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Impact of Glass Ceiling on the Career Upward Mobility of Women in a Selected Large Scale Telecommunication Company in Sri Lanka

Jayawardane, JMSSK and Sajeewani, TL

Abstract

This study is to discuss the relationship between glass ceiling and the upward mobility of women managers in the telecommunication sector in Sri Lanka. There is an empirical and knowledge gap in the Sri Lankan context on the relationship between the glass ceiling and the upward mobility of women managers and its impact. The main objective of this research study is to identify whether there is an impact of glass ceiling for the upward mobility of women managers in Sri Lankan large scale telecommunication company. The research problem of this study: Whether there is an impact of glass ceiling for the upward mobility of women managers in a selected telecommunication company in Sri Lanka? The data were collected from a convenient sample of 100 female executives in a Sri Lankan large scale Telecommunication Company with a structured questionnaire which consisted of 32 questions with five point Likert scales. Data was analyzed using univariate analysis, correlation and regression analysis with the SPSS (16.0 version). The findings of the study were that, the three factors of glass ceiling i.e. stereotype of women, work/family conflict and unfavorable corporate practices are negatively correlated with the career upward mobility of women managers in the Sri Lanka large scale telecommunication company. According to the regression analysis, 3.5% of the variance in career upward mobility of women managers has been accounted by the above three dimensions of glass ceiling. It is concluded that among the three dimension of glass ceiling considered in the study, especially the level of work/family conflict faced by women managers should be reduces in order to further enhance their career upward mobility. It was implied to the management of the company to take necessary actions to boost upward mobility of women managers in the organization.

Keywords: *Stereotype of Women, Work/Family Conflict, Unfavorable Corporate Practices, Glass Ceiling, Career Upward Mobility of Women Managers*

Introduction

Ever since the occurrence of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, with the emergence of factories, many doors were opened for women in the working world. In that era women worked not with an intention of advancing through their career life, but only as a fulfillment of their obligation to support the family income (Lastrina 2003). Nevertheless, in recent past few decades, many scholarly works suggest that, despite of the stereotypical picture of women there have been a growing number of females, especially professionally educated

women entering the paid labor force since the 1970s (Man et al. 2009; Jayatilake et al. 2013). As cited in Man et al (2009) Powell and Graves (2003) state that the proportion of women in the managerial ranks has increased in almost all countries. Women are demanding greater equality in the working environment. As a result, women and gender difference issues have turned out to be the main considerations to be attentive in order to achieve equality on the workplace (Man et al. 2009; Bombuwela et al. 2013). However, the proportion of women in lower and mid-level management positions has increased dramatically, while the proportion of women reaching top management positions or climbing up the corporate ladder has remained relatively small (ILO, cited in Man et al. 2009; Dreher 2003; Kiaye and Singh 2013). It is commonly believed that women have fewer opportunities in advancing through their career than have men. Some of these obstacles that lead to the under- representation of women in leadership and upper management positions are directly relevant to the phenomenon of 'Glass Ceiling' (Smith et al. 2012; Afza and Newaz 2008; Pai and Vaidya 2009; Kiaye and Singh 2013). The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission identifies the term glass ceiling as "artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities". The glass ceiling is the "unseen, yet unreachable barrier that keeps women and minorities from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements" (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission 199 5by cited in Cotter et al. 2001). Even though working women are readily gathering the required experience and education, there is concern that they still encounter what has been termed the glass ceiling in today's workplaces. Hence, it is expected that there is an impact of glass ceiling for the upward mobility of women managers.

Problem Background and Problem of the Study

Glass ceiling is a contemporary HRM aspect that came into consideration of HRM professionals some thirty years ago. The barriers that prevent women from ascending to senior management positions in large corporations have often been described by the metaphor "glass ceiling", a transparent barrier which prevents women from moving up the corporate ladder past a certain point (Morrison et al. 1987, cited in Bombuwela et al. 2013). Although women are now graduating in higher numbers than men from educational institutions and more women are entering the paid workforce readily gathering the required experience and education and taking up managerial roles and work hard as their male counterparts, they may face lot of barriers in their career development. So the poor representation of women at senior management levels continues in almost every sector in Sri Lanka. Hence this study is undertaken to observe the impact of glass ceiling for the upward mobility of women managers in the Sri Lanka large scale telecommunication company. The research problem for this study is: Whether there is an impact of glass ceiling for the upward mobility of women managers in the Sri Lanka large scale telecommunication company?

Research Framework

As cited in Bombuwela et al. (2013) Maheshwari (2012) indicates glass ceiling global barriers can broadly be divided into three categories namely, individual, societal and organization related barriers. Afza and Newaz (2008) have proposed five major factors which influence glass ceiling effects in organizations: management perception, work environment,

work- life conflict, sexual harassment, organizational policy. According to the study, management perception and work environment are most significant factors which contribute to glass ceiling whereas organizational policy and work life conflict are the second most significant factors (Afza and Newaz 2008). Having considered the above research findings and empirical evidence, this study is based on three factors which contribute to glass ceiling and influence the upward mobility of women managers namely, stereotype of women, work/family conflict and corporate practices.

Following hypotheses were formulated based on the above rationale.

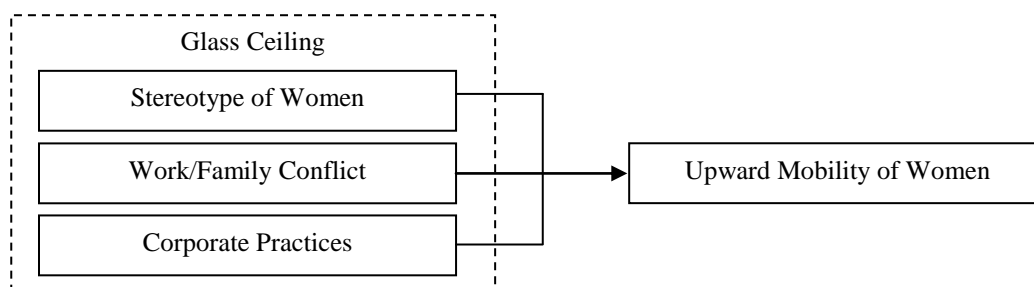
H1: *There is an impact of stereotype of women to the upward mobility of women.*

H2: *There is an impact of work-family conflict to the upward mobility of women.*

H3: *There is an impact of corporate practices to the upward mobility of women.*

This conceptual framework mainly highlights the relationship of two variables i. e. glass ceiling and the upward mobility of women managers. The independent variable here is glass ceiling which is measured using three contributing factors; stereotype of women, work/family conflict and corporate practices. The dependent variable is the upward mobility of women managers. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework of the study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



Method

This study was conducted in a quantitative design by collecting data through a questionnaire and the two variables were identified and tested based on the hypotheses developed. This study focuses on hypotheses testing and identifying correlation between variables. These types of studies usually explain the nature of certain relationships and explain the variance in the dependent variable.

This research study focuses on probability sampling and for the purpose of the study the researcher only selected 80 executive women. Sampling technique used for this study was the random sampling.

Measures

The three dimensions of the independent variable glass ceiling: stereotype of women, work/family conflict and unfavorable corporate practices were measured through

questionnaire with five point scales, which were completed by the respondents themselves approximately as they have experienced. The variables of the study constitute interval scales. The dependent variable of the research model was measured by an instrument consisting of 7 statements. The career upward mobility of women managers was measured in terms of two dimensions as career focus and attitude towards the Organization (Afza and Newaz 2008). These dimensions consist of 7 aspects as career focus (willingness to take risks, having a proven record of accomplishments, being entrepreneurial and having specialized training), attitude towards the organization (having corporative and non threatening leadership style, interest in high stake and challenging assignments and membership in professional bodies). The career upward mobility of women managers was measured by their responses to the questionnaire with five point Likert scales of ‘Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree and Strongly Disagree’.

The glass ceiling was also measured by the questionnaire. This questionnaire contained 13 statements, the considering three dimensions as stereotype of women (‘Think leader think male’ attitude), work/family conflict (lack of sufficient family time, missing family responsibilities and stress) and unfavorable corporate practices (lack of recruitment, lack of T & D opportunities and lack of mentoring). Each dimension i.e. stereotype of women, work/family conflict and unfavorable corporate practices were measured by their responses to the questionnaire with five point Likert scales of ‘Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree and Strongly Disagree’.

Validity and Reliability

The internal item consistency reliability of the instrument was examined with Cronbach’s Alpha test (Kottawatta 2014). The results of Cronbach’s Alpha test are given in Table 1, which suggests that the internal reliability of the instrument was satisfactory.

Table 1: Results of Cronbach’s Alpha

	Instrument	Cronbach’s Alpha
1	Upward Mobility of Women Managers	0.859
2	Stereotype of Women	0.722
3	Work/Family Conflict	0.702
4	Unfavorable Corporate Practices	0.726

The content validity of the instruments was ensured by the conceptualization and operationalization of the variables using the available literature and indirectly by the high internal consistency reliability of the instruments as denoted by the Alphas (Kottawatta 2014).

Techniques of Data Analysis

Data collected from primary (questionnaire) source were analyzed using the computer based statistical data analysis package, SPSS (version 16.0) for validity, reliability, and relationship testing. The data analysis included univariate and bivariate analyses.

Results

To investigate the responses for independent and dependent variables of the respondents, univariate analysis was used. The results of the univariate analysis are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Univariate Analysis

	Upward Mobility of Women Managers	Stereotype of Women	Work/Family Conflict	Unfavorable Corporate Practices
Mean	3.8082	2.8857	3.0400	2.6643
Std. Error of Mean	.04484	.04544	.06352	.05249
Median	3.8571	2.6667	3.0000	2.6667
Mode	3.71	2.67	2.80	2.83
Std. Deviation	.37513	.38021	.53145	.43912
Variance	.141	.145	.282	.193
Skewness	-.573	.233	.098	.070
Std. Error of Skewness	.287	.287	.287	.287
Kurtosis	.922	-.058	.274	.075
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.566	.566	.566	.566
Range	1.86	1.67	2.60	2.33
Minimum	2.86	2.00	1.80	1.50
Maximum	4.71	3.67	4.40	3.83
Sum	266.57	202.00	212.80	186.50

According to Table 2, level of career upward mobility of women managers, stereotype of women, work/family conflict and unfavorable corporate practices are normally distributed. As per means, work/family conflict is at moderate level. Stereotype of women and unfavorable corporate practices in the organization are at a low level. Career upward mobility of women managers is at a quiet high level.

The bivariate analysis, Pearson's Correlation between stereotype of women, work/family conflict, unfavorable corporate practices and career upward mobility of women managers are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: The Pearson's Correlation between Independent and Dependent Variables

	Stereotype	Work/Family Conflict	Corporate Practices
Pearson Correlation	-0.016	-0.021	-0.145
Sig. (1-tailed)	0.0449	0.0431	0.0115

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed)

According to the Pearson's correlation coefficients of stereotype of women, work/family conflict and unfavorable corporate practices, all the dimensions of the independent variable are negatively and significantly correlated with career upward mobility of women managers in the organization. However, unfavorable corporate practices are the dimension with the highest correlation compared to other dimensions.

The results of simple regression analysis of the three dimensions of the independent variable (stereotype of women, work/family conflict and unfavorable corporate practices) against the dependent variable (career upward mobility of women managers) are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of Regression Analysis

	Stereotype of Women	Work/Family Conflict	Unfavorable Corporate Practices
Method	Linear	Linear	Linear
R Square	0.000256	0.000441	0.021
Adjusted R Square	0.014	0.014	0.007
F	0.17	0.31	1.466
Significance	0.0449	0.0431	0.0115
B-Constant	-0.015	-0.015	-0.124
b-Value	-0.016	-0.021	-0.145

According to Table 4, all the dimensions of the independent variables are negatively related with the dependent variable.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the results of the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, it was found that there is a negative relationship between all the three dimensions of glass ceiling and the career upward mobility of women managers. According to the results of regression analysis, it was confirmed that there is a negative impact of the three dimensions of glass ceiling on the career upward mobility of women managers. Hence there are statistical evidences to support to accept all the three hypotheses formulated for the study. The first hypothesis was: there is a negative impact of stereotype of women on the career upward mobility of women managers. The b value of the equation, the gradient of the regression curve is -0.016 which is significant at 5% (Sig. $P = 0.0449$). As indicated by R squared (adjusted), 1.4% of the variance of upward mobility of women managers is explained by stereotype of women. Hence, it was confirmed that there is a negative impact of stereotype of women on the career upward mobility of women managers in the organization. The second hypothesis was: there is a negative impact of work/family conflict on the career upward mobility of women managers. The b value of the equation, the gradient of the regression curve is -0.021 which is significant at 5% (Sig. $P = 0.0431$). As indicated by R squared (adjusted), 1.4% of the variance of upward mobility of women managers is explained by work/family conflict. The statistical testing supported to accept that work/family conflict and the career upward mobility of women managers has a negative relationship. The third hypothesis was: there is a negative impact of unfavorable corporate practices on the career upward mobility of women managers. The b value of the equation, the gradient of the regression curve is 0.145 which is significant at 5% (Sig. $P = 0.0115$). As indicated by R squared (adjusted), 0.7% of the variance of upward mobility of women managers is explained by unfavorable corporate practices. Hence, it was substantiated that unfavorable corporate practices have a negative impact on the career upward mobility of women managers in the organization.

The findings of this study shall be important in the theoretical as well as practical scenario. As this research model proves to be an explanatory model of the career upward mobility of women managers, the findings of the study are important to improve upward mobility of women managers. As a major way of enhancing career upward mobility of women managers in the organization, programs relating to successfully cope up with work/family conflict are needed to be implemented. Corporate practices are another ways of enhancing career upward mobility of women. Therefore, top management and authoritative personalities in the organization should cultivate the management practices which are favorable to the upward mobility of women managers. As cited in Man et al. (2009) according to Knuston and Schmidgall (1999), corporate practices include training and development, networking, mentoring, flexible working hours and other family-friendly initiatives, for example, provision of nursery services and day care centers, flex-time, family support services, which can be helpful in terms of allowing the effective reconciliation of employees' multiple roles. The researcher believes that there may be other factors which contribute to create a glass ceiling in an organization apart from the three factors which were the considerations of this study. Further research studies are suggested to find out the effects of these factors on the career upward mobility of women managers not only in the particular company but in the telecommunication sector as a whole. In the context of researching the effect of these factors or variables on the career upward mobility of women managers, essentially future researchers may have to encounter serious difficulties in measuring the variables, as there is no measurement instrument precisely developed.

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Jayawardane, JMSSK
Accounts Associate
Accenture Lanka (Pvt) Ltd
sumudu.jayawardane@yahoo.com



Sajeewani, TL
Senior Lecturer
Department of Human Resource Management
University of Sri Jayewardenepura
tilasanthi@gmail.com
