

Influence of the Glass Cliff Phenomenon on the Effectiveness of Women Senior Managers in Organisational Development in Kenya.

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Abstract

This study sought to understand the influence of the glass cliff phenomenon on the effectiveness of women senior managers in organisational development. Specifically, the study examined the influence of promotion processes on the effectiveness of women senior managers. Using a descriptive survey design, registered and active non-governmental organisations in Nakuru County participated in the study focusing on women senior managers. A self-administered questionnaire, both open and closed-ended questions, was used in collecting data. Quantitative data collected was sorted and cleaned, and the analysis was undertaken through the use of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. Pearson correlation and Chi-square tests were used to determine the influence between the study variables. On the other hand, thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. The study established that there is a positive relationship exists between promotion processes and the effectiveness of women senior managers ($r=0.619$; $p<0.05$). Furthermore, the chi-square results indicated a statistically significant association between promotion processes and the effectiveness of women senior managers ($\chi^2=36.905$; $p=0.000$). The study concludes that women are promoted into senior management positions where the organisation is failing. Women are not promoted into risky positions as compared to their male counterparts, but contextual gender factors such as patriarchy contribute to the women feeling that their positions are risky. This study recommends that a comparative study should be conducted to compare the influence of the glass cliff phenomenon on the effectiveness of women senior managers in developed and developing countries.

Key Terms: Glass cliff phenomenon, organisational development, promotion processes, women leadership.

How to cite this article in APA.

Kalekye, E., Koome, P., & Gichuhi, D. (2021). Influence of the Glass Cliff Phenomenon on the Effectiveness of Women Senior Managers in Organisational Development in Kenya. *Editon Cons. J. Bus. Manag. Stud.*, 3(1), 101-108. <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjbms.v3i1.259>

Introduction

Women leaders have the potential to contribute enormously and positively to organisational development, yet they continue to be underrepresented in leadership spaces. However, this does not deter the fact that women hold different leadership positions compared to men. Cultural and social stereotypes continue to come into play when it comes to leadership positions and attitudes (Glass & Cook, 2016).

On a global scale, women hold leadership positions, albeit marginal, in their path to achieving organisational development. Pereira and Paola (2019) present that women face barriers while climbing their career ladders, and they eventually shatter the glass ceiling. Despite these advancements, women continue to face career progression barriers that make it difficult to be presented in leadership positions.

In Africa, Tokar et al. (2019) report on South African organisations shows that about 46 per cent of individuals entering the workplace are women. However, only 7 per cent are executive directors who have a place on boards. On the other hand, Johnson and Hackman (2018) cite Rwanda as a shining example of gender parity, especially in the political front where there is the highest percentage (64 per cent) of women legislators in Africa, and it is among the highest in the world. In Kenya, Njihia (2017) report shows that out of 449 directors from 51 publicly listed companies, only 12% were female directors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Glass Cliff Phenomenon and Women Leadership

The glass cliff phenomenon has continued to generate a lot of debates around the world as numerous studies seek to unravel the phenomenon. In the scholarly discourse on women development in organisations, the glass phenomena such as the glass escalator, glass ceiling, and

glass cliff have focused mainly on the obstacles women face in organisations with different magnitudes of biases and discrimination in their organisational lives. This also affects organisation development and, specifically, organisational development interventions that are planned to solve problems, identify opportunities, develop strengths and correct aspects that are found to be inefficient (Chandrasekar & Velusamy, 2017). Thus, gender discrimination brews inefficiencies in the organisation.

The glass cliff phenomenon was first discussed by Ryan and Haslam in 2005 after their study on FTSE 100 companies listed in the London Stock Exchange revealed that when the stocks in most of the companies were failing, then there was the subsequent appointment of a woman into the board leading to improved performance of the companies (Ryan et al., 2016). The glass cliff thinking has been used to describe instances in which women are promoted to senior roles, especially when there is a possibility of a decline in the organisation. The promotion of female leaders is continually associated with instances when poor performance is experienced in different fields and realms.

In the political realm, Browning (2017) highlights that the glass cliff is exhibited when women gain their candidacies when it seems impossible to win as compared to their male counterparts vying for similar positions. He further adds that the United Kingdom shows the glass cliff appointments in regional elections in evidence of the glass cliff effect. This ideology is supported by Glass and Cook (2016), who points out the political elections in the United Kingdom are usually connected to the appointment of female leaders into precarious positions. An example of the glass cliff in the United Kingdom political arena is the appointment of Theresa May as the Prime Minister at a time where Britain sought exit strategies and pathways from the European Union. This was a precarious position.

In the legal sector, Peterson (2016) says that the glass cliff is explained by the assignment of female legal professions with cases considered less lucrative but more troublesome than men. In the educational sector, Peterson (2016) also suggests that it is very unlikely that men will agree to the fact that the glass cliff effect exists. However, the exploration of the context in which women are allowed to participate in academic management and the nature of the positions they are given to hold shows that traces of the glass cliff exist.

In the Non-Governmental sector, Black et al. provide evidence that women have limited leadership positions in NGOs. For instance, at the United Nations system, only 42.8 per cent of the employees are women; however, scaling to leadership positions, the number reduces. Also, the women's promotion into leadership positions for many NGOs, whether local or international, is skewed to favour men creating gaps for glass cliff appointments to take place. This reduces the effectiveness of women in leadership positions.

In organisations, the glass cliff phenomenon focuses on gender as a determining factor for organisational development (Yaghi, 2018). The overarching argument for the glass cliff is that women and men are promoted to senior positions under different contexts and circumstances. However, this does not indicate that female leader are not able to handle their new leadership positions. Instead, different motivations lead to the promotion of women to leadership positions. Additionally, Velte (2018) opines that there are prevailing gender stereotypes that exist in organisations that push for the glass cliff agenda. For instance, women are thought to have leadership advantages, making it seem that they have better leadership qualities for handling crises (Murugami, 2017).

Unequivocally focusing on senior management positions, female leaders are often viewed as attentive, compassionate, and sensitive to the stakeholders' needs compared to male colleagues holding similar positions. This propels a mindset that affects women in leadership roles regarding prejudiced thinking about leadership ability, recruitment, the likelihood of promotion and job fit (Oliver et al., 2018). Seemingly, favourable attitudes towards male leadership are upheld, making it strenuous for women leaders to attain and advance to leadership positions. However, even when they advance to the position, Burton and Leberman (2017) argue that maintaining the leadership positions places the women in precarious positions which are on the glass cliff. Therefore, this study sought to assess the influence of promotion processes on the effectiveness of women senior managers in organisations.

Empirical Review

Women's promotion into senior management positions is dependent on the organisational environment. In the contemporary corporate sector, the glass cliff is viewed as a barrier to gender parity. Many countries endeavour to achieve gender equality in organisations. In Britain, a study by Ryan et al. (2016) reveals that women are promoted into senior levels of management when there is weakening organisational performance, such as declining performance of the stock. In the federal government, the study by Sabharwal (2015) revealed that the promotion of women leaders was based on the policies of the agents. However, agreeing with Ryan et al., Sabharwal notes that women in a leadership position are promoted into risky positions which men mainly dominate. A lack of organisational support for the women set them up for the glass cliff. An important characteristic for organisational development is that this affects the totality of the organisation's systems, structures, and processes.

Based on archival data on organisations in the United Kingdom, Main and Gregory-Smith (2018) found that

women directors are appointed to risky positions, which ultimately causes shorter career stints. At their time of appointment, the organisations are seen to be undergoing financial turmoil. In a similar study, Glass and Cook (2016) found out that as compared to male peers, women leaders experienced shorter tenures. Their study also found out that the women CEOs were promoted in firms that were in a crisis or were struggling. The promotions are encouraged by key decision-makers in the organisation.

A study by Peterson (2016) shows that the increase of Swedish women academic managers is not an indication that parity has been achieved between men and women in organisations. The study indicated that the permeation of the women managers was in a context which competitive. There was a high competition between higher education institutions concerning the recruitment of markets on international and national students. This competition led to the radical transformation of the organisation and the emergence of requirements for new managerial roles and skills. This resulted in increased workloads coupled with work stresses and strains. Additionally, the women leaders found that their new positions were marred with increased professional role conflicts. At the time of their appointment, the women managers describe the context of their promotion as difficult with problematic and complex organisational circumstances.

In exploring the promotion context for women leaders in the organisation, Yaghi (2018) found out that gender was a factor considered in the promotion of women in senior leadership positions. The study showed that women leaders believed that their work involved a certain degree of risk. However, it was discovered that this did not mean that the women leaders' work was riskier than their male counterparts. Therefore, the women did not believe that they were placed in their position to fail. This study brought divergent opinions to the glass cliff literature by suggesting

that women may not fail due to the glass cliff but to organisational politics.

In Kenya, a study by Omukaga (2019) on the corporations listed in the Nairobi Securities Exchange (NSE) found out that the promotion of women in top leadership positions does not depend on tumultuous conditions. Nonetheless, the study showed that when it comes to board diversity, the promotion of women was very hard. Men were always considered for promotions as compared to their female counterparts. Thus, there is an indication that women's promotion had more to do with non-leadership roles than with their abilities and capabilities. This line of thought has a connection to gender stereotypes.

In NGOs, Black et al. (2017) found out that as opposed to the corporate sector, the culture and requirements for leadership in NGOs varies due to the diverse context in which these organisations operate. Therefore, the promotion of leaders considers adaptable skillsets necessary to work with different cultures, communities, and contexts. The landscape of operation of NGOs is continually changing, making it very dynamic and also challenging. These challenges can lead to crisis and, subsequently, leadership changes for crisis management, thereby paving the way for glass cliff effects to take place.

RESULTS

Influence of Promotion Processes on the Effectiveness of Women Senior Managers

The study sought to assess the influence the promotion processes have on the effectiveness of women senior managers in NGOs in Nakuru County, Kenya. On their promotion, the women senior managers indicated that although they did not feel that they were likely to be promoted into risky positions as compared to their male counterparts, other factors contributed to them being in risky positions. One of the respondents indicated;

'I do not believe that women are put in riskier positions as compared to men. But I do think that you cannot compare my experience with those of my male colleagues. They seem to have it easier as there are no gender issues that come into play in their promotions as compared to me. On the other hand, my organisation is male-dominated, and I work in a male-dominated community; so, when gender is considered, perhaps I am in a riskier position than my male colleagues.' (Research data, WSM respondent 48, 2020).

Another respondent indicated;

'In my opinion, the word risky is relative. What is risky to me is not risky to you, but as a woman working in this community that is so patriarchal, I believe that promotions and even working operations are riskier as compared to the men.' (Research data, WSM respondent 25, 2020).

These findings are similar to those of Gupta et al. (2018), who found out that the experiences of women in senior management are different from those of their male counterparts. Nevertheless, Yaghi (2018) found that gender is a factor that is considered in the promotion of women senior managers. The view on risky promotions and positions is contextual. In matriarchal contexts, Yaghi explains that women are not placed in riskier positions than their male counterparts so that they can fail. This can be due to organisational politics. However, in patriarchal contexts, this may not be the case.

Moreover, most of the women senior managers indicated that the organisation was performing poorly at the time of their promotion to senior management. One of the reasons provided for this was financial issues, as donors were ceasing funds due to the poor global economic conditions faced in recent times. However, some respondents indicated that poor performance of the organisation was not entirely attributed to financial turbulences as there

were other factors such as internal conflicts, high turnover of women senior managers and poor project implementation.

One of the respondents indicated;

'I was promoted to this position three years ago, and at the time, the organisation was going through leadership wrangles, and publicity issues were arising. This led to many employees leaving the organisation, and one of our major donors also left. I was put in charge of creating a good public image and re-establishing a good rapport with the community.' (Research data, WSM respondent 7, 2020).

These findings are similar to those of Sabharwal (2015), who indicated that an organisation's performance could be affected by several factors, which are financial or non-financial. The glass cliff phenomenon occurs in terms of promoting women when the organisation's performance is declining; the effectiveness of the women is affected as there is low satisfaction in their work. When organisations are in crisis, women managers are often considered to deal with the crisis.

On the questionnaire, all the close-ended questions on promotion processes and effectiveness of women senior managers were transformed into dummy variables to allow for inferential tests to take place. This was done by computing the variables and adding them into new dummy variables called promotion processes and effectiveness. These dummy variables were then each transformed into a dichotomous variable and coded as 1 (yes) and 2 (no). First, a correlation test was conducted to establish the strength between the two variables. Results are recorded in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation between Promotion Processes and Effectiveness of Women Senior Managers



		Effectiveness	Promotion processes
Effectiveness	Pearson Correlation	1	.619**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	54	54
Promotion processes	Pearson Correlation	.619**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	54	54

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in Table 1, the correlation value (r) is 0.619 with a p-value of 0.000. According to Akoglu (2018), Pearson Correlation is used to establish whether variables have a linear relationship between them. The relationship between variables can be positive or negative. In this study, there is a positive relationship between promotion processes and the effectiveness of women senior managers ($r=0.619$; $p<0.05$).

Thereafter, a Chi-square test was conducted to test the association between promotion processes and the effectiveness of women senior managers. The findings are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Test of Association between Promotion Processes and Effectiveness of Women Senior Managers

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	36.905 ^a	8	.000
Likelihood Ratio	32.503	8	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.155	1	.693
N of Valid Cases	54		

As indicated in Table 2, the Pearson Chi-Square value χ^2 is 36.905, while the p-value is 0.000. This shows that there is

a significant association between promotion processes and the effectiveness of women senior managers. These results are in tandem with Ryan et al. (2016) results, who indicate that promotion processes are strongly associated with the effectiveness of women in senior management positions. Additionally, Ryan et al. posit that the glass cliff phenomenon is categorised by promotion processes whereby women are promoted to precarious management positions and when organisational performance is dwindling. This affects the performance of the women, and therefore, their effectiveness.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion: This study concludes that women are promoted into senior management positions where the organisation is failing. Women are not promoted into risky positions as compared to their male counterparts, but contextual gender factors such as patriarchy contribute to the women feeling that their positions are risky. Therefore, it is inferred that the promotion aspect of the glass cliff phenomenon is contextual. Additionally, there is a statistically significant strong association between promotion processes and the effectiveness of women senior managers in NGOs in Nakuru County, Kenya. This study also indicates the need for organisations to take measures to ensure that the promotion of women senior managers does not propagate the glass cliff phenomenon as this affects the effectiveness of the managers in the organisation. Yaghi (2018) argues that the glass cliff research does not intend to show or rather accuse men of targeting women in the leadership process from an explicit point of view. This does not negate the fact that there still exists a discriminatory process in the promotion of women to leadership positions. Systems, structures and processes are more aligned in making it easier for men to lead in organisations as compared to their female counterparts. The focus on systems, structures and processes are embedded in organisational development. These organisational development goals are inextricably

intertwined with change processes such as promoting and empowering managers who are key actors in the organisation development processes (Chandrasekar & Velusamy, 2017). Gendered leadership takes different magnitudes in both developing and developed countries. Yet, despite the presence of scholarly evidence, there continues to be a gap in understanding the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions.

This is a barrier to gender equality, which leads to the glass cliff phenomenon when the glass ceiling is finally broken.

Recommendation: This study recommends that a comparative study should be conducted to compare the influence of the glass cliff phenomenon on the effectiveness of women senior managers in developed and developing countries.

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