

# Breaking the Glass Ceiling Philosophy and Reality: A Study of Gender Progress and Career Development in the Corporate World

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## Abstract

With the evolving nature of the business world, it has become a modern necessity to have a diverse workforce. As such, human resources professionals and managers must be prepared for the redesign of their organizations to be more inclusive throughout their formal hierarchies. Although the overall attitudes have become generally more feminist, the unfortunate reality is that women continue to face internal and external barriers which act as a ceiling to their career development and advancement. Rather than viewing the paucity of women in management positions as a problem because of public disdain towards gender disparities within the workplace, this paper emphasizes that organizations should view this as an opportunity to gain a competitive advantage, given that having more women in leadership positions is correlated to improved organizational performance.

The main argument of this research is that gender diversity can lead to better outcomes for an organization; in addition to this, research demonstrates that the inclusion of more women within management positions may also encourage a transformational leadership style, which could potentially lead to sustainable growth for a company. Throughout this paper, using the methodology of reviewing recently published literature, this paper demonstrates the fact that the glass ceiling is detrimental to the economic development of both women and the companies as institutional barriers seem to persistently block them from equitable advancement opportunities. Using published data and expert analysis, we provide suggestions and recommendations for the creation of an inclusive work environment where all employees can have fair and transparent progress based on their goals and qualifications.

The “glass ceiling” literature has empirically demonstrated that managers can reduce the negative gender-based stereotypes by empowering more qualified women to take on leadership responsibilities. At the meantime, professionals can serve as advocates in their local governments to create and change laws that are unfair and unjust. All local leaders, managers and employees must promote the benefits of diversity to build and encourage inclusion in the workplace. Furthermore, all organizations can improve their inclusion training so their employees can keep an open mind regarding diversity. With the application of the recommended skills and suggestions, coupled along with public awareness and advocacy for equity in hiring and promotion decisions, the “glass ceiling” can certainly be eliminated in all organizational settings.

**Keywords:** glass ceiling, discrimination, wage gap, inclusion, gender equality, mentoring, and career development.

**JEL Classification:** J16, J31, D63.

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## Introduction

Even today, women within the workforce manage to bump into a “glass ceiling”, an invisible barrier preventing them from further ascending within their careers; in fact, this subject has been in the news for quite some time locally, nationally and internationally (Bekdemir, Ackermann, Beil, Croger, and Mujtaba, 2015). Philosophically, some argue that this concept is a self-imposed idea created by the minds of women as an excuse for why they cannot reach their full potential; however, the reality is that there are actual barriers which women have to face, making it harder for them to stand out from the rest of the workforce. Institutional obstacles and other barriers can be generated from society in general, organizational mindset, and from women themselves, i.e. self-fulfilling prophecy (Mujtaba, 2013; Mujtaba and Kaifi, 2010). Within this paper, a discussion is held in regard to managing discriminatory problems towards women in the workplace. Among these external barriers, there may be internal threats as well, including unconscious bias, gender stereotypes, and lack of sufficient mentorship.

Unfortunately, in regards to career development and advancement, women are often excluded from consideration. This includes opportunities for leadership planning, mentorship programs, and apprenticeship opportunities. In order to pursue higher caliber positions, employees including women need guidance, which can offer advice and support; such forms of empowerment are necessary for women to pursue higher goals within their careers. However, if there is discouragement or lack of support in regard to opportunities for career growth, the potential and capability of the female gender are rather limited. Without feedback, there is no room for improvement and advancement. In turn, women are seen as outsiders who do not fit in with the higher caliber; this is a huge obstruction for diversity in the workplace, especially in top management positions. Overall, this creates an invisible ceiling, which stops women from progressing and meeting their personal or professional goals. This issue is a prevalent organizational diversity challenge. It is unfortunate that organizations claim they need to “face the problem” in regard to the risk of unequal statistics becoming public. Rather, organizations should be reaping the benefits of diversity by incorporating women within management. Organizations miss out on too much potential, effectiveness, and efficiency by not recognizing the blessing and modern necessity of having a diverse workforce where women have a voice and are heard.

A diverse workforce is an incredibly valuable asset within today’s evolving business world; this is demonstrated in a recent study, published in the *Journal of Management*, which incorporates a meta-analysis in advocating for more women leaders (Hoobler, Masterson, Nkomo, & Michel, 2018). Known as the “business case”, this research advocates for a link between women representation in leadership positions and organizational financial performance. Results from this meta-analysis suggest that there is a moderate relationship between having more women leaders and the firm’s overall and sales performance. In fact, the presence of a female CEO is shown to have a stronger positive correlation with organizational financial performance in cultures which promote gender equality (Hoobler et al., 2018).

Although women have started to reach out for leadership positions, workplace culture has been discouraging through creating challenges (such as minimizing obstacles) for women specifically (Jaffe, 2019). Top management positions require high demands from an employee. Gender stereotypes and expectations can create a deleterious work environment for women. For example, if a working woman arrives late after dropping off her kids at school, then she will tend to receive critical comments, since this is simply another responsibility that society seems to place solely on the shoulders of women. On the other hand, if a working man does the same action, he would at times be appraised by the workplace culture and be affirmed as a “great dad” (Jaffe, 2019). Comments such as these can affect employee performance; while the comments toward working women may prove discouraging, the affirmative words towards working men will encourage them. Thus, women tend to feel belittled and feel like they do not belong within this management environment. Even while working the same position at a company, men and women tend to have very different work experiences (Jaffe, 2019; Mujtaba, 2012).

Failures to climb the corporate ladder when appropriate can lead to employees reaching a plateau or even having the desire to quit; this can lead to dashed hopes and corporate frustration (Mujtaba, 2010). A virtuous manager understands the need to manage the various skills existing in the workforce to create a positive work environment, where employees feel valued and can use their strengths and differences to best contribute to the organization. Caring about employees is creating harmony within the work environment, facilitating exchange and interaction. Inclusion or managing differences means working with everyone in the department and organization to serve all customers in a quality manner. Everyone in the department and organization must be able to adjust and adapt to the changing circumstances and needs of diverse customers at each moment. Managing diversity is also about enabling each member of the team to perform up to or

beyond his or her potential as well as creating a competitive advantage for the organization through the human resources asset. The purpose of managing diversity should be to develop everyone's capacity to accept, incorporate, and empower human talents so we can be as productive as possible. Thus, it is essential to mentor, empower and encourage more women to climb the corporate ladder.

Organizations are constantly pursuing economic prosperity. Having the best team possible, makes a significant difference in a company's success. Diversity in the workplace offers benefits that may help a business achieve financial goals by generating and developing new ideas, encouraging a firm's growth, strengthening a firm's image, and cultivating the culture of acceptance, tolerance, and collective work. A group of individuals with different genders, races, nationalities, and religions have countless diverse perspectives and ways of understanding; therefore, there will be several unique responses and viewpoints to situations that may arise, creating the best quality approach. To achieve this optimal work environment, every employee should be equally heard. The collective knowledge that can be found in a diverse group of people may be a solid tool in increasing organizational effectiveness by maximizing individual potentials, merging individual talents, encouraging innovation, and increasing productivity through inclusion.

According to a recent study published from Stanford's Graduate School of Business, in the business world, women who are aggressive, assertive, and confident but who can turn these traits on and off depending on the circumstances, get more promotions. Females should be able to express their femininity and have equal opportunities even while doing so. In order to glean managerial interest, females often have to act more masculine, which is extremely unfortunate considering that it may lead to internal turmoil and cognitive dissonance. This change in behavior should not be necessary for women to climb the corporate ladder; women should be provided with the same equal opportunity that men receive in the business world. The study implies that females who display more masculine traits have a greater chance for career advancement in the business world, which is a means of preventing a diverse mindset within the workplace. It is important to advocate for a change in mentality and empower women to reach greater heights in their respective fields (Rigoglioso, 2011).

In order to increase organizational performance, it is essential to adapt to the evolving world and increase diversity within the workplace. Diversity provides an organization with unique perspectives and approaches in tackling situations innovatively. Consequently, this paper focuses on increasing gender diversity in leadership by encouraging more women to pursue top management positions within a business.

### **Gender and Pay Gap Literature**

Since ancient times, gender equality has always been an issue. In modern times, one area in which males and females are not equally treated is compensation for work. An article from *Forbes* lists the top ten jobs with the greatest wage gaps between men and women (Dill, 2016). Women account for 76 cents of every dollar that men earn (24.1% pay gap); however, after adjusting for controls such as industry and title, this wage gap is only 5.4% (Dill, 2016). The jobs, which have the greatest pay gap between men and women, include computer programmer, chef, dentist, c-suite executive, psychologist, and pilot. All of these positions had a pay gap higher than 16% (Dill, 2016). On the other hand, the jobs with a pay gap less than 1% included event coordinator, internal medicine resident, and hardware engineer (Dill, 2016). The wage disparity between men and women varies between jobs and careers, it is prevalent even today within the workplace.

Gender inequality can be also attributed to the beliefs and attitudes of management since the mentality of management also influences their behavior toward subordinates. An article from *Administrative Science Quarterly* discusses the beliefs of managers and how politics may lead to gender inequality amongst their subordinates (Carnahan & Greenwood, 2018). From 2007 to 2012, microdata was collected from the U.S. legal industry and it was found that law offices with associations of being liberal hire a higher percentage of females. Additionally, this particular case study demonstrated that male ideology held more value than female ideology, which is a clear issue when it comes to voicing one's opinions within the workplace. This ideology is deemed to have played a role in hiring, work team selection, and promotion of male versus female subordinates (Carnahan & Greenwood, 2018).

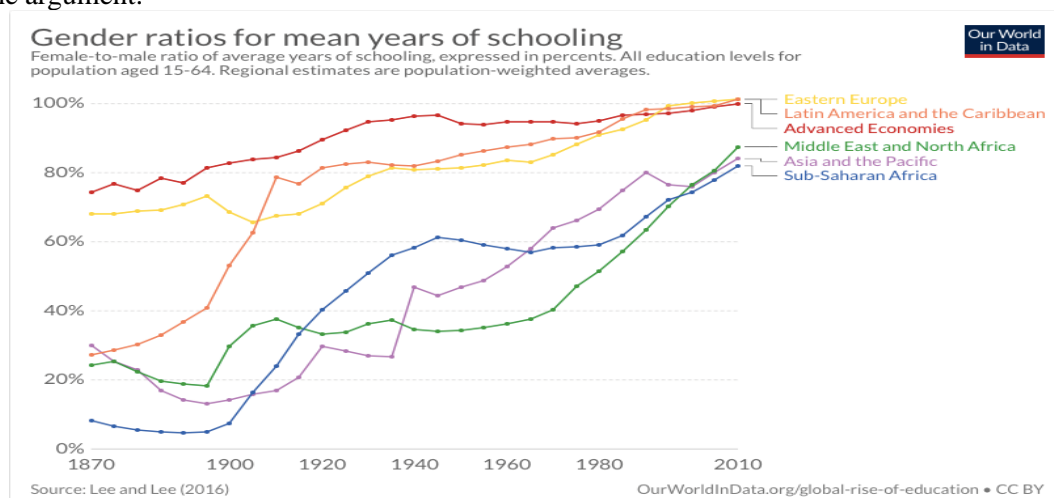
Unfortunately, even within other countries, such as India, the empowerment of women can also have an artificial air to it. Disparities within education and sex biases are probable causes for why women face inequality in regard to compensation (Das, 2018). In order for these stereotypes to change, it is important to take the right steps towards correcting the mentality, which is prevalent. This involves the empowerment of women through various means, including bridging the disparity in education between males and females, campaigning for laws, which promote gender equality, and conscious socialization, which includes

endorsements by celebrities and advertisements about violence against women (Das, 2018). The article from the *ASCI Journal of Management* calls for the translation of women’s empowerment movement from rhetoric to reality through a national effort for change (Das, 2018).

A major step to take is managers and leaders advocating for a change in mentality in regard to gender roles and gender inequality (Mujtaba and Kaifi, 2010). A 2016 article from *Gender, Work & Organization* discusses the topic of masculine and feminine identity (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). In particular, women’s bodies and appearances are discussed within this article. Given that there are embedded notions for masculine leadership, often times, women within a business are expected to conform to these standards and practice the idea of “respectable femininity”, which involves women controlling their appearances and actions to reflect what is expected by the majority population of males (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). Since women are a minority within management positions, this leaves them more vulnerable to scrutiny. The concept of “respectable femininity” confines women to prove their “respectability” through their modest manner of dressing, appearance, and well-mannered behavior (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). The qualitative study demonstrates that there is a power struggle that females face since their bodies and appearance are regulated, in turn, which also leads to the regulation of a woman’s identity.

An article from *Communications of the ACM* discusses the role of the Internet in removing barriers for economic prosperity, for the purpose of closing racial and gender-based wage gaps (Goss & Gupta, 2003). The explosion of computer usage within the workplace between 1979 and 2000 led to an increase in reliance on information technology within various industries, extending from finance to medicine. Even with all the variables considered (education, age, marital status, industry, occupation, or Internet usage), women made less than men in every category (Goss & Gupta, 2003). Increased usage of information technology (IT) within and outside of the workplace has been shown to also increase economic payoff towards women. More specifically, the Internet helps to popularize the idea of equal pay for equal work. The paper presents the argument that the eruption of IT usage has also led to the narrowing of the gap of wages between men and women for less-educated workers; however, in college-educated workers, the opposite phenomenon occurred (Goss & Gupta, 2003). Thus, the wage gap between men and women is wider in college-educated workers in comparison to less educated workers.

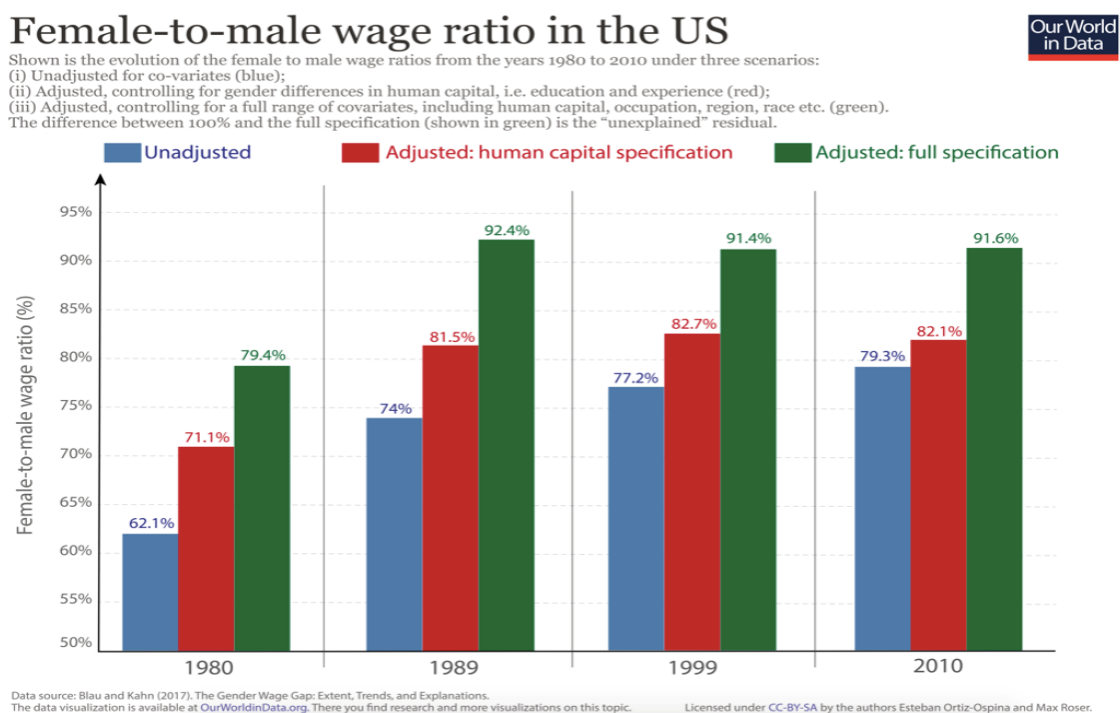
While this data may be shocking, the conclusions obtained from the same information can vary depending on how it is interpreted through statistical analysis. The wage gap has been shrinking dramatically over the last century. While the disparity still continues to shrink, the rate of its shrinkage has significantly decreased. This is due to the fact that women are obtaining higher education at tremendous rates which increase every year. This increase in education has led to higher paying jobs, which adds to minimizing the wage gap (Ortiz-Ospina, 2018). As seen in *Figure 1*, there has been historical narrowing, and at times reversal of the education gap between men and women. Data shows that women are catching up and surpassing men in quantitative educational attainment, with respect to years of schooling. The problem is that while education is rising at a very fast rate, the wage gap is not necessarily closing at the same speed. The debate surrounding this issue stems from the fact that certain statistical manipulations will show favorable outcomes for each side of the argument.



**Figure 1. Gender Gap and Education**

Source: Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2018, February 19). Why is there a gender pay gap? Retrieved May 3, 2019, from <https://ourworldindata.org/what-drives-the-gender-pay-gap>

According to a 2018 article published in *Our World in Data*, the wage gap that is commonly mentioned in news headlines and debates is the unadjusted wage gap. This unadjusted wage gap is the result of calculations done through the comparison of all male and female workers without considering differences in worker characteristic such as age, expertise, and education level. The second wage gap is the adjusted wage gap. This is the result of calculations done only after accounting for underlying differences in education, experience, and other factors (Ortiz-Ospina, 2018). An adjusted wage gap is an efficient tool that is used to make comparisons within groups of workers that have similar jobs, experience, and education, and this comparison is useful to statistically analyze certain groups and levels to analyze the extent to which different factors contribute to observed inequalities. The effect of these various calculations can be seen in *Figure 2*, which illustrates how unadjusted, adjusted to human capital specification, and adjusted to full specifications can alter the size and distribution of the wage gap (Ortiz-Ospina, 2018). This figure shows that the unadjusted gender pay gap has been shrinking since 1980s, which ultimately leads to the conclusion that the gender wage gap has in fact narrowed. Additionally, the graph shows that education has played a huge role in narrowing the wage gap. Finally, it was determined that while certain statistical manipulations lead to various findings, the main conclusion is that the gender-based wage gap is still a prevalent issue that must be corrected, given that the unadjusted wage gap still sits at 79.3% in comparison to the fully adjusted gap at 91.6% (Ortiz-Ospina, 2018).



**Figure 2. Wage Ratios based on Gender**

Source: Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2018, February 19). Why is there a gender pay gap? Retrieved May 3, 2019, from <https://ourworldindata.org/what-drives-the-gender-pay-gap>

Another article from *Business Source Premier* claims that the wage gap between men and women actually increased from 2015 to 2016 (Addady, 2016). According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, the gap has been narrowing at about a rate of 6% every five years from 1995 to 2005 (Addady, 2016). However, for the past few years from 2005 until 2015, the gap only narrowed by 0.3%. If this rate is to continue, the wage gap would not be closed until 2059 (Addady, 2016). Even though on average, women have higher levels of education than men in the United States, the wage gap remains and needs to be closed as soon as possible, to prevent setting women back from reaching their goals.

In an article from the *International Journal of Social Economics*, the underlying factors, which generate and explain the wage gap are explored (Mbratana & Fotie Kenne, 2018). In exploring the gender wage disparity, certain findings can be applied, such as preventing discrimination against women, providing the chance for equal opportunity, supporting policies which reduce any obstacles for women in business, encouraging more women to become entrepreneurs and achieve a good balance between work and family life (Mbratana & Fotie Kenne, 2018).

Additionally, an article from *The Center for American Progress*, suggests investing in affordable and high-quality child care along with early childhood education (Glynn et al., 2014). This step would help women have supplemental care options in raising their children; thus, the stigma of having children while working can be alleviated. This alternative option would allow women to prove to companies and organizations that childbearing will not affect their work performance, ultimately removing the excuse that many companies use when deciding to not hire women.

Currently, the United States Senate is trying to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. This amendment is intended to provide more effective and permanent solutions to victims of pay discrimination basis of sex. According to the official transcripts and documents from Congress.gov, on May 3, 2019, this act was read for the second time and placed on the Senate Legislative Calendar under General Orders (DeLauro, 2019).

While this act has already been introduced and passed the House, it must still pass the Senate and President in order to become a Law. This is significant due to the fact that the Paycheck Fairness Act would strive to reduce pay secrecy, provide women more effective tools in order to address and challenge pay discrimination, and through this act, it would be much more difficult for companies to pay male workers more than female workers based solely on gender. This act would be a significant landmark, encouraging the entire country to change its mentality.

In an article from the *Journal of Business & Society*, the leadership style of women in the modern business environment is discussed (Psychogios, 2007). Male and female managers have differing styles of leadership; ultimately, the ideal leader would be transformational in nature (Psychogios, 2007). A positive correlation was discovered between female transformational/transactional leadership styles and employee engagement (Fadhilah et al., 2018). The results from this study illustrate that employees do not prefer male leaders over female ones; thus, gender stereotypes can be rejected.

An article from the *Amity Global Business Review* discusses the influence of female leadership within the insurance business (Kour & Sudan, 2018). The study provided evidence that women tend to take a transformational leadership approach; female management was able to have a positive influence on employees' satisfaction in both private and public insurance companies (Kour & Sudan, 2018). The article claims that women will empathize with employees and continuously quality train them in order for the employees to reach their career objectives (Kour & Sudan, 2018).

According to an article in the *Journal of the East Asian Economic Association*, women in Malaysia face occupational segregation and gender differentials (Ismail et al., 2017). Although the population of women in the labor market has increased over time, a wage decompensation model suggests that wage discrimination within occupations occurs. This means that males and females may be attracted to different jobs, which might be a possible explanation for the gender gap. Ultimately, for Malaysia, this potential argument may not be enough. A study found that in skilled, agricultural, forestry, livestock and fishery workers have the highest wage gap at 31% (Ismail et al., 2017). Given that these jobs are not commonly known to have a high percentage of female workers, the argument regarding the fact that different careers with varying salaries attract a specific gender, which eventually causes the wage gap, is not fully valid, and the data does not support this.

Not only does the wage gap imply problems for female workers alone but it can also affect companies as a whole. This is due to the fact that if marginalized groups such as women and minorities feel that they are being treated unfairly, their motivation will begin to decline, ultimately leading to a decrease in productivity as well. In the case of a manufacturing plant, lower productivity and attention to detail would result in numerous detrimental consequence such as a decrease in product quantity or quality. This is not only wasting materials but also wasting the potential of human capital; plus, decreased product quality can sometimes even lead to lawsuits from consumers. Overall, these consequences result in additional expenses for the company as well.

Additionally, not only can the wage gap lead to problems in production and employee productivity, but it can also lead to lawsuits against the organization or company. If unfair compensation is determined, lawsuits can be claimed, and companies may be held liable for gender discrimination. According to an article in *The New York Times*, in 2018, a class-action lawsuit was filed by four women who worked in Nike's corporate headquarters, against Nike (Creswell et al., 2018). The lawsuit was filed due to the claim that Nike commonly practiced systemic gender pay discrimination, which violated the Equal Pay Act. The claim was

based on the fact that women, especially at the corporate level, are paid far less than their male counterparts for doing the same work, receive smaller bonuses, and have a much lower chance of being promoted.

According to the docket of *Cahill v. Nike, Inc.* (3:18-cv-01477), the lawsuit is still being settled, but thus far, Nike's CEO, Mark Parker has promised to fix the hiring procedures, in addition, to pay and bonus practices. Amongst these promises, the assurance to hire more women as top executives is already being fulfilled. Nearly 12 top Nike executives have left the company, and many of these seats are being filled by women (Creswell et al., 2018). If this lawsuit is successful, it will be a major stepping stone for ensuring that all companies provide equal pay and opportunity to both men and women. Besides legal steps, there are other actions which management and employees can take in order to have more women pursue management positions.

For many reasons, it is important to advocate for women to enter top management positions. Not only is it a modern necessity but it is also an opportunity for a business to glean a competitive advantage. Effective communication within a workplace can establish a culture towards women in the workplace; improving communication is essential to improving workplace culture as well.

The following two sections discuss recommendations for effective communication and suggestions on encouraging women to enter management positions within the corporate world.

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

Companies can use inclusion as well as transparent policies and effective communication skills to empower women and other marginalized groups within a workplace setting. One skill that leaders and employees of all levels can learn, in order to take advantage of the benefits of diversity and build more inclusive work environments, is to practice listening to understand versus listening to respond. When listening to understand, one is not listening to figure out whether or not to agree with the other person, but to understand various perspectives. Some employers and managers listen to what their employees say, and they usually have a response ready as to whether they agree or not. However, listening to understand the perspective of the employee would be more beneficial in this instance because the employer can try to align his/her viewpoint with that of the employee and foster better communication overall. This is a great way of becoming more effective in communicating because if the manager/employer listens and understands employees, then employees are more prone to listening to and responding to feedback to the employer. This will allow change for the better and employee performance would be able to reach its full potential.

Another recommendation that could be helpful in improving communication within a workplace is to encourage individuals within an organization to stay curious when faced with a different or unexpected idea. Instead of shutting down an idea because it does not fit to what the majority agrees on, one should become curious about why one employee sees things in a different manner and believes the idea could work. This results in an open mindset and also encourages people to speak up because they will not feel ostracized by the majority mindset. Overall, this action makes it easier to listen and understand; therefore, it helps find solutions, which may have been inhibited by groupthink. Individuals have differing and unique life experiences, which can encourage a diverse thought process and enable innovative solutions. If the manager is curious about how an employee's idea may work, he or she should ask the employee to explain more about it, instead of disregarding it.

Another recommendation for improving communication involves managing intent versus impact. A manager should be aware that his or her words and actions may have a different impact than intended. An inclusive environment is a feedback-rich environment. A male manager should not be using self-evaluation to measure his behavior towards women in the workplace; rather, he should be collecting feedback from women at the company on their opinions and suggestions. This active approach from management would improve interactions within the workplace and potentially boost the synergy of the environment as well. Observing how people react to your words and behaviors and also ensuring that they fully understood your intent is essential to good communication.

Communication to improve attitudes toward women in the workplace involves interacting or influencing each other in a positive manner. This behavior must be practiced each day at the workplace to achieve a successful goal of an organization. Each person's communication affects both personal and organizational effectiveness through influencing the organizational environment and how women feel within it. A multicultural organization's level of communication can set the foundation or tone for a learning

environment. It is important to promote a positive environment that can support the customer needs or business while encouraging employee's moral.

Communication is a key element in an organization. Having knowledge of people's cultural background, body language, and non-verbal communication and having an open mind is important in facilitating a welcoming and encouraging environment. These aspects can create job satisfaction, decrease conflicts, increase productivity, and encourage communication as a whole. Companies, which encourage open and easy communication between employees and higher executives, face lesser employee turnover. Allowing women to express themselves freely encourages their ideas regarding work-related issues. In addition to this, personal and professional growth in the workplace is encouraged through open and clear communication and mutual discussions.

Effective communication at the workplace is crucial to establishing and maintaining the quality-working relationship. In early childhood, women are cultured by the games they play (centered on family and building relationships); thus, women tend to focus on group harmony and minimizing conflict. Examples of such childhood culturing include tea parties and make-believe family games. As women get older, their attitudes project these lessons into the work environment, influencing how they conduct themselves in meetings and teams. This is why it is important to empower women through maintaining and encouraging proper communication within a workplace setting. Being able to express an open-mind in all communications can make a business successful and adds to the growth of the company.

Men and women who have open minds are adaptable in dealing with any situation in the workplace. In particular, these qualities give women the platform which they can build on by adding their unique ideas for a successful outcome. If a woman is able to express herself and her femininity within an open-minded environment, effective communication is facilitated. This can build a bridge between team members at work and contributes to growth within the company. This will allow for avoiding conflicts and having clear communication. During their childhood, women learn to build relationships and deal with conflicts. Later on, in life, these qualities benefit women since they can apply their unique background to help the company with professional growth, success, and relationship-building.

### **Women Entering Management Positions**

An analysis of the modern-day workforce shows that most companies, do not usually hire women for top-level positions. In order to help women, advance themselves into higher positions, there are several steps that an organization and women themselves might be able to take. First, women need to work on internal transformation by developing confidence in themselves; this will allow them to overcome limiting beliefs such as "imposter syndrome" and various fears (fear of failure or success, fear of ridicule). Women can also work on external transformation as well, through self-branding to "lean in" and positively project themselves, since confidence and assertiveness can improve one's external appearance. There are so many free resources today due to different associations, technology, and the Internet. Through conducting research and developing more skills, women can embrace their destiny.

Empowering each other by forming and joining affinity groups to have a voice and fight the barriers or bias they might have a greater impact through creating publicity for the cause as well. If many women at one company work together and show that they are capable and want to work in higher-level positions, more opportunities will start to arise. If women take an active approach, management would have to listen to their requests. They could even work with the company to design some opportunities that would help them advance as well as change the organizational culture to make it more inclusive and equal.

Another great step that women could take is creating a strategic plan for their career. This can be done by setting goals and reaching out to mentors. Women can pursue a degree or work experiences to supplement their qualifications; volunteering, working part-time, or internships may contribute to their cause as well. Asking for what one wants is also very important; if one is working for a company and thinks they might prefer another position, they must ask in order to let management become aware of their interest. Even if one is unsuccessful, management will become aware of the employee's desire to advance within the company and will hopefully provide training and growth opportunities to eventually facilitate moving up the corporate chain. For example, if there is a possibility of shadowing the person who does that job, it could build one's experience level and encourage the company to consider one as an internal recruit.

Women can also proactively ask for feedback from managers, superiors, or colleagues that are trustworthy; taking their comments into consideration can improve performance. One's actions, verbal and nonverbal



communications, and behaviors can affect other's perceptions. Feedback can allow you to hear other's perspectives and taking it to heart will improve one's weak areas. These steps will help women become better at everything they do; as a result, they would develop well-roundedness within the workplace, which can be a huge advantage as higher level positions become available.

In addition to this, the organization and management can take steps to contribute to the empowerment of women. One step that they can take is related to recruitment. Negative recruitment experiences can shape women's decisions to not climb the corporate ladder (Brands & Fernandez-Mateo, 2017). Women are less likely than men to pursue a recruitment option once they have been rejected by the company within the past (Brands & Fernandez-Mateo, 2017). Due to the fact that women are a minority within management, rejection can strike as a major blow to the motivation and overall mentality of women. As the minority population, they will tend to assume uncertainty about their skill levels for a position. Women are likely to place more emphasis on fair treatment in the recruitment process compared to men (Brands & Fernandez-Mateo, 2017). Thus, it is important for organizations to remain impartial and be fair in their recruitment process towards both men and women. Empowering women means providing equal opportunities to them and ensuring that their perception of the process is also fair.

The empowerment of women can be facilitated through the establishment of effective communication within the workplace setting. Women are perceived as being too emotional compared to men. An article from *Harvard Business Review* discusses how women should try and come out as passionate rather than seeming too emotional; unfortunately, too much emotion or excitement can be misinterpreted (Heath & Flynn, 2015). Male managers and executives can be biased; therefore, when women communicate, there is a "thin line" between passionate and emotional. Advice from the article suggests that women should use intentional and passionate language while avoiding passion within their tone; other tips include using other appeals such as logical or creative to back up their passionate appeals (Heath & Flynn, 2015).

An article from the *Journal of Small Business Management* makes the argument that women are insufficiently resourced when it comes to social and human capital (McGowan et al., 2015). Due to these deficits, their effectiveness in leadership and potential for development decreases (McGowan et al., 2015). Thus, women need to take an active approach to improve both their social and human capital. For improving social and human capital, the article suggests improving networking skills to encompass a more dense and diverse population and also developing themselves to be the center focal point of this network (McGowan et al., 2015). Thus, the young female entrepreneur will have several supporters who strongly identify with her. Utilizing a transformational leadership style and emotional alignment of the leader's vision with her supporter's values is recommended (McGowan et al., 2015). Taking these steps can help maximize a young woman's chance of becoming more successful in management.

An article featuring Rhoda Olsen, CEO of a company called Great Clips, discusses her advice towards women who are interested in advancing within the business field (Parker, 2017). Olsen advocates for women to pursue business leadership; she serves as a mentor and supporter to many women in the franchising business. According to Olsen, women are such great leaders due to having a stronger emotional component. Women have a unique skillset in which they are good at listening to, collaborating with, and supporting others; this helps them become successful as business leaders (Parker, 2017).

An article in *Human Resource Management* explores the enabling force behind female CEOs and the development of their unique leadership style through in-depth qualitative interviews (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018). Compared to men, high potential women are over-mentored, under-sponsored, and have limited access to networks (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018). This means that women need to take active leadership of their careers in order to advance up the corporate ladder. In addition to this, it is discovered that women are more likely than men to combine both masculine and feminine behaviors in an androgynous leadership style (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018). In the interviews, the women interviewed called for female CEOs to toughen up and develop confidence in pursuing a promotion (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018).

An article from *African Business* makes the argument that investing female leaders pays off for businesses (Ashong & Jones, 2019). Research has demonstrated that diversity within the boardroom yields dividends; companies which have women on their boards have a 36% better return on equity (Ashong & Jones, 2019). In fact, the article makes the argument that investors actually have an important role in shaping the diversity of an organization by promoting gender equity. They can set requirements for the organization, such as requiring that 30% of the board members need to be women. According to the article, the best investors take

advantage of women's talent and ideas and treat gender balance as important as other aspects of performance measurement (Ashong & Jones, 2019).

A periodical discusses three cornerstones for developing successful female leaders (Racioppi, 2019). The first cornerstone was having inclusivity as a corporate focus, meaning that the corporation as a whole would focus on the advancement of women. The second step involves getting managers onboard; this includes having managers providing the same feedback to women as they do to men. In addition to this, it is important for management to recognize their unconscious bias towards women and have a more inclusive perspective. The last cornerstone focuses on inspiring women "to be in the game to win" and starting early (Racioppi, 2019). This point involves encouraging women to actively develop strong social networks; organizations can provide these tools through providing workshops or explaining opportunities for career advancement during orientation. Ultimately, these three cornerstones can help women and support them in climbing up the corporate ladder.

Workplace inclusion is necessary for the sustainable growth of an organization. While it is a long-term and complex process, it does lead to a competitive advantage due to the increased amount of diversity (Romney, 2019). Overall, the inclusion of diversity cannot only produce better outcomes but also demonstrate a company's overall commitment to customers (Romney, 2019).

## Summary

There are many recurring conflicts that discourage women in the workplace from climbing the corporate ladder. As stated before, barriers can be generated externally (society, organizational mindset) or internally (women having self-limiting beliefs or doubts). It is important to analyze both internal and external barriers because it allows us to discover the root of these problems. The cause ranges from unconscious bias to gender stereotypes. Overall, there is a lack of sufficient knowledge of how to properly sponsor and develop more female workers. Often, women are excluded in leadership roles in the workplace and this must change. In order to shift the current workplace culture towards women empowerment, more women need to be represented in higher up positions.

Women have proven to be able to successfully handle positions of high power; evidence for this statement stems from real-life examples and research studies. When managers disregard qualified women simply due to their gender, organizations miss the opportunity to recruit a new set of ideas, perspectives, and points. Managers who fail to educate themselves on how to utilize a diverse workforce end up being counterproductive to the mission of an organization. To avoid this mistake, the management team must learn how to handle the various skills present in a diverse workplace. They can do this by creating a work environment that is comfortable to be in.

When employees can come to work and feel at ease, it results in a positive mindset, which leads to more productivity. It is also important that employees feel valued and can use their strengths and differences to contribute to the organization. Everyone has a different perspective on life; female leadership approaches may differ from male approaches. The only way to know how to manage a diverse workplace is to work with a diverse team, which includes women. Every level of the management team must be able to adjust and adapt to the changing circumstances and needs of not only the customers but each other. As a result, the employees will be able to accept, incorporate, and empower female talents and coworkers.

Gender inequality has been dated back to ancient times and it is still prevalent in today's work society. Women are not paid the same equal rate as men and jobs, especially in fields such as computer programming, culinary arts, and dentistry among others. The wage disparity between men and women is prevalent even today within the workplace because women are still seen as incapable of performing as well as men in male-dominated careers. This is not just a domestic problem as the same conflicts are shown to occur around the world. Countries, such as India or Afghanistan, may directly or indirectly impose limits on the education of women, which limits their job potential. Women are also further dismissed due to gender stereotypes that underestimate and depict their abilities. This is one of the leading reasons why women face inequality in regard to compensation (Das, 2018).

A push for a change within these stereotypes can be done by empowering more women, whether it is through bridging the wage gap by education and fairly assessing female ideas and strategies. It can also be done by advocating with your local government officials to create and change laws or requirements that are unjust, eradicating the preconceived notion of women being inferior to men. In the United States, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prevents discrimination based on sex; it is important for women to be aware of their rights so

that they can take legal steps when necessary. For these stereotypes to change, it is important to take the right steps towards directing them. This involves the empowerment of women through various means, including bridging the gap in education between males and females, campaigning for laws that promote gender equality, and conscious socialization.

It is recommended that businesses use the given tools in order to effectively encourage women to pursue management positions, contributing to the creation of a diverse workplace. A simple skill that managers and employees can learn to promote diversity is to build and encourage inclusivity in the workplace. When dealing with those different than oneself in mindset, it is important to empathize with them and truly consider the perspective of the other person. This builds the communication within the team.

An additional skill that can be used to improve education is to keep an open mind. To further clarify, this means that one should be able to look beyond the surface level when handling situations; staying curious when faced with different perspectives is an open-minded mentality, which facilitates new and better ideas. In addition to this, managers should be aware that their words and actions may have a different impact than intended. Managers should provide proper and timely feedback that is communicated and understood effectively to give women an opportunity to improve their skills while advancing their careers.

As society continues to push towards more gender equality, efforts will be reflected as more women are successfully hired for high paying and significant jobs, with equal pay as their male counterparts. Hopefully, with enough public awareness and advocacy, the “glass ceiling” will be broken through the empowerment of women in every sector of society.

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