Chapter 4

Understanding Career Barriers of Women Executives:
Glass Ceiling and Glass Cliff

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ABSTRACT

Inequalities between women and men continue in global labor markets. Although the inclusion of women as labor force increases day by day, their representation in senior management levels remains insufficient. Women continue to face several barriers preventing them from attaining equal access, participation, and progress in the business environment. Within this chapter, the authors discuss two types of career barriers called "glass ceiling" and "glass cliff," which women encounter frequently in their work life. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a general perspective on barriers of women's career advancement and to examine glass ceiling and glass cliff the in its background, its causes, and its consequences. The chapter also aims to analyze studies which criticize the concept of glass ceiling. The results of the chapter are expected to be a source for researchers in the areas of women's career barriers, women's leadership, and gender inequality.

INTRODUCTION

In almost all countries of the world, although men have been more involved in employment than women, gender differences have considerably decreased in recent years (Ortiz-Ospina & Tzvetkova, 2017). Thereby, women's global labor force participation rate which plays a central role in the countries' economic development (Narayana & Shongwe, 2010, p. 83) has increased rapidly and changed the structure of the workforce (Dizaho, Salleh & Abdullah, 2016, p. 328). Nowadays, women's opportunities at their workplace have significantly improved, but women still deal with career challenges (McCrady, 2012, p. 718). Many forms of discrimination, including horizontal and vertical types, have been revealed in organizations (Kim & Park, 2016, p. 43). In particular, gender inequality at the workplace still remains

as a prominent challenge in developing countries (Anisman-Razin, Kark, & Saguy, 2018, p. 690) despite a general perception of gender equality (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998, p. 787). In order to explain gender inequality in an organization, researches draw attention on Acker's (1990) Theory of Gendered Organizations which confirmed that organizations were deeply embedded in gendered processes. Besides, researches on leadership and gender have accumulated on gender inequality and the underrepresentation of women in high-level positions (Haslam & Ryan, 2008, p. 530). In spite of the notable increase in women's role in the organization, they remain underrepresented in positions of leadership (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018, p. 671). Women's improvement in management career can be affected by several components such as individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors (Metz, 2003). Especially, as women climb through the corporate stages, they face barriers which are not visible at all levels (Hede, 1994, p. 81). The main paradigm that frames the barriers women executives face in high-level management in an organization has been the glass ceiling. However, several women have recently made steady advancement and moved to leadership status. Some of them have found themselves in the glass cliff as these management positions have a high risk of failure (Sabharwal, 2013, p. 399). The glass ceiling and the glass cliff, which are two concepts related to each other, are discriminatory barriers to the professional upward mobility of qualified women executives, regardless of their actual performances (Kulich & Iacoviello, 2017, p. 331).

The purpose of this chapter is to present a general theoretical perspectives of the barriers that hinder women's career development and to specifically analyze glass ceiling and glass cliff within the frame of background, causes and consequences. The chapter also discusses criticisms about glass ceiling. This qualitative research is based on secondary data that provides a comprehensive overview.

BARRIERS OF WOMEN'S CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Every woman's career path in business life can be affected by various factors. In the literature, there are extensive studies focusing on the factors that stand in the way of the advancement of women in organizations. A brief review of pervasive barriers identified for woman employees to access in leadership positions is presented below.

The work of Fagenson (1990) discussed three theoretical perspectives for demonstrating women's limited advance in management. She firstly addressed the dominant traditional theoretical paradigms which were gender-centered perspectives and organization structure perspectives. In the gender-centered perspective, underrepresentation in senior management tasks is linked to factors that are inappropriate traits of women, cognitions, attitudes and behaviors, while organization structure perspective highlights the structure of organization. Due to the limited results of these perspectives, she also explored a new perspective called as gender-organization-system approach, which suggested limited progress of women in their organizations can be related to the gender, the organization, the social and institutional system. These perspectives overlap the different categories of women career barriers in the other studies. Powell (2000) examined prior reviews on women in the managerial levels and highlighted that there were two general types of career barriers. The first barrier was person-centered, including personal characteristics, skills and behaviors that were contrary to the requirements of managerial roles. The second barrier was situation-centered and referred to the barrier within the work and sociocultural environment. According to another classification by Johns (2013), the barriers that hindered women from reaching managerial positions were structural, cultural and organizational types. She analyzed studies with regard to the effect

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