

A study of the existence of glass ceiling in the telecommunication sector of Bangladesh.

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Abstract: *The purpose of the study is to examine the existence of the glass ceiling in the corporate telecommunication sector in Bangladesh. It has been noticeable that the career progression of women is significantly lower than that of men especially in the telecom industry. The study also aims to contribute to identifying the factors which create the existence of the glass ceiling. The analysis of the data gathered through the course of the research will help to determine the contributory factors which have impact on the career advancement of female employees in the organization itself. The study will also concentrate on issues about why the female employees are being stereotyped about a specific category of jobs, the different conflicts that may exist and how these can be tackled. The perception and mind set of the management towards every female colleague will also be highlighted in the report.*

Despite the sense of continued progress toward gender equality in the workplace, it is noticeable that the ration of male to female employees is significantly less than expected in terms of advancement, compensation and benefits.

Key words: *Glass Ceiling, Bangladesh, Telecommunication, Career Advancement, Organization Structure.*

I. Introduction:

Over the past decade the percentage of female employees entering the job market has increased immensely. The trend in the increase maybe be a contributing factor to the changes in the society, where there shows a shift in the way of life. In Bangladesh, the number of female progressing towards higher education is increased. It is commonly believed that female employees have lower career progression in comparison to male employees. Most of the problems have been identified to be related to the existence of glass ceiling. By definition “glass ceiling” refers to the invisible barrier of impediments that exist in the organization that impedes on the career progression of female employees in an organization. (Afza. S.R.,Newaz.M. K, 2008). It is not doubtful that there exists a barrier in the professional arena, which differentiates the two genders. There seems to be no doubt about the existence of gender equity in the labour market.

Gender differences and the perceptions of men and women differ from nation to nation mainly because of the cultural diversity in the society. It is also noticeable that other contributing factors include the changes in the economy as well as the political situations in the country. Bangladesh is a nation that has been categorized by United Nations as a middle income country which has also brought about demographic changes thereby employing new options and changing the trends at different levels. It is apparent that a large percentage of female employees are employed in the mid level or lower level positions. Women leaders at the top level are significantly low and this maybe because of the discrimination that prevails. In Bangladesh the stereotype perception confers the changes in the attitudes towards the type of job roles and also business sectors where they are best suited to work. Because of the traditional concepts of women being for confined to household work and the maternal aspect subordinates often provide a different attitude towards their female subordinates, leading to a more conducive atmosphere in the workplace. In a report published in the financial express, it has been highlighted that there seems to be less than 1 per cent female leaders in the top managerial positions. It has also been speculated that the number the gender gap in the managerial position at mid level and top level is regarded as a more male dominant sector of the organization. (Financial Express, 2012). However, the complexity of the contributing factors and the conflicts are deeper. The study attempts to identify the contributing factors and also provide recommendations on how the issue may be minimized.

II. Literature Review:

The term glass ceiling was first defined by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt in their publication in March, 1986 in an edition of the Wall Street Journal. (Afza, Newaz, 2008). The glass ceiling can distinctly be considered as a factor in the changing organizational culture. Organizational culture today is more diversified and attributes to defining the personality and constitutes the broad aspects of core values and beliefs, ethics as well as the policy. Depending upon the job context, the concept of flextime and work from home, professional development, mentor ships and a provision of nursery services as well as day care centres also

contribute to employing female employees in an organization. The glass ceiling today refers to the specific type of gender or racial inequality that can be distinguished from other types of inequalities (Cotter, 2001). According to statistics gathered from Fortune 500, it is seen that Women hold 11.1% of board seats in Fortune 500 hundred companies. 86% of Fortune 500 companies (429 companies) have at least one or more women director; 14% (71 Companies) have no women on their boards. 188 companies in the fortune 500 have 2 or more women directors; 34 companies have 3 or more women directors. The above statistics also confer to the sudden surge of women who are selected as potential candidates for the top level positions at the executive levels (Murray, 2010). Murray (2010) in his book also hinted that the trajectories of women progressing to the top level differs from country to country, this maybe because of the socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions of the countries. He has also highlighted the research of Andersen, Alexander and Dolan who have also categorized the hard and soft policies for men and women in the organizations taking an organizational culture perspective.

The concept of a glass ceiling is an oft-used metaphor for the relative disadvantages regarding women's career opportunities, alluding to the growing difficulties for women when moving up the career ladder (et al. Afza, Newaz, 2008, Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia and Vanneman, 2001, Charles and Grusky, 1995: 68). It sounds as though there is a definite stop for women at a certain level in the hierarchy, but this should, of course, be interpreted in a less harsh way (Baxter and Wright, 2000; Britton and Williams, 2000). Dessler (2011), in his book has highlighted an inconsistency with the needs for women, challenges that they are facing because they are not very proactive in getting assignments.

The current organizational culture in Bangladesh inhibits the promotion of female executives to a higher ranked position. As it is noticeable that most of the top level managers are men, they use this position to impose rules and policies in appointing people who have the same mindset and are ready to adopt the culture without any changes. (Kanter, 1977). Looking at the aspect from the viewpoint of organizational culture, it seems that women find it more difficult to work with men rather than work by themselves. In addition to the location of work, it can be noticed that very low percentage of women are referred to work outside the country and relocating to a new location because of the family responsibilities. According to Istiak(2010), a major group female executives consider their performance at work to be unfairly judged leading to a level of job dissatisfaction. In parallel to the low job satisfaction, the persistent changes in organizational culture attributes to a more complex environment in the work place, thus creating the glass ceiling.

Basically, there is a need to conduct a further study in order to identify the factors of the existence of the glass ceiling Identifying the factors and the impact on the career advancement of female employees in the organization will be a challenge.

III. Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the contributing factors of glass ceiling in the organization
2. Evaluate the factors that influence career advancement for women in an organization
3. Evaluate the level of conflict in the organization.

Research Method:

For the purpose of the study different research methods have been employed.

i. Source of Data

For the purpose of the research, both primary and secondary data has been used. Secondary data has been gathered by extensive research of journals, articles, publications, books and websites. Aside to the secondary data, primary data has also been used for the purpose of the study. Questionnaire survey of 100 female employees in two of the largest telecommunication vendor organizations have been used for the purpose.

ii. Sampling and Data Collection

The sample of the study covers the female employees from L M Ericsson Bangladesh Limited in Dhaka. Keeping in mind that the data collection may be difficult, I have kept my sample size small. The list of female employees has been collected from the Human Resource Department. There are only 56 female employees in the whole organization of 450 plus employees where only 40 employees (71.42%) have filled up the circulated questionnaire out of the total population as primary data.

iii. Questionnaire Design and Testing

A structured, close ended questionnaire uses 5-point likert scale; with end points ranging from "Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). The respondents were also asked to indicate their age, position (top level, mid level, low level). Family size, Age and Marital status. Initially a draft questionnaire was

prepared, based on the secondary research such as considering the topics from different published articles and journals. The collected data has been tabulated and analysis has been performed with SPSS 17.0 version.

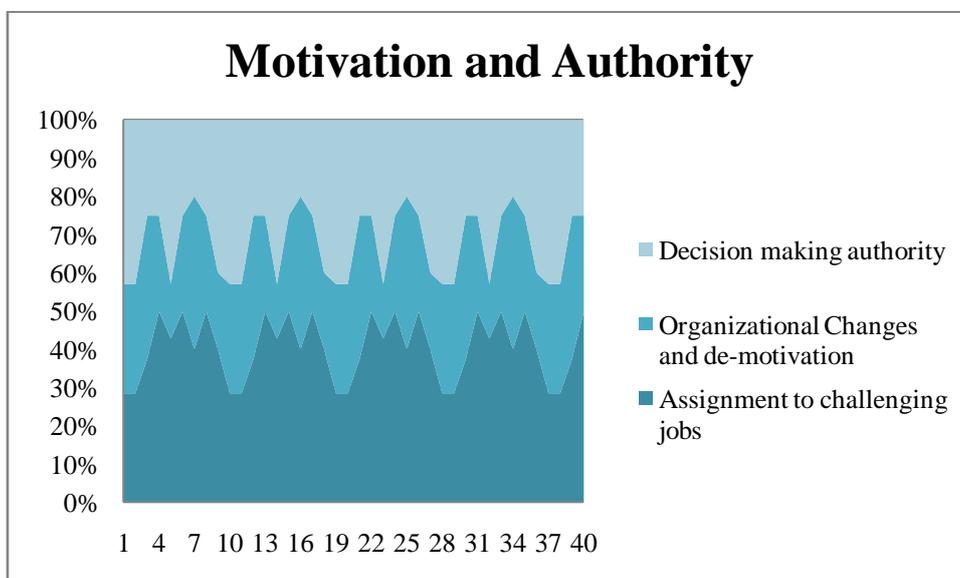
iv. Data Analysis:

For the purpose of the research all primary data gathered through questionnaire survey. Simple statistical methods have been used for data analysis to find the standard deviations, and correlations. To simplify the data presentation, the key questions have been represented using pie charts showing the percentage of how the factors are contributing to the effect of the existence of glass ceiling.

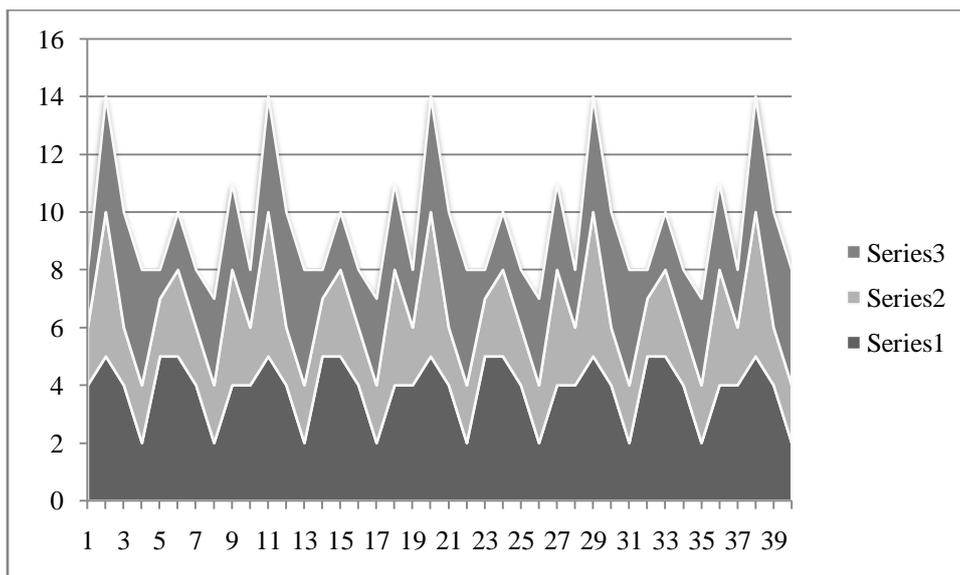
IV. Findings:

It has been possible to find out several key contributory factors that have been pointed out to be the aspects why the glass ceiling exists in organizations. As the said research concentrates on the telecommunication industry, the findings are more alarming than that of other industries. The telecommunication industry is more commonly known to be male dominated sector as most of the jobs involve fieldwork and heavy lifting. The percentage of female employees in this sector is very negligible. In this section, a few of the key findings will be highlighted and explained.

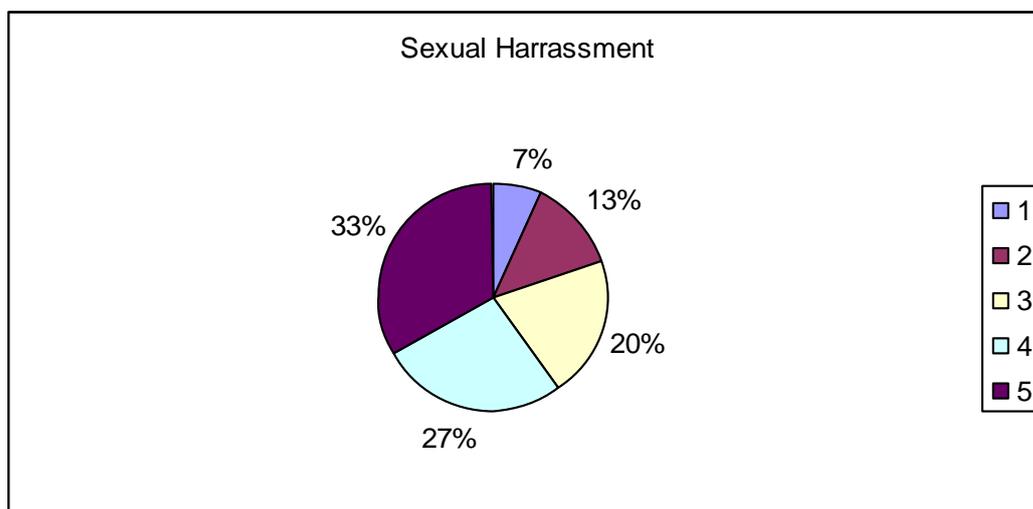
1. From the graph below it can be noticeable that the motivation level and the delegation of authority is one of the key factors for career progression in the organization. As it was highlighted in the 1986 publication of the wall street journal, the highest ranking women are mostly in the non-operating areas such as public relations or seldom in the finance department. As women are not considered to be the weaker sex, the role in any major decision making is not seen and therefore considered to be virtually absent. This is also a key factor for demonization of female employees in organizations.



2. From the survey conducted it has been noticeable that the number of female employees involved in any sort of field work is only 5%. And these employees in most situations are expected to work for long hours and also work under pressure. As the respondents have pointed out in the questionnaire that their managers at times make unrealistic requests which leads to problems in their family lives and impacts the work life balance.



3. Sexual Harassment: This is a burning issue in organizations where female employees are engaged in the mid and top level of the organization. Female employees are at times subjected to unethical behaviour from their male superiors who lead to a rise in the conflict level and decrease in the motivation level. In Bangladesh, where the society it is very much male dominated, the percentage of women complaining about sexual harassment is alarming. In the survey it has been found that a number of female employees have been subject to sexual harassment at some point in their career as they had no choice but to comply with the requests made by their superiors.



V. Conclusion:

The main aim of this paper has been to examine the factors that impact the performance of female employees in the telecommunication sector of Bangladesh. From the study it has been possible to conclude that the glass ceiling exists in the industry. The level of conflict and the motivation level have been considered to be the key indicators towards the rise in the glass ceiling and also the complexity in the managerial hierarchy. In recent years, the government even though has brought about changes in the labour of Bangladesh as stated in the Bangladesh Labour Code 2006. But, the changes in accordance with the policies are not yet adopted by many organizations. Change is mandatory for organizations as it is the only way to diminish the organizational myopia about stereotyping and minimizing the conservative attitude towards encouraging female employees to move up the corporate ladder.

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