

## Social Intelligence and Its Impact on Women Hotel Managers

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Hospitality employees, specifically hotel managers, interact with a variety of people daily. During this interaction, they are responsible for understanding and acting upon interpersonal cues. Therefore, the skill of social intelligence (SI) is beneficial for anyone serving in this role. The purpose of this study is to examine social intelligence and its impact on women hotel managers. The Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale measures each component of SI with a seven-item subscale. A web-based questionnaire, including the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale, was distributed to 223 professional contacts within the hospitality industry. Of the 209 usable surveys, 120 (57%) were completed by women. Independent-sample t-tests were used to determine the impact of SI on women hotel managers. Results indicated that overall, while hotel managers perceive their SI to be higher than average, women are slightly more socially intelligent than men. Considering that SI can be taught, and more women managers are needed, educational and human resource efforts should be designed to prepare women for hotel management opportunities.*

### **Keywords**

Social Intelligence, Women, Hotel Managers, Impact, Hospitality

### **INTRODUCTION**

Soft skills are important (Majid, Eapen, Aung, & Oo, 2019; National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2016). The hospitality industry is an industry where interpersonal skills such as friendliness, ability to work with others, and effective communication are necessary. Social Intelligence is a soft skill, and according to the Tracom Group, “Social Intelligence is the future’s most important skill” (2021, 0:21).

Hospitality employees, specifically hotel managers, interact with people daily. This interaction includes providing services to guests, transacting business with vendors, directing employees, and communicating with owners, the brand, and the community. “Hotels are the most popular vacation accommodation by far, with over half of all US adults choosing this over any other” (Applebaum, 2023). This means that guests account for a significant number of the hotel manager’s interactions. “In most cases, the *service* provided by hospitality employees is the actual product that customers consume” (Wolfe, Phillips, Asperin, 2014, p. 4). In addition, hotel managers are responsible for “positive customer relations” (Blayney, & Blotnick, 2018, p. 15), which may first begin with a negative customer experience. Managers need to be able to 1) assess a situation and 2) act appropriately. These are the two components of SI (Zaccaro, Gilbert, Thor, & Mumford, 1991). The purpose of this study is to examine social intelligence (SI) and its impact on women hotel managers. “In 2021, the proportion of women in senior management roles globally grew to 31%, the highest number ever recorded” (Catalyst, 2022). Today, within the hospitality industry, of the 39% of the 22 million jobs lost at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, women were in the majority (Goldfischer, 2023).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Providing enjoyable experiences for guests is the foundation of a hotel manager's responsibilities (Genc, & Genc, 2018, p. 13). How managers go about executing these experiences also impacts how their employees go about executing this responsibility. In a study where hotel employees completed 276 surveys, it was "revealed that managers with high social intelligence manage the emotional labor of their employees" (Genc & Genc, 2018, p. 13). The authors used the work and SI studies of researchers Albrecht and Goleman as well as the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale created by Silvera, Martinussen, and Dahl. Managers modeling SI have a direct impact on how their employees use their soft skills to provide services to guests.

Several authors have defined SI, while many other authors have adopted the definition first offered by Thorndike in 1920, "the ability to understand others and to act wisely in social situations" (Walker & Foley, 1973, p. 839). Walker and Foley (1973) provide readers with a historical review of SI, including why interest was lost in studying the topic over the years. One reason given was the lack of a test to measure SI (p. 840). However, as tests were developed, interest resumed, and researchers selected tests based on their validity and reliability. Due to the very nature of the hotel manager's role, testing for SI would be ideal. "The manager has to continually mix with people and is very much the person in the middle" (Mullins & Davies, 1991, p. 24).

The role of the hospitality manager is "unique" due to the nature of the industry (Mullins & Davies, 1991, p. 22). Therefore, the hospitality industry requires managers who have technical competence, social and human skills, and conceptual ability (p. 23). Technical competence is the ability to do the job, while conceptual ability is decision-making. There are many demands of the job, yet human skills, the ability to work with others, is the central focus. "The one essential ingredient of any successful manager is the ability to manage people effectively" (p. 25). This means one must understand people and know how to act around them in social situations.

SI consists of three components: 1) Social Information Processing, 2) Social Skills, and 3) Social Awareness (Zautra, Zautra, Gallardo, & Velasco, 2015, p. 7). Zautra et al. (2015) used the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale to measure the SI level of students. Then, students took online classes to see if their SI level would increase. "The findings provide consistent evidence that the SI curriculum led students to enhance their sensitivity to other people's, and develop greater confidence in their ability to successfully navigate social relations" (Zautra et al., 2015, p. 12). SI can be taught, and while the findings did not vary much among men and women, there are studies that support the idea that women are more socially intelligent (Bell, 2018, p. 2; Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008, p. 76; Mendez, 2016, p. 2).

To know how to respond to a situation, one must first understand the situation. This includes appropriately assessing people's attitudes, whether happy, sad, or angry. On average, women tend to be better at this assessment (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008, p. 76). According to Bell (2018), in 2016, Korn Ferry conducted a research study analyzing facets of both emotional and social intelligence. The study included 55,000 professionals from 90 countries (p. 2), and the results indicated, "women are 86% more likely to display consistent and effective emotional self-awareness than men, and are 45% more likely to demonstrate consistent empathy" (p. 2).

"Although the hospitality industry shows growth, only few women are found in high managerial positions" (Marinakou, 2014, p. 18). In areas where tourism is a focus, Marinakou (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 male and 15 female managers in Greece. The interviews yielded many results, including noting that while women may be successful managers, they face challenges (p. 23). "Female managers have the skills and competencies required to succeed in this demanding industry" (p. 24). Women are caring, supportive, nurturing, and, most importantly, are better communicators (p. 18). These soft skills may make

women successful managers; however, challenges in work versus family demands keep them from advancing.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

In examining SI and its impact on women hotel managers, a more extensive study was conducted to include examining SI, person-vocation (P-V) fit, and turnover intention of hotel managers (Figure 1). P-V fit was shown to be the mediating factor between SI and turnover intention. This article further explores the relationship between SI and gender in which there is one research question with three hypotheses:

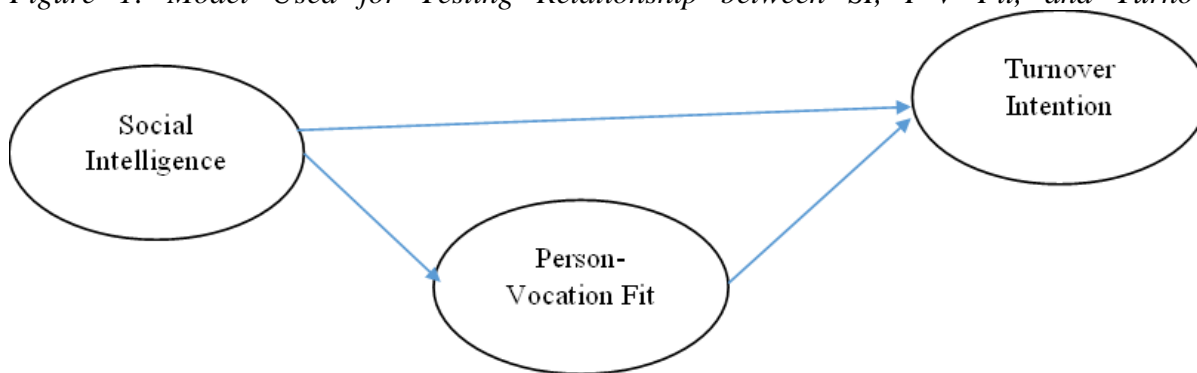
**Research Question. How does the demographic characteristic of sex influence social intelligence?**

HA1: Women score higher in the social information processing dimension of social intelligence than men.

HA2: Women score higher in the social awareness dimension of social intelligence than men.

HA3: Women score higher in the social skills dimension of social intelligence than men.

Figure 1: Model Used for Testing Relationship between SI, P-V Fit, and Turnover Intention



Note: Adapted from *The Role of Social Intelligence in Relationship to Hotel Managers' Person-Vocation Fit and Turnover Intention*, 2018, p. 38. Dissertation proposal.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

One questionnaire was created to gather this information and demographic data. Permission was received from Dr. David Silvera to use the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale. The Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale measures each component with a seven-item subscale assessing the following:

- 1) Social Information Processing – “the ability to understand and predict others’ behaviors and feelings” (p. 7)
- 2) Social Skills – “the ability to enter new social situations and adapt to them” (p. 7)
- 3) Social Awareness – “the degree of awareness, and lack of surprise in response to social situations” (p. 7-8)

The scale uses a seven-point Likert scale with 1 representing strongly disagree and 7 representing strongly agree. The internal reliability for the SI dimensions are as follows:  $\alpha$  = Social Information Processing 0.80, Social Awareness 0.75, and Social Skills 0.60 (Grieve & Mahar, 2013).

The questionnaire was sent via email with a target of 200 hotel managers representing all hotel types ranging from full-service hotels to limited-service hotels representing all hotel management roles ranging from general manager to department heads, like food and beverage manager. Managers were encouraged to participate in snowball sampling by sharing the questionnaire with other hotel managers.

Descriptive statistics and independent-sample *t*-tests are the research design used for this study. The researchers looked at the data's summary statistics, including the mean and standard deviation of the collective responses to each survey question. The goal was to determine the SI level of women hotel

managers compared to men and determine if there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Over 80% of the 120 female respondents were in supervisory roles where they had employees they were responsible for managing. These roles include front office manager, sales and marketing manager, and operations manager (Table 1). Operations manager was not listed as an option, but respondents wrote that was their current position. It is the women in these hotel roles that are directly responsible for “positive customer relations” (Blayney, & Blotnicky, 2018, p. 15) and are considered to be “unique” due to the nature of the industry (Mullins & Davies, 1991, p. 22). They must possess much more than conceptual ability and technical skills. They must also have social and human skills.

**Table 1. Sample Departments of Women Hotel Managers (*n* = 120)**

Characteristics	N	%
<b>Hotel Department</b>		
Accounting	2	1.7
Administration	13	10.8
Bar/Lounge	1	.8
Banquets/Catering	7	5.8
Engineering/Maintenance	1	.8
Front Office	23	19.2
Housekeeping	4	3.3
Human Resources	6	5.0
Reservations	1	.8
Restaurants	4	3.3
Revenue Management	1	.8
Sales/Marketing	27	22.5
Other (Please Specify)	27	22.5
Other/Missing	3	2.5

Collectively, hotel managers in this study perceive their SI score (37.47) to be higher than the average score (34.20) that was indicated by Silvera et al. (2001). Specifically, there were three hypotheses that addressed the demographic characteristic of sex and social intelligence.

While the first hypothesis was not supported, hypotheses two and three were supported, resulting in women scoring higher overall in SI (Table 2).

**Table 2. Mean Ratings for Social Intelligence Dimensions ( $n = 209$ )**

SI Dimensions	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Social Awareness (SA)</b>		
Women	5.39	.788
Men	5.42	.682
<b>Social Information Processing (SP)</b>		
Women	5.37	.852
Men	5.03	.938
<b>Social Skills (SS)</b>		
Women	5.52	.944
Men	5.32	.906
<b>Overall Ratings</b>		
<b>Women</b>	16.28	2.58
<b>Men</b>	15.77	2.53

*Note:* Scale is 1 = Describes me extremely poorly to 7 = Describes me extremely well.

Scale for 4 questions is 7 = Describes me extremely poorly to 1 = Describes me extremely well.

The process of being socially intelligent begins with the subscale of Social Information Processing. Hotel managers must be able to accurately assess and anticipate the feelings of others, including employees, vendors, peers, ownership, brand representatives, and especially, guests. Is the guest standing at the front desk of the hotel shaking their fist, happy, sad, or angry? According to Goleman & Boyatzis (2008), women are inclined to do this better than men. In this study, independent-samples *t*-test indicated that the scores were lower for women ( $M = 5.39$ ,  $SD = .788$ ) than for men ( $M = 5.42$ ,  $SD = .682$ ),  $t(207) = .308$ ,  $p = .758$ . The next subscale of SI, Social Skills, requires the hotel manager to adapt to the situation and know how to act with the angry, fist-shaking guest in front of them. Is an apology, smile, or complimentary guestroom warranted? In this study, independent-samples *t*-test indicated that the scores were higher for women ( $M = 5.52$ ,  $SD = .944$ ) than for men ( $M = 5.32$ ,  $SD = .906$ ),  $t(207) = -1.51$ ,  $p = .133$ . The third and final subscale of SI is Social Awareness. Here the hotel manager must be mindful of their surroundings. Are there other guests looking and listening in on the conversation? Is the hotel manager able to be immune to the stares, or are they sensitive and perhaps even surprised by the guest's response to their behavior? Has the hotel manager been trained and knows what the appropriate action is in this case? In this study, independent-samples *t*-test indicated that the scores were higher for women ( $M = 5.37$ ,  $SD = .852$ ) than for men ( $M = 5.03$ ,  $SD = .938$ ),  $t(207) = -2.73$ ,  $p = .007$ . Again, hypothesis number one was unsupported by the research; however, hypotheses number two and three were supported by the research.

## CONCLUSION

Goleman & Boyatzis (2008) stated that among the most successful leaders, gender differences are absent in SI scoring. In the general population, gender differences in SI scoring may be significantly different. It is important to note that SI is a needed skill for all hotel managers. Yet there is no formal hospitality training in education and no practical training among hotel companies on the skill of SI. Imagine what can be done to increase management scores if there were SI training. This is a skill that can be learned and developed (Zautra, Zautra, Gallardo, & Belasco, 2015); however, there is a need to recruit, maintain, and develop the female hotel manager for top leadership roles. With a foundation of being slightly more socially intelligent than their male counterparts, women hotel managers trained in this area are poised for leadership success.

## **Implications**

While SI scoring between men and women in this study are similar, women scoring slightly higher than men has significance. In the original research study, it was found that hotel managers with a higher level of SI have a higher P-V fit in the hotel industry overall and a lower turnover intention. In essence, socially intelligent hotel managers are more comfortable working in the hotel industry and interacting with others and, therefore, are less likely to leave the industry. With women scoring slightly higher in SI, they stand to remain in the industry but not advance to top positions.

The needle barely moved in 2013 (Catalyst) regarding the number of women in senior management roles. Women were in the majority (Goldfischer, 2023) of the hospitality industry jobs lost during the pandemic. The hospitality industry and the hotel sector, specifically, must make a concerted effort to recover from this loss. Providing SI training, both formally and practically, will assist in moving women hotel managers through the ranks to top leadership positions. Socially intelligent managers will remain in the hospitality industry because there is a good P-V fit, and therefore there will be less turnover intention. Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in women leadership across companies and also within the hospitality industry. Businesses are noticing that while there has been improvement over the years, women leaders at the highest level are lacking.

## **Limitations and future research**

There are two noteworthy limitations of this study: 1) the slight difference in gender SI scores may be due to the narrow sample size, and 2) there is no way to verify the information provided in a self-reporting tool.

A larger research sample of participants may yield additional results and perhaps an even larger difference in SI scoring between male and female respondents. According to researchers Goleman & Boyatzis (2008), on average, women are more likely to score higher in the SI dimension of social information processing. This dimension allows people to sense other people's feelings. CNN reported on a study conducted by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), stating, "No matter where they live in the world, no matter what their cultural or family influences: In general, women are better at empathizing with other people than men" (2022). Although in this study, women hotel managers scored higher than men in the dimensions of social awareness and social skills, scoring higher in social information processing would have provided for a more significant difference in scoring overall.

Many times, when using a self-reporting tool, the responses may not always be accurate due to the respondent's mood at the time of reporting. This is called a transient mood state (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). It is reminiscent of a child who is hungry taking an exam. They feel hungry at the time of testing and may not be in the ideal mood to focus on a test. The same holds true for any self-reporting tool such as the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale. The researcher is unable to control the environment or mood of the participant. A hotel manager may have just dealt with an angry customer, and this would likely elicit bias across the measures of the tool.

Future research in this area should focus on collecting data from a broader cross-section of women hotel managers. There are options researchers can address, including: 1) separating out and comparing SI levels of women managers in full-service hotels and of limited-service hotels or 2) women hotel managers who are new to management and seasoned women hotel managers. It would be of great interest to university hospitality programs and human resource departments to examine the impact of SI, review the SI level of recent college graduates, and determine if they are prepared for hotel management.

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