Women Assuming Special Leadership Missions in the Maritime Industry

By

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Abstract:
Women continue to aim to venture into roles that have been traditionally held by men. The fight for equality has extended to allowing female captains to command military ships and private vessels. Leadership is not purely a male domain. Leadership qualities can be exhibited by both men and women. If the world is serious about human capital development, all international communities will embrace both genders in a leadership capacity to include the Maritime industries.

Key words: Ship captain, gender perceptions, conflict theory, leadership, human capital
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Cultures tend to shape careers whereby women struggle to obtain leadership roles. Careers such as ship captains, assistant ship captains, ship inspectors, and dock educators continue to emerge woman as governing authorities. The role of the captain of a ship has been described only in a masculine sense (USS Constitution Museum, 2011). Limited articles mention woman assuming the role as captain of a ship (Crevier, 2013; U.S. Navy, n.d.; USS Constitution Museum, 2011). When women are assigned to map, manage, and steer assets within any given system, a toxic culture can emerge for the women. With appropriate support systems, woman may gain confidence and operate in the manner whereby constituents of diverse systems accept their passion to surge forward.

**Theoretical Background**

Conflict theory suggests a power struggle exists within societies, and women may not have a fair chance to obtain this power (Fallon & Jome, 2007). Conflict theory claims gender will always play a role in women leadership struggles because of unequal resource distribution (Downes, n.d.). Women can be relegated to the back burner based on the appropriation of limited resources in society, which can bring conflict based on gender (Fallon & Jome, 2007).

Women continue to be viewed as the weaker sex in many cultures and as a result, women experience difficulties fighting for their rights. Many men continue to usurp power within the home based on culture and social behaviors are characterized as the “head of households.” In many religious sectors, conflicts exist whereby women are encouraged to be “subservient”. Despite the accomplishment of many women, the majority of women tend to take on the role of caregivers even if this role means giving up their rights to be recognized as equal members of society (Ruwanpura, 2007).
**Women Assuming Maritime Roles**

Up until 1963, a major taboo against women oceanographers existed primarily based on superstitions and perhaps discrimination (Bonatti & Crane, 2012). Even in 1963, many representatives of first worlds were still against women oceanographers (Bonatti & Crane, 2012). In current role of captain within the U.S. Armed Forces, women seem to be “unwanted” as commanders of war ships (U.S. Navy, n.d.).

Differences between men and women have been perceived based on “influence tactics”. Men use “influence tactics” such as personal attractiveness and assertiveness while women use tactics such as ingratiating more with other women and exchange tactics with men (Merchant, 2012). In addition to gender differences in communication, influence tactics differ in leadership styles (Merchant, 2012). Men tend focus on the task while women tend to focus on the relationship (Merchant, 2012).

Research concerning the “intersection of gender and communication styles” gives credence to the hypothesis that men and women have fundamental differences in the way language and meaning are conveyed (Merchant, 2012). Women tend to be more friendly, conversational, humble and respectful when they speak as opposed to men who are controlling and dominating in their speech (Merchant, 2012). Women dialogue and speak to stimulate social interactions while men command while speaking. Men command to ascertain their rights of dominance and control (Merchant, 2012).

Women are more transformational while men are more transactional (Merchant, 2012). Elena Lubimova was the first woman oceanographer to sail on a Scripps research vessel (Bonatti & Crane, 2012). This female Russian expeditionary was a geophysicist from the Institute of Physics of the Earth of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow (Bonatti & Crane, 2012).
In the 80s, Susan J. Clark was the first female captain of Exxon to sail an oil tanker (DeJoy, 2013). In 1990, Lieutenant Commander Darlene Iskra, USN was the first Navy woman to command a non-war ship, the USS Opportune (U.S. Navy, n.d.). In 2011, Captain Jennifer Brokaw “became the first woman in the past 10 years to reach the level of captain in the special mission division at Maersk Line, Limited (MLL), a marine contractor with the Department of Defense (Crevier, 2013, para. 1).

Based on gender differences, women tend to face the backlash of “gender stereotypes” which have negative connotations in the workplace where women are seen as weak and men being more aggressive are seen as capable (Merchant, 2012). Based on the organizational gender perception theory, when men immediate come in contact with a woman, men perceive a nourisher rather than a business partner or associate (Nelson-Porter, 2004). This bias and discrimination toward female leaders creates an atmosphere of inequality and tends to push men upwards toward leadership roles while women continue to be placed in the back burner of in the workplace (Merchant, 2012). The notion and perceptions that women are not effective in the maritime sectors, however, has changed. Women contributions on several expeditions show their assertiveness to navigate around the globe (Bonatti & Crane, 2012; Crevier, 2013).

**Responsibilities Associated with Maritime Leadership**

Missions come with different needs and responsibilities, and the ship is the primary element to begin the journey (Stephens, Stephenson, & Predaina, 2005). In case of an emergency, captains must remain with their ships till the last passenger onboard is safe (Allen, 1994). Military captains are completely in-charge of the crew in times of war and have to only answer to the president (USS Constitution Museum, 2011). The heroic captain of the infamous ship, the Titanic, maintained self-confidence and control during moments of panic and disarray.
(Allen, 1994). The captain was directly involved in managing and calming the passengers over an extended time, assessing the damage, and creating solutions to save lives (Allen, 1994).

The captains on the Mercy Ships, however, have more demanding responsibilities including gearing the ships and the crew safely to unfamiliar territories (Stephens et al., 2005). Because of funding, the turnaround time had to be swift. The captains of the Mercy Ships have to fund their venture or raise funds for their benevolent mission (Stephens et al., 2005).

**Methodology and Findings**

Individual has the capability to make multiple choices over time and one cannot easily ascertain which job will become a preferred occupation (Hill, 1994). A need gratification theory is central to occupational choice (Morgeson, F. P., DeRue, D. S., & Karam, E. P. (2010). Need orientation is developed through childhood experience, which is constant in the individual (Morgeson et al., 2010). Individual choose an occupational role, which will be rewarding in terms of their particular needs (Morgeson et al., 2010). Research further shows individuals will apply for positions that intimately satisfy their goals and needs or reform a particular job to suit their needs (Hill, 1994). For this research and with the assistance of a representative from Brigette’s Technology Consulting and Research Firm, five professionals in the Maritime industry (MP) were given the opportunity to answer four questions that aimed to gain a better understanding why the role of captain or assistant captain of a ship has not been rightfully assigned to or accepted by more women.

1. Name the primary ship you are associated with?
2. What is the mission of the ship?
3. What is your role in relations to leading on the ship?
4. Do you believe major stakeholders in the Maritime industry trust women with managing or steering a ship and directing the crewmembers?

Demographics of maritime professionals. Five participants from diverse sectors within maritime industry shared their experiences that provided insight into the progression of women to assume the role of captain of a ship. As shown in Table 1, of the 5 professionals, only 2 are in position to navigate a boat or vessel in the future. MP 2 who had maritime studies in high school is in training to become a tug master, an individual who drives the smaller boats. MP 4, the only male maritime participant in this research, is a Navigation officer, which is junior to the captain. Working in the Nigerian waters, MP 4 navigates offshore support vessels (OSV, a working vessel), anchor handling and supply vessels, and diving support vessels (DSV), such as Jascon 23, Jascon 45, and Walvis 5. While attending the academy for 4 years, MP 4 earned a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree in ship navigation.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MP 1</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Publisher and Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP 2</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Black Zulu speaking</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Tugmaster Trainee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP 3</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>U.S. Navy Reserve Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP 4</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>Hausa, tribe in Nigeria</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Navigation Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP 5</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Research Coordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two women were associated with research. MP 1, the editor of a news publication for the Southern African commercial industry, covers training, ships, tugs, safety, Navy issues, and so forth. MP 5, a researcher, covers Granite State. Although MP 3 is a Lt. Commander (0-4) in the U.S. Navy, she is stationed on one Naval Air station whereby aircrafts are abundant and ships are not present.

Mission of ships. The mission of a ship varies across sectors. MP 3 shared, the mission of Naval ships depends on the needs of the U.S. Navy: “transport weapons, supplies, foods (merchant/cargo ships), or patients (e.g., medical ships) or refuel planes for landing (carrier ships). Only two (2) medical ships are left, one for the East Coast and one for the West Coast.”

The mission of the ships MP 4 navigates depends on the contract of private companies and clients. MP 4 engages in an oil field in deep sea, towing rigs across the ocean, pipe laying on the sea bed and so forth. The mission of ships that MP 5 is associated with includes whale watching. In regards to contracting, the mission of the tugs as shared by MP 2 is to bring the ships in and out of the ports. Within the very small industry, MP 2 shared only one cargo ship, the SA Agulhas, was used to transport some passengers and cargo or items to the islands. SAMSA (South Africa Maritime Safety Authority) is used for training learners. MP 2 is not aware of any country in Africa that owns a cargo ship; however, indicated what fishing ships are owned by Africans. MP 1 shared, “SA Agulhas was in 2012 converted to a cadet training vessel with a key secondary function as a working merchant marine vessel.”

Leadership roles associated with ships. MP 1 reflected on published literature that highlighted the accomplishment of women in leadership positions associated with ships (see Table 3). Licensed pilots are authorized to navigate ships of any size and type into South African waters. The literature depicts through the process of raising awareness, women have
been able to gain recognition. The 2010 “Women in Maritime” voyage highlighted the roles of “sea-going women.” MP 4 expressed concerning the abilities of the one female captain he knows, she is a Mexican and “a good one.”

Table 2

**Accomplished Women in Leadership Roles in the Maritime Industry**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Credential</th>
<th>Entity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly Klaasen</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Safmarine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precious Dube,</td>
<td>Marine pilot (Black)</td>
<td>Transnet National Port Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bongiwe Mbambo, and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinky Zungu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xoliswa Bekiswa</td>
<td>Marine pilot (Black)</td>
<td>Guided the MSC Sola, the largest vessel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>of its kind to dock in South Africa into</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the Port of Ngqura in 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bekiswa</td>
<td>Marine pilot (Black)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akhona Geveza</td>
<td>Trainee</td>
<td>Safmarine Kariba</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MP 3 further shared, in the U.S. Navy, “Captains of ships may hold other ranks than Captain, such as Lt. Commander (0-4) and Commander (0-5) for smaller ships; Captains (0-6) or Admirals (0-7) or larger ships.” As a Navigation officer working in the bridge with the captain, MP 4 commands the crew based on the captain’s standing orders, which include daily ship maintenance and other tasks requested by their clients. MP 3 if activated for war onto a medical ship will assume the role of a registered nurse (RN). If activated onto a Naval carrier, as a Naval officers, MP 3 will performed the duties assigned at random, such as watch duty officer, fire duty officer, and so forth.
MP 2 shared, when ships enter into a port or harbor, pilots board the ship first followed by port personnel. “Pilot tells the tugs what to do until the ship is safely alongside or has left the quay then the tugs are made fast to the ship” MP 5 while managing the research assistants on board the ship leads the captain on where to search for whales and how to operate the ship around the whales.

**Trust associated with gender diversity.** Diversity seems to be welcomed in the maritime industries. MP 3 further shared, “Women serve on ships, submarines, and airplanes.” The superiors over the ship (Admirals or whoever writes the military orders) will allow the women who hold a degree and volunteers for missions to lead or go onto the ship. MP 1 highlighted training that has commenced:

Five women cadets of a group of nine completed an 18-day mechatronic training course in the Netherlands in late 2013, in preparation for the arrival of Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA) Dredging Services’ new grab hopper dredger being supplied by IHC Merwede. The students, all from KwaZulu-Natal, completed their mechanical engineering diplomas (at Mangosuthu University Technikon and Durban University Technikon) prior to joining TNPA and embarking on a career at sea. In addition, they have completed the 6-month maritime studies course at Durban University of Technology and are in various stages of their year of seafaring time. Training cadets in mechatronics is a first for TNPA’s dredging services which rely heavily on external specialist technicians to maintain the vessels vast array of sophisticated controls and electronics on board.

MP 4 expressed, women attend the academy; however, while onboard, women are not seen. “They disappear”. MP 4 shared, most women serve on crew and pilot boats. In regards to large vessels, women find that performance is difficult because of the tasks. “When you yourself say you cannot do it, no stakeholder can have interest or even trust you.” MP 1 further reported that the body of Geveza, the young female cadet training on board the Safmarine Kariba, was retrieved from the Adriatic Sea off of Croatia. Although pathologists said Geveza committed suicide, allegations arised that an officer had been abusing her and other female cadets.
MP 5 who have worked under two female captains and have served with several female mates shared although the maritime industry becoming more and more diverse, “some members of the older generation are still not comfortable with women in charge but thankfully times are changing.” South Africa, MP 2, believes on big ships, there is not more than five female captains. “On the tugs side, they do not have a choice; I think 70% of tugmasters are female.”

Limitations to this research include finding the email addresses for captains of ships. Many women seem to be associated with Yacht clubs than with ship and tankers. Most captains appear to be White men, and African women or African Americans appear to be scarce in many sectors in the maritime industries. Women seem to engage in naturalist activities associated with boating, to include fishery and saving the whales. Email, social media, and one-on-one telephone interviews were effective means to collect data for this research. Based on several solicitation calls and one follow-up email message, many organizations that promote the maritime industry do employ captains of ships at their organization.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

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The conceptual foundation for the article is feminist theory. Feminist theory simply states that women are familiar with gender inequality and women are burdened, deprived, and disregarded in comparison with men (Downes, 2000).

As stated by MP 5 more and more women are becoming ship captains.
Future research may involve researching women who lead submarines. A retired female E-5 in U.S. Navy (personal communication, May 24, 2014) shared in 1988-2001, no women were allowed on submarines or had jobs on submarines. The submarines did not have female bathroom facilities.

As further reported by MP 1 in the news publication, additional research may consist of logistics, electronics, oil and gas, marine fuels, current affairs, piracy issues, supply vessels, marine law, business issues, Black economic empowerment (BEE), import and export matters, environmental issues, salvage and towing, break-bulk, and face-to-face profiles.

References


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