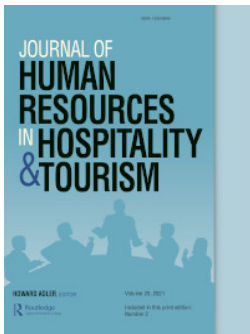


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## Women in hospitality leadership: barriers and best practices in Aruba

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### ABSTRACT

The current study uses qualitative semi-structured interviews to assess the perceived barriers and best practices of women at two different levels of leadership in the hospitality industry in Aruba. There were differences between levels related to acknowledgement and response to the glass ceiling, stereotyping, and work-life balance. Absence of formal higher education did not limit advancement to higher level positions. The majority of women used an inclusive, democratic leadership style unless it was deemed ineffective, and mentoring played a large role in the success of women in leadership. Implications for academics and practitioners in small island economies are discussed.

### KEYWORDS

Women; hospitality leadership; glass ceiling; Aruba; small island economies

## Introduction

The majority of organizations that comprise the hospitality industry employ many females in the employee ranks and even entry level management positions but do not have representative numbers in the middle and upper level management positions. An example of this is found in the foodservice industry in the U.S., where women represent 56 percent of first-line supervisors (National Restaurant Association, 2017), but their representation is severely lacking at the CEO level with only 4 publicly held restaurant companies having women in the top position (Maze, 2018). Another example is in the lodging industry where a recent report by the American Hotel and Lodging Association's Women in Lodging Forum found that women represented only 5% of CEO positions in U.S. hotels and only 9% of president positions despite a large number of women in lower levels of the lodging industry (Clausing, 2018). The events industry is also comprised of a large majority of women, but only 20% of them are in leadership positions (Ledger, 2013).

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It is notable that the hospitality industry differs from many other industries because of the nature of the job. This is particularly salient with how the employees work closely with one another during long and irregular work hours (Brownell, 1993a). These differences can lead to unique impacts for women employed in the industry. Santero-Sanchez, Segovia-Pérez, Castro-Nuñez, Figueroa-Domecq, and Talón-Ballesterro (2015) developed a job quality index for the hospitality and tourism industry. Their findings suggest that women tend to hold lower quality and lower paying jobs in hospitality than men do.

More noticeably, in small island economies that are heavily tourism dependent where hospitality and tourism jobs are available, equal representation of women in upper level leadership positions is also lacking. In Aruba, for example, there are very few general managers in the lodging and timeshare industry that are females (LaSorte, personal interview, 2019). The island of Aruba has more than 50% females working in the accommodation sector, but still has a very small percentage in higher-level leadership positions (Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) Aruba, 2019).

As will be shown in the current study, numerous researches have looked at what barriers are perceived by women in the hospitality industry (e.g., Mooney & Ryan, 2009; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018). However more research is required in order to determine what factors influence women in leadership positions, what are perceived barriers to female leaders, and if and how these factors interact (Yukl, 2013). This study will use expectancy theory and work-family border theory as theoretical frameworks.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to try to understand the best practices by women in leadership positions in the hospitality industry in Aruba for dealing with barriers they may face. This leads to the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived barriers preventing women from being promoted to the top positions in the hospitality industry in Aruba?
2. How have women who are in these top positions overcome these barriers and what are best practices noted by women in leadership positions in Aruba?

## Literature review

Previous literature has shown that there has been at least a negative bias toward women as leaders regardless of industry for decades (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Based on a report from Catalyst, only 26.45% of executive and senior level officials and management positions are held

by women, and only 24 women (5%) hold CEO positions in the S&P 500 companies (Catalyst, 2019).

The Gender Equality Index, 2017, a report by the European Institute for Gender Equality that measured gender equality in the European Union in the period 2005-2015, states that of all the domains that are regularly evaluated, the domain of power between the genders in the workplace has the lowest score (Gender Equality Index, 2017, p 70). This conclusion is based on the fact that although women make up half of the workforce and tertiary graduates, they are still exempted from many decision-making positions and this is best visible on corporate boards. This is primarily caused by gender stereotypes in the corporate cultures. Lyness and Thompson (2000) systematically compared matched pairs of male and female executives to find barriers and facilitators to advancement. Results found that women perceived more barriers to leadership positions than men. Women reported having to develop relationships and maintain a good track record more than men did to facilitate advancement in their careers (Lyness & Thompson, 2000).

In a study of 60,470 employees across a diverse range of organizations by Elsesser and Lever (2011), found that while 54% of respondents did not have a preference of the gender of their boss, a much greater percentage of the remaining respondents preferred to have a male boss rather than a female boss. Some of the reasons listed for preferring a female boss were that they are more nurturing and compassionate, while those favoring male leaders focused on females being too emotional (Elsesser & Lever, 2011). Studies such as these show that there are biases that exist that can cause real or imagined barriers to women as they try to advance in their careers.

### ***Barriers to women in hospitality leadership***

Sahoo and Lenka (2016) found that organizational barriers to women's advancement include an absence of inclusive policies, lack of career planning for women, and a lack of upper management support. Boone et al. (2013) argued that the barriers for women in moving up in their careers are more frequently self-imposed and that oftentimes the organizations fail to assist women in overcoming these barriers. These barriers include lack of confidence, emphasizing work-life balance, and prioritizing family responsibilities. Workplace-imposed barriers were also noted including discrimination and stereotyping (Boone et al., 2013).

The purpose of a study by Brownell (1993b) was to understand perceptions of career-related obstacles for women in middle-management in the hospitality industry. The top five issues reported by women in this study were the "old boys' network", the lack of women mentors, the job

characteristics associated with hospitality work, the lack of role models, and work/family conflict (Brownell, 1993b). The “old boys’ network” is the idea that there are difficulties with networking for women because the men are hesitant to let them in, or opportunities are rarer and the persistence of a masculine culture in the workplace slows progress for women (Mooney & Ryan, 2009). The issue with the lack of women mentors has been tied to the fact that women in higher positions may not have time to mentor since they are dealing with similar barriers, and women may also be hesitant to help other women that may compete with them (Brownell, 1993a). One of the barriers listed in a study by Mooney and Ryan (2009) was also the job characteristic of long hours expected by managers in the hospitality industry.

Mooney and Ryan (2009) conducted interviews with women in hotels in Australia and New Zealand to understand what prevented them from reaching upper management positions. The barriers differed depending on how far into their career the respondents were and how flexible they were to being mobile or moving for work. There has been a question of whether these effects are due to the barriers in the workplace or if these are decisions by the women themselves that prevent them from progressing (Mooney & Ryan, 2009). In a separate study, Clevenger and Singh (2013) designed a questionnaire to understand perceptions of barriers in the hospitality industry. Barriers included the glass ceiling, the “old boys’ network”, and societal gender norms. Furthermore, statistical analysis found that females had a stronger perception of organizational and societal barriers to advancement when compared to males (Clevenger & Singh, 2013).

The following sections are the major categories determined by research related to gender-related barriers and work-life balance barriers.

### ***Gender related Barriers- Glass ceiling phenomenon, stereotyping and role expectations***

The glass ceiling phenomenon has been generally defined as the invisible barrier that prevents women from moving up to the highest positions in a company and that impede women’s career growth and workplace advancement (Boone et al., 2013). The U.S. Federal Glass Ceiling Commission describes the glass ceiling as a barrier that cannot be seen and is insurmountable for women and minorities to rise up on the corporate ladder despite their qualifications and achievements. (Baxter & Wright, 2000; Britton & Williams, 2000; Wright & Baxter, 2000).

According to Yukl (2013, p.448), gender-based discrimination is caused by beliefs that women are less qualified for leadership roles than men. These beliefs are based on assumptions that serve as the main explanations

for the glass ceiling: masculine characteristics deliver more effective leadership, gender stereotyping and role expectations. According to Yukl (2013) other possible reasons for the glass ceiling include: lack of effective mentorship, opposing family demands, “old boys’ network”, lack of opportunity to gain experience, exclusion from internal networks, performance standards that are higher for women than for men.

Innate biases can also be partially blamed for the glass ceiling (Daft, 2015), yet also for phenomenon like gender prejudice and stereotyping and the “old boys’ network” where men in top management often choose someone similar to them. Stereotypes suggest that women tend to be more emotional than men and that for women in leadership positions, showing emotion can be negatively perceived (Brescoll, 2016). These concerns by women about being perceived as emotional can reduce their effectiveness in leadership positions (Brescoll, 2016).

Female hotel managers in Singapore were surveyed on factors that had contributed to their success including their interpersonal skills, leadership skills, determination, hard work, job knowledge, and experience (Li & Wang Leung, 2001). Barriers included lack of access to networks and work-family conflict. Almost all of the respondents felt there was a glass ceiling preventing their advancement (Li & Wang Leung, 2001). Women in this study also reported lack of family support for their work.

### *Work/life balance*

Grzywacz and Carlson (2007) defined work-life balance as the “accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domains” (p. 458). When women’s perspectives on work-life balance were compared across Gen X, Gen Y, and Baby Boomers, there were concerns amongst all generations that family-work conflicts inhibit career advancement and that for some, work had to be sacrificed to care for family needs (Roebuck, Smith, & El Haddaoui, 2013).

Men and women in Australia were interviewed to understand their issues regarding gender relations in the work place and work-life balance (Connell, 2005). One of the issues presented was the lack of support by their domestic partner at home. Many of the women reported having to do all of the domestic work in addition to their full-time job, juggling responsibilities (Connell, 2005). Women in leadership positions who had at least one child in Vienna, Austria were interviewed for a study by Schueller-Weidekamm and Kautzky-Willer (2012), and children were cited as the biggest obstacle for getting to a top leadership position.

Hoobler, Hu, and Wilson (2010) conducted a meta-analysis to understand work to family conflict (WFC) and family to work conflict (FWC),

specifically regarding the impact of these two on performance, pay, and promotion. Both WFC and FWC had a negative relationship with career satisfaction and perceptions of performance (Hoobler et al., 2010). This meant that not being able to balance work and life issues led to dissatisfaction with work and poor performance at work. When women were willing to take the work home with them and let it invade the personal life domain, it increased the amount of pay they received. This ability to bring work home with them was not possible for all women but did benefit those who could (Hoobler et al., 2010).

## **Context of Aruba**

Tourism destinations such as Aruba, that have a heavy reliance on hospitality and tourism organizations, depend upon a large availability of trained and educated workforce to staff the resorts and lodging properties that support the economy. Aruba derives the majority of its GDP from tourism and the hospitality sector with the overall services sector accounting for more than 75% of the GDP (Aruba GDP, 2019).

The employed labor force in Aruba in 2017 was comprised of 52,400 people between the ages of 15-74, of which approximately 52% were female (Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) Aruba, Statistical Trends 2019). Of the employed labor force, 13% are in the accommodation sector (7206 people) of which 55% are women. Similar to the numbers in the U.S., there are limited numbers of upper management positions in the hospitality industry in Aruba filled by women (LaSorte, personal interview, 2019).

Due to the high demand for leaders in the hospitality and tourism sectors in Aruba, the island nation of Aruba has been trying to develop people educated to manage and lead those hospitality and tourism operations. According to the University of Aruba, in the past 4 years an average of 65% of the students enrolled in the first year of the Bachelor's program in Hospitality and Tourism were females. This can be an indication that there is an interest of Aruban women seeking higher positions in the industry (FHTMS Administration Office, 2019). The following section discusses the theoretical frameworks used to inform the current study.

## **Theoretical frameworks**

### ***Expectancy theory***

The expectancy model originally developed by Vroom (1964) suggests that action will lead to an expected outcome and specifically, that motivations for certain work-related behaviors will result in corresponding performances or outcomes. The expectancy theory explains how employees are

motivated to behave or work in a certain way based on the expected outcomes that may result.

Expectancy theory may explain why women choose or do not choose certain career paths (Brooks, 1988). Hollenbeck, Ilgen, Ostroff, and Vancouver (1987) suggested that the differences in pay gap may result from women having a lower expectation for wages and compensation than men and are therefore motivated to take a lower paying job. Hollenbeck et al. (1987) argue that people tend to choose a job that has employees that match their own demographic as well, thus possibly dissuading women from working hard to achieve top leadership positions traditionally held by men.

### ***Work/family border theory***

One of the frequently noted barriers to women in the workplace is the demand for their availability which leads to issues with work/life balance (Carvalho, Costa, Lykke, & Torres, 2018). The work/family border theory was introduced by Clark (2000) as a way of explaining how people transition between their life at work and their life with their family. According to Clark (2000), people cross the borders between the domains of work and family all the time. Clark (2000) found that people were proactive rather than reactive to the conflicts and difficulties caused by work/life balance and they developed tools to help provide balance in their life. It was also found that employees with greater work/family conflict had lower life satisfaction (Lambert, Kass, Piotrowski, & Vodanovich, 2006).

Emslie and Hunt (2009) suggested that women may have to do more border crossing than men during their work and family life. Furthermore, the greater the segmentation between the two domains of work and life, the lower the conflict and the more positive spillover (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010).

Cowan and Hoffman (2007) interviewed workers regarding how they dealt with work/life conflicts. Their findings suggest that organizations should be flexible with time designated for work, location (such as working from home), how the organization evaluates the employee's work, and compensation. The pressures may be greater for women when there is a greater societal expectation for women's involvement in the family domain and their domestic partners are more likely to work outside of the home (Boone et al., 2013).

### **Methodology**

A qualitative methodology was used to gain understanding from the experiences of female leaders in the hospitality industry in Aruba. In depth

interviews are especially beneficial for gaining deep understanding in urgent issues (McCracken, 1988), and as such, this study used semi-structured interviews with women in the hospitality industry at two levels of leadership: lower to mid-level (MLE), and top level (TE). The titles of the positions differed per organization. Based on the information received from the organization, women at the different levels were identified for interviews. Examples of titles and responsibilities are:

- -Top/upper level: General Manager (GM), Resort manager, Hotel manager, CEO, CMO, Director, Department Head. Examples of responsibilities are: overseeing total property or total department and managing people at manager and supervisory levels.
- -Middle/Lower level: Managers and Supervisors. Examples of responsibilities are: overseeing a smaller area of the hotel or part of a department, and managing people at supervisory or operational levels.

Purposive sampling is most useful when the goal of the research is to describe a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The number of people to include in the sample is reliant upon access to as well as the depth of the data gained from the interviews (McCracken, 1988). While this number may be as small as eight (McCracken, 1988), a list of at least thirty possible respondents that satisfy the previously specified characteristics was developed through snowball sampling after consulting an initial list of contacts developed by the Aruba Hospitality and Tourism Association. Respondents were recruited by email and telephone and were provided with a brief explanation of the study before requesting their voluntary participation.

Prior to any recording of data, consent was obtained from all respondents, the respondents were assured of confidentiality, and the respondents were able to opt out of the study at any time during the interview process. Answers to the interview protocol were elicited through face-to-face, in-person interviews that lasted approximately one hour in length. Interviews were conducted in the work place of the respondent chosen by the respondent, typically in a quiet room such as their office, the conference room, the lobby or the coffee shop.

Questions for the interviews were developed after an in-depth literature review. Completing a literature review before developing an interview protocol enables the specification of categories and relationships to help organize the data (McCracken, 1988). Using the list of questions maintains a consistency between each interview and allows the interviewer to focus on the answers given by the respondent. However, leaving room for further questions allows for the interviewer to take advantage of any opportunities

to gain greater detail by pursuing expanded explanation of answers to the questions (McCracken, 1988).

At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer explained the purpose of the interview and how the responses would be used. The researchers removed any personal identifiers from any transcripts to help ensure confidentiality.

The first section of the survey contained demographic questions to gain simple descriptive details about the respondent guiding further understanding of the respondents' answers to the open-ended questions (McCracken, 1988). The main portion of the survey was comprised of questions related to barriers (RQ1), overcoming barriers and best practices (RQ2), developed after an extensive literature review including some questions used in a study conducted by Baumgartner and Schneider (2010, p. 573).

The barriers that were assessed as categories in this study include the most common barriers for women as found in literature such as the glass ceiling, stereotyping, work family demands, mentors, personality traits, and knowledge and education and can be categorized in the three types of explanations for women's underrepresentation in high level positions (Northouse, 2010), which are:

- Human Capital: education, work-home conflict, developmental opportunities (including encouragement and inclusion in networks).
- Prejudice: gender stereotypes, biased perceptions and evaluations.
- Gender differences: style, effectiveness and traits.

Overall, data was analyzed and coded by two distinct researchers following data saturation to ensure reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2013). Saturation occurs when additional respondents do not provide any new details and data collection can cease (Patten & Newhart, 2017).

## Results

A total of eighteen females were interviewed and half of the respondents were senior or top-level executives in hospitality and tourism locations (noted as TE), while half were in the middle to lower management positions (noted as MLE). The majority of respondents were educated with at least some college (88.9%) and the majority of these women had bachelor's degrees (68.75%) or master's degrees (18.75%). The large majority of women had been with their organization for more than 5 years (66.7%) and there were 33.33% with more than 10 years of experience. Ages of interviewees ranged from 22 years old to 56 years old and the mean age for the top managers was 49.7 years old while the mean age for the middle to lower level managers was 34.8 years old. See [Table 1](#) for more details.

**Table 1.** Demographic Status of the Participants.

Participant	Current Position	Age	Education	Years with current company
TE 1	Manager of Hotel & Casino	53	BA	4 years
TE 2	Department Head	40	BA	16 years
TE 3	Director of Room Operations	49	BA	6 years
TE 4	HR Director	57	BA	27 years
TE 5	Director of Resort Experience	31	BA	2.5 years
TE 6	F&B and Banquet Manager	55	BA	29 years
TE 7	GM	55	High School	23 years
TE 8	CEO	56	BA	Less than 1 year
TE 9	Chief Marketing Officer	51	MBA	8 years
MLE 1	HR Manager	28	BA	9 years
MLE 2	Marketing Manager	32	BA	5 years
MLE 3	Credit Manager	40	BA	11 years
MLE 4	Reservations Manager	42	3-year College	17 years
MLE 5	PR & Marketing Manager	29	3-year College	Less than 1 year
MLE 6	Business Manager	45	MBA	7 years
MLE 7	Banquet Manager	34	MBA	1.5 years
MLE 8	HR Coordinator	41	BA	8 years
MLE 9	Sales Executive	22	High School	4 years

Note. TE = Top Executive; MLE = Middle Lower Executive

### Content analysis

In answering RQ1, data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and questions that asked the participants about their perceptions of the glass ceiling, stereotyping, work family demands, mentors, personality traits, and knowledge and education. In order to determine the perceptions of the managers related to these topics, the data was coded and assessed for content themes. Each of the three investigators independently coded the data and conducted their own thematic analyses. Once completed, the data was triangulated by bringing the sets of analyses together for evaluation. Finally, assessing the results, various themes were determined in each content area and agreed upon. The themes and implications are discussed in the following paragraphs.

### Glass ceiling

Data analysis shows that the majority of women believe that the glass ceiling exists as a barrier and they have encountered it in their careers. Those who have not encountered the glass ceiling phenomenon were younger, belonging to the lower management level (MLE).

### Themes

Almost twenty percent of the respondents did not know what a glass ceiling was and asked for an explanation. A significant number of the respondents agreed that the glass ceiling is something that women have control over, that they create it themselves, and that it can be overcome or broken. The majority of managers with this opinion were in top management.

“The glass ceiling is what you make of it.” (TE2)

“It is up to women to break it (the glass ceiling).” (TE1)

As to what advice the interviewees would give to young female professionals for managing the glass ceiling, it could be noted that the advice covered both cognitive and behavioral aspects. A summary of the advice is:

- Believe in yourself.
- Be present and let your voice be heard.
- Don't be afraid of challenges.
- Get out of your comfort zone.
- Put in the work.
- Learn and adapt.
- Have the competence, skills and experience needed.
- Get things done and work hard.

As one top level executive (TE2) summarized: “*You can do anything you set your mind to. Don't be limited by your gender*”.

Another mid-level manager (MLE3) stated: “*If you think you can do it, do it!*”

### **Interpretation**

The glass ceiling is a phenomenon that is perceived to exist in the hospitality industry in Aruba and although many of the females interviewed acknowledged that they have encountered it, they did not express a sense of helplessness about this issue. On the contrary, the top-level managers (TE) compared to the many of the MLE had this “fighting spirit” that was noticeable in the responses.

### **Stereotyping and role expectations**

According to the literature review, stereotyping of women is one of the common barriers that females face in their careers.

### **Themes**

Asking what women use as strategies when confronted with stereotyping revealed the following themes: proving oneself and being confident in their performance, also being prepared and capable. These themes are considered a continuous process and as one top level manager stated: “*Never stop looking at yourself and how you can do better.*” (TE2)

Overall the women used their knowledge, expertise and confidence as strategies to counteract stereotyping. Strategies also involved including men on your team and educating them.

When asked what modifications they made in their actions and behaviors in order to be perceived differently based on their gender, the following themes emerged: keep your emotions in check, adapt and be conscious about your expressions, be more tactful and learn the language of men. This was expressed in the following way by one of the respondents:

*“Being a female you always have to be on top of your game. We have to do more, especially the higher you get.” (TE9)*

Interestingly one respondent mentioned that she had to become softer and less aggressive (TE) while another one had to become more assertive (MLE).

### **Interpretation**

Many women with longer career paths have created their own strategies of coping with stereotyping. Two MLE women who were younger, stated that they had not encountered stereotyping. Modifications in action and behavior based on gender occurred in most of the respondent groups, however this was linked to the level of management at which they operate. Modifications were mostly made by TE, while in the MLE level, the majority stated that they did not make any changes in their actions and behaviors due to their gender.

*“I am who I am, I am a woman, I am sensitive, people know that, and that is fine, I would not change”. (MLE1)*

### **Work-Family demands**

One of the barriers that is often faced by women in leadership positions is work-family demands and this was assessed by asking the women to describe any conflicts that professional women face when trying to manage both a career and family life.

### **Themes**

The first theme to be revealed regarding work-family demands was that of guilty feelings. Many of the respondents felt that trying to balance work and home life was important, but very difficult to do. They felt guilty when their work life imposed on their family or personal life. The majority of women stated that work impacted family life, but not the other way

around. Many women believed that the impact on family life caused a sacrifice in time spent with their family. There were many common responses such as needing a supportive family and/or spouse and that helped mitigate the negative impact. They felt that their family helped them stay motivated and inspired them in their work. For some, the motivation of knowing that they were a provider of the family kept them on track.

Some of the comments by top executives were:

“Don’t be afraid to ask for help when you need it. Don’t be too tough to ask for help.” (TE1)

“As a woman in leadership, you cannot be a mom as you would like to be.” (TE3)

“Woman’s hurdles are more in the social aspects. Personal life can provide you with the support and confidence that you need to proceed believing in yourself.” (TE8)

“Women have to learn to not see it as being there for your family but see it as creating something better for your family” (TE4)

These statements show the need for women in leadership to ask for help when they need it and also that they may have to use reprioritization regarding tasks both at the office and at home to keep a balance between work and family.

### **Interpretation**

Most women did not feel that their family created a barrier for their work life, but that their work life created a challenge for their family life. When the women had children, this became more apparent, but even women without children recognized the extra challenges to this. On the other hand, several of the top executives presented their view in how important it was to keep focused on the work and do well. The job helps them to create something better for their family and this was noted by a couple of women at both ranks of management.

### **Mentors and/or role models**

Another barrier that is often faced by women in leadership positions is the importance of and often lack of mentors and role models. This characteristic was assessed by asking the women interviewed to describe what a mentor was to them and to discuss any significant mentors that they have had. The question was also asked about whether their organization had a formal mentoring program or not. Finally, the respondents were asked about whether other women come to them to get help or mentoring advice.

## **Themes**

The themes found in the mentor and/or role model content analysis was that the definition of mentors clearly stated that they provide guidance, they are honest, provide advice, and they are someone to look up to. Most of the female leaders that were interviewed had male mentors rather than female mentors. When asked about formal mentoring, the common theme identified was that formal mentoring would be nice, but some thought the formality may make it difficult to be effective unless it was specifically related to the job and taken seriously. A smaller number of respondents do not think it is needed and even indicated that it could be intimidating and inefficient.

When asked about whether they had been mentors before, the large majority stated that they are mentors and help other women with personal and work related issues, but a few women said that they help other women but would not consider themselves mentors. Two quotes below from top executives also shows a theme that was stated by several others in the interviews about how or if women help each other out.

“Women are competing and we should not; let’s help each other.” (TE4)

“If it is not within the same company, we want each other to succeed. Where you may have some issues will be in the same company where people are competing.” (TE8)

## **Interpretation**

It appears from the interviews that mentorship is seen as a positive thing for women in leadership and they take advantage of it for the most part. One surprising finding is that the majority of mentors identified were male. The comment made by TE4 above regarding competing with each other rather than helping each other out is also telling. These themes could be pointing to the lack of women mentors or the lack of willingness of women to mentor other women as they try to move up the ranks in leadership.

## **Personality traits**

The barrier of personality traits can have many components to it and the interview questions focused on leadership style and communication style. Another interview question asked the respondents if they had opinions on why women may not pursue upper management positions.

## **Themes**

The first theme concerning leadership style revealed in the interview transcripts was that many of the women leaders stated that they use a democratic leadership style and they focus on being open and flexible with their

employees as long as the results are there. Another theme that came up was that the women felt empathy toward employee issues and they provided feedback to people. Many of the respondents stated that they changed their leadership style based on who they were working with, especially when outcomes are not reached.

One of the top executives stated that she is judged by the look on her face if she is not smiling all the time at work.

*“I (have been told that I) have a resting bitch face. I am unconscious about the expression on my face, but other people judge me for that.” (TE2)*

These themes show that many women try to use an inclusive leadership style, but also are cognizant of adjusting their leadership style as needed for different people. They also are aware that they may be judged for the look on their face or their actions and therefore need to make a concerted effort to be seen as professional. The theme of being flexible and creating a comfortable leadership style by developing relationships was also echoed in a few of the interviews.

*“My leadership style is the result of people themselves... a reaction to experiences” (TE4)*

*“Definitely, I am not authoritative.” (MLE4)*

When looking at the themes regarding communication style, the following came out: the preference for how to communicate and the chosen communication strategy is predominantly face-to-face, followed by using email or WhatsApp as a way to have things documented.

The information provided by the respondents to the question on why other women do not pursue upper management positions was very interesting and consistent across most of the women in this study. The consistent themes were fear, lack of confidence, not believing in themselves, not wanting to leave their comfort zone and take on the responsibility, and a few women mentioned that it was a man's world or the 'good old boys' network that prevented women from wanting to get into the leadership levels. Some of the direct quotes show why women may want to stay away from these leadership positions.

*“We are careful with what we say or do because we don't want to be seen as a bitch.” (TE1)*

*“There are people that understand enough about leadership positions to know that you actually work more. Others think that once you are a boss you can relax but you work more.” (TE8)*

### **Interpretation**

The majority of women felt that they were effective leaders using a democratic and inclusive leadership style, but many did realize the benefits of

being flexible and using different styles with different employees. The key touch point for the leadership style was that the results had to be there and if not, the style could be adjusted. Communication style by women tended to be focused on face-to-face in order to have that personal contact with employees, but then a follow-up using documentation was important also. Women in multiple quotes stated that they felt that they did not want to be perceived badly, so that may impact their freedom in leadership and communication styles. The primary reasons that women had for identifying why women did not go into upper management positions was fear and lack of confidence.

### **Knowledge and education**

The last barrier examined in this study was knowledge and education. The respondents were asked the specific question about what role they felt education plays in advancing one's career.

### **Themes**

The majority of women with leadership positions in the hospitality industry in Aruba find that education is important either just to be more knowledgeable or as a support for further growth or refreshment of knowledge. However, there was a group of women that believe that education is not as important in the hospitality industry and that other factors determine growth and promotion such as: performance, achieving targets and attitude.

### **Interpretation**

Although most women agree that education is important, the ideas about education differed. Most of the upper level women find education important. Some statements were:

*“Very important, makes you more knowledgeable, open and confident.” (TE7)*

*“A key role for your critical thinking skills, research skills and writing skills.” (TE9).*

In the MLE group, the majority finds that education in the hospitality sector is only important as a support or growth accelerator.

*“Education is very important because it lets you stand out on paper, but for advancement they don't look at education. Actual performance is more important in this industry.” (MLE6)*

*“Differs per industry. In hospitality, they do not look at education.” (MLE2)*

*“Not necessary as they will teach you, but not unimportant.” (MLE7)*

In conclusion, in the hospitality industry in Aruba someone without education can grow into leadership and this is mainly due to the fact that

hotels provide their own relevant training. Also, other parameters such as successful performance weigh more in growth opportunities.

### **Potential best practices**

In order to assess RQ2 related to best practices, interview questions were reviewed in further details to review strategies used to overcome potential barriers reviewed earlier. The questions that specifically addressed this were:

- What advice would you give any young female professional for managing the glass ceiling in their careers?
- Assuming that you've encountered stereotypes in the workforce, define what, if any, strategies you have used to counteract them.
- What circumstances would make you want to change or adapt your leadership style?
- Did you have to modify any of your actions or behaviors in order to be perceived differently based on your gender? Were these modifications successful? What did you expect to achieve by doing this?

Recurring advice in managing the glass ceiling was related to personal characteristics and perseverance such as believing in oneself, being courageous and not giving up. Another best practice identified is to be prepared and put in the work. These best practices have an overlap with the best practices used to specifically counteract stereotyping. The main themes identified were proving oneself, being confident in performance and being prepared and capable.

Regarding leadership style and possibly having to adjust their styles, the best practice identified here was that most of the women chose an open, flexible, inclusive and democratic leadership style if it is effective. If not, the style was changed to more controlling, directive and autocratic.

Finally, the best practice as to modifications in actions and behaviors to be perceived differently based on gender indicated that many of the respondents had to make some modifications in the way they were presenting themselves; be less emotional, more tactful and in control so as to blend in and adapt to the environment.

### **Discussion, conclusions and implications**

This study set out to investigate and answer the following research questions: What are the perceived barriers preventing women from being promoted to the top positions in the hospitality industry in Aruba? And how

have women who are in these top positions overcome these barriers and what are best practices noted by women in leadership positions in Aruba?

In RQ1, from all the different barriers that women can encounter in their career the focus of this research was on six selected barriers that were prevalent in the literature: the glass ceiling, stereotyping, work family demands, mentors, personality traits, and knowledge and education.

### ***Glass ceiling***

the majority of women in the upper management levels in the hospitality industry in Aruba have encountered the glass ceiling. Younger managers belonging to lower management levels encountered the glass ceiling less or not at all. This trend in age and experience with the glass ceiling phenomenon is also seen in the attitude that women have toward the glass ceiling being self-imposed or not. Most of the top executives find that the glass ceiling is something that can be dealt with and overcome. It is remarkable that the majority of these women in Aruba reacted to this phenomenon by refusing to be victimized. This female resilience is also apparent in the barrier of stereotyping, where females used confidence, knowledge and expertise as strategies for coping with stereotyping. This finding is in agreement with the study of Boone et al. (2013), who identified lack of confidence as one of the self-imposed barriers of women in their study.

### ***Stereotyping***

Previous stereotypes suggest that women are more emotional and this is seen as a negative leadership trait (Brescoll, 2016). This study confirms that women are aware that being perceived as emotional may have an adverse consequence on the evaluation of their performance. The consciousness about how women might be perceived in a stereotypical manner and the importance of making modifications to behavior was more prevalent in the top-level executives. The majority of the middle and lower level leaders did not change in order to be perceived differently as a woman.

### ***Work-Family demands***

From theory, we can derive that the industry specific characteristic of long hours is seen as a barrier (Mooney & Ryan, 2009) and that there is an effect on family life. This was confirmed in this study where the majority of women agreed that work impacted their family life. This finding was across all age groups and position level and is in accordance with an earlier study by Roebuck et. al (2013) where across generations, work-family conflicts (WFC) were seen as an inhibitor to career advancement. For some in

the current study though their family acts a motivator to perform better at their job. In line with Sandberg (2013), the utilization of spousal support served as a way to create work-life balance. This was especially acknowledged by women in the top-level positions.

### **Mentors**

Literature indicates a lack of female mentors and a hesitance of women to help other women (Brownell, 1993a) which was confirmed in this study, however the hesitance to help other women was not stated specifically through the answers of the respondents. On the contrary, many females in the current study guide colleagues and give them advice without knowing that they are playing a mentor role. The fact that women seek each other out to share experiences without an organized platform might indicate a need for this. However, several women mentioned that the formality in mentoring programs might impact the effectiveness.

Regarding the gender of mentors, from previous studies it appeared that females prefer female mentors because they tend to understand the challenges most commonly faced (Hanson, 2008 as cited in Elmuti, Jia, & Davis, 2009), however, in this study the female managers more often had male mentors. There is no specific reason as to why there were more male mentors other than the fact that there may have been more males in top-level positions who took on mentoring roles.

*Personal characteristics:* in this study, the data confirms the idea that personal characteristics and choices made by women are important barriers that prevent women from moving up the ladder (Mooney & Ryan, 2009). The consistency in the answers of the respondents shows that the women believed that pursuing upper management positions was personal. Many fear the consequences of a higher-level position, such as the weight of the responsibility, the effect on family, and increased stress. These reasons also fall in the category of self-imposed barriers of the glass ceiling identified earlier and confirm the study by Vianen and Fischer (2002) that women had less confidence and ambition toward pursuing a management position.

*Leadership style:* in accordance with previous research (Daft, 2015; Northouse, 2010), the democratic and participative, inclusive leadership style of females in this study was confirmed. An interesting addition that was mentioned by the majority of the respondents is that this style would only be pursued when effective. If the effectiveness was impacted, the women switched to a more authoritarian style of leadership. This finding however, is not uncommon for women in leadership positions as previous literature indicates that women tend to adapt their democratic leadership style to a style that produces the most favorable evaluations and outcomes

(Northouse, 2010, p.303). Communication style: the study also showed that communication style of women was predominantly personal (face-to-face) and the use of emails as written back up.

*Knowledge and Education:* in a study by Cooper Jackson (2001) amongst middle management executives, the highest-ranking barriers to career advancement and work-life balance were tuition reimbursement and flexible hours. The importance of education was apparent in this study, however many executives believe that in the hospitality industry in Aruba an external education is not a condition for growth or promotion.

In RQ2, the respondents identified the following best practices: confidence, courage and perseverance, preparation, hard work for overcoming the glass ceiling and stereotypical situations; support of spouse and role reversal in family duties; change from flexible, democratic leadership to autocratic style when democratic style is not effective; and face-to-face communication with written back up.

### *Academic implications*

In assessing the academic implications of the current study, the findings contributed to the expectancy theory. Consistent with the expectancy theory, which states that individuals will adjust their behavior based on the expected results; this study shows that females saw the glass ceiling as a self-imposed barrier and expected to overcome the glass ceiling by persevering, preparation and hard work. As the expectancy theory suggested, gender inequity/stereotype was overcome by those female leaders who understand/acknowledge stereotyping at the workplace, but did not hesitate to address this by changing themselves to be perceived as more composed individuals in their environment and by proving themselves. The expectancy theory was confirmed because women first start with an inclusive leadership style however they change their style of leading into a more directive when they expect to have better results or more results than their status quo leadership style.

In addition, the work family border theory explains how people transition between their life and work and their life with their family. According to this theory people are more proactive than reactive to work life balance conflict. This was confirmed in the study where multiple women in the top levels mentioned that it is important to create a work-life balance first for example by organizing day care, a nanny or arrangements with the spouse. The theory also suggests that people cross the border between domains of work and family all the time. The impact of work on family (WFC) was confirmed by all women on all executive levels in this study however the other way around, family impacting work, was not confirmed and this was on all executive levels.

### **Practitioner implications**

The current study shows that there is an underrepresentation of top female leaders in the hospitality industry in Aruba. Based on the findings of this study the underrepresentation might be reduced by applying the following strategies.

*Formal Mentoring programs:* there is a lack of formal mentoring programs and women have acknowledged that having a mentor would help them in their career path and overcoming challenges they face. Women have also confirmed that they would accept the role of mentor. Since the women encountered mostly male mentors yet preferred female mentors, women who have reached upper executive levels could play an important role as mentors.

*Organizational Policies facilitating work –family.* A major concern for women remains the impact of work on family. The existence of specific policies issued by management to alleviate the work-family demands were not mentioned by the women in the study. Hence this gap is one area where management can provide support to the women who experience this to be a major challenge in their work life.

*Individual leadership development programs-* Women differ in their personality and life situations. The career path in organizations has been focused on traditional male models and women had to adapt to these models. An individual approach to preparing women for executive positions based on their unique situation could start by identifying talent and grooming them into leadership positions. The aim of the flexible approach of these tailor-made programs would be to facilitate the development of leadership potential by taking into account the women's unique situation, needs and desires.

With these measures the gaps identified through the study in especially the need for more organizational involvement in creating policies and developing women will encourage them to grow in their careers. In a location so dependent on hospitality and tourism organizations, it is critical to find best practices and ways to overcome any perceived barriers in the workplace to encourage a more balanced workplace and leadership positions.

### **Limitations**

Future research should probe further to examine the role the different executive levels play in the experience and opinion of the glass ceiling phenomenon and stereotyping as this theme was identified in the underlying study. Generational differences besides executive levels could also be included in this further study as to investigate the impact of age on attitude

toward barriers in women's careers. Finally, the inclusion of men in future research is recommendable to gauge the opinion of men in the hospitality industry as to barriers of female career advancement.

While qualitative research provides rich information, the findings are limited in scope. First, semi-structured interviews present opportunities for interviewer bias (Arendt et al., 2012). To reduce interviewer bias, two researchers attended each session and a third researcher reviewed and interpreted the notes. Further, the present study only examines women leaders in the hospitality industry rather than men and women as the scope was purposefully narrowly defined. Also, the context of the study in Aruba may limit the generalizability of the findings.

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