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# THE LACK OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN MANAGEMENT IN THE HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM INDUSTRY: FOCUSED ON THE INTERVIEW WITH EXECUTIVES

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## Abstract

This study examines underrepresentation in hospitality management, noting the contrast between lower-tier workers, predominantly minorities, and upper management, which lacks diversity. The paper suggests inclusion of minorities in hiring processes could improve workforce diversity. Challenges including attracting and retaining minority employees and promoting them to management roles are discussed. Barriers like escalating education costs and academic readiness that impact potential future managers are also explored. The study contends that given the multicultural customer base, the industry must recognize the value of a diverse workforce to improve service quality.

## Keywords

Lack of Diversity, Glass Ceiling, Mentorship, Education

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## Introduction

The hospitality and tourism sector, one of the most rapidly expanding industries, was forecasted to provide employment to 328 million people by 2022 (Watson, 2008). The inception of this industry can be traced back to the Babylonian code of laws, specifically the Code of Hammurabi, which mandated tavern owners to report any guest conspiring to commit a crime (Brymer, 2020). The industry witnessed substantial growth during the Silk Road era, a crucial trade route linking the East and West, facilitating not just the exchange of goods like silk, spices, and precious metals, but also cultural exchanges and interactions (Saduov, Mukanov, Asanova, Rakhimzhanova, & Raimbekov, 2019).

Despite employing millions worldwide and generating substantial revenue, the hospitality and tourism sector reveals a striking lack of diversity and inclusion within management roles (Gilbert, 2022). Factors such as insufficient training, inadequate education, and a dearth of mentors for minority groups are often cited as reasons for this disparity. This skewed representation in leadership can lead to a deficiency in innovation, creativity, and a comprehensive understanding of diverse customer bases. It also restricts the availability of positive role models for women and minorities within the sector.

The Castell Project, 2021, revealed that out of 671 websites reviewed, only 11% showcased a Black director (Black Representation in Hospitality Industry Leadership, 2021). Another study indicated that although women and minorities constitute 60% and 40% of the hotel industry's frontline staff, respectively, they represent only 10% of the General Managers (Mirza, 2021). These figures highlight the considerable discrepancy in the representation of minorities and women.

Given the global reach and diverse clientele of the hospitality and tourism industry, it is crucial for its workforce to reflect this diversity. Moreover, diversity is a catalyst for innovation, offering varied perspectives that can enhance business operations and productivity.

Organizational culture is another key aspect of diversity within the hospitality and tourism industry. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023). This is particularly relevant in the hospitality and tourism sector, where the interaction between host and guest is central to the industry (Bavik, 2016).

This paper will explore the issues of the glass ceiling, mentorship scarcity, and the need for adequate training and education as potential causes of the diversity deficit in management roles within this industry. Through interviewing leading figures in the hospitality industry, the study aims to gather insights and develop feasible strategies for enhancing diversity and inclusion, thereby fostering increased productivity.

## **Literature Review**

The hospitality sector stands as one of the foremost global industries in the present day. However, it grapples with a significant challenge - the underrepresentation of women and minority groups in leadership roles. Research indicates a trio of underlying causes for this disparity, which encompass the presence of a glass ceiling, a scarcity of mentorship opportunities, and gaps in training and education.

### ***Glass Ceiling***

Research was undertaken to ascertain whether the glass ceiling continued to impede women's advancement to leadership roles. This research encompassed interviews with women occupying high-level positions in the hospitality sector. When questioned about the glass ceiling and its ongoing impact on women's promotion to senior management roles, the study found that these women perceived a shift from the traditional concept of the glass ceiling. Some respondents cited self-imposed obstacles, such as the struggles associated with motherhood, as part of this glass ceiling (Boone, 2013). Challenges like balancing the demands of raising a family and progressing in the corporate world often resulted in these women missing out on opportunities once they were ready to ascend the corporate ladder, as a new generation had entered the workforce (Brizendine, 2008). The study concluded that women should be given the chance to both raise their children and hold corporate leadership roles.

O'Connor's study shed light on another aspect of the glass ceiling. It suggested that the shortage of women in the pipeline for executive roles could be a contributing factor to the persistence of the glass ceiling. Furthermore, the study noted that women's initial reluctance to negotiate for better compensation could impact their career progression, possibly leading supervisors to assign them less challenging tasks, thereby affecting their potential to assume leadership roles (O'Connor, 2006).

Mansoor Soufi's (2011) research confirmed the existence of the glass ceiling, revealing that approximately 6% of men held the belief that top management roles were better suited for men. This study also found that nearly 30% of men were averse to the idea of having women as supervisors. While not all men were opposed to women leaders, they generally saw management as a domain of masculinity rather than femininity (Soufi, 2011). An additional facet of the glass ceiling is the conduct of male coworkers. Many women grapple with a corporate culture that appears hostile towards them. The glass ceiling may be influenced by five factors: management perceptions, workplace environment, instances of sexual harassment, work-life balance, and the organization's policies (Barelka, 2019).

### ***Mentorship Deficit***

Mentorship is a critical solution to the leadership gap experienced by women in the hospitality industry. Payne's study suggests that high turnover in the industry, often due to low remuneration, can be mitigated by identifying individuals with leadership potential and providing them with mentors. This strategy facilitates the development of crucial skills such as leadership, technical abilities, and communication - all of which are fundamental for effective leadership (Payne, 2020).

Mentorship involves matching an experienced individual with someone less experienced, fostering skill development and knowledge transfer. This approach benefits the company as it encourages internal promotion, demonstrating loyalty to its current employees. A case study conducted in the United Kingdom paired 15 women in the hospitality sector with 15 mentors. This study incorporated both male and female mentors and mentees, meeting monthly. It was found that women often felt challenged expressing themselves to male supervisors. They also felt alienated by the masculine culture of boardrooms, struggling to find their footing within the organization (Dashper, 2020).

Mentoring programs are among the most effective strategies in human resource management, serving to retain and motivate employees. With a mentor, employees have a reliable source for industry-related questions and insights, thereby acquiring timely and pertinent information about their field.

### ***Gaps in Training and Education***

As the hospitality and tourism sector evolves, so does the need for enhanced training and education. With advancements in software, increased variety in the industry, and growing expertise requirements, the education of industry professionals needs to keep pace. Initially, the industry didn't require formal degrees, but this is gradually

changing with the sector's expansion and the growing demand for skills in data analysis, accounting, and even artificial intelligence (Ricci, 2022).

The industry's educational aspect has received criticism, primarily because many people underestimate the hard work and specialized training inherent to the hospitality sector. It's often overlooked that the industry presents unique challenges requiring intensive, specialized training, such as managing diverse individuals – a crucial skill in hospitality.

### **Method**

In this research, we utilize an interview-based method to investigate the core issues behind the lack of diversity in the hospitality industry and to develop strategies for improving diversity and inclusion in the future. Our research population comprises members from notable organizations such as the National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators & Developers (NABHOOD) and the National Society of Minorities in Hospitality (NSMH), both of which are dedicated to addressing the issue of underrepresentation of people of color in the hospitality industry.

Participants are randomly selected with an emphasis on individuals holding managerial or ownership roles within their respective organizations. The study involves 10 participants, including executives and persons of color in management roles across various hospitality and tourism businesses. The selection criteria focus on their roles within these organizations and particularly target individuals who are active members of minority-focused organizations and national associations. Experts from these organizations oversee the selection process, and the interview schedules are organized based on each participant's availability.

To illuminate the scarcity of diversity and inclusion in management roles within the hospitality and tourism industry, we conduct structured interviews with a diverse array of participants. All of these individuals have substantial knowledge in the hospitality field and have expressed their willingness to contribute to the project. Each participant engages in a 45-minute interview session, which can be conducted either face-to-face or via Zoom. The study adopts a qualitative analysis method to interpret the collected data.

Data collection is facilitated using a qualitative questionnaire that consists of five open-ended questions. These questions probe into various topics such as the existence of a glass ceiling, the role of mentorship, and the gaps in education and training. The specific questions are:

1. Do you see the glass ceiling as an obstacle to diversity in managerial roles among minorities? If so, why?
2. Have you personally experienced the effects of the glass ceiling phenomenon?
3. How can mentorship contribute to advancing diversity?
4. What kinds of training and educational support can a company provide to improve diversity?
5. Do you feel that companies are making significant efforts to enhance diversity?

### **Results of the Interview**

In this research, the main method for data interpretation is quantitative analysis, derived from the comprehensive interviews carried out. After the interviews, the transcriptions are scrutinized, and the emergent themes from the questions are systematically arranged into the Table 1 shown to provide an organized summary of the findings. To adhere to ethical standards, all participants are briefed about the ensured confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, as well as their right to exit the study at any moment.

Interviewee	Q1: Perception of Glass Ceiling	Q2: Personal Experience with Glass Ceiling	Q3: Importance of Mentorship	Q4: Suggested Diversity Interventions	Q5: Perception of Industry Changes
Interviewee 1	A barrier due to race or gender	Passed over for less experienced candidate	Guides new employees	Tuition reimbursement	Recognizes the creative potential of diversity
Interviewee 2	Disadvantages already marginalized individuals	Seen it in previous work history	Provides a role model for minorities	Diversity training	Forced due to lawsuits
Interviewee 3	Discriminatory against minorities	No personal experience	Inspires minorities	On-the-job training	Recognizes the importance of diversity
Interviewee 4	Causes lack of diversity	Heard about it in the company	Brings innovative ideas	Time off for education	Recognizes the benefits of innovation
Interviewee 5	Impacts workplace innovation	Passed over for a promotion in training	Opportunities for learning	Partnerships promoting minorities	Allows qualified applicants in management
Interviewee 6	Hinders qualified individuals	Passed over without explanation	Provides industry insight	Communication and diversity training	Promotes diversity through fairs and events
Interviewee 7	Stereotypes individuals	Didn't receive job in another office	Assists inexperienced employees	On-the-job training, internships	Initiates recruitment fairs at HBCUs
Interviewee 8	Prevents qualified individuals due to ethnicity	No personal experience	Assists in understanding various positions	Team building, hiring from within	Promotes minority hiring initiatives
Interviewee 9	Halts promotion progress for underserved	Trained candidate received the job	Provides relatable information	On-the-job training, invests in continuing education	Some deny existing issues
Interviewee 10	Impacts attraction of qualified applicants	Seen it in the workplace, not personally victimized	Offers trusted guidance	Continuing education reimbursement, on-the-job training	Increasing recognition of diversity advantages

**Table 1. Summary of Interview Responses**

\* The table still encapsulates the central ideas expressed by the interviewees.

The analysis distinctly highlights that there is a widespread consensus among executives that the lack of diversity is a critical issue in the Hospitality and Tourism industry. The outcomes of the interviews are delineated according to the categories defined in the literature review and the research areas of interest.

### **Glass Ceiling**

The topic of the glass ceiling garnered significant attention during the interviews, with many participants identifying it as a substantial barrier contributing to the industry's diversity deficit. One respondent voiced that the prevalence of the glass ceiling effectively deters minorities from pursuing their professional ambitions. Such invisible barriers often discourage potential candidates from applying for positions as the industry is predominantly male-owned, casting doubt on women's authority roles. Furthermore, the glass ceiling doesn't solely impact gender but also encompasses racial discrimination, thus stifling innovation. Participants were also queried on their personal encounters with the glass ceiling. As anticipated, the female interviewees confirmed their experiences, with some highlighting subtle discriminatory practices, such as intrusive questions about their childcare responsibilities or future marital plans.

The consensus among all interviewees was that the persistence of glass ceilings in corporations seriously hampers diversity. Some companies are compelled to confront these issues due to looming discrimination lawsuits. In response, companies are becoming increasingly transparent and are demonstrating this by establishing dedicated diversity departments tasked with ensuring equal job application opportunities for minorities. Another key factor prompting companies to prioritize diversity is their recognition of the need for their workforce to reflect the markets they serve. The executive participants unanimously agreed on the necessity of diverse management, positing that diversity fosters innovation and attracts minority patrons to their businesses.

One interviewee expressed, "The glass ceiling doesn't require shattering but breaking." He conveyed his belief that dismantling the glass ceiling would pave the way for women and minorities to ascend the corporate hierarchy and achieve success. He also emphasized the importance of those who face discrimination to voice their experiences, asserting that the silence surrounding the glass ceiling impedes its demolition, subsequently hindering women and minorities from realizing their full potential. Another participant expressed a desire for women and minorities to recognize their value and reject any notions of not belonging in the industry.

### ***Mentoring***

In discussions about the role of mentoring in promoting diversity, executives suggested that Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) could serve as ideal launchpads for mentorship programs. They advocated for the formation of partnerships with HBCUs, particularly those offering Hospitality and Tourism programs. These collaborations could enable companies to provide internship opportunities to students, thus facilitating firsthand learning about business operations from existing management within the organization. Such partnerships have the potential to introduce fresh graduates, already familiar with the company's workings, into the workforce. This approach can expedite the transition into managerial roles, bypassing the expense and time required for extensive training.

To promote diversity, the executives suggested initiatives such as 'Diversity Hire Days' at companies. These designated days would exclusively cater to individuals who could contribute to the company's diversity. The potential employees are invited to the company, providing them the chance to explore the company at a leisurely pace, without the urgency to finalize applications and engage with everyone at once. They are offered tours of the business and opportunities for personal conversations with various staff members. This initiative benefits both potential employees and employers, as it offers employers a chance to acquaint themselves with the job seekers.

### ***Training and Education***

The executives emphasized the crucial role of on-the-job training in facilitating the progression of minorities within the field. They also highlighted different diversity training programs that could potentially alleviate the stress sometimes associated with diverse hiring practices. One executive identified a significant gap in the form of tuition reimbursement, which obstructs employees who aspire to pursue advanced degrees but cannot afford to reduce their working hours to attend school full-time.

The executives agreed that the lack of adequate training and education posed significant challenges. Subtle racial discrimination was also identified as a prevalent issue, with one executive noting that while racism might not always be overt, its undertones still present a challenge for many within the industry. Another highlighted challenge was the insufficient dissemination of job advertisements within the company, preventing minorities from being aware of and applying for advancement opportunities.

One suggested strategy to enhance training and education was to engage high school students in the industry. For instance, programs at Virginia Beach's Advanced Technology Center and Tidewater Community College provide shadowing internship opportunities for students, allowing them to gain firsthand industry experience. These students earn college credits by participating in practical tasks such as front desk work and event planning, equipping them with the skills required in the industry.

Moreover, NABHOOD is actively partnering with colleges and universities to offer industry-specific training. They invite students to their annual convention to network with hotel owners and operators, offering mentorship and internship opportunities.

## **Discussion**

Upon juxtaposing the interview data with the literature review, significant parallels were found. The participating managers unanimously agreed that the glass ceiling, insufficient mentoring, and lack of training and education contributed to the diversity deficit within the industry. They concurred that these problems could stifle innovation in the sector.

The interviewees acknowledged that women and minorities are disproportionately impacted by the glass ceiling. Despite possessing the necessary experience, they are often overlooked for promotions and leadership roles. The consensus was that while minorities can easily secure positions such as housekeeping, they are seldom recruited for management roles. Even though the literature suggests that the glass ceiling is diminishing due to initiatives like Diversity Days and other training programs, it remains a significant barrier to the advancement of minorities in the field.

The research confirmed the lack of mentoring as a significant concern. However, organizational developments are gradually addressing this issue. Institutions like NABHOOD, NSMH, and MiH are pioneering efforts to help minorities find their footing in the hospitality and tourism industry. Collaborations with industry businesses to offer internship opportunities to students from minority institutions are progressively bridging the gap.

Training and education for diversity are also evolving. By linking students with industry mentors, minorities are gaining the necessary training to set them on a leadership trajectory. These initiatives facilitate internships and other educational opportunities to help students achieve their aspirations. Thus, while the literature and data align in some aspects, evolving changes are impacting the hospitality and tourism industry.

Based on this study's findings, several recommendations have been proposed to promote inclusivity in the industry:

- **Cultural Diversity Workshops:** Implementing cultural diversity training workshops to increase awareness and understanding.
- **Advancement of Hospitality Education:** Promoting educational opportunities within the hospitality field.
- **Expansion of Mentorship Programs:** Enhancing mentorship presence to guide and inspire industry newcomers.
- **Minority Incentives:** Offering incentives to attract and retain minority groups within the hospitality sector.
- **Leadership Development:** Providing executive leadership training to aid individuals in ascending to higher industry positions.
- **High School Outreach:** Engaging with high schools to introduce students to opportunities in the hospitality and tourism sector.

### **Conclusion**

This research elucidates the factors contributing to the diversity deficit in the hospitality industry. Several elements, including the pervasive glass ceiling, hinder women and minorities from advancing to upper management levels due to often-invisible obstacles. The scarcity of mentorship further exacerbates this issue. Without representation, individuals may feel ill at ease, impacting their chances of promotion. Additionally, the dearth of specialized education and training in the field of hospitality impedes the development of a more diverse workforce.

To foster greater diversity and inclusivity within management teams, we recommend that senior executives make concerted efforts to familiarize themselves with individuals from various backgrounds. We propose that industry leaders establish collaborations with Historically Black Colleges and Universities and explore the potential of students graduating from their hospitality programs. The inception of internship programs can provide young individuals from diverse backgrounds with opportunities to enter the industry and learn from experienced staff. Further, organizations should consider offering more comprehensive tuition reimbursement programs and ensure their widespread promotion within the company, rather than limiting them to upper management.

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