

for over 51% of employees in management, professional, and related occupations. In other industries, such as manufacturing, trucking, and architectural/engineering services, the percentage of women managers is much lower (13%–18%).²¹ Unfortunately, similar kinds of data for minorities are not available, though few doubt a general underrepresentation of minorities in managerial roles as well. Thus, the closer to the top of the hierarchy, the thicker the glass in the ceiling. At lower levels, the glass becomes much thinner. Across industries, there are substantial variations in this pattern.

Where glass ceilings exist, there are two important questions to ask: What are the reasons for a lack of upward mobility and representation for minorities and women at higher levels of the organization? What changes need to be made, especially staffing-related ones, to help shatter the glass ceiling?

Barriers to Mobility

An obvious conclusion from such data is that there are barriers to mobility, many of them originating within the organization. The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission conducted a four-year study of glass ceilings and barriers to mobility. It identified many barriers: lack of outreach recruitment practices, lack of mentoring training in revenue-generating areas, and lack of access to critical developmental assignments; initial selection for jobs in staff areas outside the upward pipeline to top jobs; biased performance ratings; little access to informal networks; and harassment by colleagues.²² Added to this list should be another important barrier, namely, child rearing and domestic responsibilities that create difficult work/life balance choices.

An instructive illustration of these barriers, particularly the internal ones, comes from a 21-company study of men and women in sales careers.²³ The study found that 41% of women and 45% of men were eager to move into management, but the women were much less optimistic of their chances of being promoted. Whereas the sales forces studied were 26% female, only 14% of sales managers were female. The study portrayed "a survivalist culture where career paths are more like obscure jungle trails and where most women say they experience sexual harassment." The study also found "recruiters' use of potentially discriminatory screening tests, managers' negative stereotypes about women, women's lack of access to career-boosting mentors and networks, and difficulty entertaining customers in traditional ways such as fishing and golf outings." Saleswomen were also highly dependent on their mostly male managers for job and territory assignments, which were often based on stereotypes about willingness to travel, relocate, and work long hours.

Overcoming Barriers

It is generally recognized that multiple actions, many of them beyond just staffing-system changes, will be needed to overcome barriers to mobility. Exhibit 6.9 shows a listing of such actions, many of which are consistent with recommendations of the Glass Ceiling Commission.²⁴