

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, ECONOMICS & MANAGEMENT

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**GLASS CEILING- GLOBAL STUDY AND ITS RELATED IMPLICATIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The glass ceiling is a social taboo and its blatant effect on industry has been a subject of concern during the last few decades. The existing regulatory framework lacks adequate rules to curb glass ceiling practices. Glass ceiling is a hurdle which is created artificially by top management in any organization that restricts women to be ranked at higher levels. There is a need to eliminate glass ceiling practices in the corporate sector to keep female employees motivated and bring them at par with male co-workers. Equality at work place in terms of opportunities creates congenial working environment and leads to significant improvement in female employee's attitude, commitment and ownership. The objective of this study is to bring on the surface the glass ceiling practices and suggest ways to overcome this evil by strong HR policies and positive attitude towards female. Glass ceiling impedes the career progression of female employees in the organization and must be completely eradicated from the society to ensure the work engagement and commitment of employees. This study is aimed at drafting the guidelines for working environment that ensures equal employment opportunity for female employees should prevail.*

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**KEYWORDS**

Career Progression, Equal Employment Opportunity and Glass Ceiling.

**INTRODUCTION**

The glass ceiling is a concept that most frequently refers to barriers faced by women who attempt, or aspire to attain senior positions in corporations, government, education, and nonprofit organizations. It can also refer to racial and ethnic minorities and men when they experience barriers to advancement. Female employees face the hurdle in their career progression and experience a barrier that hinders their way to progress. Their career advancement to the top level position suffers because of the presence of the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling as a term first appeared in a 1986 article in the Wall Street Journal entitled "The glass ceiling: why women can't break the invisible barrier that blocks them from top jobs" (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). Since then this term denotes an artificial and transparent barrier that kept women from rising above a certain level in corporations. Although women are now graduating in higher numbers than men from educational institutions (Fagenson & Jackson, 1994) and more women are entering the paid workforce (Hind and Baruch, 1997) and taking up managerial roles (Parker & Fagenson, 1994), owing to the 'glass ceiling,' the poor representation of women at senior management levels continues. There are several reasons behind the glass ceiling. First, homosociality as it implies that men have a tendency to prefer men for self-reflection, relaxation and social support (Reskin & Hartmann, 1986). Second, sexist attitudes can be used by the men in strategies to secure power, authority and other privileges (Rosenfeld & Kalleberg, 1990). Third, statistical discrimination, where employers avoid promoting women because women as a group are absent from work more often than men, due to child bearing and child care responsibilities (De la Rica & Iza, 2005).

According to Morrison, White, Van Velsor, and Center for Creative Leadership (1987), glass ceiling is basically a concept used in a situation in the organizations where women are blocked to the higher positions in the organizational hierarchy. As a result, women and visible minorities, who tend to suffer from negative views of their abilities and preferences (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1993), are likely to receive fewer promotions and more likely to remain at the lower rungs of the organizational hierarchy.

According to Linehan (2002), female managers in every country remain a tiny fraction of those in senior positions. Women managers report that a lack of career development opportunities has created problems in their careers (Rosen, Miguel and Peirce 1989). They also perceive that they have fewer opportunities than men for promotion to senior management (Parker and Fagenson 1994). Additionally, two-thirds of the women executives surveyed by Russel Reynolds Associates (1990) said they were not actively encouraged to participate in career development activities. A lack of a career has been cited as a problem encountered by Australian women managers (Smith, Crowley and Hutchinson 1993). This upper-level gender segregation results in women remaining concentrated at the bottom of the career ladder even in those areas that are traditionally female dominated. Linehan, Scullion, and Walsh. (2001) indicate that female international managers have to overcome many additional overt and covert barriers before being developed for international assignment. The findings of a study by David (2001) show that there is evidence of a glass ceiling for women.

As noted by the scholars (e.g., Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001; Maume, 2004), a glass ceiling occurs when discrimination increases in severity with movement up the occupational hierarchy. As a result, inequality grows over the course of a person's career. It is also apparent when racial and gender inequality is observed after controlling for productivity-relevant factors. The studies mentioned above provide confirming evidence that the glass ceiling is a unique form of inequality, and that bias against people of color and women may be more severe later in the career than at labor market entry. Glass ceiling is present at the workplace and it is also affecting the workforce diversity especially at the international assignments. Today is the era of competition and companies can survive only if they are proactive and are favoring the diversity at the workplace and essentially the workforce diversity. There must be equal employment opportunities for employees to help minimize the concept of glass ceiling. At the level of firm performance, the glass ceiling phenomenon presents problems for at least three reasons and thus deserves further research attention. First, if lower level female managers perceive that the opportunity to reach senior management is limited because of gender; this may dampen their desire and motivation to compete at this level. A belief that hard work and perseverance will not pay off, among a large segment of the workforce, would be likely to have negative productivity effects at all levels of the organization. A second reason for concern relates to a lack of diversity among members of top management teams – too much homogeneity may lead to poor and costly decisions (Elsass & Laura, 1997). Finally, under tight labour market conditions, gender based barriers can further reduce the supply of needed talent and resources. Resource dependence theory suggests that it is to the firm's advantage to eliminate barriers to needed resources, and in some cases to focus on moving women into key management positions because they may better match the demographic characteristics of significant customer segments (Jacobs, 1992; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Glass Ceiling has also an effect on Organizational Commitment which is addressed by following authors. Dost, Khizer Bin, Rehman, and Tariq (2002) found moderate level of relationship between glass ceiling and organizational commitment. Therefore, employee commitment towards organization is fairly affected by the glass ceiling. Organizations should develop policies to minimize the glass ceiling practices. They should give proper career advancement opportunities to females in order to retain highly skilled and qualified professional. As quoted by Jawahar and Hemmasi (2006) when organizations do not give proper career advancement opportunities to women employees, they have to face unavoidably loss of competent, capable, skilled, experienced and knowledgeable professionals. Similarly, female employee shows decreasing organizational commitment when they work in the environment which is highly dominated by the

gender bias and men stereotypes (Korabik & Rosin, 1991). This shows that gender biasness has an adverse effect on the commitment of female employees towards Organization.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mohamed Zainal (2009) observed several factors that hurdle the women elevation besides manager's perception including the work and family life conflicts. He added, in assessing the phenomena of glass ceiling in Malaysia there are many factors that can affect the female employee promotion, but he focused on manager's perception toward women promotion. Gender bias environment is faced by women all over the world. Even in developed countries women face the challenges to their survival in job. Sub-continent is underdeveloped as compared to the European world. Women have to do take care of their kids and home besides their job. They are highly educated but they don't get a chance to avail the status in top management.

Lincoln (2008) observed that work and life balance challenges can impact women's advancement and, if not dealt with, may contribute to the glass ceiling phenomenon. On the other hand one of the most common causes of the glass ceiling for women is a conflict between work and family. Women with work centered preferences are more likely to work the long hours necessary for promotion into management jobs, as job demands expand at each successive level in the hierarchy. The demands associated with management positions create work family conflicts for women especially, because men in paid employment are considerably more likely to have an adult partner who takes on the bulk of family responsibilities.

Lyness and Heilman (2006) examined relationships of gender and type of position (i.e., line or staff) to performance evaluations of 448 upper-level managers, and relationships of performance evaluations to promotions during the subsequent 2 years. Consistent with the idea that there is a greater perceived lack of fit between stereotypical attributes of women and requirements of line jobs than staff jobs, women in line jobs received lower performance ratings than women in staff jobs or men in either line or staff jobs. Moreover, promoted women had received higher performance ratings than promoted men and performance ratings were more strongly related to promotions for women than men, suggesting that women were held to stricter standards for promotion. This suggests that women had to be highly impressive to be considered eligible for leadership roles, whereas this was not the case for men.

Erik, Bihagen, and Ohls (2006) have conducted the research on whether women are discriminated through sticky floor or glass ceiling effects in Sweden. They have found through their research that women in Sweden suffer more from sticky floor effects than glass ceilings. Female disadvantages appear to attenuate with hierarchical level, glass ceiling results from a pattern of accrual. This is because the social policies in Sweden focus on top of the occupational hierarchy and not on the lower hierarchical levels.

De la Rica and Iza (2005) provide an interesting formal analysis in order to rationalize the glass ceiling hypothesis. They suggest that a dead-end argument operate in the upper tail of the distribution. Women are less frequently promoted because their jobs can less easily be promoted. Employers are most often reluctant to invest in women's training, for instance because women have more favorable outside opportunities than men within the household (for domestic work or child care), which again increases the gender wage gap. Therefore, women have to be more productive than men in order to be promoted owing to a higher probability of departure and less training.

Jeavons and Sevastos (2002) found that female employees think that compared to male managers, female managers must continually prove themselves in order to be taken seriously and get promoted. Whereas male managers think that male and female managers are treated equally and in the same fashion as those of male managers. They supported that the existence of a strong glass ceiling effect prevents women to progress in the organizations. This existence of a strong glass ceiling effect prevents women to progress in the organizations. However, qualitative data showed that women were employed by the organization at a level that was lower than their qualifications, or lower than men doing the same job. Therefore, even with equal rates of promotion, women will not progress as far as men.

Chenevert and Tremblay (2002) also stated that even if female managers have a high level of education and the desire to progress in their careers, it remains the case that few achieve the same status or salary as their male counterparts and that one of the reasons for this is the so-called glass ceiling.

Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, and Vanneman (2001) provided clear content to the glass ceiling concept. They develop four criteria to define the glass ceiling and differentiate it from other types of inequality: "a glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial difference

1. that is not explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee (implying discrimination),
2. that is greater at higher levels of an outcome than at lower levels of an outcome,
3. in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not merely the proportion currently there,
4. that increases over the course of a career".

This study focuses on glass ceiling effects, the essence of which is described as 'the greater disadvantages for moving into higher outcome (e.g. earnings, authority) levels at later stages in one's work.

Mavin (2000) also indicates that the glass ceiling issue has considerable impact on women's careers internationally. The concept of glass ceiling effects is generally viewed as a set of impediments and/or barriers to career advancement for women and people of color (Baxter & Wright, 2000).

Lyness and Thompson (2000) were curious about whether women and men executives followed similar routes in climbing the corporate ladder. This study compares the careers of matched samples of 69 female executives and 69 male executives by examining perceived barriers and facilitators of advancement, self-reported developmental experiences, and career histories. Consistent with tokenism theory, women reported greater barriers, such as lack of culture fit and being excluded from informal networks, and greater importance of having a good track record and developing relationships to facilitate advancement than did men. Career success, measured by organizational level and compensation, was positively related to breadth of experience and developmental assignments for both genders, but successful women were less likely than successful men to report that mentoring facilitated their advancement. Developmental experiences and career histories were similar for female and male executives, but men had more overseas assignments and women had more assignments with non authority relationships.

Baxter and Wright (2000) stated that the glass ceiling hypothesis states that not only is it more difficult for women than for men to be promoted up levels of authority hierarchies within workplaces but also that the obstacles women face relative to men become greater as they move up the hierarchy. Gender based discrimination in promotions is not simply present across levels of hierarchy but is more intense at higher levels. Empirically, this implies that the relative rates of women being promoted to higher levels compared to men should decline with the level of the hierarchy. Their study explored this hypothesis with data from three countries: the United States, Australia, and Sweden. The basic conclusion was that while there is strong evidence for a general gender gap in authority, the odds of women having authority are less than those of men, there is no evidence for systematic glass ceiling effects in the United States and only weak evidence for such effects in the other two countries.

Habib (2000) has studied the effects of Brick Wall and Glass ceiling in public administration of Bangladesh. He used a set of questionnaires taken from United States Merit System Protested Board (USMSPB), which were reported in Naff (1994), for surveying commitment to work. Naff analysis was used to explore discrimination against women civil servants at work place. His analysis has shown that women are discriminated in civil services of Bangladesh from entry to the higher posts (Glass Ceiling). Social cultural factors are the principal stumbling blocks and build a wall for entry of woman into civil services. Their career path was hindered by the impediments of the systematic and attitudinal reasons.

Koshal & Gupta (1998) conducted a survey 'Women Managers in India: Challenges and opportunities' to find out to what degree the glass ceiling exists in the largest democracy of the world and how women manager functions? The study also intends to analyze what kind of cultural barriers are existing for women in India that prevent them from advancing to corporate leadership positions? The results of study revealed that more than 40 percent men and women believe that there are significant barriers to women's advancement in their organizations and organizations do not encourage women enough to assume leadership position. There appears to be inequity in pay in corporate India, fifty seven percent women think that they need to work harder than men to prove their competence. Male stereotyping exclusion of women from informal communication network, commitment to family responsibilities, lack of business experience, and not being in the pipeline long enough are some of the barriers to women's advancement.



Phillips and Imhoff (1997) confirmed the glass ceiling hypothesis and indicated that women in their early lives experienced a number of barriers during their decision of their career path. His research on women's careers is predicated on the assumption that bias and stereotyping in organizations disadvantage women. He suggested that wage differences exist more for technical rather than managerial occupations.

The second Department of Labor (1992) report on the Glass Ceiling Initiative indicated that while progress is being made, many barriers to top positions still exist. The study found that while women and minorities are hired at entry levels, hiring practices do not extend to the recruitment of a diverse pool of applicants at higher levels. In addition, the report revealed a lack of commitment to diversity among top managers despite mention of increased interest in diversity. That is, the willingness to take action to ensure that diversity exists at all levels of the corporate world was not generally apparent. Thus, success stories of qualified minorities and women advancing into higher level management positions were the exception rather than the rule.

The Department of Labor (1991) found that while 37 percent of employees in the nine surveyed Federal contractors are female, only 17 percent of management positions are held by women and only 6.6 percent of all executives are women. The numbers show an even greater discrepancy for minorities. Fifteen and one-half percent of all employees are minority group members, yet minorities hold only 6 percent of all management positions and only 2.6 percent of all executive positions. The DOL results showed that there is a point beyond which women and minorities simply have not advanced (minorities plateau at an even lower level than women). While women and minorities have begun to climb the corporate ladder, their proportional presence in high level and high paying positions does not approach that of white males.

### IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

A diverse workforce is a reflection of a changing world and marketplace. Diverse work force in terms of gender brings high value to organizations. Respecting individual differences will benefit the workplace by creating a competitive edge and increasing work productivity. Diversity in the workforce can reduce lawsuits and increase marketing opportunities, recruitment, creativity, and business image. In today's business world, men and women work side by side in careers of all kinds. For the most part, there are no more "female" jobs or "male" roles in business. Consequently, men and women are asked every day to relate to each other in new (and equal) ways, and that makes some people uncomfortable. Workplace diversity strategies help to build the department's relationship with the community, enhance the contribution of its employees and improve the quality of its programs, products and services. It creates a more inclusive and supportive work environment, better team work and more effective client service delivery. A great deal of research has focused on glass ceiling. The management literature has suggested that Glass Ceiling phenomenon still exists in a corporate world. Despite an increasing number of studies, few consistent conclusions have yet to be reached about the antecedents and outcomes of glass ceiling. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to address glass ceiling as one of the constructs of gender diversity and to offer suggestions for improving organizational capability to manage this glass ceiling.

### OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The following objectives are formulated for the present study:

1. To conceptualize glass ceiling practices in the corporate world and its related impact on female employee morale.
2. To make HR policies more women friendly and treating them at par with male employees.
3. To evolve the paradigm shift in attitude of society towards female employees.
4. To suggest possible ways to wear away the evil of gender discrimination at managerial level.

### CONCLUSION

Review of literature spells out the widespread existence of Glass Ceiling phenomenon across the globe and its ill effects are quite obvious. Women who aspire to have a strategic position in corporate world find it difficult to balance their professional and personal life. The demanding career needs lots of time and competitive skills and the word career has gone through a sea change in terms of its meaning and importance. Women do get frustrated and their contribution to the organization is significantly reduced if they get stuck with the same position or duties. This research article examines the effects of corporate culture, climate, and practices on the existence of a glass ceiling from the perspective of women employees seeking higher position. A few women have moved beyond the glass ceiling into the executive suite, yet their number is not proportionate to their representation at middle management levels and is far below that of their similarly qualified male counterparts. Both domestically and globally, women represent a relatively untapped source of talent for leadership in the workplace. While progress has been made across the globe, barriers to women's advancement continue to exist, including cultural norms, stereotypes, and employer policies and practices. To summarise all these ideas show that glass ceiling is the visible and invisible impediment which separates the professional and organizational hierarchical level for the women. In particular, women who believe that glass ceiling phenomenon will operate to their disadvantage may be less likely to apply for open positions than equally qualified men.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH: MICRO AND MACRO LEVEL INITIATIVE

There are number of ways that HR professionals can adopt to break the glass-ceiling barrier and at the same time there should be legislative support through government policies and involvement to do away with this practice.

#### CORPORATE LEVEL INITIATIVE

1. Commitment of the organization's top management to treat female employees at par with male counterpart for strategic positions. Ensure that diversity (including women in senior positions) is a key business measurement for success that is communicated to all employees by top management.
2. Key to organizational change is education of management, women and the overall workforce.
3. Review HR policies and practices to determine if they are fair and inclusive in terms of pay differences, hiring practices, history of promotions to senior positions and above all affirmative action plans.
4. Examine the organization's informal culture like studying subtle behaviors, traditions and norms that may work against women. Also discover men's and women's perceptions about the organization's culture, their career expectations and what drives their intentions to stay or leave.
5. Establish and lead a change-management diversity program for managers and employees and implement retention programs for women.
6. Acknowledge successful senior-level women as role models and create and implement leadership development programs for women.
7. Monitor the impact of recruiting strategies designed to attract women to senior levels of the organization and track women's advancement in the organization and explore reasons of women attrition.
8. Monitor the extent to which recruitment strategies yield results for female employees to attain the highest position in the organization.

#### LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT

1. Government should mandate both public and private organizations to submit annual reports covering various activities undertaken for human resource development. The report must touch-base the proportion of male and female employees in the workforce, the number of male and female employees appointed in the last year, trainings imparted to male and female employees, percentage of female employees given assignments and how many female employees were promoted. Such report will serve as a primary source to scrutinize the data and investigate gender bias, if any.
2. Questionnaires to assess the male favoritism at the strategic positions should be introduced by the government and such analysis should cover a good sample of employees across private and public sectors. Such forms assess the behavior of authorities, boss and colleagues at work place for female employees. These forms, to maintain secrecy, mention only the gender and not the name of the employee and should be filled in the presence of a neutral competent authority to extract the correct and accurate data.
3. A separate quota for female employees should be fixed for trainings and administrative posts in each organization. Further the government must announce "equal wage", keeping in view the credentials and experience, of male and female employees.

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