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Shattering The Glass Ceiling In Corporates

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Abstract

Glass ceiling, a political term, is used to donate a phenomenon that says that there are certain barriers that prevent women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder. This effect happens irrespective and regardless of their qualifications or achievements. While, there is no doubt that women hold management positions, a very less number have made the jump to top-level senior management positions. The purpose of the paper is to analyse what exactly constitutes glass ceiling and why it occurs. It also aims to highlight current industry trends and how hard (or easy) women find it to reach the top management positions in companies. Objective of the study was that given the changing dynamics of the workplace demography in the recent times, it is imperative that we understand the reason behind this change and its effect. We studied and analysed research papers, review papers and journal articles to summarise and write our review paper. The paper finds that despite considerable development in the sphere of reducing gender discrimination there is still considerable literature proving the existence of glass ceiling. The implication of the paper is that it may take few more years to eradicate the concept of glass ceiling. Effective steps need to be taken to remove the obstacles and prejudices that women face even today to quicken the dismantling of glass ceiling.

Keywords: Glass Ceiling, gender, barriers, discrimination

Introduction

According to a study conducted in Colorado State University in 1994 only one to five percent of the top executive officials are women. Hymowitz & Schelhardt, in their paper in the Wall Street Journal dated March 24, 1986 titled, “The glass ceiling: Why

women can't seem to break the invisible barrier that block them from the top jobs" used the term "*The Glass Ceiling*" for the first time.Glass ceiling can be defined as a subtle and elusive barrier which is so resilient that it prevents women and minorities from moving up the management hierarchy. According to Hoobler (2009) the term "glass" in glass ceiling is an allegory referring to the transparency and subtleness of the obstacles and hurdles. Innumerablemodelshave been used to explain the glass ceiling. These can be categorised as person centred theories, situation/organisation theories, social role theories, interaction theories and human capital theories.

Worldwide, there has been an unparalleled change taking place in the structure and participation of the workforce in the world economy. This change has been impelledby the activecontribution of more females in the business than before. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2006), there are only 40% women out of the 2.9 billion workers globally. However, this increasing involvement of women in the workforce does not tantamount to their high representation at senior management levels.

The USA was the first country to acknowledge that the concept of Glass Ceiling exists in their corporates. As part of US Civil Rights Act, a Federal GCC was created. The main aim of this GCC was to study and providesuggestionsto the US Government on how to eradicatesyntheticbarricades that prohibitedwomen from reachingtop level positions. The glass ceiling was said to exist in American organisations because it was seen that women could only reach a certain level in the companies and not beyond. While 50% of the total workforce was composed of women only 11% women reached senior management while a miniscule 2% were part of corporate boards. Once women reached the middle management, they got stuck at that level due to structural barriers that were attributed to glass ceiling. The GCC report also stated that women were being recruited into "feminized" positions in the organisation, such as human resources and personnel management as against to holding top management positions in departments such as sales, marketing, operation and production. Additionally, the GCC's report also showed that glass ceiling neglects and ignoresexcellence and accomplishments of women by strengtheningprejudiced barriers and societal stereotypes that take the form of gender bias, harassment andconservative organisational norms that are not in the favour of women therebyobstructing their ascendantprofessionalmovement.

While, lack of education and inadequate work experience may be valid reasons to prevent high career mobility, glass ceiling barriers are less tangible and are embedded in culture. These are actually societal and psychological factors that work together to obstruct the progression of women into top management positions.

If we look around the world across countries the situation remains same. Similar to the problem being faced by women in America, a related trend can be seen even in South Africa. While there has been arise in women participation in the workforce, the top management positions remain the domain of men. Women are eluded of reaching higher positions due to subtle forms of discrimination that manifest themselves in HR aspects of compensation, training and/or opportunities for networking. According to a study conducted by Powell and Graves the proportion of women holding lower and middle management positions has increased due to the recent emphasis of increasing

workplace diversity. However, the percentage of women reaching senior organisational designations has remained relatively small pointing to the presence of inequitable barriers reiterating the point mentioned before. This proves that the increasing number of women in the middle management has occurred as a concentrated and a conscious effort to increase equality and diversity in the work environment and not as a sign of accepting women at par with men when it comes to holding top jobs in corporates.

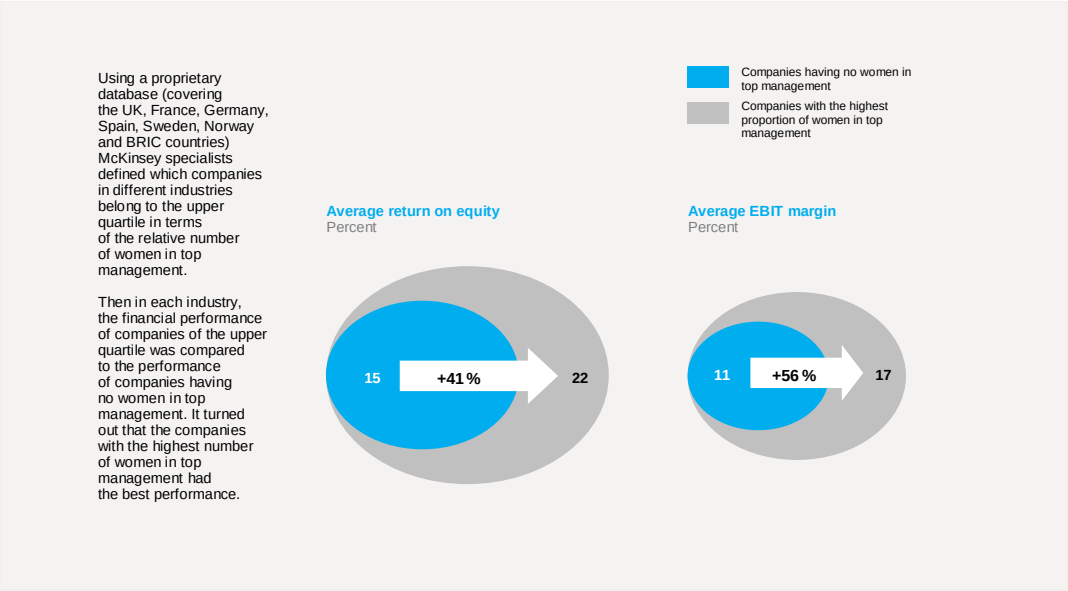
When it comes to analysing the situation in India, the situation is not very different. It is often emphasized that with a country which has already had a women president, a woman running the major Opposition party and three powerful chief ministers as women, India has effectively shattered the barrier of Glass ceiling. However looking at India's 135th rank out of 187 countries in terms of Gender Development Index (July 2014), it seems India has to go a long way to realize the dream of gender equality. While on one hand India has examples of Indra Nooyi, Kiran Muzumdar Shaw, Anu Aga, Chanda Kochhar, Shikha Sharma, Naina Lal Kidwai and Kalpana Morparia who made it to the top in their fields; on other hand there's a volume of work portraying Glass Ceiling in one form or another.

Why does it matter? : The business and economic perspective of breaking the glass ceiling

There has been innumerable literature proving the correlation between having women employees on the top and the financial health of the company. Women employees result in better financial performance of the organisation. They are better leaders and decision makers. According to the McKinsey Report title *Women as a valuable Asset* published in 2012 companies where the top management was held by both, men and women, do well in comparison to organisations with only men at the top. This is because of the combination of different leadership styles brought on board by men and women which is ultimately more effective in nature. Thus ensuring and promoting gender diversity on company boards is a strategic move for organisations.

The McKinsey report surveyed 231 firms to measure excellence on 9 parameters such as control, leadership, accountability, etc. They found a positive correlation companies that ranked high on these parameters and the company's operational efficiency. Moreover, the study found that in organisations where the number of women on top board was more than 3 performed better operationally as well as financially than companies where there were no women on board.

The following statistic summarises the result of the 2ndMckinsey survey where financial performance of European and BRIC Companies, where there were 2 or more women on the board, were measured.



One sector in India which undoubtedly leads at having the most number of women CEOs at the top is the Banking sector. The top banks are being headed by a women manager each successfully managing as well as taking their respective companies to an all new height. We have Arundhati Bhattacharya as the first women chairperson on State Bank of India (SBI), Chanda Kochhar as MD and CEO of ICICI Bank; Shikha Sharma as MD and CEO of Axis Bank; Naina Lal Kidwai heading HSBC as country head; Kaku Nakhate as president and country head (India) of Bank of America Merrill Lynch, VijayalakshmiIyer as CMD of Bank of India; Archana Bhargava as CMD of United Bank of India and Shubha lakshmi Panse as CMD of Allahabad Bank. According to Arun Duggal, Chairman of Shriram Capital and a veteran international banker, the banking sector has more women at the top management because banking required sound instinct and intellectual capability to analyse business where women are better than men. Various factors are seen as reason for this growth in the banking sector. From the initial days a large number of women were employed in bank. Also unlike manufacturing sector, there are no challenges (doing night-shifts) and other stereotypes in the banking arena. Also, women inherently have been seen as managers of family's wealth. According to SwatiParimal, Non-Executive director on the board of ICICI Bank, women tend to be more careful and conservative when it comes to money and hence make better judgements. According to her they also better team players and good leaders. As a result, ceterus paribus, banks prefer women as compared to men in Indian.

Existing Trends

Women's restricted reach in the executive levels of management is result of a number of barriers that that face regularly, namely, societal, governmental, internal business, and business structural barriers. The mobility rate up the ladder is very slow compared to that of men in similar positions and industries.

Though women make up 40% of the total workforce around the world, there are only 10% on the boards. According to Qlik View Application, only 3.2% of 250 CEOs in Asia-Pacific Region are women. As compared to that, India fares better than other countries with 4 CEOSs out of top 50 companies in India.

According to the 2014 Fortune 1000 list, only women hold only 5.4% of CEO positions while they hold only 5.2% of CEO positions in companies featured in the Fortune 500 list. According to Caroline Fairchild we need more women who work long enough in cubicles to reach leadership positions.

Of the top 100 companies listed on Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), only 120 women, a measly 1%, hold positions of directorship out of the total 1112 directorships available.

These trends can be mainly attributed to the lack of a support system for women when it comes to family welfare. It has been observed that many women leave organisations once they reach middle management levels due to the constant tussle between workplace and home responsibilities. Even though Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) decided on parental leave provisions, child support systems etc., for the member nations to bolster the professional ongoing. However, none of these are actually put into place. There are very few flexible work arrangements for full time moms. This is in case puts the entire onus on the woman to choose between home and work. And whenever the choice is of going home, this off-track detour is often as considered an obstacle to any growth and promotional opportunities to these women. They lose out on the race simply because they have a family or the "probability" that they may have a family.

Over the years, a number of studies conducted show how women outperform men at positions they are largely represented at. However, they hesitate to enter fields here they are already less represented at. These are the inhibitions that women experience at workplace. Whenever there is an underrepresentation of women either the environment is unconducive to women or the view is that it is unconducive, which further leads to less women entering that field. It is a cycle that grows in the organisation then. This can also be attributed to the notion that women are more averse to taking challenges because they are already handling homes and this just adds to the pressure that they may carry.

Most of us believe that sexual harassment takes places at the lower levels where male superiors ask for sexual favours in return for promotions or salary raises. However, in reality sexual harassment is more pronounced when women reach the top levels – a "power threat". It is a method of isolating women so as to curb their growth. This is the easiest method that insecure colleagues find to sabotage a growing career. It becomes more pronounced as an effect of authority than of sexual desire, i.e. most common offences like leering, staring, indecent gestures and jokes etc. are consciously made in order to make the colleague uncomfortable and is not out of any sexual desire but only to offend and make the victim insecure and uncomfortable. Although a number of anti-discrimination laws and anti-harassment laws have come into the picture, however, even today harassment is part of the "work culture". No law will be able to curb and contain it until people in the organisations consciously realise

the ill effect of issues against women and the impact it has on the bottom line of the company, will things change.

This feeling of insecurity or lowered morale or self-confidence seeps in very early among women. At the entry levels, 16% of women aspire for a top executive level job compared to men of which 34% do. These numbers move in opposite directions as the job hierarchy progresses, with women becoming less sure of their aspirations while men become more ambitious. This is the effect of the lack of support from organisations and supervisors and seniors. Instead of any motivation or guiding, women are continuously reminded why they aren't as competitive as men at work. This results in loss of morale and confidence to reach the top for women.

Pay differences are a stark reality. With no transparency in the pay system, women and men are paid differently for the same jobs that they fight for. Women are paid at least12% to 23% lower than men. This is despite an equal experience, education and references. To add to this paradox is that women in the past year formed 60% of all graduates in the country. Salary is an issue and since there is no evidence to this salary distance, organisations and supervisors tend to deny this altogether.

In fact, informal networking also becomes more of an obstacle to women. Men tend to interact more casually with the managers and informal conversations across functions than women. This informal networking is more profound since men tend to socialise more with managers after work and lunches with the managers. Women, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, avoid informal interactions and lose out on forming a rapport with the managers which comes in handy during promotional references etc. Networking not only gives you a platform f social exchange but it allows more people to interact and share information. Men ask for sponsors and mentors more strongly since they network more. Women lose on a huge opportunity in asking out for sponsors at work lest it may be misconstrued as a relation of any sexual interest. Moreover, women are reluctant to move up the ladder by using connections or what is considered inappropriate means at office space.

Women also face Gender stereotypes at work. A display of feminism and you are termed "incompetent" for work. From being very profound a few years ago, they are now often subtle humorous jibes at the woman. They can't even be reported since they are not very apparent. They reduce the self-confidence an employee. It questions her decision to work with people who don't take her seriously.

Moreover, even Gender typecast put women in a fix where they are judged negatively by displaying strong, persuasive and assertive behaviours. They are often compared with their men counterparts and are judged for aping their style. If a man is dressed in smart formals, he speaks loud and clear, he is often called a Boss. However a woman, dressed in smart formals, makes herself loud and clear is called Bossy. A man working late is often called a Dedicated Father. However, a mother who works late is called Selfish. Any feature which contradicts the stereotype is judged as well. This is a double bind paradox. Therefore, women find it like riding a thin rope. To act either way is a tricky situation.

Roadmap ahead- Shattering the Glass Ceiling:

Like any other revolution or for any change to be adopted and accepted we need sufficient time to elapse. Since the entry of women in the workforce has been recent, their acceptance and ability to reach higher positions too shall take time.

Employers musttake the initiative and be dedicated to ensuregender diversity and equity before the glass ceiling can truly be broken. Organisations that have been effective in breaking down barriers more often than not have few characteristics in common.These common aspects are: they have CEO support; they are personalised to the needs of the organisation; they are comprehensive; they help to break preconceived notions and stereotypes; they are measurable and hence are capable of tracking progress. Each policy will surely and definitely have metrics to measure each facet. This helps organisations to continuously monitor the effectiveness of their programmes.

Such policies, that are all-inclusive and particular to the problems and needs of eachorganization, help in breaking down structural, organizational, and cultural barriers. The first step starts with active recruitment of women employees. Furthermore, setting voluntary targets for female representation on boards, executive committees, and senior management posts can be seen as other major effective steps to be taken. To overcome structural barriers, organisations need to establish flexible work arrangements such as work from home or flexi-time options; and other work-life balance polices. There must also be clear emphasis to create effective succession planningpipelines that identify, train, develop and promote women. Mentoring and counselling programs within organizations must be seen as an important tool to help women rise up in the corporate ladder. Such programs should identify successful leaders of both sexes to serve as mentors to raise women's aspirations and to identify goals and pathways that move their careers forward.

Results of the McKinsey report *Women Matter 2012: Making the Breakthrough* corroborate with what has been said above. The report shows that companies are confronting the issue of gender equality sincerely and are dedicating resources toward correcting gender disparity. According to the 2012 McKinsey report, there are 4 methods via which companies are performing to their optimal level. These 4 steps include:

- Having the top management involved in such programmes: this means that the top bosses not only have to give a token support to the movement but rather make it visible that they see such changes as a way of life and not only as a series of initiatives.
- Addressing employee mindsets, whether female or male, to better support diversity and making the business case for gender diversity;
- Monitoring women's representation carefully; and
- Driving the gender diversity programs with full enthusiasm

Results of the McKinsey study also shows that only having the top management commitment (i.e., CEO support) is not adequate in increasing gender diversity at the workplace. This is because most often the top management support does not trickle down through the organization to the lower levels. This clearly shows that organisations have to ensure an attitudinal change and overcome cultural bias existing

within the company. Moreover, corporations that do well in changing the gender dynamic have a substantial mass of initiatives that they meticulouslyevaluate and drive through. In other words, these businessesinculcate the concept of gender equality as part of their organisational fabric. They practice what they preach and deliver on what is promised.

According Debra Meyers on and Joyce Fletcher, a step by step approach is required to bring about this change. They suggest going beyond the existing strategies including the ones mentioned above. We must realise that for women to "fit in" we cannot only remove those structural barriers or accommodate them or tell them to be more "like men" in their leadership styles. Also, we must learn to go beyond the regular "run-of-the-mill" HR Strategies that talk about sensitivity training, flexibility in work timings, or talk about creating special policies. That's just overlooking the entire problem and looking at the short term. Also, there is the baggage of 1000 years that cannot be eradicated by a one-time sensitivity training conducted for few hours. Here, what we end up with is a façade of acceptance with women finally getting stuck in a dead-end job.

What is actually required goes beyond the "text bookish" ideas. We need steps of incremental change that will identify and destroy deep rooted notions of gender discrimination. For this to begin, both men and women require to take up the charge because it ultimately both the genders would benefit from a world where equality exists and gender is irrelevant to the way work is designed and distributed. This is done by identifying how "women friendly" your company is. Are pay policies equal, do job descriptions talk about women gender as a contra indicator, are women stuck in the clichéd job departments such as HR or Corporate Communications, are a majority of women employees leaving the firm, etc. Once the problem is identified, the cause must be diagnosed. This can be done by analysing the work culture, ethics, activities valued, etc. Answering questions such as who succeeds in the organisation, what impediments growth of an individual employee, how are employees appraised and improved etc. too can help diagnose the problem. After this phase a clear strategy to remove discriminating policies must be put in place in a phased manner. These tiny changes called "small wins" can help over time eradicate the entire problem from its root over time. It is indeed a long drawn process but a highly effective.

In her book *Lean In* published in 2013, Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook explains how it is a myth that women can't have it all. Stereotypical notions, deeply entrenched in our society are the first impediments to solving this issue. She believes that the first step to bring about the change is to destroy the double standard opinion that makes ambition perceived as a negative quality in a woman while it is a positive trait in a man. It has also been observed that women find it difficult to accept compliments about their accomplishments. They attribute their achievements to family, partners saying they had a lot of "support along the way". Women themselves must learn to appreciate and accept themselves and their accomplishments before they accept the world to do so. Also, women need to forgo the need to "have it all". While a career woman is expected to look after the family, no one expects the same from a man. This is because we have taught men and women to be like that.

While organisations can do only this much to eradicate the gender biases, the change actually must start from the home. One must push for shared earning and shared parenting concept at home. Women must expect and ask for help from their partners in rearing a child, doing household chores and paying the bills. Only when each household believes that every job of this world is a 50-50 partnership between the man and the woman can we actually bring about those changes at the organisational level.

Merida Johns believes that even educational institutions should use their ability to hone young minds by breaking these stereotypes and create a world of equality by instilling the required values.Educational leadership programs more often than not advocateleading leadership theories that are unsuccessful in helpinglearners go beyond the narrow structural model and are ineffective in equipping them to address issues of social justice, diversity, and gender.To bring about substantial and noticeable changes in society, thesescholasticestablishments must build and administer leadership development programs that address issues related to gender diversity and teach transformational leadership to shatter the preconceived ideas, biases and assumptions about women's leadership abilities.

Though it’s easier said than done, it is only with each small step can we strive to reach our goal.

Conclusion:

You ask a woman in power what is the biggest issue that she faces at the workplace, and the answer will surprise you –“Guilt”. Most women face this dilemma. They see themselves parting their lives into 2 parts to maintain a family and to maintain workplace dignity. They are facing a constant battle at both the places. They juggle their time between the two choices constantly. This happens because we as a society make things different for them constantly. At work, - glass ceiling, at home- pressuring her to be more “nurturing” and “present”.

There is no empirical theory that exists that provides for an evidence that men are better managers than women or if men and women have different types of managerial styles. There are only good or bad managers which are irrespective of their age or sex. And thus as people are promoted through the hierarchy, the organisations should be gender-blind as far as performance is concerned. The problem is that we are not so unbiased. We see people through the filter of sex-stereotypes which have been internalised in the system- both at home & at work. As of today, in The United States women have become the primary bread earners of almost 63% households, they still need to fight to be respected and meted equally at workplace.

Today, women are shattering glass ceiling like never before but still a lot of work needs to be done towards uplifting the majority. They have taken up CXO level positions in a number of companies, namely – Candy Florina, Chairman and CEO of Hewlett Packard ;Patricia Barbizet, Chief Executive of Artemis: Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook; IndraNooyi, President and CFO of PepsiCo and many more. In 2008, as the United States stood at the brink of history and elected a male Black President, Mr. Barack Obama, admired the spirit of his contender Ms. Hilary Clinton

mentioning glass ceiling, admitting its existence worldwide, "And although we weren't able to shatter that highest, hardest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you, it's got about 18 million cracks in it."

Organisations and Government are doing what they can on their part, by providing support facilities for home bound work for women and laws for protecting the dignity of women at workplace. It is now up to the culture and conscious efforts of the working class that a paradigm shift in the mindsets of people at workplace, will bring about a more inclusive and progressive environment.

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