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REVIEW OF GLASS CEILING PROBLEM IN THE USA

The policy of «glass ceiling» in the USA is considered in the article, the causes of this phenomenon and the ways of breaking the «glass ceiling» are given.

«Glass ceiling» is an invisible barrier that determines the level to which a woman or other member of a demographic minority can rise in an organization. [1, 224] This situation is referred to as a «ceiling» as there is a limitation blocking upward advancement, and «glass» (transparent) because the limitation is not immediately apparent and is normally an unwritten and unofficial policy. This invisible barrier continues to exist, even though there are no explicit obstacles keeping minorities from acquiring advanced job positions – there are no advertisements that specifically say «no minorities hired at this establishment», nor are there any formal orders that say «minorities are not qualified» – but they do lie under the mask of apparent equality. [2, 77]

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 the article «The corporate woman» by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt on March 24, 1986 in the *Wall Street Journal*. [3] It has come to represent a variety of biases that prevent qualified minorities and women from advancing in the work-place particularly into mid-and senior-level management positions.

The U.S. Congress acknowledged the glass ceiling issue by enacting the Glass Ceiling Act on November 21, 1991. This act encourages employers to remove barriers to the advancement of women and minorities. It includes a mandate that focuses on studying how businesses fill management and decision making positions, trains and develops people for advancement into such positions. It also focuses on the compensation systems and reward structures currently used in the workplace.

Major research into the existence of the «glass ceiling» was sustained through the across-industry study by the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission from 1991 to 1996, and continues with the work of organizations such as Catalyst and Boston College. [4] Reports of the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission provide disturbing statistical evidence: 95 percent of senior managers of Fortune 500 service and Fortune 1000 industrial companies are men. In the Fortune 2000 companies, only 5 percent of senior managers are women. These numbers present a statistical profile that is troubling when we consider that the percentage of bachelor's degrees earned by women rose from 35 percent in 1960 to 50 percent in 1980 and to 57 percent in 2000. Similar growth exists at the master's degree level: from 32 percent in 1960 to 50 percent in 1980 and 58 percent in 2000. In contrast, the rate of growth is even greater for women earning business degrees. At the bachelor's level the percentage rose from 7% in 1960 to 34% in 1980 and 50% in 2000. At the master's level, the percentage of degrees earned by women went from a low of 4% in 1960 to 22% in 1980 and 40% in 2000.[5] Therefore, more women are graduating from college, more women are earning degrees in business, but their presence in senior management is

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negligible. Despite comprising more than two-thirds of the population and more than 57 percent of the labor force in 1995, women were underrepresented at upper levels of management. This representation of women in management suggests that at executive levels we would see a similarly strong representation of women. Contrary to their presence at middle management, women comprise only 5 percent of executive suites. The data had not improved, for while women made up more than 45% of the labor force, they represented only 12% of all corporate officers. [6] Women are graduating and entering management positions yet there is a bottleneck at middle management levels. Women experience glass-ceiling effects that keep them from climbing corporate ladders to levels above middle management. As more women graduate with business and other professional degrees and enter corporate life, the problem becomes more urgent they experience a slower progression compared to their male counterparts. So, while entry is easier, progression slows and in most situations regardless of their qualifications or achievements, women are prevented from climbing the corporate ladder to the top. Thus, the glass ceiling describes an organizational level beyond which female managers are not promoted even though they are as qualified as their male counterparts.

The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission's report summarized the major barriers to women's advancement in organizations. Included in its list was placement in «relatively dead-end staff jobs»; lack of mentoring, management training, and career development; and lack of job rotation and «critical development activities» opportunities. [4]

So, what are the possible causes of «glass ceiling»?

Training opportunities may influence women's advancement in organizations. A study examining determinants of managerial advancement found that training, which men received more frequently than females, led to advancement. If women do not have access to the training, upper management may perceive them as less qualified than men and may then be unable to qualify for the next job. If a woman's career later accelerated for affirmative action reasons, the organization may be setting her up for failure because she lacks the experience training will give her. The study also showed men were more likely to get promotions because they were «known quantities» to their bosses; upper management perceives them as being more credible. Managers appeared to be more hesitant to advance women, asking them to prove themselves extensively before promoting them. Having the women prove themselves before promotion supposedly reduced the perceived risk taken by the manager.

In keeping with the issue of training experience, an additional developmental activity that affects promotion opportunities is overseas experience. Women are less likely to receive overseas assignments, which increasingly is becoming an important developmental activity given our global economy. There are various reasons why there are few US women expatriates: 1) Women perceive less opportunity for receiving overseas assignments so they do not pursue getting them. 2) Expatriates are usually middle-or senior-level managers so there are fewer women to choose. 3) Women's family status (whether single or married) is stereotyped as being problematic. 4) Women will not be treated kindly or credibly by certain cultures. 5) Lastly, prejudiced attitudes in their own home companies impede women from being selected for overseas assignments.

«Men are more easily accepted in positions of power and influence and women are placed in secondary roles». This statement stems from a more traditional view of the roles of men and women in organizations. A study using the Women as Managers scale revealed negative attitudes toward women as managers, and the researchers suggested these results may be a reflection of lack of experience with female managers, prompting reliance on negative stereotypes or myths regarding women in management positions.

Finding ways to help break the «glass ceiling» is going to be a long and difficult struggle. Many women have found that a mentoring relationship has helped them professionally. While the process of deliberate mentoring in organizations is fairly new, the idea is not. «Mentoring has

been going on in the male population for decades. When women began entering the work force in masses, they had to seek out mentoring relationships to break through the glass ceiling.»[7, 21] Mentoring is the pairing of a seasoned professional with someone embarking on a career, or just joining an organization. The purpose of a mentoring relationship is to provide guidance and encouragement, and share experiences. Through this process, the subordinate grows in his or her career and within an organization. «Mentoring circles are a way to survive the shards of glass once the glass ceiling is broken.»[7, 21]

A few steps suggested by the American Management Association to break the glass ceiling are to: First, set clear goals and make a long-term commitment to all employees, rather than try to fill a quota, top management should be concerned with preparing employees with higher-level positions. Second, develop formal and informal support systems through coaching, mentoring, and other types of consulting. Third, allow mid-level managers to learn more about the inner workings of senior management. Fourth, allow talented managers of both sexes the opportunity to participate in high-level meetings, such as strategic planning sessions. Fifth, have feedback programs that give manager a clear sense of their strengths and weaknesses. Finally, convince all rising stars that the advantages of moving up to the executive suite outweigh the personal sacrifices. Although higher pay and prestige are strong motivators, not everyone wants longer hours, stress and job uncertainty.

Finally, let me add that the number of women in senior executive positions still lags considerably behind the number of men. A 2008 survey showed that 95% of American workers believe that women have made «important advances in the workplace over the last 10 years» but 86% believe that the glass ceiling has not been broken, even if it has been cracked. [8]

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