Original Scientific Paper

UDC: 338.486.3:640.45"2023/2024"
005.966-055.2
DOI: 10.5937/menhottur2400011L

Received: 11 May 2024
Revised: 17 June 2024
Accepted: 30 September 2024
Published online: 14 October 2024

The mediating role of the glass-ceiling phenomenon in the relationship between career opportunities and employee engagement within the hospitality

Jelena Lukić Nikolić[1*], Pero Labus[2]

[1] Modern Business School, Belgrade, Serbia
[2] Hotel Ambasador, Split, Croatia

Abstract

Purpose – The main purpose of this paper is to examine and analyze the relationship between career opportunities and employee engagement, as well as the mediating effect of the glass-ceiling phenomenon within the hospitality. **Methodology** – Beside desk research, this paper employs the empirical research undertaken by use of a specially prepared online questionnaire. Research was conducted between October 2023 and April 2024 with participation of 567 women employed in the hospitality, while proposed relationships were tested by using the partial least squares method for structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM, SmartPLS software). **Findings** – The research results showed the existence of a positive relationship between broken glass-ceiling and employee engagement, that career opportunities are positively related to employee engagement and elimination of the glass-ceiling effect, and that the glass-ceiling effect mediates the relationship between career opportunities and employee engagement within the hospitality. **Implications** – This is one of the first studies which addresses the topics of glass-ceiling, career opportunities and employee engagement in the hospitality by using specific methodology (questionnaire and PLS-SEM). The research findings may be used as a basis for decision making process for retaining employees in the hospitality on the long run by eliminating glass-ceiling effects, improving career opportunities and employee engagement.

Keywords: hospitality, employee engagement, women's career, glass-ceiling phenomenon, career opportunities
JEL classification: L83, M12, M54

Posrednička uloga fenomena „staklenog plafona" u relaciji između karijernih mogućnosti i angažovanosti zaposlenih u ugostiteljstvu

Sažetak

Svrha – Svrha ovog rada je da istraži i ispita relacije između karijernih mogućnosti i angažovanosti zaposlenih, kao i posredničku ulogu fenomena „staklenog plafona" među zaposlenima u ugostiteljstvu. **Metodologija** – Pored kabinetskog, u ovom radu je sprovedeno

[*] Corresponding author: jelena.lukic@mbs.edu.rs

i empirijsko istraživanje primenom posebno koncipiranog onlajn upitnika. U periodu od oktobra 2023. do aprila 2024. godine sprovedeno je istraživanje u kojem je učestvovalo 567 ispitanika ženskog pola zaposlenih u ugostiteljstvu. Relacije između varijabli su testirane pomoću modeliranja strukturnih jednačina metodom parcijalnih najmanjih kvadrata (PLS-SEM, SmartPLS softver). **Rezultati** – Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju postojanje pozitivne veze između eliminisanog fenomena „staklenog plafona" i angažovanosti zaposlenih, zatim između karijernih mogućnosti i angažovanosti zaposlenih i eliminacije „staklenog plafona", kao i da fenomen „staklenog plafona" ima posredničku ulogu u odnosu između karijernih mogućnosti i angažovanosti zaposlenih u ugostiteljstvu. **Implikacije** – Ovo je jedna od pionirskih studija koja se bavi istraživanjem fenomena „staklenog plafona", karijernih mogućnosti i istraživanjem angažovanosti zaposlenih u ugostiteljstvu koristeći specifičnu metodologiju (upitnik i PLS-SEM). Rezultati istraživanja mogu da posluže kao osnova za proces odlučivanja o tome kako zadržati zaposlene u ugostiteljstvu posmatrano na duži rok, pomoću eliminisanja „staklenog plafona", poboljšanja karijernih mogućnosti i unapređenja angažovanosti zaposlenih.

Ključne reči: ugostiteljstvo, angažovanost zaposlenih, karijere žena, fenomen „staklenog plafona", karijerne mogućnosti
JEL klasifikacija: L83, M12, M54

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry has established itself as a key engine of worldwide economic activity and a large source of global employment (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019). As a dominating labor-intensive industry, hospitality demands employees to have the adequate competence for delivering high-quality services (Papageorgiou et al., 2024). Conversely, the hospitality industry is characterized by low salaries, poor working conditions, extended hours, shift work, weekend and holiday obligations, job insecurity, high levels of direct communication, demanding clients, managerial pressure to achieve high results, and limited opportunities for remote work. These factors have collectively led to numerous adverse consequences for employees and their well-being (Avdiu & Nayyar, 2020; Baum et al., 2020; Kim & Lee, 2020; Lukić Nikolić & Garabinović, 2023). Furthermore, all these issues contributed to the common and negative fact that the hospitality business is becoming less appealing for newcomers in the labor market, while existing employees are reconsidering their career options (Huo, 2021). As a result, the hospitality industry faces the difficulty of long-term employees' retention. The solution to this unfavorable situation can be found in human resource management and its related approaches and practices. First and foremost, career advancement opportunities are extremely important to all employees in the modern workplace, particularly in the hospitality industry, because all employees aspire to achieve sustainable career development (Jiang et al., 2021). Furthermore, all employees desire to be engaged and give their best while obtaining reciprocity from their employers. In that context, gender equality, defined as equal opportunity for both men and women, was identified as a key aspect in creating a positive working environment and organizational climate. The inequality in gender advancement to higher positions in the hospitality industry can be easily observed, especially given that careers are usually continuous in the sense that an individual progresses from an entry-level position to a first-line manager, middle-level management, and top management (Ng & Pine, 2003). The glass-ceiling is a phenomenon that blocks women from ascending to higher-level executive positions. According to studies, the glass-ceiling effect reduces women's chances for advancement on higher positions in the organizational hierarchy. Despite the growing theoretical interest in gender equality and the glass-ceiling, there has been little empirical research on this problem (Babic & Hansez,

2021), especially in the hospitality industry. That was the primary reason for this paper: to examine and analyze the relationship between career opportunities and employee engagement, as well as the mediating role of the glass-ceiling phenomenon within the hospitality industry. The significance of this study arises from the fact that the hospitality industry has a considerable labor shortage and high employee turnover (Innerhofer et al., 2024; Kwok, 2022). To maintain stability and growth, hospitality businesses must retain talented and competent employees (Lazzari et al., 2022; Xuecheng et al., 2022). Consequently, leaders and managers of hospitality businesses are under pressure to provide equal career opportunities to all employees and to break down the glass-ceiling phenomenon in order to increase employee engagement.

The paper is organized as follows. The first part of the paper contains a literature review on the glass-ceiling effect, employee engagement, and career opportunities in the hospitality industry in order to propose research hypotheses. The second part of the paper focuses on research methodology and provides a brief summary of the empirical research undertaken, beginning with the questionnaire structure, data collection procedure, and statistical software and techniques used. The third part of the paper contains the research results with discussion of the research findings. Finally, the paper's key findings are given in conclusion, together with their implications for the academic community and practice, as well as the limitations of the conducted research and recommendations for further research on this topic.

2. Background

Glass-ceiling effect. The glass-ceiling was first used as a metaphor to illustrate women's limited promotion chances in the organizational hierarchy (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). This metaphor has become commonplace in business and management literature and practice nowadays (Martinez-Fierro & Lechuga Sancho, 2021). In general, the glass-ceiling metaphor can relate to members of specific population groups, such as racial/ethnic minorities, people with various sexual choices, and women (Stavrinoudis et al., 2021). In this paper it is used to refer to women. Glass-ceiling represents persistent barriers, discriminatory practices, and attitudes that prevent qualified women from advancing to higher management positions (Babic & Hansez, 2021; Powell & Butterfield, 2015), or a lower probability of women being promoted than men, or simply a lower proportion of women at the top management positions (Espinosa & Ferreira, 2022). The glass-ceiling represents discrimination against women in management, which rises as women advance in their professional positions inside the organization (Babic & Hansez, 2021; Cotter et al., 2001). The glass-ceiling effect can have a wide range of negative implications, both for individuals and organizations. Job dissatisfaction, disengagement, burnout, professional stress, and low productivity are some of the most serious repercussions of the glass-ceiling at the individual level. At the organizational level, there is diminished appeal as an employer, a poor employer brand, lower levels of overall results, and high fluctuation rate of employees (Taparia & Lenka, 2022). Eliminating the glass-ceiling effect is important for organizations because a lack of professional growth opportunities for women is connected with talent loss, high women turnover, work disengagement, lack of commitment and loyalty (Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2017). Furthermore, eliminating the glass-ceiling led to equal career opportunities and enhanced employee engagement, which results in better organizational performance.

Employee engagement. Employee engagement is defined as a consistent, positive, affective-motivational state of employee fulfillment and high satisfaction (Maslach et al., 2001). Employee engagement requires vigour, determination, and absorption (Schaufeli et al. 2002). Vigor signifies a high degree of energy and mental resilience on the job, particularly in stressful conditions, as well as a desire to go above and beyond what is required of

employees. Dedication is characterized by a sense of purpose, excitement, inspiration, pride, and challenge, whereas absorption indicates a thoroughly engaged and happily immersed individual in his task—focused concentration, outstanding control, and profound satisfaction (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Employees that are engaged are full of positive energy and excitement; they are deeply immersed, devoted, and enthusiastic about their work tasks and activities (Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli, 2016). They care about the organization's future and are willing to go above and beyond job description to meet the objectives (Cook, 2008). As a result, organizations in the hospitality industry make significant efforts to engage their employees. According to research, employee engagement is critical for organizational success and results (Rozman & Strukelj, 2021), because employees who are willing to do more than what is required in job description exhibit high performance, service quality, and positive organizational behavior.

Career opportunities. Career, as a person's collection of professional experiences (Greenhaus et al., 2010), represents vertical growth process that results in professional advancement through improvements in many conditions such as job responsibilities, status, and payment (McDonald et al., 2005). Perceived career opportunities in an organization refer to employees' perceptions of the alignment of work assignments and employment prospects with their career ambitions (Kraimer et al., 2011). Career has traditionally been measured by promotions, salary, and other objective criteria, while in the contemporary business environment, career is considered as a self-directed and value-driven orientation defined by individual employees (Lehtonen et al., 2022). Career opportunities can be seen as growing professional skills, getting rewards, and achieving employees' career objectives (Weng & McElroy, 2012). Employees must be prepared to deal with changes in the nature and type of job, as well as working environment. Any type of training and development that corresponds to employees' affinities and preferences increases their engagement. Employees who upgrade and develop their knowledge and abilities are more engaged because they find satisfaction in performing new tasks (Swarnalatha & Prasanna, 2012). Similarly, the existence of personalized employee training and development programs leads to better engagement since employees know that the organization actually cares about them and their careers (Jain & Khurana, 2017).

Consequently, the proposed hypotheses in this research are:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between broken glass-ceiling and employee engagement.

Hypothesis 2: Career opportunities are positively related to employee engagement.

Hypothesis 3: Career opportunities are positively related to elimination of glass-ceiling effect.

Hypothesis 4: Glass-ceiling effect mediates the relationship between career opportunities and employee engagement.

3. Materials and methods

The field research was conducted using a questionnaire technique for data collection. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of profile questions with the aim to establish respondents' basic characteristics, including gender, age, education, working experience, marital status, and parental status. The second part of the questionnaire encompassed statements from three measurement scales that had been used in previous research and confirmed to be reliable and valid. The first scale Career Opportunities (CO) was developed on the basis of statements developed by Kraimer et al. (2011) with the aim to examine

whether organizations from hospitality industry provide opportunities for developing specialized functional skills, advancement to higher managerial levels, established programs and policies for career progress of employees, etc. The second scale, Employee Engagement (EE), included eight statements from the engagement scale utilized in the cross-national study (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The third scale, Glass-Ceiling Effect (GCE), was developed from three initially defined statements by Elacqua et al. (2009). In addition, this measurement scale includes three new statements more suitable to European culture, developed on the basis of the research of Babic and Hansez (2021) (e.g. I notice that men progress more quickly than women in this company; Women are not given the same treatment as men in managerial positions at this company; and Men are able to get jobs at higher hierarchical levels in this company than women, even with the same expertise and skills) with the aim to more thoroughly investigate manifestations of the glass-ceiling effect. Respondents answered to statements by selecting one of the responses on a seven-point Likert scale (1 – completely disagree, 7 – completely agree). Statements used in this research are presented in Table 2.

The questionnaire was administered online using Google Forms and sent to the e-mail addresses of hospitality objects managers such as hotel restaurants, exclusive restaurants, classic restaurants, restaurants serving Chinese and Mexican food, cafeterias, bars, beach bars, etc., with the kind request that they complete the questionnaire and forward it to other employees. With three follow-up e-mails, in the period October 2023 to April 2024, a total of 567 women employed in hospitality objects in four countries (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Croatia) participated in this research. In accordance with the ”ten times” rule (Barclay et al., 1995), which states that the minimum sample size should be ten times the number of independent variables in the most complex regression in the model, the sample size obtained in this research is more than sufficient (10*8=80 while 567 respondents participated in this research).

The data was processed and analyzed using Statistical Software for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 and SmartPLS software version 4.0. Proposed hypotheses were tested using the partial least squares method for structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), which represents the key multivariate analysis tool used in business and organizational research (Ringle et al., 2020), and increasingly applied in various tourism studies (Seocanac, 2024).

4. Results and discussion

Table 1 shows the results related to the basic characteristics of the respondents who participated in the research. The largest number of respondents is between 25 and 34 years old (39.2%). This is followed by respondents who are between 35 and 44 years old (20.8%) and those who are between 45 to 54 years old (17.6%). A small number of respondents is above 55 years of age (13.2%), while only 9.2% of respondents are from 18 to 24. Almost 60% of respondents have finished secondary school, followed by those who have finished high school (22.8%) and faculty (14.6%). The research included 3.5% of respondents who had only completed primary school. In terms of the length of work experience, more than 70% of respondents work up to 5 years, with 33.7% of respondents working for less than 1 year, and 37.2% of respondents working from 1 to 5 years in hospitality. Furthermore, 17.6% of respondents have worked in the hospitality from 5 to 10 years, while 11.5% of respondents have worked there for more than 10 years. In terms of marital status, the majority of respondents are married or cohabiting (66.1%) and the majority of respondents (61%) have children.

Table 1: The basic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics		**N**	**%**
Age	From 18 to 24	52	9.2
	From 25 to 34	222	39.2
	From 35 to 44	118	20.8
	From 45 to 54	100	17.6
	Above 55	75	13.2
Education	Primary school	20	3.5
	Secondary school	335	59.1
	High School	129	22.8
	Faculty	83	14.6
Working experience	Less than 1 year	191	33.7
	From 1 to 5 years	211	37.2
	From 5 to 10 years	100	17.6
	Above 10 years	65	11.5
Marital status	Married/cohabitating	375	66.1
	Unmarried/divorced	192	33.9
Parental status	Have children	346	61.0
	Do not have children	221	39.0

Source: Authors' research

Table 2 shows the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for each of the measurement scales and statements used in this research. All respondents (N=567) used a seven-point Likert scale (Min=1, Max=7) to answer all of the questions. The Career Opportunities (CO) scale has a mean value of 4.65. The mean values for each statement on this scale are similar, ranging from 4.60 to 4.68. Employee Engagement (EE) has a mean value of 5.66. The statement that employees are immersed in their work has the greatest mean value of 5.81, while the statement that when they wake up in the morning, they prefer to go to work has the lowest mean value, 5.47. The mean value for the entire scale Glass-Ceiling Effect (GCE) is 5.53. The statement that women at the company are not excluded from important senior management communications has the greatest mean value (5.64), while the lowest mean value is recorded for the statement that respondents did not notice that men can get jobs at higher hierarchical levels in the company than women even with the same expertise and skills (5.48).

Table 2: Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for scales and statements

Variable		**M**	**SD**
Career Opportunities (CO)	**Source**	**4.65**	**2.052**
My company provides opportunities for employees to develop their specialized functional skills (CO1)	Kraimer et al. (2011)	4.68	2.088
My company has programs and policies that help employees to reach higher managerial levels (CO2)		4.64	2.118
There are career opportunities within my company that are attractive to me (CO3)		4.68	2.114
My company offers many job opportunities that match my career goals (CO4)		4.60	2.141
Employee Engagement (EE)		**5.66**	**1.867**
At work, I feel full of energy (EE1)	Schaufeli et	5.57	1.884

When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work (EE2)	al. (2006)	5.47	1.969
I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose (EE3)		5.64	1.945
My job inspires me (EE4)		5.58	2.019
I am proud of the work I do (EE5)		5.70	1.961
Time flies when I am working (EE6)		5.74	1.915
I feel happy when I am working intensely (EE7)		5.75	1.895
I am immersed in my work (EE8)		5.81	1.863
Glass-Ceiling Effect (GCE)		**5.53**	**1.920**
I do not believe that women at our company generally progress to a certain level, then go no further (GCE1)	Elacqua et al. (2009)	5.51	2.097
I believe our company is serious about eliminating barriers that prevent women from reaching their potential (GCE2)		5.52	2.095
Women at our company are not excluded from important senior management communications (GCE3)		5.64	2.033
I did not notice that men progress more quickly than women in this company (GCE4)	Babic and Hansez (2021)	5.52	2.109
Women are given the same treatment as men in managerial positions at this company (GCE5)		5.53	2.104
I did not notice that men are able to get jobs at higher hierarchical levels in this company than women, even with the same expertise and skills (GCE6)		5.48	2.120

Source: Authors' research

Reflective indicator loadings for the structural model were calculated and presented in Table 3. All values of reflected indicator loadings are higher than the threshold value 0.708, indicating that the reliability criterion is met (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 3: Reflective indicator loadings

	EE	**GCE**	**CO**
EE1	0.951		
EE2	0.961		
EE3	0.971		
EE4	0.970		
EE5	0.975		
EE6	0.967		
EE7	0.971		
EE8	0.965		
GCE1		0.818	
GCE2		0.886	
GCE3		0.939	
GCE4		0.948	
GCE5		0.954	
GCE6		0.953	
CO1			0.964
CO2			0.969
CO3			0.980
CO4			0.967

Source: Authors' research

Table 4 shows the Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (rho_a), Composite Reliability (rho_c) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values used to establish indicator and construct reliability and validity. Cronbach's alpha for the Employee Engagement (EE) scale is 0.990, rho_a is 0.990, rho_c is 0.991, while AVE is 0.934. Cronbach's alpha for the Glass-Ceiling Effects (GCE) scale is 0.962, with rho_a of 0.975, rho_c of 0.970, and AVE of 0.842. For the scale Career Opportunities (CO) Cronbach's alpha is 0.979, rho_a is 0.979, rho_c is 0.985, while AVE is 0.941. The obtained results for each of the scales indicate significant scale reliability as well as construct reliability and validity, since Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (rho_a and rho_c) are greater than 0.7, and AVE is above the threshold value of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 4: Scale reliability and construct reliability and validity

Scale	Cronbach's alpha	rho_a	rho_c	AVE
Employee Engagement (EE)	0.990	0.990	0.991	0.934
Glass-Ceiling Effect (GCE)	0.962	0.975	0.970	0.842
Career Opportunities (CO)	0.979	0.979	0.985	0.941

Source: Authors' research

Table 5 shows the results of discriminant validity using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) correlation ratio. The obtained results fall below the specified criterion of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015), indicating that discriminant validity using the heterotrait-monotrait correlation ratio is met. Additionally, the results of cross-loading indicators and the Fornell-Larcker criterion are presented in the Appendix 1 (Table A1 and Table A2).

Table 5: Discriminant validity: heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlation

	EE	GCE	CO
EE			
GCE	0.507		
CO	0.677	0.422	

Source: Authors' research

Table 6 shows the results for the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for the inner model. All values are lower than criterion 3 (Hair et al., 2021), showing that collinearity does not pose a problem in this research model.

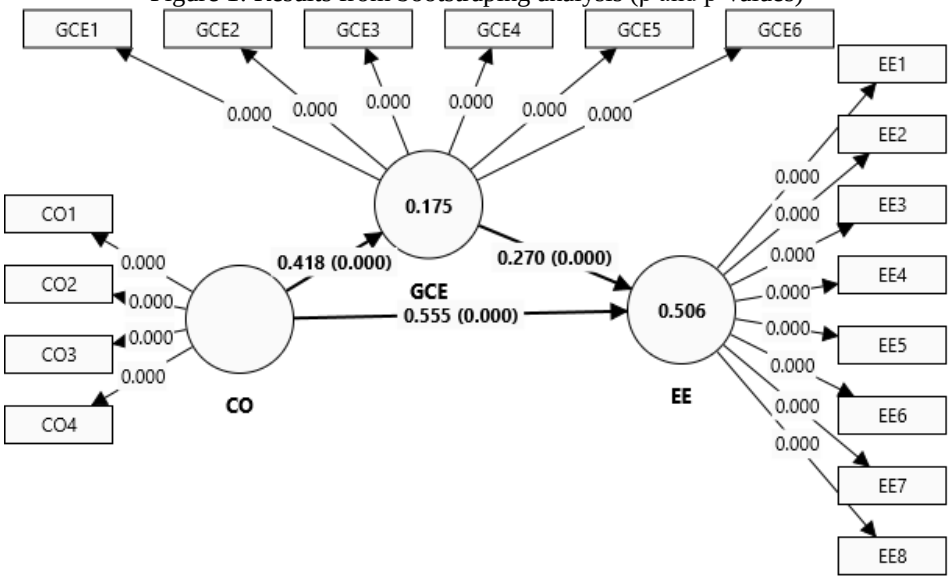
Table 6: Variance Inflaction Factor (VIF)

	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)
GCE -> EE	1.212
CO -> EE	1.212
CO -> GCE	1.000

Source: Authors' research

To test the structural model, 10,000 random subsamples of the original data set were created (with replacement enabled). Results are presented on Figure 1.

Figure 1: Results from bootstraping analysis (β and p-values)



Source: Authors' research

Finally, Table 7 presents results regarding PLS-SEM ratio coefficients and their level of significance with the aim of evaluating the relationships between measured scales. The results revealed that the relationship between glass-ceiling effects and employee engagement is positive and statistically significant (β= 0.270, t = 6.374, p = 0.000). Similar results are obtained for the relationship between career opportunities and employee engagement – positive and statistically significant (β= 0.555, t = 20.557, p = 0.000). Furthermore, the relationship between career opportunities and glass-ceiling effect is positive and statistically significant (β= 0.418, t = 9.720, p = 0.000). Finally, the glass-ceiling effect has a mediation role in the relationship between career opportunities and employee engagement (β= 0.113, t = 4.940, p = 0.000).

Table 7: Statistical significance testing – total and specific indirect effect

	β	**t**	**p**	**Hypothesis**
GCE -> EE	0.270	6.374	0.000	H1: Approved
CO -> EE	0.555	20.557	0.000	H2: Approved
CO -> GCE	0.418	9.720	0.000	H3: Approved
CO -> GCE-> EE	0.113	4.940	0.000	H4: Approved

Source: Authors' research

Table 8 presents the coefficient of determination (R^2) in order to examine the percentage by which the independent variables explain the dependent variable (Seocanac, 2024). The results revealed that only 17.5% of the variance in GCE is predicted by CO (weak value), while 50.6% of the variance in EE is predicted by CO (moderate value).

Table 8: Coefficient of determination (R^2) results

	R^2	**R^2 adjusted**	**Interpretation of values**	**Criteria** (Hair et al., 2011)
EE	0.506	0.504	Moderate	R^2=0.25 weak R^2=0.50 moderate R^2=0.75 substantial
GCE	0.175	0.174	Weak	

Source: Authors' research

Table 9 presents the results regarding the effect size (f^2). Results revealed a large effect (0.514) of CO on EE, while the effect size of CO on GCE is medium (0.212). Finally, there is small effect size of GCE on EE (0.122).

Table 9: Effect size (f^2) results

	f^2	**Effect size**	**Criteria** (Cohen, 1988)
CO -> EE	0.514	Large	Above 0.35 large effect 0.15-0.35 medium effect 0.02-0.15 small effect
CO -> GCE	0.212	Medium	
GCE -> EE	0.122	Small	

Source: Authors' research

Conducted statistical analysis, which used a partial least squares method for structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), resulted in the acceptance of *hypothesis 1* that broken glass-ceiling has a positive relationship on employee engagement among hospitality employees. Furthermore, research results showed that career oppotunities are positively related to employee engagement confirming on that way *hypothesis 2*, and that career opportunities are also positively related to elimination of glass-ceiling effect confirming on that way *hypothesis 3*. Finally, research results confirmed *hypothesis 4* that broken glass-ceiling mediates the relationship between career opportunities and employee engagement.

Those findings are not surprising given the recent trend toward more balanced gender equality, with an increasing proportion of women applying for leadership and higher-level managerial positions. Gender has historically played a crucial role in hospitality employment. Women's access to managerial roles in hospitality has recently been identified as an important topic in the literature (Albors-Garrigos et al., 2021). Furthermore, gender equality has become a global concern recognized as one of the important components in Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The fifth SDG aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, ensure their active participation in leadership and decision-making, and empower women through information and communication technologies, whereas the eighth SDG focuses on full and productive employment and decent work with equal pay for all people (United Nations, 2018).

Other research findings confirmed the observed relationship between variables. They also showed that career opportunities are a significant employment resource that promotes numerous positive organizational outcomes (Weng & McElroy, 2012). Having women on management teams increases a company's financial success (Martinez-Fierro & Lechuga Sancho, 2021), hence there are programs aimed at promoting workplace gender equality (Ryan, 2023). Research conducted among 467 women employees in India found that the existence of a glass-ceiling phenomenon in organizations has a negative influence on employee engagement (Balasubramanian & Lathabhavan, 2017). Similarly, a study conducted among 553 women on managerial positions in India (Punjab) highlighted that the presence of a glass-ceiling has a negative influence on employee engagement (Sharma & Kaur, 2019). Furthermore, a study conducted at hotels in South Korea (Seoul) with 214 employees found that glass-ceiling perceptions were negatively related to employee engagement (Min & Yoon, 2021). Consequently, decision-makers, leaders, managers and human resource professionals in the hospitality industry have clear evidence of the negative impact of the glass-ceiling phenomenon on career opportunities and employee engagement.

5. Conclusion

The research results confirmed all proposed hypotheses, i.e. broken glass-ceiling has positive impact on employee engagement among hospitality employees, career opportunities are positively related to employee engagement and elimination of glass-ceiling, while glass-ceiling mediates the relationship between career opportunities and employee engagement.

Theoretical implications of this paper include the fact that this is one of the pioneering studies which addresses the topics of glass-ceiling, career opportunities and employee engagement in the hospitality industry using specific methodology (questionnaire and PLS-SEM) and large sample size (567). The questionnaire was validated, and its reliability and validity were confirmed, which is important for future researchers. The paper's practical implications are focused on the ability to apply research findings to help retain hospitality employees by removing glass-ceiling effects, expanding career opportunities, and increasing employee engagement. Glass-ceiling effect can be eliminated or at least minimized by establishing clear and objective criteria for promotions, equal career opportunities for all employees, promoting work-life balance and flexible work arrangements, and fostering an inclusive organizational culture. By use of these practices, companies can create a more equitable workplace where all employees have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Removing the glass-ceiling effect not only benefits individual employees, but also enhances organizational performance, innovation, and competitiveness. That is why understanding the relationships between those constructs is crucial for all hospitality objects, leaders, managers, and human resource professionals.

This research is accompanied by several limitations. First and foremost, the conceptual research model used in this study included three variables (glass-ceiling, career opportunities, and employee engagement) and their relationships, without considering a broader range of other variables that may be important, such as organizational commitment, organizational climate, and leadership style. Second, the questionnaire employed in this study contained only closed-ended questions, with no opportunity for respondents to write down their views, perceptions, and opinions on the topic matter. Third, results regarding Cronbach alpha coefficient were higher than 0.95 indicating a possibility for redudancy in items (different semantics but similar meanings in some scales) and too long questionnaire.

Future research on this topic should include more variables in the conceptual research model in order to get more holistic and general results. Furthermore, in addition to closed-ended questions, questionnaires should include open-ended questions and be supplemented with data collection techniques such as interviews in order to provide more in-depth conclusions. Finally, it would be beneficial to conduct longitudinal research in order to examine whether and how activities oriented to elimination of glass-ceiling in hospitality objects impact on career opportunities and employee engagement.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the reviewers for their time and valuable feedback and suggestions, which helped us improve the quality of the paper, particularly the data analysis and interpretation.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Albors-Garrigos, J., Signes, A. P., Segarra-Ona, M., & Garcia-Segovia, P. (2021). Breaking the glass ceiling in haute cuisine: the role of entrepreneurship on the career expectations of female chefs. *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, *27*(3), 605–628. https://doi.org/10.20867/thm.27.3.8
2. Alexakis, G., & Jiang, L. (2019). Industry competencies and the optimal hospitality management curriculum: An empirical study. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, *31*(4), 210–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2019.1575748
3. Avdiu, B., & Nayyar, G. (2020). When face-to-face interactions become an occupational hazard: Jobs in the time of COVID-19. *Economics Letters*, *197*, 109648. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2020.109648
4. Babic, A., & Hansez, I. (2021). The glass ceiling for women managers: Antecedents and consequences for work-family interface and well-being at work. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, 618250. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.618250
5. Balasubramanian, S. A., & Lathabhavan, R. (2017). Women's glass ceiling beliefs predict work engagement and burnout. *Journal of Management Development*, *36*(9), 1125–1136. https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-12-2016-0282
6. Barclay, D. W., Higgins, C. A., & Thompson, R. (1995). The partial least squares approach to causal modeling: Personal computer adoption and use as illustration. *Technology Studies*, *2*(2), 285–309.
7. Baum, T., Mooney, S. K. K., Robinson, R. N. S., & Solnet, D. (2020). COVID-19's impact on the hospitality workforce – New crisis or amplification of the norm? *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *32*(9), 2813–2829. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-04-2020-0314
8. Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
9. Cook, S. (2008). *The essential guide to employee engagement. Better business performance through staff satisfaction.* Kogan Page Limited.
10. Cotter, D. A., Hermsen, J. M., Ovadia, S., & Vanneman, R. (2001). The glass ceiling effect. *Social Forces*, *80*(2), 655–681. https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2001.0091
11. Elacqua, T. C., Beehr, T. A., Hansen, C. P., & Webster, J. (2009). Manager's beliefs about the glass ceiling: Interpersonal and organizational factors. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *33*(3), 285–294. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2009.01501.x
12. Espinosa, M. P., & Ferreira, E. (2022). Gender implicit bias and glass ceiling effects. *Journal of Applied Economics*, *25*(1), 37–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/15140326.2021.2007723
13. Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *18*(1), 39–50. https://doi.org/10.1177/002224378101800104
14. Greenhaus, J. H., Callanan, G. A., & Godshalk, V. M. (2010). *Career management* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
15. Hair, J. F., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2011). PLS-SEM: Indeed a silver bullet. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *19*(2), 139–152. https://doi.org/10.2753/MTP1069-6679190202
16. Hair, J. F., Hult, T. M., Ringle, C. M., Sarstedt, M., Danks, N. P., & Ray, S. (2021). *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) Using R. A Workbook*. Switzerland: Springer.
17. Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *43*, 115–135. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-014-0403-8

18. Huo, M.-L. (2021). Career growth opportunities, thriving at work and career outcomes: Can COVID-19 anxiety make a difference? *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, *48*, 174–181. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2021.06.007
19. Hymowitz, C., & Schellhardt, T. C. (1986). The glass ceiling. *Wall Street Journal*. March 24, pp. 1D, 4D–5D.
20. Innerhofer, J., Nasta, L., & Zehrer, A. (2024). Antecedents of labor shortage in the rural hospitality industry: A comparative study of employees and employers. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, *7*(1), 28–55. https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTI-04-2022-0125
21. Jain, S., & Khurana, N. (2017). Enhancing employee engagement through training and development. *Asian Journal of Management*, *8*(1), 1–6. http://dx.doi.org/10.5958/2321%E2%80%935763.2017.00001.4
22. Jiang, Z., Jiang, Y., & Nielsen, I. (2021). Thriving and career outcomes: The roles of achievement orientation and resilience. *Human Resource Management Journal*, *31*(1), 143–164. https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12287
23. Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, *33*(4), 692–724.
24. Kim, J., & Lee, J. C. (2020). Effects of COVID-19 on preferences for private dining facilities in restaurants. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, *45*, 67–70. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.07.008
25. Kraimer, M. L., Seibert, S. E., Wayne, S. J., Liden, R. C., & Bravo, J. (2011). Antecedents and outcomes of organizational support for development: The critical role of career opportunities. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *96*(3), 485–500. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021452
26. Kwok, L. (2022). Labor shortage: A critical reflection and a call for industry-academia collaboration. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *34*(11), 3929–3943. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-01-2022-0103
27. Lazzari, M., Alvarez, J. M., & Ruggieri, S. (2022). Predicting and explaining employee turnover intention. *International Journal of Data Science and Analytics*, *14*, 279–292. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41060-022-00329-w
28. Lehtonen, E. E., Nokelainen, P., Rintala, H., & Puhakka, I. (2022). Thriving or surviving at work: how workplace learning opportunities and subjective career success are connected with job satisfaction and turnover intention? *Journal of Workplace Learning*, *34*(1), 88–109. https://doi.org/10.1108/JWL-12-2020-0184
29. Lukić Nikolić, J., & Garabinović, D. (2023). Personal and organizational factors impacting burnout syndrome among hotel employees: A bibliometric and content analysis. *Hotel and Tourism Management*, *11*(2), 129–145. https://doi.org/10.5937/menhottur2302129L
30. Martinez-Fierro, S., & Lechuga Sancho, M. P. (2021). Descriptive elements and conceptual structure of glass ceiling research. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(15), 8011. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18158011
31. Maslach, C., Schaufelli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *52*, 397–422. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.397
32. McDonald, P., Brown, K., & Bradley, L. (2005). Have traditional career paths given way to protean ones? Evidence from senior managers in the Australian public sector. *Career Development International*, *10*(2), 109–129. https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430510588310
33. Min, S., & Yoon, B. (2021). The role of glass ceiling perception on work engagement and service orientation behavior among female hotel employees. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, *20*(4), 497–511. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332845.2021.1959799

34. Ng, C., & Pine, R. (2003). Women and men in hotel management in Hong Kong: Perceptions of gender and career development issues. *Hospitality Management*, *22*(1), 85–102. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0278-4319(02)00077-4
35. Papageorgiou, G., Marneros, S., & Efstathiades, A. (2024). Predicting career success in the hospitality industry of Cyprus: A competency-based approach. *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, 1–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/15313220.2024.2341616
36. Powell, G. N., & Butterfield, A. (2015). The glass ceiling: What have we learned 20 years on? *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, *2*(4), 306–326. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOEPP-09-2015-0032
37. Remington, J., & Kitterlin-Lynch, M. (2017). Still pounding on the glass ceiling: A study of female leaders in hospitality, travel, and tourism management. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, *17*(1), 22–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332845.2017.1328259
38. Ringle, C., Sarstedt, M., Mitchell, R., & Gudergan, S. (2020). Partial least squares structural equation modeling in HRM research. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *31*(12), 1617–1643. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1416655
39. Rozman, M., & Strukelj, T. (2021). Organisational climate components and their impact on work engagement of employees in medium-sized organisations. *Economic Research*, *34*(1), 775–806. https://doi.org/10.1080/1331677X.2020.1804967
40. Ryan, M. K. (2023). Addressing workplace gender inequality: Using the evidence to avoid common pitfalls. *The British Journal of Social Psychology*, *62*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12606
41. Schaufeli, W. B. (2016). Heavy work investment, personality and organizational climate. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *31*(6), 1057–1073. https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-07-2015-0259
42. Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, *25*(3), 293–315, https://doi.org/10.1002/job.248
43. Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A., & Salanova, M. (2006). The measurement of work engagement with a short questionnaire: A cross-national study. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, *66*(4), 701–716. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164405282471
44. Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., Gonzalez-Roma, V., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). The measurement of engagement and burnout: A confirmative analytic approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *3*(1), 71–92. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015630930326
45. Seočanac, M. (2024). PLS-SEM: A hidden gem in tourism research methodology. *Hotel and Tourism Management*, *12*(1), 115–131. https://doi.org/10.5937/menhottur2400005S
46. Sharma, S., & Kaur, R. (2019). Glass ceiling for women and work engagement: The moderating effect of marital status. *FIIB Business Review*, *8*(2), 132–146. https://doi.org/10.1177/2319714519845770
47. Stavrinoudis, T., Maroudas, L., Doumi, M., Kyriakaki, A., & Vlassi, E. (2021). Corporate climate and glass ceiling in the hospitality industry: The women's point of view, In M. Valeri and V. Katsoni (Eds.), *Gender and Tourism* (pp. 183–203). Leeds: Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80117-322-320211011
48. Swarnalatha, C., & Prasanna, T. S. (2012). Employee engagement: A review of literature. *Indian Journal of Research*, *1*(11), 113–116.
49. Taparia, M., & Lenka, U. (2022). An integrated conceptual framework of the glass ceiling effect. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, *9*(3), 372–400. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOEPP-06-2020-0098

50. United Nations (2018). Sustainable development goals: Goal 5: Gender equality. Retrieved April 29, 2024 from http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/
51. Weng, Q., & McElroy, J. C. (2012). Organizational career growth, affective occupational commitment and turnover intentions. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *80*(2), 256–265. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2012.01.014
52. Xuecheng, W., Iqbal, Q., & Saina, B. (2022). Factors affecting employee's retention: Integration of situational leadership with social exchange theory. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*: 872105. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.872105

Appendix

Additional tests regarding discriminant validity

Table A1: Discriminant validity: Cross-loadings results

	EE	**GCE**	**CO**
EE1	0.951	0.502	0.662
EE2	0.961	0.500	0.679
EE3	0.971	0.503	0.659
EE4	0.970	0.484	0.652
EE5	0.975	0.472	0.641
EE6	0.967	0.477	0.620
EE7	0.971	0.467	0.626
EE8	0.965	0.473	0.616
GCE1	0.335	0.818	0.230
GCE2	0.404	0.886	0.362
GCE3	0.502	0.939	0.411
GCE4	0.493	0.948	0.405
GCE5	0.506	0.954	0.426
GCE6	0.485	0.953	0.422
CO1	0.642	0.411	0.964
CO2	0.653	0.414	0.969
CO3	0.661	0.395	0.980
CO4	0.634	0.405	0.967

Source: Authors' research

Table A2: Discriminant validity: Fornell-Larcker criterion

	EE	**GCE**	**CO**
EE	0.966		
GCE	0.502	0.918	
CO	0.668	0.418	0.970

Source: Authors' research