

Women Leaders in Shipping as Role Models for Women Seafarers

C. Dragomir

Constanta Maritime University, Constanta, Romania

A. M. Baylon

Maritime Academy of Asia and the Pacific, Bataan, Philippines

N.T. Azirh

Regional Maritime University, Accra, Ghana

A. Leon

Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Facultat de Nàutica de Barcelona, Spain

ABSTRACT: This article presents a part of the qualitative research results from the GECAMET international academic study on gender issues in shipping. One of the aims of GECAMET research represent the understanding of human factors considering gender equality and cultural awareness issues met in the shipping industry.

In this paper are published qualitative results obtained through 47 structured online interviews of women seafarers made in the period 201-2018. The target group of respondents was formed by women leaders in the shipping sector which are current seafarers with careers on board ship. Other data collected involved leaders defined as ex-seafarers working in managerial positions working on shore.

Results of the interviews provide a great source of inspirational leadership. Data obtained is useful for women seafarers that need models and motivational aid in order to join maritime education and maritime careers, and to surpass any eventual challenges. Data is also useful for shipping organizations and MET in order to improve equal and effective access of women to seafarer careers on board ship.

The research was possible with the support of the International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU) and the Nippon Foundation in Japan.

1 INTRODUCTION

There have been made increasing efforts to gain an awareness of human element issues. And also, efforts were made to gain awareness on gender issues in shipping and on the increasing role of women seafarers.

Undoubtedly, a competitive maritime company is the one that clearly states the mission of reflecting a serious commitment to provide qualitative transport activities and has the ability to adjust rapidly to client's needs and opportunities providing competitive navigation. Yet, a competitive maritime company should also have the ability to resonate to global societal necessities in the maritime sector.

Many maritime companies are concerned in developing - and communicating more or less loud, responsible campaigns towards societal needs outside their companies. For example, they would commit to urgent medical cases; would offer sponsorships for educational institutions, conferences, forums and fairs; would plant trees or support the disadvantaged. Such actions are very fine and much needed in the society. But sometimes people needing help might be closer than expected. Namely, can be the case of a maritime companies own employees: seafarers and crews that bring back direct return to the company. Seafarers are affected by several labour issues and one of such issues is included under the large umbrella of gender stereotypes. Maritime companies would probably need to start social responsible campaigns

first with their own employees, by removing gender barriers at women seafarer employment and glass ceiling barriers after employment of female.

Maritime companies showing commitment to gender equality in shipping are simply benchmarked. *Gendering shipping* is a new emerging trend of benchmark in the maritime sector, based on visible good examples of social responsible attitude on solving the gender issues within the industry. The concept of *gendering shipping* defines companies who communicate actively the voluntary implementation of gender policies in their organizational culture. The implementation of gender policies occur before regulations on the topic might shift the voluntary approach in one more or less recommended or mandatory approach. *Gendering shipping* represents a supportive response of the seafaring industry, long expected, to the empowering necessities of female seafarers' communities from the world shipping sector.

This article presents one of the outcomes of "Gender Equality and Cultural Awareness in Maritime Education and Training" (GECAMET) trans-national project funded between 2017-2018 by the International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU) and the Nippon Foundation.

In the GECAMET research team have jointly contributed 10 researchers from maritime education and training institutions of Australia, Canada, Ghana, Norway, Philippines, Romania, South Korea, Spain and Vietnam. They have proposed concrete measures of good practice for motivating women to join the shipping sector, and in such regard the research team have used their diverse and complementary experience in assessment of shipping companies, professional expertise regarding multicultural (mixed) business work environment in both on shore and off shore business, experience in intercultural coaching, training and consultancy, organizational anthropology, study of the cultural differences and scientific expertise on performance and multicultural vessels.

The overall research objectives in GECAMET were to improve the understanding of human factors in the maritime sector, considering gender equality and cultural awareness issues; to evaluate the economic efficiency of shipping companies with mixed crews; to evaluate the effects of external requirements on ship management policies regarding modern human resource management, gender equality and cultural awareness and to evaluate holistically the role of maritime education and training in the complex relation human factors- shipping business environment – ship management policies.

GECAMET research undergone several topics concerning management of human resources in maritime sector, gender equality and cultural awareness. In this paper are presented the results of the interviews made strictly on the topic *Women Leaders in shipping as Role Models for other seafarers*.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on women seafarers is scarce. Notable input was provided by M. Zhao who was the main researcher in the ILO/SIRC study on seafarer women commissioned by ILO in 2003. A more recent study on the topic was delivered by K. Pike et al (2016) on Gender Empowerment and Multi-cultural Crew (GEM).

Several dissertation master program thesis on this topic were conducted within World Maritime University by H. Aggrey (2000), Jo, S.-H. (2010) and N.T. Azirh (2014).

Other papers were written on issues of seafarer women of specific nationalities and on women lecturers in shipping.

3 RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

This article presents an overview perspective on the maritime sector considering the gender aspect. The objective of the GECAMET study was to identify best practices that can be recommended by Maritime Education and Training (MET) and shipping institutions in order to improve the situation of women access to a seafarer career.

The main research questions were the following: What MET and shipping institutions should do in order to empower women in shipping? What MET and shipping institutions should do in order to develop women leadership skills? How can the shared experiences of women leaders help develop leadership skills of other women in shipping?

The main purpose of the study was to identify women in the maritime industry that are role models for other seafarers, to collect advices from such models and to share them by making them public, in order to empower more seafarer women. Another purpose of the study is to encourage men and women awareness gender equality in shipping

The definition of **women leaders** in shipping, considered primarily and applicable to the study presented below within this paper, was the following: a woman having seafaring experience, regardless time/rank/sector at sea, (though is preferable to find women seafarers with minimum work experience of 1 month by sea and current or past position of officer on board ship), having managerial positions in the maritime industry (currently or in the past), working onshore or offshore, no matter the country she is working now.

The research methodology consisted in a mix of methods used, namely:

- 1 3 brainstorming working sessions with academia researchers having diverse experience on shipping issues and
- 2 1 focus group held on 12 April 2017 at headquarters of a Romanian Maritime Education and Training institution with 34 stakeholders of the maritime business, including an IMO Ambassador, an ITF representative, several owners of shipping and crewing companies, female seafarers and Maritime Education and

Training teaching staff. The focus group has followed the Focus Group Guide issued by the Research Directorate-Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (2015).

- 3 interviews with seafarers which can be considered role models for other seafarer women, out of which, within this paper, are presented 47 replies. Other research target groups were also surveyed.

Beside interviews, secondary research methods used in our study were comprehensive literature review on gender in shipping and observations made in the maritime industry and MET institutions.

Out of the three primary research methods enlisted above, the main research method used was the in depth semi-structured interview.

Research based on interviews had the following methodology:

- 1 During the brainstorming sessions within the working meetings held with GECAMET members in May 2017 and during the focus group were collected sufficient information to design the draft of the interview plan. An insightful input was brought by an individual researcher with significant experience in studying seafarers women, Ms. Minghua Zhao, who has shared an interview schedule prepared for women seafarers and used in her study commissioned in 2003 by ILO and SIRC.

- 2 We have established several target groups criteria to identify the profile of women leaders: woman seafarers with ongoing sea service and women who had seafaring experience, regardless time/rank/sector at sea, (though preferable with minimum work experience of 1 month by sea and current or past position of officer on board ship), having managerial positions in the maritime industry (currently or in the past), working onshore or offshore, no matter the country she is working now.

The interview was structured in two parts: demographic information and core questions, containing diverse questions related to experience on board, motivation, challenges, support and expectative.

The demographic information part of the interviewed person required details on nationality, age and current status: seafarer or ex-seafarer currently working on shore.

The core part had the following 19 questions:

- 1 Why did you join a maritime university and a maritime carrier?
- 2 How long have you been on the sea?
- 3 What is/was your actual/ previous rank (position occupied) on board ship?
- 4 What is/was your actual/ previous rank (position occupied) on shore? (if is the case)
- 5 What was your career process?
- 6 Why you decided to leave seafaring? In what circumstances?
- 7 How you managed to remain in the seafaring industry after quitting seafaring?
- 8 What challenges do you see today?
- 9 What advices would you give to my daughter who wants to be a seafarer / model leader like you?

- 10 What challenges do you see today for someone that would like to have the same seafaring job as you?

- 11 Who provided your opportunity of employment?

- 12 Did you receive any company support during your employment as woman seafarer?

- 13 What challenges did you meet along your way?

- 14 Were the tasks on board difficult?

- 15 Describe the type of the relationships on board?

- 16 Did your seafaring experience enhance your skills?

- 17 If you were doing again the same job on board ship, what would you change?

- 18 What do you think your career will be in 5 years from now?

- 19 In order to improve the situation of women seafarers, what are your suggestions for:

- Policy makers/ government representatives?
- Shipping companies?
- MET
- Other women seafarers?
- Men seafarers?
- Cadets?

- 3 A second stage of research was pilot testing the interview plan with several selected ladies employed by the maritime industry. A number of eight invited persons were asked to share their opinions on the draft of the interview plan.

They had suggested reducing from 19 core questions added to the demographic part, to a shorter interview plan of maximum 10 questions, including demographics.

- 4 After the pilot testing ended, we have reconsidered the interview questions and the interview plan. We have formulated new questions focusing on action and solutions to address the issues of women seafarers and we have removed redundant questions that were intended only to discover women career issues without focusing on any solutions.

- 5 The interviews were submitted by email. Invitations to participate at the study were sent by email and through social communication platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn, Whatsapp) and in person. At this study have participated 47 valid participants.

4 RESULTS

Following are the results obtained within the GECAMET study targeting seafaring women with current experience on board vessel.

During the pilot test, several replies were received, and below is an example of it:

A number of 47 valid replies were received and are enlisted in Table 1, with no alienation over the spelling and no other addition or comment from behalf of the researchers.

The interview included demographic questions. The most important question of the interview related to the women leaders in shipping topic, was:

What advice would you give to females who want to pursue a career in seafaring on board ship?

To this question were received 47 replies out of which only 47 had with effective answers, as listed below in Table 1. A second column indicated the nationality of the respondent was added.

Table 1. Replies of women seafarers target group

Questions	What is your nationality?	What advice would you give to females who want to pursue a career in seafaring on board ship?
Nr.crt.		Replies
1	Filipino	You must have the courage and strong heart to follow your dreams in life.
2	Belgian	Fight for what you love...
3	Filipino	Seafaring is a very challenging Job. For you to prevail, you must know your rights and must know the right people who can help you when things go wrong. Respect can't be bought nor it can be forced on people. You have to earn it. You can start by respecting yourself.
4	Filipino	Stay strong and be positive all the time. Don't let men intimidate you because they are men. Work with them and show your worth as part of the team
5	Filipino	Never let your gender be a hindrance to your career. Be dedicated to your work and prove that female can also contribute to the development of maritime industry so that more companies will hire and accept females seafarers to work onboard ..
6	Romanian	None
7	Filipino	Be yourself and be brave. Don't be afraid to open up when you are being sexually harassed. Know your rights. Fight for your rights. Be tough onboard and don't let other people shatter your dreams.
8	Swiss / Australian	Have an accomplished shore career and some finances behind you first before thinking of going to sea. I went to sea after a nursing career of 15 years - at the age of 36. Now qualified as Master Mariner Foreign-going and currently sailing as Chief Officer, worldwide. I have still financial depth of 50'000.- from my study time as I was a self-funded student without sponsorship or scholarship all the way to Master.
9	Australian/ British	Life at sea can offer you a physical and mental challenge. It is a career choice that can open many opportunities. Don't be afraid to be the only woman in a male dominated environment. Create the change you want to see in the world.
10	Australian	-
11	Australia	It can be an amazing experience if you get a supportive and good crew, if you want to have a family you can only do it when you are young, or when kids have grown up
12	Australian	Stand strong & work hard ethically. Someone will notice you and word will spread.
13	Australian	-
14	British	-
15	Australian	Be flexible, work hard, act and treat yourself as an equal to encourage others to see it that way.
16	Polish	Be very strong, never give up, believe in yourself and never let anyone tell you that it's not a place for you. Women are strong, confident and smart and it can be easily adapted in a seafaring.
17	British	-
18	Australian	You have every right to pursue your dream. Don't be disheartened by other people's experiences, don't set yourself aside from your male colleagues, get in there, lift the heavy things and do the dirty jobs. Let your attitude and your work speak for themselves, you will encounter people who are threatened by you, Kill them with kindness! Don't let the societal pressures of marriage and children get in the way of what you want and most importantly, WEAR SUNSCREEN
19	British	-
20	Romanian	Your knowledge is essential! Do not let the man decide what you should do! Since you work and learn you can handle everything!
21	Dutch	-
22	USA	I know things are slowly changing for the better. Unfortunately, we are still way off from seeing true equality in this industry. Unless a lucky star is looking down on you with the rare decent captain..... RUN!!!! Run away fast!!! Men still believe we are nothing but a disease on the water unless we are there to service them. Especially, if you are pretty. Then you are really screwed! Sad, but true....
23	British	To be in a man's world you must have a good sense of humour. Don't let anyone make you feel as if you are lesser than them. There are many many men out there who are supportive of females in the marine industry, it's not all negative.
24	German	-
25	French	-
26	UK	Develop a thick skin
27	British	You have to be better, faster and stronger than the boys to be considered in this Industry
28	Tunisienne	-
29	Filipino	Focus on your career and be strong mentally, emotionally and physically.
30	Filipino	Be strong, always prepare for the guys to harass you so better learn self defense and you must have an idea what to do in case of harassment
31	Filipino	-
32	Filipino	Seafaring is a way of life. If you want to pursue it, be sure that your reasons are valuable enough to empower your maritime plans. Be prepared and equipped with proper knowledge, skills and attitude. Enjoy the process of maritime journey itself because it brings enlightenment and fulfillment with every step towards embracing the experiences you are subjected into. Be a passionate reader and love your chosen career. Celebrate your achievements. Challenge yourself and do it. But always balance your life and never stop doing what fulfills you because however small your part is, you always contribute to a greater purpose and a bigger role of maritime family. Above all, always seek God's will first. God bless!
33	Romanian	-

34	Filipino	Hang on. Pursue your goals and trust God and the rest will follow.
35	Filipino	As my previous captains told me, "you have to grow hair on your chest" meaning I should be stronger physically and emotionally. There will always be sexual discrimination on board and a lot of physical work; you don't have to do it on your own all the time. It is okay to ask for help but as long as you can do it on your own, do it. Aim for the highest peak.
36	USA	-
37	Romanian	Go ahead
38	Romanian	Don't let anyone make you feel unworthy just because you are a female.
39	Romanian	Fight for your dream and let people know how strong you can be!
40	Romanian	-
41	Romanian	To do it and to be very strong
42	USA	You have to work 150% harder to be considered half as good as the guys. But, it is getting a little better. I have been lucky enough to be in a union and on the same ship for the past 7 years and in the 16 years that I have been sailing I have noticed things getting better. It may be because I am older and more likely to say something about inappropriate comments than I was when I was a 22 year old fresh out of school. It may just be that the older more sexist guys are retiring. Who knows what it is, but there is still a lot of room for improvement.
43	German	-
44	Hongkongese	Provide leave or enough rest time when female seafarer is suffering from monthly period pain, or pregnant.
45	American	Know your job, do your job, take care of your people. Document everything. Be better than everyone else. Be yourself. Join the union. Speak up for yourself on behalf of other women. Be tough and don't take it personally. Have a strong support network and identity away from the ship. Have other job and career options. Join a network of female seafarers (like WISTA!) and seek out both female and male mentors. Ask early and often, don't assume you can do it all yourself. Know that most discrimination and harassment will occur outside the lines of being able to report it - and that if you do, it's a very antagonistic process that will pit everyone against each other and lead to little positive resolution. Best to be fierce and try to fend off problems before they arise. Finally, cultivate allies. You will absolutely need the support of men, particularly white men, to get ahead in a male-dominated industry.
46	USA	I would tell her to check out and become a member of WomenOffshore.org. She'll find role models and resources for her career on the water.
47	US	You have to LIKE the work on deck, in the engine room or galley.

Statistically, out of the initial number of 47 replies obtained from women seafarers, 15 were invalidated as containing no input to the question related to advices, they were still considered as participating to the survey through providing other useful research data. A total of 32 replies were valid for the above question, representing 68,085% of the total replies. Within the GECAMET study, replies received from women seafarers and published in this article will be further compared to replies received from other target groups, namely: male seafarers, ex-female seafarers currently working in jobs on shore and ex-male seafarers working on shore.

Female seafarers participants to the current study had the following ranks: **most of them were deck officers**, more precisely 29 out of 47 (representing a percentage of 61%). A number of **4 respondent were ship captains (8,5%), out of which 2 were captains on chemical tankers. The captains were** having the following nationalities: Belgian, Australian/British, British and Tunisian. At the study have also participated 7 engine officers (14,89%) while the rest of the respondents were ratings and catering.

Respondents were aged between 22-60, with medium average **32,6 years old**.

Related to the social status of the respondents, 32 out of 47 were **single and never married** (68% of the respondents), 7 were married (out of which only 2 were with children); one was unmarried with children, 4 were divorced and 3 were de facto.

Out of the 32 valid replies, all except one represented motivational encouragements and sources of inspiration for women seafarers in order to develop their career. Beside motivational quotes,

several useful indications were received for seafarer women, as to join an union, to join WISTA network or WomenOffshore.org to find and contact role models and resources for their sea career.

WISTA (Women's International Shipping & Trading Association) is an international networking organization whose mission is to attract and support women, at the management level, in the maritime, trading and logistics sectors, while WomenOffshore.org is an online organization and resource center supporting diverse workforce on the water.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In depth interviews are considered best practices research methods recommended by the research and academic community for collecting qualitative research data. Online interviews are easily to organize and flexible to participate but have the challenge of incapacity to follow up answers.

In GECAMET study on women leaders, the target group of respondents was formed by women seafarers with current sea service.

At the end of our study we conclude that the profile of woman leader analyzed in our study had the following average characteristics: had the rank of deck officer, had a global nationality coming from diverse parts of the globe, had a medium age average of 32,6 years old, are single and were never married and are open to share motivational encouragements and sources of inspiration for other women seafarers.

Results of the interviews, as enlisted in Table 1, provide a great source of inspirational leadership. Data obtained are useful for MET personnel during classes of management of maritime human resources. Data can also be used by shipping organizations in order to improve encouragement tools, equal and effective access of women to seafarer careers on board ship. Also the replies collected can be use to provide an effective gender policy implemented in the shipping company.

MET and shipping institutions should collaborate in establishing actions of women **empowerment as conferences, training sessions and research delivered by the academic**. In order to **develop** women leadership skills the MET curriculum should include specific courses on women leadership, gender equality and cultural communication. The shared experiences of women leaders help develop leadership skills of other women in shipping through the power of example Involving in organizations that help connect women seafarers with other women in managerial positions is another useful way of sharing experience, knowledge and useful advice.

The **main purpose** of the study was to identify women in the maritime industry that are role models for other seafarers, to collect advices from such models and to share such input by making it public, in order to empower more seafarer women. Another purpose of the study is to encourage men and women awareness on gender equality in shipping

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The materials and data in this publication have been obtained through the support of the International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU) and The Nippon Foundation in Japan.

REFERENCES

- The Royal Australian Navy, Leadership Ethic, 2010, First Edition. Chief of Navy, Sea Power Centre – Australia, Royal Australian Navy Publisher, available at http://www.navy.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Navy_Leadership_Ethic.pdf, pp.13-19;
- Aggrey, H. 2000. "Women in the maritime industry: A review of female participation and their role in Maritime Education and Training in the 21st century". Dissertation. World Maritime University, Malmö.
- Jo, S.-H. 2010. "Why not women seafarers? : towards a development strategy for the recruitment and retention of women seafarers in cargo ships with particular reference to the Republic of Korea." Dissertation. World Maritime University, Malmö
- Azirh. N.T. 2014. "Women merchant mariners: empowering West African women". Dissertation. World Maritime University. Malmö.
- ILO/SIRC (Belcher, P., Sampson, H., Thomas, M., Veiga, J., & Zhao, M.) 2003. *Women Seafarers: Global employment policies and practices*. Geneva: International Labour Office, p.9.
- www.wista.net
WomenOffshore.org