

# **The Glass Ceiling in Corporate Management Position of Banking Industry Sri Lanka**

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## **Introduction**

Due to the globalization and economic liberalization, the corporate sector has become as an important social field where the different background people or social group (workforce diversity) interact to enhance their personal career goals as well as organizational prosperity (Harvey, 2005). Though the workforce diversity provides a number of benefits to the organization and employees, there are several negative consequences (discrimination, glass ceiling) experienced by the employees (Cross, 2006). The banking sector is a pioneer corporate sector for the recruitment of employees from various social segments and this diversified nature of employee differ from age, gender, religion, geographical tertiary, social class and social status, and culture. Based on the above criteria, the employees those who are working in the banking industry can be categorized as employees of privileged social strata (PSS) and employees of less privileged social strata (LPSS). Those employees who reside in the western province, ability to receive secondary and tertiary education from foreign and local prominent education institution, socialized with traditional cum modernized social environment are considered as employees of PSS, whereas employees of less privileged social strata reside in other provinces, received their regional education institution, socialized with the more traditional social environment and less modernized environment.

## **Problem Statement**

After the liberalization of the economic system in Sri Lanka, the banking sector has become as one of the prominent industry in Sri Lanka and it has been expanded their businesses throughout the nation by way of recruiting employees from different social strata. Though the banks recruit employees from different social strata to the Non-Executive position and Executive position, employees of PSS have continuously been promoted or recruited to the top management position whereas the representation of employees of LPSS strata is relatively very low. (Pilot study, 2017).

## **Objective**

This study attempts:

To identify the factors which prevent the employees of LPSS from advancing to the corporate management position in the banking industry.

## **Theoretical Underpinning**

This paper underpinning the Bourdieu's theory of practice and concepts such as Field, Capital, and Habitus. Bourdieu argues that the relative position of the person in the field can be achieved through the appropriate practices or action (Wacquant, 2002). The practices or actions as the outcome of a relationship between habitus, capital and field. The concept of habitus is central to Bourdieu's theoretical framework and It explain the regularities of behavior that are associated with social structures, such as class, gender, and ethnicity, without making social structures deterministic of behavior, or losing sight of the individual's own agency. Fields are structured spaces organized around particular types of capital, consisting of dominant and subordinate positions. Fields cannot exist without capital. Bourdieu identifies four main types of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. Economic capital is the most straightforward type of capital, and the type which we are accustomed to associating with power (money and wealth). Cultural capital exists in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e. in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body, in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc) and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification resulting in such things as educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1983).

Social capital accrues from networks of relationships, especially institutionalized relationships, such as the family. Symbolic capital is the form that the other types of capital assume when the arbitrariness of their nature is misrecognized. For example, the "legitimate" form of the family\_father, mother, and children\_has symbolic capital out of proportion with its social or economic capital

## **Methodology**

The present study is related to the glass ceiling in the corporate banking sector in Sri Lanka. Five Top level management and six employees from LPSS have been selected for the semi structured interviews. For this, the purposive sampling method was adopted as the reality is bit sensitive. The interview lasted 30 minutes on average. The field data were coded using the NVivo data management system and then thematic analysis was carried out. Themes were found by familiarizing with the data set, transcribing verbatim, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, and defining and naming the themes.

## **Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations**

It was noted that existing literature identified factors for the glass ceiling. They are societal barriers (Palma & Topper, 2001); internal structural barriers (Cohen et al. 1998); and government barriers (Toossi, 2005). Beside, this study found several insights which prevents the employees of LPSS from advancing to the top-level management position.

This study found out that the top management position is a competitive and highly accountable position and it cannot be achieved within a short period and it is a long term process. The study recognized, the preparation and the motivation towards the achievement of a top managerial position should be started from the early stage of an employee's career.

It was noted that the employees of the LPSS reveal, lack of recognition from the top management, discriminated decision making towards the employees of the LPSS, Biase performance evaluation system, continuous support and organization sponsorship for the career development of employees of privileged social strata, lack of opportunities, disadvantaged geographical tertiary are the main factors which prevent the employees of LPSS to corporate management position. However, the top managers pointed out that skills deficiencies, lack of networking capacity, lack of confidence, are the factors which prevent the employees of LPSS from the achievement of corporate management position.

Geographical territory, it is one of the main factors for the glass ceiling for employees of LPSS. As most of the privileged people works in the head office and other metropolitan branches in Colombo, they can have a formal and informal relationship with top management. This strong relationship (social capital) facilitates the employees of privileged social strata to get promotion related benefits than employees of less privileged social strata. The majority of the employees of less privileged social strata is deployed in the branch level in their respective region and they are working with limited exposure and due to the hierarchical issues, the maintaining relationship with top management is difficult for them.

Top managers pointed out that the skill differences between the employees of both social strata is another important factor. Top managers elaborate that the top management position relates to strategic decision making, as such right combination of education qualifications, experience, knowledge, and skills are essential in banks. Though the bank's recruits diversified nature of the workforce, the employees of the PSS possess required skills, and educational credentials (Cultural Capital) which facilitate to meet the expectation of the institution. In addition to the academic and professional skills, banksexpect soft skills: communication skills, interpersonal skills to interact different stakeholders in the environment, ability to use skills in right time, mannerism (the way they talk, the way they interact, the way they dress), flexibility, emotional intelligence, and confidence level.

Top managers reveal that employees of privileged social strata possess the expected soft skills than the employees of less privileged social strata. As a result, they can easily contribute to the organizational development which positively impact to their career development. Research states that the contribution of family, schools, and their immediate environment influence the skill level of employees. As such, it is noted that the habitus and social strata contributes to the career development of the employees.

The employee, who has the right skills and ability to meet the field expectation, can get the recognition from top management. Recognized employees can enjoy the protein career opportunity from top management and get a good mentor to shape up their career progress. It is observed that the employee who recognized and supported by top management position can easily move into the career ladder to achieve a potential position.

The study shows that employees of less privileged social strata face difficulty in meeting field requirement due to the skills deficiency and lack of opportunity to build up network with top management and geographical disadvantage. As such, the employees of the less

privileged society face difficulty in getting a promotion on time. The time difference in getting promotion from the bottom level of career by employees of both social strata is a fundamental aspect in determining the career success of the employees.

### Conclusion

As a social unit, banks is considered as a one of the interaction points by the employee of the both social strata. As the banks is dominated by the top managers those who come from the privileged society, rules of the field (Objective) reflect the disposition (subjective) of top managers. As per the Bourdieu theory of practice, the disposition of top management is influenced by the environment where they reside and socialize. As such, the employees of PSS are able to demonstrate appropriate strategy as they easily internalize the rules of the bank and their capital can easily be sanctioned by decision makers in the field. But the employees of the LPSS find difficulty in generating appropriate strategies to meet the rules of the field immediately and take much time to socialize themselves in the corporate field as their disposition and rules of the field is significantly differs. Therefore, the differences in the habitus, disposition are significantly contributing to the existing realities of glass ceiling.

**Keywords:** Banking Industry; Capital; Field; Glass Ceiling; Habitus; Social Starta

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