



Women in Leadership Positions, Opportunities and Challenges

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How to Cite

Rashida Abdul- Rahman (2023). Women in Leadership Positions, Opportunities and Challenges. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies and Innovative Research*, 12(4), 13-21. DOI: 10.53075/Ijmsirq/09843489546576

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Abstract: In order to accomplish organizational objectives, leaders work with subordinates to influence their behavior. This process is known as leadership. Organizational leaders and their leadership philosophies are largely responsible for organizations' success in achieving their goals and objectives throughout the world. Choosing the right leaders and leadership philosophies can have an impact on workers' dedication, job happiness, and output. Even though gender equality is a topic of discussion in the twenty-first century, women are still underrepresented in senior leadership and management roles in businesses worldwide. There is a strong professional argument for having a diverse mix of genders in senior and executive roles within contemporary companies. Research indicates that businesses with the best records for elevating women outperform their rivals in terms of profitability across the board. However, it seems doubtful that women are not achieving high-level positions. This is confirmed by an analysis of recent data on women in the workforce, research on the connection between gender diversity in senior management and business performance, and literature on gender behavioral differences in the workplace. The gender and salary disparity that still exists between men and women in senior leadership roles is examined in this article. It goes on to address several solutions that could be used to handle this situation.

Keywords: Leadership, leadership styles, glass ceiling, women leadership barriers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Men still outnumber women in leadership roles, particularly in upper positions, notwithstanding the remarkable progress made by women in the workplace and in school over the previous 50 years (Hill et al., 2016). Men are just expected to be leaders in many more contexts than women, including business boardrooms, Congress, courts, universities,

and charitable groups. The context in which leadership emerges in the workplace, in the classroom, and in politics is examined in this study. The body of knowledge about women in leadership is extensive and is always growing and changing. It is therefore outside the purview of this work to provide a thorough analysis.

Despite the 21st-century understanding of gender equality, women are still underrepresented in top leadership and management roles in enterprises worldwide (Joan Acker, 2009). This fact represents obstacles that obstruct the achievement of gender parity, ultimately leading to the formation of the glass ceiling effect. Despite these obstacles, some women are able to rise to positions of high leadership and even question the existing quo by serving as prominent academics who investigate the circumstances surrounding women's advancement in the workplace relative to that of males. Previous studies tend to posit individual-level explanations, suggesting either that women who attain top leadership positions are exceptional or that potential women leaders lack key qualities, such as assertiveness and innovation.

2. THE GLASS CEILING

In order to understand why women are not as likely to hold important leadership roles, terms like "glass ceiling" have become commonplace. The term is frequently used to characterize the imperceptible obstacle that hinders women's opportunities for additional promotion or career advancement. The glass ceiling affects women collectively as well, preventing them from progressing merely because they are female. It is not just a barrier for individual women. Many women experience employment setbacks as a result of subtle, indirect barriers brought about by stereotyping or labeling. (2016) Glass, C., and Cook, A. There are several reasons why women experience a glass ceiling. Segregation in the workplace is one significant factor. The workforce still maintains gender segregation, particularly in executive roles. The majority of female executives work in specialized fields like finance, public relations, and people, which rarely rise to the most influential top management positions. Presidents and chief executive officers typically rise through the ranks of the corporate mainstream, a sector where the proportion of women in leadership roles is still relatively small. Even though there are women in high management positions, they are sometimes seen as merely "tokens" in order to protect corporate management from accusations of discrimination because they are rare.

According to many women in leadership roles, continuously exceeding performance standards is the most crucial career strategy for moving up to senior levels (Ragins et al., 1998). Put another way, women need to put in more effort and longer hours than males do in order to advance up the corporate ladder. The male power structure often uses the justification that there aren't enough women in the most influential roles because they lack the necessary education, experience, and maturity. This keeps women from rising to the top of the hierarchy. Put differently, entrances to top leadership milieus have

not been open to women long enough. The bureaucracies that persistently expose a lack of women in desirable executive roles maintain that it will just take time for women to catch up to males in terms of leadership equality. However, a lot of women who are advancing in their careers don't agree with this viewpoint. They contend that the patriarchal principles underlying the leadership hierarchy are the reason why there is a deficiency of gender parity in positions of authority (Stroh et al., 2000). Essentially, systematic prejudice against women prevents them from rising to leadership positions in firms (Gagnon and Cornelius, 2000).

Barriers to Women's Leadership

The idea that fixed gender roles are "natural" has been contested by the women's movement (Elmhirst and Resurreccion, 2012). Rather, gender roles are socially constructed categories that are influenced and reinforced by the pervasive presence of patriarchy in families, communities, and society at large. Therefore, it is essential to question and dismantle these fundamental, patriarchal classification structures. Understanding that men are superior, more powerful, and the "norm," while women are perceived as inferior, lacking in autonomy and authority, and secondary, is essential to the functioning of Western patriarchal society (Cohn 2013).

There is no denying the influence of socialization in starting this system. In actuality, patriarchal, sexist ideals are almost entirely unseen since they are ingrained in society's awareness. Men have built the fundamental fabric of social structure for men, and men only, with men supporting men. In many bureaucracies, both corporate and governmental, men occupy the majority of the higher positions. The majority of women occupy the lesser, supporting roles required to maintain the dominance of this male leadership. As a result, the status, benefits, and authority of individuals in positions of authority—typically men—depend on how inferior women are (Franceschet and Piscopo, 2019). Thus, there are significant ramifications for women in leadership due to this dominance structure. These obstacles to women in leadership roles have been addressed in a number of ways, especially in the workplace. Fair representation of women in businesses, politics, the workforce, unions, and religious institutions is the aim. However, advancing equality within the frameworks upheld by patriarchal ideals has its limitations. Men have grown to see their ideas and customs as emblematic of larger, gender-neutral human organizations because of the presence of male-dominated organizations. The structure is assumed to be asexual from this standpoint. As a result, women's expertise and experiences are undervalued.

Even when women move into leadership positions, they are conditioned by the perspectives and power structures to maintain the status quo; while gender composition may be changed, the underlying structure of power, knowledge, status, and wealth is not challenged. Simply put, male dominance is the main obstacle to women rising to top positions in corporations and politics (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Moreover, the persistence of conventional gender norms in society poses obstacles for women aspiring to advance up the corporate ladder. The idea that it is better for the family if the father works and the mother handles most of the parental duties is mainly supported by current value systems. Negative opinions from friends, family, and coworkers can have a detrimental impact on women's responsibilities in society and at work.

3. LEADERSHIP STYLES

There are multiple types of leaders available in the working world. Every kind of leader motivates, challenges and develops employees in different ways. Their corresponding styles can all inspire different outcomes.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership has gained prominence in recent times. In the current digital era, organizations across all industries are experiencing fast change. Employees under the direction of transformational leaders are inspired, motivated, and encouraged to act in ways that result in significant change. The end result is a motivated workforce with the freedom to create and influence an organization's future achievements. Although transformational leadership is by no means a new concept, its concepts are perfectly adapted to the fast-paced, varied, and highly technical workforce of today. The idea was credited to presidential biographer and leadership specialist James MacGregor Burns in the 1970s. This approach is expanded upon by organizational change and leadership development specialist Kevin Ford. Burns originally recognized it. Ford claims that there are three successful leadership philosophies:

- **Tactical leaders** focus on solving straightforward problems with operations-oriented expertise.
- **Strategic leaders** are very future-focused with an ability to maintain a specific vision while forecasting industry and market trends.
- **Transformational leaders** focus less on making decisions or establishing strategic plans, and more on facilitating organizational collaboration that can help drive a vision forward.

As transformational leaders work with their employees to implement effective change, they rely on things like communication, charisma, adaptability and empathetic support. In practice, this leadership style comprises four primary elements:

- **Individualized consideration:** In order to provide the right kind of support, transformational leaders pay attention to the needs and problems of their staff. They function under the knowledge that an individual's motivation might not be shared by another. Because of this, they may modify their management approaches to suit different team members.
- **Inspirational motivation** — It takes a transformational leader to be able to express a cohesive vision that inspires team members to go above and beyond. They are aware that workers with a clear sense of purpose are the most driven. These managers don't hesitate to confront staff members. They are adept at giving the work at hand purpose and never lose hope in their future ambitions.
- **Idealized influence** — Transformational leaders model ethical behavior. Their moral conduct earns a necessary level of respect and trust. This can help leaders steer decision-making that works to improve the entire organization.
- **Intellectual stimulation** Transformational leaders frequently question presumptions, take chances, and ask for the opinions and suggestions of their team members. Instead of being afraid of failing, they create an atmosphere where it is acceptable to engage in dialogue, express creativity, and express differing viewpoints. This gives workers the freedom to learn new skills, exercise more autonomy, and eventually figure out how to do jobs more successfully.

Transactional leadership

Transactional leadership, sometimes referred to as managerial leadership, is a type of leadership in which managers use rewards and penalties to get the best work out of their staff members. An exchange or transaction serves as the foundation for the transactional executive leadership approach. Workers who complete their jobs to the required standards are rewarded by the boss, and those who fall short face consequences. This dynamic between a leader and their followers is predicated on beliefs that hold that people require structure, guidance, and oversight in order to perform their jobs because they lack self-motivation. Additionally, according to the

notion, employees will carry out their jobs as directed by a transactional leader if the leader provides something the employees desire, like compensation.

The three approaches to transactional leadership are the following:

- **Contingency.** Transactional leadership uses reinforcement theory and extrinsic motivation based on a system of rewards, incentives and punishment. Employees earn contingent rewards and perks if they reach their goal.
- **Active management by exception.** Transactional leaders rely on active monitoring by default to anticipate issues and take corrective action in response to problems.
- **Passive management by exception.** Transactional leaders stay out of the team's way by default and only intervene when employee performance expectations aren't met.

These methods are used in combination with each other to achieve transactional leadership.

Transactional leadership characteristics

Transactional leadership assumes that there are superiors and subordinates, and that subordinates demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Not self-motivated;
- Motivated by reward and punishment;
- Follow clearly defined goals; and
- Must be closely monitored and managed.

The ideal setting for a transactional leadership style is one that is structured, with limited exceptions to set business procedures and clearly defined roles with assigned duties. This kind of leader operates inside the pre-existing structure of a company, according to transactional leadership theory. A transactional leader aims to get clearly defined, quantifiable outcomes from their subordinates. These are also known as SMART goals, which stand for precise, measurable, realistic, achievable, and time-bound. A transactional leader evaluates subordinates on whether they meet defined requirements and expected results. Transactional leaders appeal to the self-interest of their subordinates to keep them on track.

4. LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP

Laissez-faire leadership allows individuals to make decisions on their own initiative and adopts a hands-off style. Although leaders continue to give their teams the means and instruments necessary for success, they mainly stay out of the day-to-day operations. This type of leadership is frequently seen in creative environments, like startups or advertising agencies, because it promotes autonomous thought.

A laissez-faire leader stands out in a big way. Some of the most typical traits of this leadership style are listed below:

- The ability to effectively delegate work
- A high level of trust in team members
- An understanding of when to step in and when to give space
- A focus on the big picture instead of the day-to-day
- The capacity to reward good work and create incentives

5. AUTOCRATIC LEADERSHIP

An autocratic leadership style works best in situations where executing absolute control in a time of battle or crisis is necessary. We look to leaders in those situations to make the difficult decisions and to communicate and execute a strategy with an unwavering focus. For example, this style may be used by military leaders executing strategy on the battlefield, or by a leader overseeing an active and dangerous emergency. These are situations with high stakes and consequences, and where the wrong decision can come at a huge cost. During these times, it's important for there to be one clear voice giving direction. An autocratic leadership style, when used outside of an applicable context (ex. military leader) can drive discontent, high attrition, and fear among employees.

6. PROMOTING WOMEN INTO TOP POSITIONS

The emphasis here is on women taking on leadership roles within companies. Regarding the implications of women holding executive roles, two convictions are pertinent. In order to offer diversity to management teams, women are generally required to use different leadership philosophies than men. Furthermore, it is expected of women to rise to leadership roles by demonstrating their capacity to muster the toughness and effectiveness characteristic of top-level executives. (O' Brien, 2015) posited that both convictions stem from gender leadership beliefs, and that these interact with women's self-views to determine the effectiveness of female leaders. The interaction between organizational principles and individual self-definitions is explained by the construction of an integrated model, which has implications for female leadership (Ellemers et al., 2012). The model enables us to establish a connection between "glass cliff" and "queen bee" effects, demonstrating how both are related to the perceived importance of gender in the workplace and individual gender identities. All of these phenomena could negatively impact women's ability to pursue careers in the future, either individually or collectively. The

model further outlined how future research may build on the proposed model and examine its further implications. The model may also offer a concrete starting point for developing policies to enhance the effectiveness of women in leadership positions.

Advantages of Having Women in Leadership Positions

Dezso and Ross (2012) make the case that having more women in senior management benefits the team's informational and social diversity, enhances the behaviors of managers throughout the company, and inspires women in middle management. Better firm performance and enhanced managerial task performance could be the outcome. The possibility of a female leadership advantage has recently come up for discussion in the public press and academic journals, despite data showing that men are generally thought to be more suitable and effective than women in leadership roles (Paustian-Underdahl, and Walker, 2014). In order to address this topic, a meta-analysis was conducted that quantitatively summarizes the variations between genders in the views of leadership effectiveness across 99 independent samples from 95 research. The findings indicate that there is no discernible difference in the perceived effectiveness of leadership between men and women across all leadership scenarios. However, women are assessed as substantially more effective than males when other ratings are the only factors considered (Paustian-Underdahl and Walker, 2014). Men estimate themselves much more effective than women do, however, when self-ratings alone are considered. Furthermore, contextual moderators derived from role congruity theory are also examined in this synthesis (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The results contribute to the expansion of role congruity theory by showing how it may be extended to include both female and male leaders, as well as how it can be supported by other theories found in the literature. (Record (c) 2020 PsycInfo Database)

Women in the Economy and Workplace

Women now make up a larger and more important portion of the workforce, and their incomes and purchasing power are vital to the nation's economic health. Women are quite powerful in the eyes of consumers. Women are often referred to as the primary buyers in the household in the "she-economy" (Johns, 2013). According to reports, they decide on over 85% of household expenditures, including expensive things like investments and automobile purchases, which total \$4 trillion in discretionary spending yearly. From slightly more than a third of all workers in 1970 to almost half of all workers in 2012, women now make up a larger percentage of the workforce. Women make up 77.4% of the workforce in the healthcare and education sectors, which has an even greater ratio. Women are graduating from

college at a rate that is increasing; since 1970, the percentage of bachelor's degrees awarded to women has increased by 20% to 60%. Women's roles in the workforce have evolved along with their level of education. Nowadays, a greater proportion of women have jobs in management, professional, and allied fields; according to reports, 51% of women hold these positions (Johns, 2013).

In another study, the US General Accounting Office (GAO) discovered that, between 1983 and 2000, women made around 44% less than men, even after adjusting for any factor that might have an impact on earnings (Gao, L., & Zhang, J. H. 2015). Upon adjusting for independent variables linked to demographic traits, prior employment history, and labor market activity, the study discovered that the salary disparity had decreased to roughly 21% during this duration. This suggested that over this time, pay disparities have decreased somewhat but statistically significantly. The GAO report came to the following conclusion: Research also reveals that working moms experience a higher salary disparity than non-mothering women (Zhang and Hannum, 2018). Mothers still earn less per child than working women without children, even after taking into consideration disparities in work experience, education, job characteristics, and other variables. This discrepancy is as much as 7%. Additionally, according to data from the GAO research mentioned above, moms lost 2.5 percent of their earnings for every kid while husbands gained 2.1 percent.

Gender Diversity in Executive Healthcare Leadership

Despite the fact that women make up over 78% of the workforce in the healthcare industry, there is still a sizable gender disparity in executive leadership and senior management (Johns, 2013). The American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE) released a white paper on gender in senior healthcare management. The paper's main findings stated that while both genders could move up the organizational ladder, only 11% of women in the field had become CEOs, compared to 25% of men. The study also discovered that compared to women (46 percent), a larger percentage of men (62%) worked in general management. Women tended to work in specialized areas such as nursing services, planning, marketing, and quality assurance, which are not the usual career routes to executive leadership positions. These findings mirror those of the 1995 report of the Glass Ceiling Commission, cited above, which found that women frequently are not in the type of senior positions that are part of the usual pipeline or career pathway to executive positions.

There is a pay difference between men and women in leadership roles, according to the ACHE white paper. In 2000, women reported an average yearly wage of \$84,900, while males claimed an average

salary of \$104,300. This is despite the fact that women had reached levels of education and experience comparable to those of men. This indicates a total 19% reduction in the pay gap. Furthermore, the difference in pay was not appreciably smaller than that shown in research between 1990 and 1995, when women who shared the same traits as men were paid, on average, 18 and 17 percent less. ACHE's 2006 follow-up research report observed a slight increase in the number of women in senior hospital administration positions. According to this survey, the percentage of women who held CEO roles in 2006 was almost 63%, compared to 40% in three earlier studies. In specialized management fields, women continued to be more involved than men; 44 percent of women and 57 percent of men had jobs in general management. Even with comparable qualities, women were still paid 18% less than males overall due to the persistent salary disparity.

These results have implications for upward mobility to the C-suite for health information management (HIM) professionals, a profession composed predominately of women (92 percent). It would be expected that women in HIM would be subject to the same barriers to upward mobility similar to those faced by other women in healthcare (ML Johns).

Gender Diversity and the Bottom Line

Women's educational attainment and labor market participation have consistently improved, but in recent years, their progress into higher managerial positions has stagnated. As to the Catalyst census statistics, women accounted for 14.7% of board seats in Fortune 500 companies in 2001. By 2011, a decade later, this percentage had only gone up to 16.1 percent. The same study data shows that in 2002, women held 15.7% of Fortune 500 corporate officer positions; this percentage stayed relatively constant until 2008. According to Catalyst's 2011 census, there are no women on the boards of directors of 56 US Fortune 500 businesses. The business case for women in senior leadership is compelling. Studies conclude that inclusion of women in the top ranks of company leadership has a direct and positive impact on a company's bottom line and risk management. Adler carried out the first empirical analysis to demonstrate a significant relationship between a company's track record of elevating women into executive positions and good profitability. This study used both longitudinal and historical performance data to analyze the practices of 215 Fortune 500 companies during a 19-year period, from 1980 to 1998. Profits as a percentage of revenues, assets, stockholders' equity, and a company's competitiveness in comparison to its industry median counterpart were the four measures of profitability that were examined. The outcomes demonstrated a strong link. On all profitability metrics, Fortune 500 companies with a

high proportion of female leaders performed better than the median company in their category.

The study also revealed that firms with the very best scores for promoting women were consistently more profitable than those companies whose scores were rated as good. Similar results were found in a research done by Catalyst in January 2004. This study assessed the financial performance and gender diversity in the senior management of 353 organizations. Enough financial data was available to assess businesses in five distinct industries: financial, industrial, consumer staples, consumer discretionary, and information technology or telecommunications services. The companies were assessed using two financial metrics. Among these were total return to shareholders (TRS) and return on equity (ROE). The results demonstrated a connection between strong financial success and gender diversity in top management. Businesses that had more women in senior management positions performed better financially than those that had less women in those positions. Both the TRS and ROE increased by 34% and 35%, respectively. In a global partnership with the Women's Forum for the Economy and Society, McKinsey and Company conducted a study of European companies and found that companies with strong female representation on their boards or in top management outperformed financially in terms of diversity. In particular, between 2005 and 2007, these companies did better than their industry in terms of operating results, return on equity, and stock price growth.

A 2016 study by Dezso and Ross revealed a favorable correlation between improved firm performance and the proportion of women in senior management roles, including CEO positions. Additionally, Welbourne's research in a sample of initial public offering (IPO) enterprises found an empirical link between the performance of the company and the presence of women in top management. In the short and long terms, the equities of publicly traded companies with a higher percentage of female executives outperformed those with fewer or no female executives. With such compelling evidence of the link between gender diversity in top management positions to positive financial performance, what is holding women back in closing the gender gap in senior management positions?

7. WHAT'S HOLDING WOMEN BACK?

As previously mentioned, the Glass Ceiling Commission report from 1995 identified four types of impediments that kept women from moving up into senior and executive management positions. These included structural, governmental, social, and internal corporate impediments. These impediments are still the main ones preventing women from moving up the corporate ladder to senior

management positions. For instance, the Joint Economic Committee identified an antiquated social support structure as the main barrier to women's upward mobility. The lack of institutionalized support for working families in the United States creates a patchwork social support system that hinders women's advancement, especially in the work-family arena. This results in economic losses for the country as women struggle to balance the demands of both work and home life.

The same report pointed out that the United States' approach to federally funded parental leave contrasts sharply with peer country members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), where new parents' job-projected leave averages 18 weeks as opposed to 12 weeks in the US. The US was the only country in the OECD without mandatory paid parental leave as of January 2011. Another factor holding women back is the absence of flexible work schedules. In American society, women usually take on the primary responsibility of providing early care. However, the US early childhood education system is still underfunded and inadequate. Women also take on the responsibility of caring for elderly parents or other family members. A woman's job and lifespan are devoted to providing care, and there is little assistance available for this duty. Consequently, women often need to take professional leave in order to fulfill the duty of caregiver. The consequences for women who "off-ramp" and quit their jobs are still severe. Off-ramps like this prevent women from pursuing or being given consideration for promotions, and when they do reenter the workforce, it is challenging for them to acquire momentum and achieve parity with males in terms of earning potential and promotions.

Women's capacity to go up the organizational ladder is often hampered by the lack of a sponsor who markets and sells their strengths to other members of the team. According to a 2009 study funded by American Express, Deloitte, Intel, and Morgan Stanley, women either fail to cultivate sponsorship or misunderstand its importance in promoting career mobility. The reasons for this range from senior men's and women's unwillingness to form a sponsorship relationship because it can be mistaken for sexual attraction to women's beliefs that using connections to advance in life is improper.

Women also face challenges due to gender stereotypes and disparities in gender communication. Women who exhibit too little or too much independence, competitiveness, or assertiveness may be penalized due to gender stereotypes. Women tend to communicate in a warmer, less directed, and more moderated manner than men do, for instance. This kind of communication has the potential to diminish

confidence in women's skills. However, a woman's impact and likeability may be diminished if she displays an excessive amount of assertiveness, which goes against the image. The evaluation of women's abilities differs from that of males. As per ML Johns, "People hold women to a higher standard of competence and evaluate female managers and leaders more critically than their male counterparts, and they judge women's abilities more harshly than men."

8. BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING

Breaking the glass ceiling is difficult and requires action on numerous fronts. Federal and state governments, employers, academic institutions, and women themselves are essential players in breaking down barriers that are holding them (women) back. The government may overcome the barriers that currently prevent women from advancing in the workplace by using a variety of methods. By raising awareness of gender inequality, the advantages of gender equality, and the negative effects of male gender bias on women, children, families, communities, the business sector, and the country as a whole, the government can serve as a catalyst for the promotion of gender equality perspectives and practices. Legislation and governmental policies have the power to eliminate discriminatory practices and erroneous barriers, while initiatives and programs can deepen our knowledge of the most effective ways to do so. In order to remove obstacles that prevent women from advancing, it is also necessary to effectively execute the monitoring and enforcement of current laws prohibiting gender discrimination.

9. CONCLUSION

Before the glass barrier can be smashed, employers must take the initiative to demonstrate their commitment to gender justice and diversity. In addition, leadership development programs should be created with the goal of assisting women in gaining the essential skills for leadership, as well as assisting them in recognizing and utilizing their own strengths, growing more confident, and learning how to take calculated risks. Developing networks of support, looking for sponsors within their working organizations, finding mentors, promoting oneself, and articulating the value they offer to the workplace are all additional ways that women may help themselves build their own social capital.

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