

REVIEW ARTICLE

GLASS CEILING ON WOMEN EMPLOYEES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SULTANATE OF OMAN

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ABSTRACT

Women are one of the important resources in the organizations and also are a new addition in the organization. But as we all know that a new addition is very difficult to accept. So are women finding it very difficult to adjust them in the new world because of the sole reason of existing of Glass Ceiling? Oman is a young country and women have recently started entering into the organizations for job. Women with dual responsibility of family and work are trying to adjust to their work schedule. But when they have to face this problem of glass ceiling in the organization which demotivate them to achieve their goal. All of the women employees have continued to pursue additional education and training to assist them in career development and advancement. Glass ceiling is very common across the world and hence it also exists in Oman. The study here shows what the reasons for women to have glass ceiling are and how glass ceiling effect can be overcome by the organization. The findings are mostly based on what an organization can do to avoid glass ceiling effect.

KEY WORDS: Glass ceiling, Impact on women, Sultanate of Oman, Types of Women.

INTRODUCTION

Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal capacities. She has the right to participate in minutest details of the activities of man and she has the same right of freedom and liberty as he. She is entitled to supreme place in her own place of activity as man is". M.K Gandhi. Women are one of the most beautiful creations of God. God said that man and woman are equal. Women have the ability to work hand in hand with men. In olden days, women were only restricted to work at home and gardens. However, in present day she has become an integral part of the modern world. She is able to balance both home and work. The fortune 500 company says about 45 percent of the population is working women. Another survey says that women executives have tremendously increased in the last few decades. In spite of all these achievements done by the women, the number of women working is a very small percentage and although women are participating in the workforce, they do not achieve the same level of success as men. In Oman, most of the women are still from conservative families. In addition, working women are few. Nevertheless, in recent years because of the continuous support given by the government of Oman, the women employees are increasing gradually. But they too find some problems in the workplace. It may be due to the inevitable oppression of women in the workforce named it as Glass ceiling effect on their performance. The glass ceiling is a metaphor for the invisible barrier that prevents women from reaching the upper echelons of management. It is created by invisible forces of culture, habit, and power that serve to keep women "in their place," that is, subordinate to men.

Glass ceiling

The term "glass ceiling" has been thought to have first been used to refer to invisible barriers that impede the career advancement of women in the American workforce in an article by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt in the March 24, 1986 edition of the Wall Street Journal.

The term glass ceiling refers to situations where the advancement of a qualified person within the hierarchy of an organization is stopped at a lower level because of some form of discrimination, most commonly sexism or racism expressed by Luis, Balkin and Cardy (2006). According to the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, the glass ceiling effect can be defined as an unseen barrier that keeps women and minorities from rising up the corporate ladder regardless of their achievements and qualifications (Cotter, Vanneman, 1999).

Glass ceiling impact on women

The glass ceiling effect is on women especially when they are employed at the lower level in the organization. The middle level women employees also do face glass ceiling effect and the top-level women employees face less glass ceiling effect. The glass ceiling effect may vary from country to country. Women may be having the difficulty with childcare or elderly care. When women are employed the organization may impose international assignments where the women needs to travel far off countries, may be difficult for a lady to fulfill because of other commitments at home or even rational assignments can be a reason for women to refuse further roles in the organization. The society also imposes certain code of conduct on a women that she should be a home maker and husband is the breadwinner for the family. Omani women are supposed to be home bound. This is a cultural barrier. Only in recent days a

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small population of women is working in various organizations.

Sultanate of Oman

Oman is one of the fast developing countries in the Middle East. Fifty percent of the population of the Sultanate is women. The Omani culture doesn't really allow its women population to be employed. This is due to the mindset of the people and cultural restrictions. But recently women have started working and are facing glass ceiling in the workplace. In 1993 only 9% of the total Omani labor force constituted women and majority of them were employed in the public sector. Now the women participation in public and private sector has been considerable increased. In the past decade there has been considerably increase in women participation in employment. And the scenario has changed to such an extent that Omani women are presenting an example for other Arab countries to follow. Currently the Omani workforce consists of 16% women workforce.

Types of Women

Work-Centred Women: This group of women is in a minority, despite the massive influx of women into higher education and into professional and managerial occupations in the last three decades. Work-centred people (men and women) are focused on competitive activities in the public sphere, in careers, sport, policies or the arts. Family life is fitted around their work; many of these women remain childless, even when married. In the long run, it is work-centred people who are most likely to survive and become high achievers, in greedy occupations.

Adaptive Women: This group of women prefers to combine employment and family work without giving a fixed priority to either. They want to enjoy the best of both worlds. Adaptive women are generally the largest group among women and are in substantial numbers in most occupations. Certain occupations, such as school teaching, are attractive to women because who transfer to part-time work after they have children are adaptive women, who seek to devote as much time and effort to family work as to their paid jobs.

Home-Centred or Family-Centred Women: This group of women is a minority and relatively invisible in the Asian world, including Oman, given the current political and media focus on working women and high achievers. Home-Centred women prefer to give priority to private life and family life after they marry. This group of workers is most likely to drop out of greedy careers relatively early in adult life.

Need for the present study

Women are playing an important role in the current economics scenario. Their population in working area has been increasing drastically since 1980's all over the world and especially in Sultanate of Oman. Traditionally women were restricted to teaching the girls in schools and nurses in hospital. However, these days their area has been widened and they occupy all the areas in the organizations. The problems of working women are multidimensional and differ from women to women and country to country and organization to organization. The

problems are different for different sections of women such as rural and urban women, traditional and modern family, age of the women, marital status etc. The numbers of working women are comparatively less and in the recent years it is increasing gradually from 9% to 16%. In Oman, Majesty Sultan Bin Saied Bin Taymoor Al Busaidi's recent speech towards women employees is 'We call on Omani women everywhere, in the village and the city, in urban areas and in the countryside, in the plains and in the mountains to contribute to economic and social development with their individual abilities, skills, expertise, and positions in society. The homeland needs all citizens to continue the march towards progress, stability, and prosperity. We call on Omani women from this podium to shoulder their vital part in the society, and we are convinced they will respond'.

Objectives

1. To study the background of women executives in the middle east especially in Oman
2. To limelight the existence of glass ceiling effect on women executives in Oman
3. To analyze the reasons for glass ceiling effect on women
4. To suggest the ways and means to improve the performance of the women executives by overcoming the glass ceiling effect

Review of Literature

Women's careers have never followed the linear upward trajectory common among men. Women's careers tend to be characterized by periods of interruption and alternative work arrangements (Schrieber, 1998), and many must work part time or belong to the contingent workforce (Brumit Kropf, 1998; Schreiber, 1998) in order to balance work and family life. Cotter (2001) studied the glass ceiling effect on women and came to four major conclusions. The first one was discrimination based on race or gender. Second was the female and other minorities move very slowly in organization hierarchy. Third, is that chances of getting higher in the organization and finally negative impacts of glass ceiling effect grow as one progress in one's career. Ababkov (2005) suggested from her study on family life and professional work that husbands devote more time to their professional activity while wives devote more time to child rearing and household work and that in spite of social changes, that tends to be the norm in today's young families.

Cotter *et al.* (1996) found that women earn sixty percent of what men earn in both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. It was also found that the gap tends to get larger as women move on later into their careers, where men usually advance and receive pay raises, this is less true of women (Roth, 2004). Women tend to be hired into lower paying jobs because employers hold biases towards hiring women into higher paid positions in which they feel a male would do better (Roth, 2004). If women do make it into the male dominated high paid, high status jobs then they often face very hostile environments and, as a result leave the job or take a lower position with less prestige (Roth, 2004). Roth (2004) found that women within 5 to 7 years after completing an MBA were more likely than men to find themselves moving from high-paying jobs into lower paid ones or on a downward spiral in their career. The

reasoning was mostly due to either discrimination or family responsibilities (Roth, 2004). Doyle and Hind (1998) performed a study to look at gender differences in positions held in psychology departments in colleges and universities. They found from their sample of 582 staff members working in higher education psychology departments that gender differences are evident (Doyle and Hind, 1998). The first difference they found was that in the level of position held within the department. They found that there were more women in junior positions and more men in senior positions at every age level that they looked at (Doyle and Hind, 1998). The biggest difference was in the 40 to 49-age level, where 37% of the men held senior positions while only 25% of women had achieved a senior position (Doyle and Hind, 1998).

Research Methodology

The study was using secondary data which was obtained by reference of text books, journals, research work of the scholars, organizational research reports.

Reasons for Glass Ceiling

1. Societal barriers which are related to their education, level of job satisfaction is one of the reasons for the glass ceiling effect.
2. Societal culture transcends both the societal context in which women function and the societal attitudes and expectations of the female role that underpins female self-perceptions.
3. Some work patterns show differences between older and younger women managers. The younger women were generally less motivated to have career breaks than the older group, who tended to either have a career break or return to work after a very short maternity leave. Taking the full legal maternity leave was no longer regarded as a lack of commitment on behalf of the female.
4. Internal and external attitudes and expectations of women stem from children's education and upbringing. Societal changes in relation to education, designed to explore gender images rather than reinforce gender appropriate teachings, have resulted in improved expectations and career performance of women and blurring of the traditional gender roles within society.
5. The organizational culture is concerned with the demands and expectations associated with the working environment. Many researches showed that more women have moved into management positions, but remained under-represented and disregarded.
6. The requirement for flexibility by women to fulfill family commitments may interrupt their ultimate career progression.
7. The literature suggests that women are being pushed into less prestigious, more routine functions of careers and this makes it difficult to demonstrate reasons becoming an executive.
8. Relationships issues within the organization such as mentoring, networking and lack of role models can also be a problem.
9. Stereo typing bias can be another reason for glass ceiling. This means that men would like to hire people who look like them or have habits like them. Men hiring men than women.

10. Sometimes even the government may be playing a role in glass ceiling when they say that more number of women have jobs than men. This provokes the men to hire more men than the women.

How to overcome Glass Ceiling effect

1. The organizations should have mentoring programmes which will help the male employees to accept the female employees equally and there will not exist any glass ceiling in the organization.
2. Career rotation is another option, where men and women get equal opportunities to be the leader in the organization without discriminations.
3. There also can be an increase in board room diversity. Instead of only having men controlling the boardroom, even women can be given an opportunity to show their talents.
4. The organization can have goals for diversity. This will help the women to achieve their goal to the full extent.
5. Legislation reform constitutes an important component of any strategy to achieve equality in employment. Although legislation alone cannot provide a quick remedy and it can lead to numerous informal methods to avoid the direction of such legislation, legislation can set a community standard and serves to illustrate what is acceptable behavior.

Conclusion

It has been seen that there is a wide variety of glass ceiling effect on women in Sultanate of Oman. But if the organizations implement some of the suggested methods then the glass ceiling effect may reduce to a great extent. This will help the women to increase their performance in the workplace and also increase their job satisfaction. In the future, it is hoped that all individuals, regardless of gender or any visible differences, will have equal opportunities in their career progression in any industries they are pursuing.

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