

WORK PLACE FACTORS IMPACTING WOMEN AND ITS EFFECT ON PROGRESSION

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Abstract

Over the last three decades, a steady rise has been observed in the numbers of highly skilled female professionals and managers across different industries, which has gradually resulted in a re-configuration of the top management positions from male towards female. Despite professional eligibilities and ample opportunities, female employees are not aptly represented in the higher corridors of organisational power. Today's workforce is unique because never before has the workforce been so diverse, as women and minority are being integrated into the workforce. Despite the remarkable increase in the existence of women in the workforce, women's right of entry to diverse managerial positions remains restricted, and this is especially so for senior management positions all over the world. There is equally strong evidence of the under-representation of women in leadership positions in many countries such as Australia, China, France, South Africa, United Kingdom and United States. A review of the literature brings to fore nine customary barriers they include i) Women-Not-Good-Enough Ideology; ii) Glass ceiling perspective; iii) Negative Stereotypical Assumptions; iv) Low levels of aspiration; v) Formal and Informal network forged by men; vi) Attributions for Successful work performance; vii) Training and Development Opportunities; viii) Leadership behaviour; and ix) Impact of Organizational systems. The following are some of the highlighted barriers which this paper will be considering its effect on the overall progression of women..

Keywords: Barriers, Progression, Glass Ceiling, Gender, Women

Paper Type; Research paper

INTRODUCTION

Globally there has been a significant improvement in the presence and status of female managers over the past half century. Despite this improvement, research indicates that women continue to face barriers within organisations that affect their progression (Wood, 2008). Although figures indicate that women have been employed for wages in similar numbers to men worldwide, the number of women holding managerial positions is not reflective of this as women are significantly lower. Women were reported as making “slow and uneven progress” (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi, 2005, p. 4) in achieving equity in managerial positions, with only 20-40 percent of management positions reported to be held by women in 48/63 countries (Wirth, 2004). These figures included all management levels. Even though

a noticeable increase has been observed in women in management at junior and middle management levels (Lyness, 2002; Powell, 2003), a noticeable disparity in the figures is seen at senior management or executive levels (Eagly et al., 2003; Lyness and Heilman, 2006). The vast majority of these positions are still held by men (Catalyst, 2012; Sealy & Vinnicombe, 2012). And as a result, female leaders are something of an exception to the norm. While overt discrimination is not tolerated in organisations, subtle gender discrimination still exists and accounts for the lack of progression for women. Such discrimination, exemplified in various work practices and cultural norms, is so entrenched in organizations that it is difficult to detect. This paper looks at how those barriers present themselves, so that recommendations can be made to ensure an environment which supports growth both for the organisation and staff.

MODELS INDICATING PROMOTIONAL BARRIERS

Gendered Organisational Structure Model (GOS)

The attainment of gender equality in organisations/the world at large, is a grindingly slow process, since it challenges one of the most deeply entrenched of all human attitudes (Lopez-Claros, 2005).

Feminist critiques of gendered organisational theory indicate how gender shapes power and decision making, interest representation and accountability within the organisation. It is also observed that the interface between the personal and the professional, the formal and the informal, emotion, sexuality and power, hierarchies and difference, draw out significant organisation phenomena which shape advantage, disadvantage and unequal access and control. (Penelope, 2010).

In the GOS model of gender diversity, it is observed that the status and experience of women in organizations across organizational structure is relative to formal/informal networking, diversity performance evaluation, stereotyping and preferred leadership (Cooper, 2001). From their study, Fagenson (Fagenson E, 1993) and Cooper (Cooper, 2001) it was observed that organizational structures impedes women entry to and advancement in the workplace. The organisational structure ranges from job recruitment/assignment, mentoring, retention, and training, as well as work-life balance. Moreover Bajdo and Dickson (Bajido LM, 2000) indicate from their findings that the greatest predictor of the number of women in management position is a result of organisations that are keen on organisational culture affecting gender equity.

Promotional Opportunity Model

As women first began to enter the corporate world as managers in extensive numbers in the late 1960s and early 1970s, just a few expected to pursue their career to senior management position. Corporate policies at that time likewise had no affirmative action programs to promote women to senior management positions, which made the first generation of women managers even more wary of setting a

goal to rise to the top (Morrison, 1992). It was estimated by the United Kingdom Equal Opportunity Commission that it would take 65 years for women to reach equality with men as directors of Britain's top 100 companies (Smith, Crittenden and Caputi, 2012). In a survey carried out by Catalyst (2004), finding indicated that corporations were still not creating diversity initiatives or policies that effectively lessened the obstacles for women wishing to ascend through the ranks to senior management. Kirai and Elegwa(2012) however indicate that Promotional policies and practices are designed to foster opportunities traditionally deemed essential for women to rise to executive level positions. Oakley(2000) summarizes the significance of line experiences, performance based feedback, training and career development on the ability of women to rise to CEO and other senior level positions.

Work/Family Partnership Model

As years go by, overt discrimination has been driven out of organizations, however subtle gender discrimination still exists and has significant effect on lack of movement in shattering the glass ceiling. Such discrimination, is so embedded in various work practices and cultural norms, that it is difficult to detect, and only incremental steps aimed at changing bias can chip away at the barriers that keep women from moving into senior levels(Myerson et al, 2000). This model proffers solution for women to balance work and family responsibilities. It encompasses the implementation of policies that help employees manage non work responsibilities such as dependent-care services and flexible –scheduling program like various types of family leave practices which impact positively on the number of women in upper level management(Kirai & Elegwa 2012). Most times, promotion criteria such as evaluation, networking, and succession planning are designed and developed by men, who have limited understanding of women's lives (Crampton and Mishra, 1999), hence the motive of women is not clearly understood and most times misinterpreted thereby blocking them from advancing to the executive levels.

IDENTIFIED BARRIERS TO FEMALE PROGRESSION

Women Not Good Enough Ideology;

In many societies, top management activity has been seen as the prerogative of men (Hannagan, 2005). In these economies – more specifically patriarchal societies, there are structures regulating the roles of women. A number of these structures have aided the collective programming of the societal mind, making the under representation of women in management positions acceptable (Tai et al , 2005). In such organizations as well as societies, there tends to usually be a differentiation between the achievements of men and women which diminishes the achievements of women. As Chow (1999) argues women who happen to rise to positions of high status within such cultures have their authority often undermined and resisted because they are thought to be incompetent (Chow, 1999).

Stereotype

In the early 1970s Schein's empirical investigations of managerial sex role stereotyping revealed that 'think' manager-'think male' was a strongly held belief among middle managers in the United States. Both male (Schein, 1973) and female (Schein 1975) managers perceived that the characteristics associated with managerial success were more likely to be possessed by men than women. Recent U.S replications reveal that this view is still held today by male managers. Despite changes in women's progress in the workforce, males unlike their female counterparts, continue to perceive the managerial position as requiring masculine characteristics. To the extent this attitude is unchecked by structural limitations, the male decision maker may still favour the male candidate. As a psychological barrier to the advancement of women in management, the 'think manager-think male' phenomenon can foster bias against women in managerial selection, placement, promotion and training decisions. (Schein, 1996). However, evidence suggests that women are not so fortunate. Studies show that in many countries around the world, stereotypically feminine qualities are generally not the qualities that come to mind when people think of successful leaders (Fullager et al. 2003; Schein, 2001; Schein et al., 1996). The result, Schein and others maintain, is that feminine stereotypes can portray women as being relatively ill-suited to leadership.

Women, irrespective of their actual caregiving responsibilities, seem to be viewed as having greater caregiving responsibilities and greater family-work conflict than do men. These findings imply stereotyping, given that empirical research shows that men and women report similar levels of work interfering with family and family interfering with work (Byron, 2005); indeed, we found that female subordinates actually reported slightly less family-work conflict than did their male counterparts. Researchers have long argued that women face stereotypes that impede their career progress, but the type and nature of these stereotypes are seldom investigated.

Low Levels Of Aspirations; Family Structure/Work-Family Conflict

The Work-family is a major problem for working mothers (Aryee et al, 1999, Ng et al, 2002). The cohesion between work and family is important for many people (Whitely and England, 1977), and, unsurprisingly, the research on work-family conflict (WFC) has become a major area in organizational research (Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 2002).

Work-family conflict is defined as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985, p. 77). This conflict basically results from an individual's attempts to meet an overabundance of demands emanating from the home/family and work domains in which the individual operates (Boles et al., 2001). The demands coming from one domain make performance of roles in the other

domains more difficult. For instance Pregnancy; the biological role of a woman requires her to get pregnant and the period of pregnancy to delivery/nursing of the child is quite a demanding one, and even after the child is born and maternity leave given to the woman, it is never enough to face the demands of both the home and work. (Uwakwe, 2004). Yavas et al (2008) contend that there are three possible consequences of work-family and family-work conflicts: emotional exhaustion, poor job performance and higher turnover intentions.

Longer working hour have been shown to make a positive impact on WFC (Fu and Shaffer, 2001). It is plain and common to see that the more time spent in the work domain inevitably results in less time available at home, rendering the mountain of responsibilities associated with family roles more difficult. (Beauregard, 2006). Meeting the expectations of superiors and putting on consistent performances on a regular basis and working for more than regular working hours have also been shown to contribute to WFC (Sundar and Ashkok, 2012).

Glass Ceiling

The term gender, as stated by Enemuo, (1996) is not the same thing as sex because while sex refers to physical difference between males and females, gender concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between a man and a woman. He expatiated further that while the differences between male and female sexes are natural, universal and largely constant, gender differences are created and sustained by society through its traditions, customs, conventions, mores and regulations. The gender system is therefore how the society is organized with respect to the creation of differences between males and females through its customs, traditions, and even the legal institutions which are all components of the culture of the society.

Gender role expectations approved by the society for its members has therefore resulted in gender stereotype where females are portrayed to be doing house work and caring for babies while the males are presented to be professionals in different of fields of endeavour. Though the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria gives equal right to all citizens, yet women are practically made to play the second fiddle in most spheres of life in the society (Igwesi, 2012)

Gender is a concept that is a socially constructed expression used in categorising people who share similar sexual qualities into masculine or feminine traits. Although gender attributes are ‘historically rooted’ (Marlow and Patton, 2005), the term is not static, rather it is reactive, adapts to and responds to the aspirations, constraints and opportunities of participants within a particular context. Attempts to create static male-female biological and behavioural boundaries are often problematic. These attempts have been influenced by biological, religious, political or specific societal philosophical persuasions.

Traditionally, the vast majority of top leadership positions in both the USA and throughout the world have been held by males rather than females (Stelter, 2002).

Even though there is an increasing number of women who enter the workforce and an increasing number of managerial positions, women's access to leadership positions remains limited (Black and Rothman, 1998; Eagly et al., 2003; Oakley, 2000; Ridgeway, 2001; Stelter, 2002). In a developing countries however, the growing concern to integrate women into the workforce which increases women's economic participation stems from a general need to alleviate poverty levels and deteriorating economic conditions. As a result of the economic state of the country women have been forced to work outside of the normal status, venturing into different economic activities while still continuing to perform their traditional household duties. This has both social as well as economic implications. (Woldie, 2004)

The failure of women gaining entrance into the workforce and their failure to attain the highest management positions can be described as "glass ceiling" or "glass wall" (Tlaiss and Kauser 2010). The term glass ceiling was introduced by the Wall Street Journal, in 1986, it constitutes an invisible barrier for women and minority groups, preventing them from moving up the corporate ladder (Carli, 2001). The concept 'glass ceiling' pervaded literatures in 1990 and was used to describe the paucity of women as well as minorities, heading public and private sector organizations (Maume, 2004). The term was also earlier used by Morrison et al. (1987) in their captivating book *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can Women Reach the Top of America's Largest Corporations?*, that shed light to the issues women face in their journey through the executive echelons of the corporate organizations. Subsequently, the term "glass-ceiling-effect" became synonymous worldwide with the struggles women face in attempting to move up to the senior, executive and top management positions in corporate organizations (Wirth, 2001). Thus, failure of women and other minority groups in climbing up the corporate ladder, despite seeing the top jobs, but still not reaching them due to discriminatory barriers, is what many think of as glass ceiling (Maume, 2004).

Oakley (2000) argued that these three categories explain the barriers that result in a glass ceiling: (1) corporate practices such as recruitment, retention, and promotion; (2) behavioral and cultural causes such as stereotyping and preferred leadership style; and (3) structural and cultural explanations rooted in feminist theory.

Woldie(2004) In her study, concluded that women still have a long way to go in attaining senior management position as well as being accepted in business environment.

GLASS CEILING EFFECTS

The failure of women gaining entrance into the workforce and their failure to attain the highest position in management has led to women seeking to engage in other activities like being their own bosses that is by becoming entrepreneurs. Women activities especially in industry be it in small or medium scale production activities

empower them as they contribute not just to the economic survival of the women and their immediate social environment but it has positive repercussions on their wider social environment. (Woldie, 2004) In many societies however, female entrepreneurs do not enjoy the same opportunities as men. In many transitional economies, there has been marked progress in female education as well as improved health facilities for women. However when it comes to economic and political opportunities for women there is a limitation. (Woldie, 2004)

Impact of Organisational System/Culture

In a study carried out by Liff and Ward's (2001) on a UK high street bank in which they investigated women's under representation in senior management positions, in relation to the job requirements for such positions, their findings observe the bank outlining the requirement to attain the senior management position for women. This include the need to prove loyalty and commitment through working long hours and participating and involving in the senior and top management functions. However, women who were not suited to the requirements, were undermined and excluded by the bank. Crampton and Mishra (1999) and Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) observed that a significant number of organizations installed flexible working hours, along with pregnancy and sabbatical leave and child-care facilities to favour women employees, but still held on to the culture of long and demanding working hours, which majority of women with family responsibilities found difficult to cope with/adapt to. Moreover, women who used these measures were viewed as having a lack of commitment which reduced their promotional chances. Thus, organizations install contradicting systems working parallel to one another, confusing workforce further. The relationship between women's determination to pursue a career in top management with their relative scarcity in management positions and their less preferences for masculine ways of doing things, was examined by Van Vianen(2002) and She concludes that the organizational cultures, policies, and practises foster unfavourable processes for progression of women to the top, thereby working against women, and making them feel excluded from it.

Training And Development

There is the argument that often women themselves do not have a clear understanding of the shift in focus as well as responsibility while moving from the middle to senior and top management functions. They are oblivious to the difference between the middle management functions which are more short- and medium-term goal orientated, compared to the senior and top management function which require a wider strategic perspective. Hence, while occupying the top positions, they are still performing less strategic and lower paying tasks (Wirth, 2004). In addition, women enter a professional system with lack of job clarity and limited information on formal tasks and functions, that also becomes growth barriers for them.

It is also observed that women often lack a sponsor which is normally achieved by networking which is normally at times which might not be considered favourable due to family responsibilities. This sponsor invariably, promotes and sells their skills and abilities of these women to others in the organization and goes to bat in ensuring that progress is made with climbing the organizational ladder. A study launched in 2009 with support of American Express, Deloitte, Intel, and Morgan Stanley found that women were guilty of underestimating the role that sponsorship/networking plays in career mobility or fail to cultivate it. The reasons for this vary from perceptions by women that getting ahead through connections is inappropriate to reluctance by both women and senior men to establish a sponsorship relationship because it can often be misconstrued as sexual interest. (Women in Architecture., 2011)

Practical Implications; The most successful organisations are those that are able to attract and retain the right team. Retention of good staff however can prove difficult, if members of an organisation feel marginalised. The paper identifies barriers to progression of female employees which should provide clarity for organizational leaders to identify the various growth barriers existing in their organizations, which results in a glass ceiling towards their female workforce.

Conclusion And Future Research; . From existing literature, there is a disparity between women's motives to pursue a career in top management in relation to their absence in top management positions. It can be concluded that the organizational cultures, policies, and practises foster unfavourable processes for the top job advancements that work against women, making them feel excluded from it. There is still need for further research, as work place barriers tend to be different in different countries, which is embedded in different government policies, organisational cultures and several other militating factors.

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