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## Second generation gender bias: Invisible barriers holding women back in organizations

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### Abstract

The paper is an attempt to understand gender bias in the organizations. It explains first generation and second generation, gender bias in terms of visible and invisible barriers respectively. As first generation bias denies equality in terms of existence second generation gender bias holds the woman back from reaching the higher echelons of power. Male dominated organizations are reluctant to accept a woman in a leadership role. The Paper gives evidence in terms of data revealing gap between male and female in terms of pay gap, positions they acquire and top positions they occupy. Although it is expected that organizations need to work towards gender just systems, but it the woman who should be the agent of change. Author proposes, woman need to recognize the subtle gender biases at work place, should think like a leader, feel like a leader and act like a leader. Further, she should establish her identity as a leader rather than a female leader. She must groom other women in the organization as future leaders this will eliminate gender based leadership style. She must look for feedback on her work from all quarters and in all forms. Finally, she needs to create a synergy by sharing energy of all the women in the organisation.

**Keywords:** Second generation gender bias, gender bias, gender inequality, invisible barriers, gender justice

### 1. Introduction

Gender bias has been issue at the focus of public life since the origin of the civilized society. It was recognized that bias has been deliberately institutionalized in family structure, social customs and traditions, religion and education as well. As the economies have grown around the world and women have joined the work force in almost all the positions. The gross gender bias in the society, institutions and organizations have been addressed by virtue of legal provision, raising awareness, building social defenses, judicial activism and work of organized agencies and NGO's. These efforts could succeed to address the issue at lower positions, but could not be done away at higher positions. These two forms of the gender biases are designated as first generation and second generation gender bias. While first generation gender biases point to intentional and visible acts of discrimination against woman in the society or work place, second generation gender bias is hidden, invisible, planned, organized and has a more neutral face, but the underlying practices, values and beliefs remain distinctly male-oriented. Second generation gender bias is related to the hindrance for women to be accepted as a leader or reach at the top of an organization. These biases may be simply in the form of maintaining the status quo, or an active approach to strengthen the existing structures of male benefiting traditions, customs, values and beliefs. As men are responsible for building organizational systems of the society in which we function, it is expected that these systems will benefit them, although they may not even recognize it or deny recognizing it. It has been a difficult journey for a woman to bring the issue of gender bias at the discussion tables of policy makers and executors for public entrepreneurship. But as we are more driven towards market economy where private organizations are becoming major players and skills are the deciders, still women are being held back from reaching to the higher echelons of the power. This phenomenon has also been named as 'Glass ceiling' indicating that a woman can see the top position but can't reach

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there. In majority of the organization's they end their career at the middle rung of the corporate ladder popularly termed as 'sticky ladder'. Women face typical situations which could be described as 'intellectual discomfort' 'object like' 'forced follower' even 'routine worker' and the like. They are not in the position of decision making which prevents them to affect policies and procedures of the organization in which they work. While in organizations people sit for issues like- planning, budgeting, deciding evaluation parameters, promotion policy etc. majority are men, why they should accommodate women concern. This makes second generation gender bias more concrete and lethal to damage half of the population.

**Evidence of second order gender bias:** In 2008 the OECD found that the median earnings of female full-time workers were 17% lower than the earnings of their male counterparts and that "30% of the variation in gender wage gaps across OECD countries can be explained by discriminatory practices in the labor market." The European Commission found that women's hourly earnings were 17.5% lower on average in the 27 EU Member States in 2008. The female-to-male earnings ratio was 0.77 in the United States in 2009.

Los Angeles Times writes 15% of women report experiencing workplace bias in Gallup poll — "Fifteen percent of American women believe they have been passed over for a promotion or some other opportunity at work because of their gender, new polling from Gallup shows. Gallup also found that 13% thought they were denied a raise at some point because they were women."

(<http://onpoint.wbur.org/2013/09/03/women-workplace>)

Pay gap is a phenomenon exists all over the world higher among countries Korea (37.5%), Russia (32.1%), Estonia (27.9%), Japan (27.4%), India (24.81%) and least among countries Poland (6.2%), Spain (6.1%), New Zealand (4.2%) and Slovenia (3.5%).

(<http://www.movehub.com/blog/global-gender-pay-gap-map>)

As per Catalyst global research, there are considerable gender pay gaps within the tech sector as well as across other industry sectors. In India specifically, women and men start out as equals with equal pay and responsibility, and similar aspirations to the highest levels, including that of CEO. But a gender gap emerges over time. Women lag behind men (to a tune of about Rs 3.8 lakhs or \$6,000) by the time they are about 12 years into their careers.

(<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/tech/tech-news/Nadella-gaffe-Research-shows-wide-gender-pay-gap-in-Indian-IT/articleshow/44790726.cms>)

According to the Monster Salary Index India IT Sector Report 2014,

Only 30% of the total IT sector work-force in India is women and the fairer sex also faces a huge gender pay gap of 29%. The gross salary of a male IT worker is Rs 359.25 per hour while a female receives Rs 254.04 per hour and this disparity possibly emerges from the fact that men get promoted to supervisory positions more often than women. Only 36% of female employees are promoted to a supervisory position, while 52% of male staff get promoted to a supervisory rank.

(<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/tech/jobs/Indian-IT-faces-gender-pay-gap-of-29-Report/articleshow/38930431.cms>)

The "meh" news: That still represents a small percentage - 4.8% to be exact -of the overall CEOs on the list. While just one woman led a Fortune 500 company in 1998, that number slowly rose to 15 in 2009 before declining to 12 women by 2011.

(<http://fortune.com/2014/06/03/number-of-fortune-500-women-ceos-reaches-historic-high/>)

Women currently hold 24 (4.8%) of CEO positions at S&P 500 companies.

(<http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-ceos-sp-500>)

These all the evidences indicate that there runs a strategy of "opt out or pushed out" to keep the woman out of the workforce. The minimum these strategies can affect is that women are not allowed to progress to the top positions in an organization.

Institutions and organizations need to address the issue in terms of making recruitment, promotion, responsibilities, rules & procedures, evaluation parameters etc. gender free or gender just. But these changes will not take automatically; it needs to be brought about. This probably won't be done by man; it is to be achieved by woman. Thus woman need be an active agent for the change. Woman can address the issue by her own efforts which will turn the table on for change, i.e. will compel the organizations to make institutions gender free.

#### **What woman needs to do?**

**Recognize that hidden or stereotypical gender bias at workplace:** as describe earlier that research has confirmed that women are unaware of the gender biases at the workplace, if at all they are aware they are unable to recognize the same. They either are interested to maintain the status quo, or want to keep their mental peace intact. They forget that they are hurting not only their own interest rather causing a permanent harm to the woman gender. This necessitates woman to be aware of the gender bias in the organizations. These biases may exist in terms of use of male oriented language of the documents, male applicants' preference in recruitment, male preference for important job assignment, male sided promotions, male domination in decision making, and no consideration of women concern in decision making. These biased may not be explicit, but implemented implicitly. The advertisements are designed in such a way, which surely do not suit woman candidate. Job assignments are presented as tough, demanding, stressful, time consuming etc. Promotions are tied with regularity, late hour work conditions, work without break and the like. Thus situations are created rather than demand of the job. Women in the organization should recognize these biases and oppose it. They should demand the choice, retention and promotion of the employee based on capabilities rather than gender.

**Think Like a leader:** we cannot become something we have never thought of. We can only build a house if we imagine it in terms of thinking it to be made. Thinking can be thought as planning and collecting resources to accomplish a task. For instance in making a house we first assess our resources like available finances, time availability, and selecting piece of land and then getting a map prepared from the architecture. In the same way a woman should think about becoming a leader. She should acquire enough knowledge about leadership like-what is a leader and all about leadership, what traits a leader needs to

possess for leading a team, what are the skills a leader need to possess, specific requirements for a leader in the concerned organization and so and so on. This can be done by two ways-theoretically and practically. Theoretically she should look the concerned theories from the literature and practically she should study the successful leaders in the organization-serving or superannuated. There is no harm in going through a mentoring under a successful leader in the organization. She needs to understand the constructs of a successful leader and leadership. Understanding of leadership is all about the ability to differentiate between successful leaders and unsuccessful, means a criterion development why people fail or succeed at the top. Also, it is about understanding the relation of success of a leader in terms of relevant variables. Thinking like a leader also involves application of relevant skills to make leadership a reality. This also helps in coming out of the crisis situation. A woman who aspires to be at the top position needs to analyze her role and responsibilities as a leader. She should be able to evaluate her own traits and skills against the demands of the job responsibilities as a leader. Some time when we try to blame on gender bias, we forget our own inadequacies or a preference which holds us back from owning the responsibility. Last but not the least a leader needs to be creative enough to accept the challenges and solve the problems whenever they threaten the progress towards the goal. Personality profile research when views people as predominantly -power, perfection, peace and people oriented, in leadership we are asking for all the orientations in balanced manner. It is a tough ask, but not impossible as people have demonstrated it many a times before us. In a way we are asking woman to be intellectually adequate to be a leader rather than naturally oriented or gifted to do so. This requirement is same as organizations demand from men.

**Feel like a leader:** feeling is our emotional involvement like a painter who can imagine the picture without actually painting it. S/he knows matching and contrasting of colors without actually putting them together. Same is true when we plan to make a house. Without actually making house one should be able to locate where should be bed room, store or a kitchen etc. Actually even feeling is also quite technical in nature. For instance bedroom necessitates privacy, store requires security and kitchen needs ventilation. Same way a woman as a leader also need to feel like a leader. She must feel a change in the role in terms of taking responsibility for self-performance as well as performance of the subordinates. There are traits of a leader, which makes him/her assertive, aggressive, innovative, risk taking yet at the same time caring, nurturing and taking along every one. Feelings would technically mean passing through the stages of- receiving, responding, valuing, organization and characterization. A woman leader needs to receive all learning moments with open mind; these may come in the form of success, failure, criticism, accountability and the like. Responding is her response to the situations which may arise in the form of problem, success, failure, stress, crisis and the like. Remember we recommend response rather than reaction to the situation. Response is intellectual in nature where as reaction is reflex action motivated by survival and security. Valuing is about valuing whatever you are doing, means you love what you do. One cannot perform well without

valuing one's own work. At times a leader may feel stressed due to failures or amount of work and tend to think that subordinates are lucky that they don't have much of the responsibility. This is start of devaluing one's own work. Valuing is actually identifying values for which one is working, these values motivate her and keeps going. Next come organization is actually making a value set which is arranged in priority order, which helps in taking decision. Many a times a leader gets caught in dilemma of equal pull may be moral or otherwise and find it difficult to choose between the two possibilities. Leader must preserve the higher priority value and let go the lower priority value. Decision taking becomes so easy for a leader. Finally leader needs to imbibe characterization as a leader in her all activities, means a leader should behave like a leader rather than a male or a female.

**Act like a leader:** acting is nothing but role playing which involves assuming the responsibilities of a leader and taking decisions and executing these. It starts with imitation followed by manipulation, precision, articulation and finally ends with naturalization. Imitation is copying skills, methods, techniques and devices as used by other leaders in past and present. These can be obtained from the literature, and living examples. Leader should try to manipulate what has been learnt in theory as per her own context. This is actually theorizing leadership from one's own perspective. This helps in refining leadership practices and the practitioner turns to be a refined leader. Precision is the next stage for a leader when by virtue of learning and experience she attains expected results repeatedly. This makes leader more successful and acceptable. Articulation means delivery of the product or service. Ultimately a leader needs to justify her ability in the form of production, which comes by application of her learning and experience. Finally a leader should turn this success and production as a part of his/her nature i.e. naturalization. The success need to become a habit for a leader.

**Establish identity as a leader:** When we analyze these traits of a leader we find a woman is even better equipped than a man in the role of a leader. Production is a natural instinct of a woman, thus a woman should not doubt her ability as a leader. The only problem is that woman if at all tries to imagine herself as a leader she takes man as a reference and tries to acquire man like characteristics. It rather creates an identity crisis and she gets caught between a woman and a leader (man). A woman needs to come out of this frame of reference and to create her own space and reference to this space as well. In fact she must assess the skill requirements of the job and go ahead to even create new set of values universal in nature and matching the corporate life.

**Promote other women as would be leaders:** grooming is necessary component of becoming a leader. It would be much better situation if successful leader women prepare second order women for replacing them on their superannuation. This will create a legacy of leaders which will effectively cause vanishing of gender distinction in leadership role. It does not mean demoting males in the organization; it should be aimed at giving the justified opportunities for the women to occupy the higher posts.

**Look for 360 degree feedback:** feedback is a great instrument for self-improvement in relation to public perception of a leader. A leader needs to use this instrument to utmost. The feedback need to be 360 degree means it should cover all the sources and in all forms. The feedback should be valid, reliable, scrutinized, cumulative, documented and critical in nature. The feedback is to be used for finding out flaws and strengths of a leader to improve the efficiency and acceptability. Feedback is actually wishes of the up-line management and subordinates which needs to be taken care off for becoming a popular leader. Only popular leaders stay on top for longer period not a male or a female.

**Create Synergy:** acting individual will not work effectively; women need to share their energy turning it in to a synergy. They need to celebrate success of every individual woman and need to worry about failure of every other woman. The success of one need to be tied with success of other and failure of one should be shared by every other woman in the organization. It is just like concept of cooperative learning where either team success or team failure, there is no success or failure of an individual. This is possible by showing woman concern in policy making, policy enacting, opposing actively events of woman victimization, creating community and network among women, creating help lines and legal help for women by women at least. It will be rather more successful if supported by men in the organizations.

### Conclusion

Woman need to find ways to establish her role as a leader at the same time should fight to free the leadership entity from the labels of male or female. Second-generation, gender bias can make these transitions more challenging for women, and focusing exclusively on acquiring new skills isn't sufficient; the learning must be accompanied by a growing sense of identity as a leader. That's why greater understanding of second-generation bias, safe spaces for leadership identity development, and encouraging women to anchor in their leadership purpose will get better results than the paths most organizations currently pursue. The role of each woman becomes too important for turning the venture as a success. While it is not an easy job, to balance job demands as a leader and catering to the family needs as expected in the traditional role, she needs to make man as a partner to this transition.

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