



Sinus Sociovision



Women in Executive Positions

Barriers and Bridges



Women in Executive Positions Barriers and Bridges

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Survey by Sinus Sociovision

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I.

Introduction

Background

In spite of the Federal Act on the Equal Treatment of Women and Men and the agreement between Federal Government and private industry, the number of women in executive positions either in the private or the public sector has remained low. Even though there are as many female graduates today as there are male ones, and despite the fact that women are just as highly qualified, they still are distinctly underrepresented when it comes to executive positions in the German business world, and particularly in top management (executive board, supervisory board). This is proven by the figures:¹

	Men	Women
Total population ²	49%	51%
People in paid work ³	54%	46%
University graduates ⁴	49%	51%
Executive positions in general ⁵	69%	31%
Middle management	85%	15%
Board level ⁶	97%	3%
Supervisory Board ⁷	89%	11%

Studies on gender representation in executive positions by the European Commission, the Federal Statistical Office, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), the German Institute of Economic Research (DIW), the Hans Böckler Foundation, etc., have proven this under-representation of women for many years. In EU member state comparison, Germany ranks eleventh with a share of 30.8% of women in *general executive positions* which is below the EU average (32.5%).

1 Figures of the following table are rounded. For a detailed description of the proportion of women in executive positions, see appendix “6.1 Data on under-representation of women in executive positions”.

2 Europäische Kommission, Frauen und Männer in Entscheidungsprozessen, continuously updated database, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=779&langId=de&intPageId=0>, data recall on 2010-01-19. (last update: 2009-11-13).

3 Europäische Kommission, Frauen und Männer in Entscheidungsprozessen, continuously updated database, l.c.

4 University graduates in the year 2008, Statistisches Bundesamt, Bildung und Kultur, Prüfungen an Hochschulen, Fachserie 11 Reihe 4.2- 2008, p. 11.

5 Directors and chief executives as well as managers of small enterprises, Europäische Kommission, Frauen und Männer in Entscheidungsprozessen, continuously updated database, l.c.

6 Relating to the 200 biggest companies in Germany. Source: Elke Holst: „Nach wie vor kaum Frauen in den Top-Gremien großer Unternehmen“. In: Wochenbericht DIW Berlin 18/2009, pp. 302ff; available for download: <http://www.diw.de>.

7 Relating to the 200 biggest companies in Germany. Source: Elke Holst: „Nach wie vor kaum Frauen in den Top-Gremien großer Unternehmen“, l.c., and Elke Holst/Anne Kathrin Stahn: „Zu wenig Frauen in Spitzenpositionen der großen Banken und Versicherungen“. In: Wochenbericht DIW Berlin 89/2007, pp. 405ff; available for download: <http://www.diw.de>.

Women are particularly underrepresented at executive board level (approx. 3%) and on supervisory boards (approx. 11%). And it is striking that in co-determined business enterprises the *shareholders* seem to be very reluctant to appoint women member of the supervisory board: most of the women appointed to these boards are employee representatives. “It is mainly due to the laws on codetermination that supervisory boards feature any noteworthy number of women at all”.⁸

Time series as to the under-representation of women in executive positions show: this situation hasn’t changed significantly over the past years.

The study by the BMFSFJ

Against this background, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth commissioned the Sinus Institute to carry out a representative survey among executives in private enterprise companies, and to research into their attitudes towards a) women in executive positions, and b) political measures aiming at a *pari passu* participation of women and men in executive positions. To this end, 40 narrative interviews lasting several hours each were conducted with male business executives; in addition, 511 women and men in executive positions were interviewed in a standardized sample survey⁹.

Main Findings

Two main findings resulted from this research: A.) On the male-dominated management level of economy women are faced with massive informal and cultural bastions on the part of men. Here, various entwined mentality patterns act as barriers and “lock bars”. B.) At the same time, male and female executives share the opinion that a *pari passu* participation of women in executive positions is *economically necessary* for companies both today and for the future – but that nothing will change by itself. Hence, these executives suggest very differentiated ways to enhance the number of women in executive positions.

In detail, the study reaches the following conclusions:

1. Men and women in executive positions in the German business world state that we need more female executives! In their opinion, companies can’t do without the potential of highly qualified women. One reason for this is the demographic change, another one the necessity to institutionalize a multiplicity of aptitudes and perspectives on the management level of companies. Today and in the future, strategic wisdom requires *diversity*. Current executives are convinced that management culture will gain new impulses through management teams consisting of women and men alike, and that these mixed teams will contribute to the diversity of opinions and perspectives in management: this is indispensable to avoid risks and to seize chances in a globalized and complex world economy.

⁸ Rolfs, Christian: Gleichberechtigte Vertretung der Geschlechter in Aufsichtsräten: Gemeinschaftsrechtliche Rahmenbedingungen. Legal expert opinion by Prof. Dr. Christian Rolfs, with the collaboration of the research fellows Achim Schmid and Stefan Witschen, University of Cologne 2009, on behalf of Sinus Sociovision GmbH. p.24. Published on Sinus Sociovision’s website (www.sociovision.de).

⁹ See appendix: Research design.

2. Men and women holding an executive appointment in the business world today seriously doubt that the aim “enhancement of the number of women in executive positions” will be achieved unaidedly. In their opinion, supporting measures both on the part of politics and on the part of the companies are required – just like a shift in social attitude and role patterns.
3. Barriers do exist on the part of men in executive positions: in the course of the socio-scientific interviews most men expressed high esteem of competent and ambitious women. They showed sympathetic approval of a *general* increase of women in executive positions and regretted the low number of female executives at the time. This means that one important milestone has been reached: the *statement of acceptance* of women in executive positions. However, this political correctness as to gender doesn’t yet enhance the chances of a female aspirant to be considered when it comes to the concrete appointment to a managerial position. The study at hand detected that manifold entwined reservations about women in executive positions are still haunting men’s mind, and that men (partly unconsciously) act as “*guardians of the glass ceiling*”.
4. There, too, are barriers on the part of women on their way to executive positions. A number of competent women shy away from advancing to an executive position or from making a double jump in their career: they fear that they will have to perform better than men holding an equivalent appointment; that they will be subject to higher pressure of expectation than men; that they (representing a minority in a male domain) will have to fight some established, habitual “male” rituals and will spend themselves that way; that they will have to defend their personal, “differing” concepts of appropriate and successful management against the power of the majority; and above all: that the increase of load and lack of time will make it even more difficult to reconcile job and family.
5. The findings suggest that there are two levels which need to be considered separately: the supervisory board level and the operative management level of private enterprise companies in Germany.
6. According to men and women in executive positions, the aim “**enhancement of the number of women on supervisory boards**” can be achieved via a legal provision (a mandatory minimum quota) if this ...
 - a) is clearly limited to supervisory boards and separate from the operative management;
 - b) isn’t worded in terms of a women’s quota, because one-sided advancement of women has a negative connotation;
 - c) is part of a package of measures.
7. Current executives think that the aim “**enhancement of the number of women in operative management**” should be achieved via **different**, mutually congruent and **dovetailed measures**. These include in-house mentoring programs, internal target agreements, the inclusion of gender equality aspects in the mandatory company report, and a modern human resource management which a) takes into account the different potentials and needs of women and men in executive positions; b) promotes career changes and permeability between sectors/lines; c) encourages women to make jumps in their career.

Compatibility of work and family life ranks first among the required measures in operative management. Yet, the current executives are convinced that the discussion should neither be focused on nor limited to the reconciliation topic. In addition to the measures mentioned above, it is just as important to develop a new corporate culture and to achieve

an attitude shift in society, both bringing about the perception that women in executive positions are a *matter of course* (or should be). The inevitable change of role patterns coming along with this attitude shift affects both women *and* men in executive positions.

8. From the point of view of male and female executives, the accompanying measures should include the elimination of false assumptions and attributions (= mentality patterns of men in executive positions):

- | One of the most inhibiting attributions says that the **compatibility of job and family** is still a problem for women (not for men), and that children are a “career ender”. Our survey proves that this attribution is part of the glass ceiling game: 56% of the women in current leadership positions do have children, and 61% of these children still live at home. But also 77% of the male executives have children. The messages sent: 1.) It is **possible for women to reconcile family and executive position**. 2.) **Male executives, too**, have to **cope with the task of reconciling** job and family!
- | Another false attribution is that **career continuity** is an indispensable requirement for executive positions. This, too, seems to be part of the glass ceiling game: the study demonstrates that 44% of the female executives have taken a leave of absence from work at least once. “Gaps” in the employment history therefore don’t constitute a barrier to advancement for women! And 25% of all men in executive positions have taken time out at least once, too (quantified in absolute figures, this means that more male than female executives have taken a leave of absence from work).
- | A third false assumption claims that women don’t possess the important “success competencies” needed for executive positions. However, the survey among today’s female executives shows how strongly they are geared to the “correct”¹⁰ (classic) competence factors of executives.
- | And another false assumption says that successful careers develop gradually, step by step. While women indeed tend to climb the ladder step by step, men make several jumps in their careers – sometimes even passing several levels in one go (so-called “double jump”) – and they meet with success. Though jumps in the career are widely tabooed, neither measured nor (officially) documented, and lack transparency, they still are a key element of the promotion to (top) managerial posts. Therefore, women, too, must be supported and encouraged to make jumps in their careers.

All in all, the survey shows: today’s executives believe that in order to enhance the number of women in executive positions both in the short run and in the medium term, it is necessary to develop **political, legal, in-plant and communicative measures** to overcome the existing resistant and persistent mentality patterns and structures.

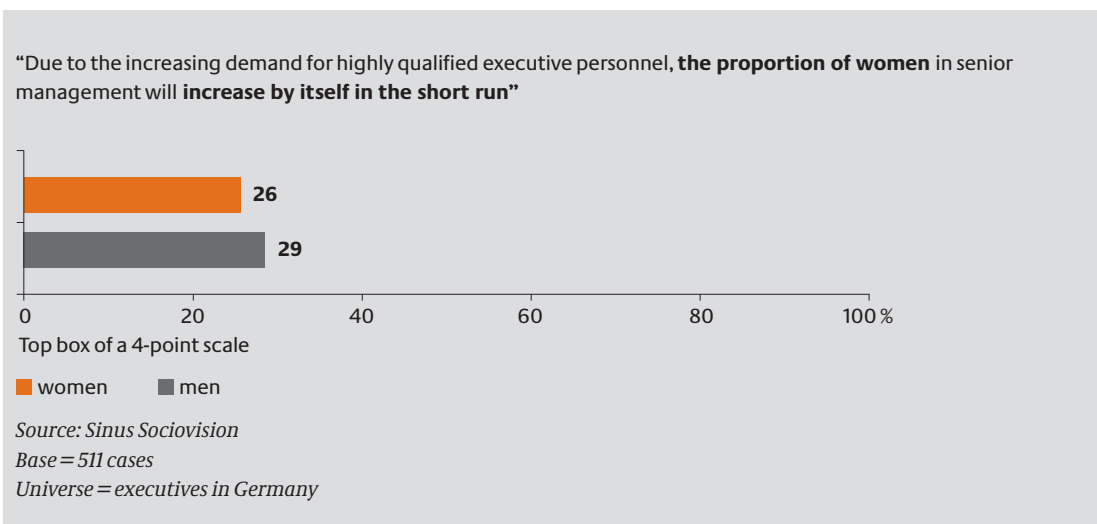
10 It is worth while deliberating on the question 1.) whether the financial and economic crisis in 2008/2009 was provoked by “wrong” (male) management skills and managerial qualities; 2.) whether the crisis could have been prevented or at least curbed by different management elements and cultures; 3.) whether this crisis could have been avoided if there had been more female executives and/or more mixed management teams (diversity of opinions and perspectives).

II.

Nothing will change by itself: a demand on politics

Up to now market mechanisms (equal “supply” of highly qualified and ambitious women and men) haven’t led to an about equal distribution and number of male and female executives. Some people believe that this situation will change *by itself in the future* and that more and more women will graduate to top managerial posts, because an ever increasing number of qualified women will be available – and that demographic change will speed up this development. Male and female executives in the German business world, however, don’t subscribe to this view; the majority of them is of the opinion that in spite of the rising demand for highly qualified managers **the proportion of women in executive positions won’t increase by itself in the short run.**

- Only 29% of the interviewed male executives and merely 26% of the female managers believe that the proportion of women in executive positions will increase by itself.
- The other way around, 71% of the men and 74% of the women in executive positions are convinced that the number of female executives won’t increase by itself and that supporting measures are needed.



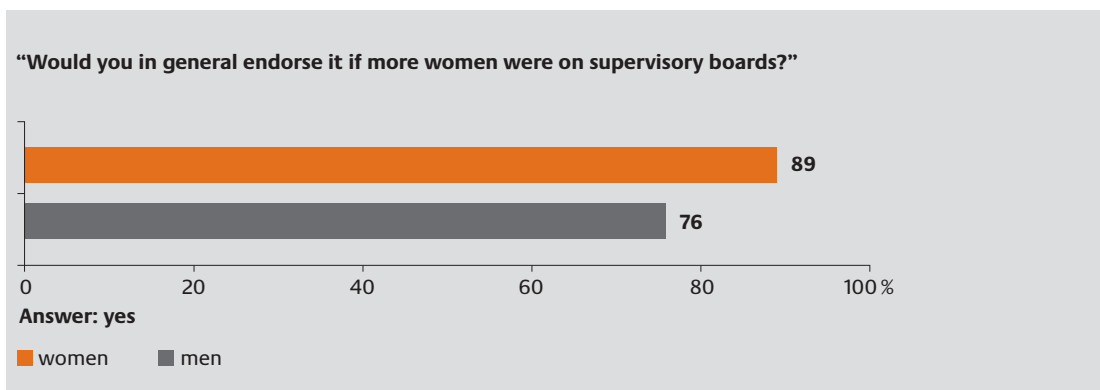
When it comes to precise steps and measures to be taken, the executives clearly differentiate between supervisory boards and the operative management level of companies. Therefore, these two sectors will be dealt with separately when presenting the findings.



Supervisory boards

3.1 Female and male executives call for more women on supervisory boards!

The call for more **women on supervisory boards is supported by a vast majority of the female executives**, but also by 76% of the men in executive positions.



24% of the men don't assent to this statement. However, only 5% of them decidedly say “No”, 19% are don't knows. And only a negligible number of women strictly rejects it (3%); the remaining 8% don't advance an opinion.

The call for more women on supervisory boards **encounters strongest resistance** among **men aged 50+** as well as among men who currently are **members of executive boards** or in charge of **staff units** (10% explicit rejection). In this group “only” 55% agree with the call for more women on supervisory boards (which still means that a majority votes *in favor* of more women on supervisory boards); 35% are don't knows.

There is a set of indicators supporting the hypothesis that these men perceive themselves in a competitive situation as to possible seats on supervisory boards. Their negative attitude towards (more) women on these boards is affected by the “battle” for the limited number of appointments, and when politics debates whether the number of seats on supervisory boards should be reduced, this perceived competition continues to intensify. Ambitious men with good prospects believe that they will lose out twice: not only will there be an even more limited number of seats, but part of these seats will also be given to women instead of men.

Women assess this issue exactly the opposite way around: not a single woman on executive boards or in charge of staff units opposes an enhancement of the number of women on supervisory boards; 100% of these women want *more women on supervisory boards*: this, of course, reflects personal ambitions as well.

Endorsement of more women on supervisory boards is particularly high in **co-determined business enterprises** with more than 500 employees: in these enterprises, **92% of the women** and **83% of the men** favor an increased number of women on supervisory boards, and **no man explicitly rejects this claim**; the remaining 17% are don't knows.

3.2 Mandatory minimum quota for supervisory boards

One tool to enhance the number of women on supervisory boards which is currently debated takes its cue from the example of neighboring countries: a legal provision.

The survey of the *Frankfurt School of Finance & Management* carried out among male and female members of German supervisory boards in 2009¹¹ checked two typical objections to a legal provision concerning a mandatory minimum quota as they are voiced primarily by men:

- 1.) It isn't possible to find a sufficient number of highly qualified women to fill emerging vacancies on supervisory boards in the short run.
- 2.) The low percentage of women in executive positions isn't caused by inequality of opportunities, but is due to the fact that women pursue different career objectives and therefore don't aspire to such positions.

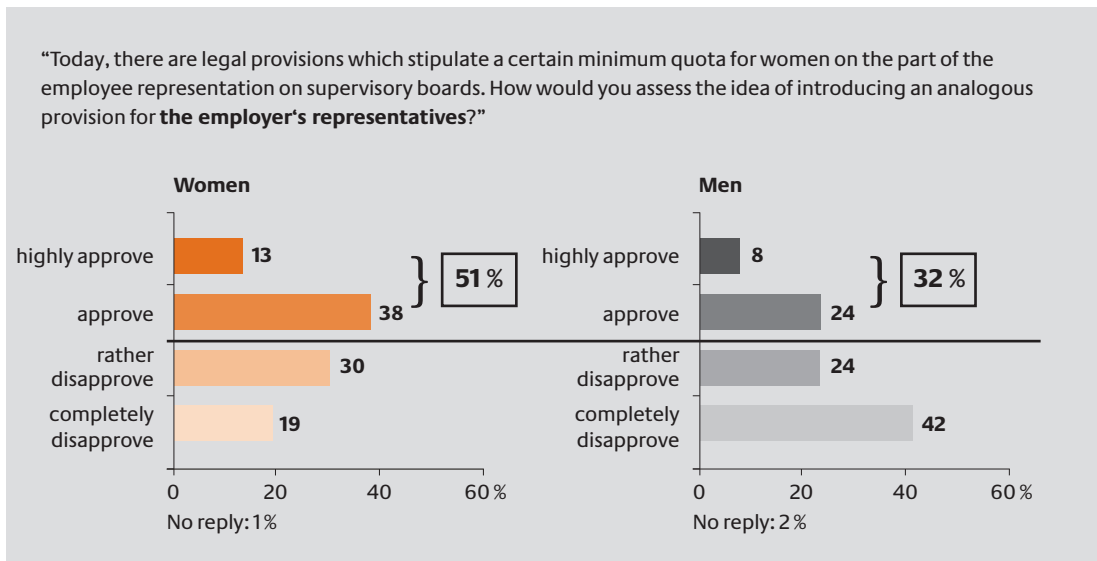
The survey among members of supervisory boards refutes both hypotheses: *“Both arguments [...] were (more or less decidedly) rejected by the respondents. Though both the overall group of male respondents and the supervisory board members who aren't employee representatives believe (by majority) that the vacancies can't be filled with sufficiently qualified women at very short notice, they still are of the opinion that in the longer run women will be able to fill these vacancies. [...] The main argument of the male opponents of a minimum quota is rejected by the majority of all female respondents (including the female supervisory board members who were appointed by the shareholders).”*¹²

The sample survey by Sinus clearly reveals, however, that the term “quota” encounters resistance and that a plain advancement of women – independent of economic reason so to speak – doesn't meet with approval; but it also discloses that the upper echelons of the business world by no means disapprove of all legal provisions alike – quite the contrary:

The idea of extending the **existing mandatory minimum quota system** for the supervisory board employee representatives of co-determined business enterprises to the shareholder representatives meets with surprisingly broad acceptance. More than half of the women and one third of the men in executive positions approve of such a legal provision.

11 Dirk W. Rudolph: Frauen in Aufsichtsräten – Befund, Ursachen und Konsequenzen des unterproportionalen Anteils der Frauen in deutschen Aufsichtsräten und mögliche Veränderungsoptionen. Frankfurt School of Finance & Management. October 1st, 2009. In May 2009, 330 members of German supervisory boards were interviewed in a standardized survey. Aim of the study and of a complementary literature research was to answer two questions: 1.) Why is the proportion of women on German supervisory boards so low? 2.) Which measures would be appropriate to increase the number of women on supervisory boards? The findings as to the structural causes correspond to the findings of the Sinus study carried out on behalf of the BMFSFJ.

12 Ibid. p.44.



And the assessment of women and men in executive positions distinctly differs in the degree of rejection: only 19% of the women are strictly opposed to such a legal provision, but 42% of the men are. This is due to two lines of reasoning:

- **Competition:** A mandatory minimum quota for women on supervisory boards diminishes the chances of men to attain such a position, because there would be less seats for men.
- Part of the question goes as follows: “... stipulate a certain minimum quota for women”. Particularly for men, this sounds like one-sided advancement of women and insinuates that men will be deprived of something, that their rights won’t be protected properly. The acceptance of possible measures is much lower when these measures are worded in terms of exclusive advancement of women/women’s quota systems, and it significantly increases when they refer to *pari passu* participation, diversity, mixed teams etc. This should be kept in mind when analyzing the findings regarding the possible extension of the mandatory minimum quota contained in the Co-determination Act.

The following deductions can be derived from the findings of this survey: when considering a legal provision, attention **shouldn’t be directed** to an exclusive **quota for women/an affirmative action program for women only**. It would be very difficult to put this across to men in executive positions, but also a considerable part of the female executives (approx. 20%) rejects an exclusive advancement of women in the form of a mandatory women’s quota.

A legal provision therefore should involve both a minimum proportion of women and a minimum proportion of men on supervisory boards.¹³

¹³ The study of the *Frankfurt School of Finance & Management*, too, dealt with the acceptance of heterogeneity on supervisory boards. The survey proved “*that more heterogeneity is endorsed*”, i.e. mixed teams on supervisory boards are welcomed on principle. More heterogeneity, however, only makes sense if it can be enunciated. Therefore, members of supervisory boards were asked whether controversial debates on differing views were welcomed on their Board, and whether decision making had improved significantly that way. The majority of the board members supported this, but it is remarkable that approximately twice as many women (39.7%) as men (23%) are of the opinion that such controversial debates aren’t welcomed on their Board (Rudolph 2009, p. 42). This corresponds with the findings of the Sinus study and becomes particularly manifest in mentality Type 1: Conservative Exclusion: rejection of women on the grounds of gender; in addition cf.: “Competitive edges of companies because of mixed management teams”.

A legal provision as to the shareholders' representation meets with higher approval among those men who on principle are in favor of more women on supervisory boards (44%)¹⁴. Likewise, the rejection of a legal provision is less pronounced in this group (only 35% completely disapprove of it).

The strongest **rejection** of a legal provision is to be found among male executives who

- ... *on principle oppose an increased number of women on supervisory boards*. Their vote comes as no surprise: 85% completely disapprove of a legal provision, another 15% rather disapprove of it. However, this group of basic rejecters of women on supervisory boards represents a minority of 5% of the male executives.
- ... *on principle oppose mixed teams on the operative management level*. But again, this group represents only a minority of 8% of the male executives. 70% of the group members completely disapprove of a legal provision concerning a mandatory minimum quota of women on supervisory boards; yet 10% of them approve of it.
- ... are aged 50 to 59 years (68% rejection) or aged 60+ (66% rejection). This supports the hypothesis that on the one hand traditional role models are taking effect, and that on the other hand these men perceive themselves to be in fierce contention for scarce positions.
- ... who are currently division managers/plant managers (75% rejection), members of the executive board (72%), department heads (69%), in charge of staff units (65%) or general managers (58%). The lower the probability of being in the run for a seat on the supervisory board, the higher the approval of a mandatory minimum quota for women.

Resistance to a legal provision as demonstrated by part of the male executives therefore seems to be predicated on traditional role models, on an "anti attitude" towards women in top management as a matter of principle, on the impending competitive situation – and only to a lesser extent on the instrument itself.¹⁵

Approval of a legal provision is high among those men who primarily think in terms of chances and potentials (for the company; for the German economy) and who don't associate menace, loss, or occupation with "women on supervisory boards", but a human capital which up to now has hardly been tapped systematically. Comparatively high approval is to be found among male executives aged 34 or younger (62%). This suggests that there is a **change of attitude** going on **in the younger generation of male executives**.

Still, these men state that "women themselves" aren't the solution; for them, it isn't a matter of "advancing women", but a matter of flexibility and responsiveness in global competition, of tapping gender-specific potentials and of utilizing (gender) diversity.

¹⁴ These are 76% of the men in executive positions.

¹⁵ However, socio-scientific communication analyses show that for reasons of acceptance it is advisable to avoid the term "quota" when verbalizing a legal provision. This term has been discredited in management circles of the business world, it is frowned upon and feared because for managers a "quota" suggests appointments independent of qualification, it is perceived as a inflexible regulation which is unobservant of the needs and requirements of companies in national and international competition.

The survey on the equality of treatment¹⁶ by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth shows that young, well-trained women from the modern upper milieu display a pronounced individualistic performance & success ethics as well as high self-confidence and self assurance regarding their professional ambitions and chances. They *look back* on the feminist movement of the 70s and 80s which achieved a change of traditional role models and believe that gender equality policies have lost personal relevance today. They perceive themselves as on par with men and feel self-confident enough to individually ensure their rights.

Against this background, it is surprising to find that a **legal provision** finds highest favor with **young women** in executive positions. 64% of the female executives under 40 welcome a legal provision (compared to 51% on average): 17% highly approve of it (Ø 13%), another 47% approve of it (Ø 38%), and only 12% of the young female executives completely disapprove of a legal provision. It seems as if personal experience and observations at close range have caused a change in attitude in the younger generation of female executives: they believe that women will not make it to the top by themselves and that the ball is in politics' court.

¹⁶ Wippermann, Carsten/Wippermann, Katja: Wege zur Gleichstellung heute und morgen. Sozialwissenschaftliche Untersuchung vor dem Hintergrund der Sinus-Milieus. Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend. Berlin/Heidelberg 2007.

IV.

Executive positions in operative business

In operative business, too, it is unusual for women to get through the so-called “glass ceiling”. It remains difficult for them (it is *more* difficult for them, it is *made more difficult* for them than for men) to advance to an executive position in middle, senior or top management. So, where are the **barriers**, and where are possible **bridges** for women to climb to an executive position? To answer these questions, a qualitative study and a representative quantitative survey were carried out interviewing male and female executives in private enterprise companies.

4.1 Mentality patterns found in male executives: “guardians of the glass ceiling”

We shall start with the findings of the **qualitative** survey. It is very illuminative to have the phenomenon (only few women in executive positions) explained and assessed by those people who actually **are** in the upper echelons of the business world: the **male managers**. In a discreet socio-scientific survey among male executives **three mentality patterns** emerged which significantly differ from each other:

- | Conservative exclusion: cultural and functional rejection of women on the grounds of gender
- | A fundamentally emancipated attitude – but women powerless against male power rituals
- | Radical individualism: lack of “authentic & flexible women” in the market

A short account of these mentality patterns is given below:

1. **Men with conservative attitudes:** rejection of women in executive positions on principle, because women get in the way of the well-practiced, proven and tested circles and networks (the “inner circle”). These men deduce a normative target from the as-is state (which is a logical fallacy), but the perception itself is self-contained and consistent.
 - | AND: They claim that the business world is conservative and that an executive needs – both for himself and for business contacts – a stable “family background”. This background serves as personal place to recuperate and signals “an orderly existence” to one’s business partners.
 - | From the perspective of these male executives, women in executive positions act like dogged lone fighters who adopt male virtues and try to beat men at their own game.
 - | At the same time women can’t withdraw from the operative business side, continue to be the “valuable busy bee”, can’t delegate and want to do everything themselves. This way they fail to demonstrate a talent for senior management.

2. Men with an emancipated attitude towards women in executive positions (primarily in middle management): men and women have equal rights and should be equally represented in the upper echelons of the companies.

- | BUT: While women stand a good chance of succeeding in middle management, different rules prevail in top management: *“The Board of Directors: that’s a whole different ballgame”*.
- | Top management is all about economic successes with which to fill the balance sheets at ever briefer intervals. An executive board is gauged on this basis, and this alone, while all other qualities and tasks are delegated to subordinate levels. Executive boards have to follow the maxim of getting as much as possible out of the resources available, improving efficiency, to achieve optimal results. Mercilessly squeezing the company for all it is worth is the name of the game. This being so, the personality profile for this function is clearly defined: toughness! Women are indeed credited with possessing this degree of toughness, but the idea clashes with the image of women in our society (socially minded, mellow, holistic, and sympathetic).
- | A woman on the Board who displays such toughness would immediately stand out and be subject to criticism. What might seem normal for a man in this position, have become the customary state of affairs, is in a woman considered “inappropriate”, “not feminine”, “trying to hard to be masculine”, etc. As such she would not be a positive representative of the company and might even damage the image and the brand.

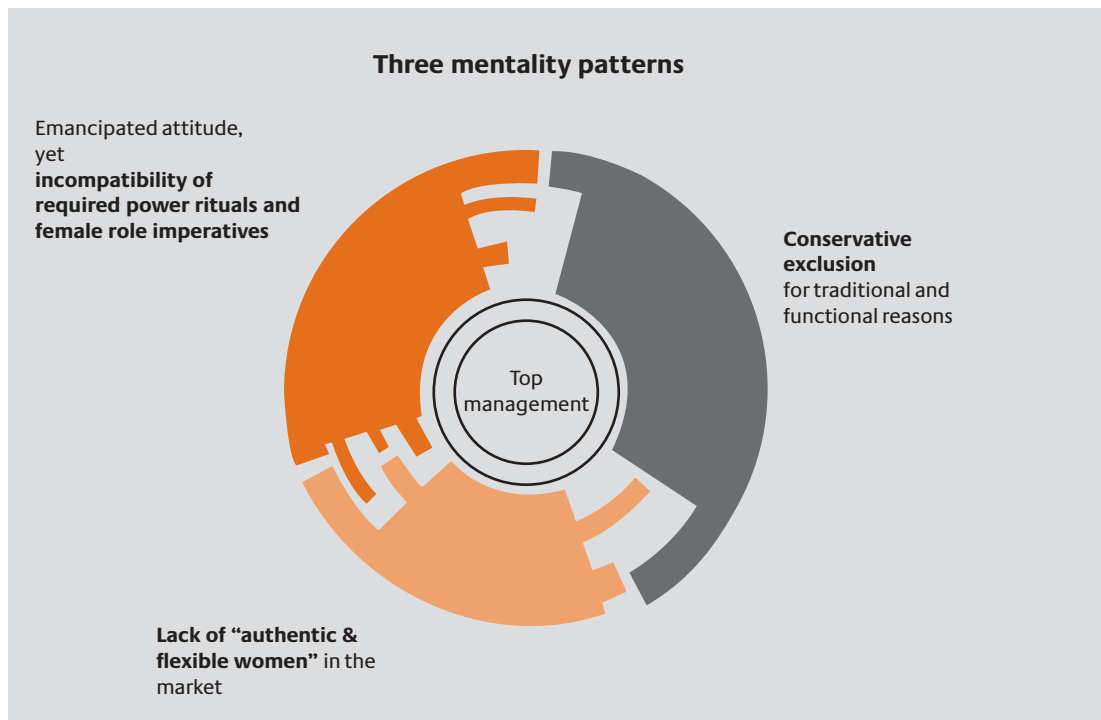
3. Men with a radical individualistic attitude: they believe that these days it is of no consequence at all whether a candidate for a job as a board member, director, or divisional manager is a man or a woman. It all comes down to their personality, professional qualifications and an uninterrupted career free from extended breaks.

- | BUT: there are too few women applying for these jobs. In the men’s view, this is due to some of the highly qualified women taking the confident decision to start a family and devote themselves to their children for a few years, with the result that they then lack the requisite career continuity.
- | In the view of men, the growing significance of the ‘authenticity’ factor is a reason why women do not make it into executive jobs very often (or more often), or why those in such positions are viewed very critically: as men see it, several women on their way up the career ladder try (consciously or pre-consciously) to play a male role because this seems to them a successful strategy. Their habits and gestures then become unauthentic.

While the first mentality pattern excludes women from executive positions on the grounds of system functionality and tradition, the second mentality pattern deplores that women aren’t suited for top management because of social role attributions (thus strengthening these reservations about women). The third mentality pattern ostensibly blinds out society and claims that gender has become irrelevant today and that the lack of female executives is due to a lack of effective demand on the part of women. As elements of one system, these three mentality patterns create a social “valve mechanism” with highly selective permeability.

It would be a fallacy to believe that only one mentality pattern could exist per company. In fact, all three of these mentality patterns do occur in one and the same company – i.e. at the different hierarchy levels. And the outcome is: the sum and the interplay of these three

patterns build up a multidimensional, interlocked barrier against women. If women live up to one “requirement”, they will invariably fall short of the other, i.e. they will confirm another preconception.



Though the “sympathetic” attitude of executives towards a *general enhancement of the number of women in executive positions* means an important milestone, this *political correctness as to gender* doesn’t yet enhance the chances of a female aspirant to be considered when it comes to the *concrete appointment* to a managerial position. To achieve real change both in the short run and in the medium term, measures need to be developed and taken which overcome these mentality patterns.

Guardians of the “glass ceiling” aren’t the *individual men* (most of them are quite open-minded about competent and committed women); guardians of the glass ceiling are the (often preconscious) mentality patterns which are set in stone in the heads and hearts of men and have formed particular role models and management cultures with rituals, language games and behavioral dispositions of their own.

Since a *culture* (particularly if it has tradition, if it is successful, if it features mechanisms which reproduce the “self” and exclude the “other”) won’t be changed simply by good intention of the individual, most of today’s executives (male and female) **don’t believe** that the increasing demand for highly qualified executive personnel will increase the number of women in senior management by itself (!) in the short run.

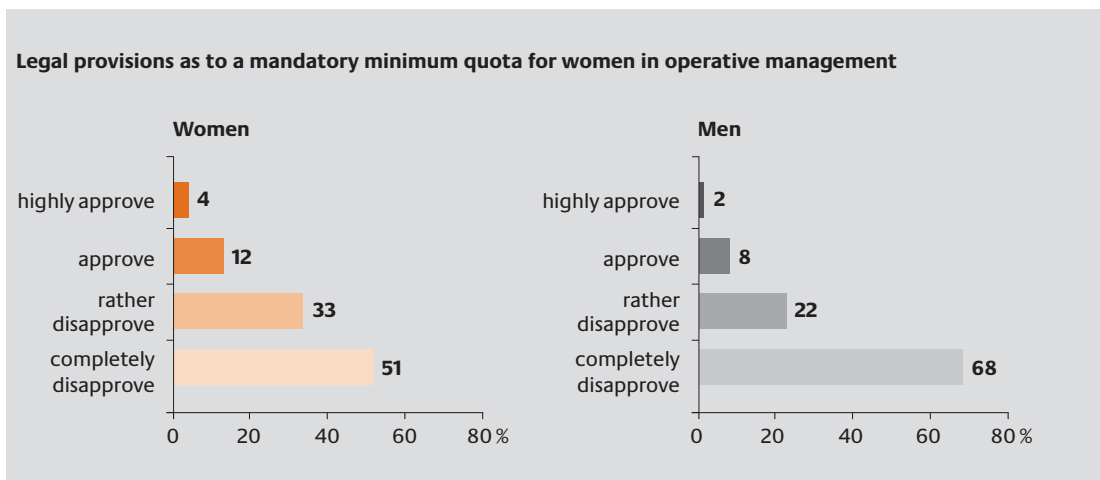
Regardless of the existing diversity and dissimilarity of the three mentality patterns, there is a red thread running through all reviews and reports of (top) managers when talking about “women in executive positions”: the statement of aspects which argue *against* women. In the upper echelons of the business world, this seems to be the normal and self-evident reaction to the topic – in spite of all the goodwill granted to women. In most companies, the issue isn’t:

What argues *in favor* of women in executive positions?¹⁷ The implicit and concurrent perspective (“What argues *against* women?”) probably has a predetermining effect on the selection of senior staff. Under reversed circumstances, i.e. if mindset and argument were turned around and the question “What argues *in favor* of women in executive positions?”¹⁸ prevailed, the predetermination would probably be reversed, too.

It would be wrong to label men in executive positions as birds of a feather and as allies against women. Though there does exist a (preconscious) mentality to “block” the idea of female executives, many of these men also believe that for the company’s benefit there should be more women in executive positions. So, it is the existing *structure* which proves to be persistent.

4.2 Rejection of a quota system for the operative side of business

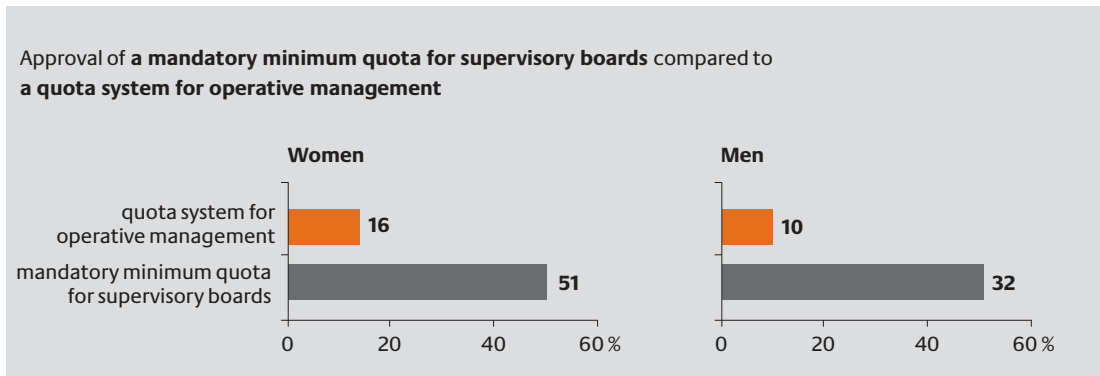
In spite of the manifold barriers neither women nor men in executive positions endorse *legal provisions* to enhance the number of women in operative management: here, only 16% of the women and 10% of the men approve of the suggested mandatory minimum quota. 84% of the women and 90% of the men reject a legal provision as to a mandatory minimum quota for women in operative management.



It is surprising to see how big a difference there is between the rejection of mandatory minimum quotas for supervisory boards and for the operative side of business.

¹⁷ Independent of this, it of course is necessary to raise the issue of social and moral gender justice. This, however, isn't part of the logic, programs and codes of companies.

¹⁸ “What argues in favor of women” has two dimensions: 1.) the *specific strengths of women* as to tasks and challenges the company is faced with (e.g. crisis management, innovation, personnel management, integration, acting in a changing world); 2.) social and cultural impacts of *more* women in the upper echelons of the business world.



The discrepancy between acceptance of legal provisions concerning supervisory boards and rejection of legal provisions concerning the operative management signals:

The discussion of a women's quota in the business world has unnecessarily mingled a quota system for members of the executive board and a mandatory minimum quota for supervisory boards. And the legislative initiatives of other European countries (Norway, The Netherlands) which did not differentiate between these two levels, either, also had a stake in the transfer of *resistance to quotas for the operative management to resistance to mandatory minimum quotas in general*.

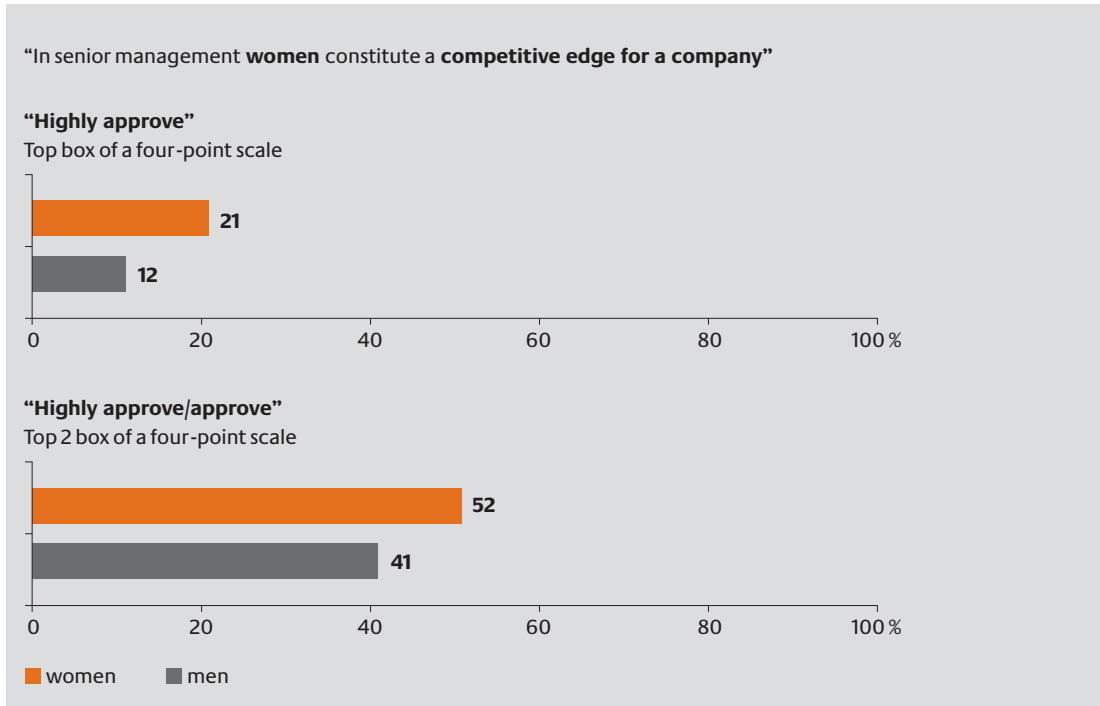
In fact, the figures for Germany demonstrate that those who try to enhance the number of women in executive positions via legal provisions have to limit ambitions to the supervisory boards. Only for this level, acceptance among (male) executives is high enough. And to enhance the number of women on supervisory boards, it also is indispensable to renounce a quota for the operative management level. Besides, whoever wants to enhance the number of women on supervisory boards should never talk of "advancement of women" or "women's quota", but broach the issue of "pari passu participation" of women and men, of "minimum proportion", and should always emphasize the economic benefit of it.

This finding of communication analysis is in line with the survey on the requirements which have to be observed under constitutional and EU law when passing a legal provision defining a mandatory minimum quota for supervisory boards (Rolfs 2009)¹⁹: *"It is compatible with EU law when the German legislative body introduces a quota system which stipulates a mandatory minimum quota for both sexes on supervisory boards. This quota has to be less than 50 % so that in any case some of the supervisory board members can be appointed independent of quota. However, it is allowed without reservation to let this quota progress continuously over a longer period of time (e.g. starting at 25 % and rising to 33 % or higher). Specific characteristics of individual companies (e.g. companies which are 100 % family-owned) have to be allowed for by derogation rule. The legal provision remains valid until full gender equality has been achieved in professional life. The legislative body has to regularly review its necessity with a view to the achievement of this objective."*²⁰

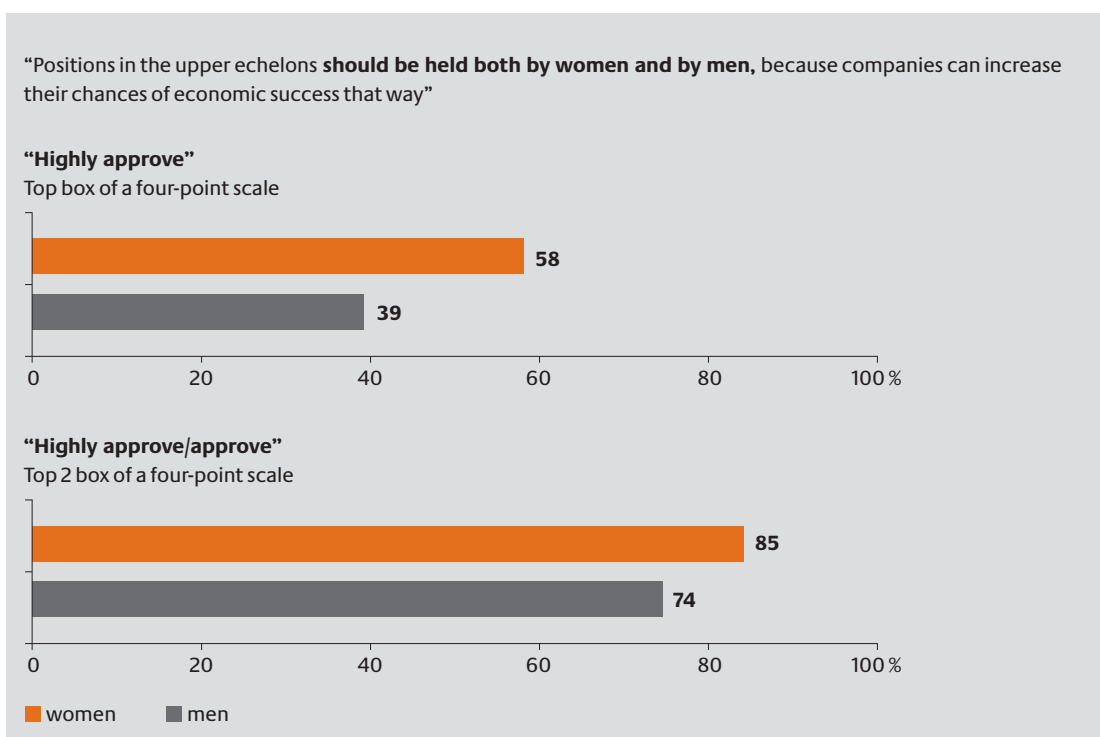
19 Rolfs, Christian: Gleichberechtigte Vertretung der Geschlechter in Aufsichtsräten. Gemeinschaftsrechtliche Rahmenbedingungen. Legal expert opinion on behalf of Sinus Sociovision GmbH. 2009, p. 54. www.sociovision.de.
20 Ibid. p. 54.

4.3 Competitive edges of companies because of mixed management teams

Neither male nor female executives voice any enthusiasm about the thesis that women in executive positions constitute a competitive edge for companies *per se*. In fact, they clearly dissociate themselves from the idea of a simple causal relationship of female gender and success of the company.



A modified wording of the statement meets with higher approval: positions in the upper echelons should be held both by women and by men, because companies can increase their chances of economic success that way.



The simplistic demand “*More women in executive positions!*” doesn’t find much favor with the top managers of the business community. There are two reasons for their negative assessment: on the one hand it is perceived as calling for one-sided advancement of women; on the other hand it only aims at the correction of a socially unjust distribution which is to the disadvantage of women, but it doesn’t contain any management philosophy. The mere demand for “more women” therefore lacks concept and perception of a well-positioned management in a globalized economy.

“*Mixed management teams*”: this suggestion finds favor with many women and men in executive positions. They associate mixed management teams with a holistic and modern management philosophy and vision, and base their assumption on experience (also in the light of the economic and financial crisis of the years 2008/09) and on the prospective attitude that **diversity of perspectives and opinions** means a **protective shield** and offers a higher probability of avoiding strategic mistakes. Global economy is *complex*: ever-growing economic factors of national, European and global provenience have to be considered – as well as their interplay. But also non-economic factors (legislation, politics, social responsibility, images, etc.) and the interdependencies of different markets have to be factored in by companies today and must be included in the strategic management decisions. This calls for diverse competencies and a multi-perspectivity: in this respect it isn’t simply a matter of social justice, but one of functional and economic wisdom to install diversity on management teams. Mixed management teams (i.e. teams featuring both men *and* women) help a company react to changing situations promptly: it is a matter of **flexibility and variability**. Besides, since women reach the same educational achievements as men today – and not infrequently, they are even higher qualified than men –, companies which almost ritually promote only men to senior and top managerial posts will miss out on many high potentials in the future. In other words, these companies systematically restrict and curtail themselves “relinquishing” the higher qualified women to national and international competitors. All these are reasons which argue in favor of mixed management teams from the point of view of German (top) executives. (This is the *internal perspective*.)

But also the *public image* aspect plays an important role, even though only a few respondents mention it. If the management of a company is either all-male or male-dominated: which impression will be conveyed to other companies which – like e.g. many American enterprises – quite naturally and strategically have male and female executives? If today more women than men graduate from university: which potential will be ascribed to a company which systematically excludes more than half of the high potentials from its executive positions – particularly in top management? If a company claims that its staff represents the “best heads” in business, won’t it ring hollow unless women, too, hold executive positions in this company? And if a company’s board almost exclusively is a men’s world, it is to be feared that many excellent female executives won’t consider this company attractive (enough) when sounding out the market. They are likely to suspect a traditional male management culture they don’t want to put up with, and probably will prefer to join a company with a more modern *culture of leadership*.

Male managers (ostensibly) express open-mindedness towards mixed management teams in the survey. However, this attitude **strongly differs from the factual appointment practice**. German companies seem to be unversed in factoring the issue of **gender as a strategic category** into their appointment decisions and apparently are rather unconcerned about the impact on their **public image**.

A full population survey which was carried out by Sinus in the summer of 2009 revealed that the vast majority of the people thinks that *“it is a good thing when women climb to executive positions”*. The first reaction therefore is dominated by approval, not by skepticism, and the effects which the attraction of public attention has on a company and the positive impact on its image (dynamics, on the move, spirit of progress, fresh breeze, new ideas, innovation) shouldn't be underestimated.²¹

The fear of causing “damage to the company's image” when appointing a woman to an executive position (as voiced by male executives) proves false: a content analysis of the media coverage of women who climbed to senior positions shows that neither the issue “compatibility of job and family”, nor a debate on society's picture of “what is appropriate for women” (with a view to the conflict between their role as women and their role as top managers), nor the issue of a continuous career history was raised. This disproves the argumentation of many male executives who express concerns that a woman in a leadership position will find it very difficult to do the splits between family and career, or that she will cause damage to the company's image if she doesn't have a “family in the background” which ensures that she is not troubled with other problems.²² These concerns and objections of some men don't prove true in practice.

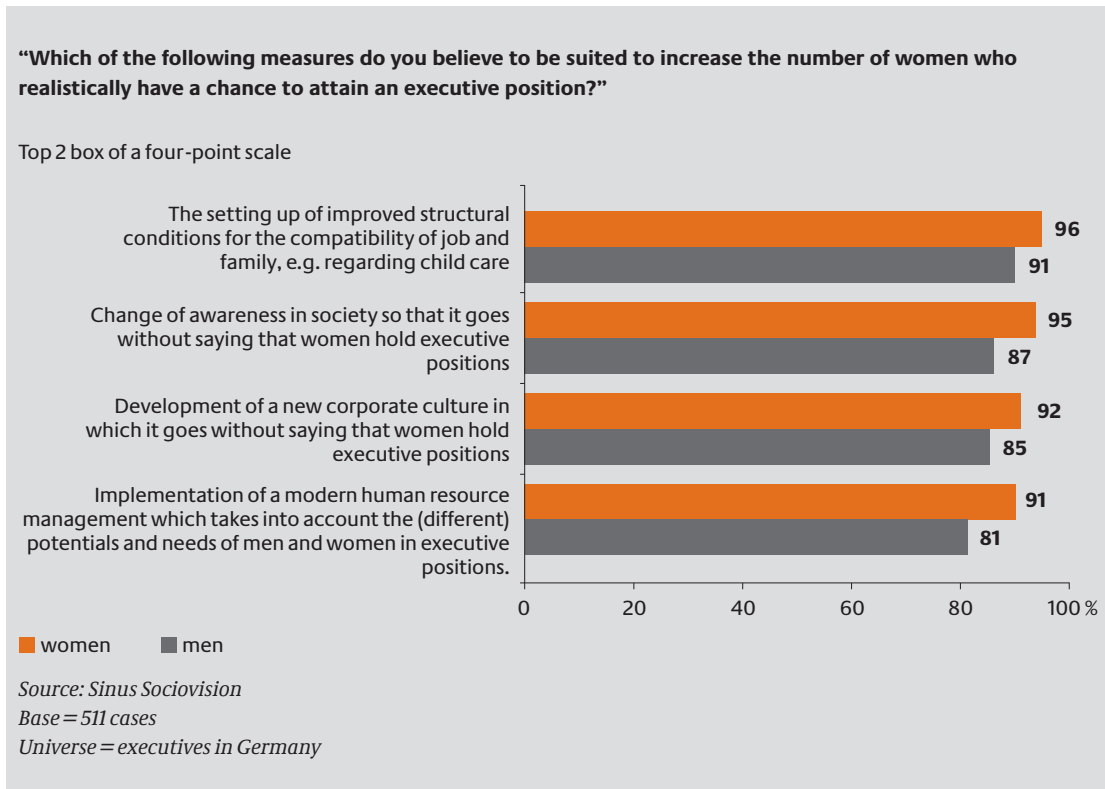
4.4 Portfolio of the measures suggested by executives

To achieve the objective (“More women in executive positions”) male and female executives propose a bundle of political, operational and communicative measures:

The setting up of improved structural conditions for the **compatibility of job and family** ranks first. However, current executives believe that the target “More women in executive positions” can't be reached by focusing on the compatibility issue alone. It is just as important to create a different **awareness in society**, to develop a **new corporate culture** (in which it goes without saying that women are (top) managers) and to implement a **modern human resource management** which takes into account the (different) potentials and needs of men and women in executive positions. More than 90% of the female executives and more than 80% of the male executives attach importance to each one of these measures.

²¹ A prominent example for this is Dr. Simone Bagel-Trah who was appointed chairman of the supervisory board of Henkel in summer 2009.

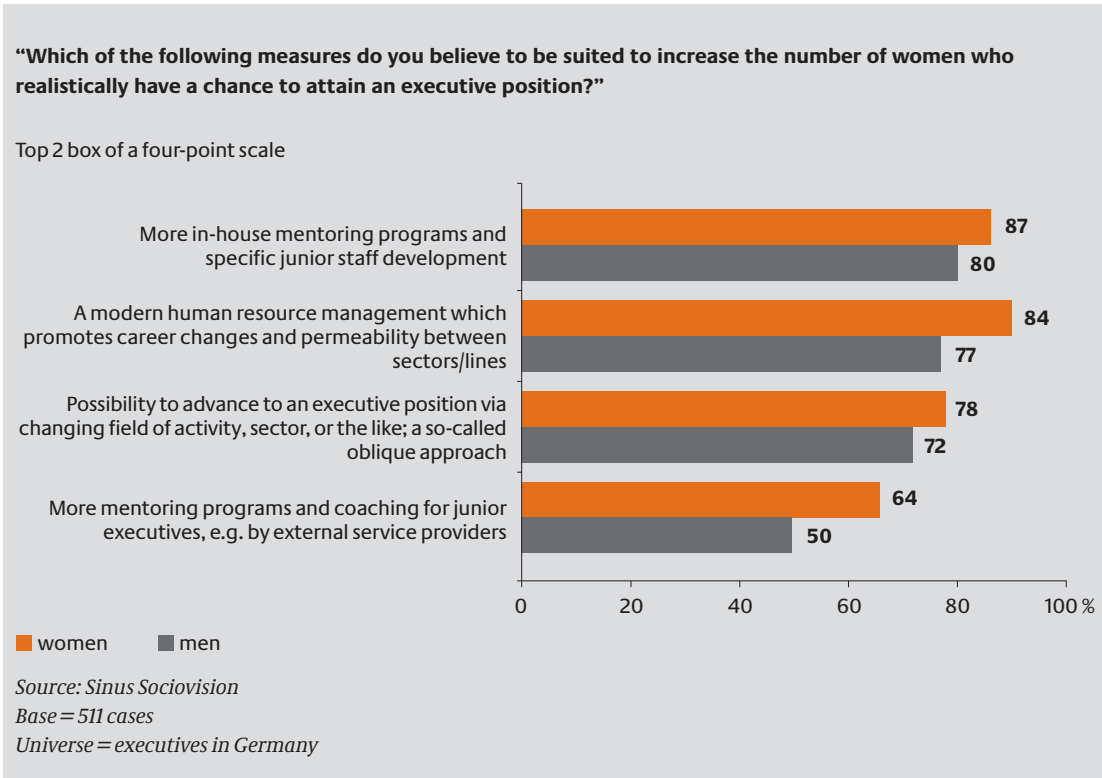
²² Q.v. chapter 5: rationale of men in executive positions, “mentality type 1: Conservative exclusion: rejection of women on the grounds of gender” and “mentality type 2: a fundamentally emancipated attitude – but women powerless against male power rituals”.



It is essential that the single measures and targets are intertwined and that they will gain in importance and dynamics because of their interplay. Example: a “new corporate culture” and the “compatibility of job and family” require and promote a new understanding of the roles of women (and men). And of course this will have ramifications on adequate human resource management.

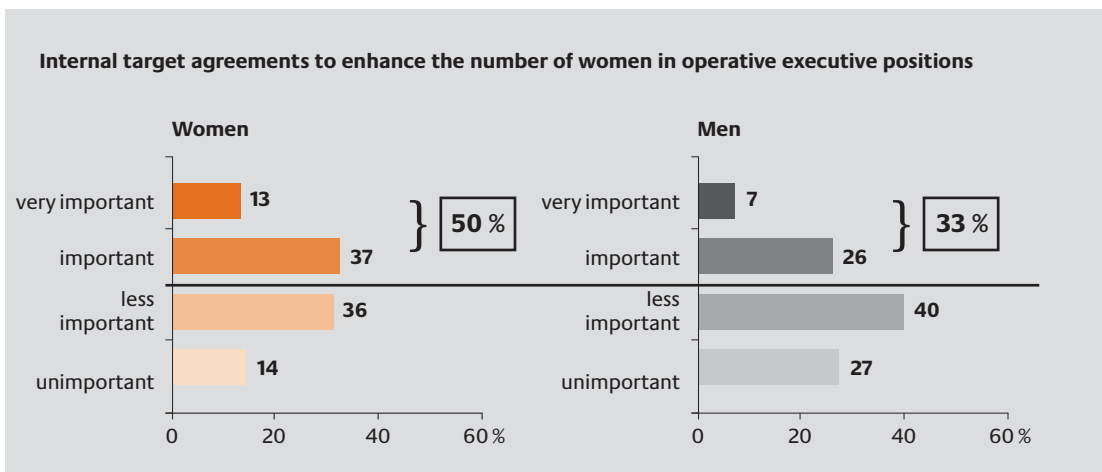
The portfolio demanded by managers of the business world therefore consists of tools with different provenience and addressees. In view of this fact, politics, the public, and the companies are challenged (culturally and operatively) – and every single one of them is an important, essential and irreplaceable element of target achievement.

There are **other accompanying measures** which are believed to be suitable: different forms and kinds of in-house mentoring programs or a modern human resource management which promotes career changes and permeability between sectors/lines. These measures, too, find favor with more than 70% of the female and male executives.



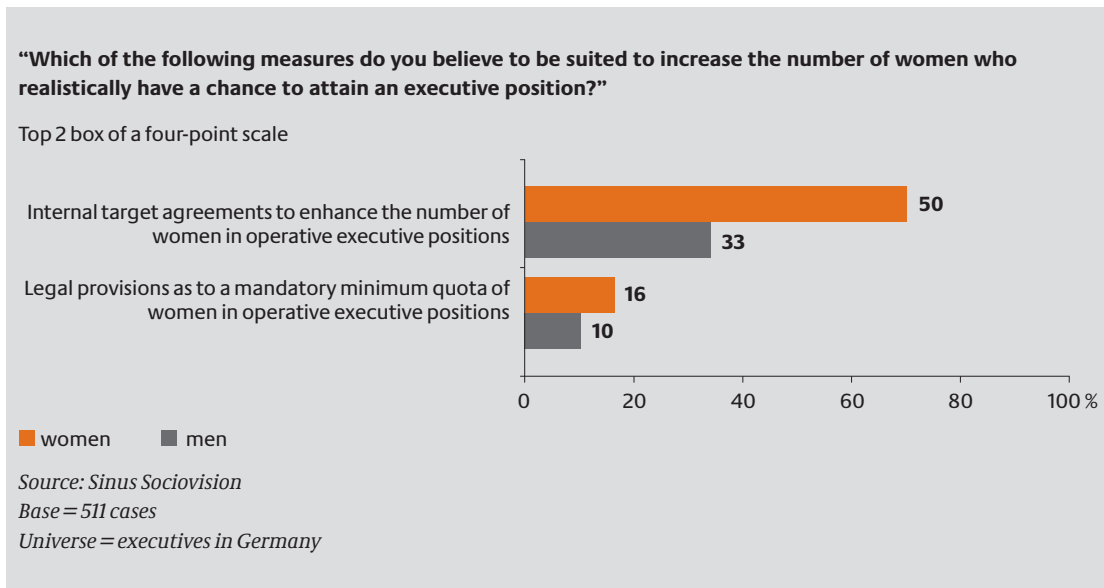
4.5 Internal target agreement to enhance the number of women in executive positions

For the operative business side, many executives approve of internal target agreements to enhance the number of women in executive positions. 50% of the female executives and 33% of the male executives believe this instrument to be important and to the point.



Especially executives **in smaller and medium-sized companies** think that internal target agreements make sense and ask for them. In companies with up to 100 members of staff **61% of the women and 41% of the men in executive positions** consider such target agreements as important.

Thus, the acceptance of internal target agreements is quite pronounced and this measure is clearly preferred over **a legal quota system for the operative side of business:**

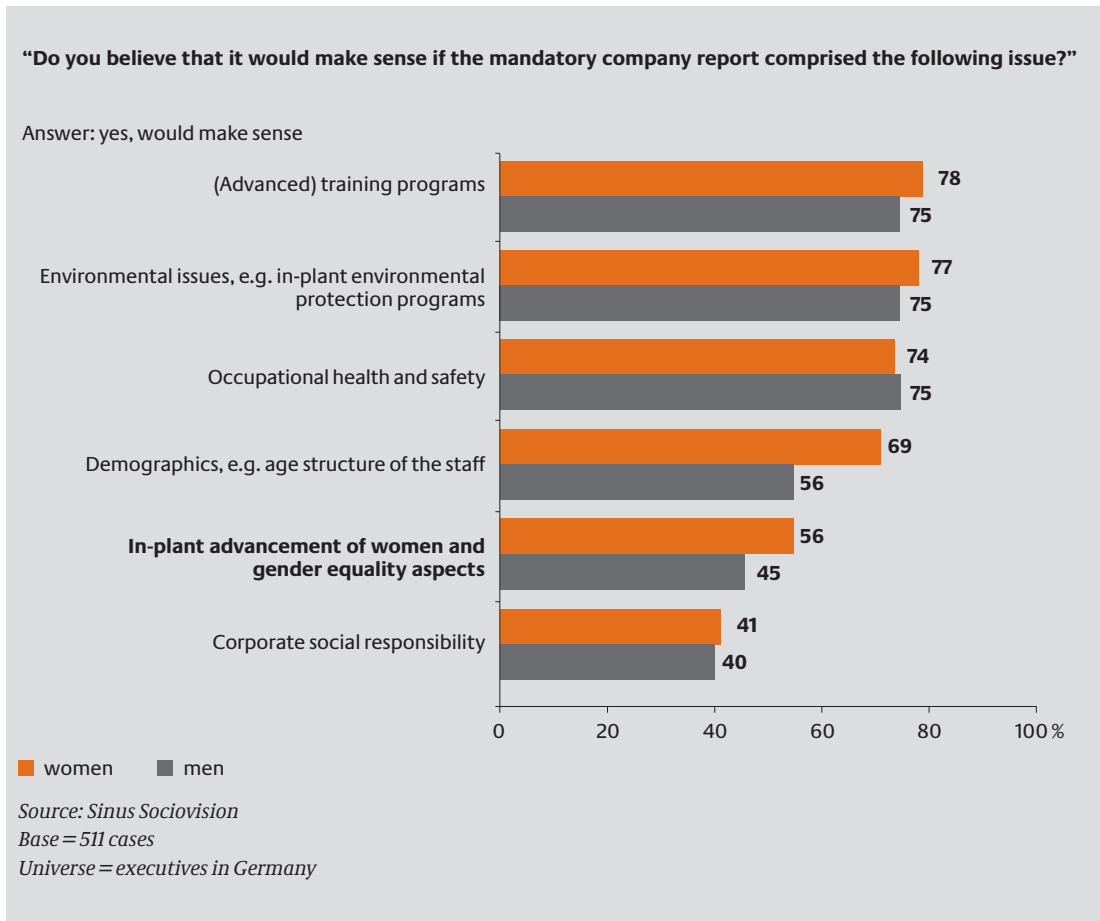


The difference between the acceptance of *internal target agreements* and of a *mandatory minimum quota for the operative side of business* is particularly high when it comes to women in executive positions (34% compared to 23% among men).

4.6 Gender equality aspects should be included in the mandatory company report

Economic and business law regulates the duties and obligations of the annual report (§ 289 German Commercial Code). In this report, not only the financial performance indicators of business are listed, but also the non-monetary indicators like e.g. employees' issues. In the SINUS study, executives were asked to assess the reasonableness of different topics from the company report. The closed-ended questions included one issue which hasn't been perceived as a mandatory part of the business report so far: in-plant advancement of women and gender equality aspects.²³

²³ However, the Deutsche Juristinnenbund (djb) believes that a stricter interpretation of § 289 HGB would already comprise such an obligation to report.



As a topic which extends the list of the mandatory report by yet another duty, gender equality aspects are in a difficult position against the already explicitly institutionalized topics – particularly against the established issues “advanced training”, “occupational health and safety”, “protection of the environment”.

In spite of this acceptance handicap, 56% of the women and 45% of the men approve of a paragraph in the company report which deals with in-plant advancement of women and gender equality aspects.²⁴

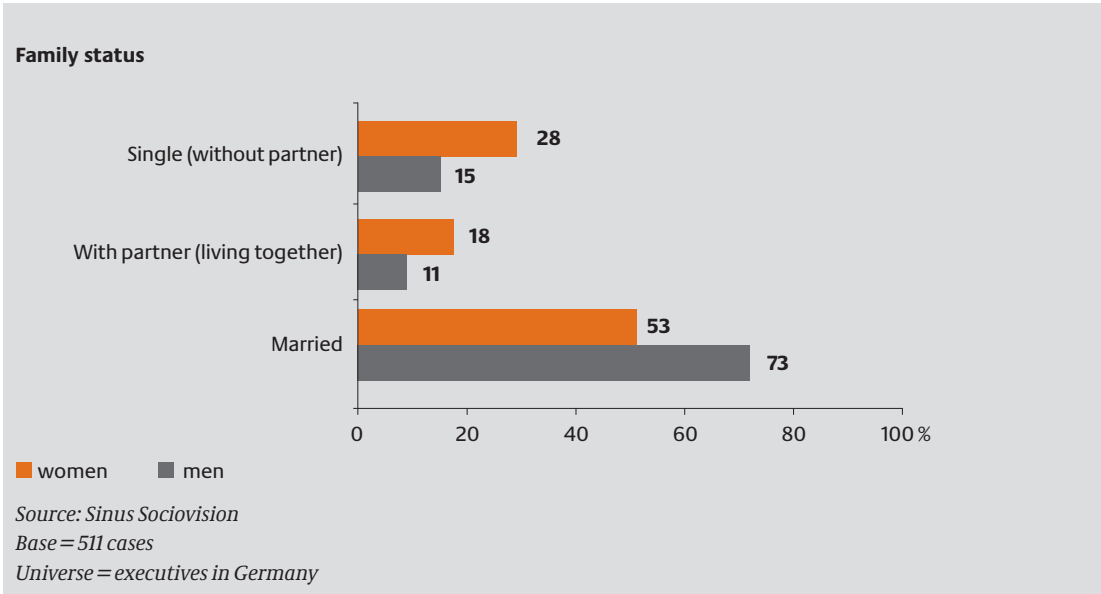
Besides, it is noteworthy to see that *gender equality aspects* find higher favor with male and female executives than the issue *corporate social responsibility* and almost catch up with the demographic age structure of the staff (which indisputably represents an important indicator how future-proof the personnel policy of the company is).

4.7 Family & career: a challenge, but not mutually exclusive

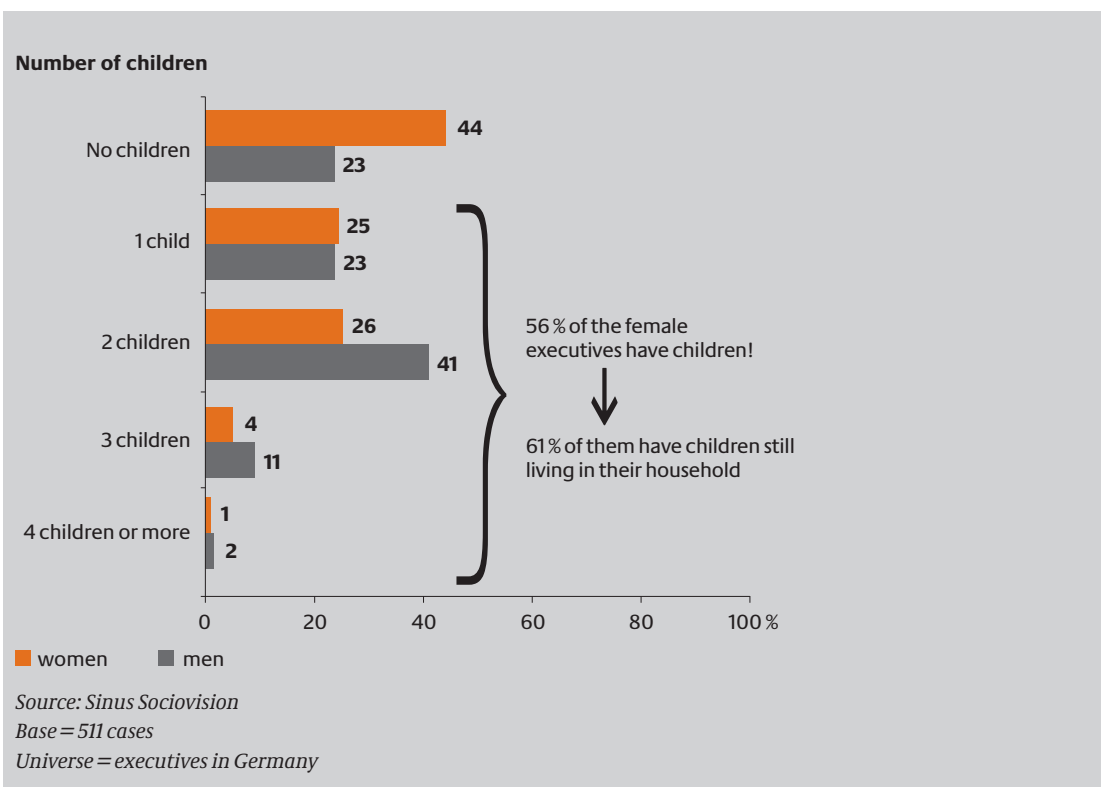
The quarters of the male executives are married and have children. For these men, “marriage and children” and “to have a family in the background” represent a dominant, normative model of normality, it has role model character.

²⁴ If we had known about the resistance of male and female executives to “advancement of women” prior to the survey, we would have phrased the statement differently and would have avoided the term “advancement of women”. It is to be assumed that the approval of the issue “in-plant gender equality aspects” would have been (even) higher, then.

This doesn't apply to women in equal measure: "only" 53% of the female executives are married, approximately one third of them are single (live without a partner). It seems that women's ways of life are more diversified and variable than those of men. Even today, foregoing a family appears to be the price a woman has (or wants) to pay for advancing to executive positions – and for staying there in the long run. However: to identify an overall incompatibility of family and career as the main cause for the "glass ceiling" means to fall short of the issue.



56% of the women in executive positions have children in their household and reconcile their time-consuming and taxing job with their role as a mother. To have (younger) children *and* at the same time occupy an executive position don't constitute mutually exclusive alternatives for women in senior management, even though the rate of female executives remaining childless is much higher than the one of their male counterparts (44% of the women remain childless compared to 23% of the men).



4.8 Taking time out is no obstacle

From the point of view of some top managers, one of the main reasons for the low number of women in senior management is the fact that a continuous occupational history without (longer) interruptions is a *conditio sine qua non* for executive positions.²⁵ But is this really true? In our survey, we explored the issue whether women who currently hold management appointments really look back on a continuous occupational history, i.e. whether they have never taken a (longer) time-out in their career.

The socio-scientific findings prove that this assertion (as voiced by male executives) is false. It prejudices, and thus acts as cement in the joints of the glass ceiling: 44% of the women in executive positions do have taken a leave of absence from work at least once. The group of women who currently hold managerial posts is pretty evenly split into the group of those who have never taken time out (56%) and into those who have interrupted their career path at least once (44%).

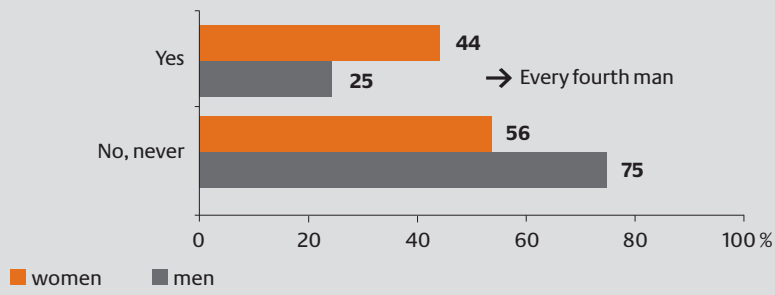
Though men in the upper echelons of the business world emphasize by majority that taking time out constitutes an enormous barrier to the advancement to top positions, reality doesn't confirm this. **Every fourth (top) manager has taken time out in his occupational career.** When relating percentages (women: 44%; men: 25%) to the dissimilar universes (on average, there are distinctly more men in executive positions than women), it becomes obvious that quantified in absolute figures more male than female executives have taken a leave of absence from work "on their way up the ladder".

However: men in leadership positions usually have interrupted their occupational history only once, whereas – against all expectation – two breaks are quite normal for women in senior management.

Time-outs lasting seven to twelve months occur most frequently (38%), followed by time-outs lasting 13 to 18 months (13%) and 19 to 24 months (12%). 41% of the women who currently are in executive positions have taken a leave of absence from work for more than one year, only a small group (21%) for maximal half a year (12% up to three months; 9% between four and six months). Since these are statements given by women in executive positions, women from all age groups should feel encouraged not to forgo their career ambitions simply because they have a family (or want one); or because their occupational career is discontinuous. There are many women in senior management who have made it *all the same* – and perhaps even *precisely because*.

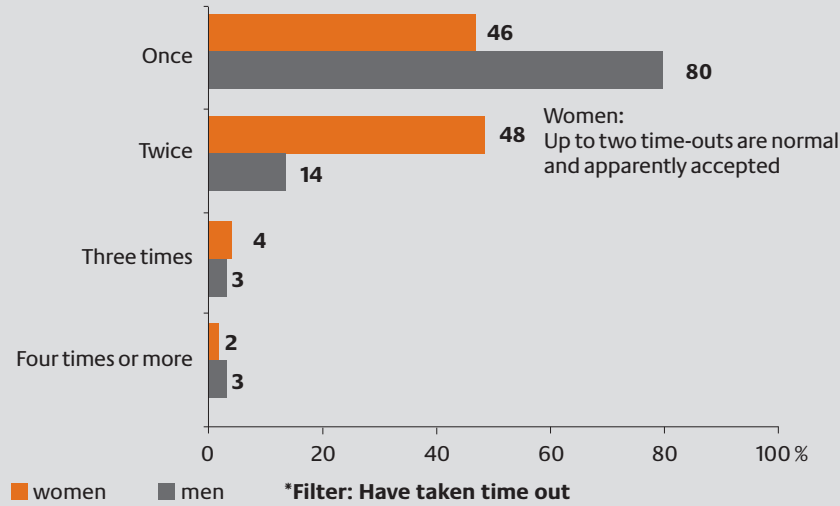
²⁵ Particularly male executives belonging to mentality type 3 emphasize this; q.v. the chapter on "Type 3: radical individualism: lack of 'authentic & flexible women' in the market."

“Have you ever taken time out?”

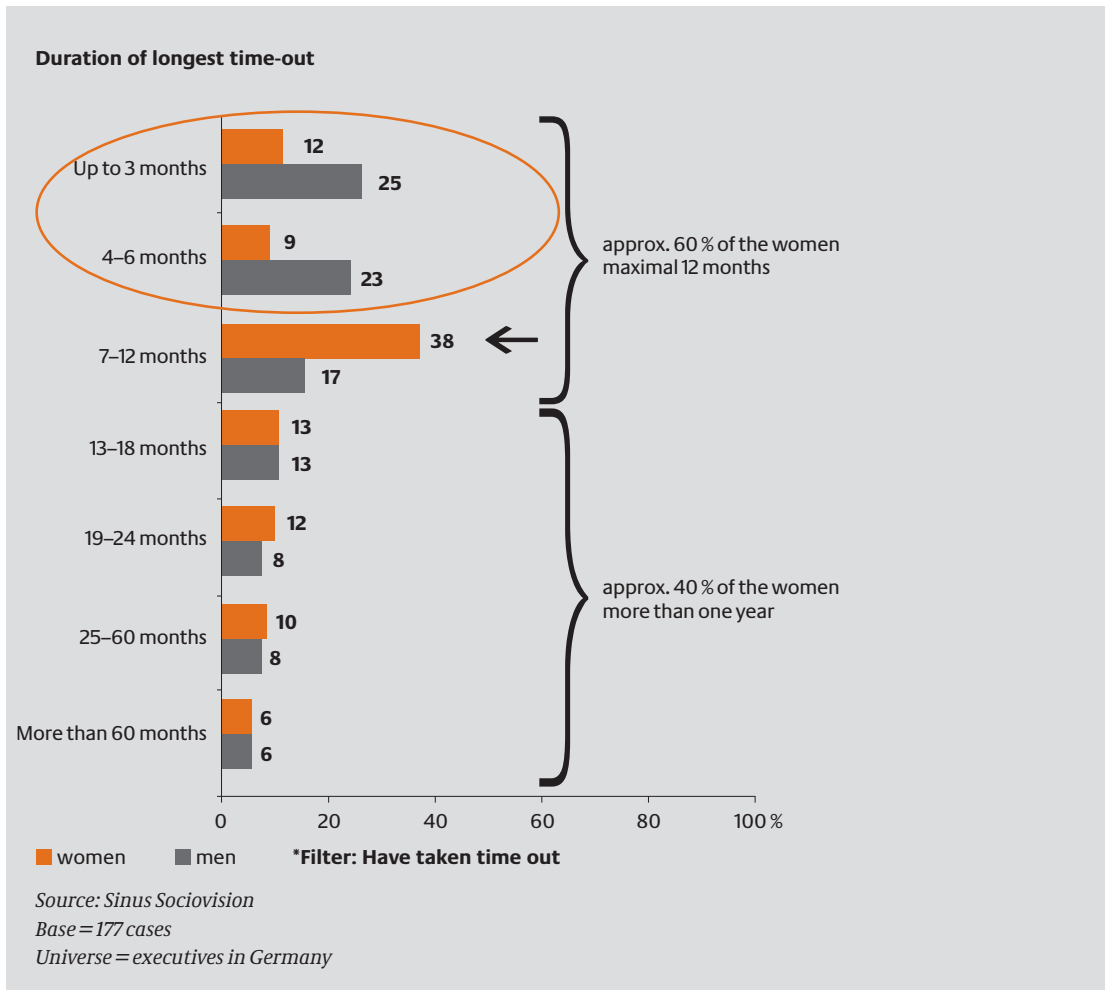


Source: Sinus Sociovision
 Base = 511 cases
 Universe = executives in Germany

Number of time-outs

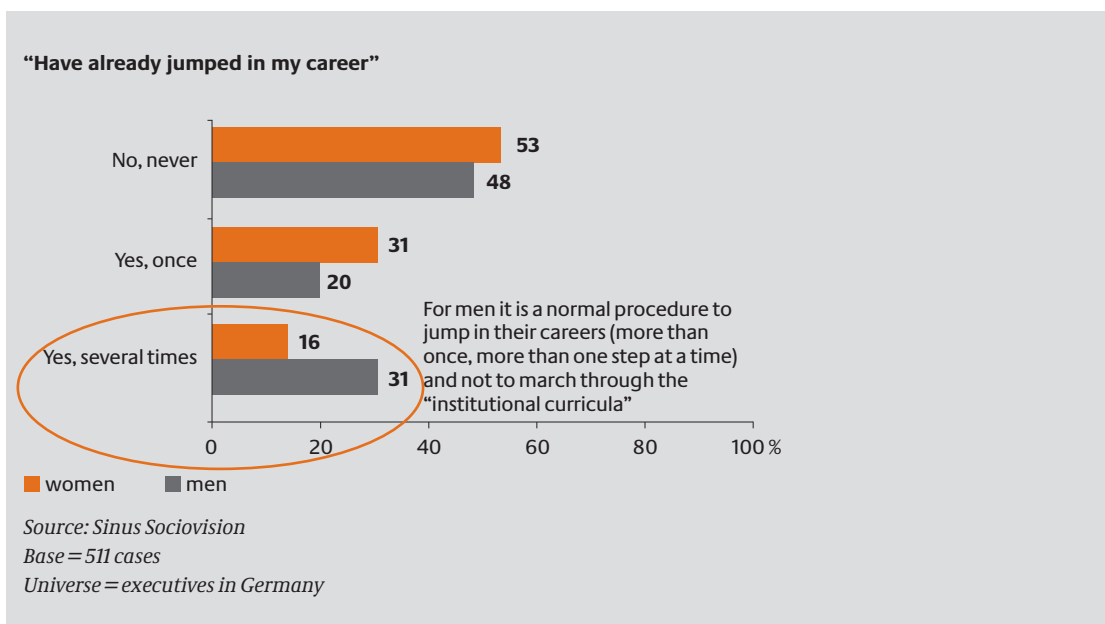


Source: Sinus Sociovision
 Base = 177 cases



4.9 Jumps in the career: men climb the ladder earlier, more often, and their ascent is steeper

Many striking patterns come to light when looking at the steps which current executives have jumped in their occupational career on their way to senior management:



First finding: jumps are an integral part of a career! Approximately half of the women and men in a leadership position attained it after (and because) they jumped one or several steps on their career ladder. The study “Women on the jump”²⁶ provides evidence that an equal number of young women and young men consider it desirable to ascend to top management. Yet young women often are scared by the unwanted “side effects” they anticipate (e.g. loneliness and loss of trust on the part of friends). Quotation Allmendinger: *“Women have to work up the courage and self-confidence to take a leap in the dark at their job, to consciously expose themselves to uncertainties and to bear fears. It won’t work any other way.”*²⁷

In comparison to those women who have already advanced to senior positions today, men climbed (and still climb) the ladder earlier, more often, and their career jumps are bigger. For men, it isn’t unusual at all to start advancing at a very early stage of their careers, to climb the single steps of the ladder in short intervals and to jump one or several of these steps. They often don’t march through the “institutional curricula”, but look for and seize chances which arise along the way. There is evidence to suggest that they don’t simply react to proposals only, but that they strategically position themselves in the company to come into consideration when opportunities arise.

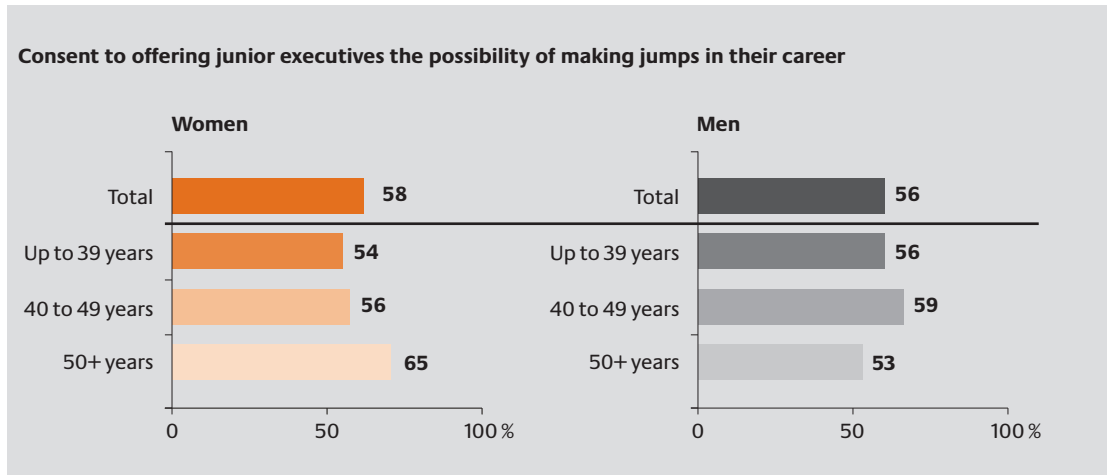
Men see jumps in the career as proof of competence, as individual USP (unique selling proposition) which they aim for, accumulate and openly communicate. Many women are more diffident in this respect and perceive a jump in their career as a rare and precious event (which they have earned, however!); for them, a jump is not the rule, but an exception and a deviation from the norm. That is why women tend to *wait* for occasions and opportunities to jump in their career, to *hope* for them – but they don’t try to strategically and offensively arrange for them. There are women who jumped in their career, but the vast majority of them only skipped one step, not several.

Put in percentage, about twice as many men (31%) as women (16%) jump several steps in their career. This already means a wide difference; in addition, it has to be kept in mind that 90% of the top managers are men and only 10% are women – so in absolute figures the number of men jumping several steps in their career is *many times higher* than the number of women.

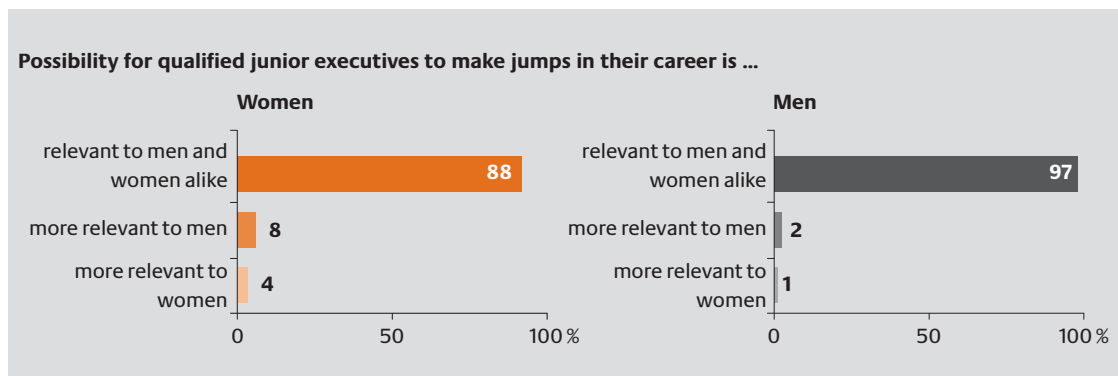
Due to the experience that jumps in the career represent an important factor for advancing to executive positions, 58% of the female executives and 56% of the male executives vote for enabling **junior executives** to **make jumps in their career**. Particularly older women (65%) perceive this to be an important means of junior staff development.

26 Cf. Allmendinger, Jutta: Frauen auf dem Sprung. Wie junge Frauen heute leben wollen. Die Brigitte-Studie. 2009, p. 48ff.

27 Ibid. p. 101. Also: “Women have to vault this barrier themselves, nobody can relieve them of it. No matter how flat the hierarchy: leadership always means – to a certain degree – loneliness. Many people are subordinate to you, and only a few superordinate. You’re out on a limb.” (Ibid. p.49.)

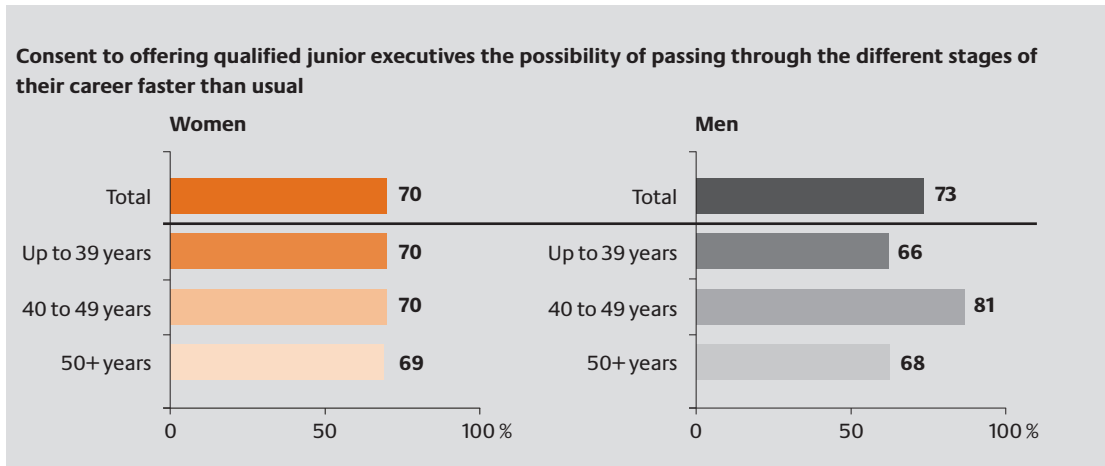


Today's executives assess the possibility of making jumps in one's career as relevant to men *and* women. Remarkably, men seem to emphasize this even more strongly than women: 8% of the women in executive positions (and only 2% of the men) believe that jumps in the career are more relevant to *men*. This attitude holds particularly true for women aged 50+ (11%), younger women are more skeptical: only 6% of the 40- to 49-year-olds and 4% of the women under 40 believe that is more relevant to men.

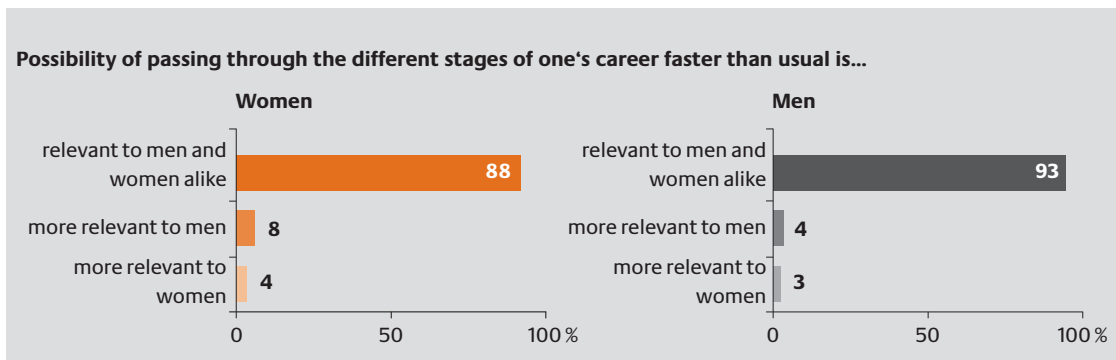


The **possibility of passing through the different stages of one's career faster than usual** meets with even higher approval. 70% of all women in executive positions consent to this – in all age groups.

This possibility is strongly supported by male executives aged 40 to 49, too. This may be due to the fact that at this stage of their careers men are particularly intent on quickly getting ahead. They perceive themselves in the phase of bifurcation: they either will stay (for good) at the management level reached so far, or they will “really” move to the top. Therefore, it is highly important for them not to stagnate. This applies to their current situation, but also in retrospect.



When it comes to the possibility of passing through the different stages of one's career faster than usual, approximately 90% of today's executives assess it to be relevant to men and women alike. Here, too, we observe that 8% of the women believe that it is more relevant to men. This attitude seems to be dependent on generation and to be based on personal experiences in the professional environment: 13% of the women aged 50+ and only 3% of the younger women think that it is more relevant to men.



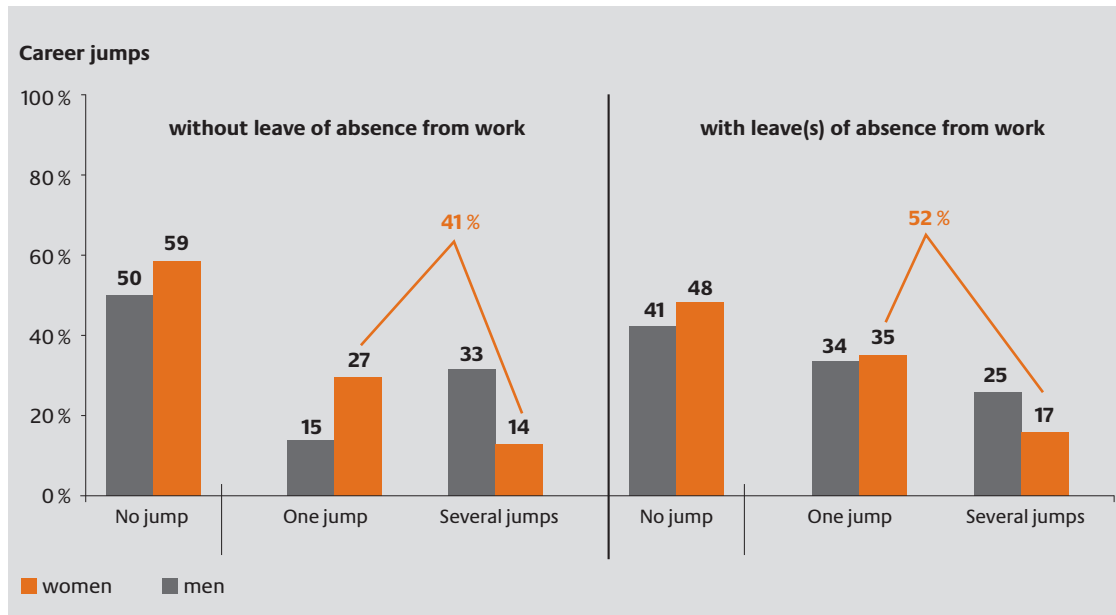
Contrariwise we notice that a (small) part of the younger executives (women *and* men) assess jumps in the career and the possibility of passing through the different stages of one's career faster than usual as **more relevant to women**: 6% of all younger executives are of this opinion (compared to 1% of all executives aged 50+).

4.10 Jumps in the career don't presuppose career continuity

There is a gender-specific correlation of taking leaves of absence from work and career jumps:

50% of the men *who haven't taken a leave of absence from work* have jumped in their careers, yet 59% of the men *who took some time out* did so, too: this is a statistically significant difference and gives reason to presume that a leave of absence from work and the probability of a career jump *positively* relate to each other. Different variants exist as to occasions and motivations for a time-out: self-imposed time-out for the purposes of reorientation, or latency stipulated by contract when changing company and employer (men's leaves of absence from work are relatively short).

Jumping *several* steps, however, is a phenomenon which occurs more often among men who haven't taken a leave of absence from work (33%) than among those who have taken time out (25%). As for the frequency of career jumps, there obviously is a correlation with the number of leaves taken: taking several time-outs means standing a lesser chance to jump several times or to make a "double jump". Or to put it in other words: for men, there is a positive correlation of career continuity and jumping several steps in one's career.

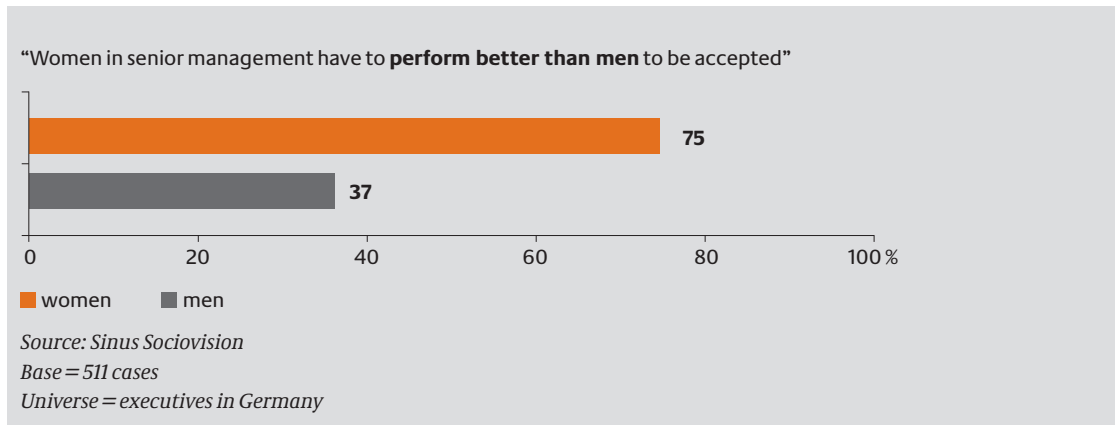


- 41% of the women *who haven't taken a leave of absence from work* jumped in their career, but so did 52% of the women who have taken time out: this finding – just like the finding for men – is *significant* and proves that career continuity isn't a sine qua non for jumps in the career. Quite the contrary: leaves of absence from work at the same time constitute a possibility to position oneself at a new, higher and more ambitious level on the market or at a company.
- But unlike men, women with a continuous career history don't enhance their chances to jump several times in their career.
- In comparison, a higher percentage of women who have taken leaves of absence from work make one jump in their career (35%) or even several jumps (17%) than women with a continuous career history (27%; 14%). This entails the quite surprising finding that leaves of absence from work correlate with higher opportunity for advancement for some ambitious women. Possible causes haven't been researched yet, but it is assumed that several factors have a stake in it: motivation, assertiveness, farsightedness, independence, distance to the roles other women play in the company, etc..

4.11 Do women have to perform better than men?

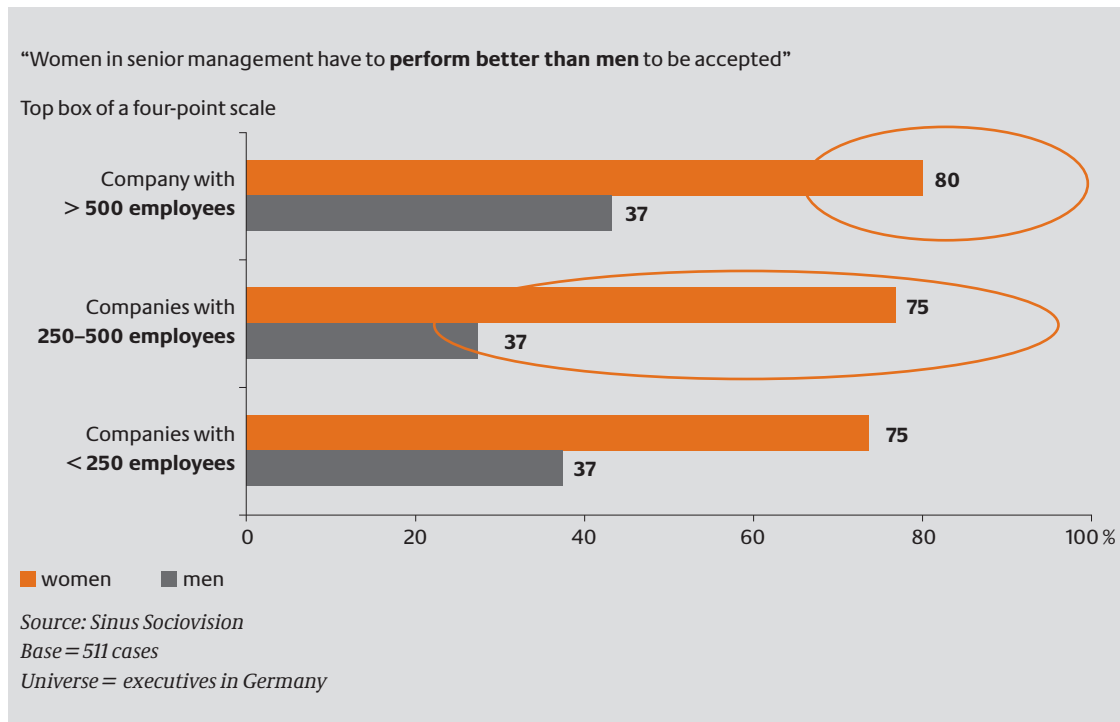
The issue whether women in senior management have to perform better than men to be accepted is assessed in a diametrically opposed way by the two genders (female executives strongly agree, male executives disagree). Though both groups deal with the same "circumstance", are immediately and equally "concerned" (both are in senior management and thus should be in the position to judge it), their perception differs fundamentally.²⁸

²⁸ The perspective of assessment is of course asymmetric: men are asked for their third-party perspective (What is it like for women?) whereas women respond both as a third party (What is it like for women?) and from a personal perspective (What's it like for me?).



Who "is right" and what is the "objective truth" would be very difficult to determine (if at all). Anyway, it is the subjective perception – of women and men – which shapes attitude and behavior as well as the deduced assessment criteria, behavior patterns and strategies.

Analysis shows that from their subjective point of view women a) have to perform better than men to be accepted, and b) have to perform even better when changing from a smaller company to a bigger one. The highest pressure is sensed by women working in companies with more than 500 employees.

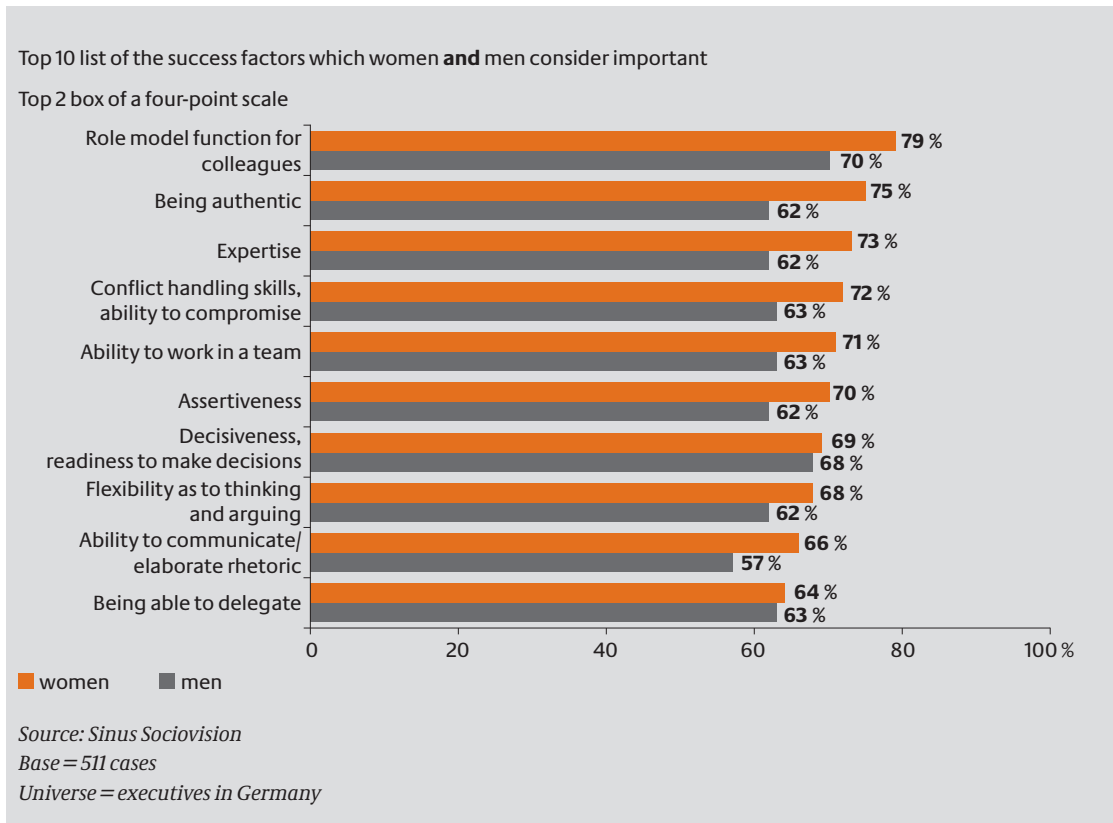


The biggest gap in perception presents itself in companies with 250 to 500 employees.

When women advance to senior management and make jump(s) in their career, they pile on the pressure in several ways: they work harder than they did in their previous position; they work harder than their male colleagues in executive positions; and particularly after making a jump in the career they believe that they have to perform even better than ever before. This perception ("women in executive positions are under higher pressure to perform than men in comparable positions") is confirmed and amplified by male executives in senior and top management, but at the same time it is discredited as "busy bee behavior".

4.12 Factors for success in executive positions: same substance, different foci

Which factors for their personal success do people in executive positions identify? The survey stated 37 factors of success and asked the executives to assess their importance for successful management. When looking at the top 10 success factors which emerged from data analysis, it becomes apparent 1.) that for women and men the same factors rank highest; 2.) that women appraise all of these elementary leadership skills even higher than men do.



This refutes the thesis voiced by some of the male executives that women weren't aware of the requirements for and the qualities needed in top management. On the contrary: women are as mindful to all esteemed aptitudes of a good and successful manager as men (or even more mindful!).

Expertise, professional motives and the private circumstances of women who currently hold a senior managerial post in the business world therefore don't bespeak any *competence or attitude deficit* of women compared to men.

	Women %	Men %	Diff. %	
Building of internal and external strategic networks	53	39	14	
Being authentic	75	62	13	
Expertise	73	62	11	
Focus on the issue/rationality	57	46	11	
Having an eye for the 'big picture'	49	38	11	
Friendliness, charm	41	30	11	
Role model function for colleagues	79	70	9	
Conflict handling skills, ability to compromise	72	63	9	
Ability to communicate/elaborate rhetoric	66	57	9	
Ability to work in a team	71	63	8	
Assertiveness	70	62	8	
Flexibility as to thinking and arguing	68	62	6	
Boosting sales and profit	40	34	6	
Multitasking/'several things on the go at once'	33	27	6	
Empathy with colleagues	55	50	5	More pronounced among women ↑
Accurate balancing and checking of action alternatives	54	49	5	
Willingness to take risks and to bear their consequences	43	39	4	
Performing well on the international stage	17	13	4	
Finding and promoting talents	58	55	3	
Diligence and staying power	58	56	2	
Motivating colleagues to strive for top performance	25	23	2	
Continuous career history	13	11	2	
No demonstration of weakness	9	7	2	
Decisiveness, readiness to make decisions	69	68	1	
Being able to delegate	64	63	1	
Strategic visions and consistent target orientation	55	54	1	
Keeping one's distance to colleagues	10	9	1	
Getting tough with colleagues	6	5	1	
Demonstrating personal superiority	4	4	1	
Gearing life completely towards the job	6	6	0	
Creativity and pioneering spirit	40	40	0	
Flexibility as to location and time	41	42	-1	
Withdrawing from daily business operations and focusing on managing and delegating	13	16	-3	More pronounced among men ↓
Pragmatism/feasibility mindset	40	45	-5	
Offering colleagues space and time for creativity	41	46	-5	
Working more than the others do	23	29	-6	
Having a supporting family in the background	38	48	-10	

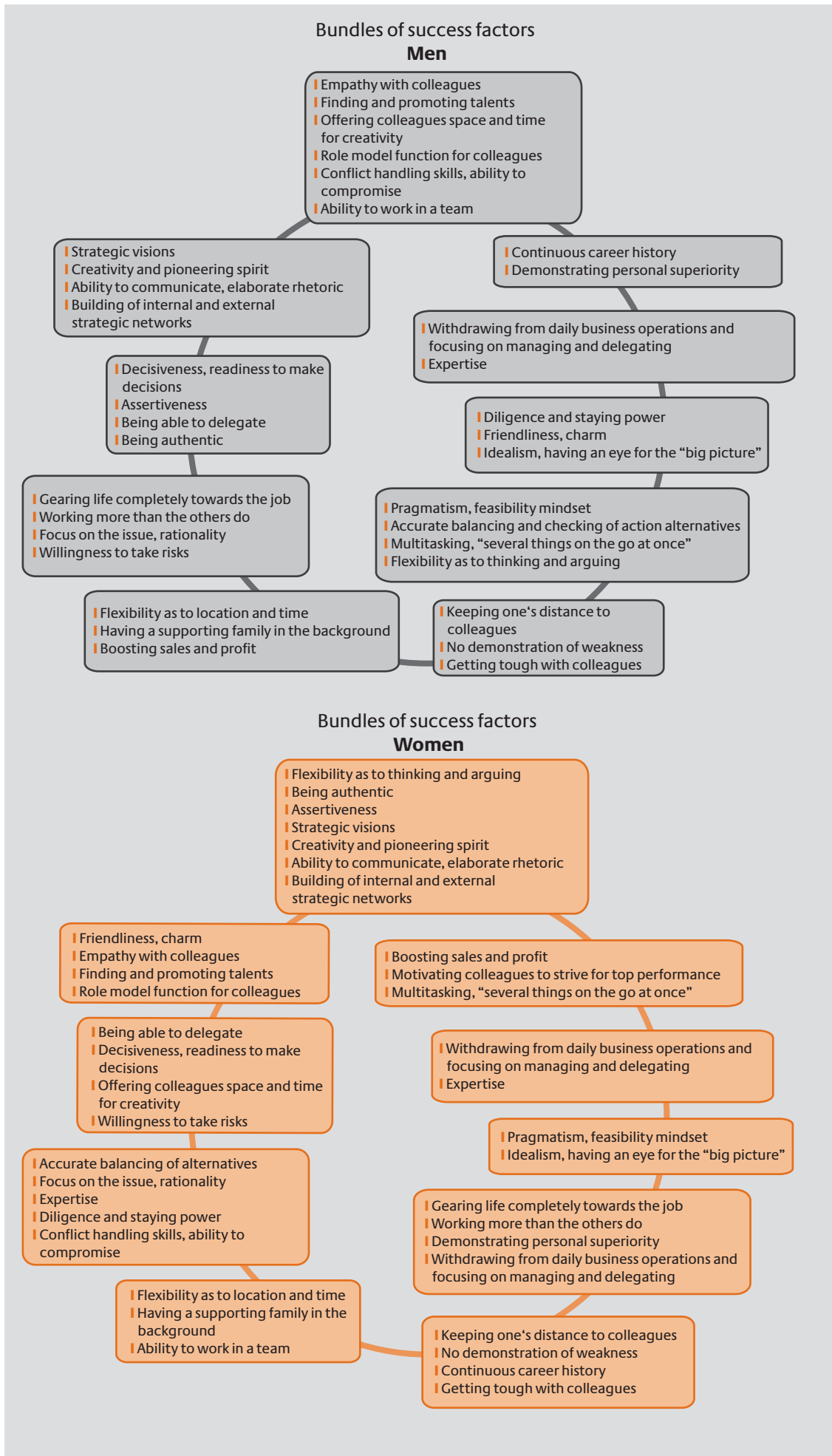
Top 10 (women) **Top 10 (men)**

In the upper echelons, certain concepts of a “good manager” prevail. These concepts are quite complex and consist of different attitudes. Significant is ...

- ... that some of the success factors are assessed in the same way by men and women in executive positions (=shared part of the concept);
- ... that many of the success factors are appraised *more strongly by women* than by men;
- ... that only a small number of success factors is appraised *more strongly by men*.

Women weight the leadership skills of a good manager differently. Though the *mathematical* differences in the assessment of the single success factors aren't exorbitant (14 percentage points at most), they are *statistically significant*. In addition, women and men perceive *different correlations* of the single competencies: the statistical correlation analysis gives reason to presume that women and men in executive positions may identify the same elements of successful management (i.e. female executives focus on the same competencies as men do), but they correlate them differently. Women in executive positions “bundle” the single competencies **in different success factor segments** than men do.²⁹ And this indicates that women and men lean towards different leadership philosophies, strategies and – above all – styles. The diagnosis of this dissimilarity is non-judgmental; there are no criteria which decide which is “better”. But dissimilarity opens up new perspectives and approaches to solutions. All in all, diversity creates the kind of multi-perspectivity in management teams which probably is needed to cope with the complexity of a globalized business world. The following charts illustrate which success factors are correlated by men – and that the “bundles” created by women reveal a similar overall picture with significant discrepancies in the details.

²⁹ This is the result of a factor analysis across the single success factors. A separate factor analysis was conducted for women and for men (principal component analysis, orthogonal varimax rotation; explained total variance of 73% and 75%, respectively). In the process, the 37 single success factors were clustered in ten main factors.



Seeing that the very low number of women in executive positions isn't due to lack of awareness of the necessary success factors, the hypothesis suggests itself that women **put extremely high pressure on themselves** because they observe and reflect on the success patterns of men and try to live up to these criteria. This notion is supported and amplified by their pre-set perception that women have to perform better than men to be accepted. So, a behavior pattern manifests itself which men observe and assess as "overly committed", as "exaggerated" and as "compensating" – particularly since *men* don't exert such pressure on themselves.

A supplemental interpretation of the findings suggests that women approach an executive position with **higher and more complex demands** than men do. They notice men's attitudes to and handling of managerial functions and perceive them as a benchmark – but they at the same time emancipate themselves (at least partially) from it. Knowing that women were excluded from (top) management in the past, they don't merely try to copy men and live up to "traditional" criteria, but *also* seek to design "leadership" according to their own ideas, to go about it authentically and in accordance with their personal visions for the future.

Hence, women in executive positions are gradually and successively establishing a different perspective in the upper echelons of the business world. This socio-scientific diagnosis is again non-judgmental. However, there are chances (possibly even a necessity) implied in it: for companies, multi-perspectivity of the leadership circles is a cultural and mental asset needed to flexibly react to internal and external challenges and rapidly changing parameters.

4.13 Not daring to jump: who will shoulder multiple burdens?

What are the reasons for refusing women access to executive positions, and what are the reasons why some women who are qualified for such posts evidently flinch from aspiring to them? Barriers are set up by company traditions or the male-dominated leadership culture, and there are barriers in the heads of the men. However, barriers do exist in the heads of the women as well, and these become easier to understand when looking at the expectations imposed on women both by themselves and by third parties. Many women don't dare to jump, because they fear that their **burden will increase exponentially**. In the following, we will give a short review of **the reasoning of women** reflecting their expectations and experiences as to executive positions:³⁰

30 The review is based on empirical data from socio-scientific interviews with a) women in top management, b) women in lower and middle management, and above all with c) highly qualified women who aren't in an executive position („Wege zur Gleichstellung heute und morgen. Sozialwissenschaftliche Untersuchung vor dem Hintergrund der Sinus-Milieus“. Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend. Berlin/Heidelberg 2007.)

- | Women already do the splits, trying to reconcile **job** and **family**. If they make a jump (or even a double jump) to an executive position, the splits will be even more extreme and even harder to do.
- | In male-dominated jobs, women have **to perform better than men** anyway **to be accepted**, and the promotion to top management is associated with a further **increase of the pressure to perform**. Women in executive positions not only have to come up to their own expectations, but also have to live up to expectations linked to executive positions by third parties. Being “exotic” and out on a limb they will come under high scrutiny, i.e. their moves and their decisions will be more closely watched and critically assessed than those of men.
- | Women in senior management are self-confident. In addition to living up to external expectations, they above all want to come up to their **own expectations and interpretations** of executive positions. They intend to acquit themselves of traditional expectations how “one” behaves as a top manager and how a “woman” should behave in management, respectively. This creates potential for conflict and friction with people who cling to the established ways and styles of leadership. And again, it’s mainly the women who struggle with these sources of friction – and less the men.

Women anticipate that a rise to a (top) executive position will invariably imply having to grapple with the coexistence of various rational and irrational, economically sensible and senseless, third-party and personal role expectations. So – in spite of all the pleasant anticipation of the job itself – the promotion to such a position is perceived as an “energy guzzler” whose burden is rather unpredictable. In light of these multiple prospects of pressure many women ask themselves whether it really is worth while.

Thus, the ball is in politics’ court to overcome the inhibiting structures (in co-operation with companies and associations!) so that for reasons of gender justice as well as economic sustainability of companies ...

- 1.) women have the same chances to advance to executive positions as men,
- 2.) the compatibility of executive position and family doesn’t turn into a heavier burden for women than for men.

V.

“Guardians of the glass ceiling”: a thick description of the mentality patterns found in male executives

Section 4.1 touched briefly on the mentality patterns of men in executive positions. A more detailed account is given below.

5.1 Type 1: Conservative Exclusion: rejection of women on the grounds of gender

A typical mentality found amongst men in senior and top management – at least when in the public eye – manifests acceptance of women executives in principle. Narrative socio-scientific interviews, however, show their true mentality structure to be in stark contrast with political correctness: women’s advancement to the highest echelons of the business world is complicated by the fact that they are unfamiliar with the well-rehearsed rules and logics prevailing among the managerial elite, do not accept them, and hence would not cooperate on this basis. Women would be a disruptive element with unforeseeable consequences for the well-oiled cogs of conservative management. In this respect, women get in the way of functioning male circles and networks – and women are mistaken in their strategy of emulating men in managerial positions. The following factors come to light here:

I The business world is conservative: a generally unspoken *conditio sine qua non* in large companies states that those within the management elite (supervisory board, executive board, directorate) must have a ‘family background’. In these positions one finds (virtually) no men without a family or with a wife working full time in confident pursuit of her own career. Top male executives need a private sphere (a) with someone to care for them: ironing their shirts, packing their case, organizing the household, raising the children, etc.; and (b) as a place to recuperate and recharge their batteries; a symbol of an orderly existence.

The underlying philosophy is that in a globalized economy with ever greater demands on flexibility, mobility and availability, the only way to produce a top performance is on the basis of a secure and orderly home background. When a woman aspires to senior management, however, despite her requiring this same foundation, others become skeptical if she puts everyday family life on the back-burner or merely ‘organizes’ family life, however professionally she may do so. A reversal of traditional roles is not accepted amongst the management elite of the business world. And if some women, especially the younger ones, take the rigorous step of foregoing children in favor of their career, they then bear the flaw of being a radical and, in the broader sense, ‘disorderly’, ‘unpredictable’ lone fighter, with no personal sphere to redress the balance.

- I Habitus of the lone fighter:** From the perspective of male executives, women on the ladder to the very top see themselves as lone fighters who have to be extremely *tough*, adopt male virtues and even beat men at their own game. They believe that they are not allowed to display weakness of any kind and have to work even harder than before and by comparison with men. The contrasting reality for men in the upper echelons is that their job is first and foremost to set a course and to delegate. In the most senior management position, it is important not to seem like a workaholic (i.e. working 70 hours a week): this would send out the wrong and fatal signal of being unable to delegate.

- I Engagement in operative day-to-day business:** In the view of top male executives, almost all women cling to the proven and, up to a certain point on the career ladder, necessary maxim of distinguishing themselves through professional expertise, time investment and success on the operative business side. However, the phase of establishing oneself professionally and achieving steady promotion is followed by bifurcation. At this point, anyone not displaying the ability to withdraw from daily business operations becomes classed as the ‘valuable busy bee’ type lacking a talent for senior management. Women in particular quickly get labeled in this way and are thereafter considered suitable for middle management – but no more than that.

- I End of the road in the ‘HR Department’:** When women are promoted to more senior managerial posts, such positions are invariably in ‘Personnel’ or ‘Human Resources (HR), or Public Relations (PR). Within the major companies, it is no secret among men that these areas represent a dead end in career terms: sidelined, less influence and power, and less prestige within the executive board. These days, ambitious managers strive primarily towards the finance, marketing, production divisions, etc. Only time can tell whether women in senior managerial positions who move to Personnel/Human Resources, for them an attractive and more readily accessible area, will find themselves in a permanent blind alley, or whether this area can become a strategic anchor enabling females to establish themselves in the boardroom – and to take responsibility for other divisions in the medium term.

- I Women as a spoke in the wheel of the ‘inner circle’:** The business elites are based on a culture of *personal* networking. Of elementary importance to each individual is the ritualized confirmation that they belong to the *inner circle* of this elect set of like-minded executives. As in all social circles there are language games and rituals designed to celebrate the difference between those on the ‘inside’ and those on the ‘outside’. It comes as no surprise to find proven masculine language games in place (especially when one considers that there never used to be any women in management circles and that things remain more or less unchanged today – one needs only look at the gentlemen’s clubs in England). They include superiority rituals in which chauvinistic insinuations also play a part. The crucial factor is that rather than discriminating or ‘objectifying’ women, men seek to demonstrate their own strength, thereby underscoring their membership of the closed *inner circle*. As an onlooker (particularly from the ranks of the feminist movement), one would describe this language and disposition as *chauvinistic*, albeit in an *elaborated, highbrow style*. But for the individual member it is merely a safe, simple and proven way of signaling to others that one belongs. The fact that the social environment and its semantics revolve around

the *all men together* premise is enough to cause disconcertion at the sudden presence of a woman: men would be inhibited and no longer able to express themselves and to communicate as before.

I Tough style of leadership: One of today’s popular, sweeping and cliché-ridden truisms is that women possess superior social skills, allowing them to manage a department more sensitively and with greater empathy than men. However, male executives have experienced the opposite (despite possibly being swayed by prejudice in this respect): surprisingly, on reaching middle management, women appear to lack this ability and seem to make a point of suppressing it. They are stricter and more detached in dealing with staff than men in the same position – and even more so in their handling of women, especially when it comes to those working part time and mothers requiring flexible working hours. Top male managers see the ‘merciless’ approach of ambitious women and their ‘inability to turn a blind eye’ as a stigma and a sign that women are not suited to the actual tasks facing a senior executive, because they fail to balance caretaking obligation and guideline competence.

Men with this type of mentality perceive and seek to explain things in a specific way. One significant interpretation is that childless women in executive positions react to mothers in the company with envy, venting upon such staff their own resentment at having missed out on family life, and thus provoking unnecessary conflicts within the department. On the one hand, men of this type describe ‘men’ and ‘women’ as fundamentally different and highlight men’s special aptitude for managerial positions, but on the other hand they appear unable to make out any special technical or social expertise on the part of women in executive posts. Instead, they are far more concerned with perceiving and evaluating the weak points of women, seeking the cause in personal and family circumstances.

The ‘errors’ committed by women as described by top managers illustrate the multi-layered bastion of the male-dominated business elite. The fact that virtually no top manager considers the discrepant ratio of women to men in the upper echelons of management as *unfair*, or sees their own methods of handling and promoting staff as out of date, is very revealing. The habitus of distinction and of reservations about business ‘women’ in top executive positions is as strong as ever.

Women hardly ever graduate to top managerial posts, and the key message here as far as top male managers are concerned, despite not saying as much outright, is: women have themselves to blame.

Conditio sine qua non: family in the background

Men with this mentality pattern consider marriage (whether still in place or not) and children an informal but vital prerequisite for those aspiring to executive status or a top managerial post (executive board, directorate).

“It is expected of executives that they be married, with an average of two children.”

“The family is a must for men on the Board.”

“A woman who wishes to secure an executive post should on no account underestimate the importance of being married. You can work as hard as you like: as long as you aren’t married, there will be a gap in your CV. You might as well go home and forget it.”

For a woman even to be considered for a leading (managerial) position, she must have experienced this family phase first hand, because – according to top managers – it will have allowed her to develop those skills that are so vital in managing a company. Being married and having children is seen as a practical indication of social and management skills.

The reasons for this are given as follows:

- A position of leadership involves dealing with many people who themselves have a family, for which one requires the appropriate empathy and understanding;
- People in a stable relationship are better able to work under pressure, better balanced and less hectic.

“For men this is an absolute must. Otherwise they won’t make it into senior positions. They have to be married by their early 30s at the latest, with between 1 and 4 children by their mid-30s. The typical average in our company is 3 children.”

“Experience tells us that this is an essential stabilizing factor for executive personnel. After all, they are under a lot of pressure and need something to act as a counterweight.”

“When highly qualified women are married and have kids, they don’t just manage their household but also know how to deal with men, namely their husband and all the rest as well. That tends to mean they have social skills, i.e. rather than evading the issue in a conflict situation at work they’re more likely to tackle it head on to seek an amicable solution. They’re in a position to delegate tasks, otherwise they wouldn’t be able to assign chores to their husband while at work. Yes, there’s no getting around it. It only works if the woman’s got her husband under control and can manage everything satisfactorily. Whether or not he’s agreeable to the situation is neither here nor there: but she must resolve the situation.”

“A woman with a family demonstrates better social skills in leading others. Our Director is a woman with two children who is far more straightforward in her dealings with men, talking to them in a far more relaxed manner, i.e. not doggedly determined to get her own way. She comes up with solutions and puts them to the men as a package with which they are able and willing to work with. These solutions stem from her professional expertise and her social skills, skills that a woman must also gather from her experience of life. And such experience gleaned within a family environment is worth its weight in gold.”

“Guardians of the glass ceiling”: a thick description of the mentality patterns found in male executives

Women keen to ‘shoot’ to the top, foregoing partnership, children and family life for the sake of their career (and offering this to their employer as a special merit) often find themselves sidetracked and at a dead end within the company, – without ever being told as much in plain terms. They continue to be seen as valuable top performers, but are out of the running when it comes to positions of leadership.

“They want things to happen too fast, and they are focused on it too much. They’ve more or less blanked out everything else from their life. And that leads to conflicts.”

“It’s a plain fact: when you’ve got a woman who doesn’t have this background and who’s keen to reach the top by the age of 35, she’s going to be lacking this experience of life.”

At the same time, it is taken for granted that the woman will no longer be struggling with the task of balancing job and family, and will already have the ‘young family’ phase behind her.

In conservative, patriarchal management cultures women do make it into middle management and some even into senior management. But despite having penetrated these glass ceilings, they don’t stand a chance of getting to the very top. This is no mere empirical observation, but a company’s maxim which in some cases becomes part of the their identity.

“No problem at all reaching the last stage before the Executive Board. In our group we’ve got three women at pre-board level.”

Professional expertise and performance aren’t everything

Highly qualified women with ambitious career plans assume that a woman must achieve considerably more than a man with the same qualifications in order to secure a highly paid executive post involving power and responsibility. During their progress to the level below the coveted executive floors, they have learned that their only chance of making it to the very top as a woman is to have excellent academic qualifications complete with an array of language qualifications and additional professional diplomas, to present a curriculum vitae with evidence of several periods of employment in large groups or smaller dynamic companies, and to concentrate 100% on the job, with everything else in life playing a subordinate role.

This is something that well-qualified women *experience first hand* in their early careers and repeatedly see going on around them. Hence the maxim – backed up in the business press and women’s magazines – that as a woman one is obliged to display *more* diligence, *more* professional expertise and *more* commitment than men (with the same qualifications) in order to land an attractive, prestigious job with a higher salary, substantial responsibility and good chances of promotion.

Women additionally aspiring to a career at senior and top levels take with them the maxims deduced from this experience to the *highest executive positions*. It is however a fatal error to assume that the preconditions and logics that enabled them to reach pre-board level continue to apply when it comes to actually entering the boardroom.

Men who have been active at the top of the executive tree for many years draw a different picture. According to this, it is almost bound to be counterproductive for women (but not necessarily for men) if they continue to focus on their professional expertise and performance to see them over the threshold to the top positions. It is more important to engage in tactically and communicatively smart *corporate policy* both inside and outside the company with a view to furthering its overall interests. Resources of particular importance here and representing further potential for the company are *personal networks* with as much *global clout* as possible.

“I’ll be quite blunt about this: your qualifications play no role at all when it comes to getting onto the Board.”

“Women need to learn that achievement isn’t everything. Qualifications are all well and good – but not everything. In my experience they count for less than a third. It’s far more crucial how one collaborates with the company. For instance, take someone who is the shooting star and high performer within a firm; such busywork is fine, but no use to anyone. They have to cooperate within the team. And women are actually better predestined for that.”

“We’re encountering more and more highly trained, competent women applying for top jobs who, at the end of the day, are unable, unwilling or see no need to deploy their feminine qualities, even though their specific strengths are indeed called for. They follow the motto: ‘What I need now is my MBA, and I don’t mind working a 70-h week at all.’ We counter this quite simply with: ‘We don’t expect you to work 70 hours a week, because then you must be doing something wrong in your job, you’re failing to delegate properly.’ But their mentality is such that they say they have to do everything themselves because they’re the only one who’s good enough. And that stands in the way of some people. Although women are the better team players in my view, they become the poorer team players when attempting to do a good job in an executive position.”

Women are unwelcome on the Executive Board

“The fact is that there’s no woman on the company’s Executive Board and never has been” – hence the emergence of a norm to the effect that *there shouldn’t be* a woman on the Board. Although, from a philosophical point of view, it may be a naturalistic error to turn a mere statement of fact into a declared target, such arguments are entirely irrelevant for the representatives and apologists of this standpoint. They are merely concerned with stability and security, maintaining the status quo and defending the cultural heritage, something that is considered to be a pillar of the company’s success and that should not be compromised or toppled in the name of equality.

“There could well be unforeseeable indirect consequences for the degree of acceptance enjoyed by the Management and for its strength of leadership – and that’s an unnecessary risk.”

On the one hand this argumentation follows the logic of a *fait accompli*: “That’s the way it is!” On the other hand, the exclusion of women from the Executive Board on principle is justified using functional lines of argument. There are two starting points here: (1) women are deemed to be lacking understanding of what the job profile requires, namely being a corporate politician inside and outside the company; (2) even those women with the strong professional and social skills needed to fulfill this function represent a source of irritation for the men-only managing body simply by virtue of their gender. Whereas in the first instance the individual woman is disqualified, in the second it is her gender that, within the context of functioning groups of men, symbolizes the alien and the different, the uninitiated and the uncertain, and also the ambitious, someone who possibly wouldn’t accept and adopt the rules and rituals, gestures and styles but criticize, attack and overturn them instead.

“This group is conservative to the core and won’t tolerate a woman on the Board, period. That’s just how it is.”

“Generally, the main criterion for Board Members is not being a woman.”

“A woman isn’t considered up to the task of being a Member of the Board. I’m not talking about her professional and technical skills, because they’re not needed on the Board anyway; our Board Members see themselves more as corporate politicians. Frau Merkel can remain Chancellor as long as she likes, but it’s not the way we do things.”

“At the moment the Board consists of a group of 5 men. Their behavior towards one another is quite different to how they would treat each other if a lady were in their midst. That’s one of the main reasons, although people loathe to say as much, why executive circles are usually comprised of men only.”

“A woman on the Board would interfere with the interpersonal relations.”

“She disrupts the circle. Sorry, but they communicate differently. To put it bluntly: the men can’t tell as many dirty jokes anymore. It’s not the professional expertise that’s called into question, that’s not the point at all. It’s purely about her disrupting the circle, the circle of men.”

Human resource management and public relations are dead ends

For around three decades, women who have enjoyed an excellent education and training – every bit as good if not better than that of men – have been confidently pursuing executive positions. From today’s perspective, experience has shown that women did not define their goals autonomously or achieve all that they set out to achieve. If one looks at the areas in which women occupy senior managerial posts, one finds that they are largely in human resources and public relations. It is fair to assume that they have accomplished the goals within their reach. Within this historical period, they have achieved as much as it was possible for them to achieve.

So, are human resources and public relations the ‘gateways’ for women to gain board member status in other areas such as finance, marketing, buying, or controlling? The conservative male mentality pattern outlined here forecasts otherwise, namely that these two areas are more likely to prove dead ends. The more women who work in these areas, in senior positions, the more the respective area loses recognition and authority within the company and the less it can be seen as a springboard for promotion to the very top. Women – according to conservative senior managers – are primarily to be found in human resources and public relations because men have ceded these domains to them. These areas offer less in the way of career opportunities because a disproportionately high number of women work there – that, at least, is the view of conservative, patriarchal top managers.

“The only area headed by women is Human Resources. The HR domain is becoming feminized, that of continuing education also. It embraces everything; all soft factors are bundled there and then the original strength of the department crumbles. When I was taken on 30 years ago, it was the personnel department that decided who got the job. Today, it is the line that decides, and HR is no more than a paperboy. They receive the application, the assessment from the line departments, are told whom to employ and then write the contract which is subsequently approved by the line department.”

“The reason is that it’s mainly women who work there and, quite simply, the decision-making function has moved elsewhere. That’s why fewer men have gone into HR. This department is being lumbered with increasingly ‘soft’ issues: continuing education, drugs, health.”

“Human resources and public relations: those are the two areas in which women stand a chance. But other areas are more attractive for men as they wield more influence with greater scope for creativity.”

“Human resources and corporate communications aren’t springboards on the way up the career ladder. Okay, it’s possible to grow and develop in HR and PR as well, and people do so. But as a woman, once in HR or PR you’re not going to move anywhere else. It’s the end of the road for them.”

Men in executive positions display better social skills: women adopt a more male behavior than men themselves

The status quo is legitimized by a series of arguments relying on relatively crude role models. A typical – and rather grotesquely ‘comical’ – example is the rigorous gender perspective, but with a different reasoning to that of the apologists for the feminist movement. Conservative, patriarchal business managers make ‘the men’ versus ‘the women’ distinction – often occupying a general position far removed from individualization and diversification. Despite their modern style and successful economic strategy, they still cling to a traditional and pre-modern interpretation of gender and role.

The crux of the matter is a disrespectful view of women exactly in the very sphere which is attributed to ‘the women’ as per the popular, banal and stereotypical cliché: the female aptitude for social empathy and communication. It amounts to a demonstration with symbolic value when patriarchal company executives claim for themselves greater competence in a field such as social skills, thereby demonstrating a self- or male-celebratory perspective.

“Women are the inferior team players. This shows in their far poorer communication skills and far poorer collaboration with men; they often feel snubbed – without cause – and assume the worst, which then reflects in their behavior.”

The image that men have of women in executive positions – whether the result of experience or projection – is that women ‘actually’ possess the better social skills and so ought to manage staff better than men. But once in senior management posts, women put aside their social skills, suppressing and concealing them for fear of appearing weak. After all, or so it is assumed, women careerists feel they can’t afford to make errors because others won’t be forgiving of their mistakes. According to conservative executives, this is precisely what triggers the feared scenario: a *self-fulfilling prophecy*. Women suppress their competencies.

At the same time – according to men – women who work on the business operations side display all too often an *obsession with details* that, instead of furthering the cause, is actually both technically and socially counter-productive. And women refuse to listen to reason, they won’t give an inch: they stick to their own convictions and attempt to implement these come what may – even in the face of resistance from the Board. Their personal conviction is more important to them than the company line. As such, women create friction, resistance and conflicts.

“There’s more frictional loss. It begins with the fact that far more women are obsessed with details. Men tend to be generalists which – I’m speaking from experience now – makes them more tolerant of staff along the lines of ‘OK, he made an error, so what. We saw it, rectified it, end of story’. It’s typical of many women in senior management to pick on details all the time. For example a decision may not have taken every single detail into account – or despite all details having been decided, it was then implemented differently – all this nit-picking, digging deeper for details leads to stress within the work organization so that women are more likely to come up against a brick wall because staffers have had enough and say ‘That’s not the way to do it, you can count me out!’. And we also have a lot of serious disputes with the Works Council when women are involved. I don’t mean subordinates, but those in management.”

“The business world is conservative. And that means you make far more progress if you apply a certain canon. The right code of conduct (Ms Manners) really does help you along. Okay! So, as a woman you shouldn’t defy it. If you snap at somebody saying ‘I can take care of that myself!’, it may be a nice gesture but isn’t smart, because it quickly gives you the reputation of being a women’s libber and uncooperative.”

Driven by ambition and a degree of toughness that they deem necessary in a position of leadership, ‘career women’ take their cue from an image of male strength, which doesn’t work. They try to be more masculine than many a man. Feeling vulnerable in their new terrain, they engage in a ritual of outdoing others in order to be taken seriously and be recognized as a person of authority, and ultimately to perform their executive duties just as well as men if not better.

“The problem that I feel women executives have is that they behave in too masculine a way.”

“Too demure. You might also say: an imitation of men. It starts with the fact that the classic garb of a career woman is the trouser suit. Ghastly, but they don’t notice the fact. The attempt to emulate by wearing the trouser suit is no help at all. Then there’s the relatively austere hairstyle, very understated makeup, perfect, everything always matches, no question. Except, as I said, you can tell what’s going on a mile off.”

“You can tell my the manner of a woman intent on making a career for herself that a lot of women think they need to be better at their job than a man and need to give an outward display of the fact through their demeanor, attitude, comments and appearance. This puts men off, and since it’s men who’ve got their finger on the button, it means the women get the short end of the stick.”

“When decisions go against women, – something you must never take too seriously – they tend to get that down-at-the-mouth look. It’s pretty easy to tell when something isn’t going a woman’s way. Embittered is perhaps too strong a word, but a glum look, unfavorable expressions, and an unfavorable posture.”

The manifold descriptions of career women proffered by conservative, patriarchal company managers are designed to lend legitimacy to the unequal status of women in executive positions. The various disqualifying traits (“demure”, “emulation of men”, “unreasonable”, “excessively tough”, “obsessed with details”, “heavy-handed in managing staff”, etc.) amount to a declaration of bankruptcy for women, unless one attempts to reflect on what prompts men to see ‘women’ in such an undifferentiated light.

We have found this conservative, patriarchal mentality pattern in large international corporations with a fundamentally cosmopolitan, innovative, modern and flexible approach in their dealings within the global market place – and where one would normally expect an emancipated appreciation of men and women.

Family businesses also display a patriarchal mentality pattern. It is only when the founder’s highly qualified daughter works her way into or inherits the firm that the woman stands a chance.

It would be altogether too simple to moralize and stigmatize this mentality pattern as being arrogant, narcissistic or even stupid. The more interesting question at stake here is why this mentality pattern exists in our modern society and why it works in companies that can only survive in today’s market by virtue of their modernity, power of innovation and flexibility.

5.2 Type 2: A fundamentally emancipated attitude – but women powerless against male power rituals

Within corporate middle management in particular, a modern mentality pattern has become established that distances itself from the traditional defensiveness towards women (Mentality Type 1), even adopting a fundamentally emancipist stance: men and women have equal rights and should in fact – in all fairness and on the grounds of their value for the company – be equally represented in the upper echelons of the companies. These managers have strong sympathy for committed and ambitious women on their way up the career ladder. And yet they are highly skeptical about women’s chances of making it in the same way and in similar numbers as men, confronted as they are by male power rituals and given the increasingly merciless pressure to reduce success to ‘profit’ at the various levels on the way to the top.

These managers are familiar with the *closed circles* in the board room immediately above them (directorate, executive board, supervisory board) and are in a position to observe the mechanisms, rituals and pressure of power that prevail there. Meanwhile they occasionally have female colleagues working at the same level to whom they take a fundamentally positive attitude and from whose work they have learned to appreciate the ‘added value’ of women in managerial positions. These men are convinced that women executives represent a success factor for a company and that more women, including at senior management level, would prove advantageous for corporate culture, networking and company image.

The previously described conservative, patriarchal type flatly denies that women possess the emotional, social and business skills that make a good manager. The male-dominated corporate tradition leads them to view women executives as foreign bodies. By way of contrast, the – in terms of age and values – younger mentality type described here makes a structural and cultural distinction between two management levels: on the one hand middle and senior management, to which they themselves belong, and the next level up, namely that of top management (directorate, executive board, supervisory board).

The men with this type of mentality see these two levels as fundamentally distinct in that each calls for completely different skills, different rules prevail, and different communication rituals are played out. *“The Board of Directors: that’s a whole different ballgame”*.

Trusting in success or in labor relations

Top management is all about economic successes with which to fill the balance sheets at ever briefer intervals. An executive board is gauged on this basis, and this alone, while all other qualities and tasks are delegated to subordinate levels. The monetary success of the company has top priority. In the eyes of middle management, executive boards follow the maxim of getting as much as possible out of the resources available, improving efficiency, and deploying an array of technology to achieve optimal results. Mercilessly squeezing the company for all it is worth is the name of the game – not just in the short term, but on a sustainable basis. After all, they are responsible not only for the next accounting period but those thereafter and are obliged to keep generating a healthy profit. The job profile is basically very simple, or, to be more precise, one-dimensional.

This being so, the personality profile for this function is clearly defined: **toughness!**

Although women are indeed credited with possessing this degree of toughness, the idea clashes with the image of women in our society (socially minded, mellow, holistic, and sympathetic). A woman on the Board who displays such toughness would immediately stand out and be subject to criticism. What might seem normal for a man in this position, have become the customary state of affairs, is in a woman considered “inappropriate”, “not feminine”, “trying to hard to be masculine”, etc. As such she would not be a positive representative of the company and might even damage the image and the brand.

“The board members I know, well, what are they paid to do? They’re paid for success and not for being team players.”

“With this male thing of ‘we’re tough, we’re pals, and when we take a fall, it makes us even tougher’ and in this success-driven world along the lines ‘Come on, squeeze even more out of your lads!’ women are simply out of place.”

In **middle management**, on the other hand, the goals are more varied: naturally it is about quantitative success (turnover, added value), but *also* about corporate culture, the working environment, and the well-being of individual staff.

“Were I were to manage my heads of department solely on the basis of success, then the quality of our relationship would suffer. It’s important to remember this because I provide a home and a future for 20 people, and it’s not all just about success.”

“I mean, when you give someone the job on the Board, you’re not interested in how he’s going to do it. He just does it, and that’s what members of the Board have to deliver. They have to provide figures and can’t afford to talk about how much happiness or suffering goes with it. And that’s what they do. I call it trust in success what is shown to them. At the second level, say in my job, it’s also about trusting us to succeed, but on top of that I need to cultivate people’s trust in labor relations. Can a department manager talk to me as a colleague, without feeling afraid?”

The job profile is more complex: a middle manager has to strike a balance between quantity and quality, between successfully balancing the department’s books and the work climate within the department, between operative performance and the well-being of individual staff. Although social clichés lead to women being credited with superior social skills and a sounder instinct in dealing with people, there is some skepticism in management circles as to whether women will still display these skills as an executive and manage to balance the demands described.

Whether stemming from experience or prejudice, there is a sense that female executives focus too strongly on a single pole (either success or work climate), fail to achieve a balance between proximity and distance, are either too mild or authoritarian (or fluctuate between the two), and are thus liable to create latent resistance among staff (both men and women), leading to needless frictional losses. This is considered one reason why, despite there being more women in middle management these days as compared to 10 or 20 years ago, their representation still remains far lower than the proportion of women with excellent qualifications and a wealth of professional experience under their belts.

Men do not need to struggle to be accepted *as a man* in an executive position. Thanks to the fact that males in executive posts traditionally represent the norm, such managers are seen as a given or viewed in “neutral” terms.

Language games and rituals of outdoing others

Within the male-dominated *inner circle* of top management, despite all the collegiality, mutual respect and business-like cooperation, ritual demonstrations of personal success and power are normal and normative (expected) forms of communication. These are sometimes expressly provocative in style, even unfiltered and deliberately crude or abrasive. For the most part, however, communication is distinguished, using subtle, well-placed means of conveying impulses and significant messages.

“When the word’s board members come together at some event or other, what takes place? ‘My car, my second home, my ... – I can top the other guy’s joke.’ A lot of small talk goes on, a whole lot about ‘Who’s got the longest?’ Period. Sorry.”

“And then you get an aside like ‘You’ve seemed a bit tense just recently. I’m worried about you.’ And that was it!”

The goal is *not* to win every time, beat the other guy or even humiliate him, but (in tacit agreement) to emerge as the one who is always on the ball and ready to play the game. This takes an intuitive feel for the situation and the ‘opponent’, tactical skill to identify the right moment and the right choice of ‘weapon’, farsightedness, sufficient communicative and intellectual powers for the thrust and parry, along with the inventiveness required to surprise.

This verbal game of attack is flanked by gestures of physical dominance: sweeping arm movements; demonstrating physical presence by ‘commanding the ambient space’ or by radically reducing all movement, a deep (unusually loud or quiet) voice that makes itself heard, interrupting others’ flow of conversation (but not allowing oneself to be interrupted),

displaying patience (but not merely listening for long), having the last word in the form of a final comment, etc. Such rituals, perceived to be typically ‘male’ and understood by women in middle management as skirmishes between the top dogs, are **demonstrations of strength**.

What from a distance may seem like archaically male manifestations have an important social and economic function, otherwise they would never have become cultivated and established in the first place: namely that of making sure within one’s circle of co-workers whether or not they are fully equipped to do their job while demonstrating one’s own indomitability and repartee. These rituals of outdoing others demonstrate suitability for the executive post, as do territorial engagements to warn off others, playfully sounding out people’s ‘resolve to stand their ground’, finding out whether the other person is a strong ally, whether a cautious tack is required, or whether they have something interesting to offer.

A number of top-level female executives find this specific culture of demonstrating personal superiority very alien and also abhorrent, an interesting fact in as far as this masculine show of authority and strength has precisely the desired effect of discouraging women.

“Language games are being played here, clearly signaling that women should not and can not enter. It is a male inner circle that a woman can, at best, only hope to endure.”

Ambition in executive positions: normal for men, suspect in the case of women

When a professionally competent, intelligent and committed man aspires to a senior managerial post, this meets with little surprise and seems like the normal career path to follow. It is even expected of him, and were he not to show interest in taking up a managerial post within his reach, preferring instead to stick to his current job where he loves the work and has (more) time for his family or hobbies, such behavior would be viewed with suspicion.

If, on the other hand, a bold and capable woman aspires to make such a career move, she becomes somewhat suspect. Even though far more women today are to be found in middle and senior management than two decades ago, ambitious women are subject to greater scrutiny. Their behavior in various situations is dissected and appraised, only to reach the foregone conclusion that she is ‘different’ from ‘normal women’ and from men in the same position.

A man, therefore, tends to attract unfavorable attention if he does *not* aspire to get ahead. For women the reverse is true: she becomes the victim of preset norms under which she risks attracting unfavorable attention if she *does* make a career for herself/aspires a career and can expect to have her motives questioned.

“When women develop ambition, they are considered suspect by those around them. But if a well-educated, upstanding, responsible and ambitious young man were to fail to develop such instincts, people would say: ‘No, he’s not suitable, he hasn’t got enough bite.’ By contrast, when a woman does have what it takes, the same people look at her closely to see what drives her.”

At the same time, the above quotation clearly illustrates the pressure that **men** are under, namely that of having to prove they have the requisite ‘bite’. Men on their way to the top are tested in a *different* way to women.

Grinning and bearing male rituals, but not playing along

The verbal and habitual rules and games described above prevail within the social circles of managers (meetings, committees, clubs) *whether women are present or not*. Male executives feel this is something a woman just has to swallow and accept. And she’s not allowed to play by these rules herself because then she would lack credibility, seeming unauthentic, unfeminine and indeed all too masculine.

And yet there is a perception that a number of the (few) women in executive positions manifest a very masculine behavioral pattern. Some men in middle and senior management are **disconcerted** when a woman combines **strength with charm**. Although men may think they have a differentiated perception of the women “up there”, it is nonetheless fair to say that they are quick to believe the cliché: ‘goal-orientation’ is a masculine trait. According to this logic, virtually all the characteristics expected of executives are per se ‘masculine’. In the minds of her (male) surroundings, there are two paradoxical options open to a female senior manager: (1) she has good leadership qualities, in which case she is quasi a man and betraying her femaleness; or (2) she seems soft and feminine, in which case she can’t be a good manager. If she nonetheless proves successful, then her femininity and charm are seen as a deliberately deceptive front behind which lurks a tough character. As such, a woman is suspect and hence to be regarded with suspicion. Many senior male managers find it difficult to appreciate that strength and charm can exist harmoniously side by side (in one person).

“Goal-oriented women often adopt male features. A pretty mantle, as it were, is basically hiding what are in effect inherently masculine traits.”

Male egocentricity

In top management, it is normal for personal interests to come before corporate interest and even represent a career advantage in the medium term. While going against the grain of political correctness and seemingly at odds with economic reason and the brief of a company manager, this very behavioral pattern can be observed among those towards the top of management hierarchies. They have the courage and chutzpah, audacity and coolness to allow the occasional project to go to the wall, produce situations of trench warfare (divide and conquer!), as well as set false trails and traps for others.

Crucial here: although one must be *capable* of such behavior, it should *not be part of one's character*. It is all part of the game, otherwise one ends up as the victim. And the cliché is: women are unable and unwilling to go along with and endure such tactical and perfidious games.

“Getting right to the top has nothing to do with formal achievement – they’re all top people, all the board members I’ve ever met: the smartest and best educated people you could hope for. Maximizing personal gain and looking after vested interests take precedence over their sense of team spirit, in other words what is good for the company. I think this kind of person feels the need to sabotage the integration of a colleague in order to then bring about integration himself. It has to do with aggression and my intuition tells me that a woman would talk to the staff and colleagues beforehand. And that’s sometimes not quite what it takes to go all the way to the top.”

“After 30 years of observing board members I can say that they go by the credo ‘I pursue my own goals!’. This is of course also good for the company, and can always be justified. The opposite is: ‘I put the goals of the company before my own’. That’s a characteristic I’d be more likely to attribute to a woman.”

“They don’t get to where they are because of using their elbows and because they are unmannerly, but they must be capable of acting this way. That’s why I’m not saying these people are like this all the time, but they have to be prepared to pay the price in terms of their personal values if they really want the job. That’s where women are different.”

Different career motives for women

When it comes to ‘motives for getting a career’, men of the mentality type projected here often project very positive clichés onto women in executive positions: selfless, truly interested in what’s at stake, fair, plenty of idealism.³¹ By contrast, men in middle management positions cast a damning light on their own sex – particularly at the next level up from themselves – describing them as pragmatic, opportunist, disinterested: they are solely interested in power and prestige.

³¹ One interpretation would be: ambitious women with whom one is not acquainted (i.e. women in general) have noble goals; the reality is, however, that women are hindered from progressing up the ladder.

“The men are intent on gaining power, the women on achieving self-realization.”

“Women care more about the essence, the issue at stake, whereas men tend to instrumentalize the issue for their career, along the lines ‘I don’t care what I have to do, the main thing is that it adds up and stands me in good stead in the end. I’ll do whatever it takes.’ This is the category most likely to succeed in the German business world.”

“I’ve never met a woman who said: ‘I don’t care what I have to do, I’ll do it to get to the top.’ – I’ve never seen that in a woman. I see it in men though, it’s no exception with men. They don’t admit as much, but underneath they believe: ‘You have to get your hands a bit dirty.’”

One attitude held by men is that bosses gradually shed their former morals shaped by idealism and selflessness as they move up the career ladder, eventually becoming egoistic, opportunistic, lonesome ‘means-to-an-end’ strategists: and, as such, successful. This is one reason why people admire precisely those men in executive positions who have retained their idealism and authentic empathy with their staff. But they are the exception.³²

Women in executive positions are either pigeonholed as a ‘self-serving bitch’, or on the contrary: people hope and assume that a woman with ideals will not be so quick to shed this ideal in a position of leadership.

A must: aptitude for power issues

Besides special professional skills, intelligence and keen perception, people in executive positions are characterized by a sense of the issues and situations relevant (if not crucial) to influence and power.

Here again – among men in middle management – there is a marked tendency to regard men as primarily capable of such intuition and cleverness.

Behavior that attracts mild moral admonishment but is actually admired when found in men is appraised quite differently in women. Women who display the behavior described meet with strong rejection: a woman is neither entitled to such behavior, nor does it suit her! And one finds that such traditional views on men and women’s respective roles still run particularly deep in the upper echelons of management where they are firmly entrenched. Here, however, people prefer to think they have a modern understanding of gender roles along with an emancipated perception of women. This is all part of political correctness.

It is precisely this oscillation between the traditional role cliché and a modern female image that makes it so difficult for women to enter executive domains, confidently interpret gestures and general rules, maneuver around the handed-down mechanisms of power and communicate a new understanding of the female executive role.

³² The fact that people makes such a distinction between themselves and those above is possibly also a reaction to the perceptible pressure from above or a result of envy at not (yet) having managed to reach such heights oneself. The attitude of men in middle (and to an extent in senior) management is that they currently find themselves at the (morally) superior hierarchical level.

“High achievement depends on special expertise, motivation and intelligence. In my experience, board members, and I know 20 to 30, are better than average in this respect. I’ve never encountered one who wasn’t capable of grasping situations really quickly. So, where does the difference actually lie? I think it’s that they’re able to look beyond the facts and possess an instinctive grasp of power; they know what goes down well and what doesn’t, regardless of whether it’s right or not. They’re very good at that.”

Strategic, flexible role players

Top managers, especially, are not allowed to be authentic but must (be able to) make smart, strategic use of specific role play. Their personal feelings within a situation are a hindrance rather than a help, possibly revealing a weakness that others could exploit in a different situation. As a top manager one can not afford to lay oneself bare. But slipping into various roles not only serves a defensive function, but acts as an instrument of attack as well:

“They play different roles, I mean: the charismatic speaker and the low-down dirty rat in a single breath. They’re quite capable of it, all of them.”

“The guys on the Board do this well: I know XY, I know the XZ [note: → well-known top managers in German industry], I know board representatives, chairmen, managing directors, bank directors, etc. They’re capable of totally winning you over, understanding you, saying ‘Ah, don’t be modest, you’ve done a really good job!’ And the next minute: ‘You’ll just have to grit your teeth and see it through!’”

Senior executives describe this morally taboo behavior on the part of top managers in noticeably neutral terms, namely as communication techniques and social skills. They defend it against ‘priggish’ criticism as serving the interests of the company. But women are neither permitted nor are they willing to display such behavior – and if they do so, they are branded as typical arrogant bitches who, on their way to the top, have trained themselves in the art of radically male conduct, forgetting what is appropriate and decent for a woman along the way.

“Women can play a lot of roles, but kicking the lads in the balls isn’t how they do things. Now there’s an example of male lingo. That’s the way it is, I’ve rarely experienced this in women.”

“Women aren’t allowed to do what distinguishes men and makes them successful.”

So, although women are credited with the *skills* for flexible role play, it is not deemed *legitimate* for them to deploy the requisite repertoire in a managerial capacity.

Middle management: career in the post-family phase

Highly qualified, professionally skilled and committed women under the age of 35 or 40 are considered an incalculable risk for assignments in middle management, particularly if they do not have children. One always has to be prepared for the fact that they may become pregnant and be ‘absent’ for an extended period. A brief absence of a few weeks does not pose a problem as it can be covered by the human resources available; however, when a woman takes parental leave for three or even six months, the department is obliged to find another solution. And it is no easy task to find a qualified substitute who is prepared to take on a post temporarily and then relinquish it again.

How much time out can an executive afford to take when a child comes along?

“They can’t take any at all as far as I’m concerned.”

“4 weeks, 2 to 3 months at the outside!”

“A colleague of mine has 3 women in his department. One is head of the department, two are key players. Now they’re all pregnant. He is in a really bad way. He needs to find replacements, but that’s not possible. So who does the work? He does it himself. When does he do it? In his free time. So why on earth should he employ women who don’t yet have children and are of child-bearing age?”

This means that the minimum parental leave of two months is the maximum amount feasible – this applies especially to women in executive posts. At the same time, however, a woman is considered a bad mother if she returns to her desk too soon:

“A quote from my circle of friends, from a working woman: ‘I’ll be back 8 days later.’ This causes raised eyebrows, at least among women, and among men, too, depending on what type they are. The period really shouldn’t be too prolonged. Four to six months are acceptable, but for this job kind of job, it’s almost too long.”

Given candidates with similar qualifications, the same family status, both without children and of the same age, it is less of a risk for companies to pick a man for the job, or possibly a woman who already has children.

“Women with children tick the box ‘past starting a family’. They are very interested in the subject matter and are strong team players. Those are real bonuses.”

“The lesser risk is to employ and promote women who already have children.”

Men in middle management earn bonus points among their colleagues and staff when they are available for their family in emergencies during working hours, i.e. driving the child to the doctor, fetching it from kindergarten, etc. This is providing they do not always leave the office at 5.30 p.m. on the dot, but are prepared to work late if necessary. The important signal here is men in middle management no longer have to exclude or block out their family from their everyday working life entirely as was customary twenty years ago and is still the case today in very conservative companies.

The crux is that such family orientation may only be freely communicated within the same level of hierarchy – and not divulged any further up the scale.

“At middle management level, for example, if I told colleagues that I needed to fetch my daughter, it would earn their respect. I’d rather not admit it to the Executive Board though.”

Men in middle management are enjoying the new-found freedom of no longer being obliged to segment themselves (working hours versus leisure time) by drawing strict lines between their role as divisional head and work colleague and their role as husband and father. Modern men are called upon to integrate more or less autonomously the various roles demanded of them into their daily and weekly routines, thereby striking their own balance. This does not apply to board members: they remain subject to strict temporal and spatial divisions.

Whereas for men in middle management, a **flexible approach to their different roles** is seen as a benefit, a female manager deploying the same flexibility is interpreted as someone attempting a precarious **balancing act** presumed to be a very difficult feat.

Top management: while a necessity for men, a family is somewhat suspect for a woman

Here again, as with the first mentality type outlined earlier, an intact family is considered to be the norm. The difference lies in the fact that whereas the family of the first mentality type appears to be a normative requirement that is simply part and parcel of the top manager job profile, here it is more of an empirical observation, without any normative connotations. One simply finds that most top managers have the family as their private castle in which they can be themselves, release their emotions and recharge their emotional batteries.

It falls to the families of high-flying managers to top up the man’s resources, acting as his emotional, social and energy ‘power pack’. This makes the family a dependent and available “function” for board members. During his everyday working life, however, the family is taboo; it is not allowed to make demands on his time, attention, and flexibility and instead must cater for his needs.

“I’m seeing that these men always have a relatively intact family that acts as an absorber. They can go home, cry a few tears there, have a good moan and know they’ll meet with understanding – and then they return to the battle front.”

“Marriages really are a kind of pressure absorber for board members.”

“A member of the board once told me: if they were to take away my family, there wouldn’t be any point to it all.”

“If they don’t have a family that’s prepared to pay the relatively high price involved, then it won’t work. The men must gear their life to their professional status entirely; the family has to adjust to the man’s job. There’s no leeway for the man, even if he is able afford plenty in the material sense.”

The family as a precondition imposed on men does not apply for women. In the case of a female executive a family (especially with children under 16) is a burden, a source of irritation; it provokes speculation that there must be something ‘not quite right’ with her private life. Because – and this is how people think: family and executive status only work if one partner is willing to compromise. What is needed when a woman holds a senior managerial post is a reversal of the traditional gender roles – but that discredits her husband. Or else the woman deliberately foregoes the opportunity to have children – but then the assumption is ...

- 1.) that her professional zeal is leading her to do without everything else in life. The fact that she is willing to do anything to get to the top makes her dangerous.
- 2.) that she is missing the social family domain which is so important as a place where she can let herself go, recuperate, and accumulate experience along with valuable social skills. Those without this opportunity lack – in the long run – what it takes to lead a grounded and balanced existence.

“A woman executive without a family? That’s rather unconventional, odd and, as such, doesn’t fit into this ordered scheme of things.”

“I don’t think that would be particularly consistent with her colleagues’ convictions and view of the world.”

“I mean, my experience tells me: one of them needs to optimize. If both are out to maximize, then for goodness sake without children.”

“The married couples I know where both partners pursue a career have decided against having children.”

“I think that if a woman decides in favor of a career, then she should decide against having a family.”

So if a woman wants to enter senior management, ‘men’ would urgently recommend that she forego a family. But then she wouldn’t have access to that all-important sphere of emotional recuperation and scope for authenticity where there is no pressure to achieve.

Outlook: women in positions of leadership provide a competitive edge

Even though, based on their experience and their view of women, male executives of this mentality type identify considerable and very diverse obstacles and stumbling blocks for women aspiring to similar positions they nonetheless see women’s future prospects in somewhat optimistic terms. It is important that, in looking ahead to equality, the moral motive becomes supplemented by an economic motive.

“More women in executive positions! These days it is no longer a purely moral argument. This isn’t about quotas, it’s an economic argument. Basically speaking, it has to do with flexibility in the market.”

“I think it represents an economic benefit for the company.”

“Women in management would be good for German companies, and for global concerns too. After all, diversity is a strengthening factor. So you need people who allow diversity. Once this is established, and it’s tough for the first to be promoted up there, then the company is equipped to ward off external offensives because those responsible are better able to view issues from different perspectives.”

Looking ahead to the future, women in senior management are seen as an extension to the existing spectrum, not only giving the company a modern, open-minded image but standing for greater flexibility (also with regard to role distribution) and creating strategic and communicative options. Within a globalized and individualized corporate environment it is particularly important for a forward-looking company to be able to react quickly and dynamically to ever-changing competitive challenges. This also concerns networking: as more and more women in other (national and international companies) gradually progress to executive positions, one’s own company needs to respond accordingly. For instance, in 10 years’ time, a men-only management team will be at a competitive disadvantage in purely performance terms and will impair the image of the company.

Women must be aware of the rules and games that govern non-verbal communication in the board rooms. But when a woman merely copies the existing and hitherto successful rules, she must not only reckon with considerable disadvantages in terms of her womanhood, but will ultimately fail to enrich – also economically speaking – the company’s management portfolio.

“I mean, in dealing with her colleagues, she should be aware of the men’s little games, but shouldn’t join in. She can emulate certain things in order to position herself, but shouldn’t play along with everything. Then she can take up a position of her own and earn respect: ‘She won’t let you get away with that!’ And others will become her enemies. She’ll just have to deal with that. I’m afraid that women will encounter different hostility to men. The fact is: board members who are hostile to each other are capable of forgetting the fact in order to deal with a certain issue ‘OK, so now down to business! We men, we may dislike each other, but we don’t have to be friends, just professionals.’”

“Being aware of these little games, but not joining in. She’s more likely to be on the outside of this circle, looking in. She’ll have a unique position.”

“A cultural transformation really will take place if they stick at it, if becomes a broader phenomenon, a cultural transformation within this inner circle.”

As such, men of the mentality type described here recommend that ambitious women be bold enough to practice their own management culture. Initially the protagonists will have to put up with being somewhat ‘alone’, standing on the perimeter as the only woman among a lot of men. But this could prove to be her USP (unique selling proposition); it would be her way of going out on a limb, a faculty which is NEEDED in and around the board room.

5.3 Type 3: radical individualism: lack of “authentic & flexible women” in the market

A third mentality found in male executives is that these days it is of no consequence at all whether a candidate for a job as a board member, director, or divisional manager is a man or a woman. It all comes down to their personality. Professional qualifications are of course a must, as is an uninterrupted career free from extended breaks. But as long as these preconditions are fulfilled, the consensus here is that it is all about an individual’s inherent ability to manage a domain along with its staff. The view is that women generally have a broader, more refined range of options for communicating with others. There is one maxim for an executive: to be authentic. Things begin to get critical when a woman in a senior managerial position feels she has to be tougher than a man. Then she is no longer authentic.

The crucial question is, however, why are so few women to be found in senior executive posts today? The answer according to representatives of this mentality type is: there are too few women applying for these jobs. In the men’s view, this is due to some of the highly qualified women taking the confident decision to start a family and devote themselves to their children for a few years, with the result that they then lack the requisite career continuity.

Instead of appealing to women (to behave differently or give up their career aspirations), men of this disposition appeal to society and above all politicians to create a basic infrastructure in which a woman can combine family and job.

Based on experience, these men certainly do *not* consider having a family and children a precondition for securing an executive position (as believed by the first mentality pattern described here). However, it is crucial for a company to be able to plan: one needs to know who is available for which business assignments. As it is against the law to ask job candidates and staff about any intention to start a family, companies err on the side of caution when weighing up the pros and cons of offering a senior position to a woman without children.

Rejection of ‘women’s quotas’, whatever their nature, features strongly among this mentality type also. A quota is considered a bad tool as it focuses solely on the formal goal of equality. Although people admit that there is occasionally some justification for using a bad tool to help avoid an even worse situation (such as massive under-representation of women), a quota system is not considered to be in keeping with the times. It is no longer deemed necessary because gender has long ceased to play a role in selecting suitable candidates for jobs in the men’s own companies.

Gender is not what counts

The ideological roots of this mentality type lie in the radically individualist belief that the discrepancies between men and women have been largely evened out in our society, that women no longer face any real structural barriers, and that it depends solely on the personality of an individual how far (s)he climbs the ladder. There is no subtle discrimination based on gender and barely any influence from social role patterns; instead there is just innate talent and individual performance. ‘Gender’ is no longer feasibly sustainable as a category.

“Executives are born. There are people who have the right qualities from the very beginning. You can tell by watching them in the playground, always to the fore. All the others do what this person wants. Not because they exercise force, but because they simply exude a demeanor. If such a person with this kind of aura then sets out to attain a position of leadership and manages to do so, this is obviously ideal. And it has nothing to do with gender.”

“I think having a career depends on the person. You get all kinds of men, and all kinds of women. There comes a point when gender is no longer the decisive factor.”

The experience of freedom and openness expressed here is fascinating, as is the emancipation from gender-specific prejudices and role patterns along with the maxim of individual powers of leadership. This fascination does, however, dim somewhat with the entirely objective realization that even the large companies and groups have no women on their executive boards and that (almost) all senior executive posts are filled by men. Are we dealing here with a delusion of equality which in fact propagates the traditional rituals under pretense of liberalism? And yet compared to the conservative type outlined at the beginning, this mentality type seems more modern and one step ahead when it comes to women in executive positions. Of elementary importance here is the idea, the vision (unfortunately often mistaken for reality but certainly not yet implemented) that achievement and skill should ‘actually’ be the determining criteria for an executive post rather than gender. It is thus interesting to learn what well-established men see as the best strategy for advancing to senior managerial jobs.

Conditio sine qua non (I): authenticity

Whereas the first two mentality types emphasize flexible role play, the type outlined here would argue that the crucial factor is authenticity. Despite the different corporate roles that need fulfilling, personality should never be left out of the equation. On the contrary: true leadership is not down to the perfect exercising of a managerial technique. It has far more to do with credibility and the impression of trustworthiness made on members of staff.

“Authenticity! Not pursuing some sort of theoretical vision! A person’s strength comes from within. Formal qualification is trivial, it’s always the basic prerequisite, but personality is its own master and doesn’t follow any set scheme. That’s certainly the way it is with men, too.”

“Well, a woman who behaves like a man in her executive role is actually making a mistake, because she’s departing from her own strength. She doesn’t need to emulate the man, she’s strong enough in herself. And that in my view is the crucial point, that young women should have the confidence to remain authentic and to act on this authenticity.”

“I think that a woman, like a man, should take care to remain authentic because only then can she be successful in her subsequent dealings with her staff.”

“I don’t actually see any need to differentiate here between men and women. If both are authentic, they come across as having a certain personal touch. If they lack this strength of authenticity, then they come across as mechanical, sort of copied straight from text books.”

In the view of men, the growing significance of the ‘authenticity’ factor is a reason why women do not make it into executive jobs very often (or more often), or why those in such positions are viewed very critically: as men see it, several women on their way up the career ladder try (consciously or pre-consciously) to play a male role because this seems to them a successful strategy. Their habits and gestures then become unauthentic.

“The women who adopt this kind of ‘he-woman’ facade make a negative impression, seem weak. And even if they are able to exert their authority in a very strong and brutal manner, they seem weak in terms of their personality. The same is true for men.”

Conditio sine qua non (II): uninterrupted career

Personal strength of leadership is however just one pillar in the process of becoming short-listed for senior executive assignments in the first place. The second important pillar is a career unmarred by (extended) interruptions. The man/woman should be able to demonstrate career continuity over the preceding six or, better still, ten years.

Weighty *professional and symbolic* motives are used to justify this. The symbolic function should definitely not be underestimated and is perhaps even more important than detailed know-how. In winning the acceptance and loyalty of staff it is an advantage to signal to them that one is a professional who has been in business for years and never absent for any period

worth mentioning. Career continuity constitutes a trust factor for the workforce, but has symbolic relevance even beyond this. After all, the executive represents the company – and business partners along with competitors generally like to know who they are dealing with. An extended absence from professional life is interpreted out of hand as a (potential) deficit.

The fact that only women get pregnant and have children whereas today’s men are (at least) entitled to take parental leave makes it far harder for women keen to have a family to construct a continuous career biography than for men.

“Continuity in one’s professional biography. That’s an important point, it’s the essence of an executive and non-gender-specific. And though it might seem silly, a pregnancy means a break in continuity, and it’s there that we have to work on the general conditions.”

“Today we have too few women moving into these positions of leadership. Of course it has to do with the fact that the women bear the children. This childbearing business naturally poses a dilemma when it comes to accumulating experience. It becomes a kind of caesura.”

“These days a mother, i.e. a woman with a child, in an executive position is still tricky. Unlike in Scandinavia, our support system doesn’t create the scope for a woman to make an objective decision and say: ‘I’m going to stay at home for a year, or, together with my husband, I’m going to combine childcare with part-time work so that I can return to my job and allow my career to carry on.’ After all, she needs a certain amount of time to work up to the executive post.”

“If you’re talking about 1.5 year’s absence, then it really does constitute a break in functional continuity. You need to come up with specific bridging models on the functional side. You can’t just switch off an important function for a year and pretend that nothing’s happened. It may be possible in individual cases where you’ve got strong candidates. But it generally poses a problem. That’s a fact.”

“The thing about managers is: what about the continuity? It’s always a disadvantage that a woman with children is obliged to take time out. We have a lady here who had a child and returned after about 4 months because she was able to make some kind of private arrangements at home. We were all delighted that she had a child.”

The only chance that women stand of moving into an executive position is if their active family phase is already over and done with. Exceptions are those women who, thanks to their family and/or material background, don’t take parental leave and are back at the desk within a few weeks.

During the years of probation and pre-selection, a woman can not afford to show that her time and thoughts are devoted to her family. She is under stronger scrutiny here than a man and needs to demonstrate to the company her greater than normal capacity for working under pressure, her availability at short notice, and her full embrace of flexible and mobile working conditions. She is permitted to show resistance, but only on an objective basis in line with the intrinsic systemic logic of the company’s market policy. She is not allowed to resist if her reasons are non-systemic factors that include ‘family’. Having a family and children is considered all well and good as long as they serve social and emotional enrichment in the private sphere and act as a means of absorbing pressure. On no account must the family be allowed to compromise the availability of the potential executive for the company. This explains why, particularly in the case of executive positions, a woman in the ‘active’ family phase (where the youngest child is between toddler and young teenager) is considered to be at risk of being ‘out of action’. And it is imperative to the survival of the company that the management is never out of action.

Women are thus seen as being a risk factor *before* the potential family phase; *during* the family phase they are subject to scrutiny concerning their ability to work under pressure.

In choosing its management, the company is very interested to minimize this risk. Any woman who is not exceptional in terms of qualifications and personality to the degree that she is far superior to any rival applicant constitutes a latent risk. It is apparent here how **crucial significant signals** can be: the mere fact that a woman has to reconcile career and family is interpreted as a permanent source of pressure.

This puts into perspective the statement demonstratively framed at the beginning, namely that the choosing of an executive **is not a question of gender**, and proves it to be a **moral slogan rather than common practice**.

Basic family circumstances must be right

Characteristic for this mentality type is strong **social criticism** of “such a state of affairs”. But responsibility for finding a solution is delegated to “society” and “politics”: they are responsible for creating a framework within which more women have the courage and opportunity to apply for executive jobs. These men do not see their own companies as responsible. They see no way for a company itself to change the composition of its management, instead **presenting it as “powerless”** because too few suitable women actually apply for the posts in question. The internal corporate mechanisms and cultural structures are taboo areas.

Scandinavia is considered a positive example for the required framework. There – or so it is claimed – the State has promoted and installed infrastructures that allow both partners to work, even in senior managerial positions.

“If we don’t do this, if we don’t create the basic framework, then a woman is always going to be at an objective disadvantage no matter how authentic she is.”

“One point is that they need to create the objective framework within which career and family can be reconciled. These essentials need to be put in place. I’ll give you an example: I’m also responsible for Scandinavia and have a German colleague with family based in Denmark – his wife had triplets. Now that’s nothing to laugh at. He moved to Denmark and he says ‘Things are far better for me here with my family. My wife is returning to work shortly, that’s possible here. There’s a nursery just around the corner from our office.’ The Scandinavians have developed this over the years so that it’s now accepted by society. We have no such history because the social framework lags a long way behind some other countries.”

Some women tend to overcompensate

There are male executives who believe that some ambitious women try to compensate for their gender-related image disadvantage by displaying what are normally considered male managerial attributes more strongly than the men themselves. Men (fellow managers and subordinates) rate such behavior as “overcompensation”.

“These days we are experiencing more situations where we are obliged to dismiss employees. Now that’s not a particularly pleasant task. It calls for a certain inner resilience and also a certain degree of toughness that can go as far as total emotional repression. I’ve seen cases where women occasionally overcompensate. I interpret it as overcompensating. We did indeed have an example where a woman really did act like a terminator whereas a man would have shown a little more empathy. It’s something you see in women, this overcompensation through what they presume to be male modes of behavior. I find it regrettable when they overcompensate. They don’t have to do this.”

“I’ve also experienced situations where women become excessively resolute and thereby disqualify themselves somewhat.”

“It is very noticeable in women that they’re out to assert themselves even more than a man, that they are far keener to prove they are capable of fulfilling a managerial function. And this is occasionally expressed blatantly in a very tough approach leading to hasty action that isn’t always well founded, isn’t always compelling or substantiated, focusing more on personal appearances than on the original task of the unit for which she is responsible.”

Whether or not women do tend to overcompensate can not be ascertained via socio-scientific interviews. What can be empirically gauged, however, is that men do perceive women in executive positions (or aspiring to executive positions) based on this **preset monitoring sensor**. This pre-programmed perception confirms their own hypothesis – and backs up their politically correct mawkishness at the insufficient numbers of women in senior posts.

A frequent appendage to their monitoring sensor is a **scheme of evaluation** that transforms a woman’s show of leadership into a personal weakness because she exaggerates and overcompensates.

The frequent use of the word ‘compensation’ and especially the stronger implication of ‘overcompensation’ is instructive here: it points to the manifestation of a – pre-conscious – hierarchical gender image when it comes to executive positions:

- Compensation is a reaction to a deficit. In the case of male executives, as is apparent from what men have to say on the subject, there is no deficiency that would need compensating.
- In overcompensating, the woman recognizes her shortcomings, acknowledges them and then goes overboard in her response. Finding the right balance for business, for herself and for others is however an indispensable leadership skill.

Men with this mentality pattern are thus saying: it is men who recognize and determine the right balance.

No quota!

The principle “*We’d love to have more women in executive positions*” is flanked by the maxim “But no women’s quota!”. Unlike other jobs within the company, appointing someone to an executive position is a sensitive process and needs to take account of many different effects. The pro-quota argument “... *in cases of equal qualification*” can not be applied to the filling of senior managerial jobs because here the question of aptitude is largely subjective and dependent on personality. Precisely those soft criteria such as authenticity and powers of leadership defy formal definition.

If – it is argued – one were to introduce a quota, this would give rise to an array of imponderables, from the objective, discursive operationalization of specific aptitudes down to acceptance of the women by her colleagues and staff. This culminates in the final plea against a quota along the lines that women would ultimately be stigmatized and their position weakened through a quota system.

“There’s nothing worse than stigmatizing women through a quota.”

“A women’s quota does women no favors. It’s devastating for a woman to be forced to admit about herself ‘I only got the job because of a quota’. They can’t ignore the fact themselves, it clings to them. It’s degrading. They didn’t get the job for being the better candidate but because of the quota! This is damaging to the woman personally, but also in terms of her reputation and the respect paid to her by other senior executives and the staff she has to lead.”

“To begin with, I said I was categorically opposed to quotas. But that’s not being quite honest to myself. It’s a sad fact that methods such as quotas are occasionally necessary in order to break open Stone Age forms of behavior. I mean, you’re actually using a very unfortunate tool in order to trigger movement in an even worse situation. I mean, the situation is very bad and the tool is also unsatisfactory.”

5.4 Conclusion

The ‘false’ logic behind job appointments and the behavioral patterns of ambitious women described by men can not be seen as an objective appraisal of women’s situation but should be interpreted in the first instance as a subjective stocktaking of the mentality of *men* in board rooms above the ‘glass ceiling’. What they have to say reveals not only the multilayered bastions of the business patriarchy with their sometimes subtle, sometimes brutal *entre nous* mechanisms.

Their comments about women reflect not just a fictional, fully unrealistic and unfair judgment of women moving up the ladder towards or already in executive positions, but also an experiential perspective. Neither women nor men can claim to be objective. But as long as the quantitative imbalance exists between male and female executives, it remains the man’s prerogative to define the situation.

- The perceptions of men in executive positions are based on many years of experience and may be seen as well meant recommendations. They include clever tactics and pieces of advice for certain professional and social spheres. At the same time one sees here once more signs of the same handed-down pattern from which modern women wish to emancipate themselves, namely that of being told by men in a paternalistic, “well meant” manner how they should behave. The dilemma lies in the fact that the culture serving to bar the way for unwanted guests and ‘troublemakers’ centers on masculine attributes; and yet the aforementioned male executives grant insights into the silently implied rules and rituals that prevail in board rooms, thus staking out the limitations for those who wish to enter this sphere.
- Thus these insights into the logics and pre-programming that prevail in the social spheres above the ‘glass ceiling’ help us to understand that ascending to such heights does not require people to up their game in terms of past achievement and competence, but represents a qualitatively and categorically different task. It is less about professional expertise and more about the social skills involved in leadership and delegation. Women should no longer feel and act like a lone warrior (and certainly shouldn’t try to assert themselves over men), and they should no longer seek to make their mark via performance in day-to-day operations. Far more important is the networking within the company. But this is tantamount to implicitly demanding something **paradoxical** from women:
 - 1.) They are supposed to accept the culture of senior management the way it is, to adapt and not “disrupt things”;
 - 2.) They are supposed to incorporate and deploy their own “feminine” strengths.

In view of these paradoxes, women – particularly careerists in middle management – are inclined to pose men the ironic question: “*What would suit the gentlemen then?*”

From a detached perspective it transpires from talks with the men that whatever qualities one might ascribe to women, whatever one might accuse them of, one never senses *personal enthusiasm* in what women do; they are branded as awkward in terms of their basic demeanor and individual *character*, being considered a blemish and a risk because they undermine the logic of the system; their *idealism* for a cause and their persistency in pursuing it are considered all too tough, desperate, masculine, naïve, unrealistic, disruptive, dysfunctional, occasionally fanciful – and, well: typically female.

Two fundamental, diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive strategies emerge here for women careerists:

- 1.) Fulfilling the superficial preconditions, studying the rules of the system, unconditionally internalizing all this and astutely playing the game. This currently seems to be the most promising way of reaching the intended goal as it provokes no friction or resistance that could act as a trip-wire for women. Nonetheless, it still panders to the handed-down logic and is highly unlikely to bring about a cultural change in the board room. The question also arises as to whether this is indeed a worthy objective or whether the simple priority is to steer a company towards success.
- 2.) Being familiar with the basic preconditions, seeing through the rules and games, adapting where necessary, but also: sticking to one’s own style and infusing others with enthusiasm for one’s personal style of leadership. This is the riskier but presumably more sustainable path. After all, it enjoys a positive echo among the younger generation of men in middle management – and hence also meets with solidarity for the idea of a cultural change in the board room.

VI.

Appendix

6.1 Data on under-representation of women in executive positions

In Germany, the proportion of women holding managerial posts in private industry is below EU average (ranking 11th).³³

Position	2008	Women	Men
	EU-27	32.5	67.5
1	France	40.0	60.0
2	Latvia	35.3	64.7
3	Spain	35.1	64.9
4	Italy	34.7	65.3
5	Poland	34.7	65.3
6	Estonia	34.0	66.0
7	United Kingdom	33.4	66.6
8	Lithuania	31.8	68.2
9	Portugal	31.7	68.3
10	Bulgaria	31.4	68.6
11	Germany	30.8	69.2
12	Austria	30.	69.5
13	Slovakia	30.5	69.5
14	Luxembourg	29.6	70.4
15	Netherlands	29.3	70.7
16	Belgium	29.2	70.8
17	Hungary	28.6	71.4
18	Greece	28.5	71.5
19	Czech Republic	26.9	73.1
20	Romania	26.7	73.3
21	Sweden	26.0	74.0
22	Slovenia	25.2	74.8
23	Denmark	24.0	76.0
24	Finland	21.6	78.4
25	Ireland	19.2	80,8
26	Malta	16.0	84.0
27	Cyprus	8.2	91.8

Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey (LFS). NB: leaders of businesses covers ISCO (International Standard Classification of Occupations) categories 121

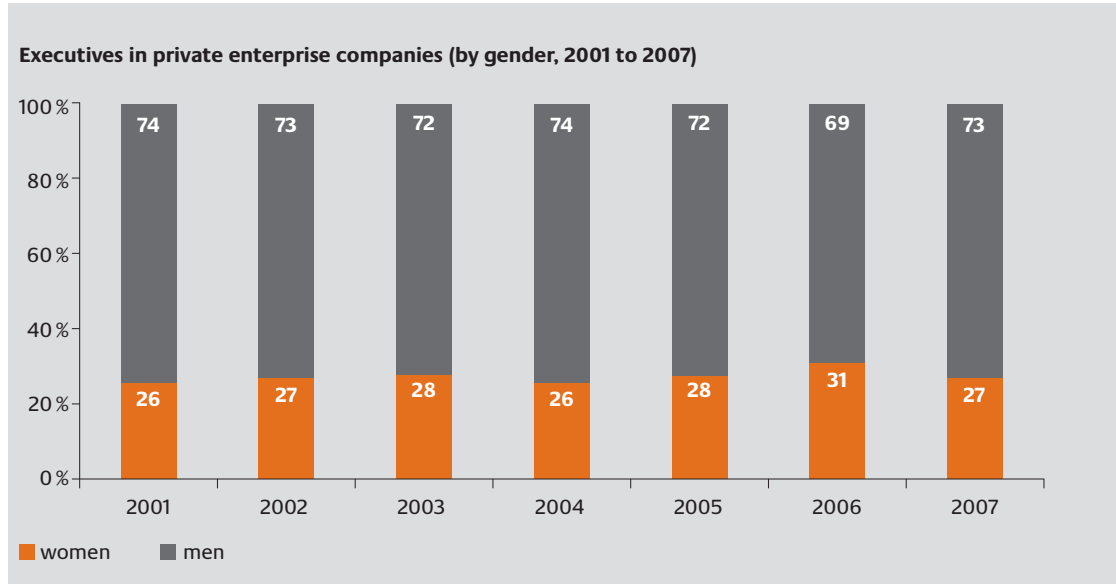
(Directors and chief executives) and 13 (Managers of small enterprises).

For MT and CY: data lack reliability due to small sample size.

FR: the figures exclude Directors and CEOs, for which data are not available

33 European Commission: Equality between women and men 2010, COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT accompanying document to the REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONSS. Brussels 2009, p. 18.

In Germany, only one third of the executives are women. Time series show that there hasn't been any significant increase in numbers over the past years; in fact, figures have been stagnating since 2001. This holds true even though the definition of "executive personnel" by the EU and in the socio-economic panel is very comprehensive.³⁴



Calculations by the German Institute of Economic Research (DIW) show that only 9% of the **members of the supervisory boards** of the **200 biggest enterprises in Germany** (excluding the financial sector) are women. "Approximately one third of the women on supervisory boards are appointed because of the existing co-determination regulations and therefore are employee representatives. When it comes to banks and insurance companies, the proportion of women on supervisory boards is a little higher and amounts to 15.5% and 13.5%, respectively. All in all, the gender-specific structure of these boards has hardly changed over the past years".³⁵

Looking at the **executive boards**, the situation is even worse: according to the data compiled by the DIW "executive boards remain an almost exclusively male domain. During the investigation period 2008/09, only 2.5% of the top managerial positions in the biggest enterprises outside the financial sector (Top 200) were held by women. The proportion of women on the executive boards of the 100 biggest banks and the 58 biggest insurance companies is negligible (amounting to 1.9% and 2.4%, respectively) – even though most of the financial sector employees are women."³⁶

³⁴ Definition: "Executive personnel comprehend people aged 18+ who stated in the SOEP that they are employed in private industry either in: [1] positions with comprehensive executive functions (e.g. directors, CEOs or board members of larger companies or associations) [or] [2] other managerial functions or highly qualified functions (e.g. division managers, scientific staff, engineers). This way, the term 'executive personnel' comprises both people in executive functions and the highly qualified specialist staff." Q.v. Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend: Führungskräfte-Monitor 2001-2006. Baden-Baden: Nomos, März 2009, 1. Auflage, p. 32. Calculation of the figures in 2007: Busch, Anne, Holst, Elke: Berufswahl wichtig für Karrierechancen von Frauen und Männern. Wochenbericht des DIW, Berlin Nr. 23/2009, p. 377.

³⁵ Elke Holst: „Nach wie vor kaum Frauen in den Top-Gremien großer Unternehmen“. In: Wochenbericht DIW Berlin 18/2009, p. 302f.

³⁶ Ibid.

In **middle management**, the situation presents itself as follows:

- In companies with more than 250 employees, the proportion of women in senior management (second level) amounts to 15%; in companies with more than 500 employees, the figure drops to 12%.
- 80% of the executive positions are filled with business, engineering, and science **graduates**; today, 25% of the students graduating in economics, engineering or natural sciences are *female*.

The analysis of more than 500.000 applications for an employment in middle management in Germany submitted within the period 2004–2008 shows: 28% of all these applications were submitted by women.³⁷

In the **scientific world**, similar inequalities prevail: even though 51% of all university graduates and 41% of those who earned a doctorate are women,

- the proportion of women qualifying as a professor amounts to 22% only,
- only 15% of the professorships and
- only 10% of the higher paid C4 positions are held by women.

In 2008 and 2009³⁸, the Hans Böckler Foundation analyzed the gender distribution (at **board level**) in **160 listed German companies** (Dax 30, M-DAX, S-DAX, Tec-Dax) and documented:

- In 2009, only 16 of the 160 stock corporations had (at least) one woman on the executive board; in 144 of the companies there wasn't a single women on the Board. As a rule, executive boards are a men's world.
- In 2009, the proportion of women at board level³⁹ amounted to 3.0% – which is only 0.5% higher than in 2008 (2.5%).
- The higher the stock market segment, the lower the proportion of women in top management. The single stock market segments and the figures as to the proportion of women at board level in 2009 are listed below (compared to 2008):

■ DAX ⁴⁰	0.6%	(0.5%);
■ M-DAX	2.6%	(1.8%);
■ S-DAX	4.0%	(3.9%);
■ Tec-DAX	5.8%	(5.1%). ⁴¹

³⁷ Source: Recruitment consultancy Michael Page International.

³⁸ Böckler Impuls 03/2009 „Frauen in Führungspositionen: Je höher, desto seltener“, p. 4; and Böckler Impuls 07/2008: „Chefetagen in Männerhand“, p. 1.

³⁹ Universe: all companies listed on DAX, M-DAX, S-DAX and Tec-DAX. Source: Marion Weckes: Geschlechterverteilung in Vorständen und Aufsichtsräten, Februar/März 2009.

⁴⁰ DAX is the stock index which represents the performance of the 30 biggest and highest-turnover German stocks (according to market capitalization) in the Prime Standard of the FWB® Frankfurt Stock Exchange (cf. Deutsche Börse AG). Initially, the DAX wasn't intended to be a competitor of the established German stock indices, but a supplement. By now, it has surpassed the others in publicity and profile and has established itself (nationally and internationally) as the leading index of the German stock market.

⁴¹ Marion Weckes: Geschlechterverteilung in Vorständen und Aufsichtsräten. Hans-Böckler-Stiftung. 23.03.2009. p. 2. Published on the internet: http://spdnet.sozi.info/bremen/bremhavn/asfbremhvn/dl/-Frauen_in_Vorstand_und_AR.pdf.

According to the calculation of the Hans Böckler Foundation, 10.2% of the **positions on the supervisory boards of the 160 listed companies** were held by women in 2009 (2008: 9.3%).⁴² The **proportion** is itemized below:

Representatives of ...		
shareholders:	4.2%	(3.9%)
employees:	19.3%	(18.3%)
Companies ...		
without codetermination:	2.6%	(2.9%)
co-determined:	11.7%	(10.5%)
Shareholder representation in ...		
companies without codetermination:	2.6%	(2.9%)
co-determined business enterprises:	4.8%	(3.6%)

Gender distribution on the **supervisory boards of the 30 DAX-listed companies** in January 2010:⁴³

Members in total:	508	
of them: women	65 (12.8%)	
	48 (73.8%)	17 (26.2%)
	employee representatives	shareholder representatives

| Female chairmen of the supervisory board: 1 (0.03%)

Proportion of women in DAX-listed companies ...

Shareholder representatives:	6.5%
Employee representatives:	19.7%

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Status 2010-01-20, see detailed list below.

Men and women on the supervisory boards of the DAX-listed companies

Company ⁴⁴	Chairman of the supervisory board	Members in total	Of them: women	Of them: employee representatives
Adidas AG	Male	12	2	2
Allianz SE	Male	12	1	0
BASF SE	Male	12	1	1
Bayer AG	Male	20	1	1
Beiersdorf AG	Male	12	3	1
BMW AG	Male	20	3	1
Commerzbank AG	Male	20	5	5
Daimler AG	Male	20	1	0
Deutsche Bank AG	Male	20	7	6
Deutsche Börse AG	Male	18	1	1
Deutsche Lufthansa AG	Male	20	3	2
Deutsche Post AG	Male	20	5	5
Deutsche Telekom AG	Male	20	3	3
E.ON AG	Male	20	2	1
Fresenius SE	Male	12	0	0
Fresenius Medical Care AG & Co. KGaA	Male	6	0	0
Hannover Rück AG	Male	9	0	0
Henkel KGaA	Female	18	5	3
K+S AG	Male	16	1	0
Linde AG	Male	12	0	0
MAN AG	Male	16	2	1
Merck KGaA	Male	16	5	4
Metro AG	Male	20	2	1
Münchener Rück AG	Male	20	2	2
RWE AG	Male	20	2	1
Salzgitter AG	Male	21	1	1
SAP AG	Male	16	1	1
Siemens AG	Male	20	4	3
ThyssenKrupp AG	Male	20	1	1
Volkswagen AG	Male	20	1	1
Total	1 woman	508	65	48

Taking the overall low number of women on supervisory boards into account, it comes as no surprise that only one woman has been appointed chairman of the supervisory board of a DAX-listed company so far.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Status: 2010-01-20. Unaccounted for: honorary members of supervisory boards and members without group position.

⁴⁵ In other countries, far more women hold senior managerial posts – for example in Norway. In 2002, the proportion of women on Norwegian supervisory boards amounted to 10%. Appeals to the business community took hardly any effect, the existing gender imbalance wasn't resolved. In consequence, the Norwegian Minister for Economic Affairs forced the debate on a quota system, and on January 1, 2006, a law was enacted which stipulated a mandatory minimum quota of at least 40% for women (and men!) as to the seats on supervisory boards of Norwegian publicly tradable companies. After two years, the transition period expired, and it hadn't been necessary to take any enforcing measures (which were prescribed in the regulations). Within two years, the proportion of women on supervisory boards rose by more than 30%.

6.2 Research design

The topic is highly complex and requires unbiased examination both of the structures of advancement and of the attitudes/opinions of the women and men involved in this process. The study at hand puts the focus on the **perspectives and experiences of board members, division managers and directors** of big and medium-sized companies. The survey was divided into three sub-studies:

1.) Representative survey among women and men in executive positions: in the context of a sample survey, 511 men and women in executive positions were interviewed.⁴⁶

Defined universe: managers of German companies which have 20 or more members of staff at their German location. The executives belonged to one of the following groups: supervisory board/proprietors/executive board/directorate/general management, division management, plant management/department, team management/staff unit responsibility.

As the proportion of women and men in executive positions is disparate, we refrained from drawing a random sample (the validity of the findings requires a sufficient number of women included in the sample!) and chose a disproportional, stratified random sample instead (50% women; 50% men). This way, it was guaranteed that the findings were reliable and applicable to both sub-groups.⁴⁷

2.) Qualitative face-to-face interviews with men in executive positions: in a qualitative survey, 40 qualitative, narrative face-to-face interviews were conducted.⁴⁸ The two central questions of these interviews were:

How do male executives perceive the development of highly qualified women aspiring to executive positions?

What are, in their opinion, the reasons why it still holds true that predominantly men are appointed to executive positions?

3.) Qualitative face-to-face interviews with women in executive positions: in an analogous manner 10 narrative interviews were conducted with women who hold a senior managerial post at present.⁴⁹ Here, too, the two central questions of these interviews were:

How do female executives perceive the development of highly qualified women aspiring to executive positions?

What are, in their opinion, the reasons why it still holds true that predominantly men are appointed to executive positions?

⁴⁶ Field time: July to August 2009.

⁴⁷ To obtain general statements (independent of gender) the data were weighted according to the real distribution of women and men.

⁴⁸ Field time: May to August 2009

⁴⁹ Field time: May to August 2009



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