



**THE BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES**  
**THE FACULTY OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS**  
**2nd International Conference: Synergies in Communication**  
**RETHINKING EDUCATION - RESHAPING THE WORLD.**  
**LANGUAGES, BUSINESS AND COMMUNITIES**  
**Bucharest, 28-29 November 2013**

## **GENDER ISSUES IN BUSINESS, A LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE**

**Nisa Shon**  
South Africa

### ***Abstract***

*Gender discrimination in the workplace remains a controversial topic. Within the media, women are portrayed as maternal creatures incapable of leadership. In Western Societies like the United States of America, Laws are enacted to prevent the different types of bias, which still occur in many parts of the world. This article serves to demonstrate by comparison and analysis the difference in progress between United States of America and South Africa. The findings of the analysis indicated a stagnation in the improvement of women in professional fields, not only are women marginalized within the workforce, they are faced with obstacles in the hiring process and generalized by stereotypes within the media. This prevents women from obtaining leadership roles in large corporations.*

### ***Keywords***

*Gender discrimination, Leadership, Gender stereotypes, bias, societal standards.*

### ***Background***

Gender inequality in the workplace is more than just wage discrimination, it is a hindrance in the performance of organizations and corporations. Societal standards masquerade women rights as a matter in progress, the bureaucracy of the hiring, promotion and bonus ranks is camouflaged by a lack of transparency. Women cannot proceed onto leadership roles if the media continues to idolize men as the quintessential leader. There is no scientific data that heralds the superiority of men in leadership roles or positions of power. In fact, history is laded with examples of how men erred in judgment in terms of their management skills.

Corporations led under the authority of male leadership have staggered into bankruptcy. Enron, Polaroid, Kodak, Trump Entertainment resorts and Parmalat represent a small percentage of companies that have declared bankruptcy. What do they all have in common?  
Men

This article does not serve to discredit men in favor of women. There are male leaders that have led with courage and fortitude such as Warren Buffett, Bill Gates and Lee Byung-chul (Founder of Samsung). In 2012, Forbes published an article which listed ten of the greatest business leaders alive, of that ten, only two women were mentioned, Indra Nooyi of Pepsico and Anne Mulcahy of Xerox. It is instrumental to our success as a species to ensure women are properly represented in positions of authority. Apart from imposing quotas on companies and imposing penalty taxes, an unaddressed issue remains in the background. The role of media in modern society. One should never underestimate the manner in which the media influences the world.

### ***Methodology***

There are three components of this article. The first part entails the analytical results of the comparative study between South Africa and United States of America. The second part tackles the many obstacles faced by women on their path towards leadership and finally there will be a brief discussion on the impact of media portrayal on women. The research methodology was quantitative in nature, the process involved the analysis of statistical data from the South African Census. In terms of measuring the global gap, factors that contributed to this study was the current economic participation of women in the workplace, the economic opportunities, etc.

### ***Discrimination***

Employment Discrimination is a common term used in the Labor world. It is also referred to as workplace discrimination or labor market discrimination. It involves discrimination in the hiring, promotion, job assignment, termination, and compensation sectors. Many woman have achieved world class education from leading institutions. However this has not boded well in the boardroom. There are still less women at the top of corporations than men. A key problem is the lack of transparency with regard to wage differentials. Most women are

unaware that their male colleagues earn higher salaries for the same type of work performance and skill output. The fact is women have become indifferent to the subtleties of gender discrimination. With the awakening of modern feminist movements that ignite every decade or so, the lack of concentration on a particular focal point for this topic can translate into a greater imbalance in the near future. All professional women have the responsibility to raise their concern and tackle the issue with rationalities in mind and hopefully eliminate discrimination within their workplace.

Gender discrimination occurs when a person treats an applicant or employee unfavorably due to their gender. As simple as that sounds, it is a complex matter that was addressed significantly in the dissertation, with over 16 subdivisions explored, the variability's and extensive outline of the problem might overwhelm many scholars in this field. However this particular article is focused on the wage differentials between men and women. This factor that would appear to occur at the bottom ranks of employment however when analyzed upon closer inspection, the issue cannot be delimited to bottom ranks or middle ranks employees. Surprisingly senior female employees are exposed to same type of gender imbalance in wages. A key factor that has to be taken into an account is the other variability that plays a role in the process.

Women might have gained momentum with regard to the acquisition of educational qualifications, therefore an important question to raise is why do men still dominate and maintain upper level management positions? Much of societal beliefs are based on archaic values that herald the superiority of man. Many religious texts are testament to this analogy. However mankind has progressed towards cloning, gay rights and procedures such as Sex reassignment surgery. One would assume that women rights would be a forerunner for the discussion and debate in political circles. But it is not. Every now and then, a feminist upheaval might erupt such as that created by Sheryl Sandburg through her novel, *Lean In*. However it is not enough. A small outburst of energy against gender discrimination, every now and then will not help the women suffering to balance her career with house-work and kids. The progress of women can only be measured with continuous demonstrations of equality. The root of the problem is much closer to home. A women cannot have a successful career if her husband or mother in law has unfair expectations. If both man and women yield a similar salary, they both should share in the household duties. Thereby enabling the women to progress to higher positions without hindrance. Men still dominate as the archetype in

terms of leadership whilst women linger in the background, in vain. One of the major components of gender discrimination is the pure ignorance of gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes have no validity. The failure of women to realize their position in the world today and take charge with conviction is a major downfall in our society. Desmond Tutu stated that "to be impartial...is indeed to have taken sides already...with the status quo." Therefore to not act and voice your opinion dictates a patronage and approbation in favor of such discrimination.

"The glaring absence of Black women in senior management positions and their abundant representation in the professional category points a number of scenarios. First is that the critical mass of black women that occupy the professional category faces significant barriers in advancing to senior management and a harder glass ceiling in advancing to top management". (Ndinda, 2004).

### ***Leadership and its implications***

Leadership involves: Establishing a clear vision; Sharing that vision with others so that they will follow willingly; Providing the information, knowledge and methods to realize that vision, and Coordinating and balancing the conflicting interests of all members and stakeholders.

In South Africa, the plight of women is marked by the fact that many are living in abstract poverty. With lack of jobs and obstacles that prevent entry into the workplace, the situation is unlikely to improve without contingent intervention. There is a growing need to address the issue of discrimination and leadership challenges with a different perspective. There are many components that contribute to a working women's inability to reach the peak of her career. Women constitute a majority of the world's population. At the moment, women consist approximately 48% of South Africa's workforce. There are fewer women in positions of authority than men in South Africa. Research has shown that when women are in positions of power, they make concerted changes to the communities that positively affect the outcome of the lives of other women and children. Their efforts are concentrated on Education, Eliminating poverty and basic needs. In order for South Africa to improve to new heights, women have to be included in decision making positions. This will ensure equitable representation of women in corporations and companies. Leadership has many broad

definitions, it is summarized in the context of gender discrimination by (Afkhani et al.,2001) as Gender-inclusive, this means that both men and women should work together to achieve goals. Leadership involves communication with purpose. In South Africa, women are usually gender segregated and discriminated against on the basis that they are incompetent. This is a factor that is not outwardly addressed. There are still many South African males not delimited to the African community that demonstrate through their words their perception of male strength versus female inadequacy. In terms of communication, South African women when compared to American women are not shy to voice their concerns when it comes to community matters however in the workplace, the situation alters considerably. Women in less skilled jobs do not voice concerns as openly as males do and this is an issue that hinders their progress. Accordingly there are still many obstacles that litter the way of success for women. With less than 33 percent in positions of management in the developed world, 15 percent in Africa, 13 percent in Asia and the Pacific. Remarkably, Western society has failed to address the lack of women in leadership roles. In the 2001, only three women from the United States of America occupied CEO positions. An important factor that inhibits women in the workplace is the fact that there is major wage discrepancy between men and women. In many parts of the world, women are paid 30 to 40 percent less than men (Afkhani et al.,2001).

"For women who aspire to top leadership, routes exist but are full of twists and turns, both unexpected and expected. Because all labyrinths have a viable route to the center, it is understood that goals are attainable. The metaphor acknowledges obstacles but is not ultimately discouraging. If we can understand the various barriers that make up this labyrinth, and how some women find their way around them, we can work more effectively to improve the situation" (Eagly et al., 2007). Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centered sustainable development (Wale et al., 2004). Rosabeth Moss Kanter evaluated the place of Men and Women in the corporation. She stated that the setting in which women are trying to succeed and fail to is not due to a women's inability to lead and take charge but due to the lack of distribution of opportunity and power. In her opinion, if women behave differently from men in organizations, it is a result of their being more often in positions of little influence or of little opportunity for advancement. (Kanter, 1977) In the interview, Rosabeth touched on some key points that

enlighten women on how to improve their current situation. She states that women need to be dedicated and committed to achieving career goals. Women lack the confidence to ask for promotions or salary incentives like men do. This is one of the key reasons why men get ahead and women do not. Apart from the gender generalizations, women do not negotiate for much at the workplace. Rosabeth encourages women to reach out to one another and start the dialogue on benefits and incentives, apart from that, improved work conditions. She mentioned an important point of how women in South Korea networked with Women from the United States of America from a popular computer company IBM, in their mutual discussions, South Korean women realized that American women have access to daycare whereas South Korean women do not. There are also factors such as traditional expectations and family values that factor into this equation. In many cases, discrimination of women is central to home life. Many women are forced to maintain the household, children and elderly. This places an unnecessary strain and burden on the women, especially if the duties are not shared equally by concerned parties. In this day and age, we cannot expect women that advance academically to cook, clean and work. This is an unfair, offensive and derogatory notion. Other companies that have established similar networks include Microsoft and Proctor & Gamble. A key misconception of leadership is that it requires the application of force and dominance. That is incorrect. Successful leaders have developed and harnessed their communication skills. In fact, the majority of successful CEO or managers utilize their power to communicate to successfully navigate the challenges of everyday business life. In (Pauley et al., 2009), Fred le franc took over a restaurant business and suffered from miscommunication with his workers, he utilized Dr. Taibi Kahler process communication model. This allowed him to successfully understand and communicate with his workers more effectively. The process model teaches managers how to be tolerant of workers and how to relate to their circumstances when they are communicating a concept or idea. Therefore to lead, communication is a necessity. Leadership cannot occur in isolation. The traditional model of how communication should occur that is vertical communication is one of the key factors that contribute to the current gender discrimination. Vertical communications occurs when Leaders or managers at the top of the hierarchy delegate tasks to lower level employees, communication channels are formal and follow a channel. This therefore reinforces the ideal that bottom tier workers should not speak out and voice their opinion on key issues. This does not shape a company into a great organization. A key feature of successful organizations is horizontal communications.

Correspondingly the manner of communication taught in South Africa is assimilated at a young age through the teaching and educational institutions. In traditional societies, African women are taught to be subservient and obedient so that they would appeal to possible husbands. This does stop the amount of "Servant-leadership" that occurs in black communities. Servant-Leadership is based on the premise that despite cultural differences, we all are human and has innate qualities to take charge and lead our family or community in difficult times. (Trompenaars et al., 2010) Servant-leaders choose options that will enrich the lives of the people. In (Blanck et al., 1986), it was found that women are better emotional communicators than men. This is a fundamental characteristic of effective leadership. (Riggio et al., 2001) states that in terms of communications, women have several advantages over men. Women do not delegate task and expect results, they assist co-workers or employees by providing individualized support and direction on how to achieve the task. Statham found that women used a more task-engrossed and person-invested style, while men use a more image-engrossed and autonomy-invested style. Here women were seen as focusing more on the task to be done and the people working for and with them, paying careful attention to what is happening in their areas of responsibility and interacting with others a great deal. The men were seen as focusing on themselves and the need to "back away" from those who work with them, emphasizing the power they have, the contribution they make in a situation (and less the task itself); they felt the ideal way to manage is to "stay out of it" (Statham et al., 1988). Moreover, another factor that contributes to the way women lead is the way they "think" is the right way, leadership styles have primarily been shaped by males as women have only had a definite role in managing corporations in recent years. As stated: "The constructs of leadership and management have been developed by males for male patterns of employment. Hence organizations can be said to be gendered, producing and reproducing gendered relations where the female is seen as less suited for senior roles, and as in need of protection" (Singh & Point, 2012) Additionally there are many reasons why women are unrepresented in leadership positions, it can be summarized by these factors: "sex-role stereotyping, a masculine executive culture, homo-social reproduction, and dependence on a traditional linear career model. Other factors specific to decision-making processes at senior levels such as networks, vague job requirements, informal selection and assessment are also important. (Fawcett and Pringle, 2000)

***Gender Stereotypes and Perception of women in the media.***



There is sufficient criticism vested against women, many allege that women are incompetent in the board room. Women are vulnerable to double standards.. They are either too soft or too aggressive, too strident or too relaxed (Bass et al., 2006). Gender stereotypes and biases often occur behind closed doors, therefore researchers find it difficult to evaluate when gender preferences favor men over women. In (Rhode, 2003) by the same token, it is important to mention that when women did receive promotions, they began to mimic masculine qualities. In the business world, a woman cannot show signs of emotion or she risks to be portrayed as weak (Bass et al., 2006). Women have received the gender backlash of their negative portrayal in the media and cultural upbringing, there are many characteristics that define what a leader should be, and none can be attributed to physical strength. Men are not smarter than women and the ideal that women cannot make decisive and smart decisions is based on the old analogy that men are superior in physical strength and mind. It is because males have had power that they have been in a position to construct the myth of male superiority and to have it accepted; because they have had power they have been able to 'arrange' the evidence so that it can be seen to substantiate the myth (Dale Spender, n.d). Phillippe Rushton, a psychologist at the University of Western Ontario, Canada concluded that men are smarter than women because their brains are 100 grams more heavier and men scored three IQ points more than women. So far there has been no correlation between the weight of a brain and the effectiveness of a person to lead an organization. There is no scientific evidence that proves that men have more intelligence than women. Therefore why do people still hold this conclusion that they are, a key factor that contributes to this negative bias against women is the media. An argument that challenges Rushton was compiled by a researcher based in New Zealand, his study found that women have lagged behind men in IQ testing scores by up to five points, however women residing in modern societies are closing the gap on this archaic thinking. Flynn collected data comparing from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Argentina. He tested 500 men and 500 women, most between the ages of 15 and 18. Flynn's study revealed shocking results; women were found to be either the equal of men or scored higher. Flynn attributed the change to opportunity and education.

While it is known that women occupy the lower ranks of organizations in surplus numbers, an interesting study found that women in senior positions in which they can express their leadership skills is useful to the organization or company. “We’ve known for some time that companies that have more women on their boards have better results,” said Chris Bart, a



professor of strategic management at McMaster's DeGroote School of Business. "Our findings show that having women on the board is no longer just the right thing, but also the smart thing to do. Companies with few female directors may actually be shortchanging their investors." (Degroote, mcmaster, 2013). With that said, new research is proving the analogy that men are effective leaders as wrong. Women are the forefront of these studies and the results speak for themselves. Women make better corporate leaders than men because they are more likely to make fair decisions when competing interests are at stake, a new study has found (The political carnival, 2013). At the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid University, A study completed in 2011 found that women make better bosses. It was revealed that female leaders provide more guidance and development of skills to the employee. Women leaders consider the opinion of employees in the decision making process.

"Approximately one in every two people on the planet is female, yet the latest IBR finds that women hold barely more than one in every five senior management roles. The bearing and raising of children is usually cited as the major explanation of these statistics, but a growing body of research suggests that such imbalance in the boardroom can be detrimental to business growth prospects" (Thornton, 2012). Gender stereotypes and the constant portrayal of how women should have led to a substantial level of bias vested against women. This bias has interrupted women in pursuing their need to lead and contribute positively to society. As (Bass et al., 1990) states: "Stereotypes have their effects on behavior. We expect women to be more submissive, so we have trouble taking orders from women, no matter what they are like individually. Women leaders themselves are in conflict when facing divergence in what is expected from them in their roles as managers and in their roles as females, but do these stereotypes reflect reality?"

### ***Results of research***

Black females are the most unemployed in terms of the statistical data. In terms of Unemployment rates we find that more women are unemployed in the January-March period of 2012 compared to the January-March period of 2013. Whilst this might be a positive note; however, there has been a slight decrease in the labor in terms of force participation rate from 48.5% in the January-March period of 2012 compared to the January-March period of 2013.

Based on this table it is safe to conclude that the employment market is difficult to enter in South Africa. As we can see the rates fluctuate as this is normal in developing nations however the current statistics of women dropping out of employment into inactive positions translate into lesser women in senior level positions. South African working women encompass more than 48% of the South African workforce whilst South African men make up 61% to 62% of the workforce. More women in South Africa struggle to find employment compared to men. Accordingly in South Africa, the amount of male managers are almost double the number of female managers. South Africa is a new economy under the helm of democracy, there should be a wider representation of women of all races in management or leadership position but unfortunately this is not the case. One of the key insights of this analysis is recognizing that there are barriers to entering the South African workforce and this is more apparent for women than men. Not surprisingly there is a surplus of women in "Sales and Service" type jobs. Sales and Service jobs include a wide variety of jobs such as Interior design, Real estate agents, Sales workers, Cashiers to travel agents. These jobs are not representative of the type of employment that would otherwise lead to leadership positions. Even so there is a 851000 female in these jobs compared to 100000 male. Another interesting statistic is the increase of male in the previously female dominated field, "Elementary". Usually Elementary stands to define educators. Usually this was a female dominated field, what has occurred is an increase in males in this particular field due to job stability and less risk orientation. With the onset of powerful legislation and programs created to uplift women, the amount of African women in domestic worker positions has yet to decrease. With 849000 female domestic workers versus 29000 male domestic workers. Only 2308 females have access to Pensions and Retirement funds compared to 3259 males. In many ways, males do receive more benefits from the Employers than females. There is a discrepancy and double standard in these figures. With the widening wage gap and the lack of retirement funds provided to women. Males have more access to Paid work leave compared to working females. Many would argue that more males work in South Africa and other factors that would explain this wide gap in paid work leave, however according to statistics, 48% of South African women account for the Work force. South Africa is a complex country, with traditional values and religious structures, many women are single mothers. Men are still reaping more benefits than women. More men have access to paternity leave than women. Approximately 3272 men access paternity leave compared to 2820 working women. When analyzing the data of why women drop out from work or choose part-time work in favor of full time work. The statistical implications reveal that women have to raise their kids and

balance their work life. In many situations they have to care for their old age parents. The common reason given for the discrepancy in the wage gap is in fact that men dedicate more hours of work than women. However, more men have access to paternity leave than women.

### ***Recommendation***

Women are faced with many challenges in the workplace, this article has forced me to re-evaluate my place in the work force, with the knowledge gained from this analysis will allow educated women to re-think their place in the workplace. It is interesting to see the stark similarities and differences between South Africa and the United States of America. Laws and provisions need to be adjusted to accommodate working mothers and programs need to be created to assist professional women when they have children. Leadership is not limited to masculine qualities, women do not stagnate in the workplace, many continue to seek education. Women need to form organizations such as labor unions to fight for their rights. The wage disparity can be tackled easily when companies and businesses are forced to Lift the veil and be transparent in their dealings. Many women would remain in the workforce if they received the same perks as men do, with that said, it is also relevant to mention the importance of standing up for your rights. We cannot abide by stereotypical expectations of women, not from society, our husband or family. We must persist in our struggle to obtain our rightful position in the professional sector. Countries need to realize that their economy is stronger with working women at senior levels.

### **References**

- Becker, G. 1993. *Human capital*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- C, C. 2012. *Geopolitics and International Business*. bucharest: ASE.
- Constantinescu-Stefanel,, R. 2007. *Negotiation and conflict management*. Bucharest: ASE.
- Degroote.mcmaster (2013) *Women make better decisions than men - DeGroote School of Business*. [online] Available at: <http://www.degroote.mcmaster.ca/articles/women-make-better-decisions-than-men/> [Accessed: 31 May 2013].
- Eagly, A. and Carli, L. (2007) *Through the labyrinth*. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press.
- Hausmann, R., Tyson, L. and Zahidi, S. 2010. *The global gender gap report 2010*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Economic Forum.

- Huffman, M. 2012. *Gender and race inequality in management*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Macionis, J. and Plummer, K. 2005. *Sociology*. Harlow: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Misra, J., Budig, M. and Moller, S. 2006. *Reconciliation policies on the effects of motherhood on employment, earnings, and policies*. [Luxembourg: Luxembourg Income Study].
- Naldi, G., Pareschi, L. and Toscani, G. 2010. *Mathematical modeling of collective behavior in socio-economic and life sciences*. Boston: Birkhäuser.
- Nicolae, M. 2010. *Leadership, A global and cultural approach*. Bucharest: ASE.
- Nicolae, M. 2007. *Leadership and Communicational Organization*. Bucharest: ASE, Lecture notes.
- Ndinda, C. (2004) 'Sweet equity'.
- Rosabeth Kanter Moss (2013) *Women, Ambition and (Still) the Pay Gap*. [online] Available at: <http://blip.tv/hbr-video-ideacast/women-ambition-and-still-the-pay-gap-3453429> [Accessed: 4 Jun 2013].
- Open.edu. n.d.. *Economics explains discrimination in the labour market*. [online] Available at: <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/money-management/money/economics/economics-explains-discrimination-the-labour-market/content-section-0> [Accessed: 2 Jun 2013].
- Simkovic, M. 2007. *The effect of enhanced disclosure on open market stock repurchases*. [Cambridge, Mass.?: s.n.].
- Williams, D. 2012. *Top 10 List: The Greatest Living Business Leaders Today*. [online] Available at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/davidkwilliams/2012/07/24/top-10-list-the-greatest-living-business-leaders-today/> [Accessed: 4 Jul 2013].