Rethinking a Glass Ceiling in the Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

Despite well-publicized exceptions, women are the minority in the highest levels of executive leadership—a phenomenon traditionally attributed to workplace barriers collectively termed the *glass ceiling*. Newer research, however, increasingly implicates self-imposed barriers to women's advancement. This suggests that barriers to women might be undergoing a "shift" whereby personal priorities hold greater influence over advancement opportunities than do traditional workplace barriers. We tested this notion via an online survey of fifty-four male and forty-five female global industry leaders. Two main findings emerged. First, contrary to traditional stereotypes, men and women held essentially the same views on career and home life. Second, data revealed that men and women emphasized self-imposed barriers over workplace barriers as the major obstacles to women's advancement. The most common self-imposed barriers involved family and household responsibilities holding a higher priority, as well as work–life balance, whereas the most prominent workplace barriers were lack of mentoring, lack of careful career planning, stereotyping, and perception of feminine traits. We argue that the "glass ceiling" is now predominantly a misnomer and that the current challenges to advancement are best characterized as an "invisible obstacle course" whereby organizations inadvertently fail in helping women to successfully manage their self-imposed barriers via a lack of active leadership development.

Keywords

glass ceiling; women; leadership; workplace barriers; professional development

In July 2012, Marissa Mayer rocked corporate America when she announced not only that she had left Google to accept the top job at Yahoo! but also that at age thirty-seven, she was six months pregnant. Interestingly, the latter part of her announcement apparently shocked people more than the first part. While this article focuses specifically on the hospitality industry as a case study, this issue exists in a much broader context. For example, the 2011 "*Time* 100" list is the magazine's popular ranking of the most influential people in the world. Women made up 29 percent of the list, with only two reaching top ten status and neither of those representing private sector businesswomen. In fact, research consistently shows that women by far are the minority in top leadership positions within the private sector and government service (Barr 1996; Daily, Certo, and Dalton 1999; Fisher 1992; Fogliasso 2011; Luxury Society 2011; Mandel 1987; Morrison, White, and Velsor 1992). Catalyst (2013) found that twenty of the *Fortune* 500 chief executive officers (CEOs) are women, and in 2011, women held approximately 14 percent of C-level positions at these companies. C-level or so-called "C-suite" roles include the CEO or equivalent, and all direct reports—titles typically with "chief" in the title, such as chief operating officer (COO), chief financial officer, or chief marketing officer. At lower levels, however, women account for just over half the employees occupying "managerial and professional specialty occupations" (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2003). That is also true of the hospitality industry, but women are not found in great numbers in the hospitality industry's top level. Of the thirteen hospitality-related companies on the *Fortune 500* list, no women held the CEO title in 2012. Since it is evident that women in top roles of organizations remain a novelty, we need to address the issue of why this is the case. In this article, we will propose some thinking points to advance solutions.

The Glass Ceiling: Past and Present

> "I can save you some time, the bottom line . . . it's still a man's world."
>
> Survey respondent's email (*name withheld*)
> to the authors, June 2012

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This quote comes from a female executive whom we invited to participate in this study. Her viewpoint suggests a poor prognosis for seeing more women in top leadership positions. As her comment entails, research on the "glass ceiling" phenomenon has historically focused on workplace barriers to women's advancement in their careers. The most commonly identified factors fall into the following seven general categories (Catalyst 1990; 1996, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2004):

- counterproductive behavior of male coworkers,
- inhospitable corporate culture,
- lack of careful career planning and planned job assignments,
- lack of mentoring,
- poor opportunities from managers,
- social exclusion (being ostracized from informal networks of communication), and
- stereotyping and preconceptions.

Some have argued that these barriers can be so subtle as not to be readily perceptible to everyone in the work environment. Furthermore, men have been found to be significantly less likely than women to believe that any of these factors hindered women's advancement in their companies and firms. Indeed, research has shown that the ways that men and women are treated differently in the workplace can be nearly imperceptible for one individual and emerge only when aggregated across individuals. Crosby (1984), for example, demonstrated that women do not generally acknowledge the ways that gender discrimination may have affected their own career experiences. They are more likely to assume personal responsibility for receiving fewer organizational resources than their male coworkers. These same women, nevertheless, believe that gender discrimination exists in the workplace and affects the resources that other women receive. The current thinking is that men and women perceive the prevalence of workplace barriers differently, although both have historically pointed to these barriers more often than self-imposed barriers that arise through personal choice or differences in personal priorities.

Over the course of a year, we have had the opportunity to candidly interview over fifteen women holding top executive-level positions in the hospitality industry from all over the world, including Kathleen Taylor (former CEO, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts), Grace Leo (CEO, G.L.A. Hotels), Maria Del Busto (Global Chief Human Resources Officer, Royal Caribbean International), and Stephanie Sonnabend (President, Sonesta Hotels), about societal and cultural factors that affect the advancement of women leaders and the effect those factors have on the hospitality industry as a whole. The barriers they associated with the contemporary workplace indicated a shift away from the traditional view of the glass ceiling. Above and beyond workplace barriers, these women equally implicated the influence of self-imposed barriers as well. Based on our interviews, we have become increasingly persuaded that the broader social context, in fact, contributes to the creation or maintenance of self-imposed barriers. For example, in a variety of social contexts, certain behaviors by women are more acceptable or expected, and these same behaviors by men may or may not be greeted with the same level of acceptance. Furthermore, the words used to describe those behaviors are different depending upon whether it is a woman or man's behavior being described. We have heard executives describe a display of emotions by a woman as "weak or emotional," whereas a display of emotions by a man has been described as a "chink in the armor." Thus, we see different levels of acceptance and tolerance depending on gender.

Recent studies have begun paying attention to self-imposed barriers that can hold women back from advancing to top ranks. The most commonly cited fall into two major areas. First, there is the often dramatic "push and pull" between family-personal issues and the time of life during which promotions to higher ranks typically take place (Brizendine 2008; Reddy 2007). Research shows that significant promotions typically take place for women when they are in their forties. At this time in their lives, many women must weigh their career advancement against family-related issues. Second, as we indicated above, self-established barriers interfere with advancement, such as unwillingness to relocate, concessions made within a spousal partnership, and traditional gender roles (Fischlmayr 2002). When women perceive barriers to their career advancement, they tend to either exit, voice concern, or rationalize remaining on a plateau (Hamel 2009). Some studies suggest that the lack of self-confidence relates to the fact that the majority of women choose to quietly exit the company rather than voicing discontent about discrimination. Furthermore, gender stereotypes seem to be well-ingrained into the minds of managers, employees, and students who are about to enter the workforce (Geyer-Semple 2011). However, research on the internal struggles of confidence and esteem for women is still inconclusive. Some studies have found no empirical link between career advancement and self-esteem (Soufi, Gilaninia, and Mousavian 2011).

Taking a Fresh Look

Based on the mixed viewpoints above, we explored current perceptions on women and leadership held by hospitality executives worldwide. In particular, we sought to answer the following question: "Have the most salient challenges affecting women's advancement shifted from traditional workplace barriers to self-imposed barriers?"

Method

Respondents

Data are derived from a convenience sample of ninety-nine executive-level respondents (M_{age} = 48.6 years, SD = 9.2, range = 28-71 years) consisting of fifty-four men and forty-five women. The breakdown by industry sector was hotel, 79 percent; restaurants and food service, 16 percent; travel and tourism, 3 percent, and casino and gaming, 2 percent. The participants tended to be highly educated. Five percent reported no formal degree, whereas the education break-down for the others was associate's degree, 6 percent; bachelor's, 43 percent; master's, 38 percent, and Ph.D. or equivalent, 8 percent. Two-thirds of the respondents were U.S.-based, and the remainder live in Belgium, Canada, China, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Portugal, Russia, Singapore, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and Ukraine.

Materials

We designed an online questionnaire consisting of twelve sociodemographic questions (e.g., age, gender, country of residence, educational background, sector of industry, current job title, age of anticipated retirement, years to reach current job level, marital status, children and status, and childcare support systems) and six questions about respondents' personal priorities, as well as beliefs and attitudes about external barriers to women in leadership roles. Four of these latter six questions used Likert-type scales, and the others were open-ended. Internal reliability for the rating scale questions was acceptable (average α = .79), exceeding Kline's (1986) criterion of .70 for satisfactory internal consistency. (Contact the authors for details on the questionnaire.)

Procedure

We identified top leaders and their direct C-level reports in the largest hotel, restaurant, gaming, and cruise companies around the world. The target group for each segment was defined as follows: the top 300 hotel companies and top 25 consortia (*Hotels* Magazine, September, 2011); U.S. and internationally-based restaurant companies with over US$200 million in revenues and thirty or more outlets, or companies that had approximately that much revenue and a global presence of ten or more units; the top 50 gaming companies (GBGC 50 Index [Global Betting and Gaming Consultants], January, 2012); and cruise line companies and subsidiaries with passenger capacity of over 1,000. Over a period of four weeks, the survey was administered electronically and anonymously to C-suite executives in the respondent pool.

Exhibit 1:
Marital Status of Hospitality Executives in the Sample.

Marital Status	Men (%)	Women (%)	Total Sample (%)
Never been married	7.3	17.8	12
Never been divorced	76.4	42.2	61
Divorced once	16.4	26.7	21
Divorced more than once	0	13.3	6

Exhibit 2:
Frequency Distribution of Resources for Executives with Children Living at Home.

Childcare Resources	Men (%)	Women (%)	Total Sample (%)
In-home childcare provider (nanny/ housekeeper)	48	35	41
Spouse	26	15	20
School/day care	13	27	20
Extended Family	13	23	18

Results

Preliminaries: The Modern Executive Lifestyle

Several lifestyle trends emerged from our data that speak to the different resources and family demands facing men and women executives. First, the mean period of time for respondents to "reach their current role" was 17.9 years (SD = 7.5), and the mean age of their anticipated retirement was 63 years (SD = 5.9). Exhibit 1 indicates that most of the respondents were married and never divorced, whereas sizable portions had either been divorced once or never married.

Interestingly, the women executives reported greater variance or instability in marital status than the men. Of the married men, 27 percent had a spouse who worked full- or part-time outside the home, while 63 percent of the married women reported having a spouse who worked outside the home.

The executives' families consisted on average of two children (SD = 2.4), with one child living at home (M = 0.94; SD = .99). Expanding on this latter statistic, 43 percent of executives had no children currently living at home, and the remainder reported one or more children living at home. Exhibit 2 indicates that executive men and women showed differences in the resources used for child-care. For the respondents, male executives rely more heavily on their spouses, while the female executives rely more heavily upon school or day-care and extended family. Both male and female executives identified in-home help

Exhibit 3:

Partial Correlations between Gender and Perceived External Barriers to Women's Advancement Controlling for Sociodemographic Background.

External Barriers	M Rating (0-3)	Gender (r)
Lack of mentoring	2.58	.16
Lack of careful career planning and planned job assignments	2.55	.15
Stereotyping	2.24	.24*
Social exclusion (ostracized from informal networks of communication)	2.18	.29*
Managers do not offer good opportunities	2.06	.03
Counterproductive behavior of male coworkers	2.06	.18
Inhospitable corporate culture	1.74	.16

Note. Gender coded: 1 = *men*, 2 = *women*.
*p < .05.

(nannies or housekeepers) as the predominate form of childcare resource.

Main Findings

Men's and Women's Perceptions of Workplace Barriers

To answer the research question about a possible shift in the barriers affecting women, we first needed to gauge current perceptions on the traditional glass ceiling. Respondents read the list of the seven workplace barriers to women's advancement and were asked to indicate "To what extent do the following barriers to women exist in *your* workplace," using the following scale: 0 (*definitely does not exist*), 1 (*tends not to exist*), 2 (*tends to exist*), and 3 (*definitely does exist*).

Holding sociodemographic factors constant via a partial correlation, Exhibit 3 shows that women gave slightly but significantly higher ratings than men only to the workplace barriers of "social exclusion" and "stereotyping." However, the effect sizes were low, accounting at most for 8 percent of the variance. Overall, men and women agreed on the presence and impact of specific workplace barriers.

It is important to note that the two highest rated workplace barriers—"lack of mentoring" and "lack of career planning"—arguably represent organizational or infrastructure shortcomings rather than being the deliberately discriminatory practices that popularly define the notion of a glass ceiling. The classic barriers, such as "counterproductive male behavior" and "inhospitable corporate culture," were far down the list.

However, the correlation analysis in Exhibit 4 reveals that these seven workplace barriers were in most cases significantly associated with each other, showing moderate effect sizes. In particular, we note the strongest correlates of the two highest rated workplace barriers. "Lack of mentoring" most strongly correlated with a "lack of careful career planning and assignments" and "managers do not offer good opportunities." "Lack of careful career planning and assignments" also most strongly correlated with "managers do not offer good opportunities" and (to a lesser degree) an "inhospitable work culture." These correlations point to managers' leadership shortcomings.

Men and Women's Perceptions of Self-Imposed Barriers

On further inspection, these results are more complicated than simple management oversight. Instead, the barriers involve interplay between workplace issues and self-imposed barriers. Most tellingly, self-imposed barriers are identified by both men and women as being *more* influential. In this context, let us first compare the personal priorities and professional ambition levels of the executive men to those of the executive women. We asked respondents to rate six general categories of personal priorities (see Exhibit 5). Rather than using a forced-ranking (ipsative) approach, which can introduce artificial statistical results, we asked respondents to use a six-point scale for each personal priority. Thus, each item was rated with one of the following scores: 0 (*entirely unimportant*), 1 (*mostly unimportant*), 2 (*somewhat unimportant*), 3 (*somewhat important*), 4 (*very important*), and 5 (*essential*).

Exhibit 5 shows that ratings on personal priorities (holding all other sociodemographic variables constant) had no relation to gender; not only were the coefficients nonsignificant, but there was also virtually no association whatsoever. This suggests that men and women agreed on the presence and impact of specific personal priorities in their lives. Specifically, both men and women gave higher ratings to the priorities of "family" and "physical health and mental well-being" than to "career" and "personal growth and development." "Community" and "spirituality" had the lowest ratings, although both of these priorities remained above the midpoint of the rating scale.

Notwithstanding the high ratings on family and physical and mental well-being, the executives in our sample also reported strong levels of professional ambition. Again, we found no significant difference between men's and women's responses in this regard, based on the following question: "If you are currently part of your company's top leadership team, but do not hold the top title, how important is it to you to hold the top title?" Using the same six-point scale (0 = *entirely unimportant* to 5 = *essential*) and excluding those already holding the top title, men's and women's

Exhibit 4:
Partial Correlations between Ratings on External Barriers to Women's Advancement in the Workplace Controlling for Sociodemographic Background.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Lack of mentoring	—						
Lack of careful career planning and planned job assignments	.66**	—					
Stereotyping	.29	.39**	—				
Social exclusion (ostracized from informal networks of communication)	.42**	.41**	.73**	—			
Managers do not offer good opportunities	.57**	.65**	.44**	.48**	—		
Counterproductive behavior of male coworkers	.45**	.41**	.53**	.65**	.37**	—	
Inhospitable corporate culture	.45**	.52**	.55**	.59**	.53**	.63**	—

**p < .002 (with Bonferonni correction).

Exhibit 5:
Partial Correlations between Gender and Personal Priorities Controlling for Sociodemographic Background.

Personal Priorities	M rating (0-5)	Gender (r)
Family	4.56	.00
Physical health/mental well-being	4.29	.07
Career	4.13	.06
Personal growth-development	3.76	−.02
Community	3.08	.01
Spirituality	2.87	.00

Note. Gender (1 = *men*, 2 = *women*).

scores were not significantly different (men: *M* = 4.47, *SD* = 1.4; women: *M* = 4.17, *SD* = 1.7; with *t*(65) = .81, *ns*). Further, ratings on "ambition to reach the top title" showed no significant correlations with any of the ratings on personal priorities. In other words, men and women held essentially identical views on career and home, and we found no evidence that professional ambition came at the expense of the personal priorities we measured. Both men and women apparently are striving to "have it all," as the saying goes.

Men's and women's responses to the open-ended questions begin to indicate where the two sexes diverge in their workplace experience. Both men and women identified issues relating to "family and work–life balance" in response to the survey item: "Please list any and all factors or variables that you believe are involved in women *not* attaining senior-most executive positions. Be as specific as possible."

We first categorized the participants' responses into basic themes and then classified them as either self-imposed or workplace-imposed (see Exhibit 6). Both sexes showed considerable agreement regarding the obstacles for women. Fifty-seven percent of the themes identified by men involved self-imposed barriers to women's advancement, especially obstacles related to family and household, while

workplace barriers were mentioned in 39 percent of men's narrative themes. For the women, self-imposed barriers constituted 51 percent of the narrative themes and 48 percent focused on workplace barriers.

To summarize these findings, we see a reasonably consistent picture. Women score as being equally ambitious as men, while men are found to be equally vested in family as women. However, women have distinctly different personal circumstances than men. For instance, these women have a greater tendency for their spouses to work outside the home, which complicates the challenge of climbing the corporate ladder while managing family and household. These results are consistent with Fogliasso (2011) who observed that some of the barriers facing women stem from stereotypes about their role in work and at home.

Going beyond generic perceptions, we wanted to examine the ways that workplace barriers may have personally affected our respondents' career experiences and determine any differences between men and women. The responses to another open-ended question are telling in this regard. We asked the eighty-eight out of ninety-nine survey respondents who do not currently hold the CEO title, "As succinctly as possible, please explain the reason(s) for *you* wanting or not wanting to reach the top title in an organization." Of those respondents, sixty were not interested in pursuing the CEO title (twenty-seven men and thirty-three women). The twenty-eight others (nine men and nineteen women) identified this as a top priority. Exhibit 7 summarizes the themes in the responses to this question about personal reasons for the sixty survey participants not pursuing the top title in an organization. Most responses for both sexes emphasized self-imposed barriers, and, based on the specific expressions in the narratives, we specifically classified "not a career goal," "work–life balance," "priority for family," "life-stage," "lack of skills or education," and "pressure and visibility unappealing" as examples of self-imposed barriers since these are self-perceptions and involve personal choices. Remarkably, only 14 percent of women's narrative themes and 10 percent of men's themes

Exhibit 6:
Frequency Distribution of Male and Female Respondents' Perceived Barriers to Women's Advancement.

Perceived Barrier	Type of Barrier	Frequency in Open-ended Comments	
		Female Respondents (%)	Male Respondents (%)
Family/household responsibilities a higher priority	Self-imposed	30	37
Stereotyping/cultural prejudice/gender-biased attitudes/ discrimination	Workplace-imposed	25	24
Organizational forces (limitations of organizational structure/lack of flexibility in job design/succession-planning/talent development)	Workplace-imposed	6	11
Work–life balance a higher priority	Self-imposed	13	14
Lack of networking opportunities (due to type of activity, timing or travel involved)	Workplace-imposed	6	3
Ego issues (lack of confidence)	Self-imposed	8	5
Lack of mentorship	Workplace-imposed	8	3
Age	Workplace-imposed	2	0
No barriers	n/a	1	4
	Self-imposed barriers	51	57
	Workplace barriers	48	39

Exhibit 7:
Frequency Distribution of Male and Female Respondents' Reasons for Not Pursuing Top Title (CEO).

Reason	Type of Barrier	Frequency for Men (%)	Frequency for Women (%)
Not a career goal	Self-imposed	31	24
Priority for work–life balance	Self-imposed	28	19
Priority for family	Self-imposed	10	19
Life stage	Self-imposed	10	2
Lack of skills/education	Self-imposed	7	14
Other company-imposed obstacles (politics/geography)	Workplace-imposed	7	7
Pressure/visibility unappealing	Self-imposed	3	7
Not the right profile/stereo-typing/discrimination/(age/ gender/sexual orientation)/lack of network	Workplace-imposed	3	7
Overall source of barriers	Self-imposed	90	86
	Workplace-imposed	10	14

Note. CEO = chief executive officer.

indicated that stereotyping, discriminatory practices, and political or geographical forces were an apparent obstacle hindering their own professional advancement. For the twenty-eight respondents who indicated a desire to reach the CEO seat, the overwhelming reasons given by men were professional achievement and financial reward; for women, the desire to be a female role model was important.

In summary, we see *both sexes* clearly placing more emphasis on self-imposed barriers to the advancement of women over more traditional workplace barriers. Make no mistake—workplace barriers still exist to different degrees. Stereotyping in particular (perhaps due to legacy issues at organizations) remains a visible symptom, but the workplace

barriers rated as most prevalent appear more aligned with organizational and leadership blind-spots rather than a systemic epidemic of overt gender discrimination.

Discussion

Our cumulative findings lead us to conclude that the most salient challenges affecting women's advancement in the hospitality industry result from self-imposed barriers. We have no data over time to say for certain whether this is a temporary shift in attitudes or a watershed moment, but a clear trend appears in our data—the themes voiced about the contemporary workplace have shifted in prevalence and significance from the themes documented in past studies.

Women in hospitality face a complicated set of barriers to advancement that suggest the traditional view of the "glass ceiling" as being predominantly due to workplace barriers now appears to be a misnomer. Executive-minded men and women have matching personal priorities and levels of ambition. Their responses signify that a shift has occurred in that the barriers to women's advancement are more *self-imposed* and largely involve choices they make about family and household. Our survey indicates that these self-imposed barriers are likely reinforced by an organization's lack of mentorship or careful career planning for women. Thus, we suggest that these workplace barriers arguably stem from inadvertent leadership failures rather than from deliberate and systemic discriminatory practices.

Rather than a "glass ceiling," we propose that leadership development in the hospitality industry—for both women and men—is better described as an "invisible obstacle course." Without active mentorship, training, and support, it is difficult for anyone to single-handedly anticipate, identify, and navigate workplace and self-imposed barriers successfully. The traditional glass ceiling argument has perhaps presented a false dichotomy to today's executive-minded women that successfully balancing work and home is a fantasy—one cannot "have it all." Maybe that is why Yahoo!'s Mayer was such an intriguing news story. In essence, she debunked or at least confronted the dichotomy. She is not the only executive to argue the point. British businesswoman, television personality, entrepreneur, and commentator Hilary Devey stated during a London Radio Times interview, "There are lots of myths about why women are under-represented in the boardroom, but the excuse about a 'glass ceiling' is the worst. I am living proof there's no such thing." Similarly, headlines were made when Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, declared, "The number one impediment to women succeeding in the workforce is now in the home."

Women and Leadership: Where Do We Grow from Here?

The current literature on women and leadership presents what appears to be a daunting scenario. Societal beliefs that support the status quo seem to prevent proactive attitudes toward change (Bastounis and Minibas-Poussard 2012). Likewise, it is argued that the deeply ingrained stereotypical beliefs and conservative attitudes relating to women inhibit promotions (Fischlmayr 2002). Ingrained expectations of the dominant male profiles for executives are proposed to be a large hindrance to women's career advancements, as they prevent the adoption of women-friendly policies and promote continued recruitment from the "old-boys club" (Claringbould 2008). Social networks and cohesion are also identified as major external factors. Singh and Vinnicombe (2004), for example, argued that the reason why many corporate boards remain male is that they originally were that

way—and that male director groups tend to prefer groups similar to them. In other words, the social identity among all-male C-suites is so strong that they choose only to bring in individuals who are similar to them.

Our cumulative findings challenge the thinking that barriers to advancement are mostly outside personal influence or control. Assuming that inadvertent leadership failures in the workplace exacerbate women's self-imposed barriers, the question now becomes, "How do organizations effectively respond?" Gender quotas are an area of debate, and no clear conclusion has been drawn on their usefulness (Bjorkhaug and Sorenson 2012; Pande and Ford 2011). Large public social campaigns are also suggested as a cure for gender equality (Bastounis and Minibas-Poussard 2012), yet little is said about who should take responsibility for these initiatives. McCarthy (2004) suggested that employers and the government should consider and support women's networks. For instance, one idea is that governments could provide tax incentives (payroll tax breaks) for employers that hire well-qualified women who are interested in more family or work–life flexibility such that if these women are working part-time, the business will receive a tax incentive in the form of a payroll tax break or health insurance policy reimbursement so that it does not cost a business any more to employ someone part-time. In our view, gender quotas do not address the underlying issue, which is a lack of leadership development for executive-minded individuals. What is needed is to make the challenges of the "invisible obstacle course" visible and to implement appropriate resources for people in it (cf. Winn 2004). This squarely places responsibility on both organizations and ambitious individuals seeking professional advancement.

Civic and business organizations can provide women with resources to navigate the obstacle course in a number of ways. Government should increase awareness about issues that women face in the workplace, as well as push for equal opportunity policies in the private sector (McRoy and Tsangari 2011). Consequently, a common and realistic recommendation from many studies is to modify company policies to be more accommodating toward women's promotions. For example, Brizendine (2008) proposed that organizations should expand the time horizon of promotions for women who are past their forties, so they can have increased time to attend to family matters. Firms are also urged to provide women with more flexibility in work time and work location, as well as relocation assistance and childcare services (Fogliasso 2011). Likewise, Catalyst (1993) proposed a multifaceted approach involving the removal of cultural and environmental barriers to women's advancement, development programs that emphasize lateral moves and line experience, and provide meaningful assignments (as opposed to one-shot training events), flexibility in arranging work schedules and sites, and implementing a system to identify and monitor the progress of

high potential women and to ensure that they acquire a broad range of experience in core business areas so that they will be able to compete for leadership positions in the organization.

Clarifying the challenges to advancement is a first and necessary step (i.e., "making the invisible obstacles visible"), but the next step cannot be overlooked. Here, we mean helping women actually navigate the obstacles themselves. Above and beyond leadership and professional skills development, women should also be provided with strong mentoring and personal development programs that specifically address personal effectiveness in managing family and household demands while simultaneously climbing the proverbial corporate ladder. We predict that both varieties of skill development are critical to the advancement of women, and such programs should be proactive.

Based on this study and the many other studies on this topic, the inescapable recommendation for anyone who wishes to advance is the advice from Christine Fogliasso (2011), who recommended that women take the initiative to seek a mentor, sponsor, or role model for support and emulation—and to pay attention to networking opportunities. We realize that this requires personal responsibility and fortitude, but our research finds this to be a proven approach for anyone interested in leadership development. It seems that many current studies offer contradictory findings and advice in this area. On one hand, many authors squarely place the blame for lack of advancement on barriers outside of women's control (e.g., Fischlmayr 2002; Claringbould 2008; Singh and Vinnicombe 2004). The proposed solutions, on the other hand, are essentially recommendations for women to take personal responsibility to "peacefully revolt" against the rigid workplace barriers that stack the odds against women. That "personal responsibility" argument seems to be a tacit admission that barriers to advancement are all, or in part, in the control of individuals. Our findings imply that organizations would do well to focus and expand strategically on the Fogliasso and Catalyst recommendations via mentoring and development programs that specifically focus on leadership skill development on the professional side while simultaneously helping women (and anyone in a leadership role) how to better address work–life balance in a satisfactory way.

Limitations and Future Research

Like past studies, our methodology could not distinguish perceptions and attitudes from the objective realities in the respondents' workplaces. Furthermore, it seems likely that a controversial topic like this is prone to distortions in explicit beliefs (what one says publicly) versus implicit beliefs (what one believes privately). Future research should aim to control for response biases related to impression management and cultural expectations. Moreover, the trends we observed were restricted to the hospitality industry and therefore may not generalize to other industries. Replications are needed to validate our findings and gain a deeper understanding of the variables and dynamics involved. Finally, the research question of whether gender-diverse C-suites affect company performance is a new one, and the answer is inconclusive and requires more exploration (O'Connor 2006; Pande and Ford 2011).

We hope our results are a catalyst for future work using more detailed and sophisticated research designs and statistical approaches (e.g., Lange et al. 2002, Lange and Houran 2009) to better understand the main and interaction effects of workplace and self-imposed barriers for women in hospitality leadership roles and other industries. Most important, our results challenge organizations to have a candid look and discussion about the resources they offer their potential leaders, both women and men, for leadership development and to take steps to further programs that identify, develop, and retain top talent. Success stories like those of Marissa Mayer, Hilary Devey, and Sheryl Sandberg show that those with professional ambition and talent can shun what may well be the excuse of a glass ceiling and instead successfully navigate the invisible obstacle course that faces anyone advancing to the C-suite.

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