

## **BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN MARITIME AND THE WAYS TO OVERCOME THEM**

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**Abstract.** Maritime is a male-dominated sector and as in all male-dominated sectors, women working in maritime jobs face some problems deriving from not only the special nature of the jobs but also the hardships they face because of the bias against them in this sector. There are very few women leaders in the maritime due to these reasons and this fact deprives the sector, which is in need of a lot of qualified staff, of the positive contributions women can make. That's why some precautions should be taken to eliminate those barriers in order to enhance women's participation and leadership in the sector and give women the place they have already deserved. In this paper, data about problems related to women's leadership are gathered by a survey and some suggestions to overcome these are discussed in a workshop by women in maritime. At the end of the study, it was decided that two methods could work better than others: Providing networking and mentoring opportunities to the women in maritime and authentic leadership of women in maritime. The ultimate goal of the study is to create part of a strategy to be applied in maritime to help women reveal the leadership traits they already have, excel in their jobs and reach top positions. Following studies can be carried out to complete the strategy and to take it further.

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Leadership is the art of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal. The leader is the inspiration and director of the action. He or she is the person in the group that

possesses the combination of personality and leadership skills that make others want to follow his or her direction [1]. Theoretically, men and women have the same rights, may have almost the same education and more or less the same traits. That means they have the same chance to be leaders, but this is not the case in practice.

In today's large organization, as women climb up the corporate ladder they vanish. While the statistics vary slightly around the world, this is an extremely consistent pattern. At the lowest levels, more than half of the employees in organizations are female. As you move to each successively higher level in the organization, the number of women steadily shrinks. At the CEO level, worldwide, there are only 3% to 4% who are women [2]. According to a report by the European Commission (2012), in the European Union, as of the beginning of 2012, women constituted only 13.7% of board seats [3]. The ratio changes and decreases dramatically when male-dominated sectors are in question. The shipping sector of maritime business is one of the male-dominated sectors. Women make up only an estimated 2% of the world's seafaring workforce. Their low number, which is about 23,000 worldwide, means that women can face a number of hardships and may even be subject to discrimination and harassment [4]. Maritime requires both physically and mentally tough people, requires leadership skills and swift decision making qualities and is less tolerant for gender differences [5].

Increasing the number of women in maritime jobs will raise awareness for the presence of women on board the ships, create a woman friendly atmosphere which requires the men to heed their behaviour and language, encourage appropriate behaviour amongst personnel and foster camaraderie. In addition, more women aboard and more women in leadership positions in maritime sector means varied and different viewpoints about everything taking place on board a ship, and an increase in the chance to respond more effectively to the requirements of the ever changing maritime industry. Because of all these reasons, it is a must to increase not only the number of women in maritime but also the effectiveness of their job performance. It is clear that some measures should be taken to realize these. To decide what measures they may be, the reasons causing these problems should be determined correctly first.

## 2 METHOD

The data used in this study was collected through a survey and a workshop. In the first part of the study, the responses given to the questions in the survey have been analysed. The questions in the survey are some of the questions originally used in the survey in **MENTORESS** (Maritime Education Network to Orient and Retain Women for Efficient Seagoing Services) **Project**, a project funded by the EU, aiming to furnish women in maritime with leadership qualities. There are 50 questions in the survey prepared for the project, 24 of which are related to this research and are taken into consideration while doing the study. The survey is given in the website of MENTORESS Project and all the parties concerned are called upon to respond to the survey. By the time this study was made, 233 people, 73 of whom are women and 160 of whom are men had responded to the survey. In the second part of the study, a workshop was held with the attendance both of cadets from maritime schools and professionals from maritime sector. The exchange of ideas during the workshop provided an insight into ways to help women

cope with bias and problems in reaching leadership positions. Drawing upon the information obtained from the survey and the workshop, leadership styles and assistance methods were taken into account with an eye to find ways to increase effectiveness and the number of women in maritime.

### 3 STUDY

Upon evaluation of the data, the causes of problems encountered by women in maritime have been identified and it is seen that these problems can be grouped under three headings, which are: Problems of Disapproval by Men, Problems Deriving from Lack of Guidance and Problems Related with Acquiring Leadership Skills.

#### 3.1 Problems of disapproval by men

Figure 1 shows the percentage of responses related to the questions about the acceptance problem for women by men, which can be seen at Table 1.

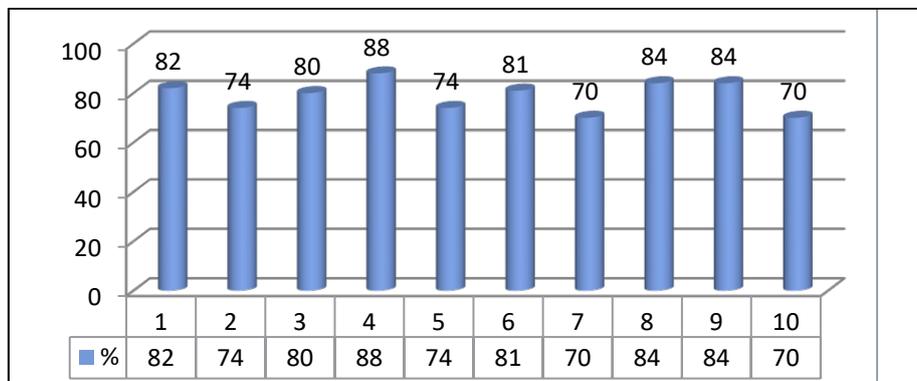


Figure 1. Percentage of Responses Given by Women to the Statements in This Part

Table 1. Statements Used in This Part and Percentage Responses by Women and Men

NO	STATEMENT	I Agree ( %)	
		WOMEN	MEN
1	The male counterparts perceive the female crewmembers as threat in competition	82	33
2	If the female crewmembers behave like a man they will be accepted easily	74	64
3	Men prefer working with other men because they think women aren't strong enough	80	69
4	Men think the presence of women on board will limit their behaviours.	88	72
5	Some officers who trust female crewmembers, still advise them to work onshore	74	70
6	When a woman succeeds in her job, male staff will be jealous of her	81	44
7	If a female crewmember makes a mistake, the feedback and reactions are exaggerated	70	43
8	It is hard for women to find appointments on board ships because the ship owners are biased against women	84	69
9	Males believe that the presence of females on board a ship will cause trouble	84	60
10	Women working at sea have less chance to be promoted to higher positions than men	70	49

The responses show that maritime is still seen as a men's job as it has always been seen in the past. There is a strong prejudice against women in maritime domain, especially on board ships. Those biased against women include ship owners too, and this makes the situation even worse by decreasing their chances of finding a job on board. The data shows that being able to find a job on board a ship is not the end of their problems, but just the beginning.

Once they are able to find a job on board a ship, they face another problem related to the perception of women on board by men, because men on board think that the presence of women there will limit their behaviour, prevent them from behaving freely, and hinder their promotion to higher positions. Because of this, they are usually seen as a threat in competition for better positions. On the other hand, “The feedback and reaction for the mistakes by women are not proportionate to the cause,” can be deduced that there is even mobbing. Furthermore, it is widely accepted that women are advised to work ashore units although it is known that they are capable of doing every job except for those requiring physical power as efficiently as men. Men believe women bring trouble along on board and they don't prefer working with them. These kinds of behaviour are also different forms of mobbing and they are discouraging for women, who already suffer from the problems of not only working in a male dominated job but also working in a place far from their families and friends for a long time, and who are not able to get psychological help easily from them or experts because being far from the land. The analysis of data also indicates that women acknowledge the problems they face aboard ship and they need help in coping with hardships such as prejudice, mobbing and fighting against jealousy.

### 3.2 Guidance requirement

Figure 2 shows the percentage of responses given by women to the questions related to guidance requirement which can be seen at Table 2.

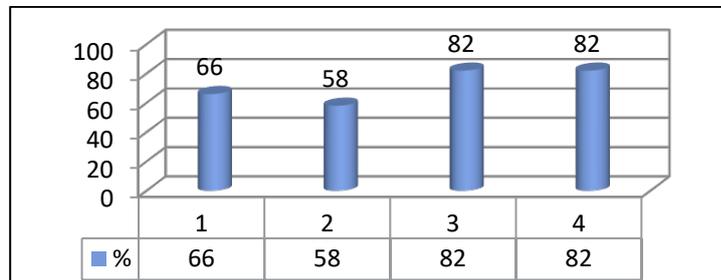


Figure 2. Percentage of Responses Given by Women to the Statements in This Part

Table 2. Statements Used in This Part and Percentage Responses by Women and Men

NO	STATEMENT	I Agree (%)	
		WOMEN	MEN
1	Working on board a ship is mentally more tiring for the female crew members	66	74
2	The female crewmembers feel lonely and helpless on board the ship	58	46
3	Female professionals could perform better if they are given prior education on working in a male dominated workplace	82	72
4	I would prefer at least another women to work with me on a ship	82	79

A high percentage of women agreeing with the statements above show that women in the maritime sector, especially those working on board, are in need of guidance and friendship. Maritime jobs are hard and demanding even for men, who constitute the majority of the personnel on board. There is usually a strong communication among them, so if they have a problem they will share it with each other or if they need help they can easily ask for it from their co-workers. On the other hand, for a woman who already feels isolated because of strong prejudice, it is hard to ask for help or to expect any kind of support from men who are mostly against her presence on board. Therefore, it seems vital to reach women to provide the support they need in maritime via easily available means for them, even when they are at sea.

### 3.3 Problems related to acquiring leadership skills

Figure 3 shows the percentage of responses given by women to the statements related to acquiring leadership skills. These statements can be seen at Table 3.

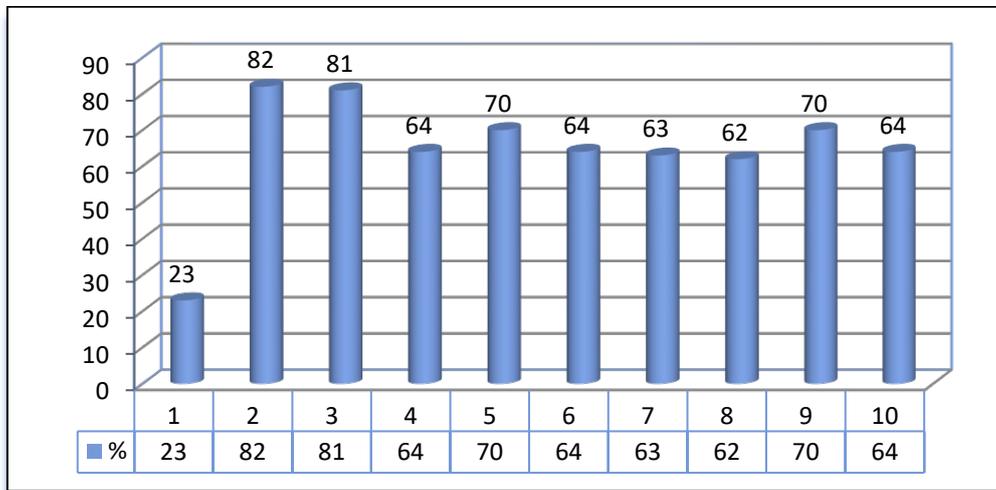


Figure 3. Percentage of Responses Given by Women to the Statements in This Part

Table 3. Statements Used in This Part and Percentage Responses by Women and Men

NO	STATEMENT	I Agree (%)	
		WOMEN	MEN
1	Male staff accepts women as equal on various tasks on board ships.	33	54
2	Men are preferred even if the female crewmembers have the same qualifications.	82	66
3	Women in maritime are likely to experience some form of sexual harassment.	81	66
4	The successful achievements of a female are usually ignored.	64	39
5	When a female crewmember makes a mistake, the feedback and reaction are exaggerated.	70	43
6	Starting from the entry stages, the women are told and advised about the negative aspects of maritime career.	64	67
7	The decisions and ideas of female staff are continuously criticized and questioned.	63	39

8	I feel the women personnel have to work harder to be accepted as equal by the male counterparts and the supervisors	62	46
9	Women working at sea have less chance to be promoted to higher positions than men.	70	49
10	I think the behaviour of male staff discourages the female staff to perform better.	64	49

As the responses show, women feel left out on board ship. They think almost all the attitudes of male personnel have negative implication for them. Although men don't confess to it, it is easy to understand this from the way they act, speak, think and judge. Most women in maritime feel they are not welcome on board and men are ready to find fault with their work. Men's discontent is reflected in the way they behave. They tend to exaggerate the mistakes women make while ignoring their achievements. This causes women to work harder to prove themselves and to get the positions they deserve. Men are still preferred in cases where they have the same qualifications for a job, so women must be much better to be accepted as equal. Unfortunately these kinds of discouraging behaviours have a tremendous effect on women. It causes them to lose self-confidence and enthusiasm towards their job, which means it will be hard for them to struggle to continue working on board if they don't have any support. This may even result in women giving up the struggle and leaving their job, at least those on board. In the light of the data obtained from the survey, it is concluded that females in the sector need to be stronger and equip themselves with some qualifications to cope with the problems they face, to be treated as equal and to get what they deserve. Another equally important point that can be concluded from the survey is that males in maritime sector should receive some kind of "training" to understand and appreciate the place of women in maritime and to get rid of the bias against them. Considering the discrepancy between the responses given to the same statements by women and men, it can be said that men, consciously or unconsciously, may cause women to be alienated from their jobs and this may result in the loss of important positive contributions women may make to maritime.

### 3.4 Suggested ways to overcome the barriers

It is clear that some measures should be taken, and a novel strategy should be adapted to overcome these hardships and to enhance women's leadership qualities, which will hopefully increase the number of women struggling for leadership positions in maritime. But, definitely, there is no magic bullet to solve the leadership gap of women in general and women in maritime in particular [4, 6]. Fortunately this problem does not require magic. There are a number of common sense steps that can be taken as individuals, employers and policy makers to create significant change. Drawing from the survey we administered and taking the suggestions made by the workshop attendees into consideration, we think that two methods can work for women in maritime. These are providing female cadets and staff with effective networks and mentors, and emphasizing authentic leadership qualities in them.

*Networking* means interacting with others to exchange information and developing professional or social contacts. It is an important personal and professional activity for women in maritime since they can meet new people, make new friends, find a new job, develop their current career, explore new career options, or simply broaden their professional horizons. They can also meet

other women from the sector and exchange their experiences. These are rare opportunities for women in maritime because of their working conditions and small number in the sector. These kinds of events also foster solidarity among them and help them find mentors who can provide guidance they may need in particular occasions. Apart from this, women in maritime need to have a good network due to their small percentage in maritime workforce, where there is a lot of bias against them and they are likely to be left out. *Mentoring* is a system of semi-structured guidance whereby one person shares their knowledge, skills and experience to assist others to progress in their own lives and careers. It's important for the mentors to be readily accessible and prepared to offer help as the need arises [7]; however, it is not always possible in maritime. Ships are the places where women have the most problems, where they feel lonely the most, where they are subject to mobbing and harassment, even sexual harassment. To make things worse, they are also the places where it is hardest to find anyone to share their problems with. Thus the best way to provide women in maritime with help seems to be virtual mentoring which is providing mentoring by the help of technological devices such as telephone, email or other means of communication. It is quite a beneficial form of mentoring when mentor and mentee are away from each other and are not likely to meet soon, as is often the case in maritime. By virtual mentoring, perhaps they won't be able to see their mentors face to face, but they will have the advantage of reaching them anytime or anywhere they like.

*Authentic Leadership* is a management style in which the authority figure of a group or organization deals with and communicates with his or her followers in a truthful and direct way. [8] They don't hide their mistakes or weaknesses out of fear of looking weak. They don't try to hide their limitations, either. [9] This does not mean authentic leaders are "soft." In fact, communicating in a direct manner is critical to successful outcomes, but it's done with empathy. The latest studies in the field of leadership describe authentic leadership as an empowering style for women. [10] Another study emphasizes that leading with greater authenticity instead of adapting to other people's expectations may unlock more leadership potential in women and accelerate their impact within their organization. [11] By expressing more of their true self, women embrace a wider range of leadership characteristics needed to run an organization. It is also said that women leaders are more empathetic and flexible, as well as stronger in interpersonal skills than their male counterparts [12]. They are able to bring others around to their point of view or alter their own point of view. They can do this because they genuinely understand and care about where others are coming from. [12] That is an essential trait with respect to the issue of diversity management, which is of vital importance in maritime. A ship is a place where people from all walks of life come together to work and, once they are at sea, they are alone with all kinds of problems that can be caused by coming from different backgrounds and cultures and having different expectations. An authentic leader has the skills to lead them efficiently.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

Like all working women, women in maritime have some problems. These problems are doubled because of working in a male dominated work place and tripled because of being at sea. To cope with them, women need to take up some assisting methods such as networking and virtual mentoring and they need to behave like their true selves, that is, authentically. Access to influential networks is critical to moving up the leadership hierarchy. Some studies have found that the social capital gained from networking with influential leaders is even more important for advancement than job performance. Mentoring and virtual mentoring may enable women in maritime to counsel and get help from experienced people. These will enable them to interact with people from the sector and make their voice heard, and will also help men to have a chance to get to know the women in the sector so that they may appreciate their competence in maritime. Women have some traits like patience, strong interpersonal skills, empathy or flexibility. They should behave like women, not like men, and make use of these traits to the full extent in their interaction with people. Being like themselves and acting naturally will make them authentic and carry them to leadership positions. Authentic leadership is accepted as the best leadership style for women. It shouldn't be forgotten that while women realize themselves and take out the potential they have for the good of the maritime, maritime will be the party that will benefit from the situation the most, because women are the other half of society and without them, like everything else, maritime will also be incomplete.

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