

# The Glass Ceiling and women in management in the Middle East: Myth or reality?

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## ABSTRACT

Although globalization and equal employment have created opportunities for female managers, they are still underrepresented in the corporate ladder. Gender and gender role stereotypes are persistent in organizations that operate in the Middle East, challenging women's employment and showing evidence of the glass ceiling in management. This paper explores the position of women in management in the Kingdom of Bahrain, as well as the barriers they face in climbing the career ladder. The findings from the semi-structured interviews with 15 female managers suggest that they identify long hours work, stereotypical behavior and gender discrimination as the prevailing factors to career growth. In addition, society and culture have also been widely identified, including family commitment and balancing work with family. The paper proposes that women who want to lead a successful professional life have found their way to break through the barriers of the invisible glass ceiling by commitment, family support and education. In addition, companies are gradually learning how to create cultures in which expectations and professionalism are not necessarily gender-linked.

## INTRODUCTION

Although, the last decade in the Middle East has been a steady economic expansion (Saddi, Sabbagh, Shediak & Jamjoum, 2012), the Arab Spring has added pressure to unemployment rates creating many challenges such as low female labor force participation rates, low levels of private sector development, weak public and corporate governance, limited competition, pervasive corruption and bloated public sectors (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). Within this context, there have been many changes for Arab women, as women are now entering the workforce and are rising to managerial positions. The percentage of Bahraini women working increased from 4.9% at 1971 to 33.5% to 2010 (Supreme Council for Women, 2013). The female representation in the Bahraini labor force is estimated at 29.8 per cent, much less than the global estimate of 51.7 per cent, but better than of the Middle East average which is estimated as 25.4 per cent (ILO, 2010). Nevertheless, women are mainly found at lower and middle management more than senior management levels (Omair, 2008; Metcalfe, 2008). Although globalization has contributed to an increase in women's participation in management, the rate of women's labor market participation in the Middle East is still the lowest in the world (Metcalfe, 2008). Nevertheless, the International Labor Organization (ILO) (2010) states that the participation of women in the labor market is on the rise. As per the World Economic Forum (2012) Global Gender Gap Report progress has been made to increase women's education, nevertheless, only 33% per cent of women join the labor force in the region. There is strong evidence of gendered occupational segregation as women in the Middle East are mainly employed in health, education and social care (Metcalfe, 2008). Research suggests that further attention should be given to women's values, career aspiration, leadership development and entrepreneurship as more and more women are joining the labor force (Metcalfe, 2008; Omair, 2008, 2010).

Most of the research on women in management in the region remains anecdotal, normative and mainly conceptual (Afiouni, Ruel & Schuler, 2013). There is scarce information available regarding different aspects of human resources management and the position of women in management in the region (Metcalfe, 2008; Budhar & Mellahi, 2007), which has increased the interest of scholars in relevant research. The main topics of interest revolve around culture (such as the Islam and the patriarchal norm structures), (i.e. Burke & El-Kot, 2011), globalization (i.e. Harrison & Michailova, 2012), gender equality and diversity (i.e. Syed, Burke & Acar, 2010) affect women at work. Others study women's career patterns and success (i.e. Omair, 2010) and work-life balance (i.e. Burke & El-Kot, 2011). A main concern for studying women in management in the Middle East is to

understand what shapes women's lives in the region, since women are still underrepresented in management in the Middle East. This underrepresentation of women at senior management has been attributed to what has been described as the "glass ceiling". Knutson & Schmidgall (1999, p. 64) define the glass ceiling as the "invisible, generally artificial barriers that prevent qualified individuals – in this case, women – from advancing within their organization and reaching their full potential". The glass ceiling may differ between countries and organizations, however the way it is managed determines the success at the workplace. There is very limited knowledge available on the experiences of women managers in organizations in the Middle East, and there is paucity of studies (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011; Metcalfe, 2008). This paper aims at presenting the barriers women face in management in the Kingdom of Bahrain, and how to overcome them, as well as at providing an understanding of how female talent may be retained in the workforce and finally at proposing ways in which companies can align their human resources practices to their business strategies to overcome the barriers women face in management in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

## **WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT AND THE GLASS CEILING**

The interest in the study of women in management has been triggered by the increasing role women are taking in management. However, as already discussed women are underrepresented in senior managerial positions, not only in the Kingdom of Bahrain, but also in other countries. Research shows that this trend is common to many countries and different cultures (Al-Manasra, 2013; Omair, 2008). Management has been considered as a career mainly for men (Powell & Graves, 2003), and women managers are dealing with blocked mobility, discrimination and stereotypes. The barriers that women face in management and the difficulties women face in advancing their career have been described as the "glass ceiling" phenomenon (Marinakou, 2011; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Man, Mok, Dimovski & Skerlavaj, 2009). Therefore, the career for women is a complex journey, but as the concept supports, it is not necessary to view these obstacles as discouraging.

When referring to barriers women face in reaching high corporate positions, most research papers touch on society's role in the matter. It seems to be that the largest barrier is society itself and its norms, and that is seen in various research papers written in different points of time over the past few decades. Societal norms including marriage, child-bearing, and certain career expectations are all believed to limit a woman's ability to progress as a manager and move to higher positions. For example, Metcalfe (2008) explored the relationship between women, management and globalization in the Middle East and has shown that women face social and organizational barriers in the labor market. Some argue that "women's legal status and social positions are worse in Muslim countries, such as Bahrain, than anywhere else (Moghadam, 2003, p. 3). Women are mainly perceived as wives and mothers, demonstrating gender segregation, hence women must marry and reproduce to earn status in the society. Moghadam (2003) suggests that Muslim societies are characterized by high fertility and rapid rates of population growth. Hence, women are different, should not be employed which strengthens social barriers to women's achievement. Islam is not more or less patriarchal than other major religions, however, "the gender configurations that draw heavily from religion and cultural norms govern women's work, family status and other aspects of their lives" (Moghadam, 2003, p. 5). At the same time, women in the Middle East are stratified by class, ethnicity, education and age. There are those who do not need to work and those who do to contribute to the family income. On the one hand, Metcalfe (2008, p. 89) suggests that many private companies are reluctant to employ "women partly due to social norms and partly due to additional costs that may be incurred for maternity provision". On the other hand, women could fulfil both their professional and marital roles with the help of domestic labor or the extended family network (Al-Manasra, 2013). Similarly, gender may be considered a source of social distinction, as the legal system, educational system, and labor market are sites of reproduction of gender inequality (Metcalfe, 2008). Nevertheless, education may increase women's aspirations for higher income and better standards of living, and weaken the barriers of traditions helping more women to join the labor force (Al-Manasra, 2013; Omair, 2010). Social changes have contributed to the reduction of sex segregation and have helped women achieve economic independence (Moghadam, 2003). Hence, as Omair (2008, p. 107) claims women in the region "can no longer be described as scared, inferior, domestic women who hardly leave their houses".

The literature suggests that the glass ceiling falls within the organizational culture and the practices in organizations, therefore how things are done. When men are more than women in these organizations, the organizational culture may adopt attributes that favor men, and that is the dominant gender (Metcalfe, 2008). The organizational culture refers to stereotypes and in general the organizational climate. The structural organizational barriers that limit women's opportunities are embedded in cultural practices. Work and social relations in the region are governed by a traditional patriarchal structure (Metcalfe, 2008; World Bank 2003). In view to this, men are considered to be the leaders and women the followers. Therefore, there is the view that organizations in

the region are male-dominated, and reflect a masculine culture (Omair, 2008, 2010; World Bank, 2003). Some suggest that managers are considered to exhibit male attributes, hence women are considered not to be able to combine their roles as wife, mother and executive, and others usually are not willing to work under a female manager. However, the suggestion that men make better managers has been widely studied in Western and Asian cultures. Limited work has been conducted in the Middle Eastern region (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). This study aims to explore the perception of Bahraini women managers concerning their traits and personalities on the progression of their careers.

Evidently, the organizational culture and attributes influence the position women hold. These two different types of cultural attributes may play an important part in how people fit into an organization and whether there is perceived or actual role / culture congruence. There is a lot of debate on the above issues with reference to occupational and vertical segregation of women in management (Brownell, 1994). During the last few decades, the participation of the Middle Eastern women in management has created a significant change in the Arabian culture (Metcalf, 2008). The low participation of women in the labor force is considered a missed opportunity for economic growth and development (ILO, 2010). Hence the purpose of this paper is to provide a more systematic study investigating the impact of various factors on career progression for women managers in the Arab context of the Kingdom of Bahrain and further fill the existing knowledge gap with information on the glass ceiling phenomenon in the region.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The importance of shattering the glass ceiling and removing barriers that prevent women from utilizing their full potential is recognized in today's organizations. The complexity of the phenomenon demands methodology that can provide access to data that reflect the views of both male and female managers, nevertheless this study presents the perceptions of female managers of their position in management in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Research in the region shows that there are methodological challenges in terms of sampling (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011; Omair, 2008), hence it is difficult to obtain a representative sample of women managers in the region. To overcome this issue, the empirical data was gathered with in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 15 female managers in different companies and sectors in the country, such as education, banking and finance, engineering, aviation, private business owners and foreign affairs; these managers were chosen with convenience sampling techniques as it was difficult to gain easy access. The participants preferred to be anonymous according to the confidentiality of their jobs. The participants' names were removed and replaced by numbers suffix, because of the confidentiality matter. The semi-structured interviews had a conversational style so that the researcher could understand how each of the participants gave meaning to their work experiences. This style helped at building trust with respondents and ensuring that the sample collected was representative as possible. The participants' profile shows that more than 70% of the participants were married and only 13.5% were single. The remaining number of participants were classified as other (i.e. divorced, separated, widowed or other). The academic qualifications of the participants was gathered and categorized from the lowest to the highest degree. Since most of the participants came from top managerial positions, half of the women interviewed (53.5%) have a Bachelors degree, 33% of the participants have a Masters degree and the remaining two participants have a PhD degree.

Content analysis was performed to the interviews in order to answer the research questions. Content analysis is used to analyze words or concepts in texts, in order to quantify and analyze the meanings of these words and make inferences about the messages in the text. The interviews have been partially transcribed and although Omair (2010) claims that there might be some challenges in using simple word frequency counts to make inferences, themes were developed not only from those that were more frequently discussed, but also based upon the relevant theory discussed in the literature review. Two main themes emerged from the analysis: the glass ceiling issues and the success factors for women in management in Bahrain.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The glass ceiling in management in Bahrain**

All the participants in the study mentioned that there are many challenges in management, and they have mainly to do with the characteristics, the culture and the nature of employment in the region. Interestingly, one of the female respondents realized to her surprise during our discussion that all the female managers she knows

are either not married or divorced. She also added that *“people call me the mother of the company, even though I do not have children of my own, they all call this company my child, or my staff come to me for advice or to discuss any personal issues they may have”*. Another said that *“being single is very good because I go back home and I do not have any responsibilities, cooking...”*. In agreement to Tlaiss & Kauser’s (2011) study, the participants support the view that single women have more time to focus on their career and their personal success. Nevertheless, marriage is not always a hindering factor as they accept it as a social necessity (Jamali, Sidani & Safieddine, 2005). It may increase their responsibilities, as a majority emphasized the importance of family support and domestic help.

The misinterpretation about religion and traditions in Bahrain kept women in lower level positions in the workplace (Metcalf, 2008). In agreement to this, the participants said that juggling work and home does not hold them from progressing at work, as they supported the view that women have incredible abilities to work under pressure, and as P2 mentioned *“a recent BBC study, made a study of the brain and it showed that the male brain is not wired for multitasking whereas the female brain is”*. However, few interviewees clarified that they can balance work with family. Some work for less hours and make their own arrangements, for example they have domestic helps and nannies. As P2 stated *“my culture puts the role of the woman as a mother at the very top, so to me as my mother had always told me ‘nobody is ever going to judge you for where you get in the corporate world; they are going to judge you whether you were a good mother or not’*. Although it has become widespread for women to balance home and career lives, the society still has an expectation for women to prioritize and focus on her family more in the region. Tlaiss & Kauser (2011) and Omair (2010) similarly suggest that this is highly seen in the Middle Eastern culture. They continue that this perception of women in general results in being treated differently within the organization and given responsibilities and tasks different than those given to men. The participants with children (20%) claimed that they find some difficulties in balancing work with family, for example P5 said: *“it is hard for women to raise a family and be in a senior level position. In our company, the hours are very long and varied, so it presents more of a challenge”*. In addition, the majority of the participants said that work in their company involves working long and varied hours and trying hard. It also involves occasionally geographic moves, which is a challenge for those who want to have a family. Another female respondent, a corporate service manager, said *“If you want to excel and advance, if you want your customers and the management to be happy you have to be there whenever it is required.”*

It is interesting to note that the majority of the women denied the impact of societal expectations as barriers to their careers when asked directly, however, in their answers to other questions, many of them briefly mentioned that the culture and society in general restrict women’s activities. Nine of the participants claimed that societal expectations did not stand in their way. The majority of these women were of nationalities other than Bahraini, including Lebanese, Pakistani, Sudanese, and Egyptian, which may explain this view. Those who claimed that social roles and expectations have at times prevented them from going higher in their career were mainly among the older age groups (all are above 36 years of age), were Bahraini, and were married except for one who is listed under “other”, meaning she has been married. P13 explained that she *“faced many barriers from the society where it was not accepting women to reach to high managerial positions. They expected women to either be a housewife or working in clerical jobs”* and *“because I was a woman I was expected to start a family rather than continue my education”*. These societal expectations are the result of the cultural norms that set apart the role of a woman versus the role of a man, and P9 explained that her social role acted as a career barrier due to the fact that she was raised as *“a Bahraini woman and she has accepted that there is a difference between men and women.”*

Overall, the results indicate that societal expectations, although are still existing, have less of an impact on the modern day woman’s career decision than they used to. However, women do still face gender-based stereotypes, which are explained in the following. The majority of the interviewees commented on the existence of gender-based stereotypes, with 12 out of 15 saying that these stereotypes are still present in the Arab world, but they have not necessarily faced any themselves and they are not as prevalent in Bahrain as they are in other countries. The main existing stereotype towards women was that their main concern should be to get married and start a family. The interviewees gave different explanations, examples, and implications of the stereotypes faced by women in the Arab region. P9 for example believed that because of the stereotypes, *“women have to work harder to reach higher positions to prove that they are good, and the proof is that that we have more men working in higher positions in the Arab world than women”*. P11 explained that the construction business and engineering have always been tied to the male gender and have always been considered as male dominated sectors. She went on to point out that the gender-based stereotype in that respect has decreased, as *“today, more women are entering the engineering field and many other fields as well.”* In reference to leadership and management styles, most of the respondents agreed that stereotypes are prevailing. In agreement to Eagly (2007) and Jamali et al. (2005) men are considered to be better managers than women. Eagly (2007) also refers to the stereotype that women have to exhibit female roles, which implies that they cannot get into fields that are normally masculine or male-dominated such as construction as P11 mentioned. Jamali et al. (2005) claim that

women were not perceived to fit to assume leadership positions in Lebanon. Similarly, some participants provided evidence of the existing culture in the Kingdom of Bahrain, and they said that still many believe that men are better managers than women, they are trusted to be effective and to perform their role as a manager efficiently. The Arab culture has been widely accepted as a masculine culture (Metcalf, 2008) where men are expected to be assertive, while women to be modest and tender. Thus, as in any other culture gender role stereotypes exist (Metcalf, 2008; Omair, 2008). Nevertheless, there were some participants in this study who proposed that in general women in management in Bahrain should exhibit behaviors and attitudes that are ascribed to their social role. They do not necessarily need to adopt masculine behaviors to be successful in management. They do not feel inferior to their male counterparts, and they have started developing organizations and associations to support networking, sharing information, training and managerial skills development workshops.

Bias and sex stereotypes were still evident in support to Mostafa's (2005) suggestion that a gender gap still exists in promoting women, even though most of the promotions are based on performance. The Bahraini women usually work in the service sector since they were mainly motivated by a need for achievement and self-fulfillment and the desire to improve their society. Dechant & Lamky (2005) identified that women in Bahrain and as well as other GCC countries have limited real world business experience and they lack some of the most important managerial skills. For example, the female manager in construction suggested she faced a lot of challenges when interacting with her staff where gender bias is high. All participants agreed that there were many challenges in management. All the women in the study agreed that it is difficult to be one of the boys and they had to try very hard to prove their skills, one manager specifically said "*you have to prove who you are and how much you can accomplish*". She proposed that no matter your sex, if you are a manager you have to meet the organizational goals, to produce work and be effective.

Omair (2008) claims that women are still far from achieving equality especially in advancement. Metcalf (2008) also mentions the issue of recruitment in the context of the Middle Eastern world where companies normally hesitate to appoint women in certain positions because of societal norms and the possible maternity costs. On the contrary to this view, the participants identified many challenges for being promoted, however they agreed that promotion has started changing in the region, since women are given more opportunities, are offered managerial positions, and many of the women in the study admitted having exploited this situation. Mostafa (2005) proposed that there are moderate changes towards more liberal views on women's role in management. Nevertheless, the participants explained that they usually have to change organization in order to gain advancement. Altman, Simpson, Baruch & Burke (2005) in their study found that younger women are more likely to move in order to gain advancement, however, this may have some negative effects on their personal life (Brownell, 1994). The main problem as many female managers said, is that many choose not to accept the challenges that are required for career progression and quit their job that is also confirmed by Ely & Rhode's (2010) study.

### **Success factors for women in management in Bahrain**

Although, many women in the study are employed very few appear at the higher levels in the hierarchy. Nevertheless, the managers in this study suggested a few success factors in management, which they considered as means to overcome the glass ceiling barriers. In fact, they proposed that their traits and behaviors have helped them climb the career ladder. They all stressed the need to work long hours that can be seen as a contributing factor to success. They have also mentioned that they might take work at home, and that sacrifices have to be made, such as spending less time with the family or for their personal life, but more importantly they stressed time management as a very important skill. More specifically one manager said "*if you manage your time properly, then you can balance work with family*". These views are also supported by similar studies. For example, Ng & Pine (2003) consider as major contributors to managers' success hard work and commitment at work. They stress hands on work, operational control and hard work in combination with frequent interaction with staff and other members of the organization as part of managers' tasks. Additionally, endurance has been identified as another success factor. The managers said that they have to show patience, to be smiling and use humor to deal with challenging situations with employees or customers. In support to this view, most of the participants identified smile and communication skills as important. Furthermore, they acknowledged good communication skills and trust towards their staff. These findings seem to support Omair (2010) who found that the financial executives in their study consider communication, trust and perseverance as success factors in their career.

Another important factor is respect, especially when it is connected with relevant knowledge and prior experience. Specifically, the female managers in the study appreciated considerably their studies and they believed that this has helped them gain the respect of their staff. Omair (2008) supports that a crucial element in

leadership development of women in Saudi Arabia was educational opportunities. Participants in the study also believed that sharing the knowledge with their staff leads to success. Thus, it seems that they feel comfortable to delegate and share everyday tasks with their teams. This allows them more time to spend on training, mentoring and planning for the department or for the organization. Moreover, many referred to 'dynamic characters', and felt they should have been stricter with their staff and more assertive, since their male staff many times challenged them. At the same time, they said they have to be enthusiastic, to have a positive personality, to be sympathetic and caring and to have an eye for detail.

Furthermore, female managers in the study claimed that they are trying to change today's management culture and style, thus they provide a more nurturing and accommodating environment. Therefore, they listen to their staff, they respect their opinion and discuss any problems at work. In this way, they encourage a team-based management style that generates more mentoring opportunities for employees through the environment and the working climate. Then, the managers added patience, perseverance and believing in your skills. For example, one said that you have "*to acknowledge your mistakes, to apologize or show with your behavior that you admit you are wrong*". In fact, some managers admitted that they either tell or show with their behavior that they acknowledge their mistakes.

Moreover, networking and mentoring was considered important mainly for women's career advancement. They said that networking was mainly built when they changed jobs, but they helped other women to progress and have a career. Mostafa (2005) suggests that mentoring has benefits such as greater work success and more job satisfaction for those who are mentored. She also adds that mentoring is especially important for women, because it allows them to be more visible to organizational decision makers and therefore, may be given the opportunity to advance.

Later, the organizational culture was discussed. A manager suggested that the culture in her company allows people to progress regardless their sex. This point affirms Powell & Graves (2003) who suggest that companies play a role in women's success by adopting strategies to advance their careers or by erecting barriers that might prevent women from advancing. In addition, Powell & Graves (2003, p.153) suggest that organizations should be ready to address any discrimination that occurs in the company, especially "when they embrace stereotypical views or display prejudices towards members of one sex as leaders".

Even when managers have a family, the companies follow the legal framework that dictates the policy concerning leave of absence when people are getting married, when they have children time off during their pregnancy or time for their children i.e. to get them to the doctor. Sometimes, however some participants said that the employees, the other managers and the top managers' behavior may undermine these privileges, thus they usually do not take advantage of this policies, "*only when it is necessary*". Therefore, organizations should act to reduce these beliefs and attitudes (Powell & Graves, 2003). Even though Jamali et al. (2005) found that women in Lebanon are responding realistically to a situation in which they view an impossible future, the female managers in this study were more optimistic about the current situation and the position that women hold in management in the region.

Many of the interviewees suggested that the barriers could be reduced by many ways. One of the methods suggested includes the woman herself, where she has to create a balance between work and life to reach to higher positions. Another way to resolve the barriers facing women could be by working harder and proving themselves to their higher management in order to get higher positions. They added that the support from their families and their husbands plays a crucial role in their success. Women entrepreneurs in the study noted that they consult their family on making business decisions. They also added that knowing the right people in the right place can help them overcome some of the hurdles in business. McElwee & Al-Riyami (2003) found similar views in their study in Oman. Oman like the Kingdom of Bahrain, is a high-context culture, hence there are extensive informal networks among families, friends and colleagues. In addition, there are close relationships with clients and suppliers.

The Supreme Council for Women in Bahrain was established to lead women, to equip them with their rightful role in the society establishing mechanisms for women development and empowerment. The Supreme Council for Women in Bahrain (2007) identified the challenges that Bahraini women faced which included discrimination at work, cultural taboos, stereotype about women, negative attitudes towards women, company policies, inability to manage work and family life, misinterpretation of religious beliefs, and lack of confidence and trust in women managers (Supreme Council for Women, 2007; Pillai, Prasad & Thomas, 2011). A participant discussed the benefits of the Council, she also commented positively on the creation of the Royal University for Women in 2005 as an effort towards assisting women in leadership programs. These changes could allow men to accept the fact that women are able to reach top positions and prove themselves. As P14 stated "*women are entering managerial roles and reaching high positions which shows that women are strong and organized where they can handle the power of their position, their family and education*". However, today

women in Bahrain can be enrolled in different sectors that were not acceptable. As P9 mentioned, *“today in Bahrain, we have Bahraini women ambassadors, ministers, and they are part of the parliament. Those roles were not open for women they only dreamed of such positions”*.

Most interviewees believe that the management roles for women in Bahrain are improving compared to the past years due to the availability of many institutions, as well as the support given by the government. Thus, the opportunities are there for women in Bahrain as long as they work towards them. Most interviewees believe that women in Bahrain in the future could progress more and climb to the top.

## **CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

This study examined the glass ceiling in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the ways to overcome these barriers in management. It is evident from the above that the glass ceiling is a reality in the region and more specifically in organizations in Bahrain. There are many women who are found in managerial positions, but they face the glass ceiling and many barriers to progress and go higher in the hierarchy. The traditional role of Muslim women is a source of conflict for the educated women who try to balance the modern world of business with a traditionally conservative social background. In fact, some decide to leave their jobs, or not progress due to the difficulties they face with balancing family with work. They do not find it easy to reconcile their dual realities. In some cases, they are taking the message that they cannot combine work with family and thus they cannot be mothers and managers at the same time (Mostafa, 2005). Nevertheless, the findings of this study agree with Al-Manasra's (2013) view that family and children are not necessarily a hindering factor to manager's career progress. However, having children while at work has been viewed as a liability for some female managers, it is however, a choice that managers have to make regardless their sex. Domestic help and effective time management skills may contribute to balancing work with family.

In a previous study on women in top management in UAE, Oman and Bahrain, Wilkinson (1996) and Jamali et al. (2005) in their study in Lebanon, found that the main challenges faced by women were discrimination at work, cultural taboos, negative attitudes and lack of confidence and trust in women managers. Similarly, in this study, the most significant barrier that has been identified by female managers is the long working hours that are required by the organizational culture. Another important barrier are gender stereotypes that are still persistent in the Arab culture. Women managers still have to prove their skills, and the cultural expectations of women create challenges for them when advancing their career. Additionally, key assignments have to be found to provide women with professional growth and learning challenges, to serve as grooming exercises for career tracks leading to executive positions and to provide them with access to key decision-making and influential mentors in the company. There is evidence in this study that the situation is changing in Bahrain in favor of women, particularly in terms of education and employment opportunities. It seems that input of women in the economy is rising as more and more women have accepted their assigned roles and have managed to change their status, and to carve out their own place of power and influence. Government agencies should consider the positive effect of women in business and management, and they should ensure that gender principles are incorporated in trade agreements to support women's economic opportunities, as well as their participation in economic policy and decision making.

Interestingly, individuals in the organizations of the study recognize the importance of shattering the glass ceiling and removing barriers that prevent women from utilizing their full potential. Ethical employment practice is a core value of corporate culture, but pragmatically women often have to outperform their male colleagues to be considered for promotion (Pillai et al., 2011). Some key success factors that are presented include the development of a management style where women may exceed the company's expectations, they will adopt a 'dynamic character', they will be nurturing, but at the same time they will be assertive to face challenges in management. Time management may help deal with the conflict between time at work and time with the family. Good communication skills and support to the team are also important. Prior experience, knowledge and education are supporting factors that help them gain respect of their staff and other people within the industry. Finally, they should grab the opportunities that are given to them, whereas organizations should provide such culture and policies to support women's advancement. Organizations at the same time should support empowerment initiatives for women, integrate equality principles in human resources planning and provide opportunities for women.

In view to all the above, the author proposes that change is required in management in the Kingdom of Bahrain, where diversity must be supported. In the competitive global arena organizations are obliged to accept that equal opportunities are a good recipe for success. There should be fostering of family responsibilities by following the relevant legislation, and finally organizations should also cultivate and nurture women's managerial style and talent for organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

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