

# The barriers for women in career advancement



## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This sections presents a review of literature pertinent to this study including a history of mentoring, the barriers for women in career advancement, the relationship between mentoring and career advancement, mentoring in healthcare administration, and the advantages and disadvantages of formal and informal mentoring.

#### **History of Mentoring**

Mentoring is rooted in Greek mythology and arose as a concept in a story where Athena, the goddess of wisdom, assumed a male form and called herself Mentor. Athena acted as a surrogate parent to Telemachus when the boy's father, Odysseus, fought in the Trojan War. Athena provided guidance and instruction to the boy as the latter assumed the leadership of the household and groomed him to be Ithaca's future ruler (Butler, 1944). Hence, the concept of mentoring has been shaped by the notion of a relationship where a more experienced adult guides a youthful individual (Kram, 1985). More specifically, Kram (1985) describes mentoring as " a relationship between a younger adult and an older, more experienced adult [who] helps the younger individual learn to navigate the adult world and the world of work" (p. 2). Lacey (2001) states that the term " mentor" has since evolved to represent either a counselor, teacher, or friend and the mentoring relationship now connotes a partnership where the primary purpose is the exchange of information and knowledge distinct to a given industry or organization. Other authors refer to mentoring relationships as " sponsor, patron, and godfather" relationships (Rowe, 1978, as cited in Kram, 1985). A

literature review on mentoring across various disciplines by Hayes (2001) produced the definition of mentoring “ as a process of building trust between two people, one is experienced and the other is a newcomer” (p. 29). Carmin (1988) provides a comprehensive definition of mentoring:

Mentoring is a complex, interactive process, occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise that incorporates interpersonal or psychosocial development, career, and/or educational development, and socialization functions into the relationship. This one-to-one relationship is itself developmental and proceeds through a series of stages which help to determine both the conditions affecting the outcomes of the process. (p. 10)

Mentoring as a field of study started with the 1978 research of Levinson et al. on adult men’s career development experiences (as cited in Kram, 1985). Levinson and his colleagues concluded that the mentoring relationship was a pivotal experience in a young adult’s life because aside from receiving knowledge from mentors, the experience also shapes a person’s self-esteem and professional identity.

Kram (1995) identifies two broad types of mentor functions: career-related support and psychosocial support. Career-related support refers to the support mechanisms provided by the mentor that boosts the mentee’s career advancement within the organization. Component functions associated with career-related mentoring include “ sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments” (p. 86). Due to the mentor’s influence and high status, experience, and leadership position in the organization, the mentee receives the best hands-on training

and gets assistance on learning more about the organization itself and its inner workings, receives exposure to the mentor's social networks, and acquires promotions. In this regard, the mentor sees him or herself in the mentee's shoes and want to groom a future executive in his or her fashion. Allen & Eby (2002) view that mentors and mentee alike benefit from the mentoring relationship and that mentors are fueled by the desire to ensure the success of the next generation of leaders. Kram (1985) theorized the mentors can provide five specific career development functions (as cited in Ragins & Cotton, 1999):

1. Sponsoring promotions and lateral moves (sponsorship);
2. Coaching the protégé (coaching);
3. Protecting the protégé from adverse forces (protection);
4. Providing challenging assignments (challenging assignments); and
5. Increasing the protégé's exposure and visibility (exposure). (p. 530)

The second mentoring function is psychosocial in nature. The psychosocial function of mentoring addresses " those aspects of a relationship that enhance an individual's sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role" (Kram, 1985, p. 32). Kram's mentor role theory (1985) suggests that there are four components of psychosocial support that mentors can provide to mentees (as cited in Ragins & Cotton, 1999):

1. Helping the protégé develop a sense of professional self (acceptance and confirmation);
2. Providing problem-solving and a sounding board (counseling);
3. Giving respect and support (friendship); and
4. Providing identification and role modeling. (p. 530)

Where career support is dependent upon the mentor's power and influence within the organization, psychosocial support focus on the emotional bond and the interpersonal relationship underlying the mentoring relationship. Career support aims at advancing the protégé's career while psychosocial support is geared at improving the protégé's personal development.

### **Barriers for Women in Career Advancement**

Compared to several decades past, women have made leaps in terms of advancing toward senior executive positions formerly monopolized by men. However, career advancement opportunities for women still lag considerably compared to the men. Tharenou (1999) estimates that although women in developing countries make up almost half of the entire workforce, only 5 percent of them are situated in top executive positions. A worrisome fact is that while there seems to be equal opportunities for men and women in entry-level positions, the road toward the more senior levels are unfortunately blocked for women. While it is undeniable that the greater workforce composition of women is one of the most positive social changes in the twenty-first century, struggle for equal opportunity persist as women are still excluded from the top positions in the organizational hierarchy.

This phenomenon has been referred to as the "glass ceiling," a term originally used in 1986 by a Wall Street journalist to connote the status of women in the corporate world. The term was coined as a description of the complex barriers that block women's opportunities to break through the top levels in the organization. This "glass ceiling" is especially evident when one looks at rarity of female senior executives in organizations of virtually all disciplines.

The concept of the glass ceiling was recognized and accepted as a public term when the 1992 Federal Glass Ceiling Commission concluded that there were indeed several barriers that hindered women and other minority groups to achieve their full potential within the career ladder. The same study confirmed that “gendered” structural and organizational barriers prevented women from attaining the most senior level positions in several companies. Moreover, it lamented on the so-called “hegemonic masculinity” that is pervasive in the organizational culture in corporate America (Woody & Weiss, 1994).

Many studies have reported on the various barriers that women encounter during professional advancement. A report by women’s group Catalyst (1994) listed the most common barriers identified by mid-level managers that prevent them from advancing further into the top-level positions. These barriers include (as cited in Arnold & Shiner, 1997):

1. stereotyping and precepts about suitability for leadership positions;
2. exclusion from informal networks of communication;
3. absence of effective management training for female employees;
4. failure to hold upper level managers accountable for developing and advancing women;
5. inadequate appraisal and compensation systems, leading to inequities in salaries;
6. inflexibility in defining work schedules; and
7. absence of programs that enable employees to balance work/non-work responsibilities. (pp. 42-43)

The work of researchers Henderson and Bialeschki (1995) has been influential in comprehensive studies that aim to identify the different barriers that women face in their pursuit of upward career mobility. They conducted a nationwide survey among women practitioners in the recreation and leisure industry. The researchers grouped the different barriers into three broad categories: individual, organizational, and home/family. By examining career patterns, family situations, career satisfaction, and equity in the workplace issues, they found that stereotyping and gender-based discrimination remains the greatest barrier for women that prevent them from advancing to the top tier of the corporate ladder. More than half of them also reported being sexually harassed. Other identified barriers include the lack of training, lack of mentors, and women's exclusion from "male-only" networks.

Another study by Frisby and Brown (1991) surveyed 30 women mid-level managers belonging to leisure-oriented organizations in order to examine their career experiences as they struggled their way to the top. Consistent with previous findings, women in middle management reported that the most common barriers they encountered from advancing in their careers include career interruptions due to pregnancy or family issues, the lack of role models or mentors, the lack of support from senior executive to promote women, exclusion, gender stereotyping, personal factors, and exclusion from male-dominated social networks.

Frisby (1992) did a follow-up study to examine in a more comprehensive manner the factors that hinder the career development of women in leisure organizations. Using a descriptive-quantitative design, Frisby grouped the

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various barriers reported by women managers that have influenced their career direction and mobility. There were legislative factors such as gender discrimination, pay equity, and laws on sexual harassment; organizational factors such as patriarchy, exclusion from networks, flexible work options, difficulty in dealing with male-dominated organizational culture, lack of training and mentoring opportunity; and individual factors such as gender, education, and geographical mobility; and lastly, family factors that include lack of support from spouse and difficulty balancing work-family responsibilities.

Due to the complex and varied nature of identified barriers for women, studies by Henderson & Bialeschki (1995) and by Woody & Weiss (1994) have grouped these barriers into three categories: a) Individual factors; b) Organizational/Structural factors; and c) Family or Home-related factors.

### **Individual factors as barriers**

Individual traits and skills are often attributed for laggard career advancement among females. Individual factors such as age, educational attainment, skills, experience, proficiency, or ability are related to advancement. There remains gender stereotypes on what men can do that women cannot that justifies greater upward mobility for males. Some express that women lack the necessary attributes such as assertiveness, motivation, or networking skills to advance in careers (Vecchio 2002). The simple fact of “being female” thus becomes a potent barrier for career advancement among women. For instance, there is a double standard when it comes to appreciating leadership in females. Morrison, Greene and Tischler (1985) opine that when women display competence in leadership, they are



viewed negatively while men who visibly lead are appreciated. Similarly, succession in vacated executive positions is usually based on the gender of the previous occupant of the position or the job. Since most senior executive positions are dominated by males, women are immediately excluded from consideration. Moreover, females are placed in “traditionally-female” positions such as staffing and human resources and cannot be promoted to higher positions that are “traditionally-male” in nature. Age can also be a barrier as individuals who are deemed “too young” or “too old” may not be deemed suitable for senior executive positions.

### **Organizational factors as barriers**

Most research studies conclude that the biggest barriers to career advancement among women are beyond their personal control. The Glass Ceiling Commission indicts organizational and structural barriers as the most predominant barrier toward women’s upward climb in the career ladder (Woody & Weiss, 1994).

Bergmann (1986) opined that organizational structures specifically job assignments are designed to prevent women from ascending to the top. Job assignments are considered to be the primary route for career advancement. Organizational structures “steer away” women’s potential for upward mobility by confining them to work roles that are considered to be “women’s occupations.” Bergmann cites a study by Forbes that the quickest way to the top of corporations is placement in functional areas or crucial job assignments that lead to the accomplishment of critical organizational tasks (p. 88).

Klenke (1996) suggests that women face an exclusion policy that prevents them from penetrating the “ old boys” network. Access to such networks is considered a significant step to gaining upward mobility in organizations. One can access information and learn more about the organization not possible in regular communication channels.

Another barrier cited by women is the lack of mentoring opportunities from male superiors. For instance, Dreher and Cox (1996) found that females find it difficult to gain informal mentors who are male. If they do find a male mentor, they also face challenges in the course of the mentoring relationships especially in relation to its nature and possibility of misinterpretation. Some female managers even report being subjected to sexual harassment.

Cooper Jackson (2001) contends that the scarcity of women role models is another perceived barrier toward advancement. Organizational leadership is predominantly patterned after the male form of leadership. Since acquiring senior executive positions are blocked, developing women role models that would inspire and motivate women and neutralize male-dominate culture in the organization becomes challenging. Moreover, because women lack opportunities for role modeling or mentoring relationships, they often fail to plan their career and build effective networking strategies.

The reality of stereotyping has been found to affect women’s career advancement deeply. Because of gender stereotyping, women feel isolated and discouraged because they perceive themselves unable to blend well or fit in with the patriarchal culture of senior executive leadership. Sometimes,

this perception leads them to believe that have to change considerably in order to suit the male-dominated culture of the top hierarchy.

Davidson and Cooper (1986) report that gender stereotyping in the organization leads to higher stress levels among women than men. This is because gender stereotyping often pressures women to exert extra effort or to work harder and perform better than their male counterparts in order to prove themselves equal to them. Women tend to believe that in order to achieve their career goals, they have to over-perform to counter the effects of negative gender stereotyping. Even when women are promoted and do acquire senior executive status, there is a prevailing norm that they have to perform even better than their male colleagues to prove themselves worthy of the position.

Powell and Butterfield (as cited in Collinson & Hean, 2001) state that stereotyping also leads to social isolation among female managers and their heavy dependence on formalized relationships for career advancement. Female managers put a prime on their professional portfolio and credentials when they pursue promotional opportunities whereas men can depend on informal networks to advance in their careers.

Collinson and Hearn (2001) believe that unless the patriarchal nature of institutions are broken down, women will find it difficult to advance their careers in what is considered male territory. They define patriarchy as a process and a context through which male supremacy is promoted by men and institutions. Patriarchy is a stumbling block for women because it “ control[s] access to hierarchical power and characteristics of knowledge

claims” (Collinson and Hearn, 2001, p. 23). In this environment, cultural practices and information flow signify male authority, hence, placing women as mere subordinates to men. However, the problem with patriarchy is that it is a “ complementary process” that is legitimized by both women and men and forms part of the organizational culture. In this manner, male dominance becomes a self-perpetuating phenomenon in organizations. Moreover, Collinson and Hearn (2001) opine that executive culture is a male realm. They believe that women are not accepted wholly into the workforce but are merely tolerated. Hence, the notion of “ patriarchal elitism” especially in top executive culture is widespread (p. 8).

Pringle (1999) contends that female managers lack access to networks, trainings, and mentoring programs because they are usually gender-based and male-gendered. The domination of men in organizations is sustained with constant identification with one another. Perpetuating a gendered organizational culture leaves women managers isolated and places them in a situation where executive leadership feels very much like engaging in constant “ physical combat” (Sinclair, as cited in Pringle, 1999, p. 8).

### **Home-related factors as barriers**

The barriers that women encounter extend far beyond the confines of the workplace to the home. For many female managers, the home environment presents several obstacles that must be overcome in order to achieve upward mobility.

One obstacle is that some women managers, especially, those with families, experience the so-called “ second shift syndrome” where they must work on

the first shift in the workplace and continue on the second shift in the home environment. The burden of juggling work-related goals with family responsibilities is a serious concern for some women. Women who find themselves in this circumstance are also called “ dual career women” where performance at work and at home are necessary. To perform this balancing act between professional development and personal life may prove too difficult for some women in many ways. Some of them eventually may find inadequate support from their respective families to pursue career advancement goals.

A 1995 survey by recruiting company Robert Haff and Associates (1995) found that more than 80 percent of women managers who were interviewed preferred a job that featured more flexible hours, provided more family time, and slow-paced advancement than grueling jobs that featured rapid career mobility. In a sense, because of additional responsibility at home and with their families, women do not perceive career mobility as “ a methodical rise to power” (Aburdene & Naisbitt, as cited in Pringle, 1999, p. 43). Unlike the men, women do not focus on the singular objective of professional advancement but struggle to “ do it all” and come up with more creative ways to reap professional success.

Research also reports that women managers continue to bear the brunt of carrying the “ double burden” of family and work. They have to be successful equally in the home and at work. In the home environment, they need to assume the manifold tasks of wife and homemaker and struggle to become equals with men in the workplace at the same time. Sue Newell opines that so long as women continue to juggle these dual roles, they may never

achieve the parity they need and deserve in relation to men in the work environment (Newell, 1992).

However, studies have also found the home and family-related barriers do not necessarily interfere with motivation and career success among many women. The problem with having the additional burden of family responsibility for women is that it is viewed as a negative thing. Research has suggested that many companies look at women with home-related commitments with disfavor (Swiss & Walker, as cited in Pringle, 1999). What is worse is that some women may even be penalized career-wise for having commitments outside of the professional realm. Having marital and family responsibilities may not interfere in terms of commitment among women but these factors might slow down the promotional opportunities of woman managers. Some women have reported that the workplace was inviting and conducive to success when they were single and changed considerably to a more unwelcome environment when they got married and had children.

In an article, management expert Douglas T. Hall (1990) suggested that in order to provide more access for women in terms of career advancement, companies need to come up with strategies that promote balance between work and family responsibilities. Among the strategies he recommend were more flexible work schedules and expanded use of home-based work option.