



Study on the Impact of Social Barriers on Women Managers and Entrepreneurs

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The issues related to women’s career development has caused major concern. Workshops and seminars are organized annually to help women overcome the barriers in the business environment. It is due to features of the world labour market in the late 20th century, which encourages an active participation of women in economic life. Thus, the study was entirely conceived by centering the issue of the glass ceiling on the development of women’s professional career in the Romanian business environment. The aim of research is to find the barriers faced by women and the effects they generate in the Romanian business environment. Also, the comparative study was completed by a quantitative research aimed at observing if the barriers and effects are felt among the female employees and entrepreneurs. The results showed a significant correlation between the barriers facing both categories under study, but they did not point to a relation between the effects and the environment where they work. The conclusions summarize the results obtained, as well as the limitations of the present research, and the possible solutions to the phenomenon.

JEL Classification: M120, M140, M210

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1. Introduction

“The progress of women in managerial careers may be influenced by numerous individual factors (self-confidence, courage, etc.), as well as organizational, systemic and social ones”¹. Cultural and social attitudes towards what constitutes “male” and “female” jobs result in professional segregation, even if the problem varies among countries and jobs. It is important to see that there are significant institutional differences among countries, especially in point of educational and academic systems².

“Women face significant barriers in career ladder climbing in comparison to their male colleagues”³. Discrimination against women takes various forms: workplace segregation, salary differences, sexual harassment, denial of development opportunities (including mentoring and poor performance evaluation), lack of promotion opportunities. Being a woman working in a competitive environment requires supplementary education regarding gender prejudice and workplace inequity. Besides, working mothers are stereotyped as not being serious or reliable enough to take on leading positions, as their priorities tend to verge towards the family. Research on women in management and entrepreneurship has become a significant study field

¹ Fagenson, E. A, *Perceived Masculine and Feminine Attributes Examined as a Function of Individuals' Sex and Level in the Organizational Power Hierarchy: A Test of Four Theoretical Perspectives'*, Journal of Applied Psychology, 1990, p. 205

² Wirth, L., *Breaking through the glass ceiling. Women in management (Updated version in 2004 included)*, International Labour Office, 2004

³ Lyness, K.S., Thompson, D. E., *Climbing the corporate ladder: Do female and male executives follow the same route?*, Journal of Applied Psychology, 85(1), 2000, , 86–101.



in the past two decades (Kanter, 1977; Larwood & Wood 1977; Nieva& Gutek 1981; Powell, 1988).

The aim of the present study is to compare the opinions of women in Romania who own their own businesses and women holding leading positions in other companies, to the purpose of observing the manner of discrimination and its effects in specialized literature.

At present, different seminars and workshops are being organized worldwide to discuss women issues and their progress in all areas of life. Some studies evince that in the past two decades more and more women get access to managing positions, mostly resulting from women movements in society, the political system and the initiatives of equal opportunity in companies. However, according to Meyerson and Fletcher⁴, women in top management are still rare. Only 10% of the Fortune 500 companies are managed by women. The report by McKinsey and Company⁵ places Korea at the bottom of a list comparing the percentage of women employed in 744 executive boards of the most important economic actors in Asia and the Pacific. Women only hold 1% of the board positions in this country, as compared to 13% in Australia, 8% in China and 5% in India. In Romania, although the number of women is more than half the population, their workforce and participation rate is lower than men's. according to the data from the National Office of the Commerce Registry (ONRC), out of the total 1,483,734 companies in Romania, 404,318 are led by women, accounting for 27.25%, and 1,079,416 are led by men, i.e. 72.75%. Thus, there is an unexploited ecosystem of the female entrepreneurship with a huge growth potential, which could be an engine of economic launch.

These numbers support specialized literature in point of the existence of a “glass ceiling” standing for the numerous barriers faced by women, when they want to climb the career ladder. In this context, the researcher strives to find the effect of this glass ceiling on the development of women's careers.

2. Literature review

There is more research on women managers than on women entrepreneurs, mainly on gender tendency and the expectations of gender role. According to studies, women managers are faced with a tendency of personality doubling, as they are expected to adhere to a male role to be successful, but at the same time are sanctioned for breaking female stereotypes (Becker et al., 2002; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Heilman and Okimoto, 2007). On the other hand, even if the concepts of greater freedom and autonomy were mentioned to suggest a lesser probability of gender bias in entrepreneurship, there is no conclusive evidence in favour of this statement⁶. The research on women entrepreneurs are still at the beginning⁷. Winn⁸ stated that the individuals who entered entrepreneurship overestimated the flexibility degree. However, there may be differences between gender roles between women managers and women entrepreneurs due to the harsher organizational pressures on managers.

⁴ Meyerson, D. E., Fletcher, J K., *A Modest Manifesto for Shattering the Glass Ceiling*. ADVANCE Library Collection, Paper 190, 2000.

⁵ McKinsey & Company, *Women Matter: An Asian Perspective Harnessing female talent to raise corporate performance*, Women at the top of corporation: Making it happen, 2012

⁶ Powel, Eddleston, *The paradox of the contented female business owner*, Journal of Vocational Behaviour 73(1), 2008, 24-36.

⁷ De Bruin, A., Brush, C.G., Welter, F., *Introduction to the special issue: towards building cumulative knowledge on women's entrepreneurship*, Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 30, 2006, 585-593.

⁸ Winn, J., *Entrepreneurship: Not an easy path to top management for women*, Women in Management Review, 19, 2004, 143-153.

Brodsky made a qualitative and quantitative study comparing women managers and women entrepreneurs and showed that the two groups shared many features, including the “rejection of the feminine stereotype”⁹. In any case, managers took up a much more masculine role than entrepreneurs, while the latter adopted an androgynous role. These differences were not statistically significant, but led to an interesting speculation. There is a greater self expression among women entrepreneurs than among women managers.

Similarly, there is research on women in the business environment that studied the gender effects, suggesting that there are differences between these two categories. It was proved that both men and women entrepreneurs appreciate professional autonomy more than managers¹⁰.

Perspectives focusing on gender and organizational structure are traditionally embraced by researchers to understand why women are under-represented in managing positions. According to the gender perspective, women are seen as having features conflicting with the requirements of the managing role, and are anti-ethical to their promotion to the superior positions in the organization¹¹. The perspective of organizational structure is based on the premise that these shape women’s behaviour in the workplace. According to Kanter, there are “advantageous” and “disadvantageous” work situations¹². Informal power and promotion structures inside the company serve to exclude women¹³.

Recent studies showed the existence of invisible barriers that women have to overcome in order to gain access to higher positions, as well as to develop their own companies. These barriers are called the “glass ceiling”. This metaphor describes an invisible wall preventing women from rising on the professional ladder despite their qualifications, skills, attitude, potential, and achievements. The term first appeared in a 1986 report generated by the Wall Street Journal on corporate women, written by Hymowitz and Schellhardt. Morisson et al. Describe this glass ceiling as a “transparent barrier”¹⁴ preventing women from rising above a certain level in a corporation.

Types of barriers women face

There are different types of artificial barriers that women face while competing for top management positions, as well as when they choose to set up their own business. Here are three of them: social, environmental, and internal barriers. Out of the internal barriers, mention is made of: the *Old boy Network*¹⁵- it is significant for women; “the old boy network” excludes women from top management, *lack of abilities and exclusion from social groups*¹⁶- women

⁹ Brodsky, M. A., *Successful female corporate managers and entrepreneurs*, Group and Organization Management, 18, 1993, 366-378

¹⁰ Orser, B., Dyke, L., *The influence of gender and occupational-role on entrepreneurs’ and corporate managers’ success criteria*. Journal of SmallBusiness and Entrepreneurship, 22, 2009, 327-354

¹¹ O’Leary, VJ, *Some Attitudinal Barriers to Occupational Aspirations in Women*, Psychological Bulletin 81, 1974, 809—826

¹² Kanter, R. M., *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books, 1997

¹³ Riger, S., Galligan, P J, *Women in Management: An Exploration of Competing Paradigms*, American Psychologist 35, 1980, 902—910.

¹⁴ Morrison, Ann M., Randall, P. White, Van Velsor, Ellen, *Leadership in Action*, This article is an edited excerpt from the book *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can Women Make It to the Top in America's Largest Corporations?*, to be released in June by Addison-Wesley, 1987

¹⁵ Bosak, J., Sczesny, S, *Gender bias in leader selection? Evidence from a hiring simulation study*, Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 65(3-4), 2011, 234-242.

¹⁶ Lewis, P., *The quest for invisibility: Female entrepreneurs and the masculine norm of entrepreneurship*, Gender, Work, and Organization, 13, 2006, 453-469.

managers are generally excluded from informal social groups, meetings and activities containing top management partners, and *lack of role models and mentors*¹⁷. Another reason for the problems of women’s career advancement is the lack of female models and mentors. The mentoring process involves two individuals, one in a leading position advising another one in the junior position. Women in executive functions evince that the lack of mentoring in women has been detrimental to their career progress.

Other possible barriers: Inadequate systems of performance assessment and compensation leading to unequal incentives, bonuses and other salary advantages, the lack of careful planning and work strategy, the absence of the professional life balance and the programs allowing the employees to balance work and family, and gender discrimination.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research model

Despite all this information, very few details are known about business women in Romania. No study has specifically analysed the challenges facing the two classes of women in the business environment, and their impact in the internal business environment. From the exact same perspective, the main questions of the study are: *What are the main barriers influencing the business environment? Are the effects of the glass ceiling different in the entrepreneurial environment than in the organizational environment?*

The purpose of research is to identify the barriers encountered by business women in career progress in their own perspective, to determine the impact of the effects of this glass ceiling, and the manner women consider themselves in relation to it. This purpose will first materialize in a descriptive manner to gain deeper understanding of the possible barriers facing business women. Second, by data collection, the study will be an exploratory one, aimed at identifying the phenomena influencing women in organizations and female entrepreneurs as well, and then comparing the manner of this influence. The general objective of the paper is to find the impact of the glass ceiling on business women. The specific objectives are: identifying the specific barriers to women in the Romanian business environment, finding out the relation between the barriers women face when advancing in their career and the organizational environment where they work, determining the impact of the glass ceiling felt by business women in Romania, and determining the relation between the effects of the glass ceiling and the organizational environment in which women are active.

The present research integrates the main factors and effects described in specialized literature (Bosak, J. & Sczesny, 2011, Lewis, P, 2006, Baumgartner, M. S., & Schneider, 2010). Qualitative research is based on the critical analysis of specialized literature on the presence of this glass ceiling, and the identification of its impact on the women in the organizational environments under study. As described in the revised literature, the main barriers are connected to traditional constructs relative to the role of women in society, which creates difficulties in finding the right balance between family life and career, and the lack of equal treatment. Also, it is my opinion that this sex role favours the occurrence of stereotypes, and women have to adapt to the organizational environment by taking on male characteristics, and lack of acknowledgement of skills and qualities. So, the research is based on the following hypotheses:

¹⁷ Baumgartner, M. S., Schneider, D. E., *Perceptions of women in management: A thematic analysis of razing the glass ceiling*, Journal of Career Development, 3,2010, 559-576.



Hypothesis 1 (H1): Both women entrepreneurs and women managers face the same invisible barriers in their career from the perspective of their work environment.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Women in the organizational environment are more prone to feeling the effects of the glass ceiling than women entrepreneurs.

3.2. Method of research

The method used to answer the research questions was the quantitative one. The quantitative approach provides a more in-depth analysis of the results obtained, increasing the relevance of the study. The instrument used in research was a quiz containing 11 questions developed on the basis of the bibliographical references in specialized literature. It consisted of two parts: part A comprises 6 identification questions with one response variant, and part B, 6 graded questions to identify the barriers and their effects. Five of the questions in this part have a 5-item gradation, from very often to never, and one contains a 3-item gradation to observe the gender-based organization position assignment. The analysis of this data is performed descriptively, as well as as psychological analysis. The results were analyzed in SPSS version 26, and data collection started in November 2019 and ended in January 2020.

3.3. Research population and sampling method

The research is based on observing and identifying the glass ceiling and its impact on women in management, and that is why the respondents were chosen according to their position in the organisation. 420 women answered the questionnaire, their positions being head of department, general executive, general manager, administrator or associate. Out of these 420 women, 289 stated that they worked in a company already on the market, and 131 started their own companies.

The questionnaires were distributed online and offline. Use was made of the social networks LinkedIn and Facebook, the e-mail provided by the various companies where women work, and the Romanian groups focusing on promoting businesses led by women. These platforms provide the possibility to become a member and support other women managing an organization or possessing their own business: *Femei în afaceri*, *Empower Women*, *Elite Business Women* and *Federația Patroanelor Femeilor Antreprenor*.

4. Results and implications

4.1. Sample presentation

According to the data obtained as responses to the questionnaire, most respondents are aged 30-39 (207 respondents), followed by those aged 40-49 (93 respondents), 88 aged 20-29 and only 32 50-59. Out of these, 121 are from the Wallachia region, 117 from Moldavia, 102 from Transylvania, 25 from Oltenia and Dobrogea respectively, 17 from Banat and only 13 from Crișana. In regard to their profession, 101 work in commerce, 89 in the service sector, 74 in IT, 63 in consulting, 49 in tourism, 21 in finance-banking, 11 in agriculture, forestry and fishing, 7 in transportation, 3 in environment and ecology and just 2 in transportation. Out of these, 131 own their own company, and 289 have management positions in already existing companies. The position of 107 women in the company is general manager, 103 are administrators, 92 are heads of department, 89 are executives, and 29 are associates. 153 are active in micro-enterprises, 137 work in small companies, 107 in medium-sized companies, and 23 in companies with more than 250 employees. In point of education, 375 have higher education, 37 graduated high school and post-high school studies, and only 8 graduated secondary and professional school.

4.2. Identifying the main barriers, effects, and testing the hypotheses

The barriers were expressed as scaled questions, according to the occurrence frequency of discrimination forms in the workplace. From this point of view, by observing the average responses, it may be stated that the most common barriers faced by women in organizations and women entrepreneurs are: difficulty in finding a balance between the professional and the personal life, followed by the lack of equal treatment and guidance. So, it can be said that women barely manage to cope with housework and be productive at work. They also feel the lack of gender equality and the need for guidance to advance in their career. The results show a mean of 4.06 for the main barrier, i.e. difficulties in finding a balance between the professional and the personal life.

Table 4.1

Barriers encountered by women

	N	Mean
Lack of higher education, specific knowledge and/or competences (foreign languages, technology, etc.)	420	2.14
Lack of female models	420	3.16
Lack of guidance	420	3.49
Lack of equal treatment	420	3.64
Difficulties in finding a balance between the professional and the personal life	420	4.06
Valid N (listwise)	420	

Source: Table managed in SPSS v.26, based on the quiz

In point of the effects felt by the respondents irrespective of their work environment, these were analyzed by observing the mean of the responses, according to the table below.

Table 4.2

Effects felt by women

	N	Mean
You have taken on many male characteristics	420	3.95
You consider that you need to work more in comparison to a man	420	3.23
Your professional competences are not taken seriously	420	3.11
Your level of self-confidence has decreased	420	3.05
It is harder for you to access social networking	420	2.07
You have limited access to promotion opportunities	420	2.05
Valid N (listwise)	420	

Source: Table managed by SPSS v.26, based on the quiz

It may be observed that the most important effect of this glass ceiling is taking on several male characteristics, with a mean of 3.95, followed by the option according to which women have to work twice as hard, with a mean of 3.23. A mean of 3.11 was obtained for women stating that their professional skills and competencies are not taken seriously. The results in Table 4.2 add to the idea that women have to make more effort proving that they are worthy leaders, and their decisions may lead to performance and even competitive edge.

To test *Hypothesis 1*, the non-parametric chi-square test was used. The Chi-square (Pearson chi-square) test checks the independence of the categoric variables which are the barriers encountered by business women, and the environment variable. This non-parametric test was chosen to test the significance of the working environment relative to the barriers encountered, with an odd number of respondents; out of the total 420 respondents, 289 are part of a company they do not own, and 131 work for their own company. The barrier variables were scaled, being ordinal variables, and the variable explaining the respondents' appurtenance to the organizational or entrepreneurial environment is nominal, dichotomous. The final variable is the position filled by women in an existing company or in their own company, so that it can be seen if the barriers encountered are different in an organizational environment as compared to the issues encountered by women in an entrepreneurial environment.

Table 4.3

Results of the statistic chi-square test

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.792 ^a	1	.005
Likelihood Ratio	6.788	1	.009
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.753	1	.005
N of Valid Cases	420		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 17.51.

Source: Table managed in SPSS v.26, based on the quiz

The value of the statistic test is 7.792 and it has a p value=0.005. Since the p value (0.005) is lower than the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), the null hypothesis is rejected and it may be asserted that there are no significant differences between the barriers encountered by the respondents and their work environment. In other words, both women managers working for already established companies, and women entrepreneurs encounter the same barriers in their desire to make career progress. In this case *Hypothesis 1* is validated.

To test *Hypothesis 2*, according to which women in the organizational environment feel more the effects of the glass ceiling than women entrepreneurs, we chose the student test to compare the mean of the effects to the mean of the respondents in their own organization or in a different organizational environment. Thus, nominal and ordinal variables were transformed into two new variables on the basis of the mean of the answers. The results of the test will show if there are significant differences between the two means obtained. According to specialized literature, women activating in an existing company might feel the effects of the glass ceiling much stronger than women in the entrepreneurial environment, due to the rigidity of the organizational environment. This organizational environment, oriented towards the traditional manager, might also involve the resistance to change in management, the perception of women and their abilities, the entrepreneurial environment, which is less rigid, more open to novelty and change, women working in an entrepreneurial environment should not perceive gender stereotypes and the glass ceiling so strongly. Nevertheless, the results of the test reject this theory. The results may be seen in the table below.

Figure 4.4

Result of the t statistic test

Independent Samples Test									
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
Efecte	Equal variances assumed	,129	,720	-,777	418	,438	-,03337	,04296	-,11782 ,05108
	Equal variances not assumed			-,768	244,756	,443	-,03337	,04344	-,11892 ,05219

Source: Table performed by SPSS v.26, based on the quiz

The values in this table show a p value equal to 0.438. which is much higher than our significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), so that the null hypothesis is accepted. In this case it may be stated that there is no difference between the effects felt by the women in the Romanian business environment, no matter what their position is- managers in an existing company or owners of their own company, Hypothesis 2 is not validated.

It may be said that women in both environments feel the same effects of the glass ceiling, especially in close connection to the result of Hypothesis 1; women managers working for certain already established companies feel the same barriers as women entrepreneurs in their career path. Correlating the two results, it may be stated that the perception on the role of the women is not influenced by their working environment, although we are speaking of two environments presupposing a series of distinctive features, and these women have the same barriers and feelings about the glass ceiling. Specialized literature presenting a more libertine entrepreneurial environment, more devoid of gender stereotypes and barriers, does not apply to Romania.

Out of all the effects of barriers stated by other researchers, a smaller importance is granted to promotion prospects, which is a plus for the Romanian business environment; women have a quite high chance of filling top management positions, but the other factors with a higher mean of the answers (taking on male characteristics, working harder than men, lack of confidence in their skills) have a psychological impact on women, leading to decreasing their level of self-confidence.

5. Conclusions and discussions

The main purpose of the present research was to investigate the phenomenon of the glass ceiling in Romania, and find out if there are correlations between it and the women engaged in the organizational and entrepreneurial environments, respectively. The research pointed out the main barriers encountered by women in their own perspective, as well as the effects they feel as a result.

The research questions were formulated to the purpose of seeing how the glass ceiling is manifest in Romania, its effects, and if there are differences of perception between barriers and effects. The results showed that managers and entrepreneurs faced the same challenges and need to adapt to the professional environment. Finally, managers and entrepreneurs developed similar adaptations to the challenges facing them. Sacrificing the career for the

family is an issue for women due to the traditional role that they are assimilated with by gender appurtenance.

These results support the information found in the international research, so that the situation of women in the Romanian business environment is no different from other countries in point of factors and effects. The research by Brodsky (1993), according to which women in organizations tend to adapt to the role of the traditional manager, and women working in an entrepreneurial environment adopt a more androgynous role, is partially true in the Romanian business environment. Both responding categories stated that they tend to take on male characteristics and lose self-confidence and femininity.

Hypothesis 1 stated that women engaged in organizations and women working in independent activities report the same barriers to their promotion prospects. The results confirmed it, and this hypothesis was based on the study by Bosak, J. & Sczesny, 2011 according to whom managers scored much higher for barriers related to equal treatment and difficulties balancing the professional and personal life than entrepreneurs, who declared that the main barriers were lack of knowledge and female models. The present study is different from this point of view, as both categories under study report the same barriers on average, irrespective of the position and the activity environment. One of the reasons why this difference may appear is due to a much better delineated organizational and entrepreneurial environment in the country where the research was conducted as compared to Romania, as well as the period when the study was conducted. In 2011, women were just starting the fight for the right to equal pay.

Hypothesis 2 presupposed that women in the organizational environment feel the effects of the glass ceiling more than women in the entrepreneurial environment. This hypothesis tallies in with the study by Baumgartner, M. S. and Schneider 2010, according to which the glass ceiling is more obvious in the organizational environment of a company that has been on the market for a long time and has a more rigid organizational culture reinforced by the passing of time, and the fact that the entrepreneurial environment is the most subject to change reflects a lesser impact of the glass ceiling. This study is opposed to the results of the present research as both categories of respondents felt the same challenges from the environment, which correlated with Hypothesis 1. although the entrepreneurial environment should provide more freedom to express femininity, the present research is more in agreement with the results of the study by Gupta et al. (2009), since the respondents defined the entrepreneurial environment in male terms. This definition captures the way they considered and adapted to the environment, which was felt by the Romanian respondents who declare taking on male characteristics due to the need for adaptation.

The women participating in the quiz belong to all the categories on the labour market, i.e. experienced women with seniority on the labour market, young and less experienced women at a medium level of experience and seniority; but even if they were at different stages of career development, they all reported almost the same challenges and effects. It evinces that gender prejudice and barriers are still a present-day issue, although there are many seminars, courses, debates and conferences trying to normalize the existence of women in management.

6. Limitations and future research vistas

This study contributed to expanding the present-day knowledge on the challenges and need for adaptation to the organizational environment, but it also pointed out that there is no favourable environment for a woman to advance in her career, although the entrepreneurial environment should provide less gender prejudice, according to the study by Lewis P. 2006.



This new knowledge could help organizations target and eliminate, or reduce the presence of obstacles in the professional path of women, maybe even through implementing certain policies that motivate women to remain in the company. For instance, practices could be introduced to ensure providing services like childcare in the workplace or educating the workforce to remove gender stereotypes and prejudice.

Similarly, great corporations should provide equal opportunities and every management structure should include a woman. Reducing discrimination and existing prejudice should come from within, inside companies, and from without, through education.

The study was limited to the challenges facing women managers/ entrepreneurs of Romanian citizenship in the Romanian business environment, the predefined barriers and effects, but it also deals with the women’s own conception in relation to the items selected. Nevertheless, there are also foreign business women leading companies in Romania, whose situation is also worth investigating.

A future research direction may be completed by the analysis of the aspects specific to the women entrepreneurs in the rural area, where business generally refer to agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry or social services that may encounter specific challenges. Another research direction could target the career and entrepreneurial intentions of young female graduates.

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