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## **Abstract**

Women are still underrepresented in high leadership positions. Whereas hindrances on the way to the top are well-documented, research focusing on experiences women make in male-dominated positions is scarce. This study aims to deepen the understanding of experiences and challenges women face in the upper echelon. In open interviews, nine women, working as directors or on executive boards in Germany and Austria, talked about their experiences as female leaders. Based on an analysis of the interview data according to Grounded Theory, I found that the women experience an ambivalence, caused by male norms and gendered expectations in the upper echelon. To deal with this ambivalence female leaders adopt varying strategies, including dissociating from their gender group, integrating communal attributes into their leadership style and focusing on tasks. The findings imply, that in order to achieve gender balance in the upper echelon, changes on an organizational level are necessary. These changes potentially resolve the found ambivalence and compensate for the extra challenges women face.

*Keywords:* female leaders, gendered organization, ambivalence



## **1 Against all Odds – Women in High Leadership Positions**

Throughout the past century the amount of women in the paid work force increased significantly, making up approximately 50% in most Western countries today (European Commission, 2013). However, even though women on average obtain the same or better education than men, they remain significantly underrepresented in high leadership positions (Catalyst 2012, 2015, 2016; Hernandez Bark, Escartin, Schuh, & van Dick, 2016; Kaiser & Wallace, 2016). This underrepresentation of women in high leadership positions illustrates the gendered character of organizations. Positions of power and influence are not only occupied by men but also associated with men and stereotypically male attributes (Deloitte, 2015; Eagly & Karau, 2002; World Economic Forum, 2015).

The underrepresentation of women in high leadership positions persists, despite governmental interventions, assistance measures for women and studies indicating equal or better performance of women compared to men at the same hierarchical position (Eagly & Carli, 2003, 2007; Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995; Hernandez Bark et al., 2016; Mavin & Grandy, 2016a, 2016b; Rastetter, 1998). However, the last years have shown an increase in public and political interest in the continuing underrepresentation of women (Mensi-Klarbach, 2014). This increased interest resulted in studies about reasons for this phenomenon and potential measures to increase the number of women in (top) management positions (Mensi-Klarbach, 2014).

Psychological research on the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions mainly focuses on the obstacles women face on their way to the top (Glass & Cook, 2016; Johnson & Tunheim, 2016; Mavin & Grandy, 2016a; Terjensen, Sealy, & Singh, 2009). These obstacles include implicit bias, subtle discrimination, tokenism and the lack of access to informal networks (Cook & Glass, 2014). Nevertheless, some women reach the top of organizations despite these obstacles (Cook & Glass, 2014: 92). Understanding their experiences in top management positions and on their way there has the potential to shed light on the role of gender in the upper echelon, as well as strategies women adopt to successfully reach the top.

This research contributes to the discussion on women in leadership positions, by focusing on experiences of women who actually reached the upper echelon, thus, attending to a topic relevant for science and the working environment (Moreno & McLean, 2016). The aim of this study is to gain more understanding of the effect that gender might have on women in the top

management. Specifically, I am investigating the following research question: What do women in male-dominated leadership positions experience and which challenges do they face?

In order to understand the specific experiences female leaders make, I interviewed women in high leadership positions for this study. More specifically, I interviewed women who work in male-dominated positions in Germany and Austria. The participants' accounts are analyzed qualitatively according to Grounded Theory, an approach characterized as inductive, theory-generating and process-oriented (Glaser & Strauss, 2010).

In the first part of this paper I will present the context of this study and the theoretical framework of gendered organizations to introduce the subject-matter. Subsequently, I discuss relevant theories and studies about women and management to derive the research question and sub-questions. The second part illustrates the applied methodology and method for conduct and analysis of this study. Finally, I will present the results and discussion of the conducted interviews, as well as a summary of the main points, limitations of this study and an outlook in part three.

### **1.1 The gendered organization**

In order to contextualize this study, I will first present an overview of current statistics related to women in leadership positions in Austria and Germany. The focus of the research lies on Austria and Germany because of the similarly low numbers of women in the upper echelon (Abd El Mawgoud & Wieser, 2016; Ankersen & Berg, 2016). Both countries belong to the same value framework, presenting a similar societal context in which companies operate (Sagiv, Schwartz & Arieli, 2011).

In Austria, 28.5% of the 200 biggest companies lack women all together in the upper echelon: not one woman is present on executive and supervisory boards (Abd El Mawgoud & Wieser, 2016). In total, 7.2% of the managers on executive boards are women, compared to 2006, this number has doubled (Abd El Mawgoud & Wieser, 2016). If the number of women on boards keeps increasing at this rate (approximately 3.5%), it will take multiple decades until gender equality is reached (Abd El Mawgoud & Wieser, 2016). On supervisory boards, women constitute 17.7%, this is a rather low number compared to other European countries (Abd El Mawgoud & Wieser, 2016). Austria has no quota or similar legislature targeting the increase of women in the upper echelon. Companies are encouraged to commit themselves to measures supporting the advancement of women (Abd El Mawgoud & Wieser, 2016).

Compared to Austria, Germany has more women on supervisory boards, namely 25.6% in September 2016 – in total numbers 1265 men and 436 women are working on supervisory boards (Ankersen & Berg, 2016). In 2015, 19.7% people on supervisory boards were female – this increase is explained by the quota implemented in the beginning of 2016: according to this quota women must constitute at least 30% of supervisory boards (Holst & Kirsch, 2016). In case companies do not hire women for replacement of leaving supervisory board members, the seats stay empty (Holst & Kirsch, 2016). However, the companies face no consequences or punishment for non-compliance to the quota (Ankersen & Berg, 2016; Holst & Kirsch, 2016).

Even though the number of women on supervisory boards increases, the development on executive boards is stagnating (Ankersen & Berg, 2016). In the 160 companies listed on stock exchange, executive boards are in total made up of 631 men and 44 women (6.5% of women) (Ankersen & Berg, 2016). The 44 women are working in only 24% of these companies, thus, 76% of these companies have no woman in their top management team (Ankersen & Berg, 2016). According to these statistics, in spite of increases in the last years, women in the upper echelon are highly underrepresented in Germany and Austria.

The continuing underrepresentation of women in the upper echelon elicited an increasing public, political and scientific interest over the last years (Mensi-Klarbach, 2014). In general, the literature dealing with underrepresentation of women in management positions is based on three approaches, namely the person/gender centered approach, structural approach, and gender-organization-system approach (GOS; Rindfleish & Sheridan, 2003).

The *person/gender centered approach* explains the underrepresentation of women in terms of individual differences due to gender. Thus, according to this theory women lack the skills and characteristics required for leadership positions, resulting in the underrepresentation of women. Men, on the other hand, exhibit these competencies (Rindfleish & Sheridan, 2003). This approach explains the absence of gender balance in leadership positions solely considering the individual level, and ignores potential structural and cultural influences that shape organizational culture, interactions between workers as well as experiences individuals make in the organization (Rindfleish & Sheridan, 2003). The approach implies homogenization of women as a group and blames women for the absence of gender equality (Rindfleish & Sheridan, 2003).

Addressing the limitations of the person/gender approach, the *structural approach* attempts to explain the underrepresentation of women in management by focusing on the structure of organizations (Rindfleish & Sheridan, 2003). This approach, however, does not take into account gender and regards the organization as a gender neutral place. Accordingly, to establish gender equality in an organization, the structure of the organization simply needs to be changed, such that power is divided among more individuals (Rindfleish & Sheridan, 2003). The *structural approach* fails to consider the gender based power differences that exist in societies at large. These power differences cause different experiences for men compared to women during socialization and career development.

The *gender-organization-system (GOS)* approach constitutes a combination of the two previously presented approaches, addressing the critique respectively (Rindfleish & Sheridan, 2003). Thus, the GOS approach argues that organizational structures shape situations, conditions and the behavior of people (Fagenson, 1993). At the same time the approach acknowledges that people experience and encounter behaviors, situations and conditions differently due to their gender (Fagenson, 1993). This paper applies the GOS approach, more specifically the gendered organizations approach, understanding and defining organizations as gendered on an individual and structural level.

Over time, the approach to consider organizations as gendered with gendered structures and positions became more popular and is widely used in science today (Bryans & Mavin, 2003; Stainback, Kleiner, & Skaggs, 2016). Management, especially top management positions are characterized as male which the quote “think manager, think male” vividly expresses (Bryans & Mavin, 2003; Schein, 1975, 2001). From a historical perspective, this association is only logical: as the big organizations came into existence, the workforce consisted of mainly men and almost exclusively men were in positions of power and influence (Bryans & Mavin, 2003). Therefore, standards of male socialization determined the structures, design and culture of organizations (Bryans & Mavin, 2003). These historically developed structures affect organizations until today and are represented in the biased conception of who is perceived as a good manager (Schein, 1975, 2001). Positions of power and influence (i.e. boards and management) are associated with stereotypical male attributes, such as authoritative, strong-minded, decisive, aggressive, competitive, confident, goal-oriented, and courageous (Askehave & Zethsen, 2014; Bryans & Mavin, 2003). These widespread associations constitute and reproduce male advantages in the work place (Bryans & Mavin, 2003; Stainback et al., 2016).

The gendered organizations approach includes an understanding of gender as a social construct, thus de-naturalizing gender (Calás, Smircich, & Holvino, 2014). Gender is not understood in an essentialist, biological manner, but rather as representing societal norms, attitudes and behaviors people learn and internalize during their lives (Sander & Hartmann, 2009). Historical developments and regional settings determine these gendered norms, attitudes and behaviors (Mavin, 2008). Gendered societal norms significantly impact the socialization of men and women, shaping experiences, relationships and interactions (Calás et al., 2014; Mavin, 2008).

Notwithstanding, the gendered organizations approach focuses on a binary view on gender, differentiating between masculinity and femininity (Mavin, 2008). This binary view tends to omit intra-gender differences leading to a homogenizing of group members, while overemphasizing inter-gender differences (Mavin, 2008). Hence, research concerned with the influence of gender or gender differences in a certain context is caught in tension between looking for similarities between e.g. women, while admitting great intra-group differences (Bryans & Mavin, 2003). These intra-group differences arise through individual differences and intersectional aspects, i.e. sexuality, race, class, ethnicity (Bryans & Mavin, 2003). Nevertheless, the category gender is of great importance in Western societies, thus significantly influencing the experiences of people (Mensi-Klarbach, 2014). Therefore, the majority of women are likely to share certain experiences (Mensi-Klarbach, 2014), as the following quote summarizes for the organizational setting:

“The gendered structures and practices operating within organizations result in qualitatively different career experiences and outcomes for women and men, with the most senior levels of management having been identified as sites of hegemonic masculinity” (Rindfleish, 2003: 299)

Applied to the organizational context, “the gendered nature of organizations and management provide a fundamental basic experience that women share” (Bryans & Mavin, 2003: 115). Belonging to the social category *woman* elicits this gendered experience, although the manifest experiences vary among women (Bryans & Mavin, 2003). The upper echelon, including boards and executive management, is defined as a masculine context, occupied by mainly men and associated with male attributes (Mavin, 2008; Mensi-Klarbach, 2014). The strong connection between top management and masculinity shapes the experiences of women in high leadership positions (Mavin, 2008; Mensi-Klarbach, 2014). Gender influences everyday organizational practices (formal and informal), like recruitment, evaluation, compensation, promotion or networks (Calás et al., 2014), thus gender affects day-to-day experiences of

women (Wright, 2016). In the next section I introduce research and concepts about influences of the gendered organization on the careers of women.

## **1.2 Hindrances on the way to the top**

The gendered organizations approach suggests that women make gender specific experiences along their career and especially in the male-dominated positions (Bryans & Mavin, 2003; Calás et al., 2014; Mavin, 2008). Psychological research about the underrepresentation of women in management positions, generally supports this notion. Most psychological research on the absence of gender balance in management positions focuses on the hindrances women encounter whilst attempting to reach these positions. Subsequently, I review this research, concentrating on those hindrances likely to continue as challenges for women in the upper echelon.

A common metaphor to illustrate the hindrances women experience on their way to top management positions, which is in line with the GOS and gendered organizations approach, is the *Glass Ceiling* (Barreto, Ryan, & Schmitt, 2009; Powell & Butterfield, 1994). The *Glass Ceiling*, defined as invisible processes and barriers restricting women, results in few women in powerful positions (Barreto et al., 2009; Powell & Butterfield, 1994). These “invisible barriers of bias” (Kaiser & Wallace, 2016: 72) include unconscious biases by managers and the gendered structure of an organization favoring men (Barreto et al., 2009; Powell & Butterfield, 1994). For example, men’s promotions tend to be based on their potential, while women’s promotions tend to be based on performance portraying a double standard determined by gender (Kaiser & Wallace, 2016; Lyness & Thompson, 2000). These biases lead to an artificial barrier, a limit at some point in the career of women, from where they cannot ascend in organizational hierarchy (Barreto et al., 2009; Powell & Butterfield, 1994).

Critiques of the *Glass Ceiling* metaphor note that today some women do break the *Glass Ceiling* and reach the top of organizations. Furthermore, the notion that only one solid, invisible barrier exists for women does not represent the reality women face (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Rather, women face multiple biases and hindrances, some of which are subtle and often go unnoticed, whilst others are more overt. The many obstacles and unexpected turns in the careers of women is best described by the metaphor *Labyrinth*, according to these critiques (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Examples of hindrances include different evaluation of the same behavior for women and men (Eagly & Carli, 2007), men receive strategically more important assignments, women experience discrimination and harassment (Kottke & Agars, 2015). In

the next paragraphs I will describe five aspects of the *Labyrinth* in more detail. Based on these aspects, I formulate sub-questions on how they could be relevant for women in the upper echelon.

The first aspect and one of the main characteristics which determines various experiences in the *Labyrinth* is the well-researched phenomenon of *homosocial reproduction*. *Homosocial reproduction* describes the effect that people in power prefer and recruit others who are similar to themselves in demographic characteristics (Kanter, 1977; Stafsudd, 2006). This preference is due to the tendency of people to infer values and attitudes from demographic characteristics, for instance gender, age and background (Stafsudd, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1985). Furthermore, this in-group favoritism supports a positive self-image and reduces uncertainty for the people in power (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1985).

Applied to companies, *homosocial reproduction* implies that the predominantly white, heterosexual men who are in positions of power and influence, promote other white men into leadership positions (Kanter, 1977). *Homosocial reproduction* is evident in promotion processes as well as career development and mentoring (Reskin & McBrier, 2000; Ridgeway & England, 2007). Consequently, women and people belonging to minority groups are less likely to attain positions of influence, leading to a vicious cycle: without women and members of minority groups in influential positions, other people belonging to these groups will only gain access to these positions when they are exceptionally good, legislature demands it, or the top managers consciously decide to break the *homosocial reproduction*.

In line with the practice of *homosocial reproduction*, the second aspect of the *Labyrinth* is the exclusion from professional networks. Research confirms that women tend to have weaker professional networks and less social ties to top managers (Barreto et al., 2009; Glass & Cook, 2016; Powell & Butterfield, 1994). This lack of ties, in turn, stems from an exclusion from certain informal meetings and conversations based on gender. Many free time activities undertaken among colleagues lead to uncomfortable situations for women, like visiting a strip club (Wright, 2016). A qualitative study conducted by Glass and Cook (2016) suggests that women are excluded from informal meetings, which male managers use to sustain and expand their networks. Additionally, small talk is often about topics stereotypically associated with male expertise, like soccer games or cars (Wright, 2016).

This exclusion from informal interactions increases with hierarchy and is especially present in male-dominated positions, namely leadership positions. Exclusion from informal in-

interactions with managers results in disadvantages for women, producing inequalities in organizations in two ways (Wright, 2016). First, small talk and free time activities facilitate bonding and networking resulting in strong professional networks (Glass & Cook, 2016; Wright, 2016). Strong professional networks, especially to managers in the upper echelon, correlate with career advancement (Barreto et al., 2009; Glass & Cook, 2016) because managers forward career relevant information among their network (Wright, 2016). Second, during informal interactions managers discuss job and career related information and make preliminary decisions about promotions (Barreto et al., 2009; Sander & Hartmann, 2009).

Women in high leadership positions ascended in the hierarchy despite these disadvantages caused by informal interactions. Consequently the following questions emerge: Which role do female leaders assign informal interactions in their careers? In what way do female leaders experience informal interactions with colleagues on the same or higher levels?

The third aspect of the *Labyrinth* is family responsibilities, repeatedly associated with the underrepresentation of women in (high) leadership positions (Carli, 2015; Olid, 2013). On average, women still undertake the majority of housework and especially care work (for children and elderly people), leading to interruptions in their work trajectory (Ghassemi & Kronsteiner-Mann, 2009; Olid, 2013). Furthermore, due to the strong cultural connection between women and caretaking, many women do not return to work after having a child, or do so in part time (Ghassemi & Kronsteiner-Mann, 2009; Olid, 2013; Woolnough & Redshaw, 2016). Interruptions in work trajectories and part-time employment correlate with less career success, more specifically negative career outcomes (Olid, 2013; Seierstad & Kirton, 2015; Woolnough & Redshaw, 2016).

Especially top management positions imply long working hours and constant availability – both aspects are difficult to combine with family responsibilities (Carli, 2015). In line with this, female leaders state compatibility of parenting/housework and career as one of the main challenges for them (Johnson & Tunheim, 2016; Seierstad & Kirton, 2015). Next to the difficulties combining work and family lives, superiors tend to exclude mothers more often in promotion decisions because they assume that mothers are unable to fulfill the requirements of leadership positions due to their obligations as mothers (Carli, 2015). This assumption demonstrates traditional ideas about family life and gender roles.

As multiple studies imply that compatibility of work and domestic responsibilities is one of the main hindrances in careers of women related challenges are likely to influence the experi-

ences female leaders make. In line with this assumption the following questions result: What role/impact does family or private life have on the careers of the women (and vice versa)? How do women manage the combination?

The fourth aspect of the *Labyrinth*, potentially relevant for women in high leadership positions, affects women's careers when they are already in management positions. Women face higher scrutiny and performance pressures compared to men in the same positions, because of their minority status in management and gender-based role expectations (Glass & Cook, 2016; Kanter, 1977; Mavin, Grandy, & Williams, 2014). Subsequently, I introduce both aspects (minority status and gender-based role expectations) respectively, as well as their combined influences on women's careers.

Leadership positions are dominated by men, thus women are likely to be the only female or part of a female minority. According to *Token Theory* (Kanter, 1977), belonging to a minority in a given situation leads to more visibility in itself and to be perceived in terms of the minority group membership. A woman in a management position with only male colleagues is very visible and the category *woman* stands out. Negative effects of this high visibility are heightened scrutiny, exaggerated stereotypes, and an isolation from the majority group (Glass & Cook, 2016; Kanter, 1977; Mavin et al., 2014). In this setting, failures are more likely attributed to group membership than individual reasons or contextual influences.

Furthermore, women most probably face the challenges suggested by the *Role Congruity Theory* (Eagly & Karau, 2002): a perceived incongruity between the expectations based on women's social roles and the demands of a leadership position tend to impede successful leadership for women (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Glass & Cook, 2016). In the gendered organization, high leadership positions are associated with stereotypical male attributes, summarized as agentic, including assertiveness, being controlling, confident, and ambitious (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In contrast, women are stereotypically associated with so-called communal attributes like being empathetic, social, kind and caring (Eagly & Karau, 2002). We learn these associations in the course of socialization and they lead to expectations of certain behavior based on them. If the exhibited behavior is incongruent with the expected behavior based on group membership, people perceive the person more negatively (Eagly & Karau, 2002). According to *Role Congruity Theory*, a woman who is assertive, demanding, and ambitious is evaluated more negatively than a man behaving in the same way.

Thus, women in leadership positions face a situation in which, on the one hand, stereotypical female behavior is expected based on their gender, on the other hand, stereotypical male behavior is expected based on their position as a manager (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Consequently, female leaders tend to be more negatively evaluated, due to incongruence between the two diverging role expectancies (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Glass & Cook, 2016). These *double-bind* situations produce very limited possibilities for accepted behavior and correlate with increased strain and pressure experienced by female compared to male leaders (Sander & Hartmann, 2009).

Taken together, *Token Theory* and *Role Congruity Theory* suggest heightened visibility of women in high leadership positions as women and a narrow scope of action, in which women are perceived as both competent and gender congruent. This high scrutiny implies pressures to outperform colleagues and avoid mistakes due to allocation to gender instead of context (Glass & Cook, 2016). Negative evaluation and reactions by colleagues, supervisors and subordinates might be based on being perceived as atypical or counter-stereotypical in regard to gender role expectations (Mavin & Grandy, 2016b; Mavin et al., 2014). The combination of *Token Theory* and *Role Congruity Theory* results in the question: Which experiences do female leaders make based on being part of a minority group (women) on their hierarchical level?

The fifth aspect of the *Labyrinth* is the lack of support and challenges to authority, which hinder women from ascending from middle management to high management positions (Glass & Cook, 2016; Mavin & Grandy, 2016b; Vial, Napier, & Brescoll, 2016). Management positions usually include privileges and authority based solely on holding the position (Glass & Cook, 2016). Furthermore, status implies the degree to which a leader is respected and admired by her\*his subordinates and colleagues, which is necessary or at least advantageous to legitimize authority as a leader (Vial et al., 2016). Low status, and thereby perceived illegitimate authority, results in less subordinate cooperation and reduced positive extra role behavior of subordinates, leading to a self-reinforcing cycle: The experience of negative reactions by subordinates based on their perceptions as an illegitimate leader provokes negative emotions in the leader which leads to more negative behavior on behalf of the leader and a confirmation on behalf of the biases held by subordinates (Vial et al., 2016). Research by Vial, Napier and Brescoll (2016) implies that female leaders tend to lack authority based solely on position and additionally encounter more difficulties legitimizing their authority and achieving high status among subordinates. Female leaders may find themselves in an in-

between status: “they hold power because of their formal positions, yet remain marginalized because their feminine bodies are ‘out of place’ in organizations” (Mavin & Grandy, 2016a: 1096). For women in high leadership positions two questions emerge: How do female leaders experience their relationship to subordinates? How do female leaders evaluate privileges and authority in their position?

### **1.3 Research on women in high leadership positions**

As illustrated, hindrances women face in gendered organizations on their way to the top are well documented, while experiences of women who did break the *Glass Ceiling* are not (Cook & Glass, 2014; Glass & Cook, 2016; Johnson & Tunheim, 2016; Mavin & Grandy, 2016a; Terjensen et al., 2009). The masculine context of high leadership positions implies a significant influence on women’s experiences in these positions, underlining the importance to understand the situation of women in high leadership positions (Mavin, 2008; Mensi-Klarbach, 2014; Moreno & McLean, 2016). Existing studies about women in the upper echelon concentrate on correlational methods to illustrate (positive) effects women exert as part of boards, for example more effectiveness of boards, greater engagement (Singh, 2008), improved problem solving in teams (Woolley & Malone, 2011), decreased levels of conflict and improved board development (Nielsen & Huse, 2010). These correlational studies offer business cases underlining the positive effects gender diverse teams have on company success. However, only qualitative studies, such as in-depth interviews, enable to understand the experiences women make in leadership positions (Bührmann, 2013; Mavin, 2008; Mensi-Klarbach, 2014; Moreno & McLean, 2016).

So far, this call for qualitative research about women in the upper echelon is met by three studies conducted in Norway, Sweden and Mexico, respectively (Johnson & Tunheim, 2016; Moreno & McLean, 2016; Seierstad & Kirton, 2015). In all three studies, researchers asked female leaders in open or guideline interviews about their experiences as women in high leadership positions. Two of the studies applied a hermeneutic phenomenological method, while the third applied a thematic analysis. A noticeable aspect in two studies is the importance of private life during the interviews. Seierstad and Kirton (2015) explicitly asked for the women’s private life, focusing on work-life balance. In line, all reported findings treat the compatibility of career and family, considering the impact of legislature and the gendered distribution of house and care work. The women did apparently not speak about relationships or experiences at work (Seierstad & Kirton, 2015). Even though Johnson and Tunheim (2016) asked “What is it like to be a professional woman leader living and working in Sweden today?”,

their results, also, consist mainly of categories related to parenthood and Swedish legislature on quotas and childcare.

The results presented by Moreno and McLean (2016) about the experiences of female leaders in Mexico are not about compatibility of work and private life. However, the results appear to be on a manifest level, i.e. the thematic analysis yielded a summary of the interviews and included little interpretation by the authors. Relevant categories comprise, among others, the importance of academic education, working hard and considering ethical values in decision making at work. Just like the other two studies, the results do not contain information concerning relationships or the working context.

These studies clearly point towards the importance of national context and prevailing legislature, which influence the number of women in top management and shape to a certain degree the organizational cultures (Johnson & Tunheim, 2016; Seierstad & Kirton, 2015). For instance, state legislature affects childcare support and quota regulations in top management (Mavin & Grandy, 2016b).

As shown above, previous research on women in leadership positions lacks an understanding of women's experiences and challenges in the upper echelon. Those few studies investigating the experiences of female leaders concentrate more on the compatibility of career and family life and remain at a manifest level. National context especially in the form of varying legislature and quota regulations impact the odds of women reaching the top and most likely the experiences women make in the upper echelon. Therefore, this paper aims to answer the following question: What do women in male-dominated leadership positions experience and which challenges do they face (in Austria and Germany)?

To answer this question and exceed the manifest level of narration, a qualitative research design and analysis according to the Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2010) are most suitable. Following the Grounded Theory approach I established a theoretical sensibility, which is crucial to ensure a more open approach to the data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 2010). The theoretical sensibility in this paper consists of the presentation of the context (see 1.1) and the review of existing studies, including potential influences female leaders might experience in male-dominated positions (see 1.2). This review resulted in the following sub-questions (see also 1.2):

- Which role do female leaders assign informal interactions in their careers? In what way do female leaders experience informal interactions with colleagues on the same or higher levels?
- What role/impact does family or private life have on the careers of the women (and vice versa)? How do women manage the combination?
- Which experiences do female leaders make based on being part of a minority group (women) on their hierarchical level?
- How do female leaders experience their relationship to subordinates? How do female leaders evaluate privileges and authority in their position?

## **2 Method**

The research question – What do women in male-dominated leadership positions experience and which challenges do they face (in Austria and Germany)? – is broad and aims understand and explore the experiences of female leaders. Consequently, a qualitative research design is most appropriate. The emphasis on women's experience corresponds with feminist principles in methodology, as does the understanding that women share certain experiences based on the socially and politically constructed category *woman* (Bryans & Mavin, 2003). The focus on everyday life experiences, the present life situation and continuances from earlier life experiences is best summarized in the term *Lebenswelten* (Lamnek, 2010). Hence, the appropriate methodological perspective for this research design is the theoretical position of *Phenomenology* in the tradition of Heidegger (Heidegger, 1962; van Manen, 1990). The basic idea is that societal constructions are based on subjective orientation in the world and a making sense in the social world. Thus, the societal construction of the world is reconstructed through the accounts of research subjects, enabling understanding and analysis of a phenomenon through recounted experiences (Lamnek, 2010).

### **Participants**

Potential participants included all women working in high leadership positions, namely on executive or supervisory boards (including for example Chief Executive Officers, Chief Operating Officers, Chief Financial Officers, managing directors, non-executive directors) in Germany or Austria. I recruited participants from my broader professional network and personally reached out to potential participants. In total, nine women agreed to participate.

The nine women interviewed for this study are either directors or part of the executive boards of their companies. They work in the following types of organizations: sociopolitical foundation, research association, non-governmental organization, media company, consultancy, university, internet company, insurance company. The youngest interviewee is 35 years old and the oldest 61 years old, the average is 46.2 years. All of the interviewed women are white and are/were in heterosexual relationships. The five women in this sample who have children have between one and four children ranging from toddler to adults.

### **Interviews**

To ensure an unconstrained and open atmosphere, the interviews took place in the interviewees' first language, German. I designed the interviews as open interviews to enable the participants to speak about their experiences in their own words and focus on those aspects

most relevant to them (Dannecker & Vossemer, 2014). In the introduction to the interviews I further encouraged the women to speak freely about what *they* think is relevant to answer the questions. To avoid an influence through my prior knowledge and assumptions, the first two questions were very broad, namely: *What are your experiences as a woman in a high leadership position?*<sup>1</sup> *If at all, in what way does being female impact your day-to-day experiences at work?*<sup>2</sup> These two questions were maintained throughout the research, all interviewees answered them. After these two questions, I posed immanent questions, resulting from and based on the narration I heard. I asked, for instance, for more detail or examples on a certain topic brought up by the interviewee to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and importance to the individual woman. Furthermore, I prepared a number of questions related to the sub-questions of my research. These questions changed slightly based on experiences from earlier interviews. The prepared questions were only asked if the interviewee did not talk about the topic herself.

I sent the proposed questions for the interview to six of the interview partners before the interview took place, because this was a precondition for most of them to participate in this study. Also, prior to the interviews, the interviewees received a statement of informed consent, including their rights and anonymity possibilities. Furthermore, all interview partners gave their consent for sound recording of the interviews.

I conducted three interviews via telephone and the other six personally at the offices of the leaders. All interviews took place between October 4<sup>th</sup> and November 7<sup>th</sup> 2016, were transcribed right after the interview and analyzed between November 2016 and January 2017. The interviews lasted between 30 and 110 minutes, with an average of 54 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. I transcribed the interviews in great detail, approximating a naturalized transcription, including pauses, stuttering, background noise or laughing (Howitt, 2016: 138ff; see Appendix 2 for detailed transcription symbols). Due to poor quality of one of the records, making it impossible to understand the interview, that interview was excluded from the analysis.

## **Data analysis**

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<sup>1</sup> Was sind Ihre Erfahrungen als Frau in einer hohen Führungsposition?

<sup>2</sup> Falls überhaupt, welche Rolle spielt es in Ihrem beruflichen Alltag, dass Sie eine Frau sind?

To facilitate a systematic analysis of the data and increase transparency and intersubjective understanding of the research process, I analyzed the data with the scientific software Atlas.ti – Qualitative Data Analysis ©. The transcripts were imported into the program and analyzed in German. The reason for undertaking the analysis in German was to avoid changes in implicit meanings through translation into English. I translated the results and quotes from the interview from German into English only during the writing process.

The data was analyzed according to Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2010), a method characterized by its openness, inductive theory-generating and process-oriented approach: „A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomena it represents.“ (Strauss & Corbin, 1991: 24). The Grounded Theory approach is adequate for this study because no hypotheses or categories could be derived from the existing literature. The ideal form is to generate a theory based on the data; however, in this study theoretical saturation could not be reached. Grounded Theory is suitable for this study as it satisfies the explorative and hypothesis-generating character (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

As a first step, I applied open coding to all eight interviews, that is, I went through the interviews line by line, labeling each unit of meaning with a title or summary in a few words (see Appendix 3 for a list of all codes). These codes are close to the data and offer a first overview of apparent issues present in the data. Then, connections between codes were visualized in networks, representing underlying concepts in the data (axial coding). The combination of these concepts generated categories apparent in the interviews, which were specified and elaborated through selective coding. Selective coding implies to go through the interviews again look for more information in line with the categories and especially contradicting these. With the information from selective coding the categories were changed and defined. Finally, I analyzed the connection between the resulting categories and their relationship to one another, which resulted in the key-category *ambivalence* as part of or influencing all of the categories.

Due to the fact that I conducted the research as a single person, I guaranteed triangulation of the analysis by discussing the results with my supervisor, as well as three lecturers specialized in Grounded Theory method at my university. I integrated the feedback and input received into the data analysis. Furthermore, in the context of a seminar accompanying this study, a group of fellow psychology students coded parts of the interviews and I included these into the analysis.

Intersubjective transparency is crucial in Grounded Theory analysis due to constant interpretation by the researcher. To guarantee this transparency in the course of the research process I wrote down all considerations, reflections and decisions concerning the conduct and analysis of the research in a field diary as well as memos (Schultz, 2014). These were integrated into the analysis of the data. Furthermore, the field diary and memos were used to reflect my role and influence as a researcher in this process and my assumptions.

### **Self-reflection of the researcher**

An important part of qualitative research in general and Grounded Theory specifically is the reflection of the researcher's assumptions as well as possible influences on the subjects and analysis through the researcher as a person. I will now summarize the reflections of my influences on the research process. I am a master student of psychology and thus, brought prior knowledge and assumptions learned in the course of my studies into this research. The introduction including all relevant studies is an attempt to be aware of these assumptions and, on a conscious level, try to minimize the influence on the analysis and conduct of the interviews. I tried to approach all of the interviewees in the same manner, with great interest in their stories and experiences.

How does my identity as a young, white woman influence the interview situation with other white women? On the one hand belonging to the same group (woman) might have elicited a sense of familiarity and trust. Furthermore, the age difference combined with me as the person asking the questions and them as the experts, might have further supported this. However, as evident in the results many of the women do not identify with being female at the workplace. The majority of the interviews were conducted at their workplace potentially eliciting the need to delimit themselves from the category *woman*.

### 3 The ambivalence of being a female leader

“As I am always thinking, it is not important. If you are a woman or a man, because for me [...] in my everyday life, it is not really important.”<sup>3</sup> (Director of a consultancy)

A very prevalent answer to the first interview question (What are your experiences as a woman in a high leadership position?) was that gender has no impact on their working lives and daily experiences at work. Most interviewees repeated this statement during the interviews, however, all gave many examples of situations and experiences in which gender did have an effect. On basis of a thorough data analysis, it became evident that this ambivalence is the key category, connected to all sub-categories. In the first part of this chapter, the ambivalence in the experience as a woman in high leadership positions will be defined and explained, to then analyze the causes of this ambivalence in the second part, the women’s strategies of handling the ambivalence in the third part and possible consequences for women and companies in general in the last part (see figure 1).

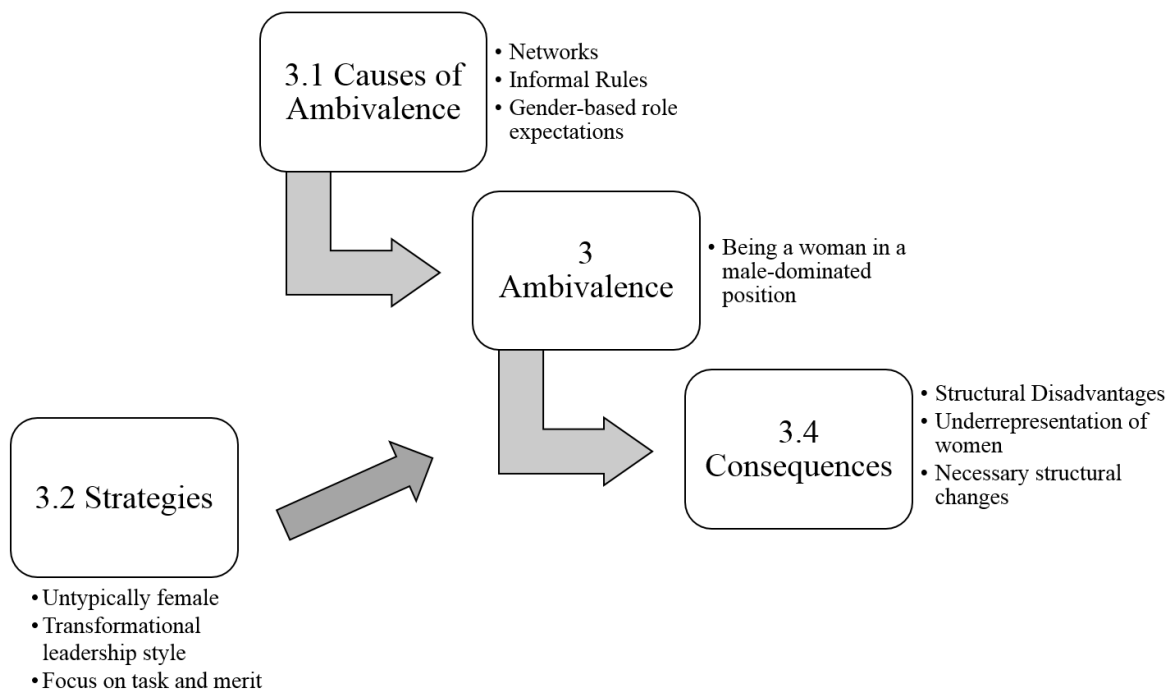


Figure 1: Overview of the findings<sup>4</sup>

Working in a top management position is highly demanding, consisting of complex tasks, problem solving and strategic decision-making. The reflection upon the influence of gender on daily experiences related to it is obviously not part of manager’s daily work. For the ma-

<sup>3</sup>All quotes are originally in German and translated into English by the author. German original: „Also ich finde ja immer, es spielt keine Rolle. Ob man Frau ist oder Mann, weil ich finde [...] in meinem Alltag finde ich, spielt es keine große Rolle“

<sup>4</sup> Figure developed and designed by Jessica Wulf

jority of my interviewees it was the first time to consider possible influences. The interest in such a reflection was given, as they knew the interview was about experiences as a woman in these positions.

As stated in the introduction, gender roles are understood as socially shared beliefs about behavior and attributes of women and men (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hernandez Bark et al., 2016). Gender roles make up a central category in Western societies, individuals integrate these into their self-concepts in the course of socialization (Hernandez Bark et al., 2016). Thereby, these norms and expected behaviors appear as given and are brought into social interactions without thinking about them (Powell, Bagilhole, & Dainty, 2009). The combination of reflecting little on influences of gender and the implicitness of gender explains the perception of the women that gender is unimportant and has no impact on working experiences. Furthermore, the women seemed not to experience the ambiguity apparent in the interviews. For example, one interviewee stated both of the following in the course of her interview:

“And um, also if you are a woman, of course recognition among colleagues or from subordinates or also with my superiors than again, are shaped in the end by what you bring on the track professionally. [...] In this respect, there is I believe no difference in perception, or relevance. [...] perceivable a different way of treatment I do not experience.”<sup>5</sup> (Director of an insurance company)

“It is however, that I have a colleague, who actually plays the same role I play, only for a different customer base. And we have the same superior. And when the two of us are together in a meeting, my superior behaves in a different way, compared to when we- when I am there alone. [...] because it is just- it is a different way of contact.”<sup>6</sup> (Director of an insurance company)

Also evident in this quote and apparent in all other interviews is, that these high achieving women focus on skills, tasks and merit in explaining their career advancements. Attributing experiences to being a woman, especially negative experiences or hindrances, potentially leads to a self-perception as a victim. Being a victim does not fit the self-perception of the interviewed women as competent, capable leaders.

The extent of ambiguity is influenced by the context the women work in, especially colleagues and the company's culture. Younger colleagues are described to be more open, hold-

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<sup>5</sup> German original: „Und ähm, auch wenn man ne Frau ist, natürlich die Anerkennung unter Kollegen, oder bei Mitarbeitern oder auch bei meinen Chefs dann wieder, gestaltet sich letztlich dadurch, was man fachlich auf die Spur kriegt. [...] Insofern hat's glaube ich keine unterschiedliche Wahrnehmung, oder Relevanz. [...] wahrnehmbar ne Anders-Behandlung erlebe ich nicht.“

<sup>6</sup> German original: „Es, ist aber so, dass ich einen Kollegen habe, der eigentlich die gleiche Rolle hat wie ich, nur für einen anderen Kundenstamm. Und wir haben den gleichen Vorgesetzten. Und wenn wir zu zweit in einem Termin sind, ist mein Vorgesetzter anders als wenn wir-wenn ich alleine da bin. [...] weil es einfach- es ist eine andere Art des Umgangs.“

ing less rigid gender norms compared to older colleagues and superiors. Relevant in the company's culture is the represented attitude of the executive board towards successful women and the attempts to increase the number of women in top management positions. A positive attitude towards the advancement of women and support for women facilitate a culture of less ambivalence for female leaders. Furthermore, one interviewee reported the impact of national differences: even though she is the director of a young and innovative internet company, she experiences a positive difference in treatment when meeting with managers from Norway.

The ambiguity apparent in the interviews reflects an experienced ambivalence in the working context. On the one hand masculine norms, rules and role expectations are in place in high leadership positions, on the other hand the interviewees face specific expectations due to being female and being perceived as different compared to colleagues (The causes for ambivalence will be analyzed in detail in part 3.1.). One of the strategies to handle this ambivalence, is visible in the ambiguity apparent in the interviews: a dissociation from the group women and defining gender and being female as irrelevant for experiences as a female leader (see part 3.2).

### **3.1 Causes of ambivalence**

What causes the ambivalence apparent in the interviews? The analysis yielded three conditions and processes related to the emergence of ambivalence for women in high management positions: (a) importance and working of networks, (b) informal rules existent in high management context and (c) gender based expectations of women. In the following, each category will be analyzed in detail and connected to relevant research.

#### **Networks**

Networking is a prevalent topic in the interviews, related to career success and sources of social support. Being part of networks with influential people in a company assists in career advancements by increasing visibility. As part of a network, the likelihood increases to be suggested for a vacant position. The promotion depends on the number of people who know the candidate and have positive experiences with him\*her. If this candidate has many people in high positions in his\*her network, s\*he is more likely to actually be promoted.

Furthermore, professional networks expanding beyond the own working organization, are at some level of hierarchy pivotal for social support and honest feedback. The higher in the hierarchy one ascends the fewer colleagues exist. Isolation and loneliness are in that line regarded as a negative aspect of high leadership positions. Professional networks permit to talk

about decisions and difficulties at work, as well as reflect on realized decisions and alternative options. Mutual support entails faster problem-solving on a more direct way. As one interviewee stated:

“At my level no one is left. And the level below me is dependent on me, they are my co-worker, you cannot speak openly about certain things with them. So you need an environment outside, a reliable group of people, who understand your job, so you do not have to start from the beginning every time, [...] who can give you honest feedback, because they do not depend on you.”<sup>7</sup> (Director of a research association)

The importance of networks for career advancements is stressed in multiple studies, all in line with the description of the interviewees of this study (Günther & Gerstenmaier, 2005; Haghanipour, 2013; Hodigere & Bilimoria, 2015; Holton & Dent, 2016; Machold, 2013; Mavin, 2008; Rastetter, 1998; Wunderer & Dick, 2002). However, Hodigere and Bilimoria (2015) posed an interesting and somewhat contradicting finding, namely that networks do not explain career success for women to the same degree as for men. Most of the studies about influence and importance of networks for career advancements do not consider gender as a variable and concentrate on men. Network quality and density predicted promotion for men to a high degree (89%), while only 28% of the promotions of women could be predicted by networks (Hodigere & Bilimoria, 2015). Forret and Dougherty (2004) explain similar results by the lack of access women have to important and influential people. Therefore, women tend not to be included in networks of people deciding about promotions – people in power and with great influence (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Machold, 2013). Nevertheless, exclusion from male networks is the most stated reason why women leave management positions (Hodigere & Bilimoria, 2015).

A lack of access for women to crucial networks goes along with multiple studies on importance of networks in career advancement (Günther & Gerstenmaier, 2005; Haghanipour, 2013; Hodigere & Bilimoria, 2015; Holton & Dent, 2016; Machold, 2013; Mavin, 2008; Rastetter, 1998; Wright, 2016; Wunderer & Dick, 2002). The women interviewed in this study agree upon the difficulty for women to enter influential, male-dominated networks, however all of them consider themselves to be part of these networks to some degree, which was and is crucial for their career and social support.

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<sup>7</sup> German original: „Auf meiner Ebene ist ja dann keiner mehr. Und die Ebene dadrunter ist ja von mir abhängig, das sind meine Mitarbeiter, mit denen können Sie bestimmte Sachen dann nicht mehr so offen besprechen. Also brauchen Sie außerhalb irgendwie ein Umfeld, ein verlässlichen Kreis von Menschen, die soweit ein gedacht sind, dass Sie nicht jedes Mal von Null anfangen, [...] die Ihnen dann aber auch eine ehrliche Antwort geben können, weil sie nicht von Ihnen abhängig sind.“

A reason for the difficulties entering male-dominated networks for women is a described preference for men and women to have gender homogeneous networks. Networking is perceived to be easier among women because of similar experiences in the workplace that can be shared and on which a relationship can be built upon. This results in inferior networks of women compared to men and the need to somehow enter the “networks of men” as long as few women occupy upper echelon positions (see Sander & Hartmann, 2009: 11f for similar results).

“I think, here at this company, at some point, it is important to enter the networks of men; that is important. [...] Once you are in the network, it does not matter whether you are a man or woman. It is, however, more difficult as a woman [to enter these networks]. [...] Also at company parties [...] or in general at events for example in the evening alcohol is drunk. Woman-I tend not to get drunk in the evenings. At least not [...] with colleagues or superiors. Men have less problems with this. And then you are not part of the group that goes to the third discotheque. But those things of course weld together. And thereby, you end up with clubs, that form”<sup>8</sup> (Board member of an insurance company)

Opinions among the women interviewed vary, to which degree they are part of men’s networks. Consent is present, however, that as a woman one cannot be part of the “male networks” to the same extend as men are. As a woman you can be accepted and respected on a professional level but not enter the networks as “deeply” (Board member of an insurance company) as men do. The director of an internet company described these differing relationships based on gender as a connection between men that women cannot attain with men in the same way. Attempts to build similar “buddy”<sup>9</sup> relationships cause uncomfortable situations. This is only the case at work, the director did not know similar exclusion based on gender from private relationships. This suggests that especially men who show this “buddy” behavior, or adopt it during their careers are likely to reach high leadership positions. This is in line with the *homosocial reproduction* construct – the men who reach top leadership positions do so not only by merit and being male, but also by expressing similar opinions, values and interests (Rindfleish & Sheridan, 2003; Sander & Hartmann, 2009).

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<sup>8</sup> German original: „Ich glaube hier im Hause irgendwann ist es wichtig in die Netzwerke der Männer reinzukommen, das ist wichtig. [...] Wenn Sie da gut vernetzt sind, ist es eigentlich egal, ob Sie Mann oder Frau sind. Es ist aber schwieriger als Frau [in diese Netzwerke zu kommen] [...] Also auch so auf Betriebsfeiern, [...] oder Veranstaltungen zum Beispiel wird abends dann noch was getrunken. Frau-Ich neige nicht dazu mich abends zu besaufen. Zumindest nicht [...] mit Kollegen oder Vorgesetzten [...]. Da haben Männer weniger Probleme mit. [...] Und dann ist man aber nicht, eine, die mit in dieser Truppe ist, die sich da jetzt gerade noch in der dritten Disco sich noch einen gibt. Aber das schweißt natürlich zusammen. Und dadurch haben Sie halt dann so, so Klübchen, die sich bilden.“

<sup>9</sup> German original: „Kumpels“

The described exclusivity and gendered mode of networks constitute the exclusion of women and are the demonstration of top management as *old-boys networks* (Haghanipour, 2013; Rastetter, 1998, 2002; Sander & Hartmann, 2009). *Old-boys networks* are characterized as homogenizing the men entering these networks and as exclusionary towards women. Problematic is especially that through these networks informal but relevant information is spread and decisions are reached, which are relevant for work. The described activities hindering women to enter these networks, are also activities during which decisions are made – suggesting that even when women are part of the networks some important information is not accessible to them (Haghanipour, 2013).

Rastetter (1998, 2002) defines high leadership networks as “Männerbünde” (male associations) pursuing collective goals and being based upon collectivization, loyalty inside the network and demarcation towards non-members. Inclusion versus exclusion is among other criteria based on gender – women are per se excluded, based on heterosexual, sexist norms widespread in these associations. Due to changes in legislature and values, it is impossible today to exclude women entirely from the upper echelon. Nevertheless, a so called *internal exclusion* (Rastetter, 1998: 177; Interner Ausschluss) is a more subtle but equally effective way and is consistent with descriptions of the interviewed female leaders. Even though networks and practices excluding women are prevalent in the upper echelon, in every organization a variety of micro-politics prevail (Rastetter, 2002). Therefore, these behaviors have to be regarded as tendencies, not generalizable to all male managers in the upper echelon.

### **Informal rules**

Informal rules are defined in the interviews as ways of communicating with one another, finding solutions to problems and reducing uncertainty in meetings, negotiations and informal settings. These rules evolved in times in which only men worked in these positions and they serve to facilitate communication. According to the interviews, the first women to enter these settings see themselves confronted with these informal rules, which are not in themselves against women. However, these rules are gendered, as becomes apparent in this quote:

“Of course men have partly different rules compared to women, when they are amongst themselves, and it was, if you think about leadership positions on boards, in certain committees, they were used to also as- also here in this foundation, were used to be among them-

selves and there just dominates a different way of [...] how do you behave, yes?<sup>10</sup>” (Director of a sociopolitical foundation)

One reason expressed in the interviews why men have different rules and ways of dealing, is the differing socialization of women and men. Amongst others, this leads to different gestures and body language in meetings, more self-confidence and courage among men, as well as more bragging about successes and achievements in front of superiors among men.

Even if these informal rules did not evolve against women (as was stated in the interviews), they unveil in the presence of women as potentially problematic and discriminating, resulting in uncomfortable situations for all and a need to change these behaviors. One interviewee, for instance, described how in the beginning of her presence in top management meetings, her colleagues tended to comment on the appearance of female keynote speakers or service staff as soon as the woman concerned left the room. As she further explains:

“Sometimes they even commented on this [the appearance of a woman], when she had left the room. [...] In these moments, they forgot that I was already present. [...] and then they look at each other and startle: oh, she is also here. Ahm, well then we cannot continue like this. [...] The solid patterns that were present: how does one deal with certain things, which jokes are made during dinner or later at the bar. Maybe one has to correct the jokes, because now there are women present.<sup>11</sup>” (Director of a media company)

In these situations, female leaders are obviously different than all men in the room, being excluded based on their gender. Furthermore, these well-established patterns of communication are disrupted and the women are in some cases blamed for disturbing them. Another situation in line with rituals causing exclusion based on gender is referencing between men. The director of a research association described a meeting, in which all other participants were men who referred back to inputs of the others. What *she* said was not repeated or referenced to by any of them.

The most prevalent example of informal rules and the potential to exclude women is small talk. Small talk is not only important for networking or becoming acquaintance with each other but also for initiating meetings.

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<sup>10</sup> German original: „Natürlich haben Männer zum Teil andere Spielregeln als Frauen, wenn sie unter sich sind und es war ja, wenn man an Führungspositionen denkt in Vorständen, in bestimmten Gremien, die waren das auch als-auch bei uns in der Stiftung, waren das gewohnt, unter sich zu sein und da herrscht einfach eine andere Art von [...] wie benimmt man sich, ne?“

<sup>11</sup> German original: „Da wurde sogar teilweise wurde das sogar kommentiert dann [...] als sie nicht mehr im Raum war. [...] Da hat man halt vergessen in dem Moment, dass ich jetzt schon dabei saß. [...] und dann guckt man sich an und schreckt, ohje, sie ist ja auch da. Ähm, dann können wir das ja so nicht mehr machen. [...] Die festgefahrenen Muster, die es gab: wie geht man mit Dingen um, was für Witze macht man auch beim Abendessen, oder später an der Bar. Muss man die vielleicht korrigieren, weil jetzt Frauen anwesend sind.“

“When there is a big meeting, manned top-cast, firstly one speaks about golf and soccer. And when enough was said about this topic, it is about the new cars. About either of the three topics I am pretty speechless. [...] This is, by this no harm is intended. But it is a way for men to start small talk.<sup>12</sup>” (Director of an insurance company)

Even though the interviewee states that by choosing these topics the men present have no bad intentions, the consequence is speechlessness of the female in the room. In the other interviews small talk was a recurring subject, and the topics defined different than topics the female leaders would talk about. Thus, the choice of small talk topic appears as a way of exerting, as well as preserving power by the men present. The small talk as an example of informal rules illustrates the *internal exclusion* (Rastetter, 1998: 177; Interner Ausschluss) discussed in connection with networks. By small talk about stereotypical male topics (soccer, golf, cars, etc.) the interviewed women are excluded.

All of the presented behavior and informal rules are rather subtle behaviors, not overt discrimination against women, however, leading to exclusion, uncomfortable situations and supporting the notion that top management settings are coined masculine. Overt sexist behavior, like business partners refusing to negotiate with women, or misogynist jokes, occurred, if at all, at an earlier stage of the women’s careers – all of the interviewed are today in positions of power and influence and well known in their working areas.

These results support the literature on gendered organizations, defining top management as “sites of hegemonic masculinity” (Rindfleish & Sheridan, 2003: 299). The informal rules represent a homogenous group of men with similar interests (e.g. golf, soccer and cars), values, norms and abilities and are the result of a history of *homosocial reproduction* (Sander & Hartmann, 2009). Even though, the interviewed women differ from each other and work in multiple professional areas, shared experiences based on being female in a masculine domain are visible.

Nonetheless, reactions to these informal rules vary greatly. One interviewee stated she informs herself about soccer to be able to participate during small talk, while another interviewee asked her superior about the possibility to visit a class to learn the basic soccer rules. Another reaction consists of ignoring the small talk and using the time to prepare for the meeting ahead. The director of the media company addressed the sexist behavior by her subordinates

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<sup>12</sup> German original: „Wenn ein großes Meeting ist, hochkarätig besetzt, als erstes wird über Golf und Fußball geredet. Und wenn das Thema durch ist geht es über die neuen Autos. Zu allen drei Themen bin ich relativ sprachlos. [...] Das ist, das ist gar nicht böse gemeint. Aber es ist eine einfache Art für Männer anzufangen Smalltalk zu machen“

(commenting on the appearance of women) directly, criticized it and demanded them to end it.

### **Gender-based role expectations**

Situations in which superiors, colleagues and subordinates behaved or reacted in a certain way because they faced a woman in a leadership position pervaded the interviews. These situations represent gender based role expectancies towards the female leaders, resulting in advantageous as well as disadvantageous positions for the women.

According to the analysis of the interviews heightened visibility is among the advantages of being perceived as a woman in a male connoted position and surrounding – which is suggested by *Token Theory* (Kanter, 1977), however, as a negative outcome for the token. In the case of the female leaders of this study heightened visibility came as an advantage namely because visibility is necessary for promotion. For example, the director of an insurance company underlined that a different, higher tone of voice facilitates interrupting a discussion. Furthermore, most of the interviewed female leaders do not feel included in the rivalry behavior among male colleagues, which was perceived positively. The CEO of a non-governmental organization emphasized that the repeated underestimation based on being female by negotiation partners is advantageous, such that it is easier to win a negotiation if the counterpart underestimated you.

Moreover, women face the expectation to show a soft, empathic side, which in the interviews is perceived as both advantageous and disadvantageous depending on the situation. Expected empathy encourages subordinates to share more information with a female manager about for example failures, mistakes or situations that did not go as planned. This facilitates finding mistakes and tackling the consequences. One interviewee explained that since she has been in the position as director, a number of mistakes were uncovered, that happened long before she came into the positions. This greater openness and trust can be explained as follows:

“I do believe that colleagues, staff address especially woes, or maybe also critique rather in conversations with me, than with male supervisors, just because there is a basic expectation, that a woman understands especially interpersonal topics maybe a little bit better. Yes, [...] we are all children of our upbringing. This resonates in our society.”<sup>13</sup> (Board member of an insurance company)

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<sup>13</sup> German original: „Ich glaube schon, dass Kollegen, Mitarbeiter vielleicht vor allen Dingen mit Nöten, oder vielleicht auch mit Kritik eher zu mir kommen, als zu nem männlichen Vorgesetzten, weil einfach so diese

This expected soft side or interpersonal focus can also be a disadvantage leading to more negative feedback and higher scrutiny in regard of applied measures compared to a man. One interviewee talked about a feedback from staff received concerning strategies and measures implemented to prevent a financial crises of the company. In addition to positive feedback, the following was criticized:

“I once perceived it very strongly [...] somehow from a woman [...] she has to have a soft side, and has to have a nice side, a mummy side. This became very clear to me: our communications department asked for [...] a sort of evaluation, how is [...] [she as director] perceived? [...] And part of the negative things were, sometimes too much of a management point of view, and [name of organization] is a family. [Name of organization] are 1000 people that is not a family. [...] but I think many were missing this softness expected of women.”<sup>14</sup> (Director of a research association)

The expectation of a soft side displayed by women in a high leadership position is in accordance to the *Role Congruity Theory* (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Empathy and caring for people belong to the communal attributes associated with and expected of women. This leads to positive outcomes for leader and subordinate when the leader is able to fulfill the expected communal attributes. Namely, when she speaks personally to her subordinates and they find a solution for the committed mistakes together. However, if these expectations are not fulfilled by the female leader, negative feedback is given. Even though the measures taken to prevent a financial crises of the company were successful and the manager was under time pressure to prevent the crisis, the staff nevertheless criticized the lack of display of communal attributes. The latter example displays higher scrutiny towards female leaders based on perceived role incongruent behavior (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

The expectation of displaying communal attributes can have a positive impact on what is shared by subordinates with the leader. It has, however, only positive outcomes if met by actual display of communal behavior. The results suggest that as soon as the consequence of admitting mistakes lead to punishment and not a display of empathy and support, subordinates are likely to stop sharing more information with the female leader, and in line with *Role Con-*

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grundlegende Erwartungshaltung, dass ne Frau gerade so zwischenmenschliche Themen vielleicht ein bisschen besser verstehen kann. Ja, [...] da sind wir alle Kinder unserer Erziehung. Das schwingt einfach mit bei uns in der Gesellschaft.”

<sup>14</sup> German original: „Ich hab mal ganz stark gemerkt [...] irgendwie so von ner Frau [...] die muss doch auch weich sein, und da muss doch auch so ne nette Seite, so ne Mama Seite sein. Wo mir das nochmal ganz präsent wurde war: unsere Kommunikationsabteilung hat [...] [eine] Art Einschätzung gegeben wie wird [...] [sie als Geschäftsführerin] wahrgenommen? [...] Und bei den negativen Sachen kam denn ja, ist doch manchmal auch sehr starker Management Blick und [Name Organisation] ist doch auch eine Familie. [Name Organisation] sind 1000 Leute, das ist keine Familie. [...] aber ja ähm ich glaub diese Weichheit, die hat dann vielen gefehlt, die man einfach bei so einer Frau irgendwie voraussetzt.“

*gruity Theory* evaluate the female leader more negative than a male leader displaying the same behavior (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Moreover, female leaders experience higher scrutiny because they have to prove their competences to a greater degree than men, most often to external negotiation partners. Competence and power are not necessarily assumed based on the position the woman occupies, leading to being ignored in meetings or not being accepted as a negotiation partner. Over time, as the female leaders establish a reputation, are known by most people in the sector and become influential these situations decrease. However, what is experienced also at a later stage is that men are freer in their behavior than women. If women exhibit certain “not female” behavior a harm to their status and likeability is the consequence:

“I think, you are always [...] examined more closely. Meaning, how does she behave? What does she do now? [...] and specific clichés exist, related to women, being touchy etc. [...] that is very different compared to men. Men can kick up their heels, talk big, and so on. That is different for women, I think.”<sup>15</sup> (Director of a consultancy)

The described expectations are in many cases reinforced because of the young age of most of the interviewees at the time of their first promotion into a high leadership position compared to men. This is supported in the literature (Heidenreich, 2013; Hodigere & Bilimoria, 2015). Young age impedes acceptance of subordinates and colleagues especially in the beginning of attainment of the position and results in more need to prove competence, eligibility and skills.

“That means I was 30 when I became director of the company. And of course, that is especially with clients [...] because of course your counterparts are 90% male and 90% around 50 and 60. And when you go there as a young woman it is of course always a bit more difficult. More difficult in that sense – well you are treated very politely, definitely, but of course always this topic: oh cute. Because you are not necessarily taken serious.”<sup>16</sup> (Director of a consultancy)

This part has introduced the three prevalent causes for ambiguity experienced by the female leaders, namely (a) networks, (b) informal rules and (c) gender-based role expectations.

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<sup>15</sup> German original: „Dann ist es glaube ich so, dass man immer [...] genauer unter die Lupe genommen wird. Ähm, heißt, wie verhält sie sich jetzt? Was macht sie jetzt? [...] Und auch da gibt es ja bestimmte Klischees, die man Frauen zuordnet, zickig etc. [...] Das ist ganz anders als bei den Männern. Männer können ordentlich auf den Putz hauen, Sprüche machen und so weiter. Das ist bei Frauen glaube ich anders“

<sup>16</sup> German original: „Das heißt ich habe die Geschäftsführung übernommen, da war ich 30. Und, das ist natürlich bei vielen, also grad bei vielen Kunden, [...] weil da natürlich die Gegenüber ähm zu 90% Männer sind und zu 90% um die 50 bis 60. Und wenn man da als junge Frau ankommt, ist es natürlich immer ein bisschen schwieriger. Also schwieriger im Sinne von man wird immer ganz, ganz freundlich äh behandelt, definitiv, aber natürlich immer eher dieses Thema: oh süß. Weil man wird halt nicht zwingend immer direkt ernst genommen.“

The next part consists of the analysis of strategies the women adopt in response to this ambivalence.

### 3.2 Strategies dealing with the ambivalence

The women who participated in this study are part of an exceptional group: in a structure facilitating career advancement for men, women face more hindrances than men ascending to the same positions. Therefore, analyzing the strategies applied to deal with the many barriers on their way up and in the upper echelon renders insights in possible strategies that work in such a structure. Without question all of these women are highly qualified and demonstrate expertise in fulfilling their work requirements. Furthermore, three ways of resolving the ambivalence women face in high leadership positions were most prevalent. In the following, I will introduce and analyze each of these, namely (a) being “untypically” female, (b) displaying transformational leadership style and (c) focusing on tasks.

#### Being “untypically” female

“I am aware of it – I do not fit any category“<sup>17</sup> (CEO of a nongovernmental organization)

One of the ways in which the interviewees deal with the ambiguity explained in this paper is by describing themselves as impossible to be pigeonholed. Especially, they regard themselves as untypically female concluding that gender is of no importance to them personally. At the same time, they acknowledge that it is important for others and influences the perception and reaction by colleagues and negotiation partners (as became evident in 3.1). When describing what is untypical about them, stereotypical male attributes are underlined, like being dominant, persistent, courageous, strategic and choleric. The board member of an insurance company explains:

“And I don’t think, that I am typical for a woman. I think in a conservative company, as this, you would not have the chance to become a manager, if you have very typical female characteristics. [...] I rather think that they [other female leaders in the company] similar to me, they are rather dominant personalities, [...] who dare to take counter positions. [...] otherwise they would not stand a chance in this very male-dominated domain, to work together with their peer groups [...] in a constructive way.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> German original: „Also ich bin mir drüber im Klaren, dass- ich pass in keine äh Schublade“

<sup>18</sup> German original: „Und ich glaube nicht, dass ich typisch Frau bin. Ich glaube, dass in einem so konservativen Laden, wie wir hier sind, dass Sie da nicht die Chance haben Führungskraft zu werden, wenn Sie so ganz typisch weibliche Eigenschaften haben.[...] ich glaube eher, das sind so, ähnlich wie bei mir, eher so ein bisschen auch dominantere Persönlichkeiten, [...] die sich auch trauen mal ne Gegen Position zu halten [...] ansonsten hätten sie wirklich keine Chance in dieser wirklich männerdominierten Domäne überhaupt mit ihren Peer Groups [...] in irgendeiner Form konstruktiv zusammen zu abreiten.“

This dissociation from the group *women* can be explained with *social identity theory* (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1985). According to this theory, part of the self-image of human beings is derived from the groups they belong to, in this context the group *women*. In a context in which this group is devalued or connected to disadvantages, belonging to this group elicits *social identity threat*. This threat can be confronted in two ways: *collective mobility* includes attempts to improve the standing of the stigmatized group one belongs to, or *individual mobility* including the dissociation from the group in order to improve personal outcomes (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1985).

Applied to the context of gendered organizations and women in high leadership positions: *social identity threat* is elicited by norms idealizing masculinity (networks and informal rules), the connotation of leadership and male attributes, as well as stereotypical expectations of women in high leadership positions based on their gender. The women, thus, have the option to combat stereotypical thinking about women and leadership positions potentially leading to *collective mobility* (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011). The other option, dissociating themselves from the group *women* and focus on own career outcomes represents *individual mobility*.

Which *mobility* people choose depends on the degree of identification with the social group, i.e. the importance of the group membership for self-perception. High identifiers tend to apply *collective mobility*, while low identifiers rather apply *individual mobility* (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Ellemers, van den Heuvel, de Gilder, Maass, & Bonvini, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1985). The degree of identification can vary among contexts and situations. The prevalent opinion represented in the analyzed interviews, namely that gender is or should be of no importance at work and that success and failure are based on ability and skills, suggest low identification at work. However, in this regard the sample is likely to be biased, because women choosing *collective mobility* are unlikely to choose or reach a high leadership position. Low identification at work does not imply, that the interviewees do not identify with being a woman for example at home, or with friends (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011).

The tendency to dissociate from the group *women* and apply *individual mobility* is further enhanced by experiences of workplace discrimination based on gender (Ellemers et al., 2004). Findings of a study conducted with female police officers in the Netherlands indicate that reminding the police officers of gender discrimination elicited by being a woman increases

dissociation from the group *women*, increases the expression of stereotypical views on other women and denying the existence of gender bias (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Ellemers et al., 2004). During the interviews, the female leaders described a number of situations in which they experienced workplace discrimination, like this example:

“There were also moments, which were less funny. At the beginning, I had some business partners who would not conduct the final round of negotiations about important contracts with a woman. And permanently writing to me that they really have to talk to my superior now. That was difficult at that point because I was at the highest position in this company.”<sup>19</sup>  
(Director of a media company)

The strategy to dissociate from the category *women* and to stress one’s own stereotypically masculine traits and characteristics is, thus, a self-protective and effective strategy to persist in a male-dominated position. The dissociation from femininity might therefore be reduced once gender discrimination diminishes (Ellemers et al., 2004) and management is constructed less male (Due Billing & Alvesson, 2000). A more gender neutral definition of management would furthermore enable an evaluation based solely on competence, skills and achievements (Mavin, 2006a, 2006b). All these results underline the importance to consider the context and structural conditions when analyzing the relationship between gender and organizations.

The dissociation from the category *women* by female leaders is central in the research of intra-gender relations in high leadership positions, namely research about the *Queen Bee* phenomenon. Part of *Queen Bee* behavior is the dissociation from the category *women* by women in leadership positions. Furthermore, denying systematic discrimination against women, no solidarity with other women and higher scrutiny in the evaluation of other women are considered *Queen Bee* behavior (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Derks, Laar, Ellemers, & Groot, 2011; Mavin, 2008) – all partially present in the interviews of this study.

Problematic about the definition of female leaders as *Queen Bees* is that it blames women rather than organizational structure for the absence of gender balance in leadership positions, imposing double standards as men should compete for the best jobs, but women need to support other women and show solidarity (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011). Besides, the women did not reach these positions by fighting for women’s rights, but by outperforming men (Mavin, 2006a). Furthermore, inherent in the *Queen Bee* label is the ignorance that this behavior is a

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<sup>19</sup> German original: „Es gab aber auch Momente, die weniger lustig waren. Es gab auch Geschäftspartner am Anfang, die mit ner Frau nicht die Schlussverhandlung über große Verträge führen wollten. Und mich permanent angeschrieben haben mit, also jetzt müssen wir wirklich mit Ihrem Vorgesetzten sprechen. Was schwierig war an der Stelle, weil ich war schon die oberste in der Firma.“

result of experienced discrimination based on gender, thus, blaming women for their way of dealing with experienced discrimination, however, ignoring the responsibility of the company, men and organizational structures (Mavin, 2006a, 2008).

Even though some of the described behaviors associated with *Queen Bee* were also present in the interviews, a very prevalent topic was the support of other women in reaching (high) leadership positions. One interviewee participates, for example in a mentoring program for women aspiring leadership positions. Others spoke about women they promoted into leadership positions, or effort spent to enable women with children to stay in leadership positions. These behaviors and efforts fit a further strategy applied by the interviewed women analyzed in the next section: a transformational leadership style.

### **Transformational leadership style**

A further strategy to be successful as a woman in this ambivalent context is the integration of behavioral expectations based on gender into the leadership style. The interviewees describe their leadership style as organic, systemic, young and even feminine. Two examples:

„This [leadership style] does not exclude men, because basically it is just an approach [...] with more openness, with more scope for development, with more support and assistance, and to create conditions and possibilities, that other people can develop.”<sup>20</sup> (Director of an internet company)

“My leadership style, I want to [...] before something changes [...] [I] want to understand subjects. But I also want that my team understands them, supports them. And I just want to reflect and X-ray the best ideas from my group in my team, and based on them find the best opinion for the company.”<sup>21</sup> (Board member of an insurance company)

The management style is characterized by the interdependence of departments as well as people, interest in subordinates as people, work at eye level, distributing responsibility among subordinates, and importance of developmental scope for subordinates. Furthermore, the motivation to and quality of work by subordinates is influenced by the supervisor's behavior and conditions of work – the interviewees recognize the complexity of an organization. Authoritative notions like a director who decides everything alone and has to know everything are rejected. Rather participation of subordinates and the acknowledgement that subordinates have

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<sup>20</sup> German original: „Das [Führungsstil] schließt jetzt Männer nicht aus, weil das grundsätzlich einfach a Ansatz ist, [...] mit mehr Offenheit, mit äh mehr Freiraum, [...] mit eher unterstützen und fördern und ähm einen Rahmen und Möglichkeiten schaffen, dass andere sich entwickeln können.“

<sup>21</sup> German original: „Mein Führungsstil ist, ich möchte bevor [...] sich etwas ändert, [...] möchte [ich] Themen verstehen. Ich möchte aber auch, dass meine Mannschaft sie versteht, sie mitträgt. Und ich möchte die besten Ideen aus der Gruppe in meinem Team dann einfach spiegeln und durchleuchten und daraus dann die beste Meinung fürs Haus finden.“

certain areas of expertise the supervisors might not have, are underlined. Communication at eye level and mutual respect are central. The idea of lifelong learning is deeply rooted in this idea of leadership.

The described characteristics and emphasis in the understanding of leadership are in line with transformational leadership style (Bass, 1998; Powell, 2014) which is applied by both men and women, however to a higher degree by women (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Hernandez Bark et al., 2016). A relational understanding of power stressing development, inspiration and motivation of subordinates forms the basis of transformational leadership (Bass, 1998; Carli, 2015; Powell, 2014). Consequently, a transformational leadership style integrates communal attributes reducing the incongruence of leadership and gender role expectations for women (Carli, 2015; Hernandez Bark et al., 2016; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Besides, the interviewees integrate experiences of their own into their leadership style. They avoid to only recognize those who brag about their achievements and display high self-confidence, a strategy predominantly used by men. Promotion is strived to be based on potential and achievement for shy and outgoing people alike. A reoccurring topic was that women tend to expect supervisors to see skills and achievements, while men tend to underline their achievements and are more likely to demand a promotion. This could be explained by the experience of some of the interviewed women themselves, who reacted with self-doubt and self-questioning to offered promotions.

### **Focus on tasks and merit**

“The home base is always technical expertise. In one way or the other you have to be good at a topic. You have to contribute additional value, otherwise you are not indispensable.”<sup>22</sup>  
(Board member of an insurance company)

Being hard-working, self-disciplining and extraordinarily good at their job is essential in the careers of the interviewed women. Furthermore, enjoying their tasks and having fun at work lead to the intrinsic motivation necessary to keep it up. Intrinsic motivation is especially important for women as they have to be even better than men to achieve the same. Excelling on a professional level is a strategy to deal with the ambivalences as a woman in a male connoted environment, such that they are recognized and appreciated based on merit, not gender. Rastetter (2002) found a similar strategy and explanation by women in her study: heightened performance and achievements are a typical reaction of women in male-dominated areas and

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<sup>22</sup> German original: “Sie müssen- also die Homepage ist immer die Fachlichkeit. Sie müssen in irgendeiner Form gut sein in dem Thema. Sie müssen Mehrwerte bringen, ansonsten sind Sie nicht unentbehrlich“

positions, like top management positions. This is due to the desire to confirm their beliefs that success and promotion is based on merit and skills, and independent of gender (Rastetter, 2002).

Besides focusing on tasks and skills the majority of the interviewed women did not aspire positions of power and influence. Rather, most arrived in top management positions due to the interest in new tasks and the potential increase of freedom in higher positions. Based on the analysis, self-esteem and ego were in this context irrelevant for career advancements, instead new challenges and more opportunities were appealing.

“I never wanted to be anything. I never wanted to be the director of something. Yes, that never [...] motivated me. [...] Well, there are people who just want to be in certain positions, on a certain hierarchical level. But for me, it was always about the task. And then the other things just come along. Then, you just are director of a company.”<sup>23</sup> (Director of an internet company)

A possible explanation for lower career ambition in women compared to men, especially in reaching a high management position, is the lack of role models (Morgenroth, Ryan, & Peters, 2015). Women and men tend to be equally ambitious when entering an organization. For women this ambition tends to decrease in the course of a few years within the company. This is explained by a lack of role models – (the unconscious question) why should I make it if almost no other woman made it? (Morgenroth et al., 2015). As the interviewed women belong to a minority in their company and women in top leadership positions are scarce, the lack of role models was most probably given.

This part has introduced three strategies applied by the interviewees to resolve or deal with the ambivalence women face in high leadership positions, namely (a) being “untypically” female, (b) displaying transformational leadership style and (c) focusing on tasks. In a structure facilitating the career advancements for men, these strategies potentially influenced the women’s career paths positively. Before summarizing this study and discussing the consequences that arise from the analyzed ambivalence in the upper echelon (3.4), I present a small excursion about the compatibility of leadership positions and children.

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<sup>23</sup> German original: „Ich wollt nie irgendwas sein, Ich wollt nie Geschäftsführer sein von irgendwas. Ja, das hat mich nie [...] vorangetrieben. [...] Also es gibt Leute, die wollen einfach bestimmte Positionen erreichen, die in der Hierarchie irgendwo sind. Aber mir ging’s eigentlich immer um die Aufgabe. Und dann kommt das andere halt irgendwie mit. Dann ist man halt Geschäftsführerin.“

### 3.3 Excuse Children and Career

Family responsibilities and care work were considered a potential influence and challenge for women in high leadership positions (1.2). The analysis of the interviews, however, offers a different insight: those interviewees who have children (four out of eight interview partners) talked about compatibility of childcare and career casually, it was not the focus of any interview. The combination of being a mother and a demanding job was regarded as more challenging to them, than to male colleagues. The interviewees resolve the challenges by good organization - structuring one's time efficiently, sending children to high quality daycare and dividing care work among multiple care takers (partners, grandparents) were solutions. A common experience is the confrontation with this topic and certain expectations of motherhood by the social surrounding – especially colleagues and superiors. A felt necessity exists to prove to others that one can be a good mother and advance in one's career.

Even though, the topic was present in all interviews – the interviewees without children spoke about measures taken in their companies to facilitate being a mother and having a career – compatibility of working and private life was not nearly as present as in the studies conducted in Norway (Seierstad & Kirton, 2015) and Sweden (Johnson & Tunheim, 2016), or as the reviewed literature (Carli, 2015; Olid, 2013) suggested.

### 3.4 Consequences inferred from ambivalence and Conclusion

In line with the aim of this paper, the findings result in better understanding experiences women make in high leadership positions and the challenges they face. The main finding of this paper is, that women in high leadership position experience an ambivalence caused by the working context. The interviewees expressed this ambivalence in the interviews, when underlining that gender has no impact on their working experiences while stating various experiences in which being a woman influenced the situation.

The three identified causes of this ambivalence are networks, informal rules and gender based role expectations. They support the notion that many of the identified barriers women face on their way to the top, still influence experiences in high leadership positions. *Homosocial reproduction* on the way secures the retention of established male rules and norms in the upper echelon (Rastetter, 2002; Sander & Hartmann, 2009), resulting in e.g. networks and informal rules excluding women (Günther & Gerstenmaier, 2005; Hodigere & Bilimoria, 2015; Machold, 2013). Even though the interviewed women are part of professional networks, they are not part of the influential networks to the same extent men are. This is

an example of an *internal exclusion* many women face in the upper echelon – technically they are part of the top management but informally they are still excluded (Rastetter, 1998, 2002). Informal rules present in the upper echelon contribute to this *internal exclusion* and potentially lead to uncomfortable situations for women.

The third cause of the apparent ambivalence, gender based role expectations, is also in line with challenges women face on their way to the top. Expectations of subordinates, colleagues and superiors towards female leaders include communal attributes. These expectations can lead to positive outcomes, when female leaders display communal attributes, or a more negative evaluation in case they are not shown. This is in line with the *Role Congruity Theory* (Eagly & Karau, 2002), that predicts higher scrutiny for female leaders.

This ambiguity women experience in the upper echelon is part of the structural disadvantages women face in today's organizations. This, among other disadvantages explains the absence of gender balance in spite of similar qualification of women compared to men (European Commission, 2013; Catalyst 2012, 2015, 2016; Hernandez Bark et al., 2016; Wunderer & Dick, 2002) and the positive effects women exert in leadership positions (Catalyst, 2004; McKinsey&Company, 2007; Sander & Hartmann, 2009; Smith, Smith, & Verner, 2005). As the interviewees are part of the few people and even fewer women who reach the upper echelon, they are most likely different in various ways compared to the majority of inhabitants in Germany and Austria. Foremost, they found a way to deal with the described ambiguity – in such an effective way that they can say gender has no impact on their working lives.

The identified strategies female leaders use to deal with the ambivalence are considering oneself as “untypically” female, applying a transformational leadership style and focusing on task and merit. The interviewees understand themselves as “untypically” female, dissociating themselves from the group *women*, while stressing stereotypical male attributes. Structural disadvantages for women and discrimination based on gender necessitate or at least increase the likelihood of the application of this strategy (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Ellemers et al., 2004).

The implementation of a transformational leadership style implies targeting the participation of subordinates and communicating at eye level (Bass, 1998). Furthermore transformational leadership stands for the integration of communal attributes into the leadership style (Carli, 2015; Hernandez Bark et al., 2016). This integration reduces the incongruence of lead-

ership and gender based role expectations for women (Carli, 2015; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hernandez Bark et al., 2016), constituting an effective strategy to face this ambivalence.

The third strategy female leaders apply is the focus on tasks and merit, with the result of being extraordinarily good in their areas. Excelling on a professional level is a strategy to deal with the ambivalences as a woman in a male connoted environment, such that they are recognized and appreciated based on merit, not gender. Like this, the desire to confirm the beliefs that success and promotion is based on merit and skills, and independent of gender is satisfied (Rastetter, 2002). Furthermore, this strategy accounts to some degree for the success of the female leaders – most of the interviewees did not aspire a leadership positions. Rather, the interest in new tasks lead them into these positions.

The presented strategies are probably not exhaustive. All of them have in common, that they are individual coping strategies for the given situation. These individual coping strategies do not challenge or change the status quo, namely underlying assumptions about gender and leadership. However, this is not intended as a critique of female leaders – as became evident women do not only face more challenges on their way to the top, but also after breaking the so-called *Glass Ceiling*.

## **Limitations**

A limitation of this study is, that five of the eight women knew most of the questions before the interview. It was a prerequisite for the participation in the study. This might have influenced the answers and direction of the first two very broad questions, as the follow-up questions were more specific. For example, all of the follow-up questions focused on work experiences and had no explicit question about family and private life. This might be one reason private life was scarcely mentioned in the interviews. However, the women who were not familiar with the follow-up questions did not concentrate on private life either.

Another limitation is the fact that it was not possible to parallel data collection and analysis of the data, as an ideal form of Grounded Theory would suggest. The reasons for this were the time frame of the study, which was limited and the need to schedule interview appointments one to two months in advance (due to dense calendars of the interviewees). During data analysis, it became evident that interviews with men in the upper echelon could possibly offer crucial insights as a comparison. Due to practical reasons I was not able to conduct interviews

with male leaders at that point in time. In line, I will introduce future research in the next section.

### **Future research and applications**

Future research, as became evident during the analysis of the interviews for this study, should focus on experiences men make in the upper echelon. Experiences made by male leaders have the potential to render insights in what way gender impacts the experiences of men and enables a comparison to the experiences women make.

Moreover, research should focus on further strategies female leaders apply – for example open interviews to define more strategies to then test the prevalence of the found strategies. Even though, as stated above, approaches tackling structural discrimination and challenges for women is more effective and preferable, they are likely to take some time to be implemented (if at all) and show effects. Therefore, individual strategies to master gender specific challenges can be helpful for women with ambitions to work in high leadership positions. In line with a more structural approach, research focusing on experiences women make for example in networking or mentoring programs are necessary to improve these programs and the outcomes.

Furthermore, this study like the majority of studies focusing on women in the upper echelon, included only white women in a heterosexual relationship. This was not intended, as the only criterion for participation was being female in a high leadership, male-dominated position. This suggests that an intersectional approach – considering next to gender for example ethnicity, sexual orientation or sociocultural background – potentially provides crucial information on experiences people make, who are part of multiple disadvantaged groups and the specific obstacles they face.

An implication of this study for organizations is to acknowledge the additional challenges women face on their way and at the top of organizations. Resulting in structural changes leading to more equal opportunities for all genders, by “creating a culture of inclusion for women” (Kottke & Agars, 2015: 281). Effective strategies include changes of mission statements and reward systems reflecting the importance of women in the company and the support of the top management for gender- and diversity activities (Kottke & Agars, 2015). This and multiple other studies indicate biases leading to unequal evaluation of behavior depending on the gender and higher scrutiny for women (e.g. Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Glass &

Cook, 2016; Mavin et al., 2014; Sander & Hartmann, 2009), suggesting the necessity to revise evaluation systems leading to more transparency and less opportunity for bias.

This study has shown that women tend to be excluded from professional networks, underlining the importance of mentoring and networking programs especially designed for women, in which for example the mentors are to some degree accountable for the success of their mentees (Kottke & Agars, 2015). A well-functioning example for women-only networks organized on a national level can be found in Switzerland, the Female Board Pool (Machold, 2013). In Norway, the Professional Board Forum facilitates meetings and networking for women with CEOs, board members and investors (Machold, 2013).

Additionally, according to critical mass theory (Kanter, 1977) the impact of minorities on norms and group interactions are determined by the size of the minority group. In top management, context studies suggest that at least three women are necessary to significantly change interactions and outcomes as well as norms and implicit rules in a male-dominated context (Konrad, Kramer, & Erkut, 2008; Torchia, 2013). This implies the importance to increase the number of women in top management teams to change the gender-specific challenges women experience, as evident in the interviews analyzed in this study.

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## 5 Appendix

### Appendix 1: Abstracts (English, German):

Women are still underrepresented in high leadership positions. Whereas hindrances on the way to the top are well-documented, research focusing on experiences women make in male-dominated positions is scarce. This study aims to deepen the understanding of experiences and challenges women face in the upper echelon. In open interviews, nine women, working as directors or on executive boards in Germany and Austria, talked about their experiences as female leaders. Based on an analysis of the interview data according to Grounded Theory, I found that the women experience an ambivalence, caused by male norms and gendered expectations in the upper echelon. To deal with this ambivalence female leaders adopt varying strategies, including dissociating from their gender group, integrating communal attributes into their leadership style and focusing on tasks. The findings imply, that in order to achieve gender balance in the upper echelon, changes on an organizational level are necessary. These changes potentially resolve the found ambivalence and compensate for the extra challenges women face.

*Keywords:* female leaders, gendered organization, ambivalence

Frauen sind immer noch unterrepräsentiert in hohen Führungspositionen. Die Hindernisse, denen Frauen auf dem Weg nach oben begegnen, sind gut erforscht. Studien, die sich mit den Erfahrungen beschäftigen, die Frauen in männer-dominierten Positionen machen sind hingegen selten. Das Ziel dieser Studie ist es, zu einem besseren Verständnis der Erfahrungen und Herausforderungen von Frauen in hohen Führungspositionen beizutragen. In offenen Interviews berichteten neun Frauen, die Geschäftsführerinnen und Vorständinnen in Deutschland und Österreich sind, über ihre Erfahrungen als weibliche Führungskräfte. Basierend auf der Analyse der Daten entsprechend der Grounded Theory, kam heraus, dass die Frauen eine Ambivalenz erleben. Männliche Normen und geschlechterspezifische Erwartungen im oberen Management führen zu dieser Ambivalenz. Um damit umzugehen, wenden die Frauen verschiedene Strategien an, darunter die Dissoziation von der eigenen Geschlechter Gruppe, die Integration von kommunalen Eigenschaften in ihren Führungsstil und das Fokussieren auf Aufgaben. Die Ergebnisse dieser Studie implizieren, dass Veränderungen auf der Organisationsebene notwendig sind, um ein Geschlechtergleichgewicht im oberen Management zu erzielen. Diese Veränderungen führen potentiell zur Auflösung der gefundenen Ambivalenz und kompensieren für die zusätzlichen Herausforderungen, die Frauen meistern müssen.

### Appendix 2: signs used in the transcripts

|               |                                   |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| (.)           | Pause (1 Sec.)                    |
| (number)      | Pause (number Sec.)               |
| //...//       | Two people speak at the same time |
| ((...))       | Note on background noises etc.    |
| .             | Terminating                       |
| <i>italic</i> | Emphasis                          |

### Appendix 3: Code Book

|                                             |                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| "männliche" Eigenschaften                   | Macht: zugeschrieben                                |
| aber ich finde jede Frau kann ..            | Mann-Frau Spiel                                     |
| Abhängig von Umfeld                         | Männer freier                                       |
| Alltag                                      | Männer mit Kind(ern)                                |
| also ich habs mir nicht zugetr..            | Männer unter sich: kein Mann-Frau Spiel             |
| Also solche Situationen hatte ..            | Männerwitze                                         |
| ALTER                                       | männliche Kollegen                                  |
| Anders in allen Kategorien                  | männliches Verhalten                                |
| Anderssein                                  | männliches Verhalten: Erfolge feiern                |
| Antrieb: Perfektionismus                    | Menschen äußern gerne Meinung über Person           |
| Arbeit - Privat: verschwimmt                | Menschen sind unterschiedlich                       |
| Arbeiten an Schnittstellen: Vorteil         | Mentoren Programm                                   |
| atypische Positionen                        | Mitarbeiter*: abhängig                              |
| Aufdecken Sexismus                          | Mitarbeiter*: mitnehmen                             |
| Aufgabe: Kommunikation                      | Mitarbeiter*: Reaktion                              |
| Aufgaben: FP                                | Mitarbeiter*: unterschiedlich Freiheit vs. Befehle  |
| Aufgaben: Referentin                        | Mitarbeiter*: Wahrnehmung                           |
| AUFGABENFOKUS                               | Motivation                                          |
| Augenblick erkennen                         | Muss es nur wollen.                                 |
| Ausnahme                                    | Mut haben                                           |
| Außenwahrnehmung                            | NACHTEILE FRAU                                      |
| Außenwahrnehmung: Unglaube                  | nahbare Führungskraft                               |
| Außerdienstliche Aktivitäten                | Nähe Mitarbeiter*innen                              |
| Auswirkung Bewertung des Äußeren            | Nationale Unterschiede                              |
| Authentisch sein                            | Netzwerke                                           |
| Beförderung                                 | Netzwerke der Männer                                |
| Beförderung: Argumente                      | Netzwerke der Männer: kommst du als Frau nicht rein |
| Beförderung: durch Männer                   | Netzwerke: ehemalige Vorgesetzte                    |
| Beförderung: fordern                        | Netzwerke: essentiell                               |
| Beförderung: Freude bei anderen Frauen      | Netzwerke: Frauen können das                        |
| Beförderung: sehr jung                      | Netzwerke: Retten die Männer                        |
| Beispiel: Kritik MA                         | Netzwerke: überwiegend Männer                       |
| Bekannt                                     | Netzwerke: zum reflektieren                         |
| Bekannt sein vorteilhaft                    | Netzwerke: Zweck                                    |
| beleidigt sein                              | Netzwerken                                          |
| beleidigt sein: hilft nicht                 | nicht im Team                                       |
| Branche                                     | nicht wahrgenommen werden                           |
| Branchen spezifisch                         | nicht zielstrebig                                   |
| Branchen spezifisch: Frauen in FP           | Partner: sie macht Karriere                         |
| CHARAKTER                                   | Partner: Unterstützt                                |
| Charakter überschneidet sich mit Geschlecht | Partner: Vertrauensperson                           |
| Cholerik                                    | Perfektionismus                                     |
| Coach                                       | Perfektionismus: negativ                            |
| Das ist etwas das mich unglaub..            | Person zur Diskussion                               |
| Das ist, also da reagiere ich ..            | Personenkult                                        |
| Das müssen sie ja auch, ne, we..            | Personenkult: nimmt Freiheiten                      |
| Das war so ein sehr, sehr gera..            | Potentiale erkennen – genauer hinschauen            |
| das waren für mich die schwier..            | Prioritäten setzen                                  |
| Dauer Führungsposition(en)                  | PRIVATLEBEN                                         |

|                                                  |                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Dauer Führungsposition(en): lange                | Projektionsfläche FK                                  |
| die Chancen muss man glaube ic..                 | Protegé                                               |
| Differenziert                                    | Protegé: auch Nachteile                               |
| Distanz zu Mitarbeiter*innen                     | Protegé: wichtig für Karriere                         |
| dominant                                         | Quote führt zu mehr Gendergleichgewicht               |
| Dresscode                                        | Quote: braucht Zeit                                   |
| Ego                                              | Quote: fair sein                                      |
| Ego: an zweiter Stelle                           | Quote: Idee wie umsetzen                              |
| Ehrgeiz                                          | Quote: im Unternehmen                                 |
| Ehrlichkeit                                      | Quote: kontra                                         |
| eigene Erfahrungen                               | Quote: nicht gut umsetzbar                            |
| eigene Erfahrungen: gut                          | Quote: notwendig                                      |
| EIGENSCHAFTEN                                    | Quote: pro                                            |
| Eigenschaften: FP                                | Quotenfrau: kein Problem                              |
| Eigenschaften: weiblich                          | Quotenfrau: sehr negativ                              |
| Einfluss Frauen                                  | Reaktion: Verlegenheit                                |
| Einfluss Gesellschaft                            | Reflektieren                                          |
| EINSAMKEIT                                       | Reflektieren: sich selbst                             |
| Einsamkeit - geschlechtsunabhängig               | Regionale Unterschiede                                |
| Einstellung Frau Führungsposition                | repräsentative Aufgaben                               |
| Einstellung: Beruf - Kinder                      | Reservebank                                           |
| Entgegenkommen                                   | Respekt auf Sachebene                                 |
| Entscheidung für Job                             | Risiko eingehen                                       |
| Entscheidungen                                   | Rolle abgesprochen                                    |
| Erfahrungsschatz                                 | Rollenbild: Mutter von anderen Frauen<br>aufgezwungen |
| Erfolg durch Eigenverantwortung                  | Rollenbild: Mutter vs. FP                             |
| Erfolg durch Fleiß                               | Rollenerwartung an FK                                 |
| Erfolg führt zu Macht                            | Rollenspiel                                           |
| Ergebnisfokus                                    | Rückschläge                                           |
| Erwartung: andere müssen meine Leistung<br>sehen | Scheitern                                             |
| Erwartungshaltung an Frauen                      | Scheitern dürfen                                      |
| Erwartungshaltung an Frauen: weiche Seite        | Scheitern Mann vs. Frau                               |
| Fachlich gut                                     | schmerzhafte Erfahrung                                |
| Fähigkeiten: FP                                  | schwieriger mit Frauen zu kommunizieren               |
| Fallhöhe                                         | Schwierigkeit: zu viele Möglichkeiten                 |
| Feedback: positiv                                | Schwierigkeiten                                       |
| Feedback: schwerer als Frau                      | Schwierigkeit Frauen zu finden                        |
| Fehler bearbeiten                                | Schwierigkeit: Vereinbarkeit                          |
| Fehler für Männer - weniger schlimm              | SELBST BEEINFLUSSBAR                                  |
| Fehler machen                                    | Selbstbewusstsein                                     |
| Fehler sind für Frauen fatal                     | SELBSTWAHRNEHMUNG                                     |
| FK präsent                                       | Selbstzweifel                                         |
| FK Sonderposition                                | SEXISMUS                                              |
| FK Sonderposition: Position nicht Person         | Sexismus erleben                                      |
| FP: politisch                                    | Sexismus stört                                        |
| Frage nach Gerechtigkeit                         | sexistisch offen                                      |
| Frau ausgeschlossen                              | sexistisch subtil                                     |
| Frau Sein spielt Rolle                           | Sexistische Geschäftspartner                          |
| Frau Sein spielt Rolle außen, innen nicht        | sich selbst hinterfragen                              |
| Frau Sein spielt Rolle?                          | sich selbst vermarkten                                |
| Frauen bedienen sich "männlicher" Wege           | sich selbst vermarkten: Erziehungssache               |

|                                                                  |                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Frauen haben nicht so gute Netzwerke                             | Sichtbarkeit                                           |
| Frauen mit Kind(ern)                                             | Sichtbarkeit: einzige Frau, Ausnahme                   |
| Frauen müssen gleich behandelt werden                            | Small Talk                                             |
| Frauen nachziehen                                                | Small Talk: ausloten Macht                             |
| Frauen reduziert auf Äußeres                                     | Small Talk: Frauen anders                              |
| Frauen schaffen das alleine                                      | Small Talk: Fußball                                    |
| Frauen schwieriger                                               | Small Talk: in der Sitzung                             |
| Frauen Zusammenhalt                                              | Small Talk: Teil der Strategie                         |
| Frauen: fachlich gleich gut                                      | Smalltalk                                              |
| Frauen: genau überlegen was sie wollen und brauchen - einfordern | Sonderrolle Frau                                       |
| Frauen: higher Scrutiny                                          | Spaß                                                   |
| Freiheiten                                                       | Sparringspartner                                       |
| Freiheiten als FK                                                | speziell Frauen                                        |
| FREUNDE                                                          | speziell Frauen - Zielstrebig negativ                  |
| Freunde: anderer Weg als sie                                     | Spielregeln Männer                                     |
| Freunde: gehen unterschiedliche Wege                             | Spielregeln Männer: Beförderung                        |
| Freunde: keine hilfreichen Gesprächspartner für Job              | Spielregeln Männer: Durchsetzen                        |
| Freunde: Konsequenz: Job nicht mehr teilen                       | Spielregeln Männer: Erfolge feiern                     |
| Freunde: verstehen Job nicht                                     | Spielregeln Männer: referenzieren                      |
| Freunde: werten Führungsweg ab                                   | Spielregeln verstehen hilft bei Umgang mit Ausgrenzung |
| Führung Geschlechter Gleichgewicht                               | Spielregeln: einfacher Umgang                          |
| Führungskraft Einfluss                                           | Spielregeln: speziell je Gruppe                        |
| Führungskräftebildung                                            | Spielregeln: verstehen                                 |
| Führungslaufbahn gewünscht                                       | Staatsexamen                                           |
| FÜHRUNGSPPOSITION                                                | Staatsexamen: Prüfer Männer                            |
| Führungsstil                                                     | Störfaktor Frau                                        |
| Führungsstil- weiblich                                           | Strategie                                              |
| Führungsstil - Teamorientiert                                    | Strenge mit sich                                       |
| Führungsstil - Verantwortung abgeben                             | Übereinstimmung: eigene und Unternehmens-Werte         |
| Führungsverständnis: organisch                                   | Umfrage zu Vorstand                                    |
| GEGEBENHEITEN                                                    | Umgang mit Einsamkeit                                  |
| Gelegenheiten ergriffen                                          | Umgang mit Verwechslung                                |
| Generationenunterschied                                          | Umgang Sexismus                                        |
| gescheiterte erfolgreiche Frauen                                 | Umgang: Ansprechen                                     |
| Geschlecht spielt keine Rolle                                    | Umgang: Erwartung Weichsein                            |
| Geschlecht spielt keine Rolle: lange in FP                       | Umgang: Humor                                          |
| Geschlechtergleichgewicht                                        | Umsetzung Ziele                                        |
| Geschlechtergleichgewicht: noch nicht                            | Unconscious Bias                                       |
| Gestaltungsfreiraum                                              | Und dafür ist es wichtig, dass..                       |
| gewöhnt an Veränderungen im Leben                                | Und das hat mich teilweise auc..                       |
| Gleichberechtigung                                               | Und Frauen hinterfragen sich i..                       |
| gleichgeschlechtlicher Freundeskreis                             | unentbehrlich sein                                     |
| gleichgeschlechtlicher Freundeskreis: mit steigendem Alter       | Unternehmens Struktur                                  |
| gleichgeschlechtliches Netzwerk                                  | Unternehmens Struktur: mehr Angebote für Eltern        |
| Glück                                                            | Unterscheiden: berechnete und einfache Kritik          |
| Glücklich im Job                                                 | Unterschied Mann-Frau                                  |
| Hartnäckigkeit                                                   | Unterschied Mann-Frau: Ego                             |

|                                                           |                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Herausforderung: Team                                     | Unterschied Mann-Frau: Fehler machen dürfen   |
| heterogenes Team                                          | Unterschied Mann-Frau: Gestik                 |
| Hierarchieebene relativ                                   | Unterschied Mann-Frau: Kinder                 |
| Hindernis zu FP                                           | Unterschied Mann-Frau: Mut                    |
| Hindernisse bis Ziel                                      | Unterschied Mann-Frau: Selbstbewusstsein      |
| Hindernisse bis Ziel: Umgang                              | Unterschied Mann-Frau: Selbstreflexion        |
| Homosocial Reproduction                                   | Unterschied Mann-Frau: Sozialisation          |
| Identifikationsfigur                                      | Unterschied Mann-Frau: Vereinbarkeit          |
| immer neu auf Jobs beworben                               | Unterschied Mann-Frau: Wahrnehmung von außen  |
| implizite Anforderungen                                   | Unterschied: intern- extern                   |
| Informieren: Fußball                                      | Unterschied: Mädchen Jungen                   |
| intrinsisch motiviert                                     | Unterschied: Privat - Beruflich               |
| Jung                                                      | Unterstützen                                  |
| junge Frau                                                | Unterstützt von anderen                       |
| junge Frau: nicht ernstgenommen                           | Unterstützung: durch Vorgesetzte              |
| junge Frau: süß                                           | untypisch                                     |
| kannte Job schon                                          | Veränderung                                   |
| Karriere                                                  | Veränderung: keine                            |
| Karriere bevor Kinder da                                  | Veränderung: täglich                          |
| Karriere: hat sich ergeben                                | Veränderungen: keine Angst                    |
| Karriere: im selben Unternehmen                           | Verantwortung FK                              |
| Karriere: Macht kein Ziel                                 | Vergleich Kollege männlich vs. weiblich       |
| Karriere: Schritt für Schritt                             | Vertrauen                                     |
| Karriere: Ziele                                           | Vertrauen in FK                               |
| keine Erfahrung als Mann                                  | Vertrauen: von Vorgesetztem                   |
| keine Kinder                                              | Verwechslung: Kellnerin                       |
| keine Vorstellungen                                       | viele keine Vorurteile                        |
| Kinder                                                    | vielleicht macht das in der Wa..              |
| Kinder + Karriere muss für alle passen                    | vorauselender Gehorsam                        |
| Kinder an erster Stelle                                   | Vorgesetzte                                   |
| Kinder kein Problem für Unternehmen solange Output stimmt | Vorgesetzte: Abhängigkeit                     |
| Kinder und Karriere                                       | Vorgesetzte: anderes Verhalten Frau-Mann      |
| Kinder: andere Caregiver                                  | Vorstellung entsprechend                      |
| Kinder: es besteht Kontakt                                | Vorstellung FK                                |
| Kinder: gut entwickelt                                    | Vorstellung nicht entsprechend                |
| Kinder: Plan wie das mit der Karriere trotzdem klappt     | VORTEIL ALS FRAU                              |
| Kinder: wenig krank                                       | Vorteil als Frau: Beispiel                    |
| klare Kommunikation: ehrlich sein                         | Vorteil als Frau: Krisen lösen                |
| KLEINFAMILIE                                              | Vorteil als Frau: nicht Teil Konkurrenzkämpfe |
| Klischees                                                 | Vorteil als Frau: Schnittstellen erkennen     |
| Klischees bewusst machen                                  | Vorteil als Frau: unterschätzt                |
| Klischees: Geschlechter                                   | Waffen einer Frau                             |
| Klischees: nicht                                          | Waffen einer Frau: Kommunikation              |
| Kolleg*innen                                              | Wahrnehmung Thema Frauen in hohen FP          |
| Kolleg*innen: fast keine mehr                             | Wahrnehmung Gegenüber einschätzen             |
| Kolleg*innen: gute Beziehung                              | Wahrnehmung von außen                         |
| Kolleg*innen: skeptisch über Beförderung                  | Wahrnehmung Vorgesetzte                       |
| Kommunikation ist wichtig                                 | was sich vielleicht nicht so e..              |
| Kommunikation auf Augenhöhe                               | weiblich besetzt                              |
| Kompetenz                                                 | Weiterbildung                                 |

|                                            |                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Kompetenz abgesprochen                     | wenig eigene Aufmerksamkeit Thema Reaktion auf Frauen |
| Konkurrenz unter Männern: Frauen außen vor | wenige Frauen in hohen FP                             |
| konservatives Unternehmen                  | wenige Frauen in hohen FP - schlechte Netzwerke       |
| KONTEXT                                    | wenige Frauen in hohen FP: Ausland besser             |
| Kontinuität                                | wichtige Frauenpolitische Entwicklungen in 70ern      |
| krisenhafte Position bei Übernahme         | Widerspruch                                           |
| krisenhafte Positionen                     | Widerspruch: Erfahrung als Frau                       |
| Leidenschaft: Führung                      | Widerspruch: innen - außen                            |
| Leistung anerkannt                         | Widerspruch: Kommunikation                            |
| Leistung nicht anerkannt                   | Widerständig sein                                     |
| Lernen                                     | Wirkung auf andere                                    |
| Lernen: gelassener                         | Ziel für Unternehmen                                  |
| Lösungen                                   | Ziel und Weg sind essentiell                          |
| MA: Eigeninteresse                         | Ziel: Erfolg haben                                    |
| Macht                                      | Zielsetzung                                           |
| Macht und Einfluss                         | Zukunftsvision                                        |
| Macht: holen                               | zwei gleichberechtigte Vorstände                      |