

Top management unwilling to break glass ceiling?

The impact of the policies in improving the socio economic status of women has been limited



The number of women enrolled and graduating from management institutions has gone from 25 per cent to 39 per cent in 2014 in India but their participation in managerial/administrative position is still a measly 12 per cent in India as compared to USA (43 per cent) , Norway (41 per cent), Australia (33 per cent) and UK (17 per cent). This is in spite of the fact that India is far ahead of many developing nations in providing legislation and introducing several positive initiatives for women. The policies in India are directed towards women being an important resource to national development rather than a target of welfare program, yet the impact of these policies in improving the socio economic status of women has been limited.

This poor representation of women in managerial/administrative positions may reflect the unwillingness of top management to break the glass ceiling. Glass Ceiling was defined by Morrison and Van Glinow as a barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women and minorities from moving up the management ladder.

Several studies, both academic and governmental, have shown that despite the efforts to increase diversity, women still face the glass-ceiling when it comes to top management jobs in the private sector. A study of women professionals in India found that there was a definite lack of gender sensitive policies by the employers, which proved to be a significant barrier in the career advancement of the women professionals.

In a recent global study done by Bain & Company, women entered the workforce in large numbers, but steadily vaporize from the higher echelons of organization hierarchy. The data shows that in 2014, only 3 per cent of Fortune 500 companies had a female CEO. In Europe, women constitute just 12 per cent of the boards of directors of FTSE 100 companies, while 25 per cent of these companies still have all-male boards. The situation is worse in India. There are only 4 per cent women directors on the boards of 8,000 companies listed on the BSE, of which only 2 per cent are independent women directors. Research by Forum for Women in Leadership establishes that the glass ceiling exists for women executives at all levels, with over 75 per cent of women executives in corporate India stagnating for 7 to 15 years in the mid-level executive positions

The [Companies Act](#), 2013, passed by parliament in August last year, makes it mandatory for public and private firms with an annual turnover of at least Rs 3 billion to have at least one female director by Oct. 1, 2014.

Laws should not be the driving force behind having women directors, but because it makes good business sense. Recent research done by Harvard revealed that the companies with women in their Boards provide better financial returns than those without.

In a report marking International Women's Day, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) found that women are joining the workforce in record numbers but they are still not paid as much as men, are not educated as well as them and are more likely to get fired, causing stress in women workers as they have to strive harder to make their mark. The report further stated that around 81.8 million or 6.6 percent women were stuck in low productivity jobs where they received less money than men for doing the same work. They experienced a persistent gap in status, job security, wages and education compared to their male colleagues.

In fact, a woman's career development does not just lag behind that of a man but may proceed in a completely different manner. It is noted that the patterns of education, full-time career, retirement are based on the typical working lives of men but there are no typical working pattern for modern women. Women by nature give birth to children and thus their life-cycles are vastly different than those of men, but society and organisations continue to view women within the conformed traditional stereotype parameters set for male workers for centuries.

A recent survey by Bain & Company sent a strong message to business leaders that the majority of employees do not see the current initiatives aimed at helping achieve gender parity as successful. The single most important test employees put their organization to: the number of women rising to the top. The survey results reveal the frustration employees feel with their organization's insensitivity to the progression of male and female career paths.

With the growing number of women in management, future productivity may depend on an organization's ability to integrate women into the mainstream of organizational life. Thus the ability to recognize, and act on, any negative demands in female managers' working lives would allow them to survive and prosper alongside their male counterparts.



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