Is there any ideal place for women workers? women and glass ceiling: a multi-cultural view

¿Hay algun lugar ideal para las mujeres trabajadoras? mujeres y techo de cristal: una vista multicultural

Existe qualquer lugar ideal para mulheres trabalhadores? mulheres e teto de vidro: uma visão multi-cultural

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Abstract

The restrictions that keep women from climbing the corporate ladder are the main theme of this research paper. Glass ceiling is identified and highlighted as an important and global issue not only by different women around the world but also from the different researchers and scholars and may have very negative impact on business and societies. This research focuses the glass ceiling which may restrict women especially from the top positions. This research paper will try to reflect multicultural view of glass ceiling and scale of its existence in different regions of the globe. The nature of this paper is empirical whereas in order to perform multicultural empirical analysis we selected three companies from different parts of the world, and studied their cases. With the help of carefully designed questionnaire the company officials are contacted, and their responses are analyzed in the light available literature and theoretical perspectives. On the basis of careful analysis conclusion has been drawn which lead to valuable suggestions which are presented at the end. The underlying suggestions would help to cope with the issue in better way.

Keywords: Glass ceiling, multicultural, Stereotypes, Women.

Resumen

Las restricciones que evitan que las mujeres suban en la escala corporativa son el tema principal de este trabajo de investigación. El techo de cristal se identifica y destaca como un problema importante y global, no solo por diferentes mujeres de todo el mundo, sino también por parte de los diferentes investigadores y académicos, y puede tener un impacto muy negativo en los negocios y las sociedades. Esta investigación enfoca el techo de cristal que puede restringir a las mujeres, especialmente desde las primeras posiciones. Este trabajo de investigación tratará de reflejar la visión multicultural del techo de cristal y la escala de su existencia en diferentes regiones del mundo. La naturaleza de este documento es empírica, mientras que para realizar un análisis empírico multicultural, seleccionamos tres empresas de diferentes partes del mundo y estudiamos sus casos. Con la ayuda de un cuestionario cuidadosamente diseñado, se contactó a los funcionarios de la compañía, y sus respuestas se analizaron en la literatura disponible y las perspectivas teóricas disponibles. Sobre la base de un análisis cuidadoso, se ha sacado una conclusión que lleva a sugerencias valiosas que se presentan al final. Las sugerencias

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subyacentes ayudarían a enfrentar el problema de una mejor manera.

Palabras claves: Techo de cristal, multicultural, estereotipos, mujeres.

Resumo

As restrições que impedem as mulheres de subir na escada corporativa são o tema principal deste trabalho de pesquisa. O teto de vidro é identificado e destacado como uma questão importante e global, não só por diferentes mulheres em todo o mundo, mas também por diferentes pesquisadores e acadêmicos, e pode ter um impacto muito negativo sobre os negócios e as sociedades. Esta pesquisa enfoca o teto de vidro que pode restringir as mulheres, especialmente a partir das posições de topo. Este trabalho de pesquisa tentará refletir a visão multicultural do teto de vidro e escala de sua existência em diferentes regiões do globo. A natureza deste artigo é empírica, ao passo que, para realizar análises empíricas multiculturais, selecionamos três empresas de diferentes partes do mundo e estudamos seus casos. Com a ajuda de um questionário cuidadosamente elaborado, os funcionários da empresa são contatados, e suas respostas são analisadas sob a luz da literatura disponível e perspectivas teóricas. Com base numa análise cuidadosa, foi tirada uma conclusão que leva a sugestões valiosas que são apresentadas no final. As sugestões subjacentes ajudariam a lidar com a questão de uma maneira melhor.

Palavras-chave: Teto de vidro, multicultural, estereótipos, mulheres.

Introduction

In the organizational context, the word "Ceiling" can be understood as the problems and restrictions, one can face by trying to climb the corporate ladder (Lublin, 1996). The term "Glass" means that these restrictions are not easily observable (Herminia, 1992). The complete term "Glass Ceiling" is usually referred to organizational or business situations in which women can face problems to get the top positions.

In larger sense, glass ceiling is basically about the gender or sex discrimination (Auster, 1993) which may compel the women to keep them behind (Klenke, 1996; Lathabhavan & Balasubramanian, 2017). Unfortunately, the gender base differences are engrafted in the social structure of different cultures and societies. Different types of unwanted comparisons are made and different attributes are generated to oppose women and keep them away from reaching at the top (Bombuwela & Alwis, 2013). Glass ceiling exists all around the globe, regardless of developed, developing or third world countries, with some differences in magnitude and intensity (Comeau & Griffith, 2005).

According to the ILO"s Global Employment Trends (2003), women have a very large part in the global market force, with representation of 70 percent of women in developed countries and 60 percent in developing countries. Even having a quite large part on the world"s market places, women are facing the greater unemployment rates and a noticeable difference in pay and salary compared to men (ILO"s Global Employment Trends, 2003).

Research Aim

Glass Ceiling is a highly discussed issue since women started entering the workplaces. Acknowledging the implication and importance of glass ceiling and its related issues, the purpose of this research is to see these issues through multicultural lens to better understand its consequences and to suggest the possible solutions to deal with the problem.

- Research Limitations: Due to the time and structural limitation, this research report does not claim that each and every dimension within the frame of ", Women and Glass Ceiling" has been explored. Furthermore conducting research on the basses of case studies from only three countries is itself a type of limitation of this research work.

Theoretical discussion

At the end of 1960 the number of women working as clerical staff and men working in managerial positions was almost equal (Maier, 1997). Women were not hired for management positions whereas men not for clerical work, e.g. for secretarial position (Cooper & Lewis, 1995; Kumari, 2014). Thus, women had traditionally the lower status positions with less opportunities and less payment than men (Kanter, 1977). Although more women are entering the workplaces since this time but still they are not succeed to get the top management positions. That may because women are expected to concentrate on their family duties instead of focusing on a career (Kanter, 1977).

- Existence of glass ceiling in the modern working environment: Today, in the age of gender equality, one should expect equal opportunities for men and women in the workplace (Sias et al, 2003; Bertrand et al, 2015). However, if we talk about the top management positions we can observe the situation of glass ceiling; the invisible barriers that still keep women away from these positions. A good way to become aware of these obstacles is to analyze the numbers of men and women in managerial positions in any country.

A paper about glass ceiling published by the International Labour Office (ILO) in 2004 found that there are still a significant low number of women in managerial positions compared to the number of women in employment. According to the paper, though the number of women in top or middle management positions is increasing, however, there is only a slow progress in this field. In a sample made at the beginning of the millennium 2000-2002 women made up 20-40 percent of employees holding a managerial position in 48 out of 63 countries. So it is well evident, that barriers keeping women from getting the top jobs still exist. As further, data shows that in countries like Eastern Europe women have more chances to climb the corporate ladder than in countries of East & South Asia and the Middle East (ILO report, 2004, p. 13).

Main barriers

The existence of glass ceiling and its perception was also shown by the results of a Catalyst Study (2003) the paper refers to a study about Women middle managers" perception of the glass ceiling.

In the catalyst study, women in top management positions identified the exclusion from networks, stereotyping and non-flexible work schedules as obstacles that women have to face on their way to the top (ILO report, 2004, p. 50).

The study of Cooper also shows the middle managers perceptions of stereotyping, work-family-conflict and the exclusion from networks as the main barriers and restricting them from climbing the career ladder (Van Vianen, 2000).

In fact, corporate culture seems to have a main reason for women's" difficulties to reach the top (Ragins et al, 1998). Still, the "old-boy" network exists in many corporations (Akpinar-Sposito, 2013; Kanter, 1977) described as "tight inner circles" where people who have different characteristics than the members of the circle where women have no chance to get in. This problem for women may due to the existence of social networks to push back their careers (Becker & Lowrey, 1999). Another aspect is sex stereotyping. As pointed above it was traditionally men who worked in managerial positions and therefore the perception still exists that management is a male resort. In this context, family responsibilities of women are to mention, since it is difficult for women to manage home and office parallel (Jost & Kay, 2005) This is problem faced only by women since men traditionally expect their women to manage family and home (ILO report, 2004).

- The difference of barriers to middle- and top-management: The number of working women increased constantly in the last few decades where most of them are at lower positions (Bu & McKeen, 2001) It is kind of unfortunate thing that women are still the minority in managerial and other top level positions (Combs, 2003) and need to do more to get any significant management seat (Ragins el al, 1998). This doesn"t mean women are not able to get the leading positions, but women tend to stay on lower levels even if they are able to get higher management positions (Gordon & Whelan, 1998).

Thus women usually succeed to climb up the career ladder till a particular level and after reaching this level they are restricted to get any further, no matter how ambitious they are (ILO report, 2004, p. 20). This statement also applies for those sectors, where women are the majority of the employees (Powell, 1990). In these sectors men are proportionally represented in

top positions. As a result you can state, a rule of the ILO applies: "the higher up an organization's hierarchy, the fewer the women" (ILO report, 2004, p. 13).

- Differences in managerial positions of men and women: In the organization's hierarchy where at one end, men and women are differently represented in the certain levels, at the other end, the sexes are also unequally represented in the different departments of an organization. As Kanter already pointed out, women who get a managerial position automatically adjusts herself to the key post in a principal department (Kanter, 1977), study made in the United States, United States General Accounting Office, 2002, cited in ILO report, 2004, p. 17, also tells women managers are still mainly found in very few less important departments where men, in contrast, are mainly found in the key and major departments, like purchasing etc. By analyzing cases in which women succeeded climbing the corporate ladder, it can be found that they did succeed mainly in those departments which can be named as "gender-ized areas".

Expectations of the empirical study

As a result of the theoretical discussion we have certain expectations what the findings of the empirical study could be like which we want to express here. Since we have to face the existence of barriers keeping women away from leading positions, we expect no comparable numbers of male and female managers in the chosen companies, but at least there are few women in leading positions. As it is a fact that the glass ceiling seems to be not much stronger for middle management positions, we assume that there may be more women at this level. Regarding the numbers of promotion, we claim that more men than women got a promotion and we expect women leaders to be predominant in departments of social issues (e.g. human resources). Though we face differences in the state of development in the different countries, in our opinion it would be likely that Germany presents better result than Pakistan whereas China lies between them. The open question at the end of the questionnaire aims to identity the main problems with working women and find out, if these problems would probably turn into barriers before even occurring.

Data collection

According to this situation, we use some primary and secondary data collection method. We mainly use primary data from our interview. First, we connected with the officials of the three case companies, and got the answers of our questions, to compare with the results of our primary data. We get our secondary data from the books, journals and scientific material, mainly. In this paper we use the qualitative methods which are essentially descriptive and inferential in character. Qualitative methods help us use the primary data and secondary data to conduct our analysis and conclusions.

Empirical study

To have a multicultural look at the glass ceiling, we selected case companies from different geographical areas and having different cultures. That was Germany, China and Pakistan. Germany the most developed European country, it is perceived that men and women have equal opportunities and can work along men in almost all fields. China is one of the world's biggest economy and a global industrial hub. Its economic growth and advancements are beyond the records. Last but not least, we select a case company form Pakistan to have a closer look at the glass ceiling in a developing country. Pakistan is the first Islamic country of the world that is in the line of atomic power countries of the world. Its economy is raising economy and country is striving to get recognized on the map of globe.

- Germany: Germany is a big industrial nation; with more than 2.2 trillion Euros, gross domestic production per annum. Due to this fact, we chose a traditional industrial company for our research. The company offers solutions and products for gas distribution and utilization and heating systems and is member of a group of companies operating worldwide in a leading position within the field of gas, water and electricity measurement and utilization. We focused on branches located in three different cities with 850 employees in total. Our contact person is the head of the legal department of these branches. He is well established within the company and is working there for more than 10 years. Under mentioned table, find the answers to the questions asked.

Table 1: Glass ceiling facts in Germany

No	Questions	Answers			
			Leading	Top	Mid
1	How many women/men work in leading positions, in top management and in middle-management positions?	Men	30	3	27
		Women	2	0	2
2	How many women/men got a promotion to leading positions in 2015?	Men	0		
		Women	0		
3	In which departments do you have female leaders?	Quality Management	Heating Laboratory	Commercial Administration	
4	In three words – what do you think are the main problems with female leaders?	Not interested in leading positions	Not properly qualified for top positions	Mostly prefer, part time employment	

- China: China is a big and the most prominent emerging economy, known for its low labor rates for manufactures all around the world. The number of working women in China increases day by day in almost every field. Nowadays, the government pays more attention to the equality between the male and female workers (Warner & Goodall, 2010).

To better analyze the case women and glass ceiling, we chose a company which has the female top management. Our target company was a electronic appliances company with specialized air-conditioning enterprise including R&D, production, sales and service. Our contact person, was working at the human resources department. The answers of our questions can be seen in under mentioned table.

Table 2: Glass ceiling facts in china

No	Questions	Answers			
	positions?	Women	4	1	3
2	How many women/men got a promotion to leading positions in 2015	Men	3		
		Women	0		
3	In which departments do you have female leaders?	Human Resource	Finance	Administration	
4	In three words – what do you think are the main problems with female leaders?	Not properly qualified for top positions	More sensitive to accept major responsibilities	Less interest in major positions/ Give preference to families	

- Pakistan: To see the glass ceiling in developing and third world country we selected a case company form Pakistan. Pakistan is raising economy that is doing well to get recognized on the map of globe. The company chosen from Pakistan is a health services provider, the company is working under the administrative domain of government of Pakistan. Our contact person was the head of administrative department; finding can be viewed in table below.

Table 3: Glass ceiling facts in Pakistan

No	Questions	Answers			
			Leading Total	Top	Mid
1	How many women/men work in leading positions, in top management and in middle-management positions?	Men	3	1	1
		Women	0	0	1
2	How many women/men got a promotion to leading positions in 2010?	Men	0		
		Women	1		
3	In which departments do you have female leaders?	Gynecology			
4	In three words – what do you think are the main problems with female leaders?	Not properly qualified for top positions	Scared to accept the leading responsibilities of leading positions	Cultural constrains that limit women to come to leading positions	

The results of the empirical study show that the companies in all three countries have very limited number of women as compared with men, in leading positions. Especially in the top-level positions, there are no women in Germany and Pakistan, but the company in China has a female CEO. This was surprising because we expected Germany as the most developed country to be ahead regarding women in top positions. Nevertheless, we have to take into account that this study is non-representative of all expects relating job and promotions. Though on the basis of empirical findings it can be stated, the female Chinese CEO was one of those very few women in the world who become successful to break the thick layer glass ceiling, but obviously it is not sufficient to claim, that glass ceiling for women is not present in China, and the results are mainly what we expected. Our case studies tell glass ceiling seems to not be a matter of national or domestic culture, but more of an organizational culture and the trends in practice.

Results

- Gender Differences in promotions: Concerning the promotions made in 2015, we saw that the company in Germany made no promotions at all in 2015, in China only three men got a promotion and in Pakistan it was just

one woman who got a promotion. This result surprises especially because we expected a higher number of promotions in order to draw any conclusions, but it will be fair to mention in this context that we have a limited view of only one year and we do not know the reasons for the results. A possible reason for the low number of promotions could be a different way of recruiting employees for leading positions than promotions. Nevertheless, it seems to be mostly men who get a promotion as we see by comparing the numbers. The promotion of the woman in Pakistan should be seen in due consideration of the department as she works in the department of gynecology, once again a gender-ized department as mentioned in literature review.

- Differences between leading positions of men and women: According to the theoretical discussion and our expectations, it was quite surprising that the German company has female leaders in departments which do not deal with social issues. In our opinion, a possible reason to choose women for leading positions in these fields could be that women tend to be more sensitive and into details, characteristics that seem to be necessary for succeeding in these jobs.

In the Chinese company, we have a woman in a traditionally expected department (HR), the female CEO who is an expert in marketing issues and again a female head of the financial department as well as the administrative, probably for the reasons mentioned above.

In the company of Pakistan, one woman got a promotion in the gynecology. Since gynecology is obviously a gender-ized field, this met our expectations.

- Problems with women in leading positions: From the data, we can analyze and make comparison of the existing problems between the three countries.

In Germany, maybe the women like the social contacts in their workplace and they do not want to climb the corporate ladder, because of they focus more on the relationships with the colleagues and do not want to accept more stress. And their women choose more part-time job to manage the family and job well, but the managerial positions are not made for the part-time employment. The case company is an industrial company, there are no qualified junior employees because of the technical nature of the company.

In China, the problems are mainly about the perception of the men in leading positions, they think the women are not enough qualified for the leading positions and pay more attention to their families, as well as more focusing on relationships than tasks. But the perception we get here might differ from how reality is.

In Pakistan, the problems here are mainly cultural and social issues, it is evident from the literature that there are some invisible forces which always want to push women back. Though the top management think there should be women in top management, but still there is no, so this shows there are invisible barriers.

Suggestions

According the problems we discussed above, here we have some suggestions and solutions to solve the problems.

Though part time employment might be difficult in managerial positions, flexible work hours might be a possible solution for women to manage both work and family. For the gender diversity issues, to give more promotion opportunities for the women instead of the external recruitment might be a solution, and the organizations who take to have gender diversity at the top need needs to provide suitable solutions for women to balance their personal and business life. For the invisible barriers, the invisible forces should be researched and identified in order to improve the situation.

Conclusion

Going through the case studies and literature analysis, our studies tell that glass ceiling is not a cultural or regional issue, rather its behavioral and social hierarchy. With the little differences in numbers and intensity glass ceiling is presented all around the globe. A more flexible business model is needed from companies and organizations, to better understand the issue. Convenient and favorable work atmosphere is needed for the women to naturalize the wrong perceptions about them. Societies and cultures should not under estimate women's capabilities, and this approach should not be adopted on verbal forums only, but also on practical level.

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