

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a lot of work related to women and the problems towards their career advancement. The information was mainly found in the form of previous research, journals and books. The review of literature is divided into four main topics:

- 2.1 An overview of women's career advancement
- 2.2 An overview of social influence towards women's career advancement
- 2.3 An overview of women's domestic responsibility towards their career advancement
- 2.4 An overview of women's personal aspiration towards their career advancement
- 2.5 The concept of in-depth interview

2.1 AN OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S CAREER ADVANCEMENT

The existence of the glass ceiling has become a worldwide phenomenon that limits women's career advancement, especially their participation at the top levels of corporations. In the twentieth century women have worked in all sectors of government, business, non-profit organizations and social movements. However, the dramatic increase of women in the workforce did not improve their status at work even though in the organization where the number of female employees outnumbered male workers.

The statistics of The National Statistical Office in 1998 indicated that women's employment status was relatively lower than that of men and remained concentrated in traditional and relatively low status work. Men often assume high-ranking positions such as directors, department managers, whereas far more women than men are officers.

However, in the article "Unequal Opportunities" of *Asia Magazine* (1998), Senator Srisavang Phuavongphatya explained that Asian society is gradually accepting the concept of successful career women, as women's roles are traditionally focused on being a wife and a mother.

It is evident that there is a small fraction of women in managerial and senior positions in almost all major occupations (Cortis & Cassar, 2004, p. 149). The percentage of females in the US workforce is at 46.5 per cent but only 8 per cent are top managers. These managers earn an average of 72% of their male colleagues' salaries. In Europe, none of the highest earning CEOs are female, as stated in a report from The Glass Ceiling: Smashed or Still Holding Strong *Human Resource Management International Digest* (2006).

Although, an interesting finding suggested that organizations with women executives have a tendency to outperform others within their industry (Arfken, D.E., Bellar S.L. & Helms, M.M., 2004, p. 178). Only a few companies (IBM, GE and BP for example) realize the business advantages of having women in top jobs because they could make a difference in the market place, at the same time as responding to the diverse market that they are trying to sell to. In Australia, Cigna and Westpac invested more than USD 2 million annually in recruiting and developing women executives.

A recent study by Appold, Siengthai, and Kasarda in 1998 (as cited in Vimolwan Yukongdi, 2005, p. 272) demonstrated that in Thailand the number of women in professional positions had increased more than twice between 1971 and 1995. According to Human Development Report UNDP, 2003, 55 per cent of professional and technical workers were women. However, men continue to outnumber women in managerial levels at organizations as shown in Figure 1. Men outnumbered women at the level of director (77.2 versus 22.8 per cent), department manager (66.7 versus 33.3 per cent) and supervisor (61 versus 39 per cent), unlike the number of female employees at non-supervisory levels in which women outnumbered men (54.4 versus 45.6 per cent) (National Statistical Office & Office of the Civil Service Commission, 1998)

2.2 AN OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE TOWARDS WOMEN'S CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Social influences that lead to unequal opportunity between men and women primarily include gender bias or stereotype, perception of leadership style and career

commitment. Gender bias is a never-ending issue, especially in male-dominant industries. Discrimination in personnel practices have also been found within the recruitment process, promotion scheme, appraisal system and training opportunities, especially for women in non-traditional female jobs (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998).

Because of an established gender role, women are labeled with particular behaviours such as emotional expressiveness and nurturing which lead to 'sex-role spill over effect' (Davidson & Cooper, 1992), the belief that females may carry over these behaviours to the work place. Therefore, men may feel uncomfortable in dealing with women in superior positions, especially if the women are younger than the male subordinates. Several studies indicated that women can possibly encounter difficulties in achieving social integration among their male peers. Men often felt intimidated with their female boss. They had a striking image of these superior females and referred to them as 'Rottweilers with lipstick'. As a result, gender stereotypes reflect a small number of women in managerial levels. Schein and Davidson (as cited in Davidson, 1996) confirmed that 'think manager think male', the question about an effectiveness of female leader, is a strong belief among British undergraduate male management students.

Under these circumstances, the number of high potential women decide to invade from the corporate game rather than risk the frustrations of the glass ceiling. This is a reflection of the increasing number of females pursuing their entrepreneurial dreams, allowing themselves more freedom and no longer feeling that they must adhere to a large organization.

The study conducted by Cortis and Cassar, 2004 determined two assumptions that delay or block women in climbing the corporate ladder. The first assumption perceives that women lack job involvement because work does not appear as a center of their life interest, thus, they are often perceived as not being overly interested to their career. Based on these perceptions, women are at a disadvantage in acquiring top positions in organizations. Newstorm and Davis' study in 1994 (as cited in Cortis & Cassar, 2004) emphasized the perception about job involvement that it does not include only the degree to which employees engage themselves in their job but it also covers the extent to which employees view work as being a central part of their lives.

The second assumption addressed the stereotypical attitudes towards females as another indicator against their achievement in managerial roles.

According to Cabral-Cardoso and Fernandes' study in 2003 (as cited in Cortis & Cassar, 2004) the model of successful managers are believed to have masculine traits, therefore, some prejudiced attitudes against female supervisors are certain beliefs that women cannot be good leaders. The gender-centered perspective theory also supports that only men are suitable for managerial positions. This corresponds to a study by Raviwongse (as cited by Vimolwan Yukongdi 2005, p. 270) in evaluating women's managerial competency. Only a small number of the informants believed that women are equipped with the required skills and competencies of managers. As indicated by several studies, in male-dominated organizations women managers often encounter certain difficulties with their male peers in social integration. The stereotypical attitude about leadership role will prevent women in breaking through this solid hierarchy.

On the other hand, women scored themselves as being more tolerant to pressure as good as men or even better than men. Komin & Smuckarn, 1979 (as cited in Vimolwan Yukongdi, 2005, p. 270) suggested that it is a stereotypical attitude that women are portrayed as loving, caring and a symbol of mutual help while men tend to be achievement-oriented and more assertive.

2.3 AN OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS THEIR CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Family commitment and domestic responsibilities appear to be another prominent implication that affects women's career advancement. It limits women's opportunities in maintaining social networking with their colleagues. Research indicated that extra domestic responsibilities can create workload, thus, reducing the potential of their career achievement. From Cromie's study (as cited in Cortis & Cassar, 2004, p. 150), family obligations then reinforce the explanation why women are not deeply involved in their work as much as men.

Cromie (1981) concluded that employees who are job involved have a tendency to believe in their work ethic and to enthusiastically express their growth needs, allowing how one views him/herself within the organization.

Such implication suggested that job involvement and work-based self esteem are intertwined concepts since having an important or a meaningful job in the organization positively affects one's self esteem. These transparent and subtle barriers may delay or hold back women's career advancement or even compelling them to make a choice between upward mobility and family stability. However, the study of Burke, 2002 (as cited in Cortis & Cassar, 2004, p. 157) indicated that there is no difference between gender in connection with job involvement of male and female managers. From his study, female managers are likely to be single and tend to be younger than their male counterparts.

A study of Guillaume and Pochic 2004 (as cited in Guillaume & Pochic, 2007) suggested that women become handicapped by their social representations attached to sexual roles and household division of labour. Women wear the label of housewives, even if they are not. The pregnancy and motherhood can be other major interruptions to women's careers; 38% of women withdrew from their job permanently and settled for their mothering responsibilities. The revelation of women's terminal career path is work, marriage, continued employment, pregnancy and retirement to the home. However, if these women decided to return to their job, they were often offered lesser status jobs than their previous ones. In general, women are more willing to dedicate to their maternal career and they usually expect to sustain personal growth through their family involvement.

When considering career mobility, it has become more and more difficult to negotiate with women who have children. Palmer's study (as cited in Guillaume & Pochic, 2007) describes that besides job mobility, career promotion has always been linked to time availability. There is a belief that commitment is represented by working full time including being in early and staying on late

A research from Keene and Reynolds, 2002 (as cited in Cortis & Cassar, 2004, p. 157) further suggested that domestic responsibilities can create work overload; as a result, this can overlap to affect women's experiences of work while minimizing the potential for career achievements. Therefore, in order to avoid role conflict, female managers may decide to remain single and childless.

Vianen and Fischer, 2002 (as cited in Cortis & Cassar, 2004, p. 161) described that as long as women have to sacrifice their private life in order to climb

up the ladder of top management positions, women will still remain the great minority in managerial positions. While White's study (as cited in Cortis & Cassar, 2004, p. 161) suggests that for organizations who want to assign more women in managerial positions, they should put more effort to focus on balancing work and family life because women are not attracted by high salaries.

Fielden et al. (2003) emphasised that an overriding factor stated by women with domestic responsibilities was the belief that business ownership appeared the only way that they could make a sustainable living around other family commitments.

2.4 AN OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S PERSONAL ASPIRATION TOWARDS THEIR CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Sturges (1999) observed that men and women may differ in how they measure career success. She suggested that men appear to be focused on external criterion such as status and material success. On the other hand, women focus on internal criteria such as personal recognition, accomplishment and achieving balance in their lives. This may in turn affect career choice, as it appears that the need to strive to reach 'the top' may be more important for men and women who may perceive that the costs of achieving executive positions outweigh the benefits. Additionally, there is a suggestion that women and men perceive promotion requirements differently; women are likely to expect promotion and among business students, men aspire to top management positions more than women.

At various points, many women appear to re-evaluate their lives and values and attempt to make changes in the middle of their career growth. They may desire for a better work-life balance and/or a different lifestyle which can possibly be a horizontal move rather than upward career move. A survey in 2003 found that a majority of men would not devote more time for family in exchange for their career progression. It can be understood that the failure for women to achieve the highest levels represents choice rather than regression. By using capabilities theory to reflect on career journey, women decide to develop their own yardsticks of success which are determined by factors that are personally meaningful given their priorities.

In a comparative study of Cromie in 1987 about business start-up motivations among males and females, it was suggested that men and women differ in terms of the emphasis they attach to particular motives. The literature often reveals various 'push' and 'pull' factors as motivators for business start-up (Alstete, 2002) or alternatively negative and positive factors as cited in McClelland and Swail (2005). The 'push' or negative factors are associated with the necessities that force the female into pursuing her business idea. These can be redundancy, unemployment, frustration with previous employment, the need to earn a reasonable living and a flexible work schedule, reflective of the family caring role that is still expected from women. Similarly, evidence of the 'glass ceiling effect' impedes executive women from reaching more senior executive positions and thus pushes them from management positions into their own business. The desire for entrepreneurial aspirations also relates to independence, self-fulfillment, autonomy, self-achievement, being one's own boss, using creative skills, doing enjoyable work, entrepreneurial drive and desire for wealth, social status and power. The need for independence and the challenge of business ownership are the most frequently quoted 'pull' motivators for women entrepreneurs.

Over the past 10 years, almost one-third or 29% of women employed in the private sector cited the glass ceiling phenomenon as the reason for their leaving their former employers to start their own businesses. It is estimated that women own and manage up to one third of all businesses in developed countries. A recent study by Nelton (as cited in Cortis & Cassar, 2004) regarded the growth of female entrepreneurship in 30 years since the 1970s as having increased from 5 per cent to 38 per cent.

2.5 THE CONCEPT OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

The researcher studied some interviewing guidelines and techniques of in-depth interviews for the qualitative study from Guion A. L. (2006) which can be summarized as follows.

The purpose of an in-depth interview in qualitative research is to explore the respondent's viewpoint, feelings and perspectives. An in-depth interview is more

than just asking questions but is a systematic recording and documenting of responses together with seeking for deeper meaning and understanding of the responses.

The interviewers are required to have some skills and characteristics while conducting an interview. They have to be good listeners, observant of non-verbal clues, flexible and open-minded.

The actual interview consists of three main parts.

1. Introduction

The researcher should start by introducing himself and the topic of his study to establish a good impression with the respondent

2. Making the respondent feels at ease

The researcher may start with a few soft questions to familiarize himself with the respondent

3. Be a good listener as well as good observer

This is in fact the most difficult part. The researcher should listen and observe as he leads the respondent through a conversation until the respondent has explained sufficiently to answer the research questions

However, there are some strategies to improve the quality of the in-depth interview.

1. Be an active listener

Listen and rephrase what was said to ensure that the researcher completely understands the meaning the respondent intends to give.

2. Be patient

Allow the respondent to speak freely and guide them through the conversation that leads to answer your research questions. Do not rush the respondent.

3. Be flexible

If the respondent tends to deviates too far from the topic, the researcher should carefully return him or her to the topic at hand. However, be open to slight deviations.

4. Use audio recorder

It is important that an interview be audiotaped for accuracy and later reference. Some researchers may even videotape interviews in order to capture both the verbal responses and nonverbal cues. Always ask permission of the interviewee before audio and video recording.

The methodology of this study will be discussed in the next chapter.