

## Examining Women in Leadership: An In-depth Analysis of the Glass Ceiling and Organizational Advancement

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**Abstract:** The term "glass ceiling" denotes an unseen obstacle obstructing the upward progression of women within the corporate hierarchy. Numerous prior studies consistently highlight how women encounter obstacles in attaining high-ranking positions due to corporate cultures and insufficient support structures hindering their career advancement. Nevertheless, there appears to be a shift in this trend over time. Organizations that prioritize the developmental aspects of female employees, acknowledge their competencies, and foster an inclusive environment have demonstrated greater success. Recognizing that development is a gradual process, this paper conducts a systematic literature review to scrutinize the challenges impeding women from attaining leadership roles and to comprehend its implications for organizational development. The study relies on secondary data extracted from research papers spanning the past three decades. The paper's analysis centers on four major factors: socio-cultural, organizational, governmental, and psychological barriers associated with the glass ceiling effect.

**Keywords:** Glass ceiling, organizational development, leadership, psychological

### Introduction

Throughout history, the unequal treatment faced by individuals based on their gender has been a persistent issue. While society may perceive oppression faced by men as a misfortune, the same challenges encountered by women are often dismissed as traditional norms. From ancient times, rigid roles have been assigned to both genders, with men traditionally viewed as the breadwinners while women were confined to domestic duties. Startlingly, research reveals a stark contrast in the allocation of time spent on various responsibilities, with women shouldering a disproportionate burden in childcare and household chores compared to men (Beniell & Sanchez, 2011). These societal expectations not only restricted women's participation in the workforce but also subjected them to unequal pay for similar tasks. Influential figures throughout history, like Aristotle and Pythagoras, propagated ideologies that deemed women as inferior, relegating them to limited roles that hindered their advancement. However, the landscape has shifted dramatically over time, catalyzing significant changes in

contemporary society. Today, women are actively engaging in civic affairs, exercising their right to vote, participating in political forums, and striving for financial autonomy. This transformation underscores the evolving role of women, challenging traditional norms and contributing to a more equitable and inclusive society.

In the contemporary landscape, traditional paradigms of managerial norms and workplace dynamics are increasingly being challenged (Gibson, 1994). Women are asserting their presence, making significant contributions to both organizational success and societal advancement.

The integration of women into the workforce has heralded a profound shift in their perspective. No longer confined to mere "employment" driven solely by economic necessity, women are now embracing careers as a conscious professional choice. This evolution marks a clear departure from seeking work out of obligation to actively pursuing professions aligned with their personal aspirations. However, this transition hasn't been without its obstacles. Women have faced societal judgments and criticisms as they've navigated from being seen as evolutionary participants in the workforce to becoming revolutionary agents of change (Goldin, 2006).

Despite considerable progress in women's participation in the job market, challenges persist. The concept of the "glass ceiling," coined over three decades ago, continues to loom large, symbolizing the subtle yet significant barriers that impede the advancement of women and minorities within corporate hierarchies. Originally introduced by Hymowitz and Schechellhardt in the *Wall Street Journal* in 1986 (Jain & Mukherji, 2010), the metaphor highlights the phenomenon whereby executive-level leadership positions remain predominantly occupied by Caucasian males, an issue often left unaddressed in corporate settings. Recognizing the entrenched disparities in the workplace, the Glass Ceiling Commission was established as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1991. This initiative aimed to address internal structural barriers, including the lack of concerted efforts by businesses to promote diversity and inclusion, particularly for underrepresented populations. By dismantling these barriers, society can create a more equitable and meritocratic environment, where individuals of all backgrounds have equal opportunities to thrive and succeed.

The impact of gender disparities in the workplace, particularly the challenges faced by women in advancing to leadership positions, is a complex and multifaceted issue that significantly affects not only individuals but also organizations as a whole. This phenomenon, often referred to as the glass ceiling, has far-reaching implications for self-esteem, career development, and organizational dynamics.

One of the primary manifestations of the glass ceiling effect is the persistent gender pay gap. Research by Correll and Bernard (2007) highlights how family-related

considerations and discriminatory practices contribute to this gap. Women are often perceived as less committed to their roles due to familial obligations, leading to inaccurate managerial perceptions and reinforcing stereotypes. Additionally, the rigidity of job roles and perpetuation of gender biases further exacerbate wage disparities, perpetuating the glass ceiling effect.

Several factors contribute to the slow advancement of women in the workplace, as identified by Bhatnagar and Mathur (2015). Discrepancies in training opportunities, lack of appreciation and acknowledgment, limited family support, and aversion to risky job opportunities collectively impede women's progress in achieving leadership positions.

Despite efforts to promote gender parity, women continue to face numerous obstacles in their career advancement. These barriers stem from cultural, societal, organizational, and psychological factors, collectively impeding women's progression up the corporate hierarchy. Understanding and addressing these barriers is essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable workplace.

The glass ceiling phenomenon remains a significant challenge in achieving gender parity in the workplace. Addressing wage disparities, promoting inclusive organizational cultures, and overcoming systemic barriers are essential steps towards empowering women and fostering their advancement into leadership positions. By recognizing and addressing the multifaceted nature of the glass ceiling effect, organizations can create environments where all employees can thrive and contribute to organizational success, regardless of gender.

As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, women continue to fight for their rights and equal opportunities in various spheres of life, including the workforce. Despite strides made in acknowledging barriers to career advancement, such as educational disparities and lack of work experience, women still face formidable obstacles rooted in cultural, societal, organizational, and psychological factors. These barriers collectively impede women's progress up the corporate ladder, hindering their ability to attain leadership positions and contribute fully to organizational success.

The primary aim of this investigation is to delve into the multifaceted obstacles that hinder women from ascending to leadership roles and to explore how these impediments impact organizational development. Furthermore, this paper endeavors to deepen our understanding of the increasing importance of women's participation in the workforce, underscoring its pivotal role in driving the success and growth of organizations. In the modern landscape, women's struggle for equality extends beyond the confines of the workplace. They continue to advocate for their rights and challenge

entrenched gender norms across various domains of society. Despite significant strides towards gender equality in recent decades, women still encounter systemic barriers that limit their access to opportunities and hinder their advancement in both professional and personal spheres.

While factors such as education and work experience play a crucial role in career advancement, they only scratch the surface of the challenges faced by women in the workplace. Cultural and societal norms often dictate traditional gender roles, placing additional burdens and expectations on women that can impede their professional growth. Organizational structures and practices may inadvertently perpetuate gender biases, creating barriers to entry and advancement for women.

Moreover, women often grapple with internalized stereotypes and self-doubt, stemming from societal expectations and pervasive gender norms. These psychological barriers can undermine confidence and self-efficacy, making it more difficult for women to assert themselves in male-dominated environments and pursue leadership opportunities.

### **Methodology**

An in-depth examination of pertinent literature was undertaken to investigate the obstacles encountered by women within organizational contexts. The review predominantly relies on secondary sources, encompassing research papers, websites, and eBooks. Utilizing this secondary data, the evolution in the manifestation and impact of the glass ceiling phenomenon was systematically documented across different time periods.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Ever since the concept of the glass ceiling emerged, numerous factors have shaped its endurance in society. Our aim is to delve into the impact of these factors across three distinct timeframes: 1986-1996, 1997-2007, and 2008 to the present. Throughout this journey, we seek to understand the evolving status of women in the workplace and its implications for organizational development.

Between 1986 and 1996, societal norms and cultural expectations erected substantial barriers, particularly concerning gender roles, dictating the roles individuals played in society. Families, whether consciously or not, perpetuated stereotypical behaviors that significantly contributed to the emergence of the glass ceiling phenomenon.

During this era, Indian society clung steadfastly to traditional notions of women primarily fulfilling domestic roles. Despite a growing desire among women to participate in professional work, familial responsibilities often stood as formidable

obstacles. Consequently, society constrained women's aspirations, discouraging them from envisioning roles beyond the domestic realm. The prevalent perception of women as household caregivers led to minimal emphasis on 'education for women' within the societal fabric.

This period marked the genesis of the glass ceiling effect, with various socio-cultural factors exacerbating its impact. A 1992 survey by the U.S. Merit System Board highlighted that women, despite possessing equal educational qualifications, work experience, and job commitment as men, consistently faced barriers in attaining senior federal positions. Prescriptive stereotypes dictated that women should assume passive and sensitive roles, characteristics incongruent with successful managerial positions.

Societal expectations compelled women to prioritize family life over careers, resulting in a lack of strategic career planning and limited networking opportunities. Gender-related structures and practices led to divergent work experiences for men and women, with senior executive roles viewed as domains of "hegemonic masculinity." Furthermore, women, primarily to care for young children, felt compelled to adopt flexible working hours and take career breaks, as evidenced by a Catalyst survey in 1996. The survey unveiled that within 22% of corporations, women in management roles ranged from a quarter to half, with less than 5% attaining top positions. The decreasing inclusion of women not only impacted gender diversity but also posed a threat to organizational development.

In the early 1980s, several studies sought to uncover the roots of the gender wage gap. Engagement in household chores emerged as an indirect factor contributing to wage disparity. According to Becker (1985), women allocated more time to housework, reducing their effort in market jobs compared to men, thereby diminishing their work productivity and subsequent wages. Data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics in 1988 highlighted a wage differential of 27.6% between male and female full-time workers.

The gender wage gap remained relatively stable until the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, there was a notable narrowing of the gap in the late 1980s, attributed to women's endeavors to enhance their qualifications and pursue diverse occupations (Blau et al., 1998). By the late 1990s, wage disparity was primarily associated with measurable factors such as educational qualifications, occupational segregation, work experience, and gender discrimination. During the 1980s and 1990s, employers exhibited reluctance to hire women, fearing insufficient returns on investment in training and recruitment costs. This hesitancy permeated organizational beliefs and policies, making positive change more challenging. Additionally, the earnings gap between male and female employees largely stemmed from gender disparities in the

workplace, impeding the growth and mobility of women and restricting their access to better opportunities.

These findings underscore the intricate interplay of socio-cultural norms, organizational structures, and individual aspirations in shaping women's experiences in the workplace. Addressing the persistent challenges posed by the glass ceiling and the gender wage gap demands a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including policymakers, businesses, and society at large. Only through collective action and a commitment to gender equality can we break down these barriers and create a more inclusive and equitable future for all. Mentoring relationships are invaluable for both men and women in their career journeys. However, research suggests that female managers often encounter greater barriers to advancement, making mentoring even more critical for their growth and success. Female leaders, at times, face heightened scrutiny regarding their performance standards. While some seek guidance from mentors, studies indicate that such support may be less effective compared to male counterparts, partly due to gender issues (Nieva & Gutek, 1981). Constraints on mentoring for women include limited availability of mentors and concerns about the dynamics of female manager-male mentor relationships within societal norms. Research reveals that women struggling to progress in their careers frequently cite the "absence of mentors" as a significant setback. Female mentors, particularly in male-dominated environments, offer invaluable role modeling without the potential complications of cross-gender mentorship.

Corporate culture significantly shapes an organization's vision, strategies, operational goals, and communication practices. According to Deal & Kennedy (1982), organizational culture profoundly impacts employee capabilities and their understanding of issues. The link between organizational commitment and corporate culture underscores how a strong culture provides employees with clarity on organizational goals and power dynamics (Gregory, 1983).

A 1991 study by the Bank of Montreal identified four shared beliefs contributing to the under-representation of women in senior roles: perceived lower commitment due to career breaks for child-rearing, the belief that women needed better education to compete, doubts about women's suitability for senior roles, and the expectation that time would naturally address gender disparities. Despite growing recognition of the importance of mentoring, resistance to women in the workplace persisted during this period, making any shift in established norms seem daunting.

Governmental barriers in the 1980s hindered women's entry into the workforce, prompting landmark policies in the early 1990s. However, the glass ceiling phenomenon persisted, with governmental setups also experiencing its effects.

Psychological barriers, such as family-work balance challenges and stereotypes, significantly impacted career advancement. Women faced pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, influencing their career choices and organizational contributions.

The early 21st century saw a gradual shift in outlook. Research by Jamali (2006) reported positive feedback from women managers regarding their work environment. However, despite these positive changes, women continued to face challenges such as societal expectations, gender-based evaluations, and limited flexible opportunities, all contributing to their underrepresentation in leadership roles. While progress has been made in acknowledging the importance of mentoring and addressing systemic barriers, significant challenges remain in achieving gender equality in the workplace.

In the realm of corporate dynamics, women have persistently faced hurdles in asserting their opinions and breaking through established stereotypes, which have long favored men in leadership roles. The pervasive influence of the glass ceiling phenomenon has directly impacted women's earning potential, with their competencies and abilities often undervalued, resulting in a wage gap that undermines motivation, job satisfaction, and overall organizational effectiveness.

Predictions forewarn of a widening salary gap between genders, with women's salaries projected to remain at only 69% of men's within a decade. Factors contributing to this discrepancy include the challenges posed by childbearing and child-rearing responsibilities, perpetually depressing women's earning power. Moreover, societal perceptions often dissuade women from negotiating salaries, exacerbating the wage gap further.

One significant obstacle hindering women's career progression is the scarcity of suitable mentors, particularly women in executive positions. This shortage not only limits guidance opportunities but also complicates cross-gender mentoring relationships, adding another layer of complexity to women's career development.

Despite some modest progress in women's representation in the workplace, promotions and advancement opportunities continue to elude them, with male decision-makers exhibiting a preference for their male counterparts. The increasing-disadvantage model suggests that challenges intensify as women ascend the corporate ladder, perpetuating the gender gap in leadership positions.

Organizational culture plays a pivotal role in perpetuating gender disparities, with male-centric cultures leaving women with limited power and influence within the workplace. Despite initiatives aimed at narrowing these gaps, women often find themselves labeled as 'imposters' or 'outsiders,' further impeding their integration and progress within organizational structures.

Bureaucratic obstacles, including delayed government reviews and fluctuating enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, hinder progress in achieving gender equality in the workplace. These barriers directly impact organizational growth and perpetuate systemic inequalities.

Psychological barriers and inherent biases overshadow women's capabilities, leading to feelings of discomfort, lack of accountability, and discrimination. These barriers not only affect women's motivation but also diminish their perceived professional identity, hindering their career advancement prospects. The fear of success and stereotypical perceptions of women as less capable further obstruct their career progression. Women often find themselves assigned fewer challenging roles and excluded from decision-making processes, exacerbating the glass ceiling effect. While efforts to promote fairness have led to some improvements, challenges persist, necessitating continued advocacy and initiatives to eliminate stereotypes and promote gender equality within organizations.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the untapped potential of women in leadership roles. Organizations are increasingly implementing diversity policies, mentoring programs, and support systems to facilitate women's career advancement. However, despite these efforts, women continue to face obstacles such as underrepresentation in leadership positions and a persistent gender wage gap. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including providing women with opportunities for career experimentation, enhancing mentorship programs, and challenging systemic biases and discriminatory practices within organizations. Empowering women to fulfill their potential not only benefits individual career growth but also contributes to organizational success and societal progress as a whole.

Studies underscore that women who actively advocate for promotions are 54% more likely to attain them. Recognizing promotions and diversified job roles as pivotal for skill enhancement, organizations are increasingly investing in employee training, gender diversity, and flexibility to uphold their standards. However, achieving gender diversity among executives remains a challenge deeply influenced by both organizational strategy and culture (Sandberg, 2013). Effective action plans and gender policies are deemed essential to address this issue, fostering a positive corporate culture grounded in professionalism, team building, and gender inclusion, which can significantly motivate employees to perform at higher levels.

Research indicates that women often encounter obstacles in developing professional networks due to familial obligations and a lack of sponsors introducing them to



leaders. Additionally, interactions in male-dominated settings can be disconcerting for females, hindering their participation. Biases and unconscious prejudices ingrained in work culture exacerbate challenges for women, fostering feelings of self-blame and unfair treatment. However, recent initiatives have witnessed changes, with companies adopting innovative work policies to retain their workforce. Aligning organizational values with employees' personal values, especially for women advancing their careers, has been highlighted as crucial (Korn Ferry Institute, 2013). Despite these changes, organizational regulations often favor men, necessitating transparent work rules to address gender disparities (Angier & Axelrod, 2014). Safety concerns for women at the workplace have led to the implementation of policies safeguarding their rights, contributing to proactive changes in organizational development.

Despite efforts, governmental barriers persist, as highlighted by Clevenger & Singh (2013) in their study related to industries like hospitality. The Glass Ceiling Commission emphasizes the need for improved statistical procedures and support for voluntary organizational efforts. Recognizing the government's pivotal role in eradicating the glass ceiling phenomenon, steps include implementing robust monitoring systems against gender discrimination and enforcing anti-discrimination laws. Government initiatives, such as the Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace enacted in 2016, aim to provide employment opportunities for women and address workplace challenges. Leadership development through training and flexible job options, facilitated by the government, contributes to holistic progress in organizations globally (Park & Par, 2018).

Societal norms deeply ingrained in women's minds since their early stages often constrain their ability to relinquish these norms as they mature, resulting in diminished enthusiasm for work. Numerous studies substantiate that this lack of confidence significantly hampers women's outcomes (Moss et al., 2008). Women with higher self-efficacy find it less daunting to attain executive positions, with research indicating a significant negative correlation between self-esteem/self-efficacy and barriers to their advancement (Hassana & Ehsan, 2015). Despite these findings, there hasn't been a marked improvement in how individual traits impact women's advancement in recent years. Hence, organizations must provide a work culture where female employees can operate at their full potential without unnecessary challenges compromising their individual characteristics, fostering collaboration among employees.

## Conclusion

Over the past three decades, a global shift has been observed, gradually increasing the number of women occupying managerial positions. This evolving societal mindset

recognizes the invaluable contributions of women to organizational development. Factors such as improved access to education, training opportunities, equitable compensation, and a supportive work culture have played pivotal roles in mitigating gender discrimination in the workplace.

The majority of women find themselves confined to low or mid-level managerial positions, grappling with barriers such as inadequate remuneration, lack of self-confidence, limited promotional opportunities, absence of mentoring programs, and challenges in maintaining a work-life balance. These hurdles not only impede the advancement of women but also stifle organizational growth and success.

This analysis sheds light on the existence and persistence of the glass ceiling effect, elucidating its detrimental implications for organizational prosperity. Despite various initiatives undertaken to address these issues, there remains a pressing need for more comprehensive efforts to elevate women leaders to a level playing field with their male counterparts. Ensuring gender equality in the workplace is imperative to reshape perceptions held by both men and women regarding women in managerial roles and to surmount the challenges posed by the glass ceiling. Such measures are poised to enhance the overall productivity and effectiveness of organizations.

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