

Eliminating the Glass Ceiling: Past Initiatives and Suggestions for Future Implementation

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Introduction

The fight for women's equality began during the 19th Century in the United States with the first wave of feminism. This movement resulted in women's right to vote in 1920. Since this first wave of feminism, women have made "large strides toward equality in higher education, politics, economic contributions, wage parity, and management business roles" (Elmuti, Lehman, Harmon, and Lu 2003). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the participation of women in the workplace rose from 20 percent to 59 percent between 1900 and 2005 in the United States (Barreto, Ryan, and Schmitt 4).

While these statistics represent a huge accomplishment for women, the day has still not arrived when women are viewed as equal to men. Women now fill the workforce, but remain extremely underrepresented in upper management and on boards of directors. This is due to what is called the "glass ceiling", an invisible barrier preventing women from advancing to upper-management positions.

What attempts have been made to break the glass ceiling and advance equality for women in the United States? Since the number of women in top-management positions is still disproportionate, what more can be done?

A review of the literature on the topic makes clear that after many attempts to create equality, women are still underrepresented in the higher echelons of organizations. In fact, Catalyst reports that "women represent just 9.9 percent of corporate line officer positions, and 5.2 percent of the top-earning corporate officers" (Weber).

This research is significant to the field of Human Resources because it works to

synthesize others' work in this area. Examining in chronological order what has been done through different types of legislation and through the work of organizations to eliminate the glass ceiling allows for conclusions to be drawn from a collective group of initiatives and to indicate suggestions for further success.

Under-representation of women in upper-management positions is a very relevant issue in today's society. The number of women in the workplace is growing rapidly, but the number of women advancing to the upper levels of organizations remains disproportionate. By not allowing women into these positions, businesses are not taking full advantage of a changing labor market.

This research will discuss Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action legislation that has been enforced in the United States in the area of gender discrimination and the work of an organization by the name of Catalyst, whose goal is to aid in the advancement of women to higher positions in companies. The thesis will also describe and evaluate several Catalyst Award-winning initiatives which promote non-discriminatory practices in support of women. The Catalyst Award will be discussed in further detail in the thesis. Although the issue at hand is in fact a global issue, global legislation will not be addressed.

Equal Employment Opportunity Legislation

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

As amended, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employers from discriminating based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. This act created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

to enforce all EEO laws and to oversee and coordinate all federal EEO regulations, practices, and policies (EEOC 2004). Title VII granted the EEOC the following powers:

1. to cooperate with and, with their consent, utilize regional, State, local, and other agencies, both public and private, and individuals;
3. to pay witnesses whose depositions are taken or who are summoned before the Commission or any of its agents the same witness and mileage fees as are paid to witnesses in the courts of the United States;
5. to furnish to persons subject to this subchapter such technical assistance as they may request to further their compliance with this subchapter or an order issued there under;
7. upon the request of (i) any employer, whose employees or some of them, or (ii) any labor organization, whose members or some of them, refuse or threaten to refuse to cooperate in effectuating the provisions of this subchapter, to assist in such effectuation by conciliation or such other remedial action as it is provided by this subchapter;
9. to make such technical studies as are appropriate to effectuate the purposes and policies of this subchapter and to make the results of such studies available to the public;
10. to intervene in civil action brought under section 2000e-5 of this title [section 706] by an aggrieved party against a respondent other than a government, governmental agency or political subdivision (EEOC 2004).

Equal Pay Act of 1973

The Equal Pay Act of 1973, or EPA, amended the Equal Pay Act of 1963 to prohibit gender-based wage discrimination between men and women in the same organization who perform jobs for which the required skill, effort, and responsibility are comparable (EEOC 2004).

Civil Rights Act of 1991

The Civil Rights Act of 1991 aided in the effort of gender-based discrimination in two ways. Primarily, the act provided monetary damages to victims of intentional employment discrimination. This Act's second achievement of importance to women was Title II, the Glass Ceiling Act.

The Glass Ceiling Act created the Glass Ceiling Commission "to focus attention on, and complete a study relating to, the existence of artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities in the workplace, and to make recommendations for overcoming such barriers" (EEOC 2004).

Overview

Equal Employment Opportunity Legislation was the first attempt to create equal opportunities for women and drastically increased female representation in the workplace. EEO provided women with fair representation in the case of gender discrimination, resulting in fewer occurrences of blatant discrimination. Since the passage of EEO laws, though, it seems that employers have discovered more discrete ways of discriminating on the basis of gender, making gender discrimination more difficult to spot in an organization. These tactics create the need for a more aggressive means of combating discrimination.

Affirmative Action Policies and Practices

The goal of Affirmative Action (AA) programs is to "systematically combat past and present discrimination in an organization ... [and to] implement strategies to improve the status of disadvantaged target groups, such as women". AA differs from equal opportunity in that it takes a more assertive approach by requiring the use of measures to scrutinize and transform organizational policies and practices. This is done in order to

eliminate biases and to increase target groups' representation and status (Iyer 258-59).

Organizations implementing gender-based AA usually use a monitoring program to determine whether or not qualified female workers have equal opportunities. The organization starts by assessing the proportion of jobs and promotions given to women. The number is then compared with the proportion of women the workforce who have the necessary experience and qualifications for the position in question. If there is an inconsistency between these two numbers, the organization must find out which policies are discriminatory and eliminate them. "It also introduces proactive strategies to increase the representation of women within its ranks" (Iyer 259).

One of these strategies involves increasing the number of female applicants for jobs and promotions. This is done mainly by making information regarding job openings more widely available. The second strategy gives female employees a chance to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to compete for jobs and promotions. The last strategy requires organizations to adjust selection criteria for decisions regarding employment and promotions (Iyer 259).

Any AA plan that is implemented "should include hiring goals and timetables to which the contractor must commit its 'good faith' efforts". It is illegal, however, to implement severe preferential treatment or strict quotas (Iyer 260).

Legislation Supporting Affirmative Action

The first Affirmative Action legislation occurred in 1965 with President Johnson's Executive Order (EO) 11246. This executive order established the policy of the U.S. government as providing equal opportunity in federal employment for all people. EO 11246 made it illegal to discriminate in federal employment because of race, creed, color, or national origin. Executive Order 11375,

created in 1967, amended EO 11246 by changing the word creed to religion and adding sex discrimination to the other prohibited items (Iyer 260).

As presently administered by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, EO 11246 requires the federal government, as well as organizations with federal contracts (in excess of US\$50,000) and 50 or more employees, to implement AA to prevent discrimination in their policies and practices (Iyer 260).

Failure to comply with AA requirements usually results in monetary fines (Iyer 260).

Organizations that are not covered under EO 11246 can still be mandated to implement AA under the 1972 Equal Employment Opportunity Act. This act gave federal courts the power to require companies found guilty of discrimination to implement AA strategies (Iyer 260).

It is especially noteworthy that court-ordered programs are the only ones in which it is legal to use quotas to reduce discrimination (Iyer 260). One common misconception of AA is that it means hiring by the use of quotas. This belief is inaccurate. In fact, there have been several cases in which the use of quotas has been deemed unconstitutional.

A classic example of a case in which quotas were decided to be unconstitutional is *Regents of University of California v. Bakke*, decided in 1978. In this case, the medical school of the University of California at Davis allowed students who were members of minority groups into the special admissions program, even though many did not meet certain requirements, such as the 2.5 grade point average cutoff. The United States Supreme Court ruled that the University of California could use race as only one of many qualifications in the application process, and that the use of quotas in the admission process was unconstitutional ("*Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*").

Overview

Although Affirmative Action techniques are extremely effective in forcing employers to adopt more female- and minority-friendly policies, there are still flaws. The major issue that arises from the use of Affirmative Action is reverse discrimination. Employers often overlook a qualified candidate in order to fill a position with a member of a protected group, even if the member is less qualified for the position. Instead of discriminating against a protected group, the employer consequently discriminates against those not part of a protected group, defeating the purpose of Affirmative Action to gain equal treatment.

Catalyst

About Catalyst

One comprehensive response to the issue of gender discrimination that has become a model for companies is an organization by the name of Catalyst. Catalyst, founded in 1962, is the leading nonprofit membership organization that works with businesses around the world and provides consulting and other services in order to create inclusive workplaces and increase opportunities for women and businesses.

Catalyst also does a great deal of research studying “men and women across levels, functions, and geographies to learn about women’s experiences in business, barriers to their career advancement, and individual and organizational strategies leading to success” (Catalyst, “About Us”).

The Catalyst Award

One of the ways in which Catalyst supports women is by selecting and recognizing firms for successful gender initiatives. Catalyst “honors innovative organizational approaches with proven, measurable results that address the recruitment, development, and advancement of all women, including women of color” (Catalyst, “Catalyst Award”). The Catalyst Award allows the company to recognize,

share, and celebrate successful initiatives, which consequently provides replicable models that help organizations create women-friendly initiatives.

The Catalyst Awards Conference is attended by more than 600 people from about 200 organizations and gives award winners a chance to share their successful initiatives. Award winning initiatives are also celebrated at the Catalyst Awards Dinner, which is described as “one of the most prestigious and broadly attended events in the business community” (Catalyst, “The Catalyst Award”).

Companies, professional firms, and other organizations can earn the Catalyst Award by creating initiatives that are successful in developing and advancing the careers of women.

Prospective award recipients are evaluated on the following key factors:

1. **Business Rationale:** There must be an explicit connection between the initiative and the business strategy.
2. **Senior Leadership Support:** Upper management must demonstrate commitment to the initiative.
3. **Accountability:** Formal monitoring mechanisms must support the initiative and measure its impact.
4. **Communication:** There must be mechanisms for engaging and informing employees of the initiative and its business rationale.
5. **Replicability:** All or parts of the initiative must be able to be implemented by other organizations and thus used as a model for change.
6. **Originality:** Initiatives are compared against previous winners and must include elements that are innovative and provide new knowledge.
7. **Measurable Results:** There must be documented evidence to demonstrate the impact and who improvement since the start of the initiative (Catalyst).

Catalyst Award-Winning Gender Initiatives

Aleita Johnson of the Society for Human Resource Management describes in her article various successful gender initiatives implemented by organizations that won the Catalyst Award for their success. Baxter International Inc., a global health care company, implemented an initiative it refers to as *Building Talent Edge*. This initiative was implemented across the entire Asia-Pacific Ocean. The goal of *Building Talent Edge* was to “achieve a 50/50 gender balance across management-level and critical positions by 2010” (Johnson). The goal was reached instead by 2008, two years ahead of schedule (Johnson).

CH2M HILL, a global engineering corporation, increased the number of women in senior leadership positions to 18 percent, a sharp increase from its 2003 percentage of 2.9. The initiative introduced by CH2M HILL “utilizes the company’s long standing, inclusive culture to provide women access to critical positions and key projects which lead to potential management opportunities” (Johnson). Gibbons P.C., a highly-ranked law firm with offices in New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Delaware, implemented an initiative entitled *The Women’s Initiative: Driving Success through Diversity Investment*. This initiative “created a flexible and inclusive workplace by embedding diversity as critical to business success and its firm branding” (Johnson).

The last initiative discussed by Aleita Johnson is KPMG LLP, an audit, tax, and advisory firm. The initiative established by this company was given the name *Great Place to Build a Career* and encourages a workplace culture that is inclusive of both women and minorities. This culture is supported across all levels of the firm. This initiative reduced the turnover of women by 36.3 percent.

Overview

The work that Catalyst has done in support of women is unprecedented. There has never before been an organization whose sole purpose is to aid in the advancement of women to upper-management positions. Catalyst’s efforts have led to an increased awareness of the issue of gender discrimination in the workplace and have published vital research in the area.

Although the good that Catalyst has done has not been measured by statistics, Catalyst Award-Winners are able to show statistics as to how women were helped by successful gender initiatives. The Catalyst Award creates an incentive for organizations to create programs that help women to obtain upper management positions.

Conclusion

Thanks to the decades of supportive research of Catalyst, more and more organizational effort is being focused on non-discriminatory programs. As demonstrated in this report, much has been done to increase the representation of women in the workforce in upper-level management positions. Early legislation increased the number of women in the workforce substantially, and the numbers continue to rise. As demonstrated by Catalyst, many companies have successfully implemented gender initiatives that increased the number of female top managers substantially.

Unfortunately, even after all that has been done, the total number of women holding top management positions remains disproportionate. According to a study done by Catalyst, only 3 percent of Fortune 500 Corporate Executive Officer positions and 15.2 percent of Fortune 500 board seats are held by women. In addition, these percentages have remained rather steady over the past couple of years (Catalyst, “Women in U.S. Management”). These statistics show that many companies still fail to embrace an

inclusive workplace culture. Further research is urgently needed to determine what more can be done to further alleviate the issue.

A very recent example of such research suggests that the role men play in achieving gender equality is more important than has been recognized through past initiatives. One reason that so many programs have been unsuccessful, as stated in an article released by Catalyst in May of 2008, is “that too many gender initiatives focus solely on changing women—from the way they network to the way they lead” (Prime and Moss-Racusin 2). Another cited reason is that too many organizations rely on women alone to make the changes necessary to change the status quo. Men are “arguably the most powerful stakeholder group in most large corporations” and by focusing solely on women while attempting gender initiatives, men are alienated and thus don’t support the cause (Prime and Moss-Racusin 2).

The study was conducted first through the use of in-depth interviews. The interviews were done first in order to “develop in-depth insights or hypotheses about the factors that predict men’s awareness of gender bias and their advocacy for gender equality” (Prime and Moss-Racusin 24). The interviews were followed by an online survey, which was distributed to 178 businessmen in order “to develop the hypotheses that were developed based on the interviews” (Prime and Moss-Racusin 24). Catalyst was able to study attitudes and experiences that set apart men involved in fighting for gender equality and

men not involved in any such efforts by surveying members from both groups (Prime and Moss-Racusin 24).

The research revealed that individuals must recognize that inequality exists before they will support any efforts to correct an inequality. “Men who were more aware of gender bias were more likely to say that it was important to them to achieve gender equality” (Prime and Moss-Racusin 24). It was also found that there are three important predictors of men’s awareness of gender bias: 1) defiance of certain masculine norms, 2) the presence or absence of women mentors, and 3) a sense of fair play, with fair play being the largest indicator. Lastly, three key barriers were revealed that “could undermine men’s support for initiatives to end gender bias: apathy, fear, and ignorance about gender issues” (Prime and Moss-Racusin 24).

The research by Catalyst involving men in gender initiatives indicates that men must be made aware that the status quo is flawed. Until men choose to recognize that gender discrimination exists, and is wrong, they will continue to show a lack of interest in improving the current situation.

As a female researcher studying in the fields of Business Administration and Human Resources, I am discouraged to see how underrepresented women really are in top-management positions. More research on the topic may make the difference in informing organizations in regards to enforcing successful gender initiatives.

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Orazco mural (Baker Library, Dartmouth College)