

# *The glass ceiling in hospitality organisations in Greece*

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## ABSTRACT

Although, the employment in the hospitality industry shows growth, only few women are found in high managerial positions in the sector in Greece. Gender and gender role stereotypes are persistent in organisations that operate in Greece, challenging women's employment and showing evidence of the glass ceiling in hotel management in the country. This paper explores the position of women in Greek hotel management as well as the barriers they face in climbing the career ladder. The findings from the semi-structured interviews with 15 male and 15 female hotel managers suggest that they identify long hours work, stereotypical behaviour, a good choice for single people, low wages and a few opportunities for women to evolve and others as the main challenges in their career. It also proposes that hotel managers are gradually learning how to create cultures in which expectations and professionalism are not necessarily gender-linked.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today's hospitality environment constantly changes and is characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability (Erkutlu, 2008). Within this environment, changes in the workforce and employability are evident. Amongst other factors such as geographical and cultural distances (Nickson and Warhurst, 2001), the increasing numbers of women in employment have changed the face of hospitality organisations. According to the International Labour Office (ILO, 2009) over 200 million of people are employed in the hospitality and tourism industry, but women represent only the 6,4 percent (Duffield, 2002).

Tourism has been considered to be a major contributor to the Greek economy (Papalexandris, 2008) and is considered as a major employer with 659,000 jobs in 2004, representing the 16,5 percent of the total employment in the country (ILO, 2009). Nevertheless, women have the lowest female participation rate in employment in tourism in the country (Eurostat, 2009). Additionally, although

research has been conducted in hotel management, very little research has been conducted to explore the position of women in hotel management (Woods and Viehland, 2000). Besides that, Mihail (2006) suggests that there is lack of updated empirical research on the position of women in corporate Greece. This paper aims at studying the phenomenon of the glass ceiling in hospitality organisations in Greece. The main purpose is to identify the factors that enable managers to reach the higher levels in management, as well as the barriers that prevent women to progress.

## 2. THE GLASS CEILING IN HOTEL MANAGEMENT

Even though progress has been made over the last decades, barriers to women's advancement continue to persist. These barriers as well as the lack of women in management and leadership positions refer to the phenomenon of the glass ceiling (Heilman, 2001); Knutson and Schmidgall (1999:64) define the glass ceiling as the "invisible, generally artificial barriers that prevent qualified individuals – in this case, women – from advancing within their organisation and reaching their full potential". According to Stelter (2002) the glass ceiling reflects the socially constructed expectations and beliefs that undermine women's managerial positions. Although, nowadays women hold managerial positions, they continue to face barriers to their upward mobility. The glass ceiling, according to Ragins et al. (1998) is based on attitudinal or organisational bias. It is viewed as a form of gender bias and the various differences between genders in leadership and managerial positions. In addition to this metaphor of the glass ceiling the 'labyrinth effect' has been introduced in an article of the Harvard Business Review (Eagly and Carli, 2007). This refers to the difficulties women face in advancing their career. Therefore, the career for women is a complex journey, but as the concept supports, it is not necessary to view these obstacles as discouraging.

The literature suggests that the glass ceiling falls within the organisational culture and the practices in organisations, therefore how things are done. When men are more than women in these organisations, the organisational culture may adopt attributes that favor men, and that is the dominant gender (Cooper-Jackson, 2001). The organisational culture refers to stereotypes and in general the organisational climate. In view to this, men are considered to be the leaders and women the followers. Therefore, there is the view that organisations are male-dominated, and reflect a masculine culture (Itzin, 1995). In this managerial environment women are set aside, they face fierce competition with their male colleagues, and they are forced to suppress their emotions. The literature suggests that there is the "masculine dimension" in organisations, which demonstrates the attributes of "the promotion of independence, autonomy, hierarchical relations, competition, task-orientation and the establishment of status and authority" (Van Vianen and Fischer, 2002:318). Contrary to this, the feminine culture demonstrates attributes such as "the promotion of a relational self, maintaining balance in life activities, participation, and collaboration within the organisation" (Van Vianen and Fischer, 2002:319). In addition, there is evidence of change towards new dynamic organisations where women are given more opportunities to progress and evolve (Holter, 1997). However, gender stereotypes have been viewed by many as a reason for the existence of the glass ceiling phenomenon (Mihail, 2006).

Evidently, the organisational culture and attributes influence the position women hold. These two different types of cultural attributes may play an important part in how people fit into an organisation and whether there is perceived or actual role / culture congruence. There is a lot of debate on the above issues with reference to occupational and vertical segregation of women in management, that seems to exist in hospitality as well (Maxwell, 1997:230). The hospitality and tourism industry is built on and of human relations and thus gender relations are important along with the behaviours of people within the industry (Swain, 1995), therefore the glass-ceiling phenomenon is important in this industry, since gender stereotyping is a dominant factor (Duffield, 2002). Most studies on the topic are rather descriptive and do not differentiate by industry, thus the focus of this paper is the hospitality industry in Greece.

### 3. METHOD

The importance of shattering the glass ceiling and removing barriers that prevent women from utilising their full potential is recognized in today's hospitality organisations. The complexity of the phenomenon demands methodology that can provide access to data that reflect the views of both male and female managers in the industry. Therefore, the empirical data is gathered with semi-structured interviews with 15 male and 15 female managers in 5\* star hotels in Greece, that are chosen with convenience sampling techniques. The regions chosen for the study are those that have the highest concentration of tourism demand, and are considered primary destinations in Greece (Papadimitriou and Trakas, 2008), that is Rhodes, Attica, Crete, Myconos and Thessaloniki. The hotels belong to the 5\* category and to all types such as resort, city hotel, national or international hotel chain, in order to have a variety of participants and views based on different organisational structures and culture. The semi-structured interviews had a conversational style so that the researcher could understand how each of the participants gave meaning to their work experiences.

#### 3.1 The participants

The demographics of the sample are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Sample demographics – 15 female managers + 15 male managers

Criteria	Female managers	Male managers
<b>Age</b>		
25-29	3	2
30-35	3	5
36-40	4	3
41+	5	5
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	6	6
Single	7	9
Divorced	2	0
<b>Child / Children</b>		
Yes	4	4
No	11	11

The above table shows that the male managers are more likely to be single than the female managers. The majority does not have any children, which shows that despite their age and the fact that they are either married or divorced the participants spend a lot of their time on their career and at work. The female managers are more likely to remain single and not have children in order to pursue a career. Explanations and details of what constitutes career barriers for the interviewees derive from a variety of issues such as the organisational culture and from social attitudes as they are discussed in the following.

### 4. FINDINGS

Thematic analysis has been performed to the interviews in order to answer the research questions. Thematic analysis is used to analyse words or concepts in texts, in order to quantify and analyse the meanings of these words and make inferences about the messages in the text (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Bryman and Bell, 2003). The interviews have been partially transcribed and although Stemler (2001) claims that there might be some challenges in using simple word frequency counts to make

inferences, themes are developed not only from those that were more frequently discussed, but also based upon the relevant theory discussed in the literature review.

Two main themes emerged from the analysis the glass ceiling issues and the success factors in hospitality management in Greece.

#### *4.1 The glass ceiling in hotel management in Greece*

The hospitality industry is still characterized by sex segregation in employment (Purcell, 1996). Jordan (1997) in her study confirms this and continues that gender stereotyping indicates what is identified as appropriate work for women. Many factors contribute to gender stereotyping such as gender roles and gender identity, in addition women are assigned the role of motherhood, of caring for the elderly and doing household work (Aitchison et al., 1999).

Tharenou (1998) provides a thorough analysis of the glass ceiling phenomenon, and of why women do not reach the senior management levels, she has identified the glass ceiling as an invisible barrier that prevents women from moving into senior management. Interestingly the male managers in the study did not identify the phenomenon; they mainly focused on the reasons or factors they believe make women's advancement in hotel management more difficult than it is for them. The male participants did not suggest to have experienced any gender related barriers in their careers; nevertheless, they specifically discussed the problems that their female colleagues have. All the participants mentioned that there are many challenges in management in the hospitality industry, that are the same for both men and women and they have mainly to do with the characteristics, the culture and the nature of employment in the industry.

Interestingly, one of the female respondents realized to her surprise during our discussion that all the female managers she knows are either not married or divorced. She also added that *"people call me the mother of the company, even though I do not have children of my own, they all call this company my child, or my staff come to me for advice or to discuss any personal issues they may have"*.

Women find it more difficult to combine and balance work with family needs, and this is an issue pinpointed by three male managers as well. The following as a view came from both male and female respondents, more specifically a male manager said: *"it is hard for women to raise a family and be in a senior level position. In the hotel, the hours are very long and varied, so it presents more of a challenge"*. It is evident from the sample demographics that only four male and four female managers have children, and among them only women face problems, since their role is not only to be a working woman but also a mother.

Over half of the respondents said that work in the hospitality industry involves working long and varied hours and trying hard. It also involves occasionally geographic moves, which is a challenge for those who want to have a family. All interviewees spoke about the 24/7 nature of the job and the fact that being a hotel manager requires late nights and weekend work. Therefore, personal sacrifices are required. One female respondent, a front office manager, said:

*If you want to excel and advance, if you want your customers and the management to be happy you have to be there whenever it is required. I may come in the middle of the night because we have 300 guests checking in. I will help with everything, even the bellboy to carry the suitcases...*

Another male respondent said:

*You have to be prepared to work as much as required and to put your life around the hotel, and not the other way round. It is a way of life and profession.*

Bias and sex stereotypes are still evident, since the industry is male-dominated, in support of Cobb and Dunlop's (1999) suggestion that a gender gap still exists in promoting women, even though most of the promotions are based on performance. For example, one female food and beverage manager faces a lot of challenges when she interacts with the staff in the kitchen where gender bias is high. This view supports Knutson and Schmidgall's (1999) claim that the kitchen is a male-dominated environment where very few women work and even fewer hold leadership positions. They all agreed that men are easier promoted than women, in fact one male food and beverage manager admitted that

he had promoted a male over female employee because he was concerned of all her obligations at home being a mother, even though as he said, had more experience than the male colleague. On the other hand, another female assistant general manager said that she did not accept an offer to become a general manager because she did not spend less time with her children.

All of the managers suggest that there are many challenges in the hospitality industry that are the same for women and men, nevertheless, a few drew some distinctions between female and male managers. All the women in the study agreed that it is difficult to be one of the boys and they have to try very hard to prove their skills, one general manager specifically said “you have to prove who you are”. She admitted that her dedication to her career and the long hours at work may have been one of the main reasons her marriage was broken. On the contrary, only one manager said that there are no specific sex related expectations, but the requirements and the expectations at this profession are many and high regardless the sex of the manager. She also proposed that no matter your sex, if you are a manager you have to meet the organisational goals, to produce work and be effective.

Although, the participants identified many challenges for being promoted in the industry especially for women, they agreed that this has started changing in the industry, since women are given more opportunities, are offered managerial positions which many of the women in the study admitted having exploited this situation. Nevertheless, mainly the female managers suggested that they usually have to change organisation, or even move to another city in order to gain advancement. Altman et al. (2005) in their study found that younger women are more likely to move in order to gain advancement, however, this may have some negative effects on their personal life (Brownell, 1994). In addition, the career in hotel management requires career mobility (Ladkin, 2002), while the sector is prone to vocational mobility, with employees seeking job change in order to progress (Baum, 2007). The main problem as many female managers said, is that many choose not to accept the challenges that are required for career progression, that is also confirmed by Ely and Rhode’s (2010) study.

Additionally, the participants provided evidence of the existing culture in the Greek hospitality industry and they said that still many believe that men are better managers than women, they are trusted to be effective and to perform their role as a manager efficiently. The Greek culture has been widely accepted as a masculine culture (Hofstede, 2001) where men are expected to be assertive, while women to be modest and tender. Thus, as in any other culture, in Greece, gender role stereotypes exist (Matusak, 2001). But, the male managers said that they do not see their female colleagues any differently, and they feel they do not show evidence of sex racism towards the competencies of women managers. Furthermore, the majority of the participants claim that the hotel is organized in a more ‘feminine’ way, since emotions rule in the provision of services, they are people oriented, the customers are their main concern and thus they all behave in a more gentle, polite and hospitable way in order to keep their customers and staff happy and satisfied. Finally, the female participants said that since the industry is male-dominated, it is easier for them to enter the managerial world through positions such as sales management or front office management. Therefore, this route allows them to become managers and bring change to the existing culture, which is in the hospitality industry male-dominated environment.

#### *4.2 Success factors in hotel management in Greece*

Although, many women are employed in hospitality, very few appear at the higher levels of hotel work. Nevertheless, the managers in this study suggested a few success factors in hotel management. In fact, they have identified their traits and behaviours that have helped them climb the career ladder. They all stressed the need to work long hours that can be seen as a contributing factor to success. They have also mentioned that they might take work at home, and that sacrifices have to be made, such as spending less time with the family or for their personal life, but more importantly they stressed time management, one female manager said “*if you manage your time, then you can balance work with family*”. These views are also supported by similar studies. For example, Ng and Pine (2003) and Knutson and Schmidgall (1999) consider as major contributors to managers’ success hard

work and commitment at work. All of the above confirm Wood's (1994) view on the characteristics of hospitality management. He stresses hands on work, operational control and hard work in combination with frequent interaction with staff and other members of the organisation as part of their tasks. In view to this, they stressed the need to change jobs in order to progress, and even though this may be considered a hindering factor in hotel management, it may be considered a success factor as well. Thus, the hotel managers have to develop competencies across a variety of departments, offering more career opportunities and higher salary levels (Carbery et al., 2003).

Additionally, endurance has been identified as another success factor. The managers said that they have to show patience, to be smiling and use humour to deal with challenging situations with employees or customers. In support to this view, many of male managers and a few of female managers identified smile and communication skills as important, which evidently agrees with Brownell's (1994) study where both male and female managers identified interpersonal skills and determination as success factors.

Furthermore, they acknowledged good communication skills and trust towards their staff. These findings seem to support Cichy and Schmidgall (1996) who found that the financial executives in their study consider communication, trust and perseverance as success factors in their career.

Another important factor is respect, especially when it is connected with relevant knowledge and prior experience. Specifically, the female managers in the study appreciate considerably their studies and they believe that this has helped them gain the respect of their staff. They also believe that sharing the knowledge with their staff leads to success. Thus, it seems that they feel comfortable to delegate and share every day tasks with their teams. This allows them more time to spend on training, mentoring and planning for the department or for the organisation. For example, a female manager said:

*Within the industry, I have never felt my being a woman hindered my growth or the respect that I have received for my experience and knowledge. It is individuals outside the industry who will, for example, seek the acceptance of the male during a meeting instead of the woman, even though the woman is the decision-maker. That always makes for an interesting scenario!*

Therefore, hotel managers, especially female hotel managers should benefit from hard work, interpersonal skills, job knowledge and taking advantage of their studies in hospitality and tourism management.

Moreover, many referred to 'dynamic characters', and especially the female managers felt they should have been stricter with their staff and more assertive, since their male staff many times challenged them. At the same time they say they have to be enthusiastic, to have a positive personality, to be sympathetic and caring and to have an eye for detail. Purcell (1996) in her study also suggests that 'the right kind of personality' is an important element when hiring new employees. In addition, Hicks (1990:356) found that the respondents in her study hire people 'only on personality', which almost certainly reflects the finding in the hospitality industry 'personality' is more important than many other characteristics or traits.

Next, female managers in the study claim that they are trying to change today's management culture and style, thus they provide a more nurturing and accommodating environment. Therefore, they listen to their staff, they respect their opinion and discuss any problems at work. In this way, they encourage a team-based management style that generates more mentoring opportunities for employees through the environment and the working climate.

Then, the managers added patience, perseverance and believing in your skills. For example, one said that you have "to acknowledge your mistakes, to apologise or show with your behaviour that you admit you are wrong". The female managers admitted that they either tell or show with their behaviour that they acknowledge their mistakes. On the contrary male managers said they rarely apologise, because they believe they very rarely make mistakes. Likewise, they identified proactivity and cooperation as the two most important features. Being positive, and self-confidence were valued and some respondents thought that to be successful a manager should be a risk taker or in some cases ruthless, especially when mistakes are made, or the results are not the expected.

Moreover, networking and mentoring is considered important mainly for women's career advancement. The female managers said that networking is mainly built when they change jobs, but they help other women, more than their male colleagues. Klenke (1996) suggests that mentoring has benefits such as greater work success and more job satisfaction for those who are mentored. He also adds that mentoring is especially important for women, because it allows them to be more visible to organisational decision makers and therefore, may be given the opportunity to advance.

Later, the organisational culture was discussed. A female manager said "*there are a lot of women in senior positions, and it is a culture where female and male employees as individuals regardless the attributes of their sex*". She suggests that the culture in her company allows people to progress regardless their sex. This point affirms Powell and Graves (2003) who suggest that companies play a role in women's success by adopting strategies to advance their careers or by erecting barriers that might prevent women from advancing. In addition, Powell and Graves (2003:153) suggest that organisations should be ready to address any discrimination that occurs in the company, especially "when they embrace stereotypical views or display prejudices towards members of one sex as leaders".

Even when managers have a family the companies follow the legal framework that dictates the policy concerning leave of absence when people are getting married, when they have children time off during their pregnancy or time for their children i.e. to get them to the doctor. Sometimes, however the female managers said that the employees, the other managers and the top managers' behaviour may undermine these privileges, thus they do not take advantage of this policies, "*only when it is necessary*". Therefore, organisations should act to reduce these beliefs and attitudes (Powell and Graves, 2003). The culture in Greek organisations, including hospitality organisations have an impact on female and male managers. The demanding and challenging environment forces women to think carefully before starting a family, and to manage their personal life so well that it will not influence their performance and productivity. Such stereotyping can be detrimental to their advancement, not only because they have to carefully plan their life, but also because their employees perceive them differently, or it influences whether they will be promoted, further trained or be given the opportunities to grow within the company.

Evidently, male and female managers agree on some competencies and skills that are required to advance and progress in hotel management, but they perceive differently the barriers and obstacles to their careers. For example, female managers value the relationships with their colleagues or supervisors, whereas male managers value their status in their positions, which affirms Iverson's (2000) study.

Even though Guerrier (1986) found that women in the industry are responding realistically to a situation in which they view an impossible future, the female managers in this study are more optimistic about the current situation and the position that women hold in the hospitality industry. They are also optimistic about gender equality in the sector in Greece. They believe that they are not far away from placing women in top positions. For example another female manager noted that:

*It is true that women work very hard and they are more in the hospitality industry, not at managerial positions you do not find may but the numbers are growing very fast. You find many female managers in big hotel chains mainly. I strongly believe that women are more effective, they have very good communication skills that are required in the industry, they make very careful steps and they create very good reputation.*

On the contrary, the male managers believe that both male and female managers are equal and equally treated; they have the same way of thinking and professional values. When they get married they both value their family that comes first, and thus for both is difficult to progress considering the patriarchic culture in Greece and the difficulties they may face in regards to their responsibilities towards family and work. Furthermore, they add that their female colleagues are as good as they are, and they have a bright future as long as they continue the hard work, despite the sex and gender stereotypes that persist in the Greek culture. Interestingly, one food and beverage manager stated "*make a woman's kind of work and it will be work that will blossom*".

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

It is evident from the above that hotels in Greece provide professional opportunities for women, however, the glass ceiling is evident in the sector as well. There are many women who are found in managerial positions, but they face the glass ceiling, that is many barriers to progress. In fact, some decide to leave their jobs, or not progress due to the difficulties they face with balancing family with work. They do not find it easy to reconcile their dual realities. In some cases, they are taking the message that they cannot combine work with family and thus they cannot be mothers and managers at the same time (Liff and Ward, 2001). Nevertheless, the findings of this study agree with Tharenou's (2005) view that family and children are not necessarily a hindering factor to manager's career progress. However, having children while at work has been viewed as a liability for some female managers in hotels confirming Williamson's (2008) study. It is however, a choice that managers have to make regardless their sex.

The most significant barrier that has been identified by both male and female managers is the long working hours that are required by the organisational culture as well as by the requirements at the specific work context. Another important barrier are gender stereotypes that are still persistent in Greek culture. Women managers still have to prove their skills. Interestingly, however, the male managers in the study see their colleagues as equal. Nevertheless, the cultural expectations of women create challenges for them when advancing their career. Additionally, key assignments have to be found to provide women with professional growth and learning challenges, to serve as grooming exercises for career tracks leading to executive positions and to provide them with access to key decision-making and influential mentors in the company.

Interestingly, individuals in the organisations of the study recognize the importance of shattering the glass ceiling and removing barriers that prevent women from utilising their full potential. Some key success factors that are presented include the development of a management style where they will exceed the company's expectations, they will adopt a 'dynamic character', they will be nurturing, but at the same time assertive to face challenges in hotel management. Time management may help deal with the conflict between time at work and time with the family. Good communication skills and support to the team are also important. Prior experience, knowledge and education are supporting factors that help them gain respect of their staff and other people within the industry. Finally, they should grab the opportunities that are given to them, whereas hospitality organisations should provide such culture and policies to support women's advancement.

In view to all the above, the author proposes that change is required in hotel management in Greece, where diversity must be supported, there should be fostering of family responsibilities by following the relevant legislation, and finally hotels should also cultivate and nurture women's managerial style and talent for organisational efficiency and effectiveness.

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