

Aspects of Women's Leadership in the Organisation: Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

In most organisations, women are underrepresented in top positions. Many aspects of Women's Leadership are studied in the literature for underrepresentation of women leaders. This study aims to analyse and consolidate the insights about those aspects of Women's Leadership, which gives them a stable and secure position in the organisation, beyond the unseen walls of gender discrimination. These aspects are barriers, enablers, strengths and weaknesses of Women's Leadership. The research method used for the study is a systematic literature review method. Peer-reviewed, scholarly journal articles and book references between 1990 and 2021 identified from the Scopus and Web of Sciences databases are considered for the study. The result showed much uniformity in the 'Women's Leadership' phenomenon, globally. This research found that Women's Leadership studies are mostly conducted in areas such as social sciences, business and management, medicine, education, etc. It also found that most women-leadership-related studies are conducted in developed countries where the percentage of women leaders is comparatively higher than in other industries. Still, women leaders in both developed and developing countries face similar barriers during their careers. The gender gap and the glass ceiling they have to break are some of the issues experienced by women in any organisation. Organisational bias, lack of assertiveness and poor networking also pose barriers to Women's Leadership. Yet, there are some enablers for Women's Leadership, such as mentoring, good training programmes and workplace culture. However, maintaining a work-life balance, working under pressure and excluding informal communication are considered as limitations for Women's Leadership. Strengths, such as high emotional intelligence, empathy, democratic leadership style, sincerity and ability to make decisions under critical circumstances benefit the organisation. This study will help to get an integrated and consolidated theoretical review of different aspects of Women's Leadership in the organisation. Moreover,

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the study can help to implement various organisational policies to increase the percentage of women in leadership roles.

Keywords

Aspects of women's leadership, barriers and enablers of women's leadership, glass ceiling, leadership and gender diversity, systematic literature review, women's leadership

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Introduction

Women's Leadership has always been a major topic of discussion due to the continuous underrepresentation of women in top positions in organisations (Soklaridis & López, 2014). However, women are different in a particular way and provide unique value addition through their work. These characteristics are known as feminine attributes, such as strong communication skills, advanced intermediary skills and empathy towards others (Stanford et al., 1995). Still, we found that no country has yet closed the gender gap at the organisational level (Soklaridis & López, 2014). The continuous underrepresentation of females in high positions in many countries shows a significant gender bias in hiring and promoting leaders (Eagly & Karau, 1991, 2002; Hoobler et al., 2014; Player et al., 2019). Previous research has shown that there may not be enough women leaders to fill senior leadership positions onboards (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Gipson et al., 2017). According to a report, *The C. S. Gender 3000 in 2019: The changing face of companies*, released by Credit Suisse Research Institute (CSRI), in 2019, women on company boards are around 20.6% globally (Gowthaman, 2019). Although women leaders have unique characteristics, their number is restricted (Eagly et al., 2003; Weyer, 2007). Studies conducted related to aspects of Women's Leadership have been in a specific industry or a country. The current research aims to critically analyse the literature on Women's Leadership, integrate diverse Women's Leadership perspectives and put common consolidated observations related to different aspects of Women's Leadership in an organisation and its impact on the organisation.

Evolution of Women's Leadership and Related Theories

Along with different characteristics like people-oriented approach, value-oriented approach, inclusive leadership, empathy, high emotional intelligence, multi-tasking capacity, flexibility and cooperative mindset; women leaders have some unique characteristics, such as determination, sincerity, hard work, commitment towards their work and setting future goals that give them the desired position in an organisation, but due to the glass ceiling and organisational biases, they are not able to get it (Hennig & Jardim, 1977).

Women's Leadership trajectory starts at an early age with academic excellence and other leading experiences women get in their educational life (Veihmeyer & Doughtie, 2019). Turock (2001) explained that the concept of Women's Leadership has evolved against the backdrop of feminist research (Fine & Gordon, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1990). Feminist research theory is based on three principles: social change, feminist values and beliefs and interdisciplinary characteristics of gender diversity (Oliver, 2000). Davidson and Burke (1994) have argued that organisations that develop practices and policies supporting the career development and aspirations of their women managers create a healthy work environment. In such organisations, women managers are judged by their merit. Such policies also help to increase the competitive advantage in the market, retentive investment, optimising potential and productivity, better quality management and client retention. Feminist research theory is incorporated into the literature to support women leaders and their position in management (Bhatti & Ali, 2021). According to the centered leadership theory, finding appropriate job opportunities, defining the meaning of work and taking a high interest in the work can help talented women succeed in their careers (Dai et al., 2011).

In 1991, Eagly and Karau presented the Role Congruity Theory related to Women's Leadership. This theory argued that a perceived incongruity exists between stereotypical female qualities. It states that women leaders are sometimes more empathetic, follow affirmative and participative leadership style and tend to work in team and sometimes they are goal-oriented and assertive. The theory further argues that changing stereotypical definitions of gender or leadership will reduce bias against and increase leadership roles for women. This theory further argued that Women's Leadership roles can be improved by reducing bias in stereotypical definitions of leadership and gender (Griffiths et al., 2019). The Women's Leadership impact can be measured by how people look at the qualities of a good leader and excellence of women leaders, as well as how both these conditions complement each other (Griffiths et al., 2019). Davidson and Burke (1994) mentioned that organisations should develop a healthy environment, where women leaders can grow according to their capability and talent. They can also increase competitive advantage by attracting the best talent, improving efficiency of organisational work, retaining clients or customers and managing equality. It is found that encouragement from others, mainly from male colleagues, is an encouraging factor for women leaders in any organisational culture (Lämä & Savela, 2019).

Another aspect of Women's Leadership was first introduced by Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) in their article 'Glass Ceiling Theory', in *The Wall Street Journal*. 'Glass ceiling' is defined as 'a transparent barrier that kept women from rising above certain positions in corporations' (Morisson et al., 1987). Later, another related concept of 'glass cliff' was introduced by Ryan and Haslam (2005) to indicate the tendency to place women in risky positions, weakening their performance so that they face the risk of falling off a cliff (Kagan, 2019). Sometimes, it is found that women may preferentially get placed in such a risky leadership role, which may have adverse consequences (Sabharwal, 2013). Table 1 shows the definitions of different theories associated with Women's Leadership. These definitions are part of other studies related to social sciences or psychological theories.

Table 1. Theories and Definitions Related to Women Leadership.

Theory	Author	Explanation
Feminist research theory	Oliver (2000)	Feminist research theory is defined in three principles. 'First, feminist research includes both constructions of new knowledge and the production of social change. Second, feminist research is grounded in feminist values and beliefs. Moreover, third, Feminist research is interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary and characterised by its diversity.
Theory of motivated reasoning	Kunda (1990)	People who are motivated to arrive at a particular attempt to be rational and construct a justification of their required conclusion would persuade a dispassionate observer.
Theory of centred leadership	Adair (1973)	There are three principles involved in centred leadership: achieving the task, managing the team or group and managing individuals. These three overlapping symbolic circles make the structure of centred leadership.
Role congruity theory	Eagly and Karau (2002)	Role congruity theory proposes that the perceived incongruity between female gender roles and leadership roles tends to two forms of prejudice. (a) Women are less favourably perceived than men as potential occupants of leadership roles. (b) Evaluate behaviour that fulfills the qualities of a leadership role less favourably when a woman enacts it.
Glass ceiling theory	Morisson et al. (1987)	A transparent barrier that kept women from rising above certain positions in corporations. It describes as an invisible barrier or wall that blocks women's access to the top where they want to go.
Glass cliff theory	Ryan and Haslam (2005)	The glass cliff theory demonstrates that women and individuals in minority groups are more tend to rise in the professional hierarchy is complex, risky and precarious situations.

Source: The authors.

Research Objectives

Following are the objectives of the study:

1. To explore and study theories related to Women's Leadership
2. To find and analyse barriers and enablers of Women's Leadership from the literature

3. To find and analyse benefits and limitations of Women's Leadership from the literature
4. To develop a theoretical framework for aspects of Women's Leadership in the organisation

Research Methodology

The researchers adopted a systematic literature review method, a five-step process model developed by Whittemore and Knafl (2005), for the study. The review process includes developing review questions, searching the literature, data collection, discussing the results and presenting integrated findings. This method is more helpful in a systematic literature analysis (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). It helps to accommodate different methodologies as well as different types of evidence required for a study in looking for conceptual and theoretical findings from the literature by reviewing, analysing and synthesising the literature (Torraco, 2016).

Literature Search

The data was collected from the Scopus and Google Scholar databases to find leading peer-reviewed and scholarly articles. The initial search was done using the following keywords: 'Women's Leadership', 'female leadership' and was further extended to keywords 'glassceiling', 'glasscliff', 'Women's Leadership styles', 'women on board' and 'Women's Leadership and organisation performance'. Furthermore, other publications, including different surveys related to women's leadership, were also checked. The studies on women's leadership are available from as early as 1914. For this study, we have considered peer-reviewed and scholarly articles from 1990 to 2020, since there has been a considerable increase in Women's Leadership studies during these years, especially in the recent decade.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

1. Peer-reviewed and other scholarly articles published between 1990 and 2021 on the given subject, with the exception of articles presenting different theories associated with Women's Leadership but published before 1990
2. Both qualitative and quantitative studies related to the subject
3. Online articles, surveys about Women's Leadership conducted by different NGOs or other organisations
4. Books and conference articles related to the subject

Exclusion Criteria

1. Women's Leadership literature before 1990

Data Collection

A total of 4,409 articles were found by searching the databases. After removal of duplicates and other irrelevant articles, 92 were considered for the study. While a major part of studies on Women's Leadership have been conducted in social sciences, business, management and accounting, some studies have also been conducted in medicine, arts and humanities, economics, engineering and psychology as well. Along with these research articles, non-research articles from online sources were also referred for the study to get the current picture of the participation of women leaders in industries.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

Table 2 shows key extractions from the literature related to the aspects of Women's Leadership. These extractions show how Women's Leadership studies have been conducted in the literature, considering its various aspects.

Table 2. Key Extractions from the Literature.

Sr. No.	Aspects of Women Leadership	Key Extractions from the Study	Authors
1.	Barriers	Breaking the glass ceiling	Eagly et al. (1995, 2000) and Eagly and Carli (2007)
		Prominent walls for the glass ceiling, human capital barriers—differences in communication skills, lack of education, experience, finance, gender-based stereotypes, lack of mentors, occupational segregation and organisational biases	Lewis (1997, 1998), Mani (1997), Dolan (2004) and Sabharwal (2013)
		Stereotypical attitudes from colleagues at the workplace, lack of risk-taking ability, family responsibility, lack of supportive organisational culture	Wentling (2003) and Bhatnagar (2008)
		Gender diversity gap	Eagly et al. (2000) and Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001)

(Table 2 continued)

(Table 2 continued)

Sr. No.	Aspects of Women Leadership	Key Extractions from the Study	Authors
		Emphasising on role congruity theory experiencing gender stereotype threat at performance level	Cota and Dion (1986), Cohen and Swim (1995), Hoyt et al. (2010), Coffman (2014) and Chen and Houser (2019)
2.	Enablers	Adaptability, perseverance, risk-taking, agility to learn new things, ambition and empathy	Wentling (2003), Metz (2004), Cabrera (2009), Ezzedeen and Ritchey (2009) and Bhattacharya et al. (2018)
		Mentoring	Linehan and Walsh (1999), Ragins and Cotton (1999), McKeen and Bujaki (2007), De Vries (2010), Abalkhail and Allan (2015) and Mate et al. (2019)
		Training and career development	Vinnicombe and Singh (2002), Eagly and Carli (2007) and Mate et al. (2019)
3.	Benefits	Liability, mutual understanding and trust, positive influence on sales performance, market performance, return on assets and return on equity	Burgess and Borgida (1999), Rudman and Glick (2001), Heilman et al. (2004), Singh (2007) and Hoobler et al. (2018)
		Creative leadership, overcome barriers and participated in board decisions, chairperson leadership efficacy	Mayer and Oosthuizen (2020), Kanadli et al. (2018) and Kakabadse et al. (2015)
4.	Limitations	Maintaining work–life balance	Keene et al. (2002), Naidoo and Jano (2003), Lopez-Claros and Zahidi (2005) and Qadir (2019)
		Working under pressure	OpenGart and Bierema (2002), Linehan and Scullion (2005), Laff (2006) and Qadir (2019)

Source: The authors.

Data Evaluation

Industry-wide Distribution of Articles

Figure 1 shows the chart for industry-wide distribution of articles. A significant percentage (55.13%) of Women's Leadership studies is found in social sciences and business management. The reason for this higher number is the style of work or type of leadership required in various industries that need more compassion, empathy and creativity, the qualities that women possess.

Country-wide Distribution of Articles

Most of the studies related to Women's Leadership have been conducted in developed countries. Figure 2 shows the country-wide distribution of the research. More than 35% of Women's Leadership studies are conducted in the USA and the UK, while a little above 1% of Women's Leadership studies are conducted in India. Few researchers from developing and underdeveloped countries have conducted Women's Leadership-related studies. Thus, there is a significant gap in the research related to Women's Leadership in India and other developing countries. The present study aims to fill this gap with comprehensive observations about Women's Leadership in organisations.

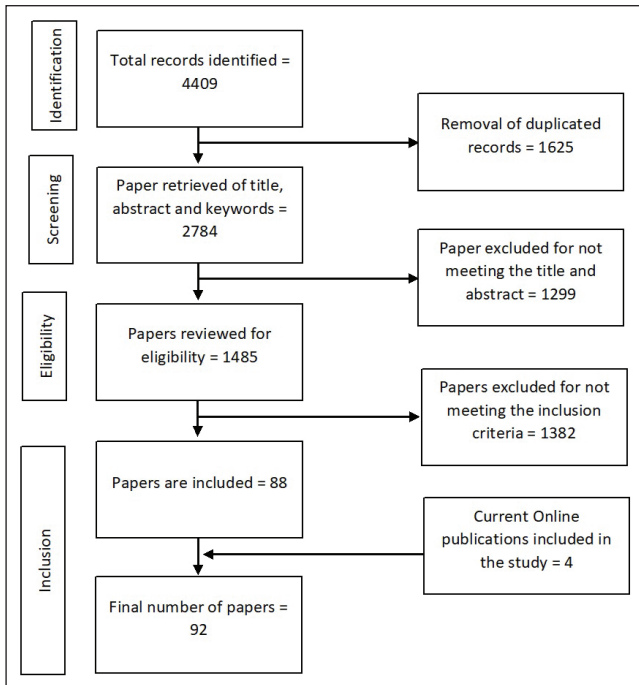


Figure 1. Flow Chart for Article Selection Decision.

Source: The authors.

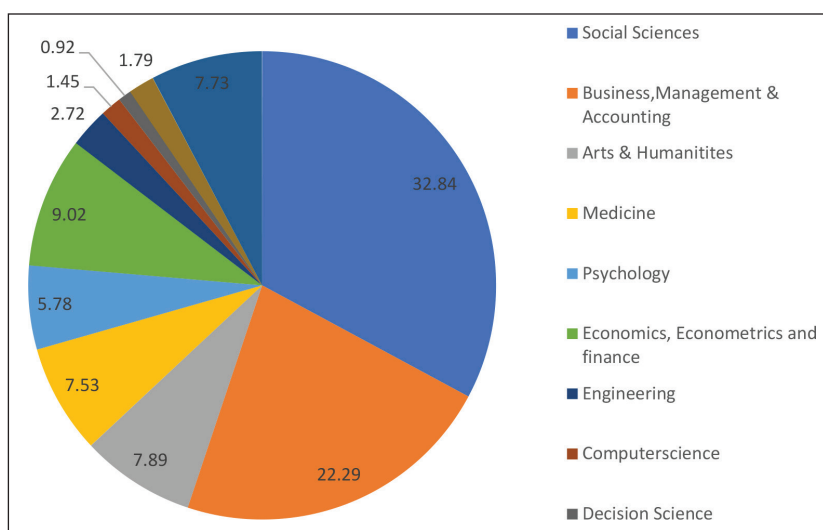


Figure 2. Industry-wide Distribution of Articles.

Source: Author's own research (Data retracted from Scopus and Google Scholar database). This figure is available online in colour.

Findings

Barriers to Women's Leadership

Many visible and invisible barriers are experienced by women who want to reach higher positions in their organisational careers. These barriers are described as glass ceiling and glass cliff in the Women's Leadership literature. Lack of education, knowledge or experience, exclusion of informal networks, stereotypical attitudes, organisational biases, occupational segregation, lack of mentorship and training programmes, lack of risk-taking ability in some situations and gender diversity are some of the prominent barriers that women experience (Bhatnagar, 2008; Dolan, 2004; Lewis, 1997, 1998; Mani, 1997; Sabharwal, 2013; Wentling, 2003). On their part, women, try to break these barriers and achieve their professional goals (Parsons & Reiss, 2004).

Breaking the Glass Ceiling

The literature indicates that women leaders are more likely to acknowledge the existence of a glass ceiling and realise its threat and unfairness (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). They have to break the glass ceiling to achieve their expected goals and targets in the organisation. Women leaders face a subtle form of discrimination that leads to restricted leadership openings, rare opportunities in decision-making, lack of support and lack of work–life balance, despite having broken the glass ceiling. Male dominance in organisations is also one reason women have to face the glass cliff (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). However, the number of women on boards of organisations is slowly increasing as they are trying to break the glass ceiling

by their determination and perseverance. As a result of the changing role of women in society, it is found that they are getting more access to jobs overbalanced to males and a respectful entry in the workforce (Duehr & Joyce, 2006).

Gender Differences in Leadership Styles

As suggested by the social role theory, the roles of men and women are now overlapping (Eagly et al., 2000), and more women are entering the workforce and seeking managerial positions in their careers. Due to this, gender issues at the workplace are prominently noticed and women leaders suffer from it. Leadership styles are either autocratic (goal-oriented) or democratic (interpersonal relation-oriented). These leadership styles are further classified into transactional, transformational and laissez-faire leadership styles (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). However, compared to men, the achievements of women leaders are measured by their leadership styles and outcomes, whereas the achievements of men leaders are measured by organisational competitiveness, control or hold over the organisation. It has been found that women receive more support from their organisations, attach more importance to their community and receive authority in their respective fields than men (Offermann & Gowing, 1990).

According to the role congruity theory, the gender stereotyping threat can be experienced while performing a role at senior levels within congruent characteristics (Chen & Houser, 2019; Coffman, 2014). Hyde (2005) argued that, due to excessive issues of gender differences, women leaders experience organisational biases at the workplace. The gender composition at the workplace could impact one's gender identity and the respective gender stereotype (Chen & Houser, 2019; Cohen & Swim, 1995; Cota & Dion, 1986; Hoyt et al., 2010). If there is a group with all women members and a women leader, then gender identity will not be prominent, since both the leader and the members belong to the same gender, whereas if the group is gender-mixed with a woman leader, she may experience the influence of gender stereotyping attitudes in decision-making. It will ultimately improve the overall group performance as well as the organisation's performance (Chen & Houser, 2019). There are diverse opinions on men and women, differing in task-or people-oriented behaviour in an organisation. Aarum-Anderson and Hansson (2011) found that there is not much difference in leadership styles of men and women. However, they argued that there is no effect on leadership behaviour due to gender differences.

Lack of Assertiveness

Women leaders are usually found to be less assertive at the workplace because of their empathetic nature. A study (Keane et al., 2021) shows that leaders who are less assertive are likely to be more submissive, while leaders who show extreme assertiveness are found to be more aggressive and commanding in decision-making. They prefer more task-oriented behaviour and focus on achieving targets at any cost. Men are considered more self-confident, commanding and forceful, whereas women are viewed as more empathetic and more focussing on interpersonal relations, due to which they are found to be less assertive in the workplace (Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

Organisational Bias

It is seen that women leaders face biases due to gender difference at the organisational level (Eagly et al., 1992; Lopez & Ensari, 2014; Maas & Torres-González, 2011). Subordinates accept women in more charismatic and democratic leadership roles in the organisation. If women tend to be more assertive or autocratic in leadership roles, they face organisational bias due to stereotyping. However, less incongruity is found if women prefer more democratic or charismatic leadership, as these are typically known as feminine characteristics (Hackman & Wageman, 1995; Lopez & Ensari, 2014). If women in a leadership role are self-promoting, aggressive and commanding in nature, they will be seen as deviating from their gendered role and will get few positive reactions in the organisation. 'To the extent that women fulfill their leadership role in a particularly dominant, assertive, directive or self-promoting style, they present greater deviation from the injunctive norms of female gender role and would receive fewer positive reactions' (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Figure 3 is a thematic diagram of the barriers for Women's Leadership in organisations.

Enablers to Women's Leadership

Various factors work as enablers for Women's Leadership in an organisation. Research indicates that mentoring can be one of the prominent elements in enhancing women's leadership capacity (De Vries, 2010; Mate et al., 2019; Ragins et al., 2017). Training and development programmes also help in progressing the career of women managers. In addition to this, adaptability, perseverance,

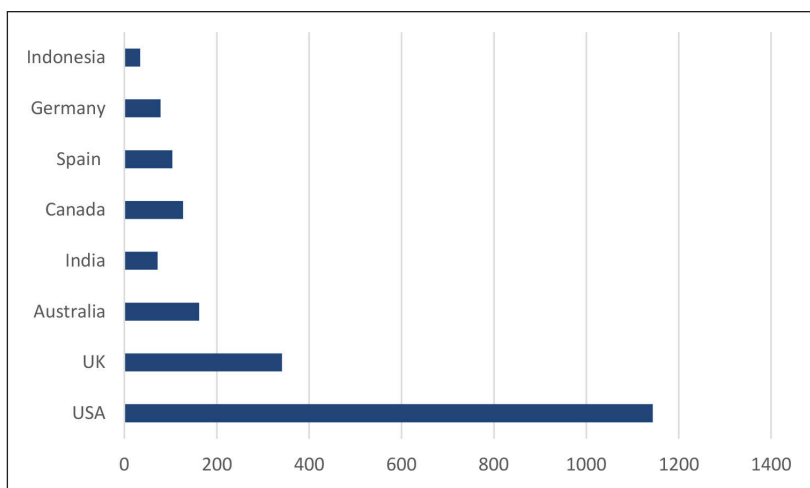


Figure 3. Country-wise Distribution of Articles.

Source: Author's own research (data retracted from Scopus and Google Scholar database).

risk-taking ability, quick learning, ambition and empathy are considered to be human capital enablers for Women's Leadership (Bhattacharya et al., 2018; Cabrera, 2009; Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009; Metz, 2004; Wentling, 2003).

Mentoring

Women try to work to their full potential as well as maintain a work-life balance. However, they often fail to reach the desired position due to different barriers. In these situations, various enablers can help them to come out of the situation. One of the main enablers is to have the right mentor to support their career. A good mentor plays a vital role in these situations. However, finding a good mentor at the workplace is another challenge for women leaders. They are hesitant to choose a mentor in the workplace, because of the stereotypical characteristics of mentors. Nonetheless, it is better to have a mentor to boost careers and skills and increase retention in the workplace (Elias, 2018). A mentor is also likely to help them recognise their peers and colleagues (Mate et al., 2019). Women's leadership capabilities can be nurtured by effective mentoring. Although mentoring cannot change the existing organisational transactional structure, it should develop social change and support (De Vries, 2010; Linehan & Walsh, 1999; Ragins et al., 2017). Research indicates that mentoring is not only helpful in personal career advancement but also beneficial for organisational success (McKeen & Bujaki, 2007; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). As a result, we can see that mentoring to improve success in career is becoming a hot topic of research interest (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015; Woolnough & Davidson, 2007).

Training and Career Development Support

Training is one of the managerial interventions that helps reduce discriminatory behaviour towards women leaders and their underrepresentation. It helps shape their career pathway towards desired leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Training programmes help understand and enhance individual strengths and strategies required to succeed at the top level without compromising the organisational values (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2002). Training programmes can help women leaders to acquire new skills and knowledge after a career break. Career development support at the workplace through mentoring, training and different welfare schemes helps women leaders to make career advancements (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

Progress in women leaders' careers is also enabled by actively building relationships through collaboration and networking, taking up relevant opportunities and making the best choices (Mate et al., 2019).

Benefits to the Organisation

The gender group composition may dramatically change women's beliefs about their ability (Chen & Houser, 2019). Due to their empathetic and participative behaviour, women leaders are found to be more responsible than men in the context of social behaviour (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Heilman et al., 2004;

Rudman & Glick, 2001). Men have a transactional style of leadership, which depends on power and authority. In contrast, women adopt a transformational leadership style based on mutual understanding and trust, informal communication, personal respect, each group member's contribution and development of each diverse talent (Singh, 2007). Women tend to have more creative leadership by fostering each other's creativity rather than integrating their artistic vision through employees' work. Due to this kind of style, more than men, women leaders are socially and culturally accepted (Mayer & Oosthuizen, 2020).

Positive Influence

Literature indicates that women directors can more significantly influence strategic board decisions with their contribution through values, knowledge and experience than their male counterparts. While they may face social barriers in boardrooms, they can overcome the obstacles and have a positive impact on the board (Kanadlı et al., 2018). We can find some common characteristics among women leaders with a successful career. They prioritise their progress and exceed in their performance expectations continuously. They try to develop a leadership style, where male colleagues are also comfortable and seek challenging or high visibility assignments (Catalyst, 2000). As Eagly and Carli (2007) have mentioned, women inclined towards transformational styles demonstrate more contingent reward behaviour. They make their subordinates happy and engaged by rewarding them for their satisfactory performance (Chandler, 2011). According to a Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends Survey, women are superior to men in honesty, intelligence, compassion, outgoing nature and creativity (Chandler, 2011). Organisations with female CEOs often report the positive influence of female leadership on ROA, ROE, sales performance, market performance and stakeholder performance (Hoobler et al., 2018). A survey data shows that the leadership style adopted by women is more interactive and participatory, as they believe in information sharing and open communication. It also helps in employee engagement and retention (Rosener, 1995). It is also found that women are more collaborative and manage business in more democratic ways (Dai et al., 2011; Mulawarman et al., 2021). The efficacy of a woman leader as the chairperson has a positive impact on a board's decision-making process. It helps in engaging and enhancing the contributions of women leaders in board decisions (Kakabadse et al., 2015; Kanadlı et al., 2018). Women should not depend upon the traditional method of being mentored by one individual. They should look for male as well as female role models from multiple men and women to help them grow (Markel & Crowley, 2016).

Effective Leadership

It has been observed that due to organisational bias, a male leader is more preferred or ranked than his female counterpart. Female candidates are potentially overlooked when it comes to leadership (Player et al., 2019). Studies have found that men have competitive and goal-oriented nature. They are more assertive and demanding at work. Women are more associated with communal qualities such as collaborative nature and sympathy towards others (Griffiths et al., 2019).

Behavioural intentions, such as leadership aspirations, may help affect women's identification in interacting with stereotype striking (Leicht et al., 2017). Women have different values than men at the workplace. They focus on task accomplishment, maintain high standards at work, need challenges, are keen on details, focus on self-development and balancing family and work (Singh, 2007). Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) mentioned that women leaders are found to be more democratic and involve others in decision-making, whereas men are more autocratic and discourage others in decision-making. They suggested that women represent a valuable human capital source with a value creation potential. They can be independent and more creative in bringing in new managerial practices that can help them prove themselves to be more efficient than other male directors. The representation of women on board will ultimately lead to improved board functioning (Adams & Ferreira, 2009). Eagly et al. (2003) mentioned that women leaders make extra efforts to inspire their subordinates; subordinates are more satisfied with their leadership styles; and women leaders are more effective in management. The study further argued that women take the utmost care for the empowerment and well-being of their female employees when working in top posts or leading roles.

Creativity

Creativity is another aspect that should be taken into account when considering Women's Leadership. Hooker and Csikszentmihalyi (2003) mentioned in their research that creativity is vital to leadership and organisational success. It supports the individual in interacting with the surroundings using profound knowledge, original answers and productive behaviours, and ideas to solve work-related problems (Mayer & Oosthuizen, 2020).

Limitations

Maintaining Work–Life Balance

Researchers have found that women are honest in their work. They work hard with dedication. However, at the same time, they have the responsibility of their family too. They are always in a quandary about maintaining this balance in their lives. The superwoman schema brings much unnecessary stress, which is a further cause of various health-related problems. Maintaining a work–life balance with such health-related issues makes their lives more stressful. The situation creates a vicious cycle and may create problems in the workplace.

Over-sincerity can be a Burden

It has been argued that women are over-emotional and have less emotional control at the workplace, and that they work more by heart than brain, which undermines their competency (Smith et al., 2016). Being over-sincere and emotional, the professional legitimacy of women leaders gets affected while working with their subordinates in the organisation. Over-emotionality towards work or colleagues can cause unwelcome consequences.

Lack of Informal Communication

There may be a lack of coordination or miscommunication with their subordinates because women leaders engage less in informal communication than men leaders (Ahsan & Panday, 2013). More formal as well as informal communication helps to increase the engagement of subordinates in their work. More engagement of employees will ultimately help to increase the productivity of the organisation, while the lack of informal communication can ultimately cause less employee engagement.

Theoretical Framework for Women's Leadership

Based on the available studies, a theoretical framework related to aspects of Women's Leadership is developed. This framework gives an idea about the role of a different aspect of Women's Leadership and their impact on organisational performance. Figure 4 shows the theoretical framework about the different aspects of Women's Leadership discussed in the study.

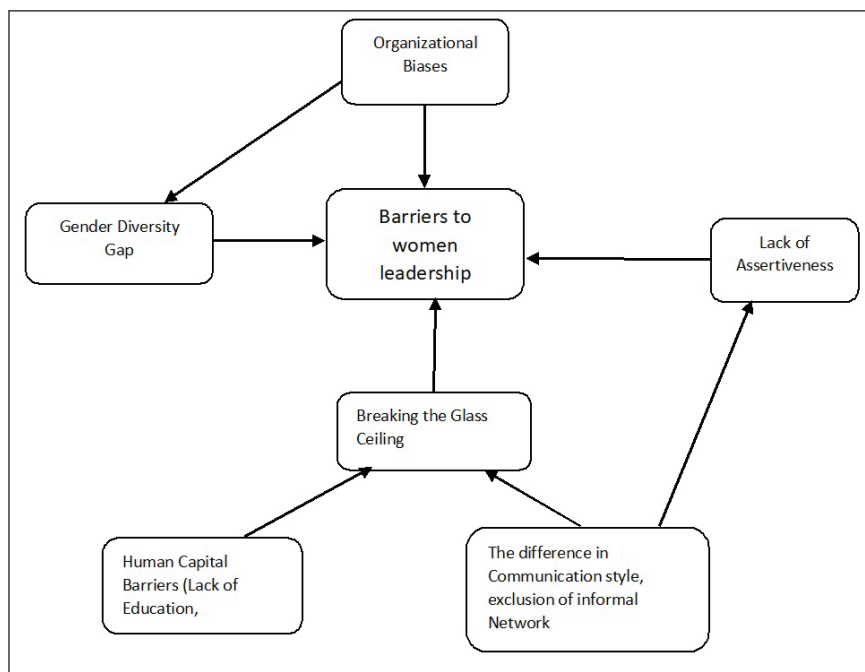


Figure 4. Thematic Diagram for Barriers to Women Leadership.

Source: The author.

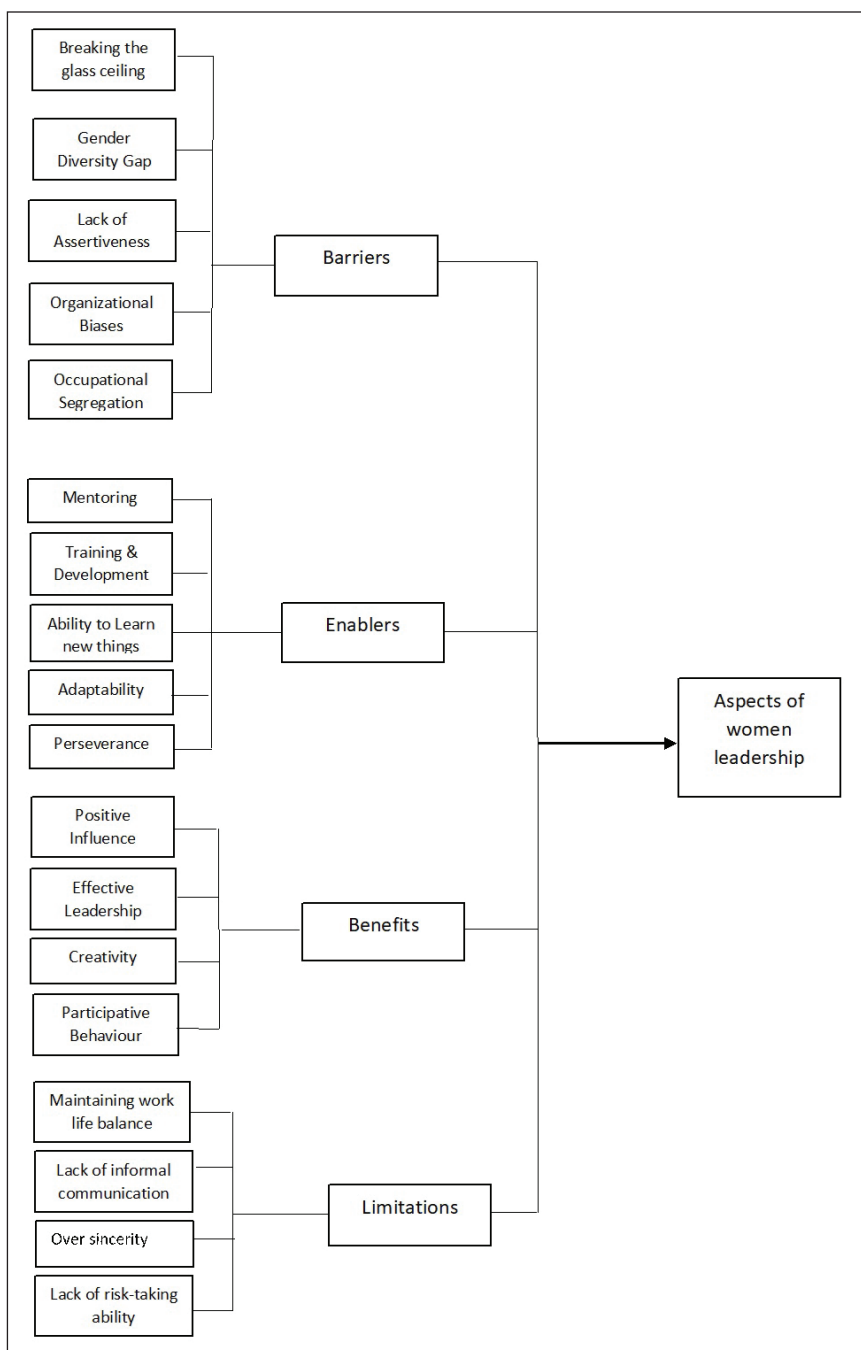


Figure 5. Theoretical Framework for Aspects of Women Leadership.

Source: The author.

Discussion

The literature survey shows a broad interest in the study of Women's Leadership in almost all industries. Still, there are not enough studies available related to industries where women lead from the front. Women face many structural and cultural barriers while reaching for the top positions in organisations. They face gender discrimination from their male peers (Evans & Maley, 2020). The study also reveals that maintaining work-life balance prevents women from acquiring leading roles. In South Asian countries, and mostly in a country like India, women have to take breaks in their career for child care and many other family responsibilities compared to those in western countries. It was found that Indian women leaders, who got support from their family members and caretakers, were able to get advancement in their careers. They built up their personal leadership skills to maintain work-life balance (Bhattacharya et al., 2018). Various social and cultural barriers are found in most of the South Asian countries (Sabharwal, 2013). However, if organisations are also supportive to consider policy changes, quotas and formal mentoring programmes, women leaders will certainly achieve their expected position in the organisation (Bhatnagar, 2008; Sabharwal, 2013; Soklaridis & López, 2014). The study also revealed the fact that women leaders need to be self-motivated, even if they are getting support in their career development process (Bhatnagar, 2008). There is a need to develop the right formal network and they should be able to put their ideas and opinions in a straightforward way (Gandhi & Sen, 2020). Women need to put more efforts to reach top managerial positions than men (Yagüe-Perales et al., 2021). However, if women want to make their own career, they should be competent and take advantage of their career opportunities by gaining adequate training (Nichols & Kanter, 1994; Wentling, 2003). This study will help researchers to get consolidated data about different aspects of Women's Leadership in the organisation. This will help further to study each aspect independently. The organisations will also get help to implement policies and regulations to increase the percentage of women in top positions.

Limitations and Future Scope

The study attempted to consolidate the available literature about the aspects of Women's Leadership and develop a theoretical framework, and tried to arrive at generalised findings about Women's Leadership in organisations. There is a future scope to get more insights into the aspects of Women's Leadership, since there may be many overlooked studies that one can consider for the research. A focussed study may provide deep insight into issues and benefits of women leaders for a particular industry or organisation. Women's Leadership is a topic that is growing every day, as more and more women are participating in leadership roles. Therefore, there is always scope to study the subject for further enhancement and development in the related field.

Conclusion

The study revealed different barriers, enablers, benefits and limitations for women leaders in an organisation. Organisations should implement policies that help to minimise the gender gap at the workplace. Moreover, they should develop a work culture, where women can get support and motivation to break the glass ceiling and reach the desired position. Mentorship, training and development programmes, as well as career development programmes can help as enablers for women leaders. The study found that organisations where women leaders are working in top positions have benefitted because of their transformational and democratic leadership styles. The creativity and positive influence of women leaders have a positive impact on employees' work engagement. However, maintaining the work-life balance, over-sincerity and lack of informal communication with others at workplace are found to be limitations for women leaders to reach the desired position. By considering all these aspects of Women's Leadership, organisations should implement policies to increase the percentage of women in top positions.

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