Disparities in Leadership Roles for Women in the Modern Workspace with special reference to Healthcare and Corporate: A Case Analysis

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Abstract

Many professions impose obstacles for women, leading to the disproportionate presence of men in top positions. Research indicates that women occupy less than one-third of leadership roles worldwide, with figures of just 37 per cent in the US and 3 per cent in Canada. Despite women constituting a majority in certain industries and achieving parity with men in entry-level positions, their representation in leadership roles still needs to improve. Traditional notions regarding women, including gender biases, hinder their potential and impede their ability to seize opportunities for leadership advancement. This could adversely affect women's self-esteem and ability to perform effectively under pressure. This study investigates gender disparities in leadership roles and notes that women who attain positions of authority in their organisations face limitations in realising their full potential. Further, it delves into the historical context, societal norms, entrenched institutional structures, and ingrained cultural biases contributing to this imbalance. The study extends to explore the reasons impacting women's employment prospects, including challenges in achieving work-life balance, absence of coaching opportunities, and unequal access to professional development programs. Finally, the research examines the effectiveness of policies and initiatives — such as mentorship programs, inclusive and multicultural promotion practices, and legislative reforms aimed at fostering a more equitable and inspiring work — implemented by legislators and organisations to address this gender gap. This case study research employs exploratory and descriptive methodologies to illuminate the barriers hindering women's ascent to leadership roles.

Keywords: Gender bias, Women in leadership, Work-life balance, Uneven representation, Career barriers

Introduction:

Despite progress, a persistent gender gap remains in leadership positions across industries. This paper delves into the multifaceted factors contributing to this underrepresentation of women, further analysing the downstream effects on organisational performance and efforts towards diversity and inclusion.

The underrepresentation of women in leadership is a longstanding issue that has garnered increasing attention in recent years. Despite advancements in gender equality and diversity initiatives, women remain disproportionately represented in executive, managerial, and academic leadership positions.

Addressing gender disparities in leadership is a matter of social justice and equity and is critical for promoting organisational effectiveness and innovation. This research explores the link between diverse leadership teams and improved outcomes, including enhanced decision-making, employee engagement,

and financial performance. Organisations that fail to leverage the full potential of women as leaders miss out on the valuable perspectives, skills, and talents they bring to the table.

Review of the Literature:

This research investigates the conditions influencing women's access to leadership positions, drawing upon the "glass ceiling" metaphor highlighting their underrepresentation. Almost 20 years of research (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2016) suggests a phenomenon where women may be more likely to be appointed to leadership positions during times of crisis. By invoking the "glass ceiling" and "glass cliff" metaphors, we highlight the paradoxical situation women in leadership often face. They may reach positions of perceived power (the ceiling) yet teetering on the edge (the cliff).

The Glass Cliff phenomenon was a reaction to a newspaper article in The Times (Judge, 2003). The article argued that a correlation exists between a higher number of women on boards and lower share prices for companies in the UK (p. 21), suggesting that the rise in female board members might negatively impact British businesses. Ryan and Haslam (2005) challenged this interpretation, proposing that women on boards were not the cause of poor firm performance. Instead, poor company performance caused women to be appointed to leadership positions. A subsequent study analysing board appointments and share prices supported Ryan and Haslam's (2005) theory. Women joined boards after periods of poor performance, and their presence did not worsen share price trends compared to men.

Women in glass cliff positions are likely to face greater challenges in their leadership roles, including (a) being blamed for pre-existing problems (Ryan & Haslam,2005), (b) experiencing shorter tenure (Glass & Cook,2016), or (c) facing stress and burnout (Ryan et al.,2005). These compounded challenges may contribute to the stagnation of women's leadership representation and perpetuate stereotypes about their capabilities.

Gender stereotypes create significant barriers to women's advancement. Studies like Singh and Sebastian's (2018) in Gujarat, India, reveal how women's entry into family businesses is based on birthright rather than potential. Despite exposure, they are rarely seen as future leaders. Despite exposure, they are seldom seen as future leaders. Furthermore, traditional attitudes confine women to domestic roles, restricting career opportunities and professional networks. Such a patriarchal culture fosters a masculine work environment where female managers tend to idealise "men as managers, managers as men" (Collinson & Hearn, 1995) and female managers become assimilated into the very system that limits them.

Research consistently reveals that gender stereotypes affect women in organisations at all levels. Schein's studies (1973, 1975) demonstrate this bias: both genders agreed that successful leaders generally associate characteristics such as leadership, competitiveness, self-confidence, objectivity, aggressiveness, strength, ambition, and desire for responsibility with men. In contrast, women are associated with traits related to concern for the compassionate treatment of others. This bias persists in boardrooms, where the contributions of women, who are often the minority, may be undervalued.

The above discussion shows how socio-cultural factors play a significant role in influencing ingrained gender stereotypes. It underscores the need for individual action to dismantle these structures and achieve gender equality.

Objectives:

The general objective of the study is to analyse the disparities in leadership roles for women in the modern workspace. The specific objectives are:

1. To investigate the root causes of women's underrepresentation in healthcare and corporate sector leadership positions.
2. To analyse the disparities in the leadership roles for women in the modern workspace with special reference to Health care and Corporate.

Methodology:

The study employs a qualitative case study approach, employing semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participant observation of Ms. X within a hospital setting and Ms. Y in a Corporate setting . Observing Ms. X and Ms. Y first-hand provides rich contextual insights into the organisational structure, as well as gender and leadership dynamics.

Case study 1:

Ms. X, recently married, was preparing to enter the workforce. However, the organisation demanded that she postpone family planning for three years, concerned that investing resources in training a female employee might incur additional costs. Later, at a new company, her performance review was bypassed due to assumptions about her family planning: given her recent marriage, there were concerns that she might take maternity leave or depart from the company. Her productivity should be considered here. A 5-year break (due to family constraints) washes 12-13 years of work experience. Despite upskilling, she is seen as a beginner when trying to re-enter the workforce after the break, forcing salary and position cuts.

Case study 2:

Ms. Y has fifteen years of experience in corporate sector. She took a five-year sabbatical to raise her kids. Even though she addressed this gap and highlighted the valuable experience she gained during her time away from the workforce by upskilling herself with current technologies by attending workshops and obtaining certification, the career break in her resume acts as a barrier to her even being considered for the interview when she plans to restart her career. Despite being highlighted for her capacity to pick things up quickly, adjust to new situations, and contribute significantly to the team, she still faces discrimination based on her position and income.

This makes them question their capacity to compete in the quick-paced market. This forces bright women into industries like catering, baking, and boutiques by chance rather than by choice.

Discussion:

Based on Case study 1 & Case study 2:

Understanding workplace disparities, especially gender bias in hiring and promotions, lack of mentorship for women, and work-family conflicts, requires examining organisational dynamics.

1. Gender Bias in Hiring

- Gender bias in hiring affects the selection of science professors. Identical resumes were sent to faculties for review. However, female applicants were consistently seen as less competent, less desirable to hire, and received less mentorship and lower starting salaries than male applicants. This bias continued even though both genders had equal aspirations to pursue a career in scientific research(Yurkiewicz, Ilana, 2012)
- Male and female managers are twice as likely to hire a male applicant over a female, according to Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.(Reuben,Paola,Luigi, 2014)

2. Lack of mentorship and sponsorship opportunities

Research suggests that women need more access to mentorship and sponsorship opportunities in their

professional development. This leads to:

- Limited access to informal networks that provide valuable connections and access to opportunities. One possible reason could be that managers unintentionally shield women from situations that could enhance their visibility and experience (Ibarra et al., 2008).
- Lack of valuable guidance and support can significantly impact career satisfaction, promotion, and salary growth (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).
- A dearth of skill and potential advocacy impacts achieving high-level positions and promotions (Hewlett et al., 2010), exacerbating workforce gender inequalities.

3. Work-family conflicts

- Research consistently reveals that work-family conflict disproportionately affects women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities. This is mainly due to prevailing social norms that place the primary burden of childcare and housework on women, leading to role overload (Byron, 2005).
- Organizational policies and practices also amplify work-family conflict. Research has shown that workplaces with inflexible schedules, limited parental leave, or a lack of childcare support worsen these conflicts, increasing employee stress levels and reducing job satisfaction (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).

Summarise

Parameters	Case Study 1	Case Study 2
Pay & Perks	✓	✓
Appraisal	✓	✓
Post maternity opportunity	✓	✓
Work-life balance	✓	✓
Lay off during retrenchment.	✓	✓
Promotion	✓	✓
Salary growth	✓	✓

Suggestions:

Impact on Organizations:

Gender disparities in leadership roles significantly affect organisational performance, innovation, and employee satisfaction. Here is a discussion of these implications:

Innovation:

Harvard Business Review links team diversity to greater innovation in spotting market opportunities, crafting new products, and adapting to business shifts.

Employee Satisfaction:

Diverse leadership fosters employee engagement, morale, and loyalty. Employees are more likely to feel valued, respected, and supported when they see reflected identities and experiences.

Organisations can explore a plethora of options to address workforce gender disparity issues:

1. Diversity and Inclusivity Practices: Research could unpack the potential of implicit bias training, diversity initiatives, and inclusive leadership practices to break down barriers to advancement for women and underrepresented groups.

2. Leadership Development Initiatives:

- Offer leadership development programs tailored for women, focusing on skills such as negotiation, communication, strategic thinking, and conflict resolution.
- Create pathways for career advancement through targeted training, coaching, and mentoring that addresses the unique challenges of women's leadership journeys.
- Encourage organisations to invest in leadership development for all employees, regardless of gender, to cultivate a culture of continuous learning and professional growth.

3. Mentorship and Sponsorship Programs:

- Industry to champion mentorship and sponsorship programs to accelerate the leadership pipeline for women and marginalised groups.
- Identify critical factors that contribute to successful mentor-mentee partnerships and workout strategies for overcoming barriers to access and participation.

4. Family and work-life balance: Organisational policies and practices should promote work-life integration, flexible work arrangements, and support for caregivers to enable greater gender equality in leadership.

5. Policy and Legal Framework:

- Assess the impact of policy interventions, affirmative action measures, and legal frameworks to promote gender diversity and equity in leadership.
- Examine the role of government regulations, corporate governance structures, and diversity mandates in driving organisational change and accountability.
- Establish transparent and merit-based selection criteria to reduce bias and promote fair evaluation of candidates for leadership roles.
- Enforce equal pay policies to address gender wage gaps and ensure that women are compensated fairly for their contributions
- Implement family-friendly policies such as paid parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and on-site childcare to support work-life balance and career advancement for women.

6. Advocacy Efforts: Raise awareness about gender inequities in leadership through advocacy campaigns, educational programs, and public forums.

By combining policy changes, mentorship programs, leadership development initiatives, and advocacy efforts, stakeholders can work together to address gender inequities in leadership and create opportunities for all individuals to succeed and thrive in their careers.

General Inferences at a Glance

Inequalities in women's leadership positions in the modern workplace are persistent. Gender bias in hiring and promotions and limited access to mentorship pose significant challenges to women's ascent to leadership roles. Work-family conflict further disadvantages them. To dismantle these obstacles, organisations must prioritise diversity and inclusion initiatives. This requires more than just well-meaning platitudes. Concrete actions are essential to create a supportive and equitable environment for women. Transparency in hiring and promotions and formal mentorship programs empower women. Additionally, flexible work arrangements acknowledge diverse caregiving needs. Policymakers also have a vital role to play. Legislative measures promoting gender equality in the workplace are essential. Consideration should be given to policies such as equal pay for equal work legislation and expanded support for childcare

services. Civil society organisations and advocacy groups are vital partners in this endeavour. They raise awareness of these issues, hold organisations accountable, and mobilise support for gender-responsive policies and practices. Ultimately, dismantling systemic barriers and fostering inclusion is a collective effort. Women leaders bring a wealth of talent and perspectives. By harnessing this potential, organisations can unlock innovation, achieve enhanced efficiency and contribute to a fairer society. The time to act is now. Together, we can build a genuinely diverse leadership landscape.

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