

Comparative Analysis Of Mid-Level Women Managers' Perception Of The Existence Of 'Glass Ceiling' In Singaporean And Malaysian Organizations

Vlado Dimovski, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
Miha Skerlavaj, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
Mandy Mok Kim Man, University Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This study presents an overview of glass-ceiling type barriers in organizations based on the perceptions of a sample of Singaporean and Malaysian mid-level women managers. Previous studies indicated the existence of a glass ceiling in organizations and presented strategic recommendations with regard to what corporations could do to remove or reduce the glass ceiling. This study investigates how women in middle management perceive their career advancement opportunities and what they consider their organizations to be doing to support their advancement. Glass ceiling and informal structures in the organizations will be analyzed from the aspects of corporate climate, corporate practices, and corporate culture. The relevant questions are derived from the model developed by Bergman and Hallberg (2002). This study aims to answer whether there is a glass ceiling present in Singaporean and Malaysian companies and further make the comparative analysis of the results. The study begins with an introduction of the concept of a glass ceiling that prevents women from advancing, and then continues with previous studies on corporate climate, corporate practices and corporate culture, and data analysis of samples from Singaporean and Malaysian organizations. The findings show that women middle managers in both Singaporean and Malaysian organizations face a glass ceiling in their working environment which, for example, inhibits the promotion of female managers, and entails a barrier to the career development opportunities of women and entails that women do not have enough organizational support, including networking, mentoring, and family friendly initiatives.

Keywords: glass ceiling, women middle managers, Singapore, Malaysia

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, there has been a growing number of women in the labor force. A study by Powell and Graves (2003) indicates that the proportion of women in the managerial ranks has increased in almost all countries. Women are demanding greater equality in the work environment. One of the main factors that needs to be considered in order to achieve equality in the work environment is gender differences. Gender differences and the mutual perceptions between men and women may vary across countries and their diverse cultures. Furthermore, contributing aspects such as education, government policies, media images, and opinion leaders can re-alter/influence gender differences and levels.

It can be noted that the proportion of women in lower and mid-level management positions has increased dramatically, while the proportion of women reaching top management positions or climbing up the corporate ladder

has remained relatively small (ILO, 2002). Circumstances do suggest that women in management are able to advance 'just so far' in corporate hierarchies, before encountering a 'glass ceiling' that prevents or reduces the likelihood of reaching top management levels or executive status in a firm.

Although women are now graduating in higher numbers than men from educational institutions (Fagenson and Jackson, 1994) and more women are entering the paid workforce (Hind and Baruch, 1997) and taking up managerial roles (Parker and Fagenson, 1994), owing to the 'glass ceiling', the poor representation of women at senior management levels continues. Aguins and Adams (1998) indicate that in the USA, women fill less than 5 percent of top management positions. David (1996) indicates that in the UK the figure is estimated to be less than 4 percent, and according to Uren (1999), in Australia the figure is approximately 3 percent. Wood and Lindorff (2001) further explain that sex differences exist in promotions to senior management, and this occurrence is noted worldwide. This study also aims to answer the question of whether a glass ceiling is present in Malaysian companies with a sample of Malaysian mid-level women managers of organizations.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature; Section 3 explains the development of a suitable hypotheses; Section 4 presents the research methodology; Section 5 provides the results of the data analysis; Section 6 discusses the findings and managerial implications; and, Section 7 concludes with a summary of the main findings and outlines directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The glass ceiling is described as a "well enshrined phenomenon supported by conclusive evidence", according to Simpson and Altman (2000). According to Meyerson and Fletcher (2000), despite the increased numbers of women both participating in the workforce and achieving management positions, the 'glass ceiling' still exists. However, Sturges (1999) observes that men and women may differ in how they measure career success. Men appear to focus on external criteria, such as status and material success, while women focus on internal criteria, such as personal recognition, accomplishment, and achieving balance in their lives.

According to Linehan (2002), female managers in every country remain a tiny fraction of those in senior positions. Women managers report that a lack of career development opportunities has created problems in their careers (Rosen et al., 1989). They also perceive that they have fewer opportunities than men for promotion to senior management (Parker and Fagenson, 1994). Additionally, two-thirds of the women executives surveyed by Reynolds and Associates (1990) said they were not actively encouraged to participate in career development activities. A lack of a career has been cited as a problem encountered by Australian women managers (Smith et al., 1993). This upper-level gender segregation results in women remaining concentrated at the bottom of the career ladder, even in those areas that are traditionally female dominated. Linehan et al. (2001) indicate that female international managers have to overcome many additional overt and covert barriers before being developed for international assignment. The findings of a study by David (2001) show that there is evidence of a glass ceiling for women. Mavin (2000) also indicates that the glass ceiling issue has considerable impact on women's careers internationally. Furthermore, Chenevert and Tremblay (2002) also stated that even if female managers have a high level of education and the desire to progress in their careers, it remains the case that few achieve the same status or salary as their male counterparts, and that one of the reasons for this is the so-called 'glass ceiling'. Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) indicate that despite the increased number of women both participating in the workforce and reaching management positions, the evidence demonstrates that, for the majority, advancement to the very highest levels is rare and that the 'glass ceiling' still exists.

Corporate Culture

The 'glass ceiling' could be reflected in corporate culture, corporate practices, and corporate climate. The term 'glass ceiling' is used to describe all the frustrations of working women at every level who can see where they want to get to but who find themselves blocked by an invisible barrier (Mavin, 2000). For ease of use, this work will no longer put the term 'glass ceiling' in inverted commas. The International Labour Organization (ILO) offers the following description of the obstacles to women's career development:

Cultural biases, gender stereotypes, and attitudes against women, coupled with their not being viewed as primary income-earners, are the major obstacles to women's advancement.

An investigation of the glass ceiling suggests that beliefs and attitudes held by organizational staff, as well as the social structures of the organization, contribute to the barriers that impede women's career advancement. The literature on the glass ceiling suggests barriers that fall under the broad categories of corporate culture, corporate practices, and corporate climate. The [U.S.] Federal Glass Ceiling Commission found evidence of initiatives that companies can take to reduce or remove career barriers to women and minorities, which they clearly outlined in their report (US Department of Labor, 1995b). As is the case with the barriers, these practices generally fall under the category of corporate culture.

Cooper (2001) indicates that if organizations are interested in retaining talented women and minorities, a change in organizational culture is called for. Male-dominated organizations still appear to have perspectives that are incompatible with the advancement of women to upper management levels. Re-addressing human resource policies and practices and changing the organizational culture and executive attitudes should help organizations retain highly talented women.

Organizational culture is a very elusive concept due to the variety of perspectives that come under scrutiny in the academic literature. According to Robbins and Coulter (2003), corporate culture refers to the values, beliefs, and norms shared by organizational members that govern how they behave towards each other and outsiders. Furthermore, Deal and Kennedy (1982) indicated that organizational culture influences what employees can do and how they conceptualize, define, analyze, and address issues.

Schein (1992) perceives organizational culture as a pattern of basic assumptions— invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration. Such a pattern has worked well enough to be considered valuable and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to these problems.

A study by Powell and Butterfield (2003) indicated that judgements about effective management continue to be based on an adherence to a purely masculine gender stereotype. Such a stereotype creates an incongruity between the role of management and the gender role of women pursuing a career in management. When women use a feminine management style, they are considered ineffective leaders (Cooper, 2001). Powell and Butterfield (2003) further indicated that this mismatch in roles often leads to discrimination against women when it comes to top management positions.

Companies' short- and long-term objectives should include efforts to achieve diversity both at the senior management level and throughout the organization (Cooper, 2001). Furthermore, Cooper indicated that performance appraisals, compensation incentives, and other evaluation measures must reflect the line manager's ability to set high standards and demonstrate progress toward breaking through the glass ceiling. Additionally, it recommends that while organizations cannot make members of society blind to differences in color, culture, or gender, they can demand and enforce merit-based practice and behavior internally.

Maier (1997) suggests that "white-male managerial behavior" is unconsciously accepted as the norm to which everyone who wishes to be a manager must aspire. Maier suggests that succeeding by assimilation to this norm blinds white men to the potential limitations of the system and how others are disadvantaged by the system. Therefore, there is a need for the companies to provide formal training at regular intervals on company time in order to sensitize all employees regarding such matters and to familiarize them with the possible resulting benefits to the company.

In addition, corporate culture also influences and determines the orientation of the organization in relation to diversity. Diversity is an asset that, when managed properly, can translate into an environment where all employees can use their full potential and develop. Limited attention devoted to and tolerance of diversity translate, on the other hand, into an inhospitable and exclusionary environment for women. The literature suggests that few organizations embrace diversity effectively and adopt a holistic approach to eliminating unfairness and

discrimination (Kundu, 2003; Cooper, 2001).

Corporate Practices

This section presents corporate practices in the organization. In the organization, a lack of clear job descriptions for higher echelon jobs and a lack of formal systems for recruitment, in some instances, tend to create obstacles to such advancement. Furthermore, the existence of informal male networks, sometimes referred to as 'old boy networks', also tends to exclude women from top positions (ILO, 2002).

The above mentioned Commission's findings (US Department of Labor, 1995a, p.33, in Cooper (2001)) noted outreach and recruitment practices that do not reach women and minorities, and found that most of the companies surveyed had not expanded their traditional recruitment methods. Once hired, women are often initially placed in 'genderized' fields: channeled into personnel-related or highly technical and professional jobs that are not traditional positions that are on-track to the top, resulting in a 'glass wall'. Organizational policies need to be in place that support the promotion of qualified women to management positions, and which thereby attempt to retain this valuable resource. Recommendations for improving opportunities include expanding women's access to core areas of the business and to various developmental experiences, such as rotational and non-traditional job assignments that broaden the base of a candidate's experience and visibility. (Cooper, 2001)

According to Knuston and Schmidgall (1999), corporate practices include training and development, networking, mentoring, flexible working hours, and other family- friendly initiatives, for example, the provision of nursery services and day care centers, flex-time, and family support services, which can be helpful in terms of allowing the effective reconciliation of employees' multiple roles. Mondy et al. (2002) further indicated that training and development are organizationally directed experiences designed to improve employee competency levels and enhance organizational performance. Insufficiencies in networking, mentoring, flexible working hours, and family friendly initiatives will indirectly strengthen the existence of the glass ceiling in the organization. Organizations are encouraged to select, promote, and retain qualified individuals, expand their recruitment practices, and seek candidates from non-customary sources, backgrounds, and experiences.

Wentling (2003) also indicated that women's advancement to top management is directly related to their increased knowledge and skills and the professional development opportunities made available to them throughout their careers. According to Cooper (2001), women's career development prospects are also affected by the variety of jobs or special rotational job assignments to which they are exposed, particularly in areas on the revenue-producing side of business. Furthermore, Metz (2003) indicated that few organizations, on the other hand, make a systematic effort to assist women by keeping them informed of all training and career development programs available and by giving them access to these programs.

The study by Cooper (2001) indicated that recommendations for improving opportunity include expanding women's access to core areas of the business and to various developmental experiences, such as rotational and non-traditional job assignments that broaden the base of a candidate's experience and visibility. This is supported by the study of Gordon and Whelan (1998), where 65 percent of the women interviewed stated the need for continued achievement, accomplishment, and perceived value to the organization. Furthermore, they suggested that organizations must be willing to take a chance on talented women who have not held the prerequisite jobs but have the credentials for the position. Ragin et al. (1998) also reported that 94 percent of the respondents regarded handling difficult or highly visible assignments as important to their success. Furthermore, their study showed that they have the need to seek out these assignments more so than their male counterparts. Ragin et al. (1998) also reported that 99 percent of the female executives in their study reported "consistently exceeding performance expectations" as critical or fairly important, stating they feel the need to prove their ability repeatedly and over-perform in order to counter negative assumptions.

Corporate Climate

As reported above, the glass ceiling can be reflected in corporate culture, corporate practices, and corporate climate. According to Cooper (2001), organizational climate refers to the prevailing corporate perceptions of

women's professional capabilities and commitment to their careers. It also includes attitudes towards women that could result in unsupportive and discouraging work environments (Knuston and Schmidgall, 1999). Klenke (1996) further indicated that in most organizations that are male-led, the male network still exists, and studies show that women have been largely excluded from these networks. The benefits of informal networking are well acknowledged as important to upward mobility, including information exchange, career planning and strategizing, professional support and encouragement, and increased visibility. Discomfort on both sides leads to this exclusion (Davidson and Cooper, 1992). Many organizations still embrace a "male-oriented" management style, where direct and aggressive behavior is the norm. However, when women embrace this style, they are frequently labeled as "bossy" and "pushy", whereas men using the same behaviors are labeled "leaders" (Davidson and Cooper, 1992). In general, negative attitudes permeate the workplace, as regards questioning women's professional capabilities, inviting them in turn to work harder in order to prove their credentials and commitment (Ragins et al., 1998).

According to Klenke (1996), interestingly, aggressiveness, objective thinking, dominance, competition, and decisiveness are characteristics often found in leadership research studies as amongst those characteristics considered by both men and women as desirable. However, when women display these traits, they often receive negative evaluations; while men displaying the same traits are positively evaluated. Women report the perception that if they adopt a 'feminine' managerial style, they run the risk of being viewed as ineffective, and if they adopt a 'masculine' style, they are criticized for not being feminine (Ragins et al. 1998). As mentioned above, Ragin et al. (1998) reported that 94 percent of the respondents regarded handling difficult or highly visible assignments as important to their success and 99 percent of the female executives in their study reported "consistently exceeding performance expectations" as critical or fairly important, stating they feel the need to prove their ability repeatedly and over-perform in order to counter negative assumptions.

According to Rosener (1990), once women are expected to assimilate and become part of the male network, there seems to be a trend away from that, particularly with the attention now being paid to women's leadership styles. However, in male dominated organizations, women often feel under-utilized and devalued. Women are not only excluded from informal networks, but also from important meetings where decisions are made. Women tend to be given lower level projects with less visibility (Cooper, 2001). Furthermore, according to Cooper (2001), women's ideas are frequently discounted or ignored, creating the "invisible-woman syndrome" and their actions are highly scrutinized and seen as a test case for women in the future.

3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses aim at evaluating the impact of corporate culture on the advancement of women. As mentioned above, corporate culture refers to the values, beliefs, and norms shared by the organizational members, which govern how they behave towards each other and outsiders (Robbins and Coulter, 2003). As reported above, organizational culture or "the way we do things around here" influences what employees can do and how they conceptualize, define, analyze and address issues (Deal and Kennedy, 1982). Furthermore, Powell and Butterfield (2003) also indicate that effective management continues to be based on an adherence to a purely masculine gender stereotype. Such stereotypes create an incongruity between the management role and gender role of women pursuing a career in management. As mentioned above, Cooper (2001) also indicates that when women adopt the predominant male management style, they are criticized for being too aggressive and bossy, and when they use a feminine management style, they are considered ineffective leaders. This mismatch in roles often leads to discrimination against women when it comes to top management positions (Powell and Butterfield, 2003). As also mentioned above, Maier (1997) suggests that "white-male managerial behavior" is unconsciously accepted as the norm to which everyone who wishes to be a manager must aspire. Maier suggests that succeeding by assimilation to this norm blinds white men to the potential limitations of the system and how others are disadvantaged by the system. On this basis, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: A culture where "white-male managerial behavior" is prevalent inhibits the promotion of women managers.

This hypothesis is used to assess the perspectives of women middle managers in organizations regarding career barriers stemming from the corporate culture of the particular organization.

According to Jackson (2001), ‘organizational climate’ is commonly used in the literature to refer to the prevailing corporate perception of women’s professional capabilities and commitment to their careers. As reported earlier by Knuston and Schmidgall (1999), it also includes attitudes towards women that could result in unsupportive and discouraging work environments. Therefore, we propose a second hypothesis:

H2: An organizational climate wherein the prevailing corporate perception is that women have lower professional capabilities and career commitment than men is a barrier to women’s advancement.

Corporate culture influences and determines the orientation of the organization in relation to diversity. Diversity is an asset that, when properly managed, can translate into an environment where all employees can use their full potential and develop. Limited attention devoted to and tolerance of diversity translates, on the other hand, to an inhospitable and exclusionary environment for women. According to Kundu (2003) and Jackson (2001), few organizations embrace diversity effectively and adopt a holistic approach to eliminating unfairness and discrimination. Hence, Hypothesis 3 suggests that women work in the context of corporate cultures that fail to value diversity.

H3: In the companies, women work in the context of corporate cultures that fail to value diversity.

The following hypotheses pertain to the impact of corporate practices on the advancement of women in the organization. As reported above, according to Knuston and Schmidgall (1999), corporate practices include training and development, networking and mentoring, flexible working hours, and other family-friendly initiatives. Furthermore, as mentioned above, Mondy et al. (2000) indicate that training and development are organizationally-directed experiences designed to improve employee competency levels and enhance organizational performance. Haslam and Ryan (2007) showed that women face equally invisible and barriers beyond the glass ceiling with regard to developmental opportunities. The literature suggests that managerial advancement is positively related to human capital credentials. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 suggests that women do not receive the development opportunities necessary for career advancement.

H4: In the companies, women do not receive the development opportunities necessary for career advancement.

Various forms of organizational support have been identified in the literature, including networking, mentoring, and family-friendly initiatives. Networking is a sought after internal, mostly informal, relationship that results in several benefits, including, valuable information exchange, career planning and strategizing, professional support, and increased visibility (Adebowale, 1994; Jackson, 2001). Mentoring relationships are also potentially valuable for women’s advancement in view of boosting emotional support and confidence and career satisfaction (Klenke, 1996; Ragins and Cotton, 1996). However, women in male-dominated organizations often have limited networking and mentoring opportunities. As reported earlier, women also report limited access to family-friendly initiatives (e.g. the provision of nursery services and day care centers, flex-time, family support services), which can be helpful in terms of allowing the effective reconciliation of their multiple roles (Davidson and Cooper, 1992). In this context, Hypothesis 5 is put forward.

H5: In the companies, women do not have enough organizational support, including networking, mentoring, and family-friendly initiatives.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is an exploratory study. Mid-level women managers in organizations in Singapore and Malaysia are proposed as the sample for the study. In Singapore, according to the Ministry of Manpower (2009), the employed female labor is more than 89,000. The samples was selected from the book published by the Ministry of Manpower, Singapore 1000 which recorded the information of the organizations registered and operate in Singapore. In Malaysia, according to the Ministry of Human Resource (2006), the number of mid-level women managers in the organizations is more than 35,000. In both of the countries, namely, Singapore and Malaysia, the samples was selected from those organizations with mid-level women managers employed in a section, department, or the whole organization, based on the previous research carried out by Kanter (1977). The structured questionnaire is developed

with 5-point Likert scales for the corporate climate, corporate practices, and corporate culture items. Mailed questionnaires were used to collect the data required for the study, at the same time, correspondence through emails, in depth interviews with the mid-level women managers were also conducted.

The women’s workplace culture questionnaires developed by Bergman and Hallberg (2002) are proposed to be tested in the questionnaires. The study measures the views and opinions of the sample regarding the corporate culture, corporate practices, and corporate climate.

According to Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970), for a population of 35,000 to 40,000, an adequate sample size is 380. In Malaysia, from October 2006 to March 2007, 1000 sets of questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and from January 2009 to May 2009, 1000 sets of questionnaires were distributed to the respondents in Singapore, based on the criteria that the respondents needed to hold a mid-level management position and needed to have worked for the organization for a minimum of one year. In Malaysia, 127 sets of questionnaires were returned, meanwhile, in Singapore, 136 sets of questionnaires were returned. According to Sekaran (2003), questionnaires which are less than 25% completed should be eliminated from further data processing. After the data checking process, in Malaysia, 106 completed questionnaires were selected for data analysis purposes, which accounts for a 10.6% response rate. For respondents from Singapore, 120 completed questionnaires were selected for data analysis purposes, which accounts for 12% response rate.

Table 1: Respondents’ Characteristics

Variable	Malaysia		Singapore	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Age				
30-39	63	59.4	68	56.7
40-49	28	26.4	36	30.0
50-59	10	9.4	11	9.2
60 and above	5	4.7	5	4.2
Marital status				
Single	37	34.9	43	35.8
Married	60	56.6	68	56.7
Divorced	9	8.5	9	7.5
Number of Children				
0	41	38.7	48	40.0
1	14	13.2	21	17.5
2	22	20.8	22	18.3
3 and above	29	27.4	29	24.2
Education Level				
Below post-secondary school qualification	18	17.0	19	15.8
Post-secondary school qualification or associate’s degree	44	41.5	46	38.3
Bachelor’s degree	36	34.0	42	35.0
Masters degree	6	5.7	11	9.2
PhD	2	1.9	2	1.7
Total Year of Working Experience				
Less than 10 years	45	42.5	47	39.2
10-20 years	36	34.0	44	36.7
20-30 years	17	16.0	20	16.7
30-40 years	8	7.5	9	7.5
Total	106	100	120	100

5. RESULTS

5.1 Sample Characteristics

In Malaysia, the 106 sets of questionnaires were analyzed for the respondents’ characteristics. As shown in Table 1, of the 106 respondents, 63 respondents (59.4%) are in the age range of 30-39 years and only five respondents (4.7%) are in the age range of 60 years and above. 60 respondents (56.6%) are married, 37 respondents (34.9%) are still single, and only nine respondents (8.5%) are divorced. 41 respondents (38.7%) do not have children, while 29 respondents (27.4%) have three or more children. 44 respondents (41.5%) hold a post-secondary school qualification or associate’s degree and 36 respondents (34%) have a bachelor’s degree. Only six respondents (5.7%) have a Masters’ degree and two respondents (1.9%) have a doctorate. The largest group of respondents, a total of 45 (42.5%), have less than 10 years of work experience. 36 respondents (34%) have 10 to 20 years of work experience and only eight respondents (7.5%) have 30 to 40 years of work experience. In Singapore, the respondents are married (68 respondents, 56.7%) and the respondents who do not have children (48 respondents, 40%), the number of respondents in this group is slightly higher than Malaysia respondents in the same group (41 respondents, 38.7%).

Table 2: Constructs for Corporate Culture, Corporate Climate, and Corporate Practices

Measurement variables	Items
Corporate culture (S2Q)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It is more difficult for women than men to be themselves working independently at work (S2Q1). ▪ Women think that they can be themselves at work (S2Q2). ▪ It is difficult to assign tasks for women to go outstation or overseas (S2Q3).
Corporate climate (S3Q)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Women receive more unfair judgements of their work performance than men (S3Q3). ▪ Women think that they have been unfairly judged (S3Q4). ▪ Negative perceptions and stereotypes about women’s professional capabilities constitute barriers to women’s advancement (S3Q5). ▪ Negative perceptions and stereotypes about women’s commitment to their career constitute barriers to women’s advancement (S3Q6). ▪ Working life is characterized by negative attitudes towards women (S3Q7). ▪ Women believe the way they have been addressed at work by management and superiors has been influenced by negative attitudes towards them because they are women (S3Q8). ▪ Men fail to pay attention to what women say at meetings (S3Q9). ▪ Women feel that they have to be extra well prepared for talking professionally to men to make them pay attention to what they say (S3Q10). ▪ Women think that they have to be more accomplished in their work than men in order to be promoted (S3Q11). ▪ As women, they must be more accomplished and ‘pushy’ to be promoted (S3Q12). ▪ Organizations value diversity (S3Q13).
Corporate practices (S4Q)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Women have fewer opportunities than men for professional development at work (S4Q14). ▪ Women think that they receive fewer opportunities for professional development than they wish for (S4Q15). ▪ As a woman, if you experience difficulty at work, you have somebody or somewhere to turn to (S4Q16). ▪ Women think that men receive more organizational support and trust than women (S4Q17). ▪ Women would prefer to receive more support and trust at work (S4Q18). ▪ Women receive enough organizational support in order to manage their professional work and their domestic responsibilities (S4Q19). ▪ Women think that they need more support than they currently receive to manage their “double role” (S4Q20).

Sources: Bergman and Hallberg (2002)

5.2 Data Analysis

This study applied the questions primarily derived from the studies developed by Bergman and Hallberg (2002). The first section of the questionnaire was designed to collect information regarding respondents’ characteristics. The second section of the questionnaire was designed to collect respondents’ information regarding the culture of their organization. The third section of the questionnaire was designed to collect respondents’ information regarding the impact of the organizational culture on their career development, while the fourth section addressed respondents’ perspectives on professional development opportunities and organizational support within their organizations.

A five point Likert scale (totally disagree, disagree, slightly agree, agree, and totally agree) was used. The data obtained was analyzed using an SPSS (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences) software program. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyze the data.

In Table 2 constructs for corporate culture, corporate climate, and corporate practices are presented, using three measurement variables with 21 measurement items. Each of them was measured on 1 to 5 Likert scale. When measuring the items, we asked respondents about their degree of agreement or disagreement.

Organizational Culture Hypothesis

H1: A culture where “white-male managerial behavior” is prevalent inhibits the promotion of female managers.

The results for S2Q1, S2Q2, and S2Q3 are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Research Findings for Questionnaires on Corporate Culture by Frequency and Percentage

Corporate culture (Malaysia)	Totally disagree	Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Totally agree
S2Q1	6 (5.7%)	17 (16.0%)	25 (23.6%)	43 (40.6%)	15 (14.2%)
S2Q2	2 (1.9%)	5 (4.7%)	37 (34.9%)	48 (45.3%)	14 (13.2%)
S2Q3	7(6.6%)	22 (20.8%)	31(29.2%)	38 (35.8%)	8 (7.5%)
Corporate culture (Singapore)	Totally disagree	Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Totally agree
S2Q1	5 (4.2%)	15 (12.5%)	20 (16.7%)	50 (41.7%)	30 (25.0%)
S2Q2	3 (1.7%)	8 (6.7%)	33 (27.5%)	48 (40.0%)	28 (23.3%)
S2Q3	10(8.3%)	18 (15.0%)	31(25.8%)	35 (29.2%)	26 (21.7%)

Table 4: Research findings for questionnaires on corporate culture by mean and standard deviation

Corporate culture (Malaysia)	Mean	Standard Deviation
S2Q1	3.415	1.094
S2Q2	3.632	0.843
S2Q3	3.170	1.055
Corporate culture (Singapore)	Mean	Standard Deviation
S2Q1	3.583	1.134
S2Q2	3.791	0.906
S2Q3	3.408	1.155

In Malaysia, the results suggest that the respondents find it more difficult for women to be themselves working independently at work. 48 respondents (45.3%) of the respondents feel that they can be themselves at work. The findings also show that 38 respondents (35.8%) agree that it is difficult to assign tasks for women to go outstation or overseas. In Singapore, of the 120 respondents, 50 respondents (41.7%) feel that they can be themselves at work and 48 respondents (40.0%) agree that it is difficult to assign tasks for women to go outstation or overseas.

In addition, respondents perceive that they can be themselves at work as the most important mean (3.632) of corporate culture. On the other hand, the Singaporean mid-level manager respondents perceive that they can be themselves at work as the most important mean (3.791). This is not surprising given the knowledge that most women as a human resource equip themselves with the required knowledge and skills for the new century. In addition, respondents perceive that they can be themselves at work; it is evident that this is a measurement variable where the item has the lowest standard deviation (below 1), meaning that the item has the most explanatory power.

In Malaysia and Singapore, the management is still predominantly white and male. Many firms exercise control by white and male middle and top level management, especially in international firms. In both Malaysia and Singapore, the senior positions are mainly held by the white and male expatriates in the international firms.

This finding is generally on the positive side and necessitates the acceptance of H1.

Organizational Climate Hypotheses

H2: An organizational climate wherein the prevailing corporate perception is that women have lower professional capabilities and career commitment than men is a barrier to women’s advancement.

The results for S3Q1 to S3Q13 are shown in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5: Research Findings for the Questionnaires on Corporate Climate by Frequency and Percentage

Corporate climate (Malaysia)	Totally disagree	Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Totally agree
S3Q3	11 (10.4%)	10 (9.4%)	30 (28.3%)	40 (37.7%)	15 (14.2%)
S3Q4	7 (6.6%)	19 (17.9%)	28 (26.4%)	41 (38.7%)	11 (10.4%)
S3Q5	2 (1.9%)	13 (12.3%)	45 (42.5%)	37 (34.9%)	9 (8.5%)
S3Q6	3 (2.8%)	15 (14.2%)	46 (43.4%)	30 (28.3%)	12 (11.3%)
S3Q7	11 (10.4%)	17 (16.0%)	36 (34.0%)	34 (32.1%)	8 (7.5%)
S3Q8	8 (7.5%)	25 (23.6%)	29 (27.4%)	36 (34.0%)	8 (7.5%)
S3Q9	8 (7.5%)	25 (23.6%)	38 (35.8%)	25 (23.6%)	10 (9.4%)
S3Q10	2 (1.9%)	16 (15.1%)	34 (32.1%)	44 (41.5%)	10 (9.4%)
S3Q11	6 (5.7%)	12 (11.3%)	43 (40.6%)	33 (31.1%)	12 (11.3%)
S3Q12	10 (9.4%)	19 (17.9%)	36 (34.0%)	30 (28.3%)	11 (10.4%)
S3Q13	4 (3.8%)	8 (7.5%)	48 (45.3%)	37 (34.9%)	9 (8.5%)
Corporate climate (Singapore)	Totally disagree	Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Totally agree
S3Q3	8 (6.7%)	13 (10.8%)	27 (22.5%)	44 (36.7%)	28 (23.3%)
S3Q4	10 (8.3%)	16 (13.3%)	25 (20.8%)	45 (37.5%)	24 (20.0%)
S3Q5	7 (5.8%)	10 (8.3%)	35 (29.2%)	46 (38.3%)	22 (18.3%)
S3Q6	5 (4.2%)	13 (10.8%)	33 (27.5%)	42 (35.0%)	27 (22.5%)
S3Q7	6 (5.0%)	21 (17.5%)	22 (18.3%)	47 (39.2%)	23 (19.2%)
S3Q8	7 (5.8%)	18 (15.0%)	32 (26.7%)	40 (33.3%)	23 (19.2%)
S3Q9	6 (5.0%)	27 (22.5%)	24 (20.0%)	39 (32.5%)	24 (20.0%)
S3Q10	5 (4.2%)	13 (10.8%)	31 (25.8%)	46 (38.3%)	25 (20.8%)
S3Q11	4 (3.3%)	15 (12.5%)	44 (36.7%)	30 (25.0%)	27 (22.5%)
S3Q12	7 (5.8%)	16 (13.3%)	30 (25.0%)	41 (34.2%)	26 (21.7%)
S3Q13	6 (5.0%)	10 (8.3%)	38 (31.7%)	42 (35.0%)	24 (20.0%)

Table 6: Research Findings for the Questionnaires on Corporate Climate by Mean and Standard Deviation

Corporate culture (Malaysia)	Mean	Standard Deviation
S3Q3	3.359	1.156
S3Q4	3.283	1.085
S3Q5	3.359	0.875
S3Q6	3.311	0.950
S3Q7	3.104	1.095
S3Q8	3.104	1.086
S3Q9	3.037	1.077
S3Q10	3.415	0.924
S3Q11	3.311	1.008
S3Q12	3.123	1.119
S3Q13	3.368	0.887
Corporate culture (Singapore)	Mean	Standard Deviation
S3Q3	3.541	1.201
S3Q4	3.475	1.152
S3Q5	3.550	0.968
S3Q6	3.525	1.052
S3Q7	3.341	1.205
S3Q8	3.350	1.192
S3Q9	3.275	1.194
S3Q10	3.616	1.014
S3Q11	3.516	1.099
S3Q12	3.350	1.220
S3Q13	3.575	0.992

In Malaysia, these results suggest that the respondents consider that the cultures of their organizations are generally not supportive of positive attitudes towards women. This is shown in Table 5, which illustrates overall agreement with prevailing attitudes, performance evaluations, and the manner in which women have been treated and addressed at work. The findings for S3Q3 show that 40 respondents (37.7%) agree that their work performance has been more harshly evaluated than that of their male counterparts. This finding is further supported by S3Q4, which shows that 41 respondents (38.7%) agree that they have been unfairly judged. In Singapore, of the 120 respondents, 44 (36.7%) agree that their work performance has been more harshly evaluated than that of their male counterparts and 45 (37.5%) agree that they have been unfairly judged. With reference to S3Q5 and S3Q6, in Malaysia, most of the respondents slightly agree that negative perceptions and stereotypes regarding women's professional capabilities and commitment to their career constitute barriers to women's advancement. With reference to S3Q7, 36 respondents (34.0%) slightly agree that work life is characterized by negative attitudes towards women. Meanwhile, the findings of S3Q8 show that the largest group of respondents (36, or 34% of the respondents) considers that the way they have been addressed at work by management and superiors has been influenced by negative attitudes toward women. On the other hand, in Singapore, most of the respondents (40 respondents, 33.3%) also give the same opinion that their superior has been have been influenced by negative attitudes towards women.

The findings of S3Q9 show that 38 respondents (35.8%) slightly agree that men fail to pay attention to what women say at the meetings. This suggests that the "invisible woman syndrome" was perceived as a particularly salient issue in the Malaysian context. In addition, the findings of S3Q10 show that 44 respondents (41.5%) agree that women have to be extra well prepared to talk professionally to men in order to make them pay attention to what they say. In addition, respondents feel that they have to be extra well prepared to talk professionally to men in order to make them pay attention to what they say, is the most important mean (3.415) of the corporate climate. On the other hand, in Singapore, most of the respondents (39 respondents, 32.5%) agree that men fail to pay attention to what women say at the meetings. For S3Q10, most of the Singapore respondents (46 respondents, 38.3%) agree that they have to be extra well prepared to talk professionally to men.

With reference to S3Q11 and S3Q12, the findings are congruent with each other. In Malaysia, for S3Q11, 43 respondents (40.6%) slightly agree that women think that they have to be more accomplished in their work than

men in order to be promoted. For S3Q12, 36 respondents (34%) slightly agree that women must be more accomplished and “pushy” to be promoted. The results for S3Q13 from the respondents in Singapore shows that, most of the respondents (41 respondents, 34.2%) agree that women must be more accomplished and ‘pushy’ to be promoted. This shows that the respondents consider aggressiveness and higher achievement as necessary for promotion.

The findings from the different questions regarding corporate climate suggest that H2 is supported in the Malaysia and also in the Singapore context. Overall, the respondents have reported dissatisfaction with the cultures of their organizations, the psychological environment created, and its underpinning values/attitudes. The acceptance of H2 suggests that Malaysia and Singapore organizations have not yet been successful in creating an appropriate gender-inclusive culture, which promotes/rewards congruent values/attitudes. Therefore, there is a need to look into this issue in order to ensure equal opportunities for evaluation of women as a human resource in both Malaysia and Singapore organizations.

H3: In the companies, women work in the context of corporate cultures that fail to value diversity.

The results from this survey suggest that 48 respondents (45.3%) slightly agree that the organizations value diversity. In the Malaysian context, organizations make consistent efforts at embracing diversity effectively. On the other hand, in Singapore, of the 120 respondents, 42 respondents (35%) agree that the organizations value diversity. The Singapore organizations’ value diversity was given attention by management earlier in comparing it with the Malaysia organizations.

Corporate Practices Hypotheses

H4: Women do not receive the development opportunities necessary for career advancement.

The results for S3Q1 to S3Q13 are shown in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7: Research Findings for Questionnaires on Corporate Practices by Frequency and Percentage

Corporate practices (Malaysia)	Totally disagree	Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Totally agree
S4Q14	7 (6.6%)	9 (8.5%)	31 (29.2%)	47 (44.3%)	12 (11.3%)
S4Q15	5 (4.7%)	20 (18.9%)	38 (35.8%)	38 (35.8%)	5 (4.7%)
S4Q16	0 (0%)	7 (6.6%)	16 (15.1%)	66 (62.3%)	17 (16.0%)
S4Q17	6 (5.7%)	12 (11.3%)	42 (39.6%)	37 (34.9%)	9 (8.5%)
S4Q18	2 (1.9%)	8 (7.5%)	37 (34.9%)	43 (40.6%)	16 (15.1%)
S4Q19	4 (3.8%)	11 (10.4%)	33 (31.1%)	50 (47.2%)	8 (7.5%)
S4Q20	1 (0.9%)	9 (8.5%)	36 (34.0%)	44 (41.5%)	16 (15.1%)
Corporate practices (Singapore)	Totally disagree	Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Totally agree
S4Q14	8 (6.7%)	8 (6.7%)	35 (29.2%)	43 (35.8%)	26 (21.7%)
S4Q15	7 (5.8%)	25 (20.8%)	31 (25.8%)	39 (32.5%)	18 (15.0%)
S4Q16	1 (0.8%)	6 (5.0%)	21 (17.5%)	75 (62.5%)	17 (14.2%)
S4Q17	6 (5.0%)	11 (9.2%)	45 (37.5%)	46 (38.3%)	12 (10.0%)
S4Q18	5 (4.1%)	7 (5.8%)	35 (29.2%)	42 (35.0%)	31 (25.8%)
S4Q19	5 (4.1%)	11 (9.2%)	43 (35.8%)	53 (44.2%)	8 (6.7%)
S4Q20	4 (3.3%)	10 (8.4%)	32 (26.7%)	43 (35.8%)	31 (25.8%)

Table 8: Research Findings for Questionnaires on Corporate Practices by Mean and Standard Deviation

Corporate practices (Malaysia)	Mean	Standard Deviation
S4Q14	3.453	1.025
S4Q15	3.170	0.951
S4Q16	3.877	0.752
S4Q17	3.293	0.976
S4Q18	3.594	0.903
S4Q19	3.443	0.916
S4Q20	3.613	0.871
Corporate practices (Singapore)	Mean	Standard Deviation
S4Q14	3.650	1.074
S4Q15	3.375	1.061
S4Q16	3.850	0.729
S4Q17	3.375	0.970
S4Q18	3.766	0.967
S4Q19	3.416	0.875
S4Q20	3.783	0.945

These results suggest that the respondents consider that the practices of their organizations are generally that women receive fewer opportunities for professional development. As shown in Table 7, in Malaysia, for S4Q14, 47 of the respondents (44.3%) think that women have fewer opportunities for professional development at work. Meanwhile in Singapore, for S4Q14, 43 respondents (35.8%) think that women have fewer opportunities at work. With reference to S4Q15, 38 respondents (35.8%) from Malaysia respondent and 39 respondents (32.5%) claim receiving fewer opportunities for professional development than desired.

In aggregate, the results presented in Table 7 lead to the acceptance of H4. The respondents are dissatisfied with opportunities for career development. The results are congruent with the findings on corporate climate that the respondents (mid-level women managers) agree that they have fewer opportunities for professional development than men in their organizations. These results suggest that the respondents are more pessimistic regarding the accessibility of career development opportunities made available in their firms. The results overall suggest that the respondents feel particularly disadvantaged in relation to career and professional development opportunities in their firms.

H5: In the companies, women do not get enough organizational support, including networking, mentoring, and family-friendly initiatives.

Several questions were used to test the hypothesis relating to organizational support. With reference to S4Q16, 66 respondents (62.3%) indicated that they had someone to turn to at work in difficult times. The findings of S4Q17 show that 42 respondents (39.6%) slightly agree that men receive more organizational support and trust than women. With reference to S4Q18, 43 respondents (40.6%) reported that they would prefer to receive more support and trust at work, suggesting that the existing levels of organizational support made available in the context of Malaysian organizations are inadequate. Also with reference to S4Q20, 44 respondents (41.5%) agree that they need more support than they currently receive in order to manage their “double role”.

On the other hand, in Singapore, for S4Q16, 75 respondents (62.5%) said that they had someone to turn to at work in difficult times. For S4Q17, of the 120 respondents, 46 respondents (38.3%) indicated that they agree that men receive more organizational support and trust than women. With reference to S4Q18, 42 respondents (35%) reported that they would prefer to receive more support and trust at work and 43 respondents (35.8%) agree that they need more support than they currently received.

This could be the case because they do not receive enough support at their organizations. The findings lead us to accept H5. It suggests that women in Malaysia and Singapore organizations do not receive enough organizational support, including networking, mentoring, and family friendly initiatives. Therefore, Malaysia and Singapore organizations should provide more support for women as a human resource by assisting them at work.

6. DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This research study examines mid-level women managers' perception of the existence of a glass ceiling in Malaysian organizations from the aspects of corporate culture, corporate climate, and corporate practices. The findings show that the culture of Malaysian organizations inhibits the promotion of female managers and that they do not receive the development opportunities necessary for career advancement or organizational support, including networking, mentoring, and family-friendly initiatives. The findings of this study are expected to shed some light on the glass ceiling facing by women as a human resource, particularly from the perspective of mid-level women managers. With respect to barriers stemming from the corporate culture, the respondents considered the cultures of their organizations to be generally unsupportive and as evidencing the need to improve the attitudes towards women. In addition, the findings also suggest the dissatisfaction with prevailing organizational practices and career development opportunities.

From the perspective of corporate culture, the largest groups of respondents in Malaysia (40.6%) and in Singapore (41.7%) feel that it is more difficult for women than men to be themselves while working independently at work (S2Q1). In addition, the largest groups of respondents in Malaysia (45.3%) and in Singapore (40%) feel that it is difficult to assign tasks for women to go outstation or overseas (S2Q2). The largest group of respondents (35.8%) in Malaysia and (29.2%) in Singapore are independent, as the findings for (S2Q3) show that women think that they can be themselves at work.

The largest group of respondents (35.8%) in Malaysia and (32.5%) in Singapore experience the "invisible women syndrome" (S3Q9) and consider (38.7%) in Malaysia, (37.5%) in Singapore that their performance at work has been unfairly judged (S3Q4). The respondents (45.3%) in Malaysia, (35%) in Singapore also considered that they worked in the context of a corporate climate that values diversity (S3Q13).

In parallel, most of the respondents also expressed dissatisfaction with prevailing organizational practices. The largest group of respondents (35.8%) in Malaysia and (39.2%) in Singapore considered that the opportunities for professional development made available in the context of their organization were inadequate (S4Q15). For the findings related to organizational support, the largest group of the respondents (40.6%) in Malaysia and (35%) in Singapore expressed dissatisfaction with levels of support and trust provided at work (S4Q18) and the largest group of respondents (39.6%) in Malaysia and (38.3%) in Singapore considers that men receive more organizational support and trust than women (S4Q17). The largest group of respondents (41.5%) in Malaysia and (37.8%) in Singapore concede that they need more support in order to manage their double role.

The findings can be attributed to a pattern of harmonious coexistence between women and men that has evolved in the context of Malaysia and Singapore organizations. Under the globalization trend, it is important to pay attention to the productivity of women as a human resource, to leverage the intellectual capital of the entire workforce, and to retain competent, experienced, and loyal managers, irrespective of gender.

7. CONCLUSION

This research study examines the effects of corporate culture, corporate climate, and corporate practices on the existence of a glass ceiling from the perspective of mid-level women managers in Malaysia and Singapore organizations. The findings suggest that the common precepts of the glass ceiling theory are supported in the Malaysia and Singapore context. However, further research in this field is expected to develop more complete questionnaires and with larger sample sizes. Getting the relevant respondents to participate in the research was the major problem that this study faced. When approached, many of them refused to participate. This problem and other issues have contributed to the limitations of the study. The major limitation of the study was the low number of respondents. While the number of respondents who participated in the study may have been low, this might be overcome in the future if more respondents could be encouraged to participate.

This research suggests opportunities for researchers interested in further exploring the glass ceiling effect in organizations. More empirical research is needed and would be particularly useful in providing more empirical evidence to support the findings. Additionally, there is a need then to conduct studies on the glass ceiling effect in

organizations from the perspective of women at lower level or top level management in order to develop a more comprehensive theory and understanding of the corporate culture, corporate climate, and corporate practices and to eradicate the glass ceiling effect in organizations.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Dr. Vlado Dimovski is a full professor of management and organizational theory at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Economics in Slovenia. He holds B.A. degrees in Economics and Philosophy, M.A. in Economics and PhD in Management and Finance. As an academician, professor Dimovski has taught and researched at various universities and institutions, and has published numerous articles in recognized journals. His academic research interests cover learning organization, competitiveness, corporate strategy, developing knowledge-based organizations and labor markets. Besides his university position, professor Dimovski was the State Secretary for Industry (1995-1997), the presidents of Center for International Competitiveness (1997-2000), and Minister for Labour, Family and Social Affairs (2000-2004).

Miha Skerlavaj is an assistant professor of management and organization at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Economics, Department for Management and Organization. His research interests include organizational learning, innovations, social network analysis, organizational culture and knowledge management. He is active in international academic associations (Academy of Management, EURAM and INSNA), and regularly acts as reviewer, editor, and conference track leader. Among many others his work appeared in *Expert Systems with Applications*, *International Journal of Production Economics*, *Interactive Learning Environments*, *Journal of the American Society of Information Science and Technology*, *Transformations in Business and Economics*, and *Journal of Information Technology*. More information at [http:// www.mihaskerlavaj.net](http://www.mihaskerlavaj.net).

Mandy Mok Kim Man is a lecturer in School Of Business and Economics, University Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia. Her research interests include Human Resource Management and Development, International Business, Marketing and Strategy Management. Her works published in international journals. She has received numerous awards, such as Mercer Human Resource Award (2005), The Best Presenter, Miami Conference (2007), The Praised Lecturer (2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009) and the coauthor for the Best Scientific paper (2008).

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