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**STRATEGIES AND BEHAVIORS REQUIRED FOR FOR MANAGING LEADERSHIP  
AND GENDER CHALLENGES - FOR WOMEN IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR IN  
ZIMBABWE**

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**Abstract:** *Research has shown that gender is one of the important criteria that determined an employee's position at the work place ( Adler, 1994, Priola, 2004). Work life balance and gender prejudices make it difficult for women managers to break the glass ceiling (Rapaciolli, 2012). These studies have shown that there many challenges that women managers face. This article presents findings of a study carried out to find out what strategies women managers in the hospitality and financial services in Zimbabwe employ in order to manage the leadership and gender challenges that face them. Research has shown that women mangers experience difficulties in striking a good work life balance due to pressure of time and prejudices from male colleagues, resulting in participants not being appreciated or noticed. The strategies that the participants used to manage the leadership and gender challenges included the following: managing their relationship with husband and enlisting his support, effective management of time and making use of domestic help.*

**Keywords:** *leadership, gender, challenges, strategy, behaviour, Zimbabwe*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Previous research findings into challenges that face women managers in the hospitality and financial services sectors in Zimbabwe indicated that women managers faced the following leadership and gender related challenges ( Zinyemba, 2013):

- women have to work very hard to be noticed;
- nature of business requires long hours and shift work which meant spending nights away from home;
- clients preferring to be served by male managers to female managers;
- gender imbalances in favour of men at the executive level;
- resistance from male colleagues and insubordination of male subordinates;
- lack of support from other senior women managers; and
- not being taken seriously by male colleagues.

In order for the women managers to effectively participate in management positions they employed a number of strategies which included good time management, improving personal effectiveness by acquiring professional skills and developing strategies for managing work-life balance.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The findings are based on a qualitative research study which using mixed methods namely in depth case studies, focus discussion groups and a questionnaire. In depth case studies were carried out on 8 participants. A questionnaire was sent out to 60 participants and 2 focus group discussions were conducted with 8 people in each group. The research focused on answering three questions which were:

- What strategies did the participants use to manage challenges that they meet at work?
- What strategies did the participants use to manage challenges that meet at home?
- What recommendations can you make for improving participation of women in leadership/management positions?

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Research findings relating to strategies for managing challenges that participants faced at home and at work are presented below.



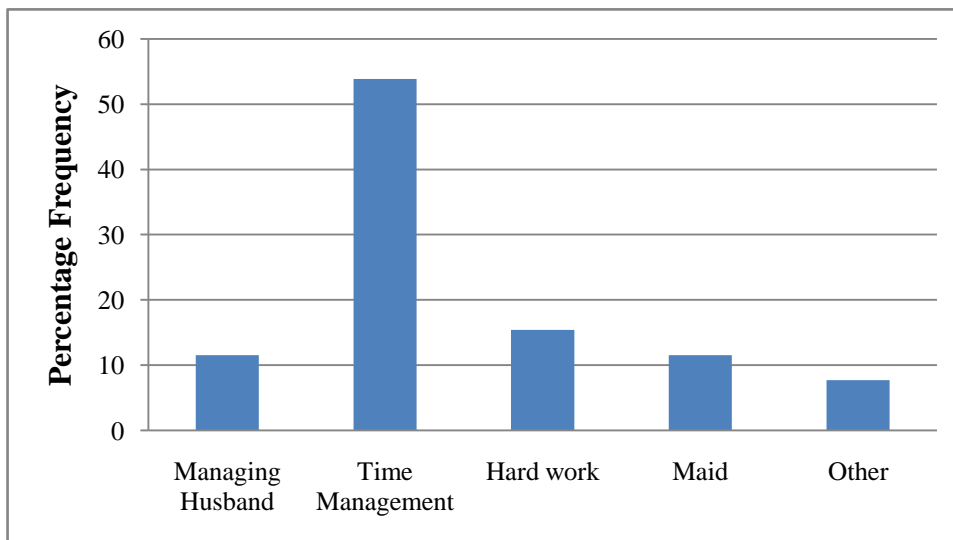
## STRATEGIES AT HOME

Figure 1 is a summary of the frequently used strategies by women managers in the hospitality and financial services sectors in managing the challenges at home.

The figure also shows that of all the strategies that the respondents employed in meeting challenges at home there were four outstanding ones namely, time management, hard work, managing husband and effective use of housemaid and children.

Time management had the highest frequency of 53 %. Effective time management meant balancing work and family responsibilities well. In order to manage time effectively findings indicated the use of daytime and weekends to attend to family responsibilities, staying up late up late into the night to catch up with one's studies and any extra work. Time management also meant proper planning of work so that no work was carried home. It was important not to mix work and home responsibilities.

**Figure 1 Strategies at home**



Working hard was another strategy that the respondents used. Staying up late and attending to family responsibilities, performing wifely and motherly roles during day time and weekends meant that one had to work very hard. It left little time for social activity.

Support from husband was indicated to be a success factor for many participants. This required engaging husband in dialogue, being open to each other and talking about each other's expectations and how they can be fulfilled. It was important to enlist the support of a husband. Open communication and good intrapersonal skills was important in managing husband and enlisting his support. The research findings showed that supportive husbands assisted with supervising children's home work and taking out children during weekends so



that the wife was left free to do other things. A supportive husband also assisted in attending school functions.

Effective use of house maid was cited as helpful. The participants indicated that they trained their house maids to cook so that the family ate well to the satisfaction of husband and children. It was even suggested that training the children to cook as well was also helpful. This strategy took pressure away from the woman manager in that she could put in a little more hours at work knowing that the meals were being prepared and when she got home she would have some time to rest and to supervise children's homework. The importance of supportive family was also highlighted in the research findings of the CIMA study (Rapacioli, 2012).

Effective management of challenges at home meant that one was able to achieve a work life balance.

## **STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING LEADERSHIP AND GENDER CHALLENGES AT WORK**

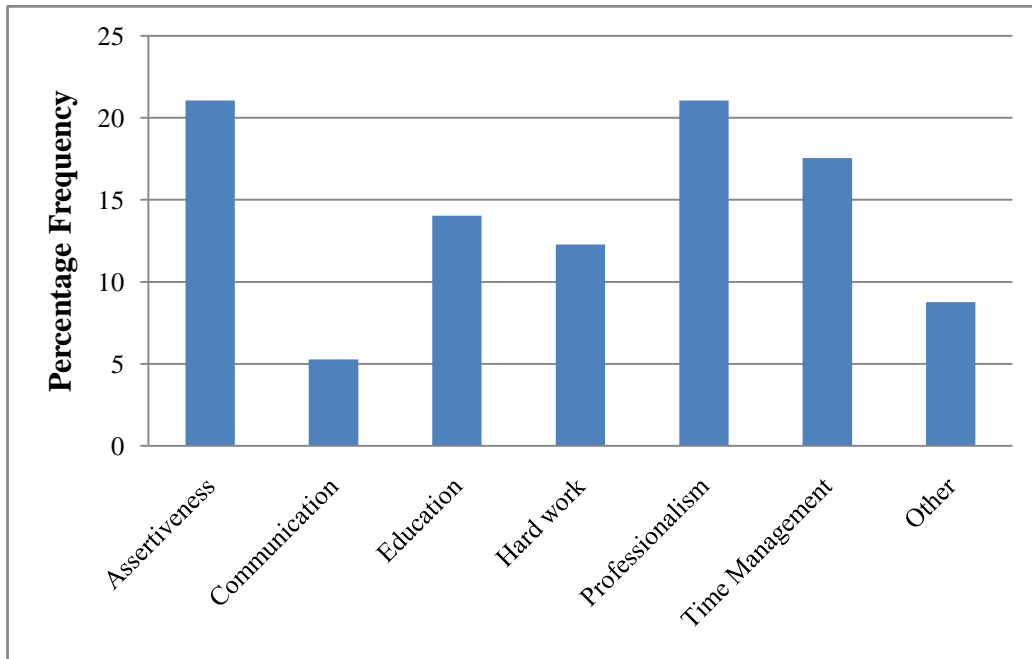
Content and frequency analysis of strategies used to manage challenges that the respondents faced at work as a woman manager cited 6 frequently used strategies namely:

- being assertive;
- effective communication and interpersonal skills;
- having educational and professional qualifications;
- hard work; and
- professionalism and good time management;

Figure 2 shows that professionalism and assertiveness had the highest frequency of 21% each followed by effective time management at 18%, educational and professional qualifications at 14%, working hard at 7% and communication at 5%. Having the right educational and professional qualifications was key to managing leadership and gender challenges at work.



**Figure 2 Strategies at work**



The behaviours associated with assertiveness were:

- being firm and fair;
- standing one's ground;
- pushing for results in the face of resistance to one's leadership; and
- ignoring negative criticism coming from men.

The behaviours associated with professionalism were:

- striving for excellence in performance;
- focusing on performance and not on personal issues;
- maintaining a professional conduct at work;
- dealing with subordinates individually and focusing on performance not the person;
- dressing appropriately so as to avoid being misunderstood by men; and
- not being emotional since women are always associated with being emotional.

Behaviours associated with educational and professional qualifications included the following:

- keeping in touch with developments in one's field via the internet and study visits;
- acquiring the necessary educational and professional qualifications needed for the job; and
- self continuous improvement.



Behaviours associated with effective management of time included the following:

- always being in time with reports and meeting deadlines;
- developing a work plan to assist in managing time;
- prioritizing work and keeping to the planned schedule of work;
- consciously making an effort not to leave work after 6.00pm;
- being creative and finding new ways of managing time; and
- trimming away some of the responsibilities by delegating to junior staff.

Behaviours associated with hard work included the following:

- being committed to work and the organization;
- being prepared to put in extra time;
- doing a thorough job consistently;
- giving a good service to the employer;
- striving to achieving in spite of a difficult environment;
- striving for excellence;
- self discipline and being available when needed at work;

Behaviours associated with communication and interpersonal skills included the following:

- speaking clearly and with confidence;
- organizing one's thoughts well and speaking with conviction;
- making meaningful consultations before making a decision;
- not being confrontational when responding to men; and
- listening effectively.

Findings relating to the strategies that participants use to manage challenges that they face at home and at work are presented below.

### **STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING CHALLENGES RELATED TO HOME AND FAMILY**

Respondents indicated that they used the following strategies for managing challenges they met at home and with family:

- training children and house maid to cook so that meals prepared in their absence were made well;
- teaching children how to drive to reduce pressure on themselves in driving them to school and picking them up from school;



- engaging husband in dialogue, discussing expectations of each other and enlisting his support and not being confrontational;
- not bringing work home and giving family quality time;
- staying up late doing work and making sure that day time was reserved for family;

### **STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING CHALLENGES AS MANAGER AT WORK**

Research findings showed that respondents used the following strategies to manage those leadership and gender challenges that they experienced at work:

- managing time well by good planning and scheduling of work to meet deadlines;
- remaining professional at all times and focusing on work;
- trimming away some of own responsibilities by developing staff and delegating to them in order to create more time to self;
- being firm, assertive and standing one's ground with confidence;
- attending all important meetings and participating actively in meetings;
- coming for meetings well prepared;
- empowering self by getting exposure to best practices from other organizations, learning through the internet and networking;
- being well informed about what happens in other departments and keeping abreast with information;
- acquiring the necessary qualifications for the job so as to be credible;
- insubordination from subordinates was managed by being firm and pushing for results to meet deadlines in spite of resistance;
- ignoring negative comments from men and keeping focused on work;
- being adaptable to different situations and maintaining good interpersonal relationships with subordinates and colleagues;
- continuous self improvement in order to keep abreast with trends and acquiring the necessary education, skills and qualifications; and
- learning to balance work and home demands and trying not to mix work and home issues.



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## **ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE EFFECTIVENESS OF WOMEN MANAGERS**

Findings from the qualitative responses to the question on advice and recommendations for women in the hospitality and financial services to be effective as managers were that:

- women managers should remain focused on their jobs and not become distracted by negative comments from other people;
- for one to be more effective and participate more meaningfully and get recognized there was need for women managers to empower themselves by being well equipped with the necessary educational and professional qualifications;
- women should continue working hard and be visible for them to be noticed;
- women managers were advised to be professional in the execution of their work and not to compromise themselves by succumbing to questionable behaviour with male superiors in order to get favours as this was not a lasting solution to their challenges;
- there was need for women managers to contribute meaningfully during meetings; it was necessary for one to always come well prepared for the meetings and to have information at the tips of one's fingers, showing confidence when talking and participating as an equal;
- there was general agreement from the findings that women managers were advised to believe in themselves and be prepared to take risks;
- in order to manage the home and work life balances women managers were advised to have a strong support system at home; this included making sure that house maids and children were properly trained to assist with some of the responsibilities such as cooking and children driving themselves to school;
- women were advised to make use of the time they go on maternity leave to empower themselves by acquiring the necessary skills and qualifications;
- the long hours typical of the hospitality industry required one to be dedicated and committed to work;
- it was necessary for women managers in both sectors to have confidence and belief in themselves that they can do it;
- women managers should learn to be assertive and stand up for what they believed to be their rights;





- it was necessary for women managers to maximise on the little time they had with family by not taking work problems home; and
- in order to get recognition at the top, women managers should raise their visibility by volunteering to take on leadership roles and responsibilities.

## OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from the qualitative responses to questionnaires indicated other recommendations which would facilitate effective participation of women in management and leadership positions. These included the following:

- creation of a network for women managers where they can network with other women managers from other organizations to share experiences;
- there should be a platform for women managers to express themselves freely, air their views and the challenges that they meet; and
- the study showed that women were not well represented in top executive positions; it expressed that there was need for a quota system to ensure women representation in top executive positions provided the women were qualified for those positions.

## CONCLUSION

The strategies that the participants used to manage challenges that they face at work and at home included the following: working hard in order to prove themselves; planning and managing time effectively, which required a lot of self discipline? Assertiveness, professionalism, effective communication skills and soliciting for help from husband were also important. Effective time management required the participants to balance work and home responsibilities well. In order to manage challenges the participants also employed domestic help and empowered their children by giving them life skills such as driving and preparing meals for themselves. This strategy reflected what other women managers in Asian countries are also doing to manage those challenges (Thein et al., 2010).

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