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**Glass ceiling**  **: Resisting by measuring**

**Abstract**

**Worldwide the rate of women's representation in management remains low. This rate is explained by the phenomenon of the glass ceiling, a metaphor that can be explained but not measured. Thus, how to resist plateauing if we can not measure it. Resisting discrimination implies being able to quantify it, hence the interest of this research, which aims to build a measurement scale of the glass ceiling: Measure to better break.**

**Keywords**

Gender, career, measuring scale, glass ceiling, Morocco.

**Introduction**

The glass ceiling does not exist   ! and what if we could measure it? . Since the popularization of the metaphor of the glass ceiling, the majority of research that has studied this phenomenon is based on qualitative methods. The quantitative studies on the subject tries to highlight the hierarchical advancement, those who do not advance by deduction are those plateauing. However, it is important to be able to measure the glass ceiling in order to resist its barriers. Building measurement tools with quantifiable results will allow decision-makers as well as women themselves to realize the extent of the plateau.

The purpose of this paper is to present, part of a broader research that aims to build a contextualised measure scale of glass ceiling. In this paper, we will present the preliminary steps that led to the construction of glass ceiling measurement items.

The first part summarizes the review of the literature that dealt with the glass ceiling. The second part presents the synthesis of the qualitative studies which aims to explain this phenomenon according to the perception of women managers, HRM and experts of the question. We will also present the methodological approach that will lead us to the validation of the measurement scale.

           In the same structures and with the same qualifications, men evolve and women cap.  Even though research shows that women seem satisfied with this situation and that they incorporate other subjective criteria in assessing their career success; the fact remains that women's situation seems more or less paradoxical and runs counter to the objectives of equity and the maximization of corporate resources. From then on, it becomes difficult to seize a plateauing due to the sex of the employees.

1. **Glass ceiling  : Definitions and Approaches**

At the crossroads between career and gender research, a common reality is debated   : For different reasons, women do not pursue the same careers as their male counterparts in companies. For the most part, they are stuck at the bottom of the hierarchy and the rate of successful women is low. The history of women's work, the evolution of legislation, male dominance and segregation of duties make companies inheritors of a set of invisible and indirect mechanisms that prevent women from advancing hierarchy as men do. The metaphor of the glass ceiling gives an imaginative account of all of these sociological, psychological and organizational processes and mechanisms that intermingle within organizations and block women in positions which, in view of the history, are not meant for them. Reporting on all these mechanisms is difficult, especially in a management perspective, where the explanation of the integration of women in companies must be framed. However, companies are only dependent on social codes. The metaphor of the glass ceiling has made it possible to simplify the interaction of all these mechanisms, and as a result, has drawn attention to the invisible barriers that women face in companies ( Buscatto , Marry   ; 2009).

In this perspective, and to better understand the components of the glass ceiling, we will focus on the definition, the approaches and the mechanisms that build it.

The Glass ceiling remains until today the most complete denomination of this phenomenon which is inscribed both inside and outside the organizations and which prevents women from advancing in the hierarchy as men do. The various mechanisms of the glass ceiling, as treated in the specialized literature, make it possible to summarize the history of women and their access to the labor market as well as the consequences of this story on its current evolution within companies. The glass ceiling is a generic term that allows the reading of company’s codes in a differentiated manner and to understand the impact of these gender codes.

The pictorial expression of Glass ceiling appeared in 1987 in the work of Ann Morrisson, Randal White and Ellen Van Velsor  "Breaking the Glass ceiling".  They define it as  “***The set of artificial barriers, created by behavioral or organizational prejudices that prevent qualified individuals from advancing their organization”*** . This image of the glass ceiling was then trivialized following a Wall Street Journal article[[1]](#footnote-1).  Laufer (1995) defines the glass ceiling as " ***all the visible or invisible obstacles that may account for a certain scarcity of women in positions of power and decision making in public organizations, in companies, but also associations or unions***   ". Other more poetic or striking expressions have been used to focus on the situation of women in business. Among them are *"*  *picking edelweiss*  *"* ( Meynaud , 1988), to image the scarcity of women in the top management of a French public company.

Defining the glass ceiling consist first on knowing the components that constitute it. The research that focused on the glass ceiling mainly sought to analyze the mechanisms of its construction. In this area, the works of Kanter (1977), Schein (1975) and Kram (1983) were pioneers and paved the way for a number of research studies on behavior of organizations towards women.  Based on the classification of Desrosiers and Lépine (1991), we propose below, to present all the barriers constituting the glass ceiling according to these three axes namely the structural barriers, the individual barriers and the cultural barriers.

**Structural barriers**

Structural barriers or the structural perspective (Desrosiers and Lépine (1991) offer an explanation of the glass ceiling which appears to be rooted in organizations, according to which the characteristics of organizations, not those of individuals, cause the problems and explain this behavior, which refers to the problems inherent in structures that prevent women from advancing.

As Laufer (2005) argues, organizational rules, whether formal or informal, are masculine. Companies represent the living environment adapted to men and discriminating for women. In the day-to-day management of any company, criteria, formal and contractual rules are adopted between the different parties involved. Within the organization itself, there is an informal dynamic that excludes women because companies were not originally thought for them. These structural mechanisms are   :

* **The alibi woman (** **Tokenism** **)** **:** summarizes the impact of the lack of gender diversity in management positions on the experience of women in companies. Kanter (1977) was the first to investigate the effect of the minority presence of women in the organization through the *"*  *tokenism* *".* This minority presence or  *"male domination**"[[2]](#footnote-2)* in management leads firstly to an effect of visibility : a disproportionate attention to the presence of women leaders, and secondly to an effect of polarization. The differences between “*tokens”*  and male managers are exaggerated which reinforces the boundaries between the two groups. Third, assimilation classifies women managers into a social construct, leading women to conform to pre-established roles[[3]](#footnote-3).
* **The lack** **of** **sponsoring for women**  **:** The sponsor in the organization plays an important role (Hunt, Michael, 1983); The sponsorship relationship allows the mentee to have the answers to work-related questions, and to know through the sponsor's experience the formal and informal standards of the organization. From there, sponsored women are more likely to advance in the hierarchy than those who are not. For women, being sponsored would amount to being recognized by their peers as part of the organization ( Noe , 1988). This sponsorship relationship also plays a role of psychological support, which allows them to reduce the professional stress they feel. As a result, these women would increase their chances of advancing in the organization.
* **Exclusion of networks** : It is important to belong to a network, because the network plays the same role as the sponsorship. However, Landrieux Kartochian (2004) points out that group existence means the existence of borders. Schor (1998) explains that women have a harder time building and maintaining networks because they have less time than men to devote to these networks.

* **Stereotypes**  **on women** : “think Manager, think male”   !   The research conducted by Schein (1973) shows that the ideal manager would be perceived as possessing masculine qualities such as aggression and emotional stability, and women themselves attribute to good manager the same masculine qualities as men. Adler and Izraeli (1988) show that leadership belongs to the male domain. Research by Fagenson and Marcus (1991) shows that women who have worked in men-run businesses place more emphasis on male leadership characteristics (Schein, 1997   ;Powell, Butterfield and Parent, 2002). Overall, the good manager is predominantly perceived as masculine. Heilman (1994) argues that the existence of these stereotypes about women's ability to exercise power leads to discrimination in female careers in recruitment, mobility and promotion.

**Individual barriers**

Individual barriers or individual perspective (Desrosiers and Lépine, 1991) refer to specificities   related to their abilities, aptitudes, personalities and attitudes. These specificities do not allow women to exercise a managerial role, particularly through an ambivalence to exercise power and work-family conflict.

* **Ambivalence to exercise power**  : women reject political games, they consider the exercise of power or the political dimension of business as unethical (Harel- Giasson , 1999). Women believe in the principle of meritocracy in a rational society where rewards are granted according to a principle of objective merit.

* **Rarity of female models of success**  **:** In the absence of models in positions of power, women have difficulty in constructing an identity in relation to the exercise of power, and this identity construction is precisely, as described by Laufer (2005), the problematic of the female executive in organizations.

* **Negative self-efficacy**  **:** women can give up mainly because their entourage of women, has a negative image concerning their skills and their professional commitment (Davidson and Burke, 2004).

* **Work-family conflict**  : There is a historical segregation of duties and the main role of women in family. According to Françoise Belle (1999), research on women has long focused on the family, with the company being presented by the researcher as "   black box "out of the woman's field of vision. *"* *Her professional life as well as the nature of her investments in work are only the result of her family constraints*  *".* According to Greenhauss and Bettel (1985), the work / family conflict is a conflict between roles where there is an incompatibility between the pressures emanating from the company and those emanating from the family.

**Cultural barriers**

This perspective (Desrosiers, and Lépine, 1991) attempts to explain the glass ceiling through intangible and symbolic aspects of organizations as well as the relationship between culture and women in management. Organizationnal culture assigns women in certain pre-established roles, which correspond to their image and to the culturally accepted symbolism of femininity.

Indeed, within organizations, some so-called neutral rules are in fact only the reflection of a historically masculine structure, based on male models of investment and success (Wajcman, 2003). Within organizations, these rules translate into codes that manifest themselves through symbols, images of ideologies, difference and inequality between men and women (Laufer 2005, Wajcman 2003).

In general, the work of Belle (1999) showed that the culture of each company induces differences in the way in which the female manager develops her sexual status, and how she adapts her status of woman to her functions within the organisations. Work in this context deals with processes of acculturation, stereotypes, unconscious processes, values ​​and male behaviors (Brière, 2006). Harel Giasson (1999), show that the organization's culture, structure, values ​​and ideology have a definite impact on the situation and behavior of women in organizations.

The mechanisms of culture and their influence on the status of women in organizations is an intangible, unconscious process that leads to dominating effects. To borrow the expression of Bourdieu (1998)   : *“* *it is an unconscious inculcation of principles that only manifest themselves*.”

However, the culture of the company is not an internal invention independent of its external environment. As Morgan (1998) explains in his metaphor of organization as a culture, every organization is a human system characterized by common values, ideas, beliefs, rites, and models of meaning that characterize human systems. These values ​​reflect the beliefs that can be found in a country. Culture is thus conceived as a set of unwritten codes and rules that promote and ensure cohesion and coordination among individuals. Shared values ​​are considered as the founding glue of an organization.

As a result, referring to Bourdieu's work on male domination, the culture of the dominant male is in *"the natural order"*  things and corresponds to the course of the world and expectations about it.

Sexual division is still a reality in today's world despite the movements and changes made. Women in business remain *"an active minority"*; a minority that thinks and acts differently, but the introduction of changes by this active minority can not be done easily. We are more in a situation of traces (Harel- Giasson , 1999) than radical changes. Indeed, the sexual division acts through three principles (Bourdieu, 1998), the first wants that functions suitable for women are in the extension of domestic functions. The second stipulates that a woman can not have authority over a man, and the third gives man a monopoly over the handling of technical objects and machines. Wajcman (2003) explains that family roles are crucial in the gender structure of organizations.

It can be noted that the three general principles of sexual division perfectly overlap the very definitions of the glass ceiling within companies. Women find themselves in support positions (human resources, communication, assistance, etc.) that make use of their female communication and group management skills, while men are much more present in the technical and financial professions. On the other hand, the observation of the glass ceiling and the low rate of women leaders confirm the principle that a woman can not have authority over a man.

Harel Giasson (1999) argues that women share the same culture as men. When men take up dominant positions, women would choose to go to less assertive positions. It is a shared cultural construct where each gender has an assigned role.

Cultural barriers show us that the roles assigned to men and women are a social construct. This social construction reinforces the glass ceiling making the feminine the inferior of the masculine.

**2.** **Methodology of the** **construction** **of the scale of measurement**

In order to build our items, we have defined the various central concepts on the basis of literature, then we conducted three qualitative studies in three stages. A first study was conducted among 30 women managers in Morocco. We conducted an analysis of variables retranscriptions based on an axial coding and selective coding process assisted by computer. Closed codes are from the central concepts of literature and open codes were built on a basis of data collected. The intercoder reliability is 85%, based on 322 interview snippets.

The second study aimed to deepen understanding of some open codes, especially for cultural barriers. This study was conducted with a dozen of experts (sociologist, Islamologist, legal expert ... ) and a final study was conducted with HRD. The interviews were analyzed on the basis of the horizontal and vertical analysis grids, based on the themes defined by the literature.

We have been able to explore the different mechanisms of the glass ceiling and specify them based on the results of these three studies. We will present below the items that correspond to each of the mechanisms identified in the literature, as well as items that correspond to the open codes validated in categories by the different qualitative studies.

**Structural barriers**

For structural barriers, the majority of components are present and perceived by women managers in their daily lives. The only mechanism that does not emerge in our empirical results is tokenism. The scarcity of women in management positions means that  are not sufficiently present in the perception of women executives.  In addition to the various structural barriers of the glass ceiling, we noted the absence of policies "   womenfriendly   »And«   family friendly »  which reinforce the barriers that block women for access to the hierarchy.

* **Lack of** **sponsoring** **[[4]](#footnote-4) for women**  **:** Interviewed women confirm that it is difficult to have a sponsor or mentor within the business. Men sponsor other men, and it is rare that a man manager agrees to sponsor a woman executive. The women  hardly manage this type of relationship, the male-female relationships are often misinterpreted in companies. *"*  *A husband would find it very difficult for his wife to have a working dinner, or a work trip, she should not meet other men too personally*  *»* HR Consultant N ° 1.
* **The exclusion of networks** : Women executives perceive informal networks as unethical, and refuse to be part of this kind of networking. They also consider that these networks are time consuming, and regard to their family obligations, they do not have time to devote to this type of network. "   *It's very simple, networking is done in pubs and in the evening when we finished a day of work, we'll have a drink somewher. I never drink and so today with the restrictions of* *smoking inside the site and all that you have all the meetings that are done in the smoking room and decisions that are taken and you are not involved because you do not smoke, you do not drink, it's guys between them and you do not have your place*  *"*

* **Stereotypes**  **on Women** : Respondents argue that there are still sexist remarks within companies that are considered "normal" within organizations. *"Women are forced to manage their femininity, set limits, manage others to give a correct image of women and avoid indecent proposals*  *"*

For some positions, women are automatically excluded because as a woman she would not be suitable for the position. Others point problems of harassment with a very low legal protection *"*  *All means are good for proving discrimination, but how to prove that a woman was not recruited because she is a woman or pregnant or otherwise.* *The employer will simply say that she does not meet the needs of the company.*  *"*

**Individual barriers**

* **Ambivalence to exercise power:** this component is interpreted according to our results by the refusal to advance in the hierarchy, some women refuse to advance in the hierarchy because this advancement would be linked to taking responsibilities that will negatively impact their family work balance. Advancement in the hierarchy is also linked in multinationals to an expatriation that is not suitable for women executives.  "Me in terms of hierarchical advance it does not interest me too much, I will admit that now what remains to me is to become HRD, today it is not one of my ambitions and for me I think that I am at a good level there , moving forward is expatriation, and I do not want to go outside Morocco, I know I'm going to cap, but it's me who wants this ceiling» .

* **Rarity of female succeeded models:** Women managers are looking for female succeeded models; women who had succeeded in their professional career but who are also mothers. In the absence of this type of model, female managers are struggling to get involved into management positions. *"* *I do not really have models, there was* *one but she is naughty and has no children.* *You have to see what will happen familial responsibilities ?* *and then, others are men...».*

* **Negative self-efficacy:** The promotion of the professional achievements of women managers by their family is very important. In the absence of this recognition, women perceive a negative self-efficacy that has an impact on their willingness to move forward.

*“I trust myself, but it's never enough. I travel often, despite my responsibilities towards my family not like my male colleagues who take their time largely.  My colleagues look at me with a badway, because I come at the last minute, I'm not there for the breifings and on the other side my son and my family find that I do not spend enough time with them, It's very difficult”.*

* **Work-family conflict:** In a context where the primary role of a woman is to focus, the work/family conflict is very important, and causes an overload of roles between the professional sphere and the private sphere.

**Cultural barriers**

* **The priority of the woman is her home** **:** The society continues to prioritize the roles assigned to women, in this prioritization the home is a big winner. Women managers can make a career but not despite of family and children who must be the top priority.

“ *The wife is obliged to look after her husband, her children, and the home.* *This is one of her first responsibilities attributed by the company “*

* **The lack of support from the entourage** **:** In order to reconcile the different roles that women must play, the support of the family (partner, parents , parents and in-laws ) is essential. In lack of this support, executives’ women experience an overload of roles that, in the light of social demands, they will the social role and not the career.

* **Maternity perceived as treason**  **:** Women managers perceive that pregnancy and motherhood are acts of treason against professional commitments. Women executives have unconsciously integrated the company vision  : maternity is an unforgivable absence, it is a betrayal towards the company *"*  *When recruiting, an executive often tells me, I do not want a woman because she risks getting pregnant and giving up the business* *".*
* **Professional naïvety :**executive women have a naive perception  about the career. They think that by being super efficient and hard working, they will be rewarded by the company without having to ask for promotions.

*"*  *I never waited for promotion or anything and everything came in a systematic way, and thanks god I had a career development that is respectable enough* *"*

**Treatment of subsequent quantitative phases**

The purpose of this paper is to build a glass ceiling measuring scale according to the steps recommended by the Churchil paradigm (1979). The proposedquantitative approach should lead to an instrument that respects the recommendations measurement theory with a multi-scale instrument.

The systematic procedure of the Churchil paradigm (1979) is based on seven steps:

A first step aims to specify the field of construction through the conduct of a review of ~~a~~ literature. A second step consists in generating a sample of items through a literature review coupled with a qualitative exploratory step. The generation of items leads to a first exploratory step where the data will be collected by questionnaire and purified through unidimensionality tests by factor analysis and reliability tests through the analysis of Cronbach's alpha.

The last three phases consist of a second confirmatory step where the data are collected, where validity and reliability are estimated sequentially through factor analysis,  Chronbach’s, Jöreskog Rho and the convergent validity.

The results obtained so far reveal the existence of three dimensions of the glass ceiling: individual, organizational, and social barriers .

At this stage we have achieved the first three stages. The literature review conducted allowed to specify the domains of the constructs. We used three latent constructs as dimensions to measure the existence of the glass ceiling phenomenon: individual barriers, organizational barriers, and social barriers.

In the context of a qualitative exploratory research, a series of items were generated following the analysis of the interviews conducted (Table n °1)

**Table** **n °** 1 **:** **Generated items and coding**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **constructed** | **Items** | **Codes** |
| **Individual barriers** | I do not want to move up the hierarchy. | **CC1** |
| I do not feel able to take responsibilities within my company . | **BI2** |
| I think that motherhood is an act of treason against my company. | **BI 3** |
| I think I do not need to ask for a promotion, just work very hard. | **BI4** |
| **Organizational barriers** | I have sexist remarks within my organization . | **BI1** |
| I suffer from stereotypes about women in my organization . | **BO2** |
| I am being harassed in my organization . | **BO3** |
| My organization does not put in place special practices dedicated to women . | **BO4** |
| My organization does not have practices in place for work / life balance . | **BO5** |
| My company sees maternity as an act of treason . | **BO6** |
| In my organization, there is no woman I consider as a successed model. | **BO7** |
| My organization does not offer me opportunities to advance in my career . | **BO8** |
| My Hierarchical Superior does not support me managing my private constraints. | **BO9** |
| My organization does not support me managing my private constraints. | **BO10** |
| I do not have a coach to progress in my career. | **BO11** |
| I am not part of the informal networks in my company . | **BO12** |
| **Social barriers** | My career should not take over my family’s responsibilities . | **BS1** |
| My family does not value my professional achievements . | **BS2** |
| My family does not support me to manag my professional responsibilities . | **BS3** |
| My partner does not value my professional achievements. | **BS4** |
| My partner does not support me to manage my professional responsibilities . | **BS5** |

We ensured the facial validity of all these items by submitting them to five academics experts in human resources management issues.

**Conclusion**

We collected data via social networks during a month and a half, relying essentially on women's networks (women engineers networks , associations for babies and working mothers, the HRD women circle....). Respondents were very active, and we were able to collect 300 valid surveys. Our goal is to collect 500 responses in order to validate the different tests inherent in scale construction.

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4. According to Kram (1985), sponsors are generally defined as individuals with the experience and knowledge necessary to provide support and career mobility to their protégés. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)