

The glass ceiling

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This paper addresses two articles, *Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership* written by Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli, and *A Modest Manifesto for Shattering The Glass Ceiling*, written by Debra E. Meyerson and Joyce K. Fletcher. The phrase glass ceiling is described in many articles as a barrier that prevents women from achieving success in their careers. Women are found at the top of middle management and are being denied of higher positions in the corporate ladder and are getting paid less than men for similar type of work.

Both articles address the question whether is the glass ceiling the reason why women are not getting advancement in their careers or it is the sum of many obstacles that hold women back into the high level jobs. According to the authors of both articles, the answer to this question is that it is not the glass ceiling the barrier for women's advancement. To understand and overcome these barriers, the authors of the articles have used terms such as labyrinth and small wins strategy.

According to Meyerson and Fletcher, it is not the glass ceiling but the organizational structures and its hidden barriers to equity and effectiveness what are holding back women. This paper will explore the author's recommendations for overcoming these barriers and for helping women prevail by changing workplace's practices in organizations. Overview The two articles chosen to write this abstract have been selected from the *Harvard Business Review*.

In the first article, *Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership*, the word labyrinth is described as a contemporary symbol that “conveys the idea of a

complex journey toward a goal worth striving for” (Walls all around section, para. 1). If women are able to understand the barriers in this labyrinth, they will be able to overcome many obstacles they encounter. Throughout awareness and persistency during the process, women will have a much better chance to obtain their desirable goals in their careers. In the article A Modest Manifesto for Shattering The Glass Ceiling, the authors mentioned that is very rare to find women holding high level positions in organizations. Women represent only 10% of senior manager positions in Fortune 500 companies. According to Meyerson and Fletcher, the best way to destroy this glass ceiling is throughout the use of the small wins approach. Main Issues In the article Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership, the term labyrinth is described as what women have to go through in the workplace to be able to occupy high level roles. Woman who desire top positions, will encounter barriers during the journey, and some of them will be able to find solutions to those obstacles to improve the situation.

Some of the obstacles or barriers named in the article are (a) prejudice; (b) resistance to women’s leadership; (c) leadership style; (d) demands offamilylife; (e) underinvestment in social capital. Prejudice The beginning of the labyrinth starts here with prejudices that hurt women and help men. Women in this country, with full time positions, earn 81 cents for every dollar than men earned (Vestiges of prejudice section, para. 1). Research has been done by many professionals seeking an answer to explain the difference in pay between genders.

One of the most comprehensive studies, from the Government Accountability Office, showed that men worked more hours per year and also had more years of experience (Vestiges of prejudice, para. 3). Even though variables such as marriage, parenthood and years of education were adjusted for both genders, the study showed a gender gap that led to wage discrimination (Vestiges of Prejudice section, para. 4). According to Eagly and Carli, men are promoted more quickly than women with equivalent qualifications even in female settings such as social work and education (para. 5).

The authors add that “ White men were more likely to attain managerial positions than white women, black men, and black women” (Vestiges of prejudice section, para. 5). Resistance to Women’s Leadership The author describes women as having communal associations and men with agentic ones. Women are compassionate, affectionate, friendly and sympathetic among other communal qualities. On the other hand, men are described with agentic qualities such as aggressive, ambitious, controlling, etc, which are associated with effective leadership (Resistance to women’s leadership section, para. 3).

Eagly and Carli consider that women are at a tough place, which she describes as the “ double bind”, because people perceive women as lacking the right traits to be effective leaders (Resistance to women leadership section, para. 4). Women who are described by the peers as effective managers possess the following traits: insincere, avaricious, and pushy amongst others ((Resistance to women’s leadership section, para. 11).

Leadership Style Women are struggling with people's perceptions about by being compassionate and caring. Qualities such as assertive and controlling are perceived by people on great leaders.

According to Meyerson and Fletcher, women are considered as transformational leaders. They encourage employees, and mentor them to achieve desired goals. It is described as the type of leadership that leads to a more innovating, productive and efficient for organizations (Issues of leadership style section, para. 6). Transactional leaders are described as leaders that reward employees for meeting their goals. Men are considered to be more transactional leaders than women. According to the article, the most effective type of leadership is the transformational style.

Demands of Family Life. Studies showed that women are working less hours a year than men and have fewer years of experience due to family responsibilities. Women are confronted with the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities. Many of them end up leaving their professional careers due to work-family conflict. According to the authors, in 2005 women devoted 19 hours per week to household work, while men just helped 11 hours a week (Demands of family life section, para. 3). Meyerson and Fletcher explain that married mothers increased their hours per week from 10.6 in 1965 to 12. in 2000, and married fathers increased theirs from 2.6 to 6.5 week (Demands of family life section, para. 4). Underinvestment in Social Capital Women are trying to balance their responsibilities at home and at work which leaves them little or no time to build the social capital needed to succeed in the workplace. Another obstacle encountered by women is the

fact that these networking activities are mostly composed by men who concentrate their meetings in male activities. The C-suite is described by the author as those positions such as chairman, chief executive officer and chief operating office.

These positions are held mostly by men and only 6% hold by women (para. 1). The authors mention the following organization actions to help women obtain positions in the C-suites (a) Increase people awareness of prejudices against women; (b) change hours spent at work; (c) be more objective in the evaluations; (d) use transparent recruitment within the organization; (e) place more women in executive positions; (f) help women build strong social capital; (g) give women opportunity to return back to work when circumstances change.

The second article, A Modest Manifesto for Shattering The Glass Ceiling mentions the difficulties women confront in organizations to work effectively: (a) women bear more responsibility at home than men; (b) women who have a set schedule missed important company meeting set after hours; (c) missing meetings made them look less committed; (e) meetings put women in a double bind (The problem with no name section, para. 5). Meyerson and Fletcher mention three different approaches that have dealt with the solution to the symptoms of gender inequity (a) encourage women to assimilate to minimize the differences.

In other words to act more like men; (b) accommodates women's needs and situations such as extended maternity leave, flexible work arrangements, etc; (c) emphasize the differences that women bring to the workforce such

as their collaborative style (Tall people in a short world, para. 5). The fourth approach mentioned by the authors, deal with sources of gender inequity. This approach consists on the belief that a change is needed in the organization due to a gender inequity problem.

After recognizing the issue, this fourth approach should be linked with the small wins strategy (A fourth approach: Linking equity and effectiveness, para. 2). The article mentions the reason why the small wins process is so effective for organizations (a) tied to the fourth approach help organizations to understand erroneous practices and assumptions; (b) make a difference in the big picture in the road to change; (c) create sense that a small change is a huge and systematic change and have great impact throughout the organization; (d) have a snowballing effect.

By adding small wins, one by one, it will create a whole new system of revised practices and efforts; (e) defeat discrimination by accepting that change is needed and that it will help the organization's effectiveness.

Factual Impact of the Main Issues in Organizations Labyrinths can be thought of as a symbolic form of pilgrimage. As paths, women walk among its turnings confronting difficult situations that need to be managed along the way. What it is important for women it is to know that the passage for the labyrinth is not simple journey.

It requires for women to be aware on their progress and also to be persistent to navigate it. Organizations need to be proactive about taking measures to understand the labyrinth that leader women confront in the workplace.

Building unique leadership traits with a supportive workenvironment will help

them to overcome the barriers to obtain the desired goals. To be more effective, organizations need to support women by becoming advocates for female to advance as managers finding endless opportunities for promotion.

Organizations need to understand that women have slowed their careers and earnings for taking the majority of family responsibilities. Thus, the implication for organizations is that women are choosing to work part time, work from home or take many days off from work. Another implication for organizations, it is the need to address the challenge for women to be perceived as capable leaders. The article describes this challenge as the double bind term where women at the workplace have to please both expectations in organizations, one as leaders and one as females.

Meyerson and Fletcher explain that “ Most organizations have been created by men and for men and are based on male experiences” (The roots of inequity section, para. 1). Women have been entering the workplace confronting the fact that organizations still embrace traits associated with men such as tough, aggressive, assertive, etc. Organizations must develop a culture of fairness by creating practices that benefit both men and women where the division of labor by gender does not exist and where women feel that they add an enormous value and feel as competent as men.

Also, organizations should foster a work environment that values working parents. It is crucial to create structures and policies where work and family complement each other and where women have the opportunity to fulfill their careers without feeling guilty of abandoning their families. In the second article the authors described how important it is to shatter the glass ceiling

using the small wins strategy. Since this strategy initiates change using diagnosis, dialogue, and experimentation, it promotes efficiency and efficiency within the organizations.

The authors add, “ The strategy benefits not just women but also men and the organization as a whole” (para. 4). The organization during this strategy go through the follow steps (a) the diagnosis of the problem in which managers dialogue to find out what is happening within the organization culture; (b) experimentation where correctives practices are replaced to obtain real wins. Text Comparison According to Greenhaus et al (2010), the glass ceiling is “ an invisible but impenetrable barrier that prevents qualified women and people of color from advancing to senior management jobs” (p. 321).

The text agrees with the authors of the two articles, about the fact that even though the number of women in managerial positions had risen dramatically, women are experiencing difficulties in getting jobs above lower and middle managerial positions. For the authors of the article, Women and The Labyrinth of Leadership, the glass ceiling is a barrier which limitations are fading. Women are facing are not only barriers, but what they describe as a labyrinth. It has obstacles and turns. For the authors of A Modest Manifesto for Shattering The Glass Ceiling, the glass ceiling is not the reason why women are holding back.

The main reason, they affirm, are the organizations in which women work. The authors state that it is “ the foundation, the beams, the walls, the very air” (The power of small wins section, para. 7). Greenhaus et al (2010)

identified factors that organizations can seek to support women advance in their careers such as (a) giving more authority; (b) inclusion to formal networks; (c) establishment of mentor relationships; (d) mutual accommodation; (e) elimination of access and treatment discrimination; (f) minimal intergroup conflicts; and (f) responsiveness to work-Family issues (p. 33).

Eagly and Carli mention some these actions such as (a) establishing mentoring programs; (b) using job performance assessments that are not biased against minority employees; (c) using open recruiting tools; (d) implement family-friendly policies for both male and female employees; (e) emphasize the visibility of women in high-level leadership positions. Debra Meyerson and Joyce Fletcher explain the need for organizations to address the power of small wins since “ they unearth and upend systemic barriers to women’s progress (The power of small wins section, para. 1). According to Greenhaus et al (2010), it is the glass ceiling that limits opportunities to minorities to develop and reach top management positions in America (p. 323). They authors add that “ The small portion of women at senior management level suggest that many women do not move beyond jobs in lower and middle levels of management” (p. 323).

For the text authors the glass ceiling, in contrast with the authors of the articles, is about managing diversity since organizations are in need to understand why women and minorities experience restricted careers opportunities. According to Greenhaus et al (2010), organizations must develop a culture where employees understand multiculturalism that is the

heart of the organization's mission that must be communicated and enforced at all levels (p. 349).

References

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