Glass Ceiling: Recent Trends & Perspective in Today's Corporate World

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Abstract:
According to ILO report-Women at Work: Trend 2016; participation of women in labor force globally has decreased from 52.4% to 49.6% between 1995 and 2015. The Global Gender Gap Report, 2015 from World Economic Forum suggests women earn only 77% of their male counterparts, this wage gap widens as the women move towards higher positions. A global analysis of the boardrooms of 49 countries covering almost 6000 companies conducted by Deloitte reveals the following data:

[Source: Women in the boardroom a global perspective. Deloitte]

Geography	% of Board Seats held by women	% of Boards chaired by women
Global	12	4
USA	12	4
Asia-Pacific	6	4
Australia	15.1	5.6
China	8.5	3.5
India	7.7	2.7

These statistics convey that while a number of women are pursuing higher education and entering in corporate world, the number of women making a staunch presence at top positions of hierarchy is comparatively low. These figures raises some key questions such as, although women are choosing their career as a priority, Is corporate world accepting them with the same perspective? Is it still bonded by stereotypical and psychological barriers that have governed the human society since ages? The paper tries to examine the existence of glass ceiling and study the concept in details.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the phenomena of Glass ceiling specific to women and gender biases with an in-depth study of the historical framework and recent trends. The idea is to understand the concept of glass ceiling and its implication in a continuously improving modern world.

Methodology: Desk Research
Keywords: Glass Ceiling, Women in Management, Gender Pay Gap, Women Career Advancement

I-Introduction:

Napoleon Bonaparte quoted, "ability is nothing without opportunity." Perhaps when it comes to scenario of women at work the quote is still as valid as it was in past. Be it politics, sports, armed forces or our corporate

world; one cannot ignore the explicit signs of gender gap that exists when we talk about women and their career advancement.

While many organizations deny sexism and agree that the goal of gender equality has been accomplished, there is still a glass ceiling for women in the workplace preventing them to reach their true potential. Glass ceiling is considered as a socio-psychological barrier hindering the growth and development of a group based on gender, age, region, religion or any such trivial factor which is not directly linked with performance. Although a number of women are breaking the walls and thriving ahead in their careers, statistics suggest that glass ceiling is still a daunting reality. In this paper we have tried to explain the concept of glass ceiling, current trends related to the phenomena and how a new entrant can cope with the evils of glass ceiling with an objective to build a robust career.

II-Glass Ceiling: A Conceptual Framework-

In 1978, the phrase 'glass ceiling' was coined by Marilyn Loden. The term was further popularized in The Working Woman Report: Succeeding in Business (Gay Bryant, 1984) Later it was used in Wall Street Journal article on barriers to women in high corporate positions (Carol Hymowitz and Timothy D. Schellhardt 1986) Sooner, the first academic article on glass ceiling came in existence - "Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can Women Reach the Top of America's Largest Corporations?"(A.M.Morrison, 1987), it focused on the consistent failure of women to reach at the peak of corporate hierarchy in spite of being a good proportion of working class.

The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, U.S. Department of Labor describes glass ceiling as an unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, overlooking their qualifications or achievements. (November, 1995). A federal study conducted in 1995 found that males held 95 percent of all top management positions (The Economist, 2005).

In simple terms it is defined as a scenario where the professional growth of a particular group is hampered because of irrelevant discriminations. When the progress of women such as promotion and increments are hindered by gender based discriminations it is an epitome of this phenomena.

As per Weyer (2007) the scarcity of female leaders is associated with the long lasting prejudice and discrimination against women in the workplace. Glass ceiling includes hurdles such as narrowly defined leader image, gender stereotypes, double standards, keeping women away from informal groups, negative attitudes and lack of mentoring (Currie & Thiele, 2001; FGCC, 1995). Glass ceiling exists as a covert policy gifted by conventional attitudes, perceptions and beliefs about gender-roles. It prevents females from attaining their full potential and rise to top positions. The term is used as a simile for the invisible yet inevitable barrier that prohibits the right person to reach the right position at the right time.

III-Literature Review:

Since 1970's, a number of scholars and elite personals have studied this invisible phenomena, starting from the studies depicting orthodox mentality- "a woman's place is at home" (Jacob,1999; Moore,1995) to thought provoking findings like feminine leadership (Marilyn Loden, 1985)

Although illegal yet the practice is prevalent in different sectors and countries. The concept is prevalent in corporate as well as government sector. A study reports that the ratio of women in supervisor's position in upper levels of government position is 1:4 (women: men) and it is 1:10 at executive's level (Naff, 1994).According to

Meyerson & Fletcher (2000) the proportion of women at highest levels in business is still less. Only 10% of senior managers in Fortune 500 companies are women. Less than 4% of CEO, Executive Vice president, president and COO are women .It applies that women are pushed back by a concealed barrier, preventing them from advancing higher because they are women (Morrison et al., 1987).

This presence of women as minority at top management levels happens across occupations (ACHE, 2001; Goodman, 2003; Robinson-Walker, 1999; Tang, 1997) industries (Dingell, 2002), and countries (OECD Employment Outlook, 2002). Forster (1999) remarked that a number of women are interested in international assignments but they are excluded of these opportunities due to conventional attitudes of home country top management.

Another study confirms the scenario of lack of women in managerial and administrative ranks in spite of the increase in the number of highly qualified women (Marlow.N.Marloe,E and Arnold,1995) In a Survey women felt that they had to work twice as hard as their male co-worker just to prove their competence & potential for promotion (Gregg & Johnson, 1990) A unique panel of data for American Economic Association members was used to investigate presence of gender difference in promotion probabilities. The results confirmed that the promotion prospects for women were low grade to those of their comparable male colleagues. (McDowell et al.1999)

However, there are certain studies that suggest that the rise in education is leading to change.

Fagenson & Jackson (1993) found that the number of women managers has increased; however, they have not reached equity with their male counterparts in salaries. The gap in salaries has reduced in some fields, but still remains large in other fields. Trends suggest that women have an upper edge in business as compare to academics when it comes to holding senior level managerial and leadership role (Center for Women's Business Research, 2004; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990).

Not all the arguments stands in favor of glass ceiling, some call it as a myth and a self created issue (Rai and Srivastava,2008)Their argument ruled out the concept of gender discrimination over competence, ambitions and commitment for work. A different perspective to glass ceiling is revealed by the studies which suggest that women are more inclined towards family. They choose work life balance & flexible working over career; owing to domestic responsibilities they cannot concentrate at their workplace (Anker 1977) Conflict with work and family responsibilities and a desire to spend more time with family were the most common barriers to career advancement of women. (Campbell 1999)

IV-Corporate World & Trends:

The ILO's Global Employment Trends (2003) reported that the participation of women in labour market is comparatively low. On the other side the rate of women unemployment is higher with significant pay differences compared to men. Women represent over 40 percent of the global labor force. A study of 257 corporations found the existence of glass ceiling. It was found that only 0.78 percent of women were CEO (Kalpana Pai, Sameer Vaidya, (2009)

In 2015, a study published by UC Davis Graduate School of Management disclosed that just 12.3 % of board seats and high-paid executive positions are held by women at 4oo largest public companies headquartered in California. While women might hold managerial titles in some industries, their positions are often less strategic and positioned in lower paying areas of the company's operations (Wirth, 2001).

A survey by catalyst census 2013: Fortune 500 Women Board Directors reveals women held only 16.9% of corporate board seats and 10% of companies had no women serving on their boards. Women held only 8.1% of top earner slots—again no change from prior year. The statistics clarifies an absence of Gender Equity both in India and across the globe.

According to Ilagan-Bian (2004), women faced many challenges in moving up such as non-supportive bosses or colleagues, sexual discrimination and male chauvinism. Women still list male prejudice as a key obstacle to their progress (Clutterbuck & Devine, 1987; Ilagan- Bian, 2004).

An article cited on The New Yorker: The whole in the glass ceiling is getting bigger (John Cassidy,2014) suggests that a lot of progress has been done in supporting gender equality at workplace, it still looks like only magnificent women can break through the glass ceiling. In a survey at American Express most women had only one person advocating their promotion as supporters which they called as sponsor, while their male counterparts had 3 or 4 sponsors, as shared by Kerrie Peraino, the vice president for Human Resources and Chief. Despite improvements over the past 20 years, there are still large gender gaps.

The ILO report, women at work 2016 states that women are more likely to be unemployed than men, with global unemployment rates of 5.5 per cent for men and 6.2 per cent for women. A recent Women's Insurance Roundtable, sponsored by the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, reported that top management commitment and actions are working to remove barriers, but "words without actions" fail.

V-Implications for new entrants:

After a deeper understanding of the concept with varied evidences & research, one can say that the glass ceiling is lessening for professional women but still prohibits them from heading ahead to the highest positions in many organizations. The good news is the other side of the coin which shows signs of accepting attitude towards working women. The belief that companies with more diverse composition and more women deliver higher returns is gaining popularity. The following are some key points that can be kept in mind while catering an issue like glass ceiling-

V.1-For Organizations-

Current scenarios expect organization to be innovative in their approach so that they can manage and nurture their talent pool. While there are sectors like manufacturing that are still skeptical about women hiring, there are founders like Jack Ma, who give credit of their company success to women employees.

a-Policies to promote flexibility: Organizations need to encourage such ideas that help women employee to create a work-life balance and look ahead for bigger career goals. Top companies such as TCS, Google, and Microsoft are focused on promoting productivity, developing a culture of freedom with accountability. Work from home, virtual team, cross functional teams etc are some concept gaining popularity owing to their positive impact on overall productivity and efficiency.

b-A Zero-Tolerance Ambience: A zero tolerance zone is an indirect way of providing a psychological support to women employees. Policies like Prevention of sexual harassment leads to development of a culture where women feel more secure and they can focus on their career and growth in a safe and encouraging environment.

c- Focus on succession planning and mentoring: Success planning not only results in enhanced employee engagement but it also helps to create a progressive organization. A mentor-mentee relationship can help

women at mid-level management to seek the right training and competency needed for reaching higher positions.

d-Innovative HR strategies to promote gender equality: Companies like Nike, Culture Machine have incorporated period policy, where women employees are allowed to take leave during menstruation. Companies like Facebook, SAP coco-cola offer paternity leaves, such policies encourage a sense of equality and help women to hold on to their careers under negative circumstances.

V.2-For Individuals-

a-Focus on competency development: The current scenario expects women to be competent enough to deal not only with the job-related challenges but fight out the stereotypical dogmas associated with women at work. Women employees should focus on improving their skills and abilities when they are targeting higher positions.

b-Implementing positive psychology at work: A strong mindset can be a huge advantage while dealing with office politics or gender inequality. The new entrant needs to deal confidently with their inferiority complex and fear of failure.

c-Appreciating the core of feminine leadership: The young women employees need to realize the positive side of feminine leadership. Qualities like empathy, generosity, patience, inclusiveness, can be used as a tool to break the glass ceiling; moving forward with such personality traits one can gift more dynamic leaders to the world.

Hard work and consistency is the key to crack the code of success in any field. Many women such as Hilary Clinton, Indra Nooyi, Sherly Sandberg, Ursula Burns have changed the perception of industry elite and already crossed significant hindrance on the road to successful careers, this is an age where women can aspire high and move ahead by setting personal goals and learning from their role models.

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