

Bias and Barriers That Women Confront in Leadership

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LS 698 MA Leadership Capstone

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Abstract

Despite the extent of globalization in today's society, women are still affected by numerous challenges. Recent statistics indicate that women hold fewer leadership positions as compared to their male counterparts. Several factors contribute to this situation. Firstly, women are exposed to rampant cases of sexual discrimination and harassment. Since they are considered weaker than men, it is hard for them to manage other employees. Secondly, women earn significantly less as compared to their men. This pay disparity demoralizes women in leadership positions and causes them to perform poorly. The third barrier hindering women is the glass ceiling. It describes a situation where the number of female employees decreases as they climb up the organizational structure. Many women are forced out of the race due to the non-supportive environment. The fourth barrier affecting women arises from several myths and misconceptions. For instance, there is the belief that women secure leadership positions through sexual favors. Dealing with these challenges has proven to be quite tricky. More support from both the public and private sectors is required to promote the welfare of women in leadership.

Introduction

For a long time, women have been abused and underestimated in the society. The only positions that were regarded fit for them were those of child bearers and home keepers. Despite the extent of globalization, some of these negative activities have continued to blossom even in the 21st century. The present regulations paint a picture of a society which is more liberal-minded when it comes to dealing with issues such as gender inequality. However, this situation has been proven inaccurate from time to time. A research done by Hoyt (2010), reveals that one in every five men believes that women should stay at home while they go to work. Such old mindsets and myths have created unnecessary barriers which have acted as stumbling blocks for women's success. Today, there is a huge debate on whether married women can balance between their family and work life. A lot of marriages have been broken as a result of this issue. Furthermore, women have ended up missing crucial opportunities that could have otherwise improved their lives significantly.

According to Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger (2007), women face more challenges when climbing up the ladder of success as compared to men. Some of the factors that contribute to this situation include male chauvinism, sexual harassment, and non-supportive colleagues. For women to be on the same level as men, they need to work harder, be more ambitious, competent, as well as qualified. Nevertheless, they still find it hard to occupy authoritative positions with the same ease as men. The few women occupying leadership positions have experienced more significant challenges when managing their subordinates (Radke, Hornsey, & Barlow, 2016). Some believe that women should not hold higher positions than men. This means that they will be unwilling to listen or work with female managers. Such frictions in the workplace can affect organizational performance easily. Another issue affecting

women is the gender pay gap. Recent reports by Rhode (2017) indicate that women earn less than their male counterparts even though they occupy the same positions. The notion that women are inferior to men has influenced decision-making in some organizations negatively. The underrepresentation of women in managerial positions has made it difficult to deal with these issues. Research shows that the number of women decreases as they climb up the corporate hierarchy.

In the recent past, cases of sexual harassment and discrimination have increased significantly. Most of the affected victims are women who are continuously coming out in the media and exposing the horrifying experiences they went through in the hands of their bosses or co-workers. These statistics clearly indicate that existing anti-discrimination policies are not that effective in promoting women's rights (Ester Wachs, 2000). In most organizational structures, acceptable behaviors and characteristics are still centered on male values. Therefore, the idea of women guiding such a company is not received well. The perception that certain genders are well-suited for specific positions is misleading. In fact, this is one of the issues that have caused women to lag behind in development. Since women are forced to take care of their families full-time, it is quite difficult for them to study and develop their careers. Some men do not like women who are more educated than them (Grant & Taylor, 2014). As a result, women are unable to seek more education due to the fear that they will be jilted or divorced. Such negative factors need to be dealt with urgently. Both men and women should have access to equal opportunities. More policies are required to promote women's right.

Background

As stated, the issue of women underrepresentation in leadership positions has existed for a long time. In the 1800s, women in America were not allowed to exercise their voting rights. These responsibilities were specifically for men (Heilman, 2015). During this time, women were considered as a weak species which could be oppressed easily. These misleading beliefs motivated women to create movements and fight for their rights. After many years of campaigns, women were finally granted their voting rights through amendment of the Constitution. This example shows the dire situation that existed in the past (Chisholm-Burns, Spivey, Hagemann, & Josephson, 2017). Also, only a few women occupied top managerial positions in their organization. Though this situation was blamed on their education level, it appears as though there were many factors in play. For instance, men seem to have abandoned their family responsibilities. It became quite difficult for women to balance their jobs and their family duties. Unlike today, most managers were not understanding and, therefore, ended up firing many female employees (Ellemers, 2014). The lack of morale and poor motivation seems to have pushed women deeper into the pool of oppression. The number of women in leadership positions seemed to decrease each year instead of the other way round.

Studies conducted during this period found that stereotyping was the major issue obstructing women development (Bierema, 2016). Most of the people in the 19th century believed that leadership was dependent on gender. This assumption reduced the chances of women becoming leaders in their organizations. The few women that managed to break organizational and structural barriers were met with a non-supportive workforce. Junior employees openly defied them and, therefore, contributed to their poor performance. The

compensation system of most companies during this time was also biased. Female employees were underappreciated and not included in boardroom meetings (Gabaldon, De Anca, Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno, 2016). Since only a few individuals were willing to fight for their rights, the liberation process took a long time to be accomplished. Though things have changed slightly in the 21st century, much still needs to be done.

Statement of Problem

The statement of the problem is that women are continuously facing more barriers and bias in their leadership positions as compared to men. Despite their advancement in education, women are still outnumbered by men in top management positions. According to Becker, Zawadzki, & Shields (2014), this leadership gender gap is persistent, significant, and systemic. A study conducted by Pew Research Center (2015) in Massachusetts revealed that only 21 out of 151 non-profit organizations had more women than men in their board of management. In the United States Congress, women make up 20% of the total number of members. For black, Asian, and Hispanic women, the problem is more significant. PEW Research Center (2015) also revealed that less than 3% of women from these groups are board directors of Fortune 500 companies. Williamson & Wilkie (2015) claim that only a few women occupied top leadership positions in the previous centuries. Despite their social status, they were forced to deal with multiple issues and challenges to prove that they could perform as their male counterparts. For instance, introducing new changes in their organizations was quite hard due to the resistance from their male-dominated workforce. Women are also finding it hard surviving in supervisory roles (Hoyt, 2010). A lot of male employees disrespect and disobey them openly. As a result, the performance of the organization is influenced negatively.

According to the Pew Research Center, most Americans believe that men are better leaders as compared to women. They also believe that women are compared to higher standards than men. This means that their few successes are described as failures. Statistics also indicate that Americans are less willing to elect female leaders to the Congress and Senate. Basically, women are forced to deal with many challenges from different sectors of the economy (Joint Economic Committee, 2016). Statistics also indicate that women are not strict enough, and therefore cannot be regarded as effective leaders. This is one of the reasons as to why many employees end up breaking rules and regulations. Today, many organizations are characterized by an unconscious gender bias. This term refers to the automatic and unintentional mental associations that are usually based on certain traditions, gender, culture, values, and norms (Madsen & Scribner, 2017). These associations affect decision-making processes and cause individuals to make assessments based on gender stereotypes. Some performance appraisal processes are based on these factors. They create a picture that women are underperforming, which is not the case (Haile, Emmanuel, & Dzathor, 2016). The work relationships that women have with their co-workers, bosses, and mentors can also be regarded as barriers. Some of these individuals ask for sexual favors which end up affecting the close working relations. Due to the negative stereotypes, a lot of women are unable to get support from female mentors.

Purpose

The paper seeks to expose the barriers and bias that affect women in their leadership positions. It will provide evidence to show how they are discriminated, harassed, and denied access to equal opportunities. The negative factors that they face in their operating environment reduce their chances of being regarded as effective leaders. The paper will use previous studies and statistics to outline organizational barriers as well as personal obstacles that women confront

in their leadership roles. In the end, the paper will have proven the significance of this matter. It will also recommend some of the steps that can be taken to deal with the outlined challenges and barriers.

Research Question

- a) What are the barriers and bias that women confront in their leadership positions?

Project Plan

The project will be divided into five major sections which are the introduction, literature review, methodology, results, and conclusion. The introduction section, as shown above, will outline the objectives and research question of the paper. It will also indicate why this research is essential and needs to be given the proper consideration. The statement of the problem is also part of the introduction. It highlights the numerous barriers and bias that women face in leadership positions, the severity of this issue, and some historical information. The abstract section will enable the intended audience to know what the research entails without necessarily having to read the entire paper. The second part of the project is the literature review. It contains numerous theories and findings from previous scholars as regards to this topic. This section is critical because it assists in identifying weaknesses in the previous studies and new areas of studies. Furthermore, it enables the researcher to gather more information and knowledge about the issues affecting women, especially in their workplaces. The third part of the paper is the methodology. This section is important because it shows the methods that will be used to collect information and analyze data. Some of the common data collection techniques include interviews, questionnaires, observations, and surveys. It also outlines the number of participants that will be involved in the paper and how they will be chosen. The fourth section is the results. This part is important because it presents tables and figures to prove our claims. It also enables

scholars to compare their data with those in the previous studies and identify any discrepancies. The last section will be the conclusion. It will contain a summary of the entire paper, limitation, and weaknesses. It will also highlight some of the areas that need to be tested in future studies.

Examples of Women Dealing with this Issue

Research shows that women experience more difficulties in their leadership and management positions as compared to men. For instance, they are more likely to be affected by resistance to change. Since they are considered as a weaker species, they are usually underestimated and frustrated. All of these forces reduce their chances of success significantly. Today, there are numerous examples of women that have been forced to endure such situations. For instance, Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, has faced more challenges during her leadership tenure as compared to her predecessors. The chancellor was forced to deal with numerous cultural barriers that prevented women from occupying certain positions. These traditions considered women to be only fit for family responsibilities. Therefore, their attempts to occupy leadership positions were much harder. Merkel's efforts to garner support from her party was also somehow tricky. Some individuals thought she could not be the head of the nation since she was a woman. Other critics felt that her gender will cause her to make decisions based on emotions which will eventually put the country in trouble. On numerous occasions, the chancellor's party has failed to agree with her on issues such as immigration. Despite these setbacks, Merkel has managed to cement her position as a powerful world leader. Her experience, determination, and persistence kept her going. As a result, she managed to prove her critics wrong as well as empower more women to take up leadership positions.

Another woman that has experienced several leadership challenges is Hillary Clinton. Her political journey to the top has not been easy. For instance, she has been forced to deal with

gender bias from time to time. In the United States, regions such as Ohio have never elected a female senator or governor. Convincing such individuals to vote for a woman is, therefore, a challenging task. Other states such as Nevada, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and Virginia have also elected very few women to top leadership positions. Hillary Clinton has failed to break the glass ceiling on numerous occasions. The term *glass ceiling* is used to describe a scenario where more women disappear as they climb up the ladder of success. This situation is common in both the private and public sectors. The U.S. general elections in 2016 were marred with claims of sexism and gender biases. Most of the campaigns were aimed at magnifying Hillary Clinton's flaws and reducing her strengths. As a result, more citizens were forced to vote for other candidates. If Hillary Clinton could have been a male candidate, she could not have been exposed to such levels of suspicion and scrutiny. Male politicians would have also not experienced any trouble in connecting with different voters. In the 2016 presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton was expected to surpass impossible standards as compared to those of her male counterparts. Male candidates can get away from a lot of drama and allegations (Glass & Cook, 2016). For instance, President Trump was accused of assault and sexual harassment on several occasions. Despite these cases, he still managed to attract more voters who ended up voting for him. During the campaigns, the treatment of women was regarded as a non-issue. If Hillary Clinton could have become the president, the lives of many women could have been impacted positively. These are just a few of the women blocked by several barriers from accomplishing their objectives. In some Islamic states, the chances of women winning presidential seats are zero. The strict regulations in countries such as Saudi Arabia restrict women from engaging in certain activities including driving. Convincing voters to abandon their traditions and shift their allegiance will be an uphill task for women.

Annotated Bibliography

This section presents a summary of the journals and articles that will be used to support numerous claims in this paper.

The first article to be analyzed is the CFA Institute (2016). It shows the number of leadership positions that women are currently holding in boardrooms around the world. The research was done in 2016 and is, therefore, current and relevant to the paper. The findings show that the number of women in these positions increased by 15% from 12.4%. The institute also notes that the corporate image of those firms that have not embraced diversity suffers. Though several improvements have been noted, most scholars still think that this rate is slow. CFA Institute (2016) recommends the implementation of new policies to support women in leadership positions.

The PEW Research Center (2015) has also made incredible findings as regards to this topic. Their study focused majorly on the obstacles that women face in leadership. They realized that women are held in higher standards as compared to men. As a result, they are highly likely to be accused of non-performance. They also found that most Americans are less likely to elect women in political positions. Women who have managed to defy odds and clinch these posts also receive less support from their colleagues.

An article by CNN (2017) also discusses the extent at which women are victimized and discriminated. They present an example of regulations used in Saudi Arabia which aim at restricting women rights. In that country, women are not allowed to interact openly with men or

drive things. These regulations seem to have been incorporated into the culture of this nation. The chances of women in leadership positions being supported are quite low.

Johns (2013), in his journal, also studies the challenges that women face in leadership positions. This scholar claims that women have failed to break the glass ceiling due to cultural, structural, and organizational barriers. The lack of support from subordinates and colleagues makes this situation worse. Some individuals also consider women as a weaker species and are, therefore, unwilling to trust them with leadership responsibilities. Johns (2013) also found that family responsibilities affect the performance of women in leadership positions. Some communities believe that family duties are specifically for women. It is quite difficult for women to balance their work with family responsibilities.

Williamson & Wilkie (2015) focus on how cultural changes can affect women leadership, specifically in large organizations. They found that unconscious bias against women takes place during recruitment, assessment, and promotion. They also claimed that some employers subjected women to inflexible work schedules. This made it difficult to balance their family and work responsibilities. Finally, some employers denied women breaks or leave to take care of their children. This caused female employees to quit and concentrate on their families. Such factors have limited the progress of women in different careers and instead favored men.

Becker, Zawadzki, & Shields (2014) sought to determine the strategies that could be taken to deal with the issue of sexism at the workplace. These scholars defined the term *sexism* as the beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, cultural, and institutional practices that affect the perception of individuals towards different genders. One of the barriers that affect the fight against sexism is the social cost. Becker et. al. (2014) claim that encouraging women empowerment at the workplace can help in reducing the impact of sexism.

Shakeshaft et. al. (2007) also advocate for gender equality in both private and public sectors. These researchers believe that boosting women education can help in breaking the glass ceiling. Just like the other scholars, Shakeshaft et. al. (2007) also support the claims that women are underrepresented in top leadership positions. Some of the barriers that affect women in leadership include the lack of confidence, poor motivation, family responsibilities, sexual discrimination, lack of support and encouragement, as well as negative stereotyping. More mentors can help in empowering women to fight for the top leadership positions.

Naff (2018) is also concerned with the steps and barriers that need to be undertaken to deal with the barrier affecting women and other minority groups in society. Naff (2018) claims that women have been underestimated for too long and, therefore, need to rise and fight for their rights. The author also emphasizes the importance of equality in the workplace. The performance of both men and women should be measured based on equal standards. The top management and other employees are also required to support female leaders. Individuals that go against these regulations should be punished.

Carter & Peters (2016), in their journal, also seek to understand the factors that are causing women to be underrepresented in leadership positions in America. These scholars focused majorly on African American women. Their research revealed that women are affected by interpersonal, structural, economic, and social barriers. The sexual discrimination that exists in most workplaces makes it difficult for women to clinch leadership positions. The situation is even worse for African American women who are racially discriminated against despite having relevant academic qualifications. It is also difficult for women to develop their careers due to the vast family responsibilities that are imposed on them. Research indicates that most men are not

fully involved in the upbringing of their children. Just like the other authors, Carter & Peters (2016) agree that this situation is indeed pulling women behind.

The Washington Post (March 30, 2016) has also provided crucial evidence that shows the severity of this problem. Their report shows that only a few women hold executive positions in the United States. In the House of Representatives and the U.S. Congress, women only hold 84 and 20 of the entire seats respectively. Also, only 26% of percent of educational institutions have female managers. Furthermore, only six states had elected female governors. There exist unconscious biases in most of these organizations. Certain norms and traditions are deeply cemented in the culture of these firms. The probability of women breaking through this strong barrier is quite low.

Intended Audience

The intended audience for this paper is huge and includes the government, women, private firms, as well as those in the public sector. The research seeks to empower and motivate women to take up more leadership positions. It also seeks to eliminate the element of sexism at the workplace. This paper will allow women to acquire a lot of knowledge on how they can deal with numerous barriers. The paper also informs the government of the severity of this issue and recommends some of the steps that should be taken to deal with bias. For instance, it implements more policies that are aimed at promoting equality and empowering women. The research also seeks to eliminate negative cultural norms from society. The only way this move can be successful is by ensuring that people are educated appropriately. Lastly, the paper seeks to introduce changes to both the private and public sectors. All of these organizations need to review their recruitment and promotion policies to ensure that they are not biased in any way. It also encourages these firms to set aside several leadership positions for women. This strategy can

help in breaking the glass ceiling. Once they have established themselves in these positions, female leaders can set the pace for others by motivating and encouraging them.

Plan of Action – How Will This Issue Be Addressed

As stated, the barriers and biases that women face in their leadership positions are quite significant. In order to deal with these issues effectively, It will require support from different stakeholders. This includes the government, courts, the community, as well as the public and private sectors. This paper, therefore, acts as wake up call for these groups. More women need to arise and fight for their rights. In case they feel that there is discrimination at their organizations, women can seek help from the legal system. By highlighting the significance of this issue, the government is expected to step up its efforts of empowering women. This mainly involves the formation of strict policies and regulations. Currently, a lot of women in the United States are rising and reporting incidents of sexual harassment that were committed against them. However, these cases need to be reported as early as possible to ensure that evidence is not tampered with and no other individuals are affected.

Proposed Methodology

This section is relevant because it outlines the numerous ways in which the research process will be carried out. The bias and barriers that women face in their leadership positions are quite significant. Men dominate most of the management roles. The chances of women succeeding in specific careers are also low. For all of these assumptions to be verified, a mixed research method will be used in this paper. The incorporation of qualitative and quantitative research techniques will enable me to collect credible information. The qualitative approach is critical because it allows scholars to support their claims through the use of theories and results

from previous studies. The huge base of information can help reveal greater details as regards to their research topic. Furthermore, scholars will easily identify new areas of research as well as the challenges involved. This information will allow future studies to be conducted more efficiently. The quantitative approach, on the other hand, relies on calculations and statistics to establish findings. The method also enables the scholars to identify any discrepancies in their data and make the required changes. Another advantage of the quantitative technique is that it allows researchers to identify the relationship between their variables.

Data collection is also a crucial part of the research. For the research to be conclusive, it needs to be centered on relevant and credible data (McGowan et. al., 2015). Some of the popular data collection techniques include questionnaires, surveys, direct observations, and interviews. This paper will use questionnaires to collect data from its participants. This method is preferred because it is cheap, simple, and fast. Furthermore, it allows scholars to structure their questions to receive specific feedback from individuals. Due to time limitation, this research seeks to use a total of 60 participants. Though this number is small, it will still enable me to collect relevant data to answer my research questions (Morley, 2014). When it comes to data analysis, the SPSS software will be used. Many scholars recommend this program due to its ability to produce credible results. It also allows scholars to perform reliability and validity tests. All questionnaires will be analyzed carefully to ensure that only valid information has been collected. Some of the participants may try to submit fake information or even empty questionnaires. The findings of the paper will be misleading if such information is used.

Ethical and Legal Considerations

All scholars are expected to conform to certain ethical and legal standards while conducting their research. These regulations help in protecting the participants and ensure that

the study is credible. The first ethical issue that affects most researches is informed consent. All participants are expected to voluntarily and knowingly give their permission to engage in research. Forcing these individuals to engage in studies can easily cause legal issues to arise. Researchers can be sued if they involve other people in their analysis without seeking their consent. To protect myself from all of these negative consequences, I will ensure that I only partner with those individuals that agree to my terms and conditions. The second ethical issue is beneficence which also means the act of doing no harm. Researchers have the responsibility of protecting their participants from danger. This means that they should not involve them in studies that can put their families or those close to them at risk. Fortunately, my topic has very few risks involved. It only involves answering simple questions and attending interviews. The third issue relates to privacy. Those scholars that sell personal information of participants to third parties are usually unethical. This is because they embarrass these individuals and expose them to danger. In my research, I will ensure that all participants remain anonymous unless I have their consent to reveal their profile. Furthermore, intricate personal details are not required for this paper. Therefore, the participants have nothing to fear. The research will also not create any conflict within an organization. This is because the study will uphold high levels of confidentiality. Some participants could lose their job positions if their claims were made public. Lastly, the selection of participants will not be discriminative in nature. All individuals regardless of their race, social, and economic status are welcome to take part in the research.

Significance

This research is vital due to numerous reasons. Firstly, the study shows the biases and barriers that women face in their leadership positions. Therefore, the paper eliminates assumptions and creates room for the implementation of appropriate solutions. The study also

serves as a call for action for different stakeholders including the government. The issue of gender inequality has persisted for a long time and needs to be dealt with urgently. The most effective way is for the existing stakeholders to collaborate and cooperate with one another. As stated, the research also seeks to empower women by outlining the different strategies that they can engage in to boost their performance. For instance, they can consult mentors who will recommend ways in which they can deal with a particular issue. It is crucial for women to speak out and let their voices be heard. This can stimulate change by piling pressure on the relevant authorities. The paper also seeks to eliminate myths and misconception about gender from the community. The belief that women are weak and should be in charge of family responsibilities alone is misplaced. Today, a lot of women have acquired relevant academic qualifications and deserve to be treated equally as their male counterparts. Assigning responsibilities based on gender should also be a thing of the past. By encouraging women empowerment, the society will eventually become supportive and accommodative.

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