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Rethinking Women in Leadership in the Contemporary Workplace

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Abstract

Given the progression of women into labor market, growing concern over improved diversity in the workplace, and legislation advocating for equal opportunities for women and men, it remained a mystery why the opportunity of women into top leadership positions remains limited and why the narrative of 'think manager think men is becoming a norm. The overarching objective of this paper is to review women in leadership positions in the contemporary workplace. This paper is conceptual in nature and based on extensive review of literature. The paper noted that women experience stumbling blocks that are becoming too tough to break and the obstructions are founded not on lack educational of qualifications, and requisite job experience, but prejudices connected to cultural, societal, organizational, individual, and situational impediments. The paper concludes that women have progressed slightly into leadership roles, but the gap is still much wider. The study recommends expanded opportunity for women into networks and gain sponsorship as a way of climbing into leadership positions. In addition, there is need for inclusive gender policy towards improving women career progression in the workplace.

Keywords: Gender, Glass ceiling; Leadership, Career progression, Discrimination.

Introduction

Women have occupied leadership positions throughout history. From the pharaohs of Egypt to the respected queens of England, women leaders are found in practically every culture and era. Women have also functioned as leaders in advocating social movements; for instance, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman who campaigned courageously for the freedom of African Americans (Kellerman, & Rhodes, 2014). Women have also championed social change in diverse settings such as peace movements, civil rights, consumer advocacy, and educational reform to mention a few. Nevertheless, in nearly all settings, politics, corporate organizations, academia, and military establishments, male leaders significantly outnumber their female counterparts. Thus, across industries and diverse field of endeavors, leadership has been mostly viewed as a male right. Although women have gained enlarged access to supervisory and middle management cadres, they remain relatively fewer compared to men. In 2019, the fraction of women in leadership positions globally raised to 29%, the highest number ever recorded, by 2020, this ratio remains the same (Grant, 2020). Notwithstanding an improving access of women to leadership roles in Fortune 500 Women CEOs, there are still roughly 13 firms manage by a man for entities manage by a woman (Catalyst, 2020). According to report published by Mercer in 2020, roughly over 1,100 businesses globally found a dripping conduit for women in leadership (Mercer, 2020).

To describe this occurrence, research attention and policy analysts have centered on the notion of a "glass ceiling"—an obstacle of bias, prejudice, and discernment that disregards women suitable for leadership position. The admiration of the glass ceiling conception upshot from the fewness of women in leadership positions, despite the presence of equality or near equality of the sexes on numerous job fitness criteria. This scarcity of women has been attributed to a multiplicity of factors, comprising women's domestic roles (Audrey & Isabelle, 2021; Rahim, et al, 2018; Greenhaus, et al, 1997) and inborn tendencies for women to demonstrate smaller degree of the personalities and enthusiasms that are essential to accomplish and attain success in high managerial responsibilities (Browne, 1999; Goldberg, 1993). Similarly, the interrogation of what society values in men and women and why these opinions enjoin the relevance they do has fascinated diverse debate for decades. According to Prentice and Carranza (2002), explicated in diffuse gender role opportunities are both descriptive and prescriptive philosophies about what men and women can do. Descriptive ideologies focus on what men and women are characteristically or typically like (such as descriptive stereotypes or descriptive rules), and prescriptive views concern what men and women are preferably like or should be like (e.g., prescriptive stereotypes or injunctive standards).

Obstructions and prejudice scheming women from ascending to leadership position is a common occurrence. Thus, women are much less probable than men to be deliberated as leaders. Supporters of gender diversity endorse greater women participation in the board of firms and stated that there is sufficient empirical proof that boards achieve tremendously when there is greater gender diversity (Damagum, et al, 2014; Williams, 2004). Other researchers stated that improve gender diversity in leadership positions is not a fairy-tale, because existence of diversity in top positions may occasionally hinder effective teamwork due differences in core values, level of acuteness, and cognitive tactics (Opstrup & Villadsen, 2015). Some prejudice against women is elusive, but obvious and unlawful discernment against women. Businesses at times still carelessly state a gender liking for some positions which stand as a requisite for applying for such vacancy position(s) (Crockett, 2015). In some judicial proceedings, an employer acknowledged that a female executive earned half as much as male executives with comparable educational qualification and experiences (*King v. Acosta*).

The questions and agitations concerning prejudice against women has raised several probing questions such as why is there still a shortage of women leaders managing the affairs of

businesses? Are there dearth of qualified female candidates? Is there still persistent discernment against women? Are women merely deciding to rank domestic/family issues over their career? And why are men overrepresented in leadership positions? No doubt, something discriminatory factors and tendencies are holding women back from assuming the cadre of leaders and the opportunities at the peak of their long career disappear at various points along the way. Based on the above research background, the paper seeks to address women's underrepresentation in leadership position and what is responsible for men overrepresentation on the board of companies.

Theoretical Framework

Role Congruity Theory

Based on social role theory, role congruity theory assesses gender roles and their prominence in endorsing behavioral dissimilarities between men and women. Role congruity theory deliberates congruency between male and female, and how it is connected to leadership (Thomas & Heather, 2011). A leader's approach in exercising power may specify whether he or she is observed as effective. Thus, according to role congruity, a group will be positively appraised when its features are observed to align with the desires of the group's distinctive social roles (Eagly & Dickman, 2005). Accordingly, social roles may constitute the foundational norms that propose valued behavior for men and women. The theory elucidates the objectionable assessments of women from ascending leadership positions based on role perform by women compare to men. Role congruity theory labels how stereotypes and communal eccentricities interrelate to impact women's achievement in the workplace (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt 2001). Based on the above account, women are considered less appropriate for leadership positions, because they lack some necessary behavioral tendencies/skills such as coherent and strict propensity vital to leadership functioning (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Therefore, more inclination is given to men because it is presumed that men are more suitable for leadership positions.

Social Role Theory

Social roles are common expectations that apply to individual who occupy a social position or are members of a social class (Biddle, 1979; Sarbin & Vernon, 1968). According to social role theory, the allocation of men and women into different social roles is the basis of comprehensive gender identity, or shared expectations curtailing from a person's identity either as a man or a woman (Eagly & Sabine, 2019; Eagly, et al, 2000). Fundamental to social role theory are both specific roles, like occupations and diffuse roles, such as wider gender roles that relate to an extensive diversity of circumstances. Along this line, people presume that women characteristically occupy social roles associated to demonstrating compassionate for others (i.e., domestic roles, healthcare workers), the communal features that are obligatory by these precise responsibilities (e.g., sympathetic, sensitive). As expressed by Eagly (1987), the foundational belief about social role theory extends beyond the views about the traits of women and men. Consequently, in social role theory, impression about roles comprise two forms of anticipations or norms (Eagly et al., 2000).

Leadership: Definition and Meaning

The definition of leadership has been a topical issue that has occupy researchers and business practitioners' attention, yet a commonly accepted meaning and description is yet to emerge (Northouse, 2018). According to Robert (2017), the principle of leadership is to fashion vision, direct, manage, and coordinate human and material efforts towards accomplishment of organizational goals. Leadership is vital because, successful leaders offer the require guidance, and support necessary to regulate and monitor subordinates' performance. Leadership has become a prominent notion in the workplace because the success or otherwise of a company is contingent on the behaviors and styles demonstrated by the leaders (Oshagbemi & Ocholi, 2006). As expressed by Bass and Bass (2008), leadership is a vibrant issue in any form of business organization has been documented as a dynamic issue that is very vital to firm sustainability. According to Abayomi and Rahim (2020), leader develop competences to direct others towards effective accomplishment of goals. Ojokuku et al, (2012) defined a leader as an individual who impacts, inspires, and encourages workers to exert the prerequisite level of effort and zeal towards the achievement of organizational objectives. According to Westcott (2014), a leader is a person who directs the effort of others towards direction that will result to the attainment of predetermined objectives.

The concept of leadership originated in the 20th century, and it sprout from scientific management ideologies, based on the premise that workers can be systematically manage and control towards increasing their effectiveness and productivity (Rahim, 2018). According to Alghazo and Al-Anazi (2016), leadership performs a remarkable responsibility by fostering an enthusiastic work climate and organizational culture that is productive and rewarding. Burns (2003) defined leadership as a form of efforts to direct workforces towards accomplishing predetermined goals. Yukl (2008) conceptualized leadership as a practice where one person usually a leader applied some form of influence or authority purposively to regulate the behavior and attitude of subordinates in the workplace. Erkutlu (2008) defined leadership as a social tactic of influencing employees on how to effectively achieve organizational objectives.

Leadership is contemplated in term of three major forms of styles: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. Transformational leaders stimulate and inspire workers to develop the capability to achieve organizational objectives by instituting some degree of trust that create confidence which inspires improved performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Weber (1947) advocates the concept of transactional leadership. Transactional leadership approach is based on transaction or exchange through promise and some form of reward and or sanction for poor performance (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Laissez-faire leadership style is label as delegative leadership and echoes "leave it alone" where the leaders allow workers to enjoy complete autonomy, set their own objectives and control their performance accomplishment (Kurfi, 2009).

Leadership and Masculinity

Leadership position and why it depicts an exclusive men club is an ongoing debate. Although no one viewpoint concerning gender and leadership effectiveness is exclusively perfect, nor completely extraneous, thus, the response to exceptional leadership remains relatively unclear. However, relevant probing issue is, does the 21st century environment demand a dissimilar form of leadership from earlier times? No doubt, there has been a paradigm shift from 'command and control' styles of leadership towards more adaptive, cooperative, and nurturing styles that are mostly associated with masculinity (Bennis, 1999), nonetheless, some women are naturally blessed with leadership traits that surpass their male counterparts (Richardson, 2004). Too many numerous issues such as race, customs, age, salary, fitness, and sexual positioning among others impact women's leadership chances, and these influences can add up to intensely diverse experiences among dissimilar clusters of women. According to

Hyde (2014), scholars have investigated the necessary components of leadership and discovered no gender dissimilarities in leadership effectiveness. However, because men have held most leadership roles for so long, the notion of leadership has been imbued with stereotypically masculine personalities, such as steadfast, aggressiveness, resoluteness, decisiveness, readiness to involve in conflict, and level of strength. Consequently, the workplace is slanted against the equalization of opportunities for women.

Although aforementioned traits are largely in most men but they are not exclusively open to men alone, For instance, health crises call for speedy, synchronized action that necessitates critical, influential leadership and most contemporary scholarship on healthcare reported that both male and female medical practitioners possess this type of leadership excellently although women are more likely to make an excuse to their coworkers for unexpected behavior after the incident (Kolehmainen, et al, 2014). According to Acker (1990), gendered firms promote some advantages and shortcomings, control and manipulation, sentiment and exploit, individuality, and sense, are designed to promote discrepancy between women and men, but mostly at a disadvantage to women. Therefore, masculinity acts to upset employees' characters and thus, the preferred worker presents her/himself as a masculine personality (Acker, 1990).

Women in Leadership Position

The channel for female leaders appears to be broadening progressively and women have made substantial gains in term of educational qualifications and job experience in recent decades, thus, positioning them not only for career advancement but also significant representation on leadership cadre. However, women are far more compared to men to experience gender discrimination in today's workplace. A large proportion of women claim their gender identity subject them to some form of discrimination, compared fewer fraction of men who believe women face prejudice (Yagile-Perales, et al, 2021; James & Marylou, 2020; Stamarski, & Leanne, 2015). According to Global Gender Gap Report (2020), a double-digit gender gap on views of gender prejudice is evident across all generations as well as across partisan clusters. Leaders do not deliberately make decisions based on their gender, however, the dissimilar approach of perceiving their competences and skills is still prevalent.

The feminine approach of perceiving human personality and roles in the workplace very is expansive, and more features that might have an impact are becoming vital to such deliberation (Katuna, 2014). For instance, it is classic for women to view the relations between diverse things and hence, have a vibrant vision of the better opinion. Numerous other narratives have also tried to capture the principle of what is particular to women's ways of leading. Scholars alluded that woman have learned to 'play the game' by adopting traditional male features, dressing like men, and make parallel themselves with men (Smith & Squires, 2016; Anyango, 2015). According to Joshua, Lawrence, and Nirmala (2020), features of women in leadership are so diverse and the common features of women executives are resiliency, inventiveness, problem solving capabilities, hardworking and compassionate. Women are also viewed to have an edge over men when it comes to ability to demonstrate honesty and ethical disposition (Leslie, 2013). Women have a slimmer gain over men when it comes to working to advance the quality of life and standing up for what they believe in notwithstanding pressure (Gita, et al, 2007).

Council (2017) alluded that the following features are tantamount with being a female in a leadership cadre: the capability to influence, the talent to collaborate, the skill to engage in multi-tasking, the competence to demonstrate care, the skill to endure, the talent to empathize, the competence to form and develop teams, having self-confidence and the competence to challenge conventional ways of doing things. Furthermore, Council (2017) maintained that women are expressively more influential because of their capability to empathize and engage with others from an emotional viewpoint. In addition, women leaders are said to be lenient,

tremendously visionary to accomplish tangible objectives, develop the innate competences to motivate subordinates, possess a high level of self-esteem and never stop to have faith in their capability to succeed even when difficulties obscure their path (Council, 2017). Academics have equally alluded that women are relationship-oriented and democratic in nature (Mbepera, 2015; Gobena, 2014; Kadyrkulova, 2008). According to Sandell (2012) and Billsberry (2009), women in leadership position demonstrate more sociable tendency when relating with people.

Glass Ceiling and Women Career Advancement in the Workplace

Marilyn Loden is widely acknowledged for advocating the narrative of 'glass ceiling' during a panel discussion to label discrimination women experience while advancing leadership position. Literarily, the metaphor "glass ceiling" refers to situation where a qualified person aspiring and possessing the requisite knowledge, job experience and qualifications to advance within the hierarchy of his/her company is obstructed and denied opportunity from progressing to top leadership position due to a discernment most often based on sexism or racism. According to Li and Leung (2001), the glass ceiling labels a form of vertical prejudice most often subjected to women in business organizations that occasion discriminatory blockades towards rising to cadre of power or responsibility or level of higher positions within a company. The metaphor of the glass ceiling is founded on a few assumptions (Cotter et al., 2001). Firstly, the core of the glass ceiling is the discernment against women in management, therefore, it obstructs women career advancement notwithstanding their educational attainment, job experience and competences. Secondly, this prejudice is problematic to observe given that present equal opportunity guidelines proscribe open discernment against women cluster. Thirdly, the presence of invisible obstacles impedes hierarchical progression (Cotter, et al, 2001).

As the notion of glass ceiling gain progressive recognition, the academicians, business practitioners and public reacted with contradictory thoughts and feelings. Some contended that the idea is a myth because women decide to stay home and exhibited less commitment to advance their career into leadership positions (Mathipa, & Tsoka, 2001). According to David Cotter and co-writers, there are four distinguishing features that must be met to determine that a glass ceiling occurs (Cotter et al., 2001). These influences are a gender or racial dissimilarity that is not explicated by other job-relevant features, a gender or racial dissimilarity that is larger at higher cadres of an outcome than at lower cadres, a gender or racial disparity in the probabilities of progression to higher roles, not just the fractions of each gender or race presently at those higher positions, and a gender or racial discrimination that upsurges over the course of a career.

Glass ceiling (GC) is an occurrence that describes the relative difficulty concerning career prospects for women. Academics have documented the motives for the perseverance of women having a less expressive incidence in leadership cadres (Gipson, et al, 2017; Kellerman & Rhodes, 2014; Acker, 1990). Among these, is the presence of a male-normed corporate culture and firm structure challenging and creating complication to women career progression (Imodoglu, et al, 2020; Keohane, 2014; Morrison, 2012). Perception of differential treatment of women and men are often viewed contrarily in the world of work (Kochan, 2007). These differences arise when "personnel decisions are founded on gender, a recognized feature, rather than on an individual's requisite qualifications or job performance (Ngo, Tang, & Au, 2002). According to Hoobler, et al, (2008), business managers think that work-life conflict is bigger for women compare to their female counterparts, thus, diminishing the likelihood of women acceding to leadership position.

Several factors have been documented as promoting glass ceiling, namely, individual, organizational, interpersonal, and situational (Audrey & Isabelle, 2021; Nilufer & Priyadarshini, 2018). As regards individual influences; women have countless tasks in their

homes and workplaces, most especially as a mother. Consequently, their responsibilities compel them to be incapable to secure an opportunity in the workplace. As regards obstacles emanating from organizational factors; prospects to gain access to leadership positions in company are given more to men than to women (Audrey & Isabelle, 2021). Obstacles created by male leaders, focus on insinuation that women cannot be successful in senior leadership position, because they are likely to have other tasks, act emotionally and cannot demonstrate firmness (Orucu et al., cited in Yaratim, 2019). Several interpersonal factors that impede women career progression include mentorship opportunity, ability to network and tendency to fashion open relationships with firm decision-makers (Rahim et al., 2017). Regarding situational factors, a few academics voiced faulty criteria or processes of hiring and or promotion to leadership. Another aspect of situational influences is the proportion of women executives who have been in managerial cadres long enough to be regarded as competent to occupy leadership roles (Elacqua, et al, 2009).

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper reviews the notion of glass, its manifestation against women career progression, and factors that constitute barriers to women career advancement particularly to leadership positions. The disparity in leadership roles based on gender prejudice is not a new obstacle, and lots of advocacy/efforts to resolve it are not also new. Nonetheless, policy agenda aiming at decreasing gender disparity in leadership positions will necessitate multiple tactics concentrating on numerous facets of society: individual level, family circle, neighborhoods, educational establishments, companies, and law makers. Most important aspect is the competence to detect: What works better for the common goals? Notwithstanding the depth of research attention, policy agenda, and adjustment to employment polices design to strengthening gender equality in the workplace, women are still struggling to have significant representation in top leadership position.

For decades, the life of women is restricted to their homes, and they have preserved their way of life both as wife and mother, according to the dictate of their husbands (Babic, Stinglhamber, et al, 2017; Yusuf, et al, 2017; Rahim et al., 2018). Barriers to women career advancement stem several influences consisting of individual, social, organizational, and interpersonal factors (Audrey & Isabelle, 2021; Rahim et al., 2018). Difficulties to gain access top leadership roles are a global phenomenon where male, compared to female are enormously concentrated in lower-level leadership positions (Shalini, et al, 2020; Xiang, et al, 2017; Mohammad-khani & Dariush, 2016). The paper reviews the phenomenon of glass ceiling and confirms the obstructions to women career advancement is devastating at bitter speed. Presently, women are working in numerous sectors of the economy, however they have a long mileage ahead of them in occupy relevant proportion of leadership positions as men do. Women advancement to leadership positions have evolved at a slow pace in the workplace As a result, the "gentleman's club" advanced by the metaphor of glass ceiling institute double edge threat for women; given the fact that women involvement in labor market is lop-sided in favor of men, and the few that are engaged and hold the vital qualifications and job experience constitute very insignificant proportion of those in leadership positions (James & Marylou, 2020; Eagly & Sabine, 2019)

Many women who have struggled to climb to the leadership positions have one time or the other hit the glass ceiling that shattered their aspiration (Albelda & Tilly, 1997). The conventional, parochial, and treacherous stereotype of women proposes that they are inferior to men; nevertheless, there is an emerging trend and empirical evidence that women possess requisite skills and experience to take up responsibilities at top managerial level. Thus, the development of women in their roles and accomplishment as leaders, have attained exceptional performance, not merely as a result of empathy of men who view them as the mother sister/

daughter, nor because of the consciousness of the necessity to lessen gender prejudice against women; but rather, due to the more vital crux of the recognition that women have the needed positive individualities desired in the contemporary business world, and have demonstrated to be performing exceptionally well, if not better than men in domains hitherto predominately dominated by men.

We now live and function in realm where women's social, political, and economic roles are being reshaped. As such more women than ever before are climbing leadership positions. For instance, in the field of science, women have been recognized as world class scientists and Nobel Prize winners in numerous fields such as engineering, medicine, legal profession, and politics to mention a few. Women have progressively occupied leadership positions in all societal domains, and they have shown impressive strengths, and adopt leadership styles proven to be more transformational, participative, and inclusive than the leadership approaches mostly adopted by male. With women making impressive and landmark accomplishment in leadership positions, this paper raises a probing rhetorical interrogation, "Why not women?" in expectations and anticipation of strengthening women presence in leadership positions.

Implications and Policy Recommendations

Discrimination in any form is forbidden. Yet, prejudice exists in the workplace. The workplace is more design to be label as exclusive 'men's club' where the men rules. Although significant progress has been achieved but the required structural support is still lacking and thus, enabling growing men club in the workplace. Recently, women and men are view as similarly good executive leaders, but gender stereotypes and prejudices persevere. For instance, there are proven and documentary evidence that alludes to the fact that women have a diverse set of core values compare to men, women demonstrate less tendency to self-centered egoism, gifted with a complete vision that makes them much more thoughtful to social and environmental contexts better than men. However, the playing field still accommodate fewer proportion of women that fit into leadership positions.

Last year, precisely September 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women: "Action for Equality, Development, and Peace" convened in Beijing. However, much odds and discrimination still persists systemically against women. Currently, gender disparity has become one of the most significant themes on the global program. However, time will not resolve the imbalance in leadership gaps, action is the main thing to lessen the glass ceiling conundrum. Gender disparity in the workplace is a solvable complication, because corporate organizations need to speedily move beyond conventional notions that men are more suitable for leadership roles. Thus, business organizations that fail to fully develop positive blueprint towards women career advancement and comprehend constructive attitudes towards women as leaders will limit the worldwide success and sustainability of their companies.

Recent report published by McKinsey documented that roughly $13 trillion could be added to global Gross Domestic Product- GDP in 2030 by promoting gender-informed practices (McKinsey & Company, 2018). Accomplishing gender parity in leadership is, first and possibly most vital, and a matter of justice for equal and promising workplace/society. This is so because, leaders are influential, so when women are restricted from leadership roles, they are deprived of opportunity to make a difference in the world. Issues such as women's role in general society and the workplace and their opportunity to be part of decision-maker carry unambiguous implications not only for the company where they work, but the larger society. Thus, attempt to correct gender imbalance in the workplace, extremely and vigorously require the effort of all regarding gender equality. This paper recommends the under-listed policy recommendations-

i. A deeper development of positive attitudes alone is inadequate to jettisoning the stereotypes prejudices women leaders face, thus, firms must progressively provide

support through training and development, sponsorship, expanded opportunities, counselling, and diversity inclusion to mention a few to lessen complications women face in the workplace.

ii. To monitor and improve the progress made in growing the proportion of women in leadership cadres, it is important to develop a framework that will capture and serve as an indicator of "female percentage of employment in leadership positions" in every company.

iii. To expand the advancement of women into leadership positions, companies should encourage and expand women access to influential networks through mentorship. This will enable them to network and mingle with men and the avenue may provide a convincing ground to the men that women are equally suitable for leadership roles.

iv. To lessen gender disparity in the workplace, diversity training programs should be encouraged. These programs may help to narrow the existing disproportionate fraction of women in leadership position.

v. Lastly, employment practice reforms are required to remedy historical and conventional inequities in the workplace. A program of this nature will help to strengthen policy framework aiming at fostering an equitable workplace.

vi. With increased migration occasioned by wars, civil strife, and effects of global warming, instituting departments for women development with organizations will help bring more displaced women into the working brackets for growth and profitability of such firms.

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