

# Shattering the Glass Ceiling: Effective Interventions

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**Abstract**—*With the changing trend in the recent years, a major chunk of the corporate force is now known to be comprising of Women. With more and more women graduating from top Universities in specialized courses, these numbers are just increasing by the day. Even though they form a huge part of the work force, the trends indicate little representation of women in the Board Room or the Top Management. This trend can be primarily attributed to gender bias that has undoubtedly made its presence felt across all companies throughout various sectors. This paper is a small endeavor to discuss the current trends with respect to the glass ceiling concept and suggest some corrective measures to shatter the same.*

**Keywords:** *Glass Ceiling; Workforce, Women employees*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Understanding the concept of Glass Ceiling

The U.S Department of Labour (1991) defines the term Glass Ceiling as “an artificial barrier based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevents qualified women and other minorities from advancing upward in their organization and senior management level positions.” This is certainly not just widespread in the States but is prevalent in India as well. The term ‘glass’ has been used metaphorically and denotes the invisibility of the obstruction. The glass ceiling is defined as the impenetrable force that excludes women and minorities from informal and formal social networks that provide access to executive positions. In general, restrictive factors or obstacles that impede the career growth of women are described by the effect of the “glass ceiling,” which is the impenetrable force that excludes women and minorities from the informal and formal social networks that provide access to executive positions (Callahan & Tomaszewski, 2007). According to Meyerson & Fletcher (2000) “The glass ceiling that is holding Women executives back is not just above them, it’s all around them, in the whole structure of the organization, the beams and the walls. The very air...most of the barriers that persist today are insidious, - a revolution couldn’t find them to blast them away”.

### 1.2 Falling off the Glass Cliff

The term ‘Glass cliff’ was coined by Ryan and Haslam (2004). They stated that “companies that appointed women to their

boards were likelier than others to have experienced consistently bad performance in the preceding few months. The term refers to a danger which involves exposure to risk of falling but which is not readily apparent.” Consequently after having broken through a glass ceiling women are in fact more likely than men to find themselves on a “glass cliff”, meaning their positions of leadership are risky- so says Mc Culloch (2004).

Anderson opines companies may offer glass cliff positions to women because they consider women “more expendable and better scapegoats.” She says the organizations that offer women difficult jobs believe it is a win-win situation for the company. If the company comes out of the crisis then it basks the glory of having done well. On the flip side if it doesn’t do well then they can conveniently blame the woman manager and claim themselves to be progressive. Eventually the company may go back to hiring men for higher posts.

## 2. PREVAILING TRENDS PERTAINING TO THE CONCEPT

### 2.1 Current Trends in Organizations

Many reasons have been offered to explain the differences between men and women’s upward progress in organizations, but much focus is on subconscious stereotyping that has been labeled “think leader, think male” (Schein, 1973, 1975). Despite the growing number of female professionals, modern statistics tell a story of sex inequality and male-dominance across all disciplines, providing agency to the purveying thought of feminist scholars that the glass ceiling exists and endures to this day (Hon, 1995).

Modern research has looked at the “glass ceiling” from a variety of perspectives to identify why females are still not held to the same standards as their male counterparts (Hon, 1995). Previous studies have identified multiple factors that inhibit the upward progression of women on the corporate ladder. These include: the patriarchal nature of today’s business and corporate climate, the denial of the glass ceiling phenomenon, traditional gender role socialization, and a lack of woman-to-woman mentorship and support communities

(Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Hon, 1995; Wrigley, 2002). These restrictions restrain female professionals from progressing towards positions in upper management and despite extensive research conducted on why barrier has been so long-standing, previous studies indicate that change is approaching very slowly (McGill, 2012; Wrigley, 2002). Corporate India claims that the glass ceiling is breaking while basking the glory of women such as Naina Lal Kidoi, Chanda Kochhar and Indra Nooyi to name a few. But the representation of these few women at the epitome of the corporate ladder can barely uproot this trend that dates way back. Organizations state that the Glass ceiling ceases to exist today and that it is nothing more than just a proverb. Clearly this positive outlook distracts us from dealing with the issue at hand. They substantiate their argument by stating that “women were paid lower salaries in comparison to their male counterparts since they worked for lesser time, left their jobs midway or too up low risk jobs” (Rai & Srivastava, 2008). Adding to this perspective is that Care giving roles are not highly rewarded in the labor market and in organizations and may often be seen as contrasting with leadership roles (Lewis, 2001; Liff & Ward, 2001; Littleton, 1997). In spite of representing nearly half of the workforce (44 percent), the average woman makes approximately 27 percent less than her male counterparts per year do (McGill, 2012).

## 2.2 Intervention at the Organizational Level

According to Bombuwela, Alwis & Chamaru (2013), Human resource experts are frequently seen at significant positions that allow them to have a huge impact on organizations. Consequently it is important that, they are knowledgeable about how the glass ceiling fact may directly or indirectly impact an organization's reputation, customer loyalty, and diversity of skill sets, growth potential. They opine that, the members higher up the hierarchy may invite Human resource experts to formulate and execute strategic organizational changes that are essential to reduce this trend.

It is apparent in previous researches that more diversity in a company may eventually lead to more creative business solutions, less excessive risk taking and overall better decision process of the company (Lansing & Chandra, 2012). Companies need to realize this fact and exploit the diverse skill sets available to them. In this respect, undertaking change initiatives by the company becomes a prerequisite. These interventions may be in the form of: Firstly, implementing a strong mentorship program in the organization. The senior members may be able to draft the career charts for their mentees, counsel employees on upgrading their skill sets and applying them at work, provide encouragement for professional development, may even lead to succession planning. Secondly, the company may ensure that everyone gets a fair chance to attend training programs that may contribute to professional development. This would lead to greater chances of being eligible for attaining promotions and positions of greater responsibility. Thirdly, providing fringe

benefits to women employees such as flexible work hours or a crèche facility within the premises may act as a major support as they will now re-consider leaving their jobs in order to care for her children. Even the male employees may be encouraged to use the crèche facility which may help breaking the stereotypical roles expected out of women for nurturing children. Incorporating policies such as paternity leave for men may help break these stereotypes. Lastly, companies who claim to be an Equal employment opportunity provider should ensure the representation of women across all the levels in the organizational hierarchical structure.

## 2.3 Intervention at the Individual level

Bombuwela, Alwis & Chamaru (2013) identified certain factors that may be responsible for the Glass ceiling. These include individual factors, organizational factors, family and cultural factors. Out of these the most predominant one was the Individual factor. The glass ceiling may manifest itself in various ways throughout a woman's career. These may be in the form of: lesser remuneration as compared to their male colleagues. Secondly, erratic career paths arising from maternity breaks which may eventually lead to lack of concrete work experience. The duration of the gap from their gainful employment outside the home will determine their salaries once they resume full time work. Sometimes women prefer taking part time employment alongside and as a result get paid hourly which later sums to a much lesser amount than their male counterparts receive.

This calls for an intervention on their part. Hence, it becomes imperative for women to overcome their mental blocks on low self esteem and poor self confidence. They need to be able to trust their competencies to take on higher levels of responsibility. One way to implement this would be to do a SWOT analysis for the self. Being true to yourself on your strengths and weaknesses and playing your roles around these will act as a spring board for success. Writing your thoughts down will help you to say these out loud and accept yourself for who you are. Prioritizing tasks and time management also becomes a major challenge for women since they are seen juggling more roles. Traditionally women are seen as more nurturing and hence bear the responsibility of child bearing and rearing. As a result striking a balance becomes difficult. This may lead to some women taking sabbaticals from their careers which may drastically affect their career trajectories. Even if they do end up taking growth opportunities, taking on leadership roles may demand more hours and effort on her part which might be difficult. Lastly, a good way to kick start post sabbatical tenure is to engage in training programs in order to update oneself with the current trends, knowledge and skills specific to your industry type. Not only would this help in building ones strengths but also aid in networking with other members in the industry.

### 3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Glass ceiling can be viewed as an invisible obstacle that may be seen to impede the professional growth of women. There are many reasons for the pay inequity among men and women. The higher we go on the corporate ladder, the drastic is this gap. In this respect, the author through means of this paper has urged the companies to make their policies more favourable for women. We are in a society where women are seen as the prime care takers of the child and understandably so. We need to try to make our organizations more conducive for their growth. Also the author advises the women today to take suggestive measures to overcome their mental blocks and pursue their career goals more rigorously. For this trend to change, an intervention is required not just at the organizational level but also at the individual level on the part of women employees. Even though some companies are embracing this change, the process is very slow.

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