Business Literature Review: An investigation into representation of women at the boardroom level of organisations

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

This study aims to investigate approaches to increasing the representation of women in the boardroom. The Equality Act 2010 included gender as a protected characteristic, making it illegal for women to be discriminated against in the workplace as a result of their gender (Parry and Tyson, 2013). Indeed, the law also gave organisations the capability to take positive action if need be to ensure that those of protected characteristics were sufficiently represented at different levels within organisations. Despite steps like this, and steps taken previously to prevent discrimination and encourage equal opportunities, women are still poorly represented at the highest levels of organisations. This literature review study will explore why this occurs, and the barriers that women face in the workplace that prevent them from getting to the top.

Context and Rationale

According to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2016), in the UK progress has been made to increase the number of women at senior levels within organisations. Indeed, it is explained by the Department that the percentage of women on FTSE 100 boards have increased from 12% to 26% since 2011. In FTSE 250 boards, the figure was lower however, at 19.6% (Davies, 2015). Figures for all male boards have also decreased. As Davies (2015) reported, in 2011 there were 152 all male boards in the FTSE 350 index, but as of 2015 there were only 15 companies in the FTSE 250, and this number continues to dwindle. While achieving the 25% figure for women on boards in the FTSE 100 is considered a major achievement, and while women on boards are increasing generally, there is a long way to go before women account for greater numbers on boards. In particular, the number of women on boards in the UK is significantly lower than in other countries that have the highest number of board seats filled by women. For example, as highlighted by MSCI (2015) Norway has 41.3% of its board seats filled by women, while Sweden has 33.7% and France has 33.5%.

According to Scruton (2016), the gender pay gap for full-time employees, based on median hourly earnings was 9.4%, and this compared with 9.6% in 2016. This was identified by Scruton (2016) to be the lowest since the survey studying this metric began in 1997, though it is also noted that the gap had not changed much in the past six years. While the gender pay gap is decreasing, it is still a large and significant gap that is likely to make a significant difference over a woman's lifetime. Figures highlighted by Dickens (2009) suggest that the problem is even greater than this, with this author presenting figures showing that women only make 82p of every £1 that a man makes. However, more women graduate and receive bachelors' degrees than men in western countries such as the USA and UK, yet ultimately women have lower salaries, and as women are counted at different levels in organisations, their numbers taper off, the higher in the organisation it gets (Kenschaft, Clark and Ciambrone, 2015; Scott, Dex and Joshi, 2009). This is problematic, and it is difficult to understand if the problem is down to women's choices alone, namely choosing to take time off to have children, or instead, if the working environment is socially constructed in such a way that disadvantages women and in fact it is this that prevents them from reaching the higher echelons of organisations.

According to Davies (2015), the government was recommended to continue with its voluntary approach of getting women more women into the boardroom, rather than putting in place any legislation. It was recommended that on the boards of the FTSE 350 companies, companies should be working towards an increase of women in the boardroom to the level of 33% by 2020. It was suggested that all FTSE listed companies should be required to assess board gender balance and deal with shortfalls apparent. However, while 33% does meet a similar level to some of the leaders of women in the boardroom, Sweden and France, by 2020 it is likely that the figures for these countries will be higher still, and the United Kingdom will still be lagging behind. Additionally, 33% is still not close to the figure already achieved in Norway.

Problem Statement

More women are graduating from university than ever before and moving into entry level positions within firms in similar numbers to men. However, looking up through the ranks of organisations, the higher the level, the lower the number of women that can be found there. This research aims to investigate why this occurs and to examine what can be done to raise the numbers of women in the boardroom. Various different approaches have been attempted, but without reviewing the literature it is difficult to know which of these has been the most effective, and why.

Needs Statement

It is important to understand why women do not achieve the highest positions they could in organisations, to take steps to address this, so that women have careers that are as fulfilled as men, and so that organisations ultimately have the best people working for them at the highest levels of the organisation. Given that as many women graduate as men it is difficult to believe that men are simply more effective than women. If social construction has occurred around gender in the workplace to make it difficult for women to succeed, organisations may not be recruiting those that are the most capable to the top positions in organisations, and surmounting this could become a source of competitive advantage. Therefore, there is a need to understand why this happens, both for women, and for businesses.

Research Question, Aims and Objectives

The research question for this study is:

Why are women underrepresented at the highest levels within organisations, and what can be done to increase their numbers at these levels?

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the complex range of reasons why women are not more evenly represented at the boardroom level or senior management levels within organisations. As a result, the objectives of this research are as follows:

- To identify the primary barriers for women to progression to the highest levels of organisations.

- To critically evaluate different approaches that have been taken to ensure that women are in greater numbers in boardroom positions and other senior management positions.
- To develop recommendations for further study into this area, and for practical steps that businesses can take to increase the numbers of women in senior management and boardroom positions.

Structure of the Research

This literature review is structured into three more chapters from this report. The structure of this report from this point onwards is as follows:

Chapter 2 – Findings – this chapter presents the findings of the literature review, highlighting what is already known about the area of study, as researched by other academics in this field. It will be presented in thematic subsections based on the literature that was uncovered during the searches.

Chapter 3 – Discussion – this section examines what can be made of the findings that emerged, and what can be concluded as a result of this.

Chapter 4 – Conclusion - this chapter reviews the findings and discussion relating them back to the initial problem statement and research question and objectives to see if these were answered/met. The chapter additionally presents the implications of the study, both academic and practical, suggesting further research topics that could be of benefit arising from this research. It also makes practical recommendations based on this research.

Chapter 2: Findings

Introduction

This chapter examines what is known about the topic. It will focus on a number of specific areas in order to achieve this. These topics are quotas in the boardroom, perceptions of women that have children and whether or not there is a penalty, and the social constructionism of gender in the workplace. Each of these areas will be examined in turn.

Quotas in the Boardroom

One approach that has been undertaken to increase the number of women at senior levels within organisations has been to set quotas for the numbers of women who should be in the boardroom. This has been put in place in some countries already, with Norway in particular leading the way in this field (Zylla-Woellner, 2014). As indicated by this author, in 2003, Norway made it a legal requirement for companies to have two women for every five people in their boardroom. This did not apply to all companies, but to government owned companies as well as any organisations listed on the stock exchange. As Zylla-Woellner (2014) reports, as of 2005 some companies had not reached the required level, and the government stated that these companies would be dissolved if they did not meet the requirements. As of the time of writing, the author stated that all Norwegian companies that were expected to have

boardrooms made up of 40% of women met the requirement. It is argued, however, that it took sanctions against companies to get to the point where this was achieved. Norway is not the only country that has taken this approach, and Bratton (2015) argues that Italy, France and Dubai have also put in place quotas to drive the numbers of women in the boardroom up. In addition to this, Deloitte (2015) reports that a number of other European Union countries have also put in place legislation of this nature to increase the number of women in the boardroom, namely Belgium, The Netherlands, Span, Portugal, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Austria and Slovenia. Deloitte (2015) explains that the measures vary per country, with different quota levels, varied deadlines to achieve the goals, different sanctions for not achieving the quotas, and different types of companies that are affected by the targets. The European Parliament is also taking steps towards driving quotas throughout the European Union through developing a directive that would require 40% representation of women (Deloitte, 2015).

While success has been achieved in terms of increasing the numbers of women in boardrooms in Norway through insisting on quotas, not everyone is in agreement that this is the correct approach to take. Thomson, Graham and Lloyd (2008) argue that targets are better than quotas because they make it clear there is a priority to be achieved, and work towards improving the situation every year, but without impacting on competition for merit. On this point, Tutchell and Edmonds (2016, p. 6) concur, arguing that in their study, many of the women they spoke with utilising an interview based research process, were against what they referred to as, 'special treatment,' in this way. Indeed, the women they interviewed felt that this would mean that women would be considered as inferior, having only achieved this position as a result of the quotas, and they too tended to believe that appointments to this level should be merit based. Despite the findings of their research with interviewed women, Tutchell and Edmonds (2016) suggest that the evidence from Norway does not support this. They argue that the experience of Norway has shown that Norwegian businesses have not been negatively impacted as a result of not taking a straightforward meritocracy based approach to women in the boardroom. In fact, these authors also suggest that there is evidence supporting the fact that boards operate more effectively now than they did before quotas were introduced, improving decision making and the debating of issues.

Perception of Women Who Have Children: Is there a Penalty?

According to Correll, Bernard and Palik (2007), mothers who are employed face a wage penalty per child of 5%. Correll, Bernard and Palik (2007) also identified that for those under the age of 35, there is a bigger pay gap between non-mothers and mothers than there even is between men and women. This would seem to suggest that there is a monetary penalty associated with having children, since women that do not have children do not experience lower wages, but women that do have children do. As already seen in the introduction, a gender pay gap has been found to exist in the UK, and this is currently 9.4%, according to the latest figures (Scruton, 2016). It was also noted that women make almost 20p lower compared with every £1 that a man will bring home in wages (Dickens, 2009). Together, all these different figures suggest that there is a problem with wages related to being a woman, and in addition, that this may be due to the factor of having children. Examining this in greater depth, Budig, Misra and Boeckmann (2012) reviewed the motherhood penalty in various different countries, to understand the importance of both cultural attitudes and work-family

policies. These authors identified that country variation does exist with regard to cultural attitudes about the employment of mothers and women, and with regard to policies on parental leave and childcare. It was discovered that when cultural support for maternal employment is high then mothers may have higher earnings. However, negative, or certainly less positive relationships exist when the prevalent cultural attitude is in support of a male breadwinner and a female in the nurturing caregiver role (Budig, Misra and Boeckmann, 2012).

Some of the literature regarding women's disadvantage in the workplace, and barriers to achieving success is around the area of perceptions of women who have children (and of those that do not), suggesting that women receive lower wages and are also less likely to be promoted if they have children. Correll, Bernard and Palik (2007) performed a laboratory based study which identified that discrimination in the workplace occurs with mothers, but not with fathers. This was highlighted to manifest itself with regard to perceptions of mothers, compared with perceptions of fathers. It was reported by these authors that employers tend to perceive women that have children as being less capable. Building on this, work by Cuddy, Fiske and Glick (2004) identified that women's careers may start to falter after having children as a result of the perception of women as being either one type or another. One of the types is a hard, cold woman who is competent in the workplace, but who does not have children. The other is of a woman that has children and who is a warm, home maker, but exhibits lower levels of competence in the workplace. Cuddy, Fiske and Glick (2004) argued that as a result of these perceptions, people were less likely to recruit women that have children when compared with fathers, or with potential employees that did not have children. The same was identified to be true of both training and promotion opportunities as well. However, it also needs to be borne in mind that a flaw of this study was the fact that in gaining perceptions of people it sought the opinions of students rather than those in positions of recruitment, so the results must be considered with caution.

However, despite these concerns with the study, other research has developed findings that are aligned with the Cuddy, Fiske and Glick (2004) research. For example, Liff and Ward (2002) carried out research into the concept of the glass ceiling, and this research was performed in the financial sector, at a bank. The study of Liff and Ward (2002) carried out semi-structured interviews with 50 people, both male and female employees, to understand perceptions of both regarding the glass ceiling and women's careers following having children. It was discovered as a result of this study that women that were parents were perceived not to have a lifestyle that was compatible with the needs of a senior management career at the organisation. In particular, the long hours were perceived to be a problem, and it was perceived that women would not necessarily be able to take these on, and that it might be this that was holding them back from achieving at more senior levels within the organisation. The perception was that women did not want to make these choices, rather than the workplace was not necessarily organised to allow them to have the ability to make these choices, when in fact, it may be possible that both factors are in play. However, the Liff and Ward (2002) study is relatively old, and from just one organisation in one sector, so this finding may not necessarily be generalizable on its own into a broader finding that applies to all women and all organisations everywhere.

Social Constructionism of Gender in the Workplace

Dhir (2015, p. 18) argues that the feminist approach to support for quotas in the boardroom suggests that quotas will lead to a situation such that there is a critical mass of women in the boardroom. As a result of this, women will not be in a situation where they have to, 'acclimate to male-dominated corporate governance environments'. Instead, just the fact that they are in boardrooms in sufficient numbers will mean that they are able to increase cultural change to the point where women are naturally more accepted in boardrooms, and are no longer marginalised. Dhir's (2015) commentary is based on his findings of researching women in the boardroom in Norway. However, in the sense that quotas in the boardroom might change the culture to the point that there are sufficient women to provide good role models for other women lower down in the organisation, quotas are argued to be of limited effect according to Groschl and Takagi (2016). These authors opine that their work shows that stigma can still exist around quotas leading to women not being able to be effective role models in this way. Yet without introducing quotas it may be difficult for women to get access to the type of control they need to have any real influence on gender equality at higher levels in the organisation (Groschl and Takagi, 2016).

Another interesting finding in this regard is highlighted by the analysis of Ibarra, Ely and Kolb (2013) to be the fact that women do not necessarily see that they have experienced gender discrimination, and even if this is pointed out to them, may not necessarily accept it. This phenomenon occurs even if they see that other women experience gender bias. This is known as second generation gender bias. This concept is also supported in the work of Biese (2017). This author suggests that women may often not realise that discrimination is occurring This can mean that women do not take action against it. In particular, this author explains that mothers can be discriminated against just in the sense that they are considered to be unreliable, just by the fact that they have a child. One of the reasons this is argued to be due to the fact that women work to try and eliminate the idea of gender at all, and they try to make sure they get seen for their abilities rather than their gender. Women find that after they have had children that policies and approaches towards them are structured in such a way as to advise them on what they will be likely to find easier, which is argued to be gender bias, rather than examining what will actually work for each individual woman. This means that women, because of their gender rather than their abilities, get side-lined, and then organisations will claim that they cannot find women that have the right experience or skills (Ibarra, Ely and Kolb, 2013). In this scenario, the reason for this is that organisational policies and approaches have led to women being shoehorned into roles that are "suitable" for them after they have had children, as deemed by others, rather than themselves. This might arguably be seen to demonstrate the existence of social constructionism of gender for mothers. These authors argue that there is no deliberate intent to exclude women, but they still are as a result of these approaches.

Summary

It has been shown that one of the biggest areas of debate in this field is with regard to whether quotas should be introduced into the boardroom and how effective this has been. The work has also shown that there is some social construction around gender at work that may be unhelpful in women succeeding. It has also been shown that there is a penalty for women

who decide to have children at work. This research now moves on to discuss the major issues in greater depth.

Chapter 3: Discussion

Introduction

As a result of analysing the findings with regard to what is known, some questions arise on what are arguably the biggest points of contention, and these will now be discussed at depth. One is whether businesses should take a meritocratic approach towards hiring rather than quotas. A second is the extent to which women have to perform as men to succeed. A third is possible solutions other than quotas. This chapter will also consider limitations of this literature review.

Meritocracy Versus Quotas

One of the biggest questions that arises out of this discourse is regarding whether there should be a meritocracy based approach to women in the boardroom and at senior levels within organisations, or whether the meritocracy should drive the approach. As Groschl and Takagi (2016) argue, the meritocracy approach occurs when those that get promoted do so on the basis of achievement and being the most qualified for the position. These authors argue that this approach lies deep in the cultural psyche of the West. The argument is, that when quotas or any other kind of affirmative action are introduced then this damages the meritocracy, and is in some way unfair – even though the meritocracy may be stacked against some candidates in the first place. The authors point out the different ways that this latter issue can occur, arguing that the merit standards put in place may not relate to the job but may provide favour to some groups ahead of others, and additionally discrimination can occur that gives others an unfair advantage to allow them to secure the skills and experience needed.

One of the biggest criticisms of a quota based system is, according to Wajcman (2013), that in the eyes of men, and some women too, it takes things too far. There has been an argument made that these types of approaches tend to be seen as lowering standards in organisations, and simply making a change just to suit women better. However, the other side of this is that it is unsurprising that a group that has traditionally held control would feel under threat as a result of positive efforts to promote the position of women and redress the balance, through the provision of special help (Wajcman, 2013). The commonest argument made against female quotas for boardroom positions is that performance is impacted and these arguments will be presented below. Nonetheless, there is also evidence that organisational and boardroom performance is not negatively impacted by introducing quotas for women. For example, a qualitative study based on 30 companies with women at boardroom level in the UK, the USA and Ghana, by Kakabadse et al. (2015) showed that board performance is not significantly impacted by having some women on the board. There is even evidence to suggest that gender quotas can lead to men performing to a higher standard when more women make their way into boardrooms (Besley et al., 2014), or at least this was the finding of their study which was based in a political working environment in Sweden.

Still, overall results are mixed in this regard, and studies have also indicated that women on the board can lead to a reduction in performance. Groschl and Takagi (2016) contend that the meritocracy can lead to quotas becoming stigmatised, impacting negatively on women who do advance in a company as a result of this. This is despite the fact that Harris (2010) shows that women who get to the boardroom level are typically both younger and smarter than the men they succeeded, and they had to prove themselves to a greater level to get to that point. On the other hand, a study by Ahern and Dittmar (2012), reviewing the work of boards since 2003 in Norway when just 9% of board positions were made up of women had completely different findings. The work of these authors identified that boards were both younger and inexperienced, and that this led to a situation where the operating performance of those companies lowered.

Yet, there are plenty more studies that show women perform at a high standard in the boardroom, and even better than men. For example, a study by Bart and McQueen (2013) identified a positive correlation between female directors on the board and corporate performance. Specifically, women were found to be consistently better than men on the reasoning score of complex moral reasoning. This is a skill that allows people to make difficult decisions that are fair when there are competing interests. As a boardroom member, this is considered a challenge that might frequently be faced, with directors having to make decisions based on stakeholders' viewpoints and in the interests of the organisation, which may not necessarily be the same thing. Liswood (2015) also presents evidence that having more women in teams at all levels can increase performance. In fact, Liswood (2015) argues that women that come to the boardroom bring different skills and experience, as well as perspectives, angles and opinions that lead to different approaches to decision making. Indeed, it is argued by Liswood (2015) that women have been found to work harder to get to the depth of issues.

According to Ibarra, Ely and Kolb (2013), one of the challenges at the current time of continuing with a meritocratic approach is that given that gender stereotypes are still in place, and that this has led to a lot fewer women at each successive higher level up in the organisation. This is problematic because the women that are at the top, or close to it are more visible, and as such, may be more likely to face scrutiny as a result of their relative rarity. This means that further up the organisation may seem a more threatening place to women than it would to men, as there are already a lot of men at the top, and so they are less likely to stick out and face the same level of scrutiny. This is an argument that could be made for quotas. Additionally, as Wajcman (2013) points out, it is clear that the approaches of the past, grounded in equal opportunities have not worked, as the same provisions cannot be simply applied to both men and women and expect them both to succeed equally. Wajcman (2013) argues that the market cannot be treated as equal as the situation is not as straightforward as that – there are distortions that prevent the playing field from being equal, and controls that have been put in place to try and address this through equal opportunities have not succeeded. If they had, more women would be in the boardroom.

Performance of Women as Men

As Barsh and Lee (2012) argue, women are expected to model male behaviour at work when they are in leadership roles. This suggests that there is a gender bias regarding the expected

performance of women at work, but there is no evidence in the literature to suggest that women that act like men because they are expected to, succeed. Work by Sandler (2014) mirrors this finding, suggesting that the differences between males and females need to be understood so that an appropriate number of women can rise to the top of organisations. By identifying high performance in women, rather than focusing on women that are exhibiting male patterns of performance (which is not the same thing), it may be possible to encourage more women to achieve at a higher level. Sandler (2014) additionally argues that while women may need to make changes to approaches towards leadership to succeed, this should not impact on their authenticity, or indeed on their emotional intelligence. This is worthy of consideration as it gets to the heart of the matter, namely that the reasons that women perform well may be different than the reasons that men perform well, and understanding both of these factors separately is essential for encouraging both to succeed. In male dominated environments such as engineering or computing, these types of problems are accentuated further. Payne (2012) argues that in these types of workplaces, women that want to succeed may find themselves having to remove themselves from their concepts of their gender identity and reject the idea of being female in order to achieve a better fit into the masculine culture that they find themselves in. As the author's analysis implies, this is unfortunate as an approach as it fails to recognise the benefits that a female approach might bring, and instead continues to build on the problem of discrimination for women at work.

Despite many women having talent and ability, the meritocracy approach is not helping them to get to the top of organisations (Villiers, 2010). This means that the talents of women are not being drawn on and utilised. Maternity leave is a fact of life, but as already noted, this has a significant impact on women's careers. Peacock (2012) argued that women may take 15 years or more to gain back the wages they lost during time on maternity leave. Women's careers are also argued by Peacock to not be supported as well as men's, leading them to not be able to compete effectively in a meritocracy. This would suggest that steps should be taken to address the experience of maternity for women, so that talent is not lost when women have children, since talented women do enter the workforce, but do not reach the highest levels.

Perhaps the ultimate expression of women having to behave like men in the workplace at the highest levels to succeed is that whereby women do not have children, or delay having children to reach an executive level (Payne, 2014). Indeed, this author argues that it has become acceptable for women to increase the age at which they begin motherhood so that they can achieve personal autonomy and achieve career goals. Payne (2014) states that 33% of those who are considered successful lawyers, academics and doctors who are female have no children by the time they reach the age of 41 to 55. This has led to an argument that women who have children somehow do not have such a high level of commitment to the workplace as men have, leading to two choices – that to have children and not have a career, or that to not have children and have a career instead. There is also, argues Payne (2014), the problem that these two different roles are seen to conflict with one another, leading to marginalisation. For example, a career driven women may not be seen as being a good mother, and vice versa.

An interesting study in this area was carried out by Coltrane et al. (2013). This took a different approach than examining what happens after motherhood, and instead focused on fathers.

The study examined data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth and analysed data statistically to assess the influence of fatherhood on men's long term earnings. It was illustrated that as a result of becoming a father, if a man reduced his work hours in line with this new responsibility he was likely to be discriminated against as well. Coltrane et al. (2013) refer to this as being a stigma around flexibility. This was found to have a negative impact on future career potential, and on earnings too. In fact, men in this position were also found to earn less too. This is interesting as it suggests that men experience similar problems to women when they are faced with a similar situation to them, and that it may not necessarily be being a woman per se that leads to problems with progression, but rather, a perceived ability to be flexible. It is possible therefore that what both men and women might face is stigma with regard to needing flexibility to bring up children as well as work in their careers. However, no other studies like this were identified to compare the results, so the findings must be treated with caution.

Possible Solutions Other Than Quotas

A number of studies have been performed to understand what can be done to help women to break through the glass ceiling. For example, Kelly, Moen and Tranby (2011) examined what can be done to help with work family conflicts. This is important, given that various studies highlighted the importance of the mother as the care giver (for example, Budig, Misra and Boeckmann, 2012) while other studies identified that the lifestyle of mother is not compatible with a senior management career (Liff and Ward, 2002). Kelly, Moen and Tranby (2011) gathered data from more than 600 employees at a white-collar organisation and analysed the situation before and after a workplace initiative was put into place to examine its impact on work-family conflict. They found that the initiative allowed employees to schedule their own working time more effectively, and this led to a reduction in work-family conflict. It is also questionable whether the change should be in businesses or in the home. After all, as highlighted by Barsh and Lee (2012) while women may be primary breadwinners and primary caregivers at the same time, it is much more unusual for men to occupy both of these roles. These types of facts may lead to businesses questioning their role in the problem. On the other hand, as Wajcman (2013) asserts, where these different family commitments exist, and where organisations have developed family friendly policies, there is a greater likelihood of female success and attainment of higher levels in the workplace. Therefore, approaches where women are 'helped' as primary care givers through the provision of childcare have achieved some success in reducing underrepresentation.

Even so, this solution falls very much into the category of accepting the status quo, assuming that gender is not constructed and that women are fundamentally different, leading to it being them that will achieve less in their careers, and arguably while these sorts of policies have helped, women are still not proportionately represented in the boardroom. An alternative approach suggested by Ibarra, Ely and Kolb (2013) is increasing awareness among women of the second-generation gender bias that they face in the workplace. They argue that their practical experience in organisations has shown them that when women are shown what is happening, they are more likely to feel empowered and work to address what is going on by taking measures to protect against it. The authors state that when this occurs women can negotiate for a working set up that will help them to live their lives which may include children, while also meeting the requirement to perform at a certain level. Women and men

can both be empowered to drive this type of change, according to Ibarra, Ely and Kolb (2013). Indeed, the present an example of where on a leadership development programme, men were being offered more strategic jobs, while women were awarded more operational roles, which was taken to mean that women were seen as having a lower level of ability. This was changed by participants requesting criteria defining how high potential was determined, and this led to an increased number of women in senior management roles. The work of these authors is based on experience rather than scientific or empirical evidence, so the findings need to be treated with caution with some degree.

Fitzsimmons (2012) asserts that skirts on seats in the boardroom is insufficient to promote change in itself, even if quotas are the approach that is ultimately taken in the countries that have been steering away from them. This analysis by Fitzsimmons (2012) argues that organisations need to take care when using the quota approach to ensure they can succeed. This requires work to be done beforehand to make sure that women can succeed in the boardroom, and to ensure that gender diversity does bring about the good governance hoped for. This is not an argument against quotas, rather it is tempered, suggesting that women need better access to training and development to ensure they can succeed. Empowering women has been one suggested approach, though Vittee (2013) argues that despite efforts in this area to empower women to take up leadership positions, only 4% of JSE listed companies in South African have female CEOs in place. Klettner, Clarke and Boersma (2016) argue that there is evidence suggesting that the problem of women at senior level leadership positions needs to be addressed lower down by providing training at the middle management layer of the organisation, and that if this is not addressed, then quotas simply will not help. A study by Toson (2012) concurs with this finding, and Sahoo and Lenka (2016) also argue for the need for increased training focusing on furnishing women with the skills needed to succeed at a senior level. Other authors have suggested that networks for women with children with role models and mentors that are succeeding can be an approach driving success for some women (Dworkin, Ramaswami and Schipani, 2014).

Study Limitations

This study is limited by the fact that many studies into women in management roles have been carried out by using white, middle class women as the subject matter. This is a criticism in general made by Acker (2006) with regard to this area of study, and while Acker's observations are more than 10 years old, from reviewing the different literature studied, it can be seen that even now, from analysing the literature gathered for the purposes of this literature review, most of the studies are still based on white, middle class women. Acker (2006) argues that both white and black and ethnic minority women who have studied this area are in agreement with regard to this, and this is problematic because it means that the work in this field takes into account only a very narrow range of perspectives. This criticism requires addressing, and this can only really be dealt with by more researchers taking an active approach to examining the issues for women of different races and of different socioeconomic backgrounds. This would provide plenty of opportunities for future research.

Summary

This chapter has analysed the major points of difference with regard to women at work. It has been shown that there have been studies both in favour of boardroom quotas for women, and additionally that women may be expected to behave like men to succeed, even though this does not draw on their unique skillset that could be beneficial for the organisation. It has also shown that there are a range of different possible solutions that could be adopted.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Concluding on this literature review, the research set out to examine the question of why women are underrepresented at the highest levels of organisations, and to find approaches to increase their numbers at these more senior levels. The aim was to develop a depth of understanding regarding the complex interplay of issues that lead to women not being more evenly represented at senior management levels within organisations. To understand whether the research question has been answered and the aims have been met, the research objectives will be reviewed.

The first objective set for this study sought to identify the primary barriers for women to progression to the highest levels of organisations. This research would appear to indicate that one of the biggest problems is that organisations were set up by men, for men, and as such they are not necessarily designed to facilitate the success of women. There are also preconceived ideas, or social construction pertaining to what it means to be a boardroom level leader within organisations, and female skills may not necessarily fit into that or be valued considering that. In some cases, it has been shown that women have to be as like men as possible to succeed, and there is a perception in society that women are either care givers or successful career women, but that it is not possible or even desirable to combine both. This has led to a situation where children may be seen as barriers to success, and where women do not have children if they want a career.

The second objective set for this research was to critically evaluate different approaches that have been taken to ensure that women are in greater numbers in boardroom positions and other senior management positions. One of the main debates emerging from this has been that with regard to quotas for women in boardrooms. These have been particularly controversial. It has been shown that the weight of evidence, or at least, based on the literature uncovered by this research, would seem to show that when there are an increased number of women in the boardroom, the boardroom and the organisation benefits from this. Yet, one study was uncovered which showed that organisations in Norway performed poorly after strict and high quotas were imposed. The primary argument against quotas in the boardroom is that pertaining to the requirement for a "fair" meritocracy, but as demonstrated in this discourse, given the way that organisations are structured for men to succeed, and the ways in which they do not account for maternity, this is an argument that is debated strongly from a feminist perspective. Other suggested approaches have included training, networking and mentoring; however, it is difficult to see the degree to which these could overcome on their own the idea that women who go back to work after maternity leave

do not want certain types of roles, which in turn then goes on to structurally prevent them from progressing.

The third objective of this research was to develop recommendations for further study into this area, and for practical steps that businesses can take to increase the numbers of women in senior management and boardroom positions. The obvious practical step would be to introduce quotas, but perhaps more gradually than the steep 40% required by a country such as Norway. Perhaps another helpful approach would be to focus on the other areas of developing women at the same time, in addition to working to overcome the stereotyped idea that women who have children may not want certain types of roles. Further robust and extensive research is needed into the area of understanding the degree to which putting in place quotas has influenced boardroom success or not, by tying it to company performance, employee engagement and other important organisational success metrics, since research does seem to be somewhat lacking in this area. Academically it might also be helpful to try and carry out a study that would investigate the cost of not having women at higher levels of the organisation, perhaps building on the studies of researchers such as Bart and McQueen (2013) who identified the importance of women in the boardroom on complex moral reasoning. If there was a way to quantify such findings, in terms of the costs to organisations that do not have women on their boardrooms, then this could lead to the development of a business case for doing so. With financial reasoning in place, it might arguably be easier to persuade organisations of the need to change, if indeed the findings of such studies did show that women are beneficial from a cost perspective to boardroom and organisational success.

Reverting to the problem statement that more women are graduating than ever before, but that their ranks narrow the higher up in organisations they get, the implication of this study is that there are structural issues in organisations that lead to extra barriers for women to surmount when compared with men. Arguably, as well as workplaces considering what they can do to retain talent that could be developed into top talent, changes need to be driven in society to increase opportunities for men. This means challenging assertions that hold women back, such as the idea that a woman cannot have children and have a career. Instead, society needs to find a way to support this, as business is shedding talented women, and this could be a significant drawback for them to achieving competitive advantage, and consequently impacting on the overall growth of the economy. By introducing policy changes and taking steps to support women to succeed, such as looking again at childcare provision, change might be brought about. Nonetheless, the problem is extremely complex, and arguably society is quite a long way off accepting women at the highest levels of organisations, due to gender constructs and tradition.

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