WOMEN LEADERSHIP: THE UNSEEN BARRIERS

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ABSTRACT

Women's advancement in management positions has not kept pace with the rise in the number of working women. Their presence at the top of the corporate ladder is rare. Despite the fact that more women are joining management roles, there is a bottleneck at the middle management level. Though entry is easier, progression slows after the middle stage, and in most cases, women are barred from ascending the corporate ladder to the top, regardless of their technological or professional credentials or achievements. In India, research and surveys show that men outnumber women in top management roles, a phenomenon known as "the glass ceiling," which is described as "a barrier that is so subtle that it is undetectable, but is so powerful that it prevents women from rising through the management ranks." Women's underrepresentation in the corporate hierarchy, gendered pay gaps, workplace discrimination, discriminatory corporate practices, a lack of commitment to the individual needs of women, sexual harassment, and exclusion of women from informal networks are all examples of the ceiling. As a result, the aim of this paper is to identify the issues and challenges that women managers in India face, propose solutions, and provide a forum for what employers and society can do to crack the glass ceiling.

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Keywords: Glass Ceiling, Hierarchy, Discrimination, Informal Network, Gender Gap.

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Introduction

Despite significant progress in education and the workplace for women over the last 50 years, men still outnumber women in leadership roles, especially at the top. While the Companies Act of 2013 mandates that at least one woman serves on company boards, the rise in gender representation on paper must be reflected in practices and culture. Women now occupy 17 percent of board positions in corporate India, according to the Egon Zehnder Global Diversity Report 2020, a rise of 8.6 percent since 2012. At the same time, women are underrepresented on corporate boards of directors. According to the survey, women hold just 11% of committee chairs worldwide, compared to 27.3 percent in the United States. In India, the average board size is 11 members, with an average of 1.9 women on each board. Although gender disparity has been on the agenda of social science and advocacy for decades in many ways, it has been unfortunately ignored in organizational leadership. Data on Indian female managers is almost non-existent, according to a preliminary search of secondary sources. The very lack of statistical data reflects the lack of attention to the issue of women in leadership in the present agenda of Indian society. The lack of statistical evidence represents the current Indian society's lack of commitment to the question of women in leadership. According to one report, in India, two women out of every hundred economically active men work in administrative and managerial roles.

What is causing the leadership gap?

Women's and men's choices and opportunities are shaped by gender, organizational, and policy barriers. Gender stereotypes, on the other hand, are socially established classifications that are influenced and reinforced by patriarchy's dominance in society, communities, and families. It is thus imperative to question and deconstruct these patriarchal classification systems. The foundation of

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patriarchal society is the belief that men are superior, more dominant, and represent the "standard," while women are seen as inferior, lacking control and autonomy, and second-class citizens. The socialization force that underpins this structure cannot be overlooked. In reality, patriarchal and sexist ideas are so deeply entrenched in society's consciousness that they are largely unseen. Males have woven the very fabric of social organization for males to support males. The majority of upper positions in many bureaucracies, whether governmental or corporate, are occupied by men. Women are disproportionately concentrated in lower-level, supporting roles, which are needed to keep this male leadership in control. As a result, the wealth, prestige, and privileges of those in positions of power, primarily males, are dependent on women's subordination. As a result, this power structure has significant implications for women's leadership. Many strategies have been tried to resolve these barriers to women's leadership, particularly in the workplace. The aim is for women to be fairly represented in businesses, politics, occupations, religious institutions, and labor unions. However, there are limitations to fostering equality within patriarchal values-based systems. Men have come to see their viewpoints and norms as reflective of larger, gender-neutral human organizations as a result of current male-dominated organizations. This viewpoint leads to the belief that the structure is asexual. As a consequence, women's skills and perspectives are undervalued. Even as women rise to positions of leadership, they are conditioned to uphold the status quo by perspectives and power structures; although gender composition may shift, the underlying system of power, experience, status, and wealth remains unchanged. Simply put, male domination remains the most significant impediment to women rising to positions of power in business and politics. Traditional gender stereotypes, which are still prevalent in society, are still obstacles to women scaling corporate ladders. Current value systems largely promote the idea that if the father works and the mother takes care of the bulk of parental duties, the family will be better off. Family, colleagues, and coworkers who are unsupportive can have a detrimental impact on women's work and roles in society.

Challenges and barriers faced by Women

- **The Glass Ceiling**

Concepts like the "glass ceiling" have been widely used to explain the restricted advancement of women into influential positions of leadership. The concept is widely used to describe the invisible obstacle that prevents women from advancing further up the corporate ladder. The glass ceiling isn't just an obstacle for particular women; it also affects women as a whole, who are prevented from progressing solely because they are female. Many women's career paths are hampered by subtle, indirect barriers resulting from labeling or stereotyping. The glass ceiling for women is caused by a variety of factors. Occupational segregation is one of the major causes. The labor market, especially executive positions, remains gender-segregated. Women executives are disproportionately concentrated in specialized fields such as personnel, public relations, and even finance, which seldom contribute to the most influential top management positions. The most common path to influence for presidents and chief executive officers is through the corporate mainstream, an environment in which women are overwhelmingly underrepresented. Although there are women in high management positions, they are often treated as "tokens" so that corporate management cannot be accused of sexism due to their scarcity. Many women in leadership positions believe that consistently exceeding performance standards is the most effective career strategy for progressing to senior levels. To put it another way, women must work harder and longer than men to advance in the business world. The male power structure's traditional excuse is that there are too few women with the right mix of training, education, and experience to step into the most influential roles as a party. To put it another way, the doors to top leadership positions for women have not been open long enough. Bureaucracies that regularly show a lack of women in key executive roles insist that it will only be a matter of time before women close the leadership gap with men. Many women who are working their way up the corporate ladder, however, disagree. They conclude that the patriarchal ideals that underpin the leadership system are to blame for the lack of gender equality in leadership roles. In essence, women are unable to rise to the top due to structural sexism.

- **The Old-Boy Network**

The "old-boy network" keeps women out of top management, which is probably the most important obstacle for women. This old-boy network is made up of males who have attended the same schools or have progressed up the corporate ladder together. The "old boys" prefer to encourage people who are similar to them. Former colleagues and associates are often sought after by men in these top decision-making positions. Since they are not part of these networks, women are often overlooked when it comes to promotions. Despite men and women having similar educational attainments, ambitions,

status, starting salaries, and commitments to their careers, men progress faster, attain higher-status positions, and receive significantly higher compensation than women. Men's relationships with other men play an important role in their ascension to power and prestige. Women haven't created similar networking mechanisms because they haven't historically been an integral force within organizations.

- **Exclusion from Informal Social Gatherings**

The topic of women executives being excluded from informal social gatherings where the foundation for corporate promotion is secretly laid is related, but distinct in its repercussions. This creates an obstacle for women when it comes to building rapport with coworkers, potential customers, and male managers. Corporations can exacerbate women's disadvantages by sponsoring events that are male-only. These social gatherings become ritualized and take on new importance as spaces for the formation of meaningful relationships. Women continue to be the "other," the "outsider," as a result of their exclusion from these informal contact networks. This significantly jeopardizes women's efforts to achieve equality in the workplace, especially in terms of advancement into positions of leadership.

- **Sex Discrimination**

Women in leadership face a significant challenge in the form of sex discrimination. Women's desire to break the glass ceiling is hampered by management's employment stereotypes about women as a collective and conflicting expectation for women. Discriminatory views are often hidden behind false "facts" about women's leadership abilities. Women are portrayed as not being aggressive enough, lacking the necessary self-confidence for the job, and not being committed enough to their careers to advance up the corporate ladder. Prejudices and gender roles, on the other hand, continue because they allow men to maintain their privileged status while keeping women in their place. Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, these myths remain. Many female executives believe that their male counterparts do not take them seriously, and many have mentioned being mistaken for secretaries during business meetings. Although few women in executive positions experience severe anti-women attitudes at work, sexism exists in other ways: Women are simply given less attention than men. Furthermore, female executives with equal roles are typically paid less than their male counterparts. Training in gender awareness, diversity, and fighting sexual harassment are all initiatives that must be implemented to correct existing attitudes against women.

- **Sexual Harassment**

Another critical issue for women in bureaucracies is sexual harassment. An employer uses harassment as a means of power; sexual harassment intimidates and demoralizes women and generates a climate of silence because many women risk losing their jobs if they report sexual harassment. Men believe they have the right to rule women because of patriarchal value systems. Preconceived conceptions of gender roles, according to feminists, are fundamental to this interpretation, since they contribute to a broad variety of laws governing gender-determined attitudes and expectations. The basis for male dominance and the capacity for male harassment or abuse against women is established by society's acceptance of these laws.

- **Lack of Mentors**

The lack of a critical mass of senior or active female role models and mentors is another obstacle to women in leadership. Mentoring is a situation in which an individual with expertise and knowledge in a specific field may actively direct and encourage another person's learning or growth. In most cases, a person in a higher-ranking role provides advice and assistance to someone in a lower-ranking position. Although some businesses and institutions of higher learning have acknowledged the significance and benefit of mentoring for their workers and have placed in place institutional mechanisms to facilitate the process, mentoring is most often done on an informal basis. Women have historically had fewer mentoring opportunities than their male counterparts due to the old-boy network that has been integral to men's mentoring and advancement. Women in executive roles claim that a shortage of female mentoring has hampered their progress up the corporate ladder. Men are more likely to be in strong roles to open doors for those of lower rank since they traditionally hold the highest positions of leadership. This is a significant impediment to women's advancement. Since patriarchy is based on men's relationships with other men, similar solidarity among women is a powerful tool for combating institutional forms and norms that disproportionately exclude women.

Women who have been groomed within the company are likely to be the best candidates for directorships. The diversity agenda and goals must be supplemented with women-friendly work practices, clear management/incentive schemes, and formal/informal mentoring services to build a strong female

talent pipeline. Coaching and mentoring of female directors to prepare them for board positions: At the industry level, it would make sense if corporations and their partners collaborated to form formal and informal mentoring groups for aspiring female executives, similar to the United States' Thirty Percent Club. It would be beneficial if India's leading independent directors taught the next generation of women directors how to be successful board members.

Action, not time, will close the gender leadership gap. Without significant improvements in the community, policies, and procedures of the organizations where women study and operate, women's participation in leadership will not increase significantly. Accountability motivates people to take action, so we need public policy to ensure that businesses follow the rules. This is a solvable problem. We have a lot of work to do to break free from stereotypes about leadership.

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