

The Glass Ceiling for Women

SUBMITTED BY: Knowledge@Wharton Summer Educators

SUBJECT(S): Management

GRADE LEVEL(S): 11, 12

≡ OVERVIEW:

This lesson will help students to think about gender as a cultural construct that affects the ways in which people are perceived as being effective leaders. Students will explore and debate the myths and truths of gender-related leadership as well as speculate about the progress made by women in overcoming their historical second-class citizen roles.

≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Management, IV. Personal Management Skills

≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- [“The Conversation: Investing with a Gender Lens”](#)
- [“Scoring Equity at the Women’s World Cup”](#)
- [“Laying the Framework for a Successful Startup”](#)
- [“Is Bossy the Other “B” Word?”](#)
- [“Exploring the Business of Money with a Few ‘Girls Who Invest’”](#)
- [“Educator Toolkit: The Chief Executive Officer”](#)
- [“Digital Natives Are Poised to Solve World Problems – and Close the STEM Gender Gap”](#)
- [“Career Insight: Advice from New York Stock Exchange President Stacey Cunningham”](#)
- [“Can Shaq Save the Papa John’s Brand?”](#)

- “Business in 3: Cell Phone Forensics, Smart Homes and Wage Bias”

Common Core Standard(s):

- CCR Standard for Reading Informational Text: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support the analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCR Standard for Reading Informational Text: Determine a central idea of a text and provide an objective summary of the text
- CCR Standard for Reading Informational Text: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text
- CCR Standard for Writing: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.

Objectives/Purposes:

- Students will understand gender as a socially cultural construct.
- Students will be able to describe gender bias and how it works to the disadvantage of women.
- Students will learn about contemporary women’s issues concerning advancement to leadership positions in corporate America.

Knowledge@Wharton Article: “The ‘Masculine’ and ‘Feminine’ Sides of Leadership and Culture: Perception vs. Reality” **Other Resources/Materials:**

- Internet access and a projection system
- Newspaper print and markers
- Case Study ([Handout](#))

Vocabulary Spotlight:

Corporate Culture: The ways of thinking, being, saying and doing that businesses and organizations value. These expectations are communicated explicitly through mechanisms such as mission statements and company handbooks, and implicitly through the ways in which rewards and negative consequences occur.

Gender: Refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women (World Health Organization definition).

Sex: Refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women (World Health Organization definition).

Role Congruity: The expectation that a person will act in a certain way based on his or her gender (from the Knowledge@Wharton article).

Gender Bias: Is the prejudice in action or treatment against a person on the basis of their sex (<http://www.legal-explanations.com/definitions/gender-bias.htm>).

Glass Ceiling: An unseen, yet impenetrable barrier, that keeps women and minorities from rising to executive level management positions, regardless of their qualifications or achievements. (U.S. Department of Labor. (1995). Good for Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital: A Fact Finding Report of the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission.)

Activities: 1) Divide students into groups of 4 containing all girls or all boys. Ask them to work on the case study provided (Management_2_Personal Management_Handout 1). (10 mins)

- Provide each team with newspaper print and markers to record their plan, which will be presented to the whole class.

2) Have students report how their teams responded to the case study scenario. (10 mins)

- Write on the board any significant responses or characteristics of the teams' approaches to the case study.

3) Have students discuss the differences that they noted between each groups' approaches to the case study — particularly stark contrasts that emerge between the gendered teams. (5 mins)

4) Inform students that the exercise was intended to get them thinking about gender differences in leadership. Ask students about the differences between men and women's leadership styles: Are there real differences? Do they think one gender performs better than another in terms of leadership style? Why or why not? How would they compare and contrast men and women's leadership styles? (15-20 mins)

- Use the concepts of “role congruity,” “gender”, “corporate culture”, and other facts/suggestions presented in the article that characterize male and female leadership, to challenge or affirm students’ perceptions during the discussion.
- Ask students if they ever thought of gender as a form of diversity. Do they agree with gender being defined this way? Why or why not?
- Have students take up the question of how gender differs from sex.
- Introduce the term corporate culture to students (in the vocabulary spotlight section). Use the example of Mary Kay’s corporate culture provided in the article. Taking the position that gender is a product of our culture, how might this affect women’s chances to lead in the workplace? What suggestions do students have about transcending these barriers?

Tying It all Together: For homework, students can be directed to interview family members about their perspectives on the changing roles of men and women during their lifetimes. Have students compose a 1-2 page essay outlining what they learned from their elders on the subject. Students can share what they learned in a follow-up class discussion, which could illuminate how recent advancement opportunities have opened up for women.

What Worked and What I Would Do Differently: I used this lesson with older high school students (a group of mostly 12th graders). They did a great job with the case study. The males and females approached the task in markedly different ways, which made for a good discussion afterwards. Their responses were within the stereotypical patterns of male and female leadership. In the lesson that I facilitated, the students actually read the Knowledge@Wharton article via a Quaker style reading (they took turns in reading the paragraphs aloud). Since the students were reading lots of articles in the summer program, this variation was often a welcomed respite from reading silently for 10 minutes (the article is a bit dense and long for some high school students). In this revised plan, I have suggested that the teachers merely take the useful concepts presented in the article to guide student learning. It is actually a great article that can be utilized for multiple learning purposes (corporate culture, diversity and gender bias, male-and-female leadership differences), so consider having the students read it themselves if time permits.