

# Female leaders in maritime professions – Finnish educational aspect

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## ABSTRACT

It has been generally stated that investing in women is the utmost effective way to lift societies, businesses, and even nations. The more there is a gender equality- the more the economic is growing. In the companies which have more female leaders acting, are the achievements better. [1]

The purpose of this paper is to examine the current status of women leadership in maritime sector. What kind of preconditions the leadership education according to STCW requirements and education in master level in maritime institutions (MET), gives for female seafarers in Finland? What kind of managerial skills and knowledge should female mariners gain to success in male dominated industry?

For this paper, I have interviewed Finnish women, who are currently working in managerial level positions in maritime sector. The subjects of the interview were connected to the leadership and managerial skills.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there are globally approximately 1,2 million seafarers sailing at sea, but only 2 per cent of them are women. Most of the female seafarers, up to 94 per cent, are working in the cruise industry. Generally, majority of women are working in cruise ships as hotel staff, but the picture varies significantly worldwide.

The right to receive education and possibilities to work equally haven't been obvious and many barriers have an influence for women seeking into maritime sector. Obstacles can be related to cultural and social matters and to traditional family and practical issues, such as how to combine motherhood with career at sea. [2]

Many international organizations, governmental agencies and private organizations have promoted the progress of women in maritime industry for several decades. A gender equality has been an ambition of the United Nations (UN) and its specialized agencies. The importance of networking platforms and demand for the development of a new strategies to bolster role of the female in the maritime industry has been understood. [2] International Maritime Organization (IMO) started in 1988 a gender programme called "*Women in maritime*". A strategic approach of IMO programme is targeted towards enhancing the contribution of

women as key maritime stakeholders. One of the policy objectives has been improving women's access to maritime training and technology and increasing the percentage of women at the senior-management level within the maritime sector. The theme for annual World Maritime Day for year 2019 was selected to be "*Empowering Women in the Maritime Community*". Awareness of the significance of gender equality in line with the United Nations' development Goals (SDGs) are promoted through this selected theme and also to raise the essential contribution of women globally to the maritime sector. [1]

The women's participation in the leadership roles and managerial positions is a global challenge and a great field of fight to equality. It is estimated that 47 per cent of the total work force consists of women but according to recent research of S&P 500 companies indicated that female represent less than 5 per cent of CEO positions [3]. A gender gap in leadership positions is still a major issue to fight for in all business sectors, also in male dominated domain, like maritime industry.

## **2. MARITIME EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP**

Leadership skills need to be applied by seafarers; not only the master and chief engineer but also by officers on deck and engine room who will prepare themselves to the future higher positions of responsibility. In certain occasions, anyone on board a vessel can be in situation where leadership skills are required in addition to technical skills. Anyhow, many seafarers are continuing their maritime career ashore, often in managerial or leading positions. So, what kind of qualifications are mariners expected to have in respect to leadership skills?

Educational systems differ between countries and possible career paths in maritime sector vary due to these differences. [2]. Educational minimum requirements for seafarers were set in 1978 when International Convention on Standards on Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) Convention was first established. Before that standards and procedures of training varied widely between countries even more despite of the fact that shipping is the most international of all industries. Manila amendments to STCW Convention and Code were made in 2010 which meant major changes to seafarers' education. One of those revisions among the others concerned new requirements on training in leadership, teamwork and resource management on operational and management levels. [3]. Currently there are various courses in MET-institutions for leadership training to meet this STCW demand.

Management level shore-based positions often require a higher educational degree which means that mariners are often motivated to continue their studies to broaden their possibilities in labor market. In Finland, Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK) has offered a Master of Maritime Management programme since 2006 which has been specifically tailored to meet women's demand for a work in land-based organization. One of the main goals of the programme has been to generate equality of female seeking into maritime professions and offer further education which is built on existing STCW based education so that there would be a visible "career-bridge" from ship to shore based managerial professions. [2]

## **2.1 Leadership onboard**

One definition for leadership according to IMO model course on leadership and teamwork: "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" and "leaders carry on this process by applying their leadership knowledge and skills" [4]

According to Devitt and Holford (2010), maritime industry has exceptional characteristics which make it challenging to apply the concept of leadership training in other industries into maritime context. The reasons for this are for example;

- Ships' teams change in certain intervals and are augmented as required. This does not normally occur outside the maritime industry. The duration of the working relationship has an impact on leadership and teamwork
- Ships' teams can vary culturally so that there is less utilization of standard communication phrases. Communication as well as use of interventions and challenges varies due to cultural issues.
- National cross-cultural, organizational, professional and departmental issues associated with the globalization of the maritime industry are affecting on leadership
- Dynamic workload matters on a ship which is operating routinely and affected by external environmental factors, commercial operations, duration of the voyage, administration requirements and supportive mechanism available. [5]

Other factors that differ from shore-based organizations are the fact that seafarers are working long periods of time away from home and their families and in addition the ship is continuously moving working environment that can exposure to various risks during the sea voyage and cargo operations.

## **3. FEMALE LEADERS IN MARITIME SECTOR**

Like earlier mentioned, women are minority in the maritime sector and due to that the remarkable majority of leaders in the maritime industry are men even though proportion of female mariners is growing. HR Consulting published in 2017 a report about women employment in shipping. According to this report over 76 per cent of the female labor force works at administrative, junior and professional level roles and only few are reaching managerial levels or higher. This report also reveals that only 0.17 per cent of women have places on executive leadership teams.

The importance of identifying possible barriers that can hinder women in applying for maritime education and profession is generally paid attention. Stereotyping gender can be one reason why men and women are unequally assessed. It has been also shown that stereotypes have an influence on self-confidence and how the different genders are expected to act in male / female dominated vacancies. One noted obstacle is women's self-evaluation of their competences and leadership skills which is important for any person that would like to seek into a job that requires a certain competences and skills. In another words, person with a lesser belief in themselves would probably not submit an application for a vacancy for which they felt they are not competent enough. According to Ortega, Øvergård and Henden's (2015) research

female maritime officers tend to underestimate their own leadership skills which is opposite effect compared to male maritime officers. [6]

Differences in the leadership styles of female and male have been found to be relatively small due to the pressure towards similarity of men and women leaders. Studies about gender affecting in leadership have shown that leadership styles of female can be more effective and productive nowadays when organizations are less hierarchical. In addition, female leaders are participatory and cooperative by character. [7]

#### **4. INTERVIEW OF FINNISH WOMEN IN MARITIME INDUSTRY**

For this paper, there have been interviewed Finnish women seafarers' and their subjective experiences of women leadership in maritime industry. Data was collected during Spring 2019 by in-depth interviews from 3 participants who were selected from SAMK alumni or they were invited by using professionals contacts. Interviews were conducted by email or personal interview.

Background of these women were bachelor's degree of sea captain program or master's degree in maritime management and they all have also seafaring experience. All participants had quite long working history from the industry and currently their vacancies are in leading managerial positions in maritime sector either at sea or ashore. Details of background in this paper are wanted to keep very limited due to protection of participants identities.

The author of this paper acknowledges that data collected to this paper is very limited and exposes only objective views of a few female from a one country. The purpose of this paper has only been to bring out a small sample of a present view among women leaders in maritime industry.

The interview consisted of five questions which were presented to the participants in English:

1. What kind of preconditions for leadership in maritime sector the sea captain's education gave to you?
2. In your opinion, what kind of characters is needed for a good leader?
3. Does gender influence on leadership?
4. In your opinion, what factors could promote the position of women as a leader?
5. What should be taken into consideration in the maritime leadership education?

##### **4.1. Results of the interview**

Each participant was graduated from bachelor level sea captain programme already a time ago when their curriculums were according to STCW 95. According to the interviews, women felt that the leadership training was hardly paid attention at that time in Met institutions and they have got support afterwards from superior onboard or their leadership skills have developed in working life.

The second question concerned the characters of a good leader. Women in this interview described that a good leader should have understanding of different types of personalities and

ability to communicate effectively with subordinates. A good leader is approachable, available for support as needed and accept suggestions from the subordinates. The leader needs to know where the organization is heading and direct the others to that goal. The subordinates should be encouraged to grow in their positions and allowed to complete their tasks on their own without micromanaging unless support is required. Other charters of a good leader were described to be; fairness, skills to listen to others and capabilities for effective teamwork.

To question, does gender influence on a leadership, the participants said that depending of a culture a gender may have effect on a leadership. In this sentence a culture can mean either organizational culture or culture of people from different countries. According to women, in cultures where male dominance is seen as a norm, women in leading positions might need to work harder and adjust their style of a leadership in addition, expectation towards female leader can be different as towards men. If it is considered as a normal to have women in the management there might be less pressure for them to conform, and the community probably would not expect them to, at least to same extent if all the other leaders were male. It is not a question of gender alone, in workplaces with a lot of diversity different leadership styles are probably more accepted if the leader demonstrates the skills needed for the job. Also, the gender experience and cultural background of the personnel you need to lead have an influence on the leading style.

Factors that could promote the position of a women as a leader were diversity embracing, condemning any inappropriate behavior or speech, whether it is a gender related, racial or anything else inconvenient. Giving the possibility for women to try their wings, like men can grow as a leader and the same way women will grow in their positions if given a chance and assistance. According to experiences of these interviewed Finnish women, female leaders are better listeners and can be therefore seen more approachable. Also, patience was said to be the benefit of women which can be important character in situations where careful consideration is needed.

The last question was about the issues that should be taken into consideration in the maritime leadership education. The answers received from interviews were strongly related to cultural awareness and good intercommunication between people.

According to one participant, the leadership onboard was seen like this: *“Leaders onboard a ship have a common goal: to make everything run smoothly, safely and cost-effectively, in that way leaders in the maritime sector are not different from their counterparts in any office shoreside. However, the cultural diversity onboard (up to 40-50 different nationalities) combined with widely varied levels of education and training the crew members have, can pose a problem and the leader needs to be able to adjust their style depending on the situation. It would be good if awareness of cultural differences could be incorporated in the maritime leadership education. Normally the majority onboard sets the norm for the leadership style, e.g. having East Europeans as the majority of leaders is quite different to having Swedish, although naturally there are individual differences between leaders as well. Sometimes a leader can unintentionally offend their subordinates, and if that person is the only one onboard*

*from that particular culture they often just need to adjust to the situation, as the majority sees their way of doing things as correct and are unaware that their way of behaving is offensive to somebody. Especially senior management should be able to pick up on this and show a good example how to create a good atmosphere.”*

The leadership style that works onboard a vessel and ashore are seen different. The working environment itself makes a difference in the leadership.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The Manila amendments to the STCW Convention 1978 brought the requirements of leadership training to become compulsory for all seafarers at the operational and management levels. MET institutions are providing this education with varying ways. However, it seems that there is room for development and improvement. To develop of good leader, you need to receive leadership training and education but also experience from real world. According to Mori (2014), jurisdiction and context should be taken into account when leadership training in Met institutions are tailored. Also, leadership education should bear in mind trainees personal progress over the long term. [8] Cultural awareness and good communicational skills were highlighted among the interviewed women and the importance of these skills should be emphasized in the maritime education.

Women working in maritime professions are acting in environment where models of leadership are formulated by rules of male-dominated domain and female working in that industry are adapting to that style. The organizational structures and work force are traditionally considered to meet the needs of male gender. Certain qualifications are connected to the men and preferred for a leader, such as independence, determination and assertiveness. Behavior of gender can be seen with different eyes, self-confidence or assertiveness of men can be seen as arrogant or abrasive conduct in women. On the other hand, qualities female or feminine style of leading are not necessarily respected similar way than stereotypical male leading style.

In Finland, those women who have continued to SAMK Master of Maritime Management studies have been highly motivated, more efficient and percentage of graduation has been higher than among the male students. Almost 100 percent of female who have been accepted to the programme have completed their studies and have also changed their jobs to land base organization during the next year after graduation [2]. It seems that women are wanted work force also in shore side leading professions and the higher degree in maritime management have improved their possibilities in labor market.

It can be seen that women starting to break the “glass ceilings” in man dominated industry and the progress is assisted by the maritime educational possibilities.

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