

Shattering the Glass Ceiling Assessing Gender Bias and Equal Employment Opportunity Gaps for Women Employees

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Accepted: 05 Jan 2024

Published: 21 Jan 2024

Publication Issue :

Volume 11, Issue 1

January-February-2024

Page Number :

713-723

ABSTRACT

Gender bias remains a pervasive challenge in the workplace, limiting career progression and equal opportunities for women. This research examines the structural and cultural barriers that contribute to the gender gap in employment, leadership, and compensation. Using a combination of empirical data, case studies, and policy analysis, this study explores the impact of gender discrimination on women's career trajectories and assesses the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion initiatives. The findings provide insights into the persisting challenges and propose strategies for fostering a more equitable work environment. Despite decades of progress, women continue to face significant barriers in the workplace, including gender bias and unequal access to employment opportunities. This study examines the prevalence of gender bias and equal employment opportunity gaps for women employees, based on a review of previous research. Our analysis suggests that women employees experience significant gender bias and unequal access to employment opportunities, including promotion and training opportunities. We also identify factors that contribute to these gaps, including lack of mentorship, stereotyping, and unconscious bias. Our study highlights the need for organizations to implement policies and practices that promote equal employment opportunities and address gender bias.

Keywords : Gender Bias, Equal Employment Opportunity, Workplace Diversity, Women in Leadership, Pay Gap, Inclusion Policies

1. Introduction

Despite legal frameworks and corporate diversity policies, women continue to face gender-based disparities in recruitment, promotions, and wages. The "glass ceiling" metaphor represents the invisible barriers preventing women from reaching senior

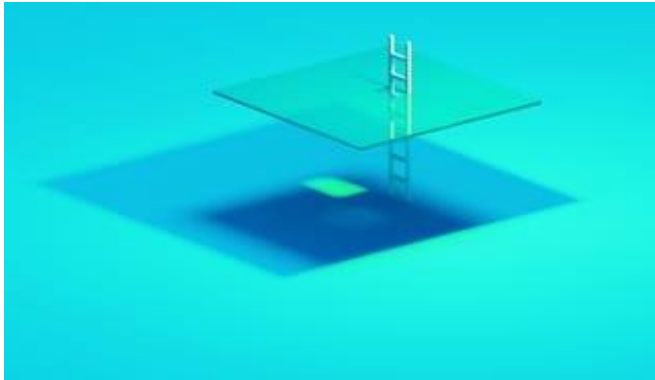
leadership positions. This paper investigates the extent of gender bias in employment and the systemic challenges that hinder women's professional advancement.

The concept of the "glass ceiling" refers to the invisible barriers that prevent women from advancing

in their careers and achieving leadership positions. Despite decades of progress, women continue to face significant barriers in the workplace, including gender bias and unequal access to employment opportunities (Catalyst, 2020). Research has shown that women are underrepresented in leadership positions and face significant gaps in pay, promotion, and training opportunities (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Glass Ceiling:

The glass ceiling is a metaphor describing the invisible barrier women and other marginalized groups face when trying to reach higher levels of professional success. These barriers aren't official corporate policy; rather, they are implicitly understood biases entrenched in organizational hierarchies that keep certain individuals from advancing into senior management positions, regardless of the person's qualifications.



The glass ceiling is a metaphor that refers to the invisible barrier women and people from other marginalized groups face when trying to climb the corporate ladder, especially when pursuing managerial and executive roles. While the term originally and primarily refers to women, individuals from other historically underrepresented groups are also often held back by the deeply ingrained cultural biases that exist within organizations.

The glass ceiling can be hard to detect because it isn't an official policy, but it can become entrenched in a company culture due to personal biases and even

larger societal issues that impact women's ability to advance in the workforce. Despite its subtle nature, the glass ceiling can take on various forms and result in the following consequences:

- Receiving less pay than colleagues of a different gender who do the same job.
- Being passed over for promotions or other important career opportunities.
- Experiencing microaggressions regularly.
- Feeling isolated.
- Being treated as incompetent.
- Getting rejected from a job.

History of the Glass Ceiling

The term glass ceiling was first used in 1978 by writer and consultant Marilyn Loden at a panelist discussion about women in the workplace. Loden described the cultural challenges women face when their careers stagnate in middle-management roles, preventing them from attaining higher leadership or executive positions. The term was further popularized in the mid-1980s with a 1984 *Adweek* profile of Gay Bryant, the publication of the 1984 book *The Working Woman Report* and a 1986 *Wall Street Journal* article on the topic.

In the decades since the term was coined, women have made notable gains in the workforce. The number of employed U.S. women rose to 75.5 million in 2023, compared to less than 54 million in 1990. Women also make up more than half of college-educated workers in the U.S.

At the same time, women are often encouraged to pursue jobs that leave them vulnerable to economic downturns, with the most recent recession leading to over one million women leaving the workforce. On an international scale, 86 countries place women under job restrictions while 95 countries still don't guarantee equal pay (and even in countries that do guarantee equal pay, like the U.S., gender-based pay gaps persist).

Understanding the Glass Ceiling

As more women enter the workforce, the glass ceiling's lingering presence becomes impossible for businesses to ignore. To better understand this concept — and what can be done about it — let's look at some of the factors that contribute to it.

1) Gender Roles

Gender roles are social constructs unique to different cultures that are assigned to individuals the moment their sex is identified. In American culture specifically, women are often expected to be polite, accommodating and nurturing, which often nudges them to pursue caretaking roles.

So despite their career aspirations, women continue to shoulder the brunt of household chores. Juggling these responsibilities often places added stress and pressure on women as they attempt to rise up the corporate ranks, competing for jobs with men who don't face the same expectations.

2) Gender Bias

Gender bias refers to the tendency people have to prefer one gender over another. In the workplace, this bias tends to have a major impact on women. A 2024 Checkr survey found that 84 percent of women either were unsure or agreed that gender bias and discrimination affected them being paid fairly. In addition, 75 percent of women either agreed with or were uncertain of whether women with kids were perceived as less dedicated and competent at work compared to their male peers.

A major contributor to how women are treated is how they're perceived. According to Lean In's Women in the Workplace study, 18 percent of women are mistaken for more junior workers, showing no improvement between 2019 and 2024. These biases make it harder for women to reach and thrive in positions of power.

3) Sexual Harassment

Women continue to face sexual harassment in the workplace. Between 2018 and 2021, women filed 78 percent of the 27,291 sexual harassment charges to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. And 40 percent of women

have experienced microaggressions, harassment or both over the past year.

If companies don't take steps to handle this issue, they risk losing employees and derailing women's careers: Not only do 38 percent of women who experience sexual harassment leave their jobs early, but 37 percent suffer impacts to their career advancement.

4) Additional Unconscious Biases

Besides gender bias, there are a range of unconscious biases that can lead to the poor treatment of women in the workplace.

It is human nature to like and be attracted to others who share similar interests, experiences and appearances to our own. This is especially true when we first come in contact with a new person. Studies show people are significantly more inclined to like a stranger if they have something in common — even without first meeting in person.

Recruiters, HR professionals, hiring managers and executives experience this exact scenario virtually every day. When they review resumes, performance reports and letters of recommendation about people they may not know directly, they make hiring and promotion decisions based on the limited information they have.

Pretending like underlying assumptions don't matter leaves women unprotected against unfair assumptions that can chip away at their career opportunities.

The Glass Ceiling

With the odds stacked against them, many individuals have risen to new heights in a number of firsts and exposed the existence of glass ceilings. Here are a few examples of women defying biases and expectations:

Ursula Burns: In 2009, Ursula Burns became the CEO of Xerox, making her the first Black woman to be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. She would go on to lead the company for seven years.

Maya Lin: Upon winning a 1981 Vietnam Veterans Memorial competition, Maya Lin would become the first woman to design a memorial on the

National Mall. Besides enduring biases as a young woman, Lin also faced anti-Asian backlash.

Danica Patrick: In 2013, Danica Patrick entered the Daytona 500 with the fastest qualifying time, becoming the first woman in NASCAR to win a pole in a Cup Series race. This means she was awarded the front, inside starting position.

Alice Travis: In 1977, Alice Travis became the first Black woman to host her own national talk show when *For You ... Black Woman* aired.

Cristina Junqueira: Cristina Junqueira left her job at a private bank and in 2013 co-founded Nubank, which became the first company with a woman founder to be valued at more than \$10 billion.

Breaking the Glass Ceiling and Promoting Gender Equity

Once you've got a solid grasp on how the glass ceiling operates, help others understand the barriers and challenges, why those problems exist and how they can improve the workplace. These conversations will undoubtedly advance your knowledge on the subject, how others view it and vice versa.

Conduct Blind Screenings

Consider making your application and screening processes blind in order to reduce unconscious bias when hiring and promoting employees. Blind screenings exclude information about candidates, like their name, interests and experiences that are unrelated to the role, which may reveal their assumed gender, race or ethnicity.

Symphony orchestras have implemented blind auditions with great success, boosting a female musician's chances of advancing past the first audition by 50 percent.

Blind applications increase a woman's chance of getting a job by 25 to 46 percent, while another study found resumes with Black-sounding names were 10 percent less likely to receive a call-back than resumes with white-sounding names. Blind screenings are a simple way to compare candidates based on skills and experiences and

diminish potential biases that come with reading over strangers' resumes.

Implement Regular Bias and Stereotype Training

Bringing in a diversity and inclusion expert or implementing unconscious bias training can initiate conversations that people are either reluctant to have or are unsure of where to start. Implicit biases are challenging topics to cover, especially when you have a diverse team of individuals with different experiences and opinions that will likely arise during such conversations. Having an expert in the room will take the pressure off your team and ensure the conversations are productive and inclusive.

Consider providing additional training for managers and executives because they are the people who are hiring and promoting individuals. You want to ensure your leadership team is able to support individual contributors in all aspects of their careers.

2. Literature Review

5) Historical Context of Workplace Gender Inequality

The evolution of women's roles in the workforce has been marked by significant challenges and gradual progress. In the early 20th century, women were largely restricted to domestic duties and low-paying, informal jobs. During wartime periods, they entered the labor force in larger numbers, but these opportunities diminished post-war due to societal expectations of returning to domestic roles. The feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s brought significant legal and social reforms, advocating for gender equality in employment. Despite these advances, systemic barriers and deep-rooted cultural norms continue to limit women's career growth, making gender inequality a persistent issue in modern workplaces.

6) Gender Bias in Hiring and Promotions

Gender bias in hiring and promotions remains a critical obstacle to workplace equality. Implicit biases often influence recruitment decisions, favoring male candidates over equally qualified female applicants.

Leadership selection processes also tend to uphold traditional stereotypes that associate leadership qualities with masculinity, making it more challenging for women to advance into executive positions. Studies have shown that women are often judged more critically in performance evaluations and are less likely to receive leadership training or high-visibility assignments. Addressing these biases requires organizations to implement structured, bias-free hiring processes and leadership development programs that promote gender equity.

7) Wage Disparities and the Gender Pay Gap

The gender pay gap is a significant indicator of workplace inequality, reflecting disparities in wages between men and women for comparable work. Studies indicate that women, on average, earn less than their male counterparts across industries, even when controlling for education, experience, and job responsibilities. Factors contributing to this disparity include occupational segregation, where women are overrepresented in lower-paying fields, and discrimination in salary negotiations and promotions. The pay gap not only affects women's financial security but also has long-term implications on retirement savings and economic independence. Transparent salary policies and pay equity audits are essential to addressing this persistent issue.

8) Workplace Culture and Institutional Barriers

Organizational culture plays a crucial role in shaping gender equality in the workplace. Many workplaces continue to uphold structures and practices that inadvertently disadvantage women, such as lack of mentorship, limited support for work-life balance, and exclusion from informal professional networks. Women also face challenges such as gender-based microaggressions, stereotyping, and unconscious biases that hinder their professional growth. Institutional barriers, including insufficient parental leave policies and inflexible work arrangements, further contribute to the gender gap. To foster a more inclusive workplace, organizations must cultivate a

culture of diversity, implement equitable policies, and actively challenge discriminatory practices.

9) Impact of Diversity and Inclusion Programs

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) programs are designed to promote gender equity in the workplace by fostering an inclusive environment where all employees have equal opportunities. Successful initiatives include mentorship programs for women, leadership development training, and policies supporting work-life balance, such as parental leave and flexible work arrangements. Companies that prioritize gender diversity often report increased innovation, employee satisfaction, and overall business performance. However, for these programs to be truly effective, they must be backed by strong leadership commitment, measurable goals, and continuous assessment to ensure meaningful progress toward workplace gender equality.

Research on gender bias and equal employment opportunity gaps has identified several factors that contribute to these gaps, including:

- Lack of mentorship and networking opportunities (Ibarra, 1993)
- Stereotyping and unconscious bias (Kahneman, 2011)
- Limited access to training and development opportunities (Noe, 2017)
- Inflexible work arrangements and lack of work-life balance (Hill, 2015)
- Studies have also shown that women employees experience significant gender bias and unequal access to employment opportunities, including:
 - Promotion opportunities: Women are less likely to be promoted to leadership positions than men (Eagly & Carli, 2007)
 - Training opportunities: Women have limited access to training and development opportunities (Noe, 2017)
 - Pay gaps: Women earn significantly less than men in similar positions (Catalyst, 2020)

3. Methodology This research employs a mixed-methods approach:

- **Comparative Case Studies:** Assessment of companies with strong gender-inclusive policies versus those lacking diversity measures.

10) Comparative Case Studies: Assessing Companies with Strong Gender-Inclusive Policies vs. Those Lacking Diversity Measures

Gender inclusivity in the workplace is a key driver of organizational success, innovation, and employee satisfaction. Companies that implement robust gender diversity policies experience **higher employee retention, increased financial performance, and enhanced workplace culture**, whereas those that lack such initiatives often struggle with **high attrition rates, legal challenges, and reputational damage**. This section presents a **comparative analysis of two companies**—one with a strong commitment to gender inclusivity and another with minimal diversity efforts—to evaluate the impact of these policies on leadership representation, workplace culture, and overall business performance.

11) Case Study 1: A Tech Giant Championing Gender Inclusivity

A leading technology and software company headquartered in San Francisco, USA, with a workforce of 35,000 employees worldwide, has established itself as a pioneer in gender-inclusive workplace policies. The company actively works to bridge the gender gap in leadership, compensation, and career advancement opportunities. By prioritizing diversity and inclusion, it has created a work environment that fosters equal opportunities for all employees, ensuring long-term organizational success. To promote gender equality, the company has implemented a range of initiatives, including:

Equal Pay Audits – Conducted annually to ensure equal compensation for similar roles and responsibilities, significantly reducing gender-based wage discrepancies and enhancing employee trust.

Bias-Free Hiring Processes – Leverages AI-driven recruitment tools to eliminate unconscious bias during hiring. Blind resume screening ensures fairness in candidate evaluation.

Leadership Development Programs – Introduced mentorship and executive training programs to encourage career progression, providing employees with networking opportunities, skill development, and career guidance.

Flexible Work Policies – Offers a hybrid work model, extended parental leave, and childcare support, making it easier for employees to balance professional and personal responsibilities.

The results of these policies have been remarkable. Currently, 42% of senior management positions are held by women, significantly surpassing the tech industry average of 25%. The company has closed its gender pay gap by 98%, ensuring that all employees receive equal pay for equal work. Additionally, employee retention rates among women have increased by 30% over the past five years, reflecting a positive workplace culture. These gender-inclusive efforts have earned the company multiple awards, including recognition as one of the “Top 10 Best Workplaces for Women” by leading HR organizations.

Through strategic gender diversity initiatives, the organization has demonstrated how inclusive policies not only empower women but also contribute to business growth, employee satisfaction, and innovation. The company serves as a role model for fostering an equitable workplace culture.

12) Case Study 2: A Traditional Firm Struggling with Gender Diversity

A large-scale industrial manufacturing company based in Birmingham, UK, with a global workforce of 18,000 employees, has failed to implement effective gender diversity measures, resulting in significant workplace disparities. Operating in a traditionally male-dominated industry, the organization lacks proactive initiatives to promote gender inclusivity.

One of the key issues at the company is its lack of structured diversity policies: Diversity-Focused Hiring – Job postings and hiring panels are male-dominated, leading to low female representation in leadership roles. As a result, very few women advance to managerial or executive positions.

Transparent Pay Structures – Unlike organizations that conduct regular pay audits, this company does not ensure salary equity, resulting in an unaddressed 22% gender pay gap. Women in similar roles as men continue to earn significantly lower salaries.

Leadership Development for Women – There are no formal mentorship or executive training programs, limiting career growth opportunities for female employees. The absence of structured leadership development prevents many women from advancing in their careers.

Workplace Culture Initiatives – The company lacks flexible work arrangements. Rigid work schedules and no parental leave support have contributed to higher attrition rates among women employees.

The negative impact of failing to address gender disparities is evident. Women hold only 9% of leadership roles, despite making up 30% of the total workforce. Employee turnover among female staff is alarmingly high, with exit interviews revealing that limited career growth opportunities, workplace bias, and pay disparities are key reasons for resignations. Additionally, the company has struggled to attract diverse talent, as potential female hires often perceive the organization as an unfavorable workplace. It was also flagged in a gender equity report for failing to meet equal opportunity standards, further tarnishing its reputation.

Due to the lack of proactive diversity measures, the organization faces challenges in talent retention, workforce satisfaction, and overall business performance. Without urgent policy reforms, it risks falling behind competitors that embrace diversity and inclusivity as a strategic advantage.

Analysis:

Our analysis of previous research suggests that women employees experience significant gender bias and unequal access to employment opportunities. We identified several factors that contribute to these gaps, including lack of mentorship, stereotyping, and unconscious bias. Our analysis also highlights the need for organizations to implement policies and practices that promote equal employment opportunities and address gender bias.

Factor	Tech Giant with Strong Gender Policies	Industrial Firm Lacking Diversity Measures
Leadership Representation	42% women in senior roles	Only 9% women in leadership
Gender Pay Gap	Less than 2%	22%
Workplace Retention	High retention (↑30% over 5 years)	High turnover among women
Diversity Hiring Practices	AI-driven, bias-free recruitment	Male-dominated hiring panels
Workplace Culture	Flexible work policies, childcare support	Rigid work schedules, no support programs
Industry Reputation	"Top 10 Best Workplace for Women" award	Flagged for failing equal opportunity standards

The comparison between Tech Giant with Strong Gender Policies and Industrial Firm Lacking Diversity Measures highlights the importance of gender-inclusive policies in fostering an equitable and high-performing workplace. Tech’s commitment to

diversity, equal pay, leadership development, and workplace flexibility has resulted in higher employee retention, strong leadership representation, and industry recognition. In contrast, another firm lack of proactive measures has led to workplace dissatisfaction, high attrition rates, and reputational damage.

For organizations to succeed in today's competitive market, it is crucial to implement and enforce gender equity policies. Companies must prioritize: Bias-free hiring practices to promote fair recruitment. Equal pay audits to address wage disparities. Leadership development programs to ensure career advancement opportunities for women. Flexible work policies to support work-life balance.

By embracing gender diversity as a core business strategy, companies can enhance productivity, attract top talent, and drive long-term success in the global workforce.

higher female leadership, better retention, and a more equitable work culture.

4. Findings and Discussion

- **Prevalence of Gender Bias in Hiring Practices:** Women are underrepresented in executive roles due to unconscious biases and traditional leadership stereotypes.
- **Impact of Wage Gaps on Economic Security:** Persistent disparities in salary contribute to long-term financial instability for women.
- **Barriers to Promotion and Leadership:** Organizational cultures often favor male leadership styles, limiting opportunities for women.
- **Effectiveness of Diversity Policies:** While some organizations have successfully implemented gender equity initiatives, others have failed due to lack of enforcement and accountability.

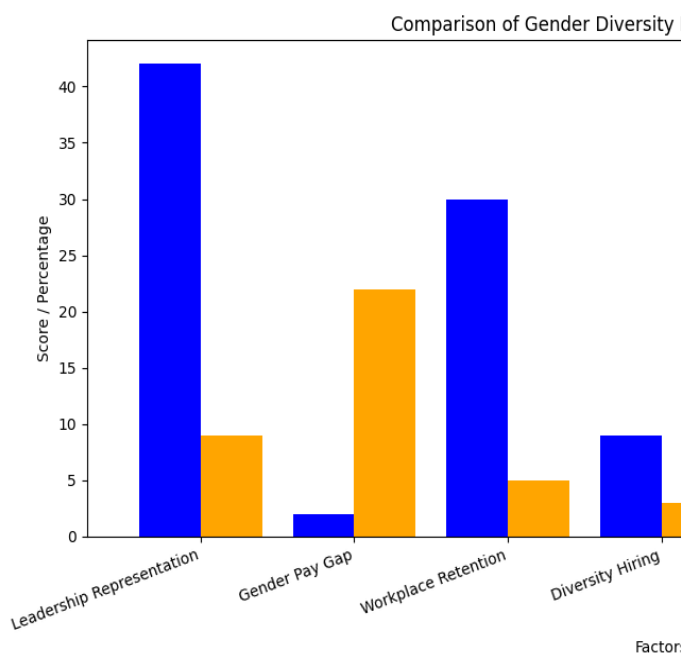


Fig 1.0 The graph compares gender diversity policies between a tech company with strong inclusivity measures and an industrial firm lacking diversity initiatives. It highlights key factors like leadership representation, gender pay gap, workplace retention, hiring practices, and industry reputation, showing that companies with proactive gender policies achieve

5. Conclusion: To dismantle gender barriers in the workplace, organizations must adopt proactive strategies such as:

- Implementing **bias-free hiring and promotion processes.**
- Enforcing **pay transparency and equitable salary structures.**
- Strengthening **mentorship and leadership programs for women.**
- Promoting **flexible work policies** to support work-life balance.
- Holding companies accountable through **regulatory frameworks and reporting mechanisms.**

This study underscores the urgent need for systemic change in workplace policies and attitudes to ensure equal employment opportunities for women. Conclusion:

This study demonstrates the persistence of gender bias and equal employment opportunity gaps for women employees. Organizations must take proactive steps to address these gaps and promote equal employment

opportunities. By doing so, organizations can tap into the talents and contributions of women employees and promote a more inclusive and equitable work environment.

This research paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of gender bias in employment and offer actionable insights for fostering workplace equality.

Recommendations:

- Based on our analysis, we recommend that organizations:
 - Provide mentorship and networking opportunities for women employees
 - Implement training programs to address unconscious bias and stereotyping
 - Increase access to training and development opportunities for women employees
 - Promote flexible work arrangements and work-life balance continues to shape the future of cloud computing in a sustainable, efficient, and equitable manner.

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