

## HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT - A GLASS CEILING APPROACH

P.K. Lavanya<sup>1</sup> & U. Rajashankari<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>MBA, Anna University, Madurai

### Abstract

*The position of women has hardly changed substantially in recent years or even decades. Regardless the seemingly growing presentation of women in politics and economy, in actuality, they still remain underrepresented in a male-dominated society, especially women are missing from top jobs. Even though women can have a real chance to receive the higher education similarly to men but this does not necessarily mean that they will and actually have the real opportunities to realize the acquired skills, abilities and knowledge in their professional life. This ceiling effect can be realized and minimized by women to reach up the career ladder.*

### Introduction

The modern society is often characterized as highly democratic, humanistic and advanced. At the same time, the arguments, concerning the real equality of all people regardless their race, gender, or social position, still persist. In such a situation, the arguments concerning the position of female in the modern society are among the most contradictive since on the one hand, there are people who sincerely believe that women have eventually managed to get an equal position in society compared to men and, at the present days, they have really equal opportunities as men do. On the other hand, there is a totally different view on the position of women in the modern society, according to which the glass ceiling still remains an unsurpassable barrier women regularly face in their life. The latter position is more realistic and corresponds to the actual position of females in the modern society since their leadership is still rather an exception than a norm.

### Meaning and Definition of Glass Ceiling

In HR term glass ceiling refers to an artificial barrier based on attitudinal or organizational bias prevents qualified women/ other minorities from advancing upward into senior management level positions or situations where the advancement of a qualified person within the hierarchy of an organization is stopped at a lower level because of some form of discrimination, most commonly sexism or racism, but since the term was coined, “glass ceiling” has also come to describe the limited advancement of the deaf, blind, disabled, and aged.

It is believed to be an unofficial, invisible barrier that prevents women and minorities from advancing in businesses or barrier to career advancement an unofficial but real impediment to some body’s advancement into upper level management positions because of discrimination based on the person’s gender, age, race, ethnicity or sexual

preference. It is also defined as an unacknowledged discriminatory barrier that prevents women and minorities from rising to positions of power or responsibility, as within a corporation.

#### Variations and Related Terms

- **Brass Ceiling** - In the traditionally male-dominated fields of law enforcement and military service, some people use the term “brass ceiling” to describe the difficulty women have when they try to rise up in the ranks. “The brass” denotes the decision-makers at the top of an organization, especially in the military; it is an example of synecdoche.
- **Stained-Glass Ceiling** is a sociological phenomenon in religious communities similar to the concept of the “glass ceiling.” The concept revolves around the apparent difficulty for women who seek to gain a role within church leadership.
- **Bamboo Ceiling** - The exclusion of Asian-descendants from executive and managerial roles on the basis of subjective factors such as “lack of leadership potential” or “inferior communication ability” where the East Asian-descendants candidate has superior objective credentials such as education in high-prestige universities (in comparison to their white counterparts with only lower-prestige university credentials). For example, research shows that there are a decent number of partners at leading prestigious law firms in the United States who did not attend top notch law schools. However, you will seldom find an East Asian American partner of a leading law firm who did not attend a “Top 16 Law School” (according to the US News ranking).
- **Concrete Ceiling** - This is a term used to describe the type of barrier minority woman encounter. Caucasian women may face the glass ceiling in the workforce, but be able to break through it from time to time; however, minority women’s glass ceiling tends to be more solid and unyielding. This ‘concrete ceiling’ is due to minority women facing both issues of sexism and racism which intensifies their obstructions in advancing within the labor market.
- **Expatriate Glass Ceiling** - After breaking through the first level of the glass ceiling, many women are beginning to face an additional barrier. This is a term used to describe this second level of obstruction which prevents women in managerial positions from receiving foreign management assignments, projects, and experiences that is becoming increasingly more important for promotion into the upper-level managerial positions as documented by Insch, McIntyre, and Napier.
- **Glass Closet** - The exclusion of openly gay men and women from certain jobs, especially in the media.
- **Glass elevator (or glass escalator)** - The rapid promotion of men over women, especially into management, in female-dominated fields such as nursing. Men in these

fields are promoted with ease - they actually have to struggle not to advance due to facing invisible pressures and expectations to move up from where they currently are. This is based on traditional gender roles and stereotypes that men are expected to be in the chief roles, while women are to be in the subordinate positions. Therefore, in the fields where men are less common, they receive differential treatment that favors them to exert their authority and control in the workplace.

- **Glass Labyrinth** - referring to something related to a maze and can find the way out of and get through; otherwise thought of as finding a path through power in an organization.
- **Sticky Floor** - refers to women who are trapped in low-wage, low mobility jobs in state and local government.
- **Sticky Ladder** - A term used to describe women's struggle to reach the top of the corporate ladder. This term describes the theory that women are not incapable of reaching the top; they just get "stuck" on the middle rungs of the ladder.

#### **Reasons for the Glass Ceiling**

##### **Late 1970s - Early 1980s:**

- Women lacked required experience and skills
- They were restricted to clerical and other support services jobs

##### **Mid - Late 1980s:**

- Trends started changing
- More women took up higher education in management
- Looked for careers in operating areas
- The debate over the existence of the Glass Ceiling began

##### **Problems in Developing Countries**

- Culture issues
- Male Chauvinism
- Marriage
- Corporate organisations do not favour women
- Unwritten rule of not employing women

##### **On the Greener Side**

##### *Women Managers are praised for:*

- Soft Skills
- Caring
- Understanding
- Good teamwork
- Good communication skills
- Patience

- Perseverance
- Style of Management
- Unique skills

#### **Types of Glass Ceiling Barriers**

- Different pay for comparable work.
- Sexual, ethnic, racial, religious discrimination or harassment in the workplace
- Lack of family-friendly workplace policies (or, on the flipside, pro-child/pro-family values that discriminate against homosexuals, non-parents, or single parents)
- Exclusion from informal networks; Stereotyping and preconceptions of women's roles and abilities; Failure of senior leadership to assume accountability for women's advancement; Lack of role models; Lack of mentoring
- Requiring long hours for advancement, sometimes called the *hour-glass ceiling*.

#### **Glass Ceiling Effects - The Gender Wage Gap**

This gap is the difference in both the wages and earnings between males and females who have equivalent job titles, training experience, education, and professions. In most circumstances, women are paid less than men when all of these factors are comparable.

**David R. Hekman** and colleagues (2009) found that customers prefer white men employees, which is why such workers may continue to earn 25 percent more than equally-well performing women and minorities. Hekman et al. (2009) found that customers who viewed videos featuring a black male, a white female, or a white male actor playing the role of an employee helping a customer were 19% more satisfied with the white male employee's performance and also were more satisfied with the store's cleanliness and appearance. This despite that all three actors performed identically, read the same script, and were in the exact same location with identical camera angles and lighting. Moreover, 45 percent of the customers were women and 41 percent were non-white, indicating that even women and minority customers prefer white men. In a second study, they found that white male doctors were rated as more approachable and competent than equally-well performing women or minority doctors. They interpret their findings to suggest that employers are willing to pay more for white male employees because employers are customer driven and customers are happier with white male employees. They also suggest that what is required to solve the problem of wage inequality isn't necessarily paying women more but changing customer biases.

A customer preference for white men may also help explain why white men hold the highest paying, most prestigious, and most powerful jobs in the occupational structure. This is referred to as **occupational segregation**. Men tend to be highly

concentrated in the top professions, such as supervisors, managers, executives, and production operators. On the other hand, women tend to be over-represented in the lowest-ranking and lowest paid professions in the workforce, such as secretaries, sales associates, teachers, nurses, and child care providers. As a result, occupations become “sex typed” as either being specifically male or female jobs.

**Gender Inequality** is often embedded within the social hierarchy and this affects how women and men are perceived in leadership roles. Different traits are ascribed to females when compared to males that often color the selection process with unfounded bias. If a female does have other traits aside from the gendered traits that she is believed to possess, then she is viewed negatively.

In a study conducted by Thomas-Hunt and Phillips (2004) they found that when women possessed expertise they were actually viewed as less influential by others. However, expertise was positive for males. Also, female led groups were less productive than male led groups even though the women held expertise in the area just like males. Therefore, possessing expertise is not viewed as positively as it is for males. This also suggests that lack of skills is not the only reason why women are not deemed worthy of leadership roles. As cited by Lyness and Thompson in 1997, one consequence of sex stereotypes is that women's achievements tend to be devalued or attributed to luck or effort rather than ability or skill, and therefore this stereotype has the potential to reduce the organizational awards that they receive.

### **The Glass Ceiling and Disclosure of Sexual Orientation**

In order to excel in the workplace it is important that people are familiar with a workers strong attributes. This may present obstacles for the LGBT community because their sexual orientation may be a large factor that plays in to how they identify themselves. In a study done by Ragins in 2004, disclosure of sexual orientation has been found to have some positive, some negative, and non significant effects on work attitudes, psychological strain, and compensation. Ragins, Singh and Cornwell in 2007, found that in some cases disclosure of sexual orientation has been found to result in reports of verbal harassment, job termination, and even physical assault. (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001; Friskopp & Silverstein, 1996). In their study, Ragins, Singh and Cornwell examined fear of disclosure only among LGBT employees who had not disclosed, or had not fully disclosed their sexual identity at work. Promotion rate and compensation were used to measure career outcomes. Promotions were defined as involving two or more of the following criteria that may occur within or between organizations: significant increases in salary; significant increases in scope of responsibility; changes in job level or rank; or becoming eligible for bonuses, incentives, and stock plans.

### Women Surpassing the Glass Ceiling

Although there is a glass ceiling, many women recently have surpassed that hurdle. When at the top management, many women feel isolated like outsiders. Most of the time they are the only female at that level and are surrounded by males. Many women have faced sexual harassment, wage inequality, blocked movement and gender stereotyped roles. Women are said to have different styles of leadership and management once they break the barrier. They are generalized to be more nurturing and caring in nature than men. Men are stereotypically, more “tough” and shrewd in business, which is sometimes seen as positive traits. Women’s traditional role is in the home, taking care of children, and keeping house. The stereotype of maternal leadership stems from that. Some men in senior management that do not want to see women climb the corporate ladder believe that they do not have the qualities to lead a company. Many believe that making assumptions about the way women act in a leadership position perpetuates the stereotypes that cause the glass ceiling. There are many reasons why women have been able to break the barrier. Some believe that having women on an executive board is a positive thing. Women make 60% of all purchases in the United States, it is common sense to want their opinion. The more women that are accepted into management positions, the more will get promoted to senior management and serve as role models for the younger. Younger men have also been more accepting of female superiors. The perception of a woman’s role is changing with the younger generation. Women who break through the glass ceiling may also face a **glass cliff** whereby they are more likely than men to occupy risky or precarious leadership positions.

### Strategies for Career Development

The glass ceiling *can* be broken, so be assertive and confident of your skills. Develop the ability to speak out in meetings. Be passionate of your career goals, with a role model or mentor to guide you. It is critical to be a ‘team player’. Most finance professionals are at loggerheads with marketers in pruning their sales and advertising budgets. Therefore, you need to look at the big picture and what it takes to increase revenue, rather than just concentrating on cost cutting. Remaining solely in finance can also be a hindrance; explore the possibility of switching to general management or marketing in order to help you reach the top.

### Conclusion

It is possible to conclude that nowadays the glass ceiling syndrome is still a serious problem. In fact, the position of women has not changed or improved substantially. In stark contrast, the life at the top is still white and male and the arguments in favor of the existence of equal opportunities for men and women seem to be not very convincing.

At least statistics perfectly illustrates that women are not only underrepresented at the top positions, but they are also often discriminated and are not considered to be potentially prospective workers. As a result, the current leaders prefer to develop men as future leaders instead of developing women whose potential may be equal or even higher than that of some men that occupy high positions. Obviously, such a situation cannot remain unchanged and the problem of the glass ceiling still has to be solved in such a way that women can get a real opportunity to fully realize their potential and become leaders.

However, to end this paper on a more optimistic note we may do well to remember the words of Russel Madden who said, “Those who complain about glass ceilings should keep in mind that glass can be shattered if one strikes it hard enough, and long enough”. Hence, the women need to take up the reality of glass ceiling as a challenge to be overcome and men as an occasion to rise to the occasion by making way for the talented and deserving women rather than blocking their path for equal opportunities for advancement.

#### References

1. Andrica, Diane. (1997). “The Glass Ceiling: Are you Affected?” Nursing Economics.
2. Castro, Ida L., Furchtgott-Roth, Diana. (1997). “Should Women be Worried About the Glass Ceiling in the Workplace?” Insight on the News. v13 n5 p24.
3. Feldman, Gayle. (1997). “Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Women Have Had a Long Hard Struggle to Reach Their Current Status in the Industry”. Publishers Weekly. v244 n31 p82.
4. Himmelstein, Linda. (1997). “Breaking Through”. Business Week. n3514 p64.
5. Baxter, Janeen and Erik Olin Wright.2000. “The glass Ceiling Hypothesis: A Comparative Study of the US,Sweden and Australia” Gender and society 14:275-94