GLASS CEILING: A PROBABLE SPEED-BRAKER IN THE PRODUCTION OF QUALITY FEMALE MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS

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ABSTRACT

The status of woman has undergone a sea change in the past two decades from a mere homemaker to a dynamic multi-tasking individual, by providing her mark in every sphere, which includes even the male dominated professions. The environment for multinational corporations has been quite volatile with numerous challenges for the firms operating in this arena. However, throughout this period there have emerged a number of executive leaders who have been recognized for their contributions to organizational excellence and leadership despite the environment fluctuation, but invariably even few years back women power was not so welcome to hold and glorify the top positions of different corporate houses. Several myths were there and so women employees used to face barriers while climbing up the corporate ladder. But she still struggles with the orthodox beliefs and rigid stereotype perceptions of the society. In corporate, she is a victim of harsh effects of 'Gender barrier 'which is still playing a key role in restraining their achievements at the workplace. In this context, an attempt has been made through this paper to discuss the realities of "Glass Ceiling" and offer some remedial measures to break the glass.

KEYWORDS : Glass Ceiling, Women, Stereotype

The world has rapidly changed in the past few years with modern innovations abound among others. However, despite being in the 21st Century, there are still some whose minds have not been opened to the ideas of fairness and equality. The "glass ceiling" is distinguished from formal barriers to advancement, such as education or experience requirements. It is usually seen as relevant to women being recruited into senior management and executive levels. Studies have, however, shown that many factors operate to affect career progression at much earlier stages in women's working lives. The experience of many women is that the satisfaction of breaking through a glass ceiling rings hollow, when they confront another more entrenched ceiling in place, at the next level. So, it is been advised to the working women that she should be aware of glass ceiling at every stage of their career development.1.1 Who Said "Glass Ceiling"?

It is unknown who first used the term glass ceiling. A widely read Wall Street Journal story in 1986 popularized the term. The story looked at barriers confronting women at high levels of corporate power. Glass ceiling was used even earlier by Gay Bryant in the 1984 book The Working Woman Report, which examined the status of women in the work place. In 1991, the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission was established to gather information and study opportunities for and barriers to advancement for women and minorities. The phrase is often used in the media. When women or minorities have made gains or achieved some success in the workplace, they sometimes refer to "cracks in the glass ceiling."

What actually Glass ceiling means?

A Glass ceiling in economic terms, refers to an invisible "ceiling" that permits women and minorities to climb the corporate ladder therefore prohibiting their "growth" and promotion there serving as barrier. We can also say that t he buzzword 'glass ceiling' refers to "An unofficial barrier to opportunities within an organization or company which is perceived to prevent protected classes of workers, particularly women, from advancing to higher positions." It is a situation where the advancement of a person within the hierarchy of an organization is limited. The limitation is normally based upon some form of discrimination, most commonly being gender and race. This situation is referred to as a 'ceiling' as there is limitation blocking upward advancement, and "glass' (transparent) because the limitation is not immediately apparent and is normally an unwritten and unofficial policy

Evidence of a Glass Ceiling

One of the most obvious signs of a glass ceiling is a disparity in compensation between males and females. The glass ceiling manifests itself in two very visible ways in regard to compensation. First, women who are doing the same job as men are paid less. Second, women are only promoted to a certain level, keeping salaries down in

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relation to their male peers. There is evidence that even when women do reach the highest levels of corporate management, they do not receive the same pay as men for the same job; a figure of 75% is often quoted. And rather than getting better over time, the position seems to be deteriorating. A survey in 2002 showed women executives in the United States earning an even lower percentage of what their male counterparts were earning in 2000 than was the case in 1995. The ratio of female to male earnings in financial services, for example, fell from 76% in 1995 to 68% in 2000. Often women do not have the same opportunities as men to broaden their skills and increase their level of competency to that required of higher level positions.

Signs and Effects of Glass Ceiling

There are many signs to indicate that the glass ceiling exists in the organizations:

● Another indicator of glass ceiling is that women's career growth is hampered by the corporate culture For instance corporate policies and practices can maintain the status quo by keeping men in positions of corporate power, stating that women outperform in 'taking care' while men in outperform in ' taking charge' .

● It is an invisible barrier that limits the level to which a woman or another member of a demographic minority can advance within the hierarchy in an organization.

● Despite better performances, women receive less support and appreciation from their male bosses and are slower to be promoted.

● Work life balance challenges, if not dealt with at the right time, impact women's advancement and may contribute to glass ceiling.

● In many corporate women are rarely offered international assignments. The prospect for global exposure is a major stepping stone for career development in employees. As it could be vital for their career path, puts them at a disadvantage and undermines their prospects to establish themselves as efficient. They then become narrowly specialized and cannot gain the broad-based experience that is demanded for most senior posts.

Such stereotypes act as main reasons for women failing to reach the top in an organization.

Barriers

The glass ceiling is an invisible, artificial barrier that prevents qualified individuals (particularly women) from advancing beyond a certain point within their employing organization. The barrier's existence can be deduced from the fact that there is a stark difference between the proportion of women (and of minority groups) who graduate from the leading universities and business schools, and the proportion who reach the higher echelons of corporate management. A number of theories have been presented to explain the glass ceiling. The two major barriers are:

● **Motherhood**

Sometimes the blame for the glass ceiling is laid at the door of motherhood. Women are distracted from their career path by the need to stay at home and rear children. Even if they return to work immediately, they fall behind their male colleagues on the career ladder. With babies to care for, they are unable to undertake the tasks that are often required to reach the top; for example, taking extended trips abroad, spending long evenings "entertaining" clients, and changing plans at short notice.

● **Male stereotypes**

Others maintain that the glass ceiling has more to do with male stereotypes of women than with anything else. In many companies these stereotypes have become institutionalized. The standards for advancement, for instance, are set by white male graduates, and women who want to progress is judged by these standards. We all think we should be replaced by someone who is exactly like us.

Glass ceiling Myths & Mysteries

Living in a borderless world, where organizations operates at a global level, corporate believes that these glass ceilings are myths and are self created. They argue that women would have to barge their way out of this self-imposed barrier. There are many arguments given as firstly the women can hold higher positions based on their talents, through hard work and aspirations. Second argument talks about work challenges, family responsibilities that get in the way of women's career development. Even women in many cases discover that family is more important to them as they

climb up the corporate ladder and hence they quit from playing senior roles in management. Assumptions are made that women are not free from family responsibilities.

In reality, an increasing number of women are providing that when it comes to taking up corporate challenges, there are many factors that hamper the women's growth within the organization. Firstly, higher roles demand higher degree of commitment, which may require more hours of work per week; however women are unable to dedicate more hours to work due to family responsibilities. Another issue regarding women leadership behavior is that, when a woman is assertive and takes charge, people often reacts negatively. However if she behaves like kind gentle lady, she may be considered as a poor leader. People view successful female managers as more deceitful, pushy, selfish, and abrasive than successful male managers These factors often act as an obstacle for rising up the corporate ladder. Finally, the success of women in smaller companies has been ignored and devalued.

Glass Ceiling Realities

The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission found that 97% of the senior managers of the Fortune 1000 Industrial and Fortune 500 are white, and 95-97% are male, furthermore, this occurring while 57% of the workforce are Ethnic minorities, woman, or both.. In India women executives earn 40% less than what men earn in entire career. India stands below average. According to a survey conducted an eye opening fact came that only 37% companies have women holding top management positions, as compared to 92% of companies in china. Statistics provided by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) indicated that only 2 percent of top level management jobs and 5 percent of corporate board positions were held by women as of 1987. The failure of more women and minorities to crack the upper levels of corporate management is due to the glass ceiling.

● Dr Sudha Selvarajan, General Manager at MindTree says, "I think a lot more is due for us. People expect us to fight it out to get privileges and not because we deserve it. There is certainly an increase in the women workforce at our organization, but this isn't a huge increase. While earlier around 20 percent of them were women, now

it must have gone up to 27 percent." She feels that it will take a lot more time for women to get the recognition they deserve. The individual, the organization, the society and the country wholly needs to make a coordinated effort in order to ensure greater empowerment of women.

● Startup companies have their own problems when it comes to employing women. Sadhna Sanjeev, Director-Finance & HR of Medsphere Technologies, a startup company, says, "Smaller organizations don't have enough facilities to provide proper inclusivity for women. In our organization only 20 to 30 percent workers are women." However she is positive, that the situation will get better with time and effort.

● The survey also says that, out of the 400 million workforce in India, 30-35 percent are female and only one-fifth of them work in urban areas. Although there has been a 60 percent increase in women workforce in the IT and BPO sector, (the maximum being in BPO's) the question is, how many of these women make it to the senior management level or break the glass ceiling in MNC's?

Measures to Cope Up from Glass Ceiling

It can be tough for women to succeed in a man's world but there are now plenty of support networks in place to empower women to get to the top, both nationally (through the Women in Management Network) and in particular sectors, localities and organizations. More and more companies are establishing support networks and groups for their female employees and setting up mentoring too. Organizations like "Women in Technology" also offer many networking opportunities and training events for women, which can be really valuable for helping women to boost their career and advance in the business world. However, by observing the Signs and realities of glass ceiling, it is suggested that there is a need to take some steps which will help in overcoming the glass ceiling. The steps should be taken from two sides namely, the women employees and the employer. Here are some tips to possibly "BREAK" the glass that restricts you from acquiring your dreams and success.

Women Employee Side

There are challenges which women need to work through, especially in industries like IT, which are fairly

male dominated. Some women can feel isolated and may struggle to adapt to the environment,'

Women Need to

● Understand that to be on top of her game, work experience really is key. Get as much experience as she can.

● Have a solid CV to get her career off to a strong start.

● Understand their own strengths and weakness, and motivations.

● Manage their profile and reputation as a tool of impression management, not exaggerating but branding their leadership qualities.

● Try to develop networking skills and other skills that aid career development like the ability to handle political situations in the workplace.

● Understand what value they add and where they add it to the business.

● Understand the negative politics at different power bases to resolve their conflicts and come out with mutually acceptable outcomes.

● Have confidence in them and in their abilities and never be scared to make herself heard. Only a lucky few get to the top without any hard work.

● Look at developing their skill and sets to arm them, with the tools they need to reach the top.

Women can break the Glass Ceiling

She should

● Be Prepared.

● Be Patient.

● Be Teachable and a Teacher.

● Be Introspective, Purposeful, and Soulful.

● Be Determined.

Employer's Side

● There's the issue of the "motherhood penalty". Many women find themselves overlooked in their jobs after having children; they have loss of confidence upon returning to work. After nine months of maternity leave, many women feel unable to re-join the work environment because they have missed out on new developments, training and networking opportunities. Companies need to realize the importance of retaining female talent and think about offering training and flexible working practices, which more and more organizations are now doing.

● Ask women, whether the culture is supportive or gender biased.

● Make organization culture more friendly and supportive for women.

● Conduct regular interaction of board members, with talented female executives at the threshold of senior positions.

● Start Simple schemes like women's groups and networks which are a great way of sharing experiences and building solidarity, and mentoring has also proved to be a highly valuable tool in many businesses.

● Monitor the flow of promotions, the flow of those getting opportunities to make sure that women are included.

● Promote best practices for women and men.

● Evaluate and reward women's productivity by objective results, not the number of hours at work.

● Make performance-evaluation criteria explicit and design evaluation processes to limit the influence of evaluators' biases.

● Avoid having a sole female member on any team. Outnumbered, women tend to be ignored by men.

● Encourage well-placed, widely esteemed individuals to mentor women.

● Give women demanding developmental job experiences to train them for leadership positions.

CONCLUSION

The "glass ceiling" is a controversial subject that's constantly in hot pursuit. There are many statistics and theories that come into play; so many, in fact, that people may find it difficult to reach a solid conclusion. Does the glass ceiling really exist, or is it all a matter of how the facts are skewed either for or against it?

After all the statistics are stripped away, though, one naked truth persists: Women are just as capable as men. "Great ideas have no gender, race, ethnic background or age," Women may have to work a little harder to reach the top, but it can and does happen. In the not-so-distant future, with a little extra effort on everyone's part, more women could be buttoning up their suits and heading into that corner office. Glass ceiling in any form should not exist in the

workplace. Everyone, regardless of gender and orientation has the right to be recognized for their hard work and have the right to step up the corporate ladder. The conclusion is that there is a persistent scope for women to excel in the corporate sector, if they learn to balance several resources like time, ideas, finance, and relationships. While women have made dramatic gains in the public, private and political arenas, formal legal processes and protections are still necessary to address discrimination and retaliation. The successful elimination of glass ceilings requires not just an effective enforcement strategy but the involvement of employers, employees and others in identifying and reducing attitudinal and other forms of organizational barriers encountered by minorities and women in advancing to higher level management positions in different workplace settings.

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