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Reasons for the Underrepresentation of Women in Executive Ranks in Germany

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1. Introduction

1.1. Statement of the problem

Women have gone through a remarkable phase of development during the last decades. Whereas their participation in the labour market has been completely irrelevant only half a century ago, women account for almost half of the total employed workforce in Germany nowadays (Statistisches Bundesamt 2010). They hold seats on executive boards, take major corporate decisions and provide for the first time a female chancellor, Angela Merkel.

However, the situation is not as rosy as it looks like. Though women constitute an important proportion of the employees, they take primarily only low management and administrative positions. The higher the rank in the corporate hierarchy, the fewer women hold a position (Beyer and Voigt 2011). In upper management ranks women are still significantly underrepresented. In 2010, only 2.2% of the seats on the executive boards of the 100 largest (i.e. most profitable) German companies and 30 companies quoted on the German stock index DAX were occupied by women (Holst and Busch 2010). On supervisory boards, women held one in ten positions in 2010 (Beyer and Voigt 2011). Thus, there is a considerable lack of gender diversity in executive ranks in Germany. And the pace of change in recent years has been extremely slow. From 2006-2011, the positive numerical increase encompassed only 12 women (Holst and Busch 2010). In addition to this, it should not be overseen that the few women who made it to the top often belong to family businesses or board dynasties so that their appointment cannot be evaluated as a gain in terms of the fight against employment discrimination. The low inclusion of women is especially surprising in light of the fact that German governments have launched a comprehensive range of laws, which intend to support parents.

Thus, the question arises why women actively participate in business life and provide half of the current workforce in Germany but are almost non-existent when it comes to upper management positions. This article is geared towards exploring the reasons for this gap, i.e. is aimed at analysing the factors that determine the underrepresentation of women in upper management ranks in Germany.

1.2. Importance of the problem

Given this situation, is it really of importance to foster women's progression in the business arena? Apart from an egalitarian approach, are there any economic reasons, which justify the call for women's further integration into executive ranks? In fact, researchers cite a number of reasons, which support that fighting

against gender employment disparity is not just an “act of charity” but simply highly recommendable from a business point of view.

First, in many countries in Europe, demographic developments like declining populations and ageing societies have resulted in a shortage of skilled employees. This shortage is expected to increase to 24 million people in the active workforce by 2040, provided that the employment rate for women remains constant (McKinsey 2007). In the light of this situation, European countries can no longer afford to underutilise the talent pool of qualified women (Peus and Welpé 2011). Tapping the full potential of females (and older people) could in fact reduce the projected figure to a shortfall of only 3 million people (McKinsey 2007). Thus, enhancing women’s contribution to the corporate world is an imperative for competitiveness.

Second, women have a key influence on purchase decisions in private households (Blackwell et al. 2006). For instance, in the U.S., women take 83% of all purchase decisions concerning household matters (Crush 2004), although they constitute only 51% of the population (CIA 2012a). Despite this clear trend, the perspectives of women as consumers are completely underrepresented on businesses’ top levels. However, if companies really want to meet their customer’s needs and be adaptable to changing consumer trends, there is no way around integrating women into decision-making boards.

Adding to this point is the fact that women measurably have a positive impact on the performance of companies. In a study carried out by Mc Kinsey (2007) among 89 European companies with the highest level of gender diversity in executive ranks, it emerged that these companies outperformed their sector in terms of ROE, EBIT and stock price growth. Although the study cannot prove a causal link, it nonetheless provides a factual tendency that can only support a claim for more gender diversity. Studies underpin that heterogeneous groups show more potential than homogeneous groups: Diversity creates fresh thinking, entails discussion about different opinions and balances lopsided tendencies shown by one part of the group so that a more well-adjusted and concerted compromise can be found (Arfken et al. 2004).

Finally, many countries invest heavily in the education of young people. Also companies spend a lot of money on the development of their employees. From an economic and business point of view, both expenditures seem to be questionable when the potential developed cannot be fully tapped afterwards (Peus 2006). Having a high employee fluctuation or letting resources lie idle both cost money. Hence, keeping women on-ramps so as to avoid the “brain drain” is not just a sociological imperative but simply an economic one in terms of cost reduction (Hewlett and Buck Luce 2005).

2. Theoretical analysis: Women in top management positions

2.1. Analysis of the global actual state

Although the female labour force participation rate accounts for more than 50%, only 21% of all senior management positions in the world are held by women (Grant Thornton 2012). It is not just the number itself, which is alarming, but also the fact that the pace of change is extremely low: In 2004, the proportion amounted to 19%; thus, within an eight-year period, an increase of only 2 percentage points has taken place. Surprisingly, South East Asia is doing best with a rate of 32% of female senior managers, followed by the EU with 24%, Latin America with 22% and North America with 18%. When examining the country level, Russia turns out to be the clear leader, showing a 46% share of female senior managers, followed by Botswana (39%), the Philippines (39%) and Thailand (39%; Grant Thornton 2012; see *table 1*). The reason why Russia is spearheading the list can be found in its sex ratio with only 0.85 men for every woman (CIA 2012b) as well as in its formerly adopted communist ideology, which heavily supported equal opportunities for women (Schuster 1971). In contrast, families in Botswana, the Philippines and Thailand usually live close to parents and grandparents who contribute to childcare activities, thereby enabling women to concentrate on the development of their careers. Towards the other end of the scale one can find extreme figures for relatively pronounced patriarchal systems like Japan (5%), India (14%) and the United Arab Emirates (15%).

Table 1. Percentage of women in senior management

Russia	46	Australia	24
Botswana	39	Spain	24
Thailand	39	France	24
The Philippines	39	Singapore	23
Georgia	38	Sweden	23
Italy	36	Switzerland	22
Hongkong	33	Chile	21
Turkey	31	Ireland	21
Poland	30	Greece	21
Malaysia	28	Belgium	21
New Zealand	28	Argentina	20
South Africa	28	UK	20

Finland	27	Mexico	18
Armenia	27	Netherlands	18
Taiwan	27	US	17
Vietnam	27	United Arab Emirates	15
Peru	27	Denmark	15
Brazil	27	India	14
China (mainland)	25	Germany	13
Canada	25	Japan	5

Source: Grant Thornton (2012).

When considering the European situation, one can notice a slight but constant progress. Whereas in 2004 only 17% of senior management positions were taken by women, the share increased to 20% in 2009 and 24% in 2012. Italy (36%) and Poland (30%) in particular excel, followed by Finland (27%), France (24%), Spain (24%), which made a big step forward with an increase of 10 percentage points compared to 2004, and Sweden (23%). One country negatively sticking out is Germany, which does not only show one of the lowest proportions of female senior management participation within Europe but within the entire world (13%).

2.2. The glass ceiling

After discovering the employment disparity that women especially face when it comes to upper management positions, the question arises, what factors contribute to women's underrepresentation on businesses top levels globally. Researchers examine this question for decades, and the following analysis will give an overview of the various underlying reasons determined, which are all subtly interrelated so that researchers have found a common name for them: The glass ceiling.

According to the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, the term glass ceiling describes the non-visible, artificial and persistent barrier "that keeps women and minorities from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications and achievements" (1995: 4). The definition pinpoints a disparity, which cannot be explained by one's personal capability or performance, indicating that the glass ceiling is not a mere reflection of labour market inequality but of subtle labour market discrimination. It refers to a transparent but unbreakable plateau that women and people of colour almost inevitably knock against in the course of their career and that hinders their advancement into top management positions.

But what are the barriers that become manifest in the concept of the glass ceiling?

The various levels of the glass ceiling, which have been detected by researchers, will be depicted in the following.

2.2.1. Sex role stereotypes

One of the most important burdens identified is the “persistent stereotype that associates management with being male” (Berthoin-Antal and Izraeli 1993: 63). It means that a managerial position is perceived as a masculine one, indicating that men are more likely to be preferred in terms of recruitment, promotion and career development. This so-called “think manager- think male” phenomenon has been broadly analysed and proven by Virginia Schein who did research on the relationship between sex role stereotypes and essential management characteristics both on a country and on an international level. It was already in the 70’s that she could confirm her hypothesis that managers are thought of in terms of characteristics, attitudes and behaviour patterns which are more frequently ascribed to men in general than to women in general (Schein 1973 and Schein 1975). The reason for this strongly held belief mainly lies in “occupational sex-typing”. Occupations are considered as sex-typed when a vast majority of those people who are in them is of just one sex so that over time a normative expectation is developed that this is how it should be (Epstein 1970). Since management is known as a traditionally masculine field, the informal conviction emerged that being a manager requires characteristics usually shown by men. Although the female ratio of women in management has positively changed during the last years, this deeply internalized belief is still prevalent, implying a general devaluation of women’s managerial qualifications.

2.2.2. Predominantly male-oriented corporate models

Another pillar, which the glass ceiling approach is built upon, is the notice of primarily men-oriented corporate models. Historically, corporations have been designed by and for men and are centred on male experiences (Meyerson and Fletcher 2000). Accordingly, structures, work practices and cultural norms are established in ways, which only suit to the life situation of men but do not meet women’s needs.

The “anytime-anywhere” approach

In particular, this is reflected by the customary demands connected with senior management. Upper management ranks are characterised by an

atmosphere in which impeccable availability and total geographical mobility are expected (McKinsey 2007). This “anytime-anywhere” approach requires comprehensive commitment to work and does not allow for career breaks or any other interruptions of an entirely linear career path. It still stems from a time that was described by a classical distribution of roles between sexes. Men could easily devote most of their time to work because women were backing them up by caring about household activities and children. But with an increasing number of women participating in the labour market over time, these traditional gender roles more and more vanished. However, the male-oriented corporate culture remained prevalent as if the historical role distribution was still existent. This proved to be a distinctive problem for women since women bear a double burden concerning work and household engagement. In Europe, on average 80% of women engage in household work compared to only 45% of men (Eurofound 2010). So the so-called unpaid *care economy*, which can be defined as “looking after the physical, psychological, emotional and developmental needs” of family members, is clearly a female domain in most European countries (ILO 2010: 53). These duties are usually not entirely transferable for women, particularly when public or private childcare institutions are missing or not affordable. Thus, the double burden, which women have to bear, is incompatible with the outdated model still embedded in most business organisations.

Homo-social recruitment practices

The masculine corporate culture is also reflected by homo-social recruitment processes in executive ranks (Arfken et al. 2004). Traditionally, board members are recruited and selected largely from the ranks of existing CEO’s (Gutner 2001). Since CEO’s are mainly male, they are likely to choose people who have the same background, interests, characteristics, age and sex (Daily 1995). Sociologically, human beings tend to like, socialize and work with people who are similar to them because those people reaffirm the validity of one’s character features and attitudes and ensure smooth and quick work processes (Casciaro and Lobo 2005). However, these behaviour patterns contribute to the persistence of closed male circles women can’t get access to.

Closed informal networks

What adds to the male-oriented culture is the existence of informal networks, which cut through formal reporting procedures and make it difficult for women to get information. If important facts are shared only during lunch or on the golf course, women face a severe disadvantage in becoming involved and being considered for advancement decisions. The challenge for women is not

only to get access to these informal networks but to even become aware of their existence (Meyerson and Fletcher 2000). In order to make informal networks more visible, Krackhardt and Hanson (1993) suggest mapping these social links besides drawing an organisational chart. However, this appears to be a difficult task, which is carried out by only few corporations so that most informal networks remain closed for female managers, depriving them of resources, information and communication options.

Lack of role models and mentoring

Furthermore, in a corporation dominated by male executive managers, women lack role models to emulate and turn to for guidance. Accordingly, women have more problems to find a mentor. For instance, 61% of women surveyed in a 2007 study rated the lack of mentoring a severe barrier to career progress, compared to only 31% of men (Catalyst 2002). Both the lack of role models and mentoring make it difficult for women to identify with success (McKinsey 2007). Women's awareness of the various barriers to their development causes demotivation and makes them less engaged in their career planning. According to a survey carried out by Harvard Business Review, 48% of men rate themselves as "extremely or very ambitious" while the share of women saying so accounts for only 35% (Hewlett and Buck Luce 2005). This psychological obstacle stemming from the male-oriented culture in companies as well as the more comprehensive concentration of women to family life gives rise to women's readiness to opt-out from their professions at one point in their career.

Adjustment to male codes of behaviour

All these factors contribute to the fact that women have to adapt their behaviour and life patterns to the requirements of the masculine model if they want to become part of the management elite. It implies the unspoken request for women to act like men and to choose a life design adjusted to male standards. In this respect, it is a particular challenge for women to become more assertive and self-confident in presenting themselves in daily business life. One of the essentials for being successful is the talent to promote oneself and to be confident and resolute about one's performance and attainments. Success is not just about competence but also about advertising one's competence to others (McKinsey 2007). However, women show a tendency to underestimate their achievements and to devalue their share of contribution. For instance, a survey among MBA students revealed that 70% of women classify their performance as equivalent to the one of their colleagues whereas 70% of men rate themselves higher than their fellows (Eagly 2003). Accordingly, if women are innately less prone to cherish

their own performance and to highlight and emphasise their achievements to others, it is more difficult for them to attain recognition and to be considered when it comes to promotion decisions. Hence, mastering masculine codes of behaviour is a Must for women who want to leverage their talent.

2.2.3. Glass cliff

Researchers have also found out that those women who have made it to the top face different circumstances surrounding their appointment than their male counterparts. Research by Ryan and Haslam (2005) has focused on the share price performance of FTSE 100 companies before and after the appointment of a male or female member of the board of directors in Britain. They discovered that the share price of those companies, which appointed a male board member, was generally constant, both before and after the appointment. However, the share price of companies, which appointed a female director, proved to be consistently low during the months before the appointment. The results made evident that companies were much more likely to appoint a female director during times of poor performance. In order to highlight the difference identified, Ryan and Haslam (2005) extended the glass ceiling approach by introducing the metaphor of a *glass cliff*: An innuendo referring to the fact that female executives often lead units, which are in crisis, so to that their professions are much more precarious and risky. These positions are less safe, much more challenging and therefore particularly dangerous for women. Furthermore, the time coincidence between the appointment of a female director and the consistently bad performance of a company might give reasons to draw a meaningful conclusion (Hamilton and Gifford 1976). Thus, women are at greater risk to be exposed to criticism and to be blamed for negative corporate results that, however, usually originate from a time well ahead of their appointment.

But why do companies tend to hire female senior managers in times of economic downturn? First, during times of crisis, companies are more likely to search for charismatic leadership, which is usually associated with women (Pillai 1996; Eagly et al. 2003). Second, directing a company, which faces financial problems, involves stress and women are stereotypically believed to have character features that are particularly suited to stress and crisis management (Lindquist et al. 1997). Unfortunately, the findings also give support to the argument that women are perceived as a “less valuable and more expendable resource (...), one less worthy of protection (Haslam and Ryan 2008: 543). They are offered jobs, which are considered as blind alley or which are over-exposed to failure. Men usually have already rejected such a deal in advance because they can afford to

wait for a better deal. Women, though, are likely to accept this offer because it is the best one arising to them (Frazier and Hunt 1998). Therefore, it appears that the “think manager-think male” phenomenon got company by a little sister, the “think crisis-think female” phenomenon (Haslam and Ryan 2008), which makes it much harder for women to stay on-ramps.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research aim and question

The main purpose of this project is to examine and understand the reasons behind women’s scarcity in executive ranks and the difficulties women encounter when climbing up the career ladder in Germany. Hence, the research question underlying this article is:

What factors determine the underrepresentation of women in upper management ranks in Germany?

3.2. Research approach

3.2.1. Secondary and qualitative research

To answer the above-mentioned research question, secondary research methods have been applied. This involved the collection and processing of secondary data i.e. data, which have already been gathered for some other purpose (Saunders et al. 2009). Since the aim of the project was to provide a critical in-depth collation, comparison and analysis of reasons for gender employment discrimination in executive ranks in Germany, a bird’s eye view has been taken: By selecting, summarising and critically reviewing secondary data, evidence has been found for bearing generalisable conclusions. Thus, as the project provides a synthesis of secondary data, it has been abandoned from undertaking additional primary research.

When collecting secondary data, both quantitative and qualitative data in the form of raw data or compiled summaries have been objects of reference. Nonetheless, the focus lay on qualitative data as mainly less tangible aspects like values, attitudes, structures and perceptions have been examined. Therefore, the nature of the research was primarily a qualitative research approach. Thereby all types of secondary data have served as a source for doing research, i.e. documentary data, survey-based and multiple-source secondary data.

3.2.2. Inductive research

Since this thesis originated from an observation and tried to find explanations and solutions for this observation and the derived research question in general without testing a particular theory or hypothesis, it constituted an inductive research approach. It was feature-detecting and theory-generating, thereby working from specific observations to broader generalizations.

3.3. Scope of research

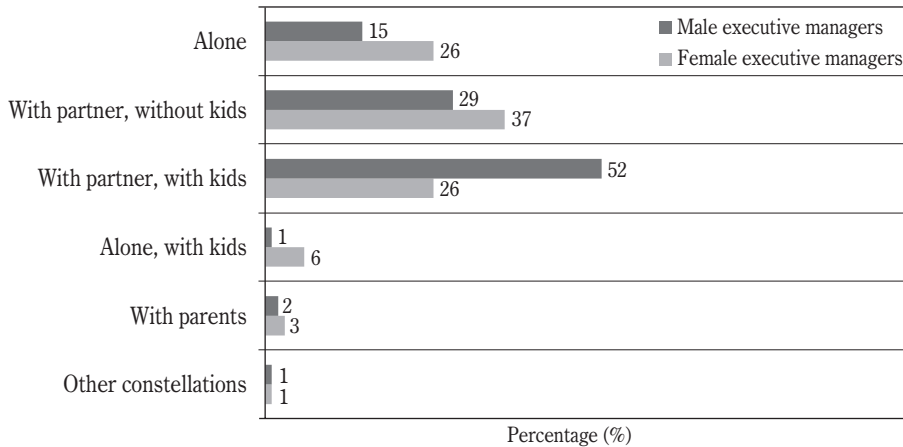
In terms of geographic coverage, the research focused on Germany. Thus, the research had a clear reference object (Germany) but nonetheless allowed for comparing and contrasting its findings with those for other countries detected in the literature review. Concerning the time period covered, the research mainly referred to secondary data of the last 25 years. Consequently, the data were still of current validity or, in case that they were out-of-date, allowed for highlighting the changes and their depth.

4. Reasons for the underrepresentation of female executives in Germany – Research findings

4.1. Lack of work life balance in Germany

As already detected in section 2.2., the possibility to balance work and family commitments is a crucial factor, which co-determines the proportion of women in executive ranks. For the case of Germany, researchers have found out that women find it especially hard to combine both areas of life. This is also reflected by the numbers: 63% of German women who hold a leading position live in family arrangements without children (Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung 2006; see Figure 1). At first glance, this might sound surprising as Germany provides extensive laws aimed at supporting working parents so that the opposite tendency should be present. Following this rationale, international authors have claimed that governmental regulations are a powerful tool, which enables working mothers to make fewer sacrifices to their career progress (Fineman 2004; Crittenden 2001). However, this does not hold true for the case of Germany. The following examination will unveil reasons for this somewhat counterintuitive result.

Figure 1. Family arrangements of executive managers in Germany



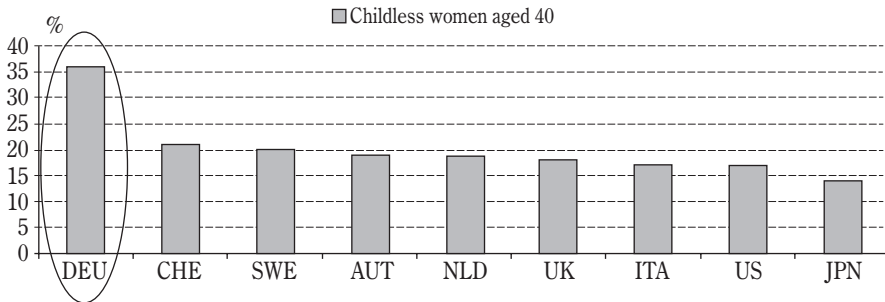
Source: Institut für Arbeitsmarkt und Berufsforschung (2006).

Impacts of the laws

Laws of the German social system that are established to support families can be summarised into three categories: (1) Financial benefits, (2) maternity protection and (3) various rights for working parents (see an extensive overview at Peus 2006). Out of these laws, the most comprehensive law grants the right to go on parental leave for up to three years after birth. Parents can choose to stay entirely home or to work part-time between 15 and 30 hours. During the whole time of parental leave, the parent is protected against dismissal.

Unfortunately, the network did not meet its objectives. Germany still has one of the lowest birth rates worldwide. With 8.33 births per 1.000 inhabitants per year, Germany takes the 217th position out of 228 observed countries (CIA 2012c). Of the countries recognised by the United Nations, it is only undercut by Singapore (7.72) and Monaco (6.85). The fertility rate in Germany accounts for 1.41 children per woman, which lies way below the replacement rate of 2. That is why the population is currently declining by 0.2% (estimation for 2012; CIA 2012d). The low fertility rate is caused by the fact that a large number of German women stay childless throughout their lives (OECD n.d.; see *figure 2*). The German society can be segregated into the group of childless who are usually not married, have a tertiary education and account for 1/3 of the population, and the group of people who have children, are usually married and make up 2/3 of society (Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung 2011). This matches to the fact that only 32% of women in leading positions have children.

Figure 2. Childlessness amongst women aged 41-44 in selected countries in 2005



Source: OECD n.d.

Reasons for the failure of the laws

One main reason identified for this problem is the lack of work life balance in Germany. Peus and Traut-Mattausch (2008) interviewed female middle managers from Germany and the U.S. in order to examine their attitudes about balancing the double burden. Only 38% of the U.S. managers perceived work life balance as a barrier to their career progress whereas the same was true for an overwhelming proportion (87%) of German managers. The German managers were very sceptical about the opportunity to combine both areas of life and often perceived it as to be completely impossible. They stated that promotions were usually associated with the number of hours spent at work (face time) and not with performance. Furthermore, they felt confronted with prejudices against mothers, as people often believed that women who decide for a child would not return after the maternity break or that they would be less engaged at work. That would sometimes even lead employers to refrain from hiring women. Correspondingly, 17% of German managers perceived childlessness as a success factor for making career whereas none of the American managers did.

These statements indicate that most of the German laws, which are designed to support families, do not meet the needs of highly qualified women. For these women, deciding for children is not so much about money but about work life balance. This is one important aspect, which German laws lack to address. Accordingly, the provision of childcare facilities is fairly meagre in Germany. As statistics show, the proportion of German children under the age of three who are enrolled in a daycare centre accounts for just 25.2% whereas there are severe differences between West and East Germany. The problem is most profound in West Germany with only 19.8% of infants in childcare facilities, compared to 49% in East Germany (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder 2011),

where the higher proportion of spots is still an inheritance of the former socialist German Democratic Republic (Wagner et al. 1995). It is planned to introduce a legal entitlement to a daycare spot for every infant turning one year from 2013 onwards (BMFSFJ 2010) but these plans are far from being realistic. Though the childcare infrastructure has been extended during the last years, municipalities, which are supposed to bear 2/3 of the costs, lack the resources to provide such a comprehensive upgrade. For pre-school children aged 3-5 years, the situation is better as there is extensive provision of kindergarten spots. However, in many cases this does not facilitate employment for mothers because opening hours are very limited and lunch is usually not included (Hank and Kreyenfeld 2000). Out of the children at school age (6-10 years) only 9.4% visited daycare facilities in 2006 as the supply of spots could not meet the demand (Lange 2007). Schools cannot be regarded as a place to take care of children either, since there are no regular school hours in Germany and classes of primary schools usually finish between 11am and 2 pm. The situation is worsened by the fact that there are almost no private providers of daycare spots. Because of strict regulations, high entry barriers and supremacy of public providers, no private competition could arise yet. Hence, childcare is not a question of *affordability* but of *availability* for executive women having children (Hank and Kreyenfeld 2000), which explains why most of the German managers perceive work and family as two mutually exclusive things.

Another point is that the existing laws, which have been originally designed to support women, can have contrary impacts on women so that the laws finally result in harming exactly those persons for which they were designed to help (Peus and Traut-Mattausch 2008). The laws comprise such extensive rights that German employers become hesitant to appoint women as they might become pregnant and make use of their rights, thereby imposing high costs on employers.

Furthermore, most of the laws have a quite clear ideological orientation because they are geared to encourage women to stay home (Cullen 2007). For instance, the German government decided to introduce the right to three years of parental leave instead of introducing a comprehensive childcare facility system. In addition, tax benefits are designed in a way that there is less incentive to participate in the labour market as a married woman (Bach et al. 2011). Furthermore, the government plans to introduce an additional childcare subsidy (also mockingly referred to as “stove premium”) for those families who decide to rear their children at home instead of bringing them to a daycare centre (Boll and Reich 2012). It can be doubted whether a government should make specifications about how people should live their family life instead of providing freedom of

choice between certain ways of life. But what makes it worse is when women who make use of the only option they usually have (which is to (at least partly) stay at home) get punished for that because this option does not match to the structures and working habits in German corporations. A managerial career in Germany presupposes continuous service and frequent promotions, hence a linear trajectory. This collides with women's family responsibilities and their life cycle patterns: The period during which women attend to childbearing and childrearing is usually the one where corporate workload and commitment necessary to be promoted is highest (Drew and Murtagh 2005). Hence, if women make use of a three years parental leave, they will irrecoverably fall behind and lose path. That is why many German family laws do not help mothers but contrariwise harm them. Accordingly, Peus and Traut-Mattausch conclude, "laws do not achieve the desired effects if they are not in concordance with societal values" (2008: 566).

In this context, the question arises why Germany lacks a comprehensive provision of childcare facilities.

Hegewisch (2004) points out that there is not enough demand because of ideological opposition to mothers who work. A study by Treas and Widmer (2000) on social attitudes to mothers and work revealed that 69% of West Germans believed that mothers who have pre-school children should stay at home, compared to 21% of East Germans. Only 1% of West Germans felt that such mothers should work full-time, which is the lowest level of any of the 23 countries examined. In regard to school age children, only 5% of West Germans thought that mothers should work full-time (whereas 27% of East Germans did) and 28% suggested that mothers should stay completely at home (versus 6% of East Germans).

The study reflects the prevalence of more traditional gender roles in Germany so that Treas and Widmer evaluate Germany as "the archetype of a conservative state promoting breadwinner-husband and homemaker-wife families" and assess it as "an extreme case in its aversion to maternal employment" (2000: 1431). Kreyenfeld and Hank (2000) base these findings on the often held German belief that external childcare is particularly harmful for young children. The psychological and emotional development of children would require the care and supervision of one fix person being the mother or a close relative. The results of the study undertaken by Peus and Traut-Mattausch (2008) support this tendency as only 9% of German managers reported to take advantage of outsiders when it comes to childrearing while half of the American managers did. Thus, German female executives seem to be able to balance work and family only in case that they live close to their parents or in-laws who attend to their children. Since women and their families often move away from their parents or grandparents due to work, many women are completely on their own regarding childrearing.

They cannot expect a lot of support from their husbands either as traditional gender role expectations assign this task to women (Holst and Busch 2010).

This is also reflected by the tendency how differently partnerships of male respectively female executives turn out to be organised. In 2004, the majority of partners of male executives did not participate in the labour market at all (29%) or worked just part-time (34%; Institut für Arbeitsmarkt und Berufsforschung 2006). For female executives, the opposite was true. The majority of their partners worked full-time (52%) or even had a leading position (32%). Thus, male executives can mostly rely on their female partners regarding household activities who neglect their own career in favour of the family. Women, however, have to cope with both areas of life. What worsens the situation is the fact that female managers do not feel supported from their employers either. Despite the introduction of family friendly measures in a lot of corporations, combining work and family responsibilities is still considered as a private affair in Germany (Peus and Traut-Mattausch 2008).

4.2. Mentality patterns

The German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Affairs, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ 2010) did extensive research on the question which mentality patterns of senior managers form the basis of the glass ceiling phenomenon. The researchers interviewed more than 500 male executives of big and medium sized corporations on their perception why women are underrepresented on businesses top levels. As a result, they could identify three mentality patterns shown by leading male managers in Germany, which generate a manifold backed barrier for women with very selective permeability. The following broad examination is based on these findings, which did not indicate the proportion of managers belonging to each of the three samples.

4.2.1. Type I Manager: Conservative exclusion – rejection of women by virtue of gender

The first type of executive male manager detected can be characterised as a very conservative one who rejects women in high corporate echelons in general because women neither know nor accept and play according to the well-rehearsed rules and ways of thinking on companies' boards. These managers perceive women as an irritating factor who disturb the inner circle of men, with unforeseeable consequences for the efficient wheels of the conventional German economy. From the fact that women have not risen into corporate boards in the past, they derive a normative expectation that this is how it should be. Thus,

their attitudes towards women on boards stand in sharp contrast to the political correctness stated in public. Their mindset is specifically determined by the following factors (BMFSFJ 2010):

Family background

First, this type of managers thinks that an executive should have a family background, i.e. be married and have children. The underlying philosophy is that peak performance can only be sustained on the basis of personal security and a place for private relaxation. Furthermore, having a family displays orderly existence to contractual partners and makes more emphatic for the affairs of subordinates. However, as already shown, combining work and family commitments usually constitutes the quadrature of the circle for German women so that it appears to be impossible for them to fulfil this requirement. And if women draw the conclusion to abstain from children for the sake of their career, they carry the stigma of being a radical, “messy” and “unpredictable” solo fighter that has no private sphere for balancing.

Female suppression of social skills and role confusion

This previous perception is related to the second mindset element. From the perspective of a type I executive, women who make it to the top act extraordinarily tough, think that they have to work harder than men do, bar themselves from showing any weakness, try to imitate male behaviour patterns or virtues and even try to surpass them. As a result, these men perceive female executives as merciless leaders who treat their employees (even more other women and especially working mothers) much stricter than any of their male colleagues would ever do. This observation of cruelty and relentlessness as a reflection of anticipatory obedience puts another stigma on women who are therefore perceived as worse leaders lacking social skills such as sensitivity and benevolence. Although these men think that women originally have better social skills than men do, they interpret women’s behaviour as a suppression of these skills and assume that women do not want their softness to be evaluated as a weakness.

The reason for this misperception of women lies again in the relationship of sex role stereotypes and perceived management characteristics (Rennenkampff 2005; Holst 2008). For Germany, the first relevant study in this area has been undertaken by Rustemeyer and Thrien (1989) on the basis of the translated BEM Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem 1974). Their findings were widely congruent with those of the already mentioned American studies. The majority of the respondents reported that an ideal manager should have features, which are normally associated with men, whereas less than 5% of the respondents perceived

typically feminine qualities as desirable for a “good manager” (1989: 114). This held true for female and male respondents at the same time. Gmür (2004) could verify these findings in a large-scale study as well. Additionally, he identified a double disadvantage mechanism for female leadership candidates: First, the expectations towards female leaders stood in conflict with societal stereotypes towards women in general. Second, the expectations placed on women to show stereotypically masculine behaviour patterns were even higher as compared to their male counterparts. This is in contrast to the mentality pattern of a type 1 manager who perceives women to be mistaken when imitating male characteristics. The reason for these differences in study results might be based on the following: Since women are generally perceived to be worse managers by gender, people might initially think that women have to compensate for this inferiority by excessively striving for recognition and self-presentation. However, if women overly show male character features, societal confusion and scepticism arises, as women do not act in accordance with the general role expectations towards women. Peus and Welpe (2011) have picked up this notion by stressing the unattainable requirements profile women are confronted with: If women act typically male, they are blamed for being unauthentic and lacking social skills, but if they act typically female, they are denied to be competent and to be suited as a leader – a classical dilemma.

Females focus on wrong things

Type I managers also accuse women of working too hard (BMFSFJ 2010). They perceive women as workhorses who try to do everything on their own and stick too comprehensively to operational tasks and details. However, the primary task of managers in upper floors is to set the lines, to delegate and to pursue external and internal corporate policy. According to a survey of the German executive association (ULA 2007), only 4% of the respondents stated professional expertise as the most important factor for raising the corporate ladder. Thus, working 70 hours a week sends the wrong, fatal signal that one cannot delegate and focuses on the wrong things (Schneider 2011).

Women as disturbance to the old boys' network

One of the most important perceptions of a type I manager is that women constitute an irritation to the old boys' club (BMFSFJ 2010). Corporate elites are based on a culture of personal networking. It is essential for the individual to receive the ritualised confirmation to belong to the inner circle of like-minded people. There are language games and rituals in order to celebrate the difference between “inside vs. outside”. These include superiority demeanours

and chauvinistic innuendos against women (Henn 2012). It is not primarily about discriminating women but about the presentation of one's own strength in order to assure affiliation to the inner circle. That is why Rastetter (1998) has identified similarities between management boards and traditional male societies (e.g. fraternities, free masons, English Clubs). The latter ones can be characterised by a difficult admission procedure, strict regulations, firm hierarchies, exclusion of women and a certain value system usually referring to brotherliness, companionship and misogyny. Important is the demarcation to outsiders and the ritual character of integrating new members. If power and privilege are passed only to those who fit, self-esteem and prestige are strengthened through reflection and confirmation. Homo-social reproduction guarantees stability, security and the defence of the cultural heritage (Pfluger 2011). Accordingly, women do not fit. And even in case that they are exceptionally admitted to the group, there are mechanisms to maintain the inner circle male by excluding women from informal meetings. This is referred to as internal exclusion despite membership (Rastetter 2008). Thus, women are rejected to boards due to their gender as they pose a severe risk to not accept and attack the proven system.

4.2.2. Type II Manager: Emancipated attitude- but perception of female powerlessness against male superiority rituals

In contrast to a type I manager, a type II manager has a generally emancipated attitude. He thinks that women and men are equal and that women should be represented at top levels to the same extent as men. He has great sympathy for committed and ambitious women though he is sceptical about women's chances to advance very far in their career because he knows about the male power mechanisms and rituals. Whereas a type I manager denies women's emotional, social and political leading skills independent from the corporate level, a type II manager differs between two corporate levels: He grants women the possibility to cope with middle management but thinks that the doors to executive levels are closed for women. In specific (BMFSFJ 2010):

Incapability of women to play male games

Within the male dominated upper circles, rituals referring to personal success and power are a normal and even normatively expected form of communication. The purpose of these rituals is to demonstrate authority, to check whether others are fully prepared for their jobs and to explore territorial limits in relation to colleagues. It requires sensitivity to the situation, tactical skills, good timing, quick-wittedness, choice of the right "weapon" and some creativity in order to

surprise others. This verbal offensive game is accompanied by physical dominance gestures such as extensive arm movements, physical presence by occupying space, a deep voice, ostentatious patience and listening (but not for too long), interrupting others and the ambition to have the final say. Women perceive this typically male display of superiority as a strange and even repulsive scramble of top dogs, which they neither can nor want to be part of. On the contrary, Peus and Traut-Mattausch (2007) underpin that the communication style of women stands in sharp contrast to the described linguistic pattern of men. They refer to research done by Tannen (1995) who identified that the female communication style causes them to be less rewarded and acknowledged for their performance. For instance, women tend to speak in passive voice and often use the pronoun “we” instead of “I” whereas the opposite holds true for men. Furthermore, women are prone to ask more questions (as a signal of interest, not missing knowledge) and formulate their proposals in subjunctive using words such as “perhaps” or “maybe”. Men, though, make clear statements in order to emphasise their meaning (Ayaß 2008). That is why they often misinterpret the female way of communication as an expression of uncertainty and ambiguity (Haindl 2004). Additionally, it is usual among women to make use of customs such as apologising, giving compliments and mitigating critique with supplementary praise but men tend to understand this too literally. Contrarily, men often practise ritual opposition, i.e. they challenge suggestions of colleagues by mustering all arguments in order to check the validity of the idea (Tannen 1990). Women, however, understand this opposition as rejection of their proposition or even as a personal attack. Though none of the different communications styles can be evaluated as right or wrong, the male style is still prevalent and therefore expected on corporate boards whereas the female style causes confusion and a defensive demeanour.

What adds to this point is the fact that women usually show a lack of self-confidence and are more inclined to underestimate their performance (Sieverding 2003). Men evaluate their intelligence, capabilities and performance generally as much higher than women do (Schneider 2011). Accordingly, in a study a high proportion of female managers (more than 50%) considered missing self-efficacy as a barrier to women’s career progress (Peus and Traut-Mattausch 2008). The different levels of self-confidence can be explained by differences in dominant attribution styles. Men are more prone to attribute achievements internally, i.e. they assume that their successes are consequences of their capabilities. Women, however, tend to attribute their accomplishments to external factors such as circumstances or luck. Consequently, the male feeling of being the cause of success constitutes a foundation for building-up confidence whereas women lack such a foundation. Related to this psychological phenomenon is women’s

propensity not to assert their interests. While men usually call for what they desire, women are more reluctant and rather suppose that their work will be recognised and rewarded automatically. As a reflection of this, women do not like to negotiate (Babcock and Laschever 2003). They perceive negotiating as an unpleasant situation and are more pessimistic about what they can achieve. Accordingly, they demand less and get less (Berlein 2012). These factors together also contribute to women's fewer success in management as women's achievements are less visible.

Executive personality profiles do not match to the societal image of women

Finally, a type II manager thinks that top management is all about economic, monetary success, which is reflected in the balance sheets. A board is only measured against numbers so that its overall maxim is to extract as much as possible from the corporate resources in order to increase efficiency and profitability. Thus, the required personality profile of a board member is quite transparent: Rigour! Though this kind of manager believes women are able to be tough, they think that such behaviour is in contrast to the societal image of women. A female, rigorous board member would stand out and would be critically evaluated as unfeminine and inappropriate. She would not be regarded as a positive representative of the company and would be at risk to damage the image of the brand (BMFSFJ 2010).

4.2.3. Type III Manager: Individualistic attitude- but perception of lack of women who fulfil the requirements

A third mentality pattern of executive men is that gender is not a factor anymore, which influences selection decisions at businesses top levels (BMFSFJ 2010). What matters are only qualification, personality and continuous service without extensive breaks. Therefore, it is up to the capability of the individual to rise up the ranks. There are no corporate barriers to the advancement of women and the major reason for the lack of executive women is that there are simply not enough women who meet the requirement profile of an executive position as women usually lack a continuous professional biography due to childbearing and childrearing.

Although such men criticise the difficulties connected with combining work and family, they delegate these problems to society or politics, which they make responsible for establishing the institutional framework that allows balancing both areas. They do not consider it as a corporation's duty to tackle the problem nor do they see possibilities for companies to change the situation.

Moreover, they believe that women rather prefer to focus on the family, thereby prioritising a special trajectory of life (supported by Mika 2011). Since there are no perceived corporate barriers for women's progress, a type III manager rejects the establishment of a women's quota (denying this type's view Assig 2002).

4.3. Conclusions

Thus, it can be concluded that one major reason for the underrepresentation of women on German corporate boards is the mentioned lack of work life balance in Germany. Although the government has introduced an extensive legal system aimed at supporting families, the desired affects could not be achieved. This is mainly because the laws failed to meet the needs of highly qualified women for whom having children is not about money but about the possibility to combine work and family. This aspect is almost not addressed by German laws so that the provision of external childcare facilities is much too low. In addition, the laws can have negative impacts on women so that they finally result in harming those they have been designed for. Moreover, ideological direction of the laws provides incentives for mothers to stay at home, which ultimately infers high material costs on employers as well as immaterial costs on women who loose path.

This special imprint of the laws can be explained by societal values prevailing in Germany. A traditional gender role allocation is still perceived as the right living concept causing ideological opposition to working mothers and making people believe that external childcare is potentially harmful for children. Consequently, researchers conclude that Germany can be labelled as a rather conservative country still promoting the antiquated single male breadwinner model. In former times, women were uneducated and therefore did not have the chance to participate comprehensively in the labour market. Women's vocation was to attend to childrearing and household activities. Role expectations, the structure of organisations and the supply of public childcare institutions were in line with this sort of women's profession. With the emergence of feminist ideas, women gained more and more access to educational establishments. So one major issue has changed over time: The level of education of women and an associated participation in the labour market. However, the aforementioned role expectations, the structure of corporations and the supply of public childcare institutions remained unchanged and are still on the same level as several decades ago. Thus, Germany seems to be in a transition state, in which one major milestone has been reached (giving women equal access to education) but in which other societal and corporate values did not adapt to this new situation yet. The case of Germany shows that it is not enough just to provide women with

education but that the traditional gender role allocation, the corporate cultures and the provision of public childcare spots have to change and adjust as well, if society wants to give women a serious possibility to rise into executive positions. The findings allow for the assumption that laws cannot cause the desired results if they do not comply with societal values. They additionally suggest that societal values have a bearing on women's chances to balance job and family that reach beyond that of governmental regulations, thereby falsifying the hypothesis that laws are the most important instrument to facilitate work life balance.

A second major reason identified for the underrepresentation of women in executive positions is the design of mentality patterns held by German male executive managers. There are three orientations of mentality, being conservative exclusion, emancipated attitude and individualistic perception. Whereas a type I manager denies women to have sufficient managerial qualifications by virtue of gender, a type II manager is more emancipated but stresses the male superiority rituals women are powerless against. In contrast, a type III manager negates the existence of structural problems in general and simply assumes that there are not enough women who are willing and capable of doing the job. He ultimately taboos internal corporate mechanisms, which cause social exclusion of women in upper management ranks.

In corporations, there is to be found not just one mentality pattern each but rather all three of them. The effect is that, when being added, the interacting patterns create a multi-dimensional, entangled barrier for women with very selective permeability. A contradicting requirement profile is set up, which women are impossible to meet. Women's behaviour is analysed and dissected comprehensively by executive men who rather focus on the reasons why women are not suited for leading positions than to concentrate on women's strengths. It cannot be said whether the "wrong" female attitudes and behaviour patterns described by men are an objective itemization of the current state or rather a subjective perception. Neither women nor men can claim an objective description of the situation. However, as long as there is a quantitative imbalance between men and women in executive positions, men have the power to define what is right and what is wrong, thereby setting normative standards, which are seemingly much closer to the male comfort zone than to the female one.

5. What's next?

There is wide consensus among researchers and practitioners that more measures have to be introduced, which facilitate balancing work and family commitments, if the number of executive women is to be increased. Women need

more support in regard to childrearing if they simultaneously want to engage at work and raise into high management ranks. Most important is the expansion of external childcare facilities. The German government is advised to invest heavily into the extension of public childcare spots so that every woman who is willing to work full-time and make a career has a place to leave her children during the day. Corporations should back this process by providing in-house facilities or, in case that this is too expensive, by providing auxiliary measures such as supporting parents' initiatives. Furthermore, flexible work-arrangements facilitate women to allocate their time according to their needs without suffering from career penalties. As such, flexitime, work-time accounts and telecommuting options can help women to better bear the double burden.

Furthermore, corporate cultures have to change. The current corporate cultures in the conservative German economy are mostly male-oriented and do not account for female behaviour patterns, communication styles and ways of living. The underlying mentality patterns are based on stereotypes, prejudices and rejection. Changing opinions and attitudes, which have developed long time ago and which are strongly internalised by people, is a challenging thing to do. It is even harder when those people (i.e. executive men) who have the power to change something, thereby have to render a piece of their own power. Who wants to clear one's own desk? The current structures seem to be cemented and intransigent. Despite several decades of discussions and options to initiate changes incrementally as part of voluntary agreements, the increase of women in executive positions has been "homeopathic" (Holst and Schimeta 2011: 3). As a measure to change these crusted mentality patterns, the introduction of a women's quota is being discussed. The proponents of the quota are gaining influence; nevertheless, opposition against the quota is still strong, especially from industry representatives. Although it is not desirable to abandon from negative discrimination of women by means of a compulsory tool that leads to positive discrimination of men, a quota appears to be an effective measure for change in Germany. In fact, the quota should not be considered as a magic bullet or universal remedy against gender employment disparity for all European countries. The special causes of the underrepresentation of executive women have to be examined in each case individually and countermeasures have to be aligned to these root causes. For the case of Germany, however, which features a very conservative economy and society, whose norms and values appear to be enduring and crusted, a quota can bring major changes and thereby improve the career situation of qualified women a lot. The idea behind the quota is to achieve a long-term cultural change in corporations that makes women in leadership positions accepted so that the maintenance of the quota becomes obsolete.

It should therefore be considered as a crunch whose goal it is to make itself redundant again once its numbers have been reached. By agreeing on a general target level, qualified women will be promoted into leading positions, more female role models and mentors will arise and a change of the prevailing stereotypes will emerge that facilitates the rise of future female executive managers. The executive atmosphere will become more sensible for female issues and concepts like face time or linear career trajectories as requirements for climbing up the corporate ladder will slowly diminish. Part-time work might even become a feasible option for an executive manager. The quota constitutes a remarkable chance to supersede “a German corporate culture that has not changed much since the 1950s” (Beyer and Voigt 2011: 4).

Not only women will profit from it but also men, who more and more want to spend time with their families and engage in childrearing. The whole society will benefit from such a move and the change will prepare corporations for the demographic challenges of the future.

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