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Glass Ceiling and Imposter Phenomenon: Psychological Challenges in Career Advancement

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Abstract

The glass ceiling denotes the unseen barriers that stem from personal, organizational or societal attitude and challenges, hindering women's progression on management positions. A career encompasses all the endeavors an individual engages in to progress thought their professional life, specially, the career choices of women in the public sector are largely influenced by their own decisions, followed by family, social and organizational circumstances. Multiple researches have examined the effects of the glass ceiling on women career advancement their finding indicates that the extent of the glass ceiling's influence on women's professional growth can very depending on the specific occupation and may differ from one nation to another. Studies carried out by chen (2005) discovered a significant and positive correlation between various career tracking strategies, such as advances education and training internal networking, formal mentoring and exceeding performance expectations, as well as women's advancement to senior executive positions. Thenumber barriers of glass ceiling hinder a significant number of women and ethnic minorities from acquiring and maintaining the most influential, esteemed, and highest -paying positions in the workforce. Furthermore, this phenomenon obstructs women from attaining senior roles places them at a disadvantage as prospective candidates for promotion. It has been observed that women progress into higher level corporate positions at a diminishing rate, s gender balance is achieved relatively swiftly at the lowers tiers of the management hierarchy in contrast to the upper levels of management.

Keywords: Glass Ceiling, Imposter Syndrome, Career Advancement, Women Empowerment.

Introduction

Contrary to common belief, the proportion of women engaging in the labor force has been decreasing over the last few years. In 2018, the labor force participation rate for women stood at 48.5 percent, a drop from 51.4 percent in 1990 (catalyst, 2010 In India, the rate of women participation in the labor force has declined from 35.1 percent in 1990 to 27.2 percent in 2017 (catalyst, 2010). Women are significantly underrepresented in senior management roles compared to men. This suggest that certain obstacles exist that hinder women's career development, particularly in attaining management positions. Typically, these obstacles

accompany them from the start to the conclusion of their careers. These obstacles are commonly known as glass ceiling barriers.

Glass Ceiling

The term 'glass ceiling' describes the unseen and unofficial obstacles in the corporate environment that hinder women and minorities. Although they may steadily advance in their careers, they often fail to attain the highest positions, irrespective of their educational qualifications, experience and accomplishments (Eagly& Carly,2007). It has been observed that women progress into higher level corporate position sat a diminishing rate, as gender balance is achieved relatively swiftly at the lower tiers of the management hierarchy in contrast to the upper of management. The glass ceiling hinders organizations from maximizing the potential of their human resources; thus, itnecedditates the dismantling of the glass ceiling in today's competitive landscape. Sampson & moore (2008), it has been established that there is a wage gap between men and women within the development field. Women may progress to director -level roles; however, they face barriers that prevent them from advancing further, despite having comparable experience and qualifications to their male counterparts.

Jain & Mukherji (2010) there is a notice prevalence of male dominance in senior roles, coupled with a lack of commitment and enthusiasm from top executives regarding the support of women's career development and advancement was discovered to varied by country and by the type of occupation, Demoski et.al, 2010. Manaras(2013), conducted studies that revealed a significant glass ceiling on women's job progression. Additionally, when 234 faculty members from 42 colleges in haryana participated in the study by sharma et.al (2019), it was discovered that women respondent confirmed that they are unhappy with their jobs and that they are over -represented at lower positions, and they are the target of bias. Despite the existence of laws and regulations promoting gender equality, it was found that responders differed greatly based on that distinction.

Imposter Syndrome

The imposter phenomena (IP) refer to an internal perception of intellectual and professional inadequacy, even in t exposed as unintelligence face of objective evidence that contradicts this belief (Clance & Imes,1978). Individuals experiencing this phenomenon often attributes their achievement to luck or mistakes, and they endure a persistent anxiety of being exposed as unintelligent or less competent (jostl et.al.,2012). It has been proposed that approximately 70% of individuals from various background experience feeling of being imposer at least during some phase of their professional journey. (Ggravois,2007). Nevertheless , the function of IP concerning career advancement is still ambiguous. Do individual with imposter syndrome possess well-defined career strategies to cope with their insecurities? or do the fears associated with imposter syndrome hinder those affected from pursuing higher levels of career progression or roles that entail greater responsibility and authority? Anxiety, depression and burnout are likely to be associated with imposter syndrome. Over preparation, procrastination, and working longer hours can make these effects worse. Physician will also avoid opportunities for promotion or growth due to fear of being exposed. The lack of promotion reinforces feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Imposter syndrome is isolating. The phrase" glass ceiling" denotes the obstacles encounters by women aspiring to attain promotions to senior management roles within official workplace, private sectors, educational

institutions or various other organizations. It can also be characterized as invisible and unyielding barriers that hinder women's career progression to elevated positions(sezen,2008).

The Glass-Ceiling-A Reflection of Inner Barriers

The barriers of the glass ceiling hinder a significant number of women and ethnic minorities from acquiring and maintain the most influential, esteemed and highest-paying positions in the workforce. Furthermore, this phenomenon obstructs women from attaining denier roles and paces them at a disadvantage as prospective candidates for promotions. women encounter considerable obstacles in their pursuit of leadership roles due to deeply rooted societal and cultural expectations (Buse, 2013), personal barriers encompass a lack of self-esteem to challenges. And unequal treatment, all of which impede the career advancement of women in corporate settings (sharma & kaur,2019). These obstacles often create barriers that hinder women from cultivating the robust self-esteem and confidence essential for advancing their careers. Societal expectations compel women to place family responsibilities above career progression, thereby reinforcing the belief that they are less dedicated or qualified for leadership roles, consequently encounter criticism concerning their capacity to juggle work and family duties, which further hinders their professional development. (chanda,2024). The prevailing opinion among the populace Is that men ought to serve as the primary earners, whereas women should assume the roles pf homemakers or mothers. Impediments present themselves in various forms, including gender stereotypes, conventional gender roles, workplace biases and opposition to female authority in numerous cultures, women are anticipated to place family obligations above their careers, which may result in career breaks and slower professional growth (Williams,2013). The belief that women should handle most household tasks further adds to the concepts of the 'second shift'. Where they are required to balance both work and home responsibilities, (Dogutas, 2024). Organization frequently do not have policies that promote work-life balance, like flexible working options or parental leave, which disproportionately hinder women's career advancement (Buss et al.,2025).

Women Career Advancement

According to Thurasimy et al. (20110), career progression is the process of moving up the organization hierarchy in term of work level, position and title as well as rising earnings or income. An employee is regarded as having a fair and equal chance to advance to a higher position or transfer to another functional area within an organization for the purpose of experience or personal growth. (Callanan & greenhaus,1999). When a qualified individual is prevented from advancing to a higher level in an organization's hierarchy because of racism, sexism, discrimination, or prejudice, this is known as a "glass ceiling" the term "glass ceiling inequality" describes gender disparities that are unrelated to an employee's job qualifications. The glass ceiling appeared to be a phenomenon that was primarily associated with women (afza & newaz, 2008), women seem to have reached a stage where, even in situation where there is a clear path to advancement, they are unable to advance farther.

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promotions. Moreover, the glass ceiling barriers exist across all areas of employment, regardless of the sectors, levels, and nature of work involved. It is essential to examine the reasons why women in India, regardless of the sector they are employed in, do not have equal opportunities for advancement in their workplaces. Therefore, an effort is made to comprehend the elements that contribute to the glass ceiling barriers, which in turn impact the career progression of women in India.

Numerous scholars have studied the impact of the glass ceiling on women 's job advancement. It was discovered that the impact of the glass ceiling on women's job advancement variesby country and based on the type of profession. research by Dimovski, Skerlavai, and Man (2010)

According to (Morgan 1993) and (Manasra,2013), there is a significant glass ceiling that Prevents women from advancing in their areers. Fiurthmore, prior empirical research (cook & Glass, 2014; Ryan & Haslam, 2007) revealed that women were more likely than men to be assigned to jobs that were already linked to subpar business performance.

Shattering the Internal Glass Ceiling

Women worldwide have utilized different strategies to shatter the glass ceiling, with case studies demonstrating their effectiveness in both developed and developing nations. The following section highlights several significant, strategies that women have implemented to rise in leadership in the 21st century.

- Work life integration- the gender gap in education has decreased as a result of women's notable advancements in the field of education and a number of non-traditional occupations through many decades.

- Networking and mentorship- in the economic sector, the concept of the "glass ceiling" has unavoidably existed. Biases like the idea that men are "natural leaders", that working mothers" cannot offer their best at work", or that they are " too sensitive, and the idea that " there is no place for people who speak quietly in the business sector "has only served to reinforce the glass ceiling's persistence and the belief that "those who speak quietly have no place in the business sector" has only served to reinforce the glass ceiling's existence.

- Inclusive policy project- UN Women harnessed the energy and commitment of 25 online volunteers to help launch the Knowledge Gateway for Women's Economic Empowerment, http://www.empowerwomen.org, an innovative online platform that provides women and girls with knowledge sharing and learning opportunities to help them take charge of their economic future (UNV 2016).the Ministry of Women and Child Development, along with Home Affairs, launched the Mahila Police Volunteers scheme in all States and Union Territories. Support to Training and Employment Program for Women. Launched under the startup India initiative, it was launched as a Central Sector Scheme in 1986-87. The programme of STEP aims to make a significant impact on women by upgrading skills for self and wage employment. Women Helpline Scheme is one of the government schemes for women empowerment that intends to give 24*7.

- Learning and development-societal norms frequently link leadership with characteristics traditionally associated with men, such as assertiveness and decisions, whereas women are anticipated to embody nurturing and communal traits (Eagly,2016). This resistance can present itself through workplace discrimination, exclusion from leadership networks, and doubts regarding women's capabilities to lead (koening,2011). Women who confront these societal norms may encounter backlash, which further complicates their acceptance in leadership roles (OCED,2020).

- Cultivating Assertive Communication- An improvement in women's work involvement, there are still relatively few women in managerial roles. As women must put in more effort than men and compete against males to demonstrate their ability at the same professional position level, gender stereotyping does have an impact on women's career advancement. (Thurasamy et.al.,2011). Women are assigned less important jobs than their male coworkers because they are perceived as feminine dependent, and less physically, cognitively, and emotionally capable. (Afza & Newaz,2008).

Gender Diversity Policies and Inclusive Work Environment

Organisations such as Microsoft, IBM and Cisco Systems have taken significant steps towards promoting women's leadership by implementing gender diversity policies aimed at fostering inclusive workplace cultures. This includes establishing clear metrics for diversity within leadership positions and holding leaders accountable for inclusivity. Furthermore, organisations that implement gender diversity policies see The emergence of globalization in contemporary India, women typically face a considerable disadvantage when compared to men across all vital areas of life, including education, income, partner selection, property rights, decision-making processes, and access to managerial or leadership roles in education, business and politics. improvements in innovation, employee satisfaction, and financial performance (Woetzel et al., 2015). In Norway, the government implemented a quota system requiring that 40% of board members in publicly listed companies be women (Gidlund, 2017). Although women hold a crucial position within families and society in today's context. Globally, there has been much discussion about giving women equal pay for comparable labor and opportunities for growth in the workplace, however there a discrepancy between men and women in everyday life (sampson && Moore,2008).

The Imposter Syndrome: Feeling Like a Fraud

An imposter impact woman more significantly and in diverse ways compared to men. This section explores how the imposter phenomenon is linked to women, how it manifests more frequently among them, and the distinct ways in which women encounter imposter feelings, such as perceiving themselves as less intelligent and experiencing a heightened fear of success.

Women also face specific cultural expectations, particularly in corporate settings that can intensify their feelings of being an imposter. Feelings of imposter syndrome at work can affect a person's productivity in a variety of ways. Instead of giving their job their all, imposters frequently spend a lot of time doubting themselves, going over their work again, or over preparing for assignments. Imposters overthink even the most routine duties since they don't analyse they're qualified for their positions and can't do them. She also talks about how some people who suffer from the imposter phenomenon put off doing their work, particular a new project, because "they

fear that it would disclose their incompetence to others one's wellbeing can be seriously weakened by encounters with the imposter phenomenon, which has an impact on both their personal and professional relationships. Clance and Otoole (1988) observe in their examination of imposter syndrome that whereas imposter feelings do not always hinder achievement, but should nevertheless be taken into account and dealt with since imposter lack a complete understanding of their own levels of skill, which leaves them unable to completely integrate their strengths, accept their failures and take pleasure in their job. Additionally, they might not even try achieve their goals or decline chances to progress. This may harm their emotional well being and prevent them from finding fulfilment in their employment.

Interplay between the Glass Ceiling & Imposter Phenomenon

Implication for mental health and work place productivity. Feeling of imposter syndrome can have both positive and negative effects on a leader. Although imposter's perfectionism inclinations might produce driven and committed hard workers, they also seriously impair one's capacity to persevere as an employee and(Gottlieb et al., 2019) leader. According to Rice and Liu (2020), perfectionist tendencies can produce high -achieving, meticulous workers who are appreciated managers. However, at their worst these traits can also indicate warning indications of personal and professional problems, such as being duly critical of supervisees or finding it difficult to take ears, some research have looked at the connection between imposter phenomenon and work, but few have particularly looked at the relationship take breaks, some research have looked at the connection between imposter phenomenon and work, but few have particularly looked at the relationship between imposter phenomenon and leadership. When they succeed, women may feel more anxious since they often have lower expectations for themselves. Women who experience imposter syndrome express more anxiety about succeeding. Women n frequently set lower goals for themselves, which may contribute to their more moderate scores, according to Fried Buchalter (1997), even though men and women scored equally on tests of fear of failure. But compared to males who experienced similar sensation, women who felt loke imposter tended to be more resilient in the face of criticism (Badaway et.al., 2018). According to this, women are more likely than males to have imposter syndrome when confronted with obstacles that reinforce their imposter syndrome, even when they also have a higher fear of success.

Moving Forward: Breaking Barriers and Building Confidence

Experience with the imposter phenomenon can greatly impair one's well being and affect one's relationship in both the personal and professional spheres. According to Clance and O'Toole's (1988) analysis of imposter syndrome, although imposter feelings do not always impede success, but in spite of this, they should be considered and addressed since imposter are unable to fully integrate their strengths. Experience with the imposter phenomenon can greatly impair one's well -being and accept their shortcomings and enjoy their because they do not fully comprehend their proficiency levels.. They may also not even make an effort to reach their objectives or turn down opportunities for advancement. They might experience emotional distress and be unable to find job satisfaction as a result. Imposter syndrome's affective impacts on mental health are discussed in Clance and O'Toole (1988) examined the necessity of using therapy sessions to examine one's socialization of femininity and the shame that goes along with it. Formalized procedures are also recommended by other scholars. Strategies,

such customized coaching programs or official training sessions at work, to help people get over imposter syndrome (Neureiter& Traut-Mattausch, 2016; Ramsey & Spencer, 2019).

The barriers created by the glass ceiling inhibit many women and ethnic minorities from acquiring and maintaining the most influential, esteemed, and highest-paying positions in the workforce. Additionally, this phenomenon hampers women's ability to occupy senior roles and disadvantages them as viable candidates for promotions. Furthermore, the glass ceiling barriers exist across all areas of employment, regardless of the sectors, levels, and types of work involved.

It is crucial to investigate the reasons why women in India, irrespective of their respective sectors, face disparities in opportunities for career growth within the workplace. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the elements that contribute to the glass ceiling barriers, which consequently impact the professional advancement of women in India.

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of the glass ceiling phenomenon on women career advancement in organizations. In order to break the glass ceiling, it is necessary to reorganize the structural cultural and psychological underpinnings of leadership so that the road to the top is no longer paved with imperceptible but firmly established obstacles. This problem becomes more severe in the context of technical and vocational education and training (TVET), a field that has traditionally and culturally been dominated by men. As a female principal who has overcome discrimination, defied conventional gender norms, and carried out internal transformation, The study found that higher levels of diversity management and female role models have a stronger moderating effect on the relationship between imposter syndrome, career expectations, work-family balance, employee engagement, career advancement and organizational commitment whilst lower levels of diversity management and female role models have a weaker moderating effect on these relationships. Flexible work arrangements have become increasingly important in supporting women's leadership. Organisations that offer flexible hours, remote work options, and family support policies tend to attract and retain more women in senior positions

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