

GLASS CEILING AND ITS EFFECT ON WOMEN'S CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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The concept "Glass Ceiling" was first used in 1986, when two Wall Street Journal reporters coined the phrase to describe the invisible and artificial barriers that impeded women from advancing to senior leadership positions in organizations. Since then, the metaphor of the glass ceiling has also come to be applied to the advancement of minorities, deaf, blind, disabled, and sexual minorities. It is unmistakable that ceilings and walls exist throughout most workplaces for minorities and women. These barriers limit the development and mobility opportunities of men and women of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Barriers that impede the progression of women include: lack of management commitment to establish systems, policies, and practices for achieving workplace diversity and upward mobility, pay inequities for work of equal or comparable value, sex, race, and ethnic-based stereotyping and harassment, lack of family-friendly workplace policies, and limited opportunities for advancement to decision-making positions to mention a few.

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The glass ceiling is a barrier not only to individuals where women and minorities have progressed within a firm but, despite their ambitions and qualifications, find it difficult to make the movement into key higher level management positions, or management positions at all but to society as a whole where the social disadvantage of these glass ceilings is the inability of qualified employees to move into the most important positions due to irrelevant criteria such as race or gender. The selection of a less qualified employee negatively impacts both the employer and ultimately the economy as a whole.

Factors that hinder women's career advancement includes: Firstly, "male stereotyping and preconceptions of women" based on outdated ideas rooted in stereotypes about women's abilities and commitment to their careers. Secondly, most often "exclusion from informal networks of communication" and "lack of mentors is a factor. Thirdly, organizational culture and finally the cultural mindset that suggest that to be a leader or successful, one need to think and act like a male. However our societal norms and expectations are the greatest hindrance to women's advancement in business. Thus most women find themselves in staff jobs, lacking the line experience necessary for progressing up the corporate ladder.

The workplace is male dominated. Ninety-four percent of the all policy making in the Fortune 500 companies is done by men. Since most of us are more comfortable being around people like ourselves, men tend to stay in their comfort zone and promote more men. Finally, women need to take responsibility for the choices and the decisions they make. If a woman is not achieving her goals in her present situation, she needs to go someplace else where she will be valued.

In order to remove the glass ceiling, organizations need to develop a culture that sees women as a resource not a problem. In essence, they need to discard the "one best male model" mind-set, and advance a mind-set that sees the word difference as "added value."

Research Design of the Study

The Rationale for the study was that the review of literature indicated that the glass ceiling conditions at the top 1000 companies and the multinational companies are one and the same or it doesn't necessarily define actual conditions. Similarly, one might expect the glass-ceiling phenomenon to manifest itself differently in Indian organizations as it does in Fortune 1000 companies as most other issues do. The lack of research of the glass-ceiling phenomenon in Indian organizations makes this study relevant. The second motivator behind this study being gender segregation and to explain why women make less than men, and also focuses on occupational

segregation, which means men and women are highly segregated by occupation, which results in female occupations being poorly paid. The disproportionate percentage of women in management at manufacturing companies makes research of the glass-ceiling phenomenon within multinational corporations relevant.

Statement of the Problem

Glass Ceiling and its effect on Women's Career Advancement in Multinational Corporations: An exploratory study.

Objectives of the Study

To explore the presence of the glass ceiling in multinational corporations.

To determine the extent to which the glass ceiling impacts women's career advancement in multinational corporations.

To analyze, understand and identify driving and hindering factors in the advancement of women in multinational corporations.

To suggest strategies and interventions to break the glass ceiling in multinational corporations.

Hypothesis

The glass ceiling does not have a significant impact on the advancement of women's careers in multinational companies.

Sample Size and Tools Adopted

The sample size consisted of 200 respondents from 12 multinational companies from Bangalore city.

The tools and techniques for data collection for the present study was a detailed questionnaire that was constructed to address the research problem. Items were measured adopting a 5 point scale. The direct interview helped in clarifying issues regarding the glass ceiling, thus enhancing the researchers understanding of the research problem under investigation.

Descriptive statistics and parametric tests were employed in analyzing and interpreting data.

Respondent Profile

The position from which the respondents were drawn was from Top Management (7%), Middle Management (70%), and Non Management (23%). The age of the respondents were Less than 25 yrs (15%), 26 – 35 yrs (61%), 36 – 45 yrs (20%), and Above 45 yrs (4%). 51% of the respondents were single and 49% married. 58% of the respondents were male and 42% were females.

Does the glass ceiling exist in multinational corporations?

Items measuring glass ceiling	Mean	Standard deviation
Does the glass ceiling exist in Indian organizations?	3.24	1.06
Does the glass ceiling exist in the respondent's organization?	2.49	1.10
Capability of women to serve in senior executive positions	3.35	1.25
Women and men are respected equally	3.28	1.23
Opportunities for women to advance into senior management positions	3.26	1.35
Competitiveness/assertiveness in women is viewed as a negative trait	2.31	1.32
Equal career development opportunities for men and women	3.63	1.36
Organization's structure and practices favour male employees	2.46	1.32
Women have to perform better than their male counterparts to be promoted to the same position	3.00	1.44

46% of the respondents agreed to strongly agree that there exist the glass ceiling in Indian organizations, whereas 54% said that they were neutral, disagree or strongly disagreed. 36% perceive that the glass ceiling exists in the Indian Business World. About 22% respondents disagree with this whereas 27 respondents hold neutral ground on the matter.

30% of the respondents agreed to strongly agree that there exist the glass ceiling in the respondent's organization, whereas 70% said that they were neutral, disagree

or strongly disagreed. 52% feel that the glass ceiling does not exist in their organization; however 8% do feel that the glass ceiling does exist in their organization.

49% of the respondents agreed to strongly agree that women are as capable as men of serving in senior executive positions, whereas 51% said that they were neutral, disagree or strongly disagreed. 27% respondents agree that women are as capable as men of serving in senior executive positions whereas 20 respondents feel that women are not as capable as men.

52% of the respondents agreed to strongly agree that women and men are equally respected, whereas 48% said that they were neutral, disagree or strongly disagreed. 36% agree that women and men are respected equally in their organization whereas 20% disagree to this indicating that the glass ceiling is in existence in some organization.

50% of the respondents agreed to strongly agree that opportunities for women to advance into senior management positions do exist in MNC's, whereas 50% said that they were neutral, disagree or strongly disagreed. 27% feel that opportunities exist for women to advance to senior executive positions whereas 25% do not agree to this.

24% of the respondents agreed to strongly agree that women competitiveness/assertiveness was viewed as negative, whereas 76% said that they were neutral, disagree or strongly disagreed. 38% respondents strongly disagree to the fact that competitiveness and assertiveness in women is a negative trait whereas 17% feel that these traits in women are negative.

71% of the respondents agreed to strongly agree that equal career development opportunities exist for men and women in MNC's, whereas 29% said that they were neutral, disagree or strongly disagreed. 71% agree that that there are equal career development opportunities for both men and women in their organization. Only 12% people strongly disagree to this fact.

31% of the respondents agreed to strongly agree that MNC's structure and practices favour men over women, whereas 69% said that they were neutral, disagree or strongly disagreed. 32% strongly disagree to the item that organization's practices and structures are designed to favour men and 27% employees also disagree to this. About 25% employees agree that organization's practices and structures favour men over women.

43% of the respondents agreed to strongly agree that in MNC's women have to perform better than their male counterparts to be promoted to the same positions, whereas 57% said that they were neutral, disagree or strongly disagreed. It is evident from the mean that an equal number of respondents either agree or disagree to the fact that women need to perform better than men to be promoted to the same position.

Does the gender of an employee impact pay and promotion?

72% of the respondents feel that there is no pay inequity in their organization in favour of men. 10% perceive that pay inequity exists in favour of men and 18% do not give their opinion.

31% of the respondents feel 'yes' gender has an impact on promotion. Whereas 23% say 'No' and 46% of the respondents say they are not sure.

Factors that enhance women's career advancement in MNC's

Training	33%
Extensive experiences	23%
Education	19%
Work-Life Balance	16%
Influence	7%
Cooperative and non-threatening style	2%

33% of the respondents feel that specialized training can help women's career advancement, followed by exposure to extensive experiences (23%), formal education opportunities (19%), providing for a healthy work-life balance (16%). The last two strategies being exerting influence from significant others (7%) and adopting a cooperative and non-threatening style of functioning (2%).

Factors that hinder women's career advancement in MNC's

Lack of equal career development opportunities for women	26%
Structures and practices	23%
Perceptions that women are not competitive	18%
Higher expectations of performance and effort from women	12%

Women's lack of enthusiasm	10%
Women's lack of self-confidence	9%
Perceptions that women should not be in a position of authority over men	2%

Lack of equal career development opportunities for women (26%) in the MNC's topped the list among the hindering factors, followed by MNC's structures and practices mostly favour men (23%), perceptions that women are not competitive enough (18%), higher expectations of performance and effort from women (12%), women lack enthusiasm (10%), women lack self-confidence (9%) and last hindering factor is the perception that women should not be in a position of authority over men (2%).

Factors that aid in the development and advancement women's careers

Programs that help women balance work and family	29%
Encouraging women	25%
Flexi-time	21%
Parental leave programs	16%
Career development support groups	4%
Mentorship programs	3%
Women role models	2%

29% feel that offering programs that help women balance their work and family obligations would be helpful in helping women's career advancement followed by encouraging women and increasing opportunities for them to serve on high visibility assignments/projects (25%), 21% are of the opinion that offering flexi-time (flexible hours) work schedules would be of help to women, parental leave programs (16%), career development support groups (4%), mentorship programs (3%), and providing for women role models (2%) will all in a positive manner aid in the development and advancement of women in MNC's.

The respondent's perception about the percentage of executive positions occupied by women in MNC's indicated that 49% opined that 25 – 50% of executive positions are occupied by women, followed by 0-25% (33%), 50 – 75% (18%) and none believed that women occupy executive positions between 75 – 100% in MNC's.

ANOVA for differences on the glass ceiling variables between demographic groups reveals significant differences in several of the glass ceiling variables between different sets of demographic groups.

Significant differences were found in age of respondents and capability of women to serve in senior executive positions, women and men are respected equally, opportunities for women to advance into senior management positions, competitiveness/assertiveness in women is viewed as a negative trait, women have to perform better than their male counterparts to be promoted to the same position, organization's structure and practices favour male employees, and equal career development opportunities for men and women. Except for gender no other demographic variables were significantly correlated to the glass ceiling variables. This indicates that women experience significantly more the existence than men in MNC organizations.

Chi Square Test to test the dependence of gender of employees with pay inequity and promotion indicated that gender and pay inequity are independent (Chi Square Calculated Value = 3.576 and Chi Square Table Value = 5.99).

Gender and promotion of employees was also found to be independent (Chi Square calculated value = 0.744 and Chi Square Table value = 5.99)

Based on the research conducted it is evident that the glass ceiling exists to a certain extent in multinational companies. Therefore, it becomes essential to intervene and set up processes that help reduce/remove these barriers that hinder a women's career progress and advancement in a systematic manner.

It is suggested that the following processes can be implemented

- Development of mentorship programs offered to women.
- Focusing special company recruiting practices to seek out qualified women for high-level positions.
- Developing "Fast Track" managerial programs that identify and develop high potential women.
- Encouraging women to participate in out-of-office social activities.
- Creation of career development support groups and networks for women.
- Offering programs that help women balance their work and family obligations.
- Offering paternal leave programs.

- Offering flexi-time (flexible hours) work schedules.
- Having a sufficient number of women role models in the highest levels of the organization.
- Encouraging women and increasing opportunities for them to gain a combination of line and staff experiences.
- Encouraging and helping women to broaden their professional experiences and their general management experience.
- Increasing opportunities for women to spend time and work in corporate headquarters.
- Increasing opportunities for women to assist and/or work with influential executives.
- Encouraging women and increasing opportunities for them to serve on high visibility assignments/projects.
- Establishing managerial accountability for development and advancement of women.

For the above suggestions to be effective organizations must ensure that

- There are adequate company programs that make it easier for women to balance their work and home responsibilities.
- There are no perceptions within the organization that women's careers are not as important because they are not the primary family provider.
- There is no feeling that women lack adequate general management and/or line experience.
- There is genuine commitment to equality of genders and advancement of women.
- Performance appraisal and incentive systems are not in favour of men.
- There is no male domination of senior positions.
- Women are willing to make the sacrifices needed to get and remain in senior positions.
- Inhospitable and discouraging corporate cultures that impede women's career progress need to be eliminated.

- There are no biases and stereotypical perceptions that women are too indecisive, weak, and irrational to be effective leaders.
- There are sufficient organizational resources in support of women's causes.
- Women are not reluctant to relocate if the job requires it.
- There is no lack of commitment and enthusiasm of top executives in support of women's career development/advancement.
- There is sufficient encouragement, and training opportunities, for women to gain experience in line functions (example: operations, manufacturing, and marketing).
- There are no perceptions that women are less interested in challenging assignments/responsibilities.
- They do not have a tendency NOT to assign women to challenging/high visibility projects.
- There are no perceptions that men make better managers than women.
- Career interruptions for child bearing, child raising and similar family responsibilities are not held against women.
- Male managers are not intimidated/threatened by women leaders/superiors.
- Male employees do not exhibit discomfort with having female managers/superiors.
- There are no perceptions that women are emotionally/intellectually unsuitable for management positions.

In conclusion, though women represent the predominant group in marketing department of most MNC's, are well educated and recruited from some of the country's best MBA programs, work hard and aspire for the same success everyone does by everyday engaging in a significant role in the process of their organizations, yet their absence from meaningful senior level decision-making positions - the glass ceiling as it has come to be known exists. The question remains how to best eliminate this barrier and are today's MNC's and other organizations engaging in a systematic and proactive manner in eliminating the glass ceiling.

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