to describe the paucity of women, heading public and private sector organizations (Maume, 2004). Earlier, Morrison et al. (1987) gave new insight to the issues women face in their journey through the executive positions of the corporate organizations. Subsequently, the term “ glass-ceiling-effect” became synonymous worldwide with the struggles women face in attempting to move up to the senior, executive and top management positions in corporate organizations (Wirth, 2001). Moreover, in Mauritius Dr. Ramguttty-Wong (1998) conducted a study on the glass ceiling with the title “ CEO attitudes towards managers in corporate Mauritius”. Her research work covered the degree of involvement of women in decision making in organizations and whether top managers were aware of the problems that the female employees encountered. Thus, women face the glass ceiling when despite seeing the top jobs; they still cannot reach them due to the discriminatory barriers (Maume, 2004).

2. WOMEN AND THE GLASS CEILING: AN ILLUSION OR A REALITY?

While initially glass ceiling studies were particularly concerned with the failure of women in reaching the senior and executive positions hence, it was essential to focus on examining the reasons for inequality within management positions and career trajectories (Maume, 2004; Morrison et al., 1987). However, Cotter et al. (2001) profound description of the term glass ceiling as a specific form of generic inequality existing at the top level of the hierarchy contradicts others (Reskin and Padavic, 2001; Maume, 2004) claiming that the glass ceiling exist in lower levels and working class jobs. They further explain that immobility can occur in all occupations, but, if

female employees limit themselves to certain jobs, then it is more to do with specific inequality and not with the glass ceiling, as it only exists when there is discrimination in career advancement. Hence, Cotter et al. (2001) three criteria for the glass ceiling occurrence suggest that it occurs when despite having similar abilities and potential as men, women face barriers in their career advancements, it also occurs when due to limited promotional prospects; women are discouraged from the initial position on the job ladder, thus raising men's numbers to survive till the top levels and lastly, while organizations may be willing to pay out high salaries to women, they still hesitate to place them in positions where they can make an impact on organizations profitability, therefore, glass ceiling is created.

3. THEORIES AND MODELS

Theories and models accounting for the emergence of gender-related behaviors in organizations, and thus the creation of a glass ceiling, fall into three categories:

- (1) Biological explanations;
- (2) Socialization explanations; and
- (3) Structural/cultural explanations (Lueptow et al, 2001).

Biological models argue that there are biological differences between men and women. These differences are thought to be a result of an " evolutionary model postulating constant gendered differences based on genetic patterns evolved from adaptation to differing reproductive challenges of early males and females" Today, biological models and evolutionary models usually are <https://assignbuster.com/women-and-the-glass-ceiling-concept/>

not applied in the context of leadership differences between men and women leaders (Lueptow et al, 2001). Thus, biological model state that the differences between men and women is genetic.

Instead, socialization and structural/cultural explanations have received much more attention than biological models (Bartol et al., 2003) and have been called “ the most accepted explanation for gender differences” (Lueptow et al., 2001). Both models are social constructionist that accounts for the differences between genders. Social constructionist theories have argued that biological differences definition varies across cultures. Instead, it is the society’s expectations that produce and maintain inequality between genders (Wood and Eagly, 2002). More specifically, authors of socialization theories argued, “ gender identity and differences are acquired through various developmental processes associated with life stages, such as schooling and work life” (Bartol et al, 2003), and therefore are based on individuals’ socialization. Thus, the social constructionist model argues that gender differences arise merely due to the perception of society. Women and men acquire differences through their developmental process. For example, level of education and interest in career development and among others. Therefore, these were the theories that depict a picture of the emergence of gender issues in organizations and the creation of the glass ceiling.

4. TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLE

4. 1. Definition of Gender.

Gender is a process through which social life is organized at the level of the individual, family and society (Connell, 1993). Thus, gender is crucial in the structure of organizations. Based on individual human experience, gender defines the parameters of how women's lives are different from men's (Rohrbaugh, 1981; Nicolson, 1992a), and through the recognition that individuals are in possession of a gendered self or subjectivity through which they themselves interpret their own experiences and operate constraints (Hollway, 1989).

4. 2. Stereotyping.

Gender stereotyping is one among the most prominent reasons why women tend to pursue different occupations and why horizontal and vertical segregation of labor markets prevails (UNED-UK's report, 1998). Gender stereotypes of occupations are manifested in the belief that certain occupations are "women's" occupations and others are "men's" (Gatton, 1999). For example, when a decision is made to offer an important assignment to a man rather than to a woman, based on the assumption that women are not free to take on time-consuming tasks because of family commitment. Ultimately, women may be excluded from senior management positions because of perceptions that they will somehow change the management process by virtue of their gender.

5. WOMEN AND EDUCATION.

Marks et al (1997) stated that the educational environments may not be conducive to women's development. In fact, enrolment statistics for 2009 from the Ministry of Education revealed that at secondary level enrolment

dropped to 84 percent for girls compared to 75 percent for boys. Moreover, it is also proven that girls performed better than boys in the examinations namely Certificate of Primary Education, School Certificate and Higher School Certificate. The table below illustrates the differences in boys' and girls' performance which is higher at lower level of education and narrowed down as the level increases (Central Statistical Office (Mauritius, 2010).

Pass rates (%) at CPE, SC and HSC, Republic of Mauritius, 2009**Male****Female****Difference****CPE****62.3****74.5****12.2****SC****71.9****82.6****10.7****HSC****74.3****82.1****7.8**

Source: (Central Statistical Office (Mauritius, 2010).

However, the number of female students enrolled in tertiary or higher education continues to rise. The entrants of female in undergraduate course in Mauritius 2009 in public institutions are 10912. It increased from 50.76 percent in 2005 to 54.89 percent in 2009. In addition, considering the number of entry of female in tertiary education in Public, Private and

Overseas institutions there were a rise of 52.35 percent in 2005 to 54.84 percent in 2009 (Tertiary Education Commission, 2010). Despite this, differences in the nature and quality of tertiary education and training for females and males continue to pose barriers for many female when competing with men for promotion to professional and managerial positions. Eventually, females are unable to break through the glass ceiling.

6. CAREER CHOICE AND DEVELOPMENT.

6. 1. Career.

A career is more than just the job or sequence of jobs a person holds over a lifetime. A career is the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviors associated with work-related experiences and activities over a person's life (Felman, 1988; Hall, 1976).

6. 2. Women and Career.

From 1900 to 1980, the percentage of women in the work force increased from less than 20 percent to over 50 percent (Hall, 1976; Ross, 1983). It is estimated that by the year 2000, 65 percent of the entrants in the work force will be women (Powell, 1983). However, in 2009, Mauritius had a lesser proportion of women than men who were in employment or economically active. The economic activity rate was 43 percent for women against 76 percent for men. Working women were 182,500 in number and accounted for 35 percent of the total Mauritian workforce. They were mostly engaged (53%) in the teaching, nursing and health-related, manufacturing and trade sectors. They were also working in traditional 'female occupations' with 61%

of them in clerical positions, sale and service and in ‘ elementary’ occupations. On the other hand, a significant proportion have entered executive and professional specialty occupations with 19% in the occupation group ‘ legislation, professionals and semi-professionals’ (Central Statistical Office, 2010).

Employment by occupational group and sex, 2009

Source: (Central Statistical Office (Mauritius, 2010).

Therefore, the statistics show that women are still working in lower positioned jobs and that only a few have succeeded to climb up the job ladder.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES.

7. 1. Women and Recruitment.

Until the mid-1980, boys were usually recruited with A-level, girls with O-level. Men were offered greater prospects compared to women who had to do routine office work (Benett and Carter, 1983; Crompton, 1989; Savage, 1992a). This creates occupational segregation and creates stereotypical view on men and women’s role and abilities. However, over the last two decades employment for men has fallen as a result of an increase in women employment. For examples, between 1984 and 1999 the proportion of men who were economically active declined from 88 to 84 percent while the proportion of women rose from 66 to 72 percent in USA (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2001). However, in Mauritius women are over represented among the unemployed. The number of the unemployed women was 25, 700

in 2009 compared to 15, 800 men. Female, unemployment rate at 12. 3% was almost thrice the rate for men (Central Statistical Office, 2010). Hence, due to certain barriers female employees still struggle to crack through the glass ceiling in Mauritius.

7. 2. Legislation and Female Employees Recruitment.

In certain job advertisement the employers tend to attract only male applicants by using sexist job titles such as “ salesman”. However, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 in USA makes it unlawful to discriminate in an advertisement by favoring either sex. Yet, there maybe exceptions where the job can be performed only by men. Moreover, there are unisex job titles such as directors, managers and officers that are non-discriminatory. Therefore, this enables female also to apply for these high profile jobs and thus, encouraging them to break through the glass ceiling (Armstrong, 2009).

8. BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S CAREER DEVELOPMENT / PROGRESSION.

Barriers which hinder career development of women are complex and varied. Although many women hold management positions, few have made the breakthrough to top - level positions.

8. 1 Promotion and Pay.

If women can perform as well as men then, pay and promotion should be identical. Yet, they tend to differ (Tosi et al, 1993). This results as a solid barrier for women not being able to crack through the glass ceiling. Pay and promotion is an essential tool to motivate employees to climb up the job

ladder. Unfortunately, as female employees are exposed to barriers that prevent them from getting a pay rise or promotion, they are bound to stay below the glass ceiling. Some authors pointed out certain factors that explain the low progression rate of female employees in terms of promotion and pay.

Salary level is undoubtedly often equated with seniority and power, and if women want to establish themselves in the higher level of the hierarchy, they will have to start by no longer accepting inferior salary scales to men. Unluckily, employers sometimes play on these female attitudes towards pay (Cooper et al, 1992). Similarly, Gerhart (1987) suggests that one of the important factors contributing to the differences in the pay of female and male employees is the starting salaries paid to both for similar jobs.

Second, women are overrepresented in low - paying industries. Ward and Mueller (1985) studied the effects of industrial sector and organizational level on wages of men and women. Women are found in disproportionate numbers in service industries in which there are low profit margins, undeveloped internal labor markets, low job skill needs, and lower wage rates.

Third, in some organizations women may be doing less complex jobs at lower organizational level and thus, they get a low pay. In a study of work assignments in manufacturing plants, Form and McMillen (1983) found that women were more frequently assigned to simple repetitive tasks in which they used hand tools, whereas men were assigned to work on machines that required higher skill and on which they had more autonomy.

Fourth, a portion of the discrepancy can be attributed to different rates of pay and promotion at lower and higher organizational levels. Women do well at lower levels in organization, where their promotion rates and salary progression equals or exceeds that of men (Gerhart et al, 1987). These salary progression rates change at higher levels. Thus, preventing women progress and climb the job ladder.

The research cited above has been done during a period of significant change in the roles and number of women in the work force. Indeed, there has been progress, and luckily, it is likely to continue as the women who have entered the managerial and professional labor force at lower organizational levels have advanced in their careers.

8. 2. Training and Development.

Training and development is a fundamental tool that enables employees to acquire certain skills that enable them to contribute in the achievement of the organization's objectives. However, female employees often show their dissatisfaction towards limited training courses offered to them (Cooper, 1992). In fact, some authors have argued upon the provision of gender mixed or all female management training courses.

Harlan and Weiss (1980) argued that all female management training courses only highlight perceived differences between men and women managers, and prove detrimental in the long run. They suggest the following reasons for this:

Women maybe needing more training compared to men as perhaps, they lack certain abilities.

This may cause tension between men and women as women maybe receiving 'favored treatment'.

On the other hand, other authors (Davidson et al, 1985) argue strongly that research evidence has proved that all-women management groups are less threatening and enable women not to be dominated by the dominant group namely the male employees in terms of speech, role allocation, loyalty affiliation of managerial skills, confidence building and assertiveness training. Langrish (1981) suggests that the arguments against women-only management training programmes are primarily of three kinds:

'Real world' arguments, that is, to be able to work alongside men as successful managers, women should be able to undergo training with men. This will enable them to face the real world.

The 'special needs' view suggest that women have special needs hence, should label them 'different' that is, inferior to men.

The 'coping' argument state that women have to learn how to work with men as their superiors, colleagues or subordinates, the best way can do this is to experience working with them on management courses.

These arguments are relatively weak for the following reasons:

Women are often assigned roles by the management trainers that restrict their learning potential and experience. They are given roles such as mother, seductress, pet or iron maiden-roles (Cooper et al, 1992).

In a gender-mixed training course, women are less likely to be able to develop valuable ways of learning new skills due to the presence of overwhelming numbers of men. In a recent review of women's training needs, Colwill and Vinnicombe (1991) reaffirmed that in all-female groups, women are more able to admit faults, identify needs and areas where they feel inadequate, and engage in interactions which develop their strengths.

Eventually, Herbert and Yost (1979) believe that training women in managerial skills is of little value, if they are not allowed to demonstrate their skills on the job or not rewarded. Thus, all the arguments show the reason for which female employees cannot shatter the glass ceiling.

8. 3. Lack of Female Role Models.

As people seek role models as part of their career development, they often search for individuals with similar backgrounds to themselves. However, this is difficult for many women. Consequently, young women are often said to be disadvantaged by the lack of female role models at the top of organizations (Vinnicombe et al, 2000). Thus, female employees tend to restrict themselves below the glass ceiling as there is a lack of female role model above the glass ceiling. Indeed, a Catalyst (2000) survey of current MBA students in the USA reported that 87 per cent of women and 77 per cent of men said that it was important or very important to feature more women business leaders as role models. However, in an earlier Canadian <https://assignbuster.com/women-and-the-glass-ceiling-concept/>

public sector study of 1, 579 senior managers, Javidan et al. (1995) found that female subordinates had no problems in accepting superiors of either sex as role models. In contrast, they found that female superiors were not seen as role models by male subordinates. The critical factor for acceptance of a role model by both sexes was whether the subordinate perceived the superior to be successful or not, but the sex difference indicates persistence of seeing a male to be the manager (Schein and Mueller, 1992).

8. 4. Work-Life Balance.

Work-life balance has become a key issue for many of today's managers, particularly for women (Bailyn et al, 2001). In fact, it is a major barrier that prevents female employees to break through the glass ceiling. Hence, the way in which some high profile women manage their work/life balance has become of great interest in the media, and the few women who do apparently manage this well are role models for many younger female managers. As early as 1978, Shapiro et al. noted that selection of role models was encompassing patterns of how to manage work/life issues as well as " on-the-job" behaviors.

However, younger women may reject as role models the women at the top who do not have children. They are sometimes seen as having given up an essential part of their emotional and social capital to achieve success on masculine terms. Ely's (1994) study indicated that female managers in male dominated professional firms were less likely to be good role models especially for young female employees as they are viewed as women who were forming themselves in male moulds.

In fact, in Mauritius statistics show that on a typical working day, a working women spend around 7 hours at work and 3 hours 30 minutes during household chores and caring for the children compared to 8 hours and 1 hour respectively for a working man (Central Statistical Office, 2010).

Eventually, some women may not be willing to sacrifice their family life and reach the higher level of the hierarchy where there is greater need for commitment and extra hours of work. Instead, they are happy below the glass ceiling as there they can keep a balance family life.

8. 5. Incidence of Sexual Harassment.

Sexual harassment affects all female employees in some form or the other. It is a major issue at the workplace as it hinders the development of women within a comfortable work environment thus, preventing women to crack through the glass ceiling.

The European Commission code of practice draws attention to the fact that sexual harassment 'pollutes' the working environment; millions of women, and some men suffer. As a result of this uncomfortable working environment employees take time off, are less efficient, and, in the worst cases, leave their jobs. Therefore it is clear that female employees leave their jobs due to sexual harassment at the lower level of the organization itself and thus, are unable to climb the job ladder.

Brake et al (1992) have taken findings for various types of harassment in various settings, and conclude that female worker or student has at least a 40 percent chance of encountering some form of sexual harassment in her place of work or study.

Eradicating sexual harassment is indeed, a major challenge to attitudes. There is a need to devise formal procedures to deal with such complaints. It is important to ensure that effective measures are made available and to be used in cases of harassment (Wilson, 2002).

8. 6. Organization and Culture.

Organizational culture is another barrier that prevents women to shatter the glass ceiling. The masculine culture can be characterized by working long hours, having to cancel holidays due to work commitments, and bullying. Women who leave work at 5pm are considered to be less committed (Liff and Ward, 2001). In organizations, there is no sign of progression towards a friendlier environment which include flexible working arrangements. Female employees fear to voice out these issues as they maybe considered as less committed. Women then continue to have trouble in breaking the glass ceiling. Eventually, according to Wilson (2002) where men and women work in the same industry there is discrimination. Women sew what men cut out, women serve what men cook, women run machines which men service are examples of organizational culture that hinder women advancement.

8. 7. Women and Performance Appraisal.

Female employees are unable to shatter the glass ceiling due to their poor evaluation during the performance appraisal system. Some authors have argued the reasons behind such poor evaluations.

Lott (1992) had shown that women are less known to the evaluator; thus, the result is more likely to be negative. On the other hand, where women are

known well, as in a situation where someone they know is appraising them, the evaluation would be more positive.

But, Thomas (1987) demonstrated that the words used to evaluate men and women in appraisal are different. Women were 'less competent, logical and mature' and their performance required fewer recommendations and only vague praise. Therefore, female employees maybe having less equal opportunities due to their poor evaluation during the appraisal (Wilson and Beaton, 1992).

Alimo - Metcalfe (1993) has also reported significant differences in the perceptions of women and men in appraisal interview in an English context. Women found it more difficult than men to: talk freely about what they wanted to discuss; discuss their relationship with their appraiser; give feedback to their appraiser; and identify their areas of strength.

Besides, research on self-assessment and 360 degree feedback shows that women managers are less likely to overestimate their performance than their male counterparts, they tend to rate themselves lower than men do and lower than their own bosses rate them (Beyer, 1990; Lindeman et al, 1995; Fletcher, 1999).

Ultimately, more general studies of performance show that female give lower estimates of their performance or ability. It has been suggested that this may be due to gender difference in self presentation, rather than self confidence (Daubman and Sigall, 1997).