

Gender Gap: Female Leader's Perceptions in the Case of Austria

Bachelor of Science in
International Management

Submitted to Ms Lidija Lalicic

Katrin Schula

1521027

Vienna, 17.06.2018

Affidavit

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

The thesis was not submitted in the same or in a substantially similar version, not even partially, to another examination board and was not published elsewhere.

17.06.2018

Date

Abstract

This examination covers the issues of gender inequalities in the Austrian labor market. Initiated by the latest statistics in this field, which drastically confirm a still existing gender gap, this thesis aims to reveal possible social injustices in Austrian companies.

After having condensed the existing academic literature on this topic, a qualitative research has been deducted. In form of a semi-structured interview, 8 female Austrian leaders were asked to share their experiences and observations on this topic. It turned out that a gender gap is still existent in Austria. Wage inequalities, as well as a glass ceiling are not common phenomena in the Austrian labor market, but can still be found in some companies. Nevertheless, the right steps in order to overcome this form of discrimination have been set by many businesses. Concepts like the flexible part-time model support women in creating a balance between family and their job. However, not all initiatives are preferred by all interviewed female leaders, for example the governmentally forced mandatory gender quota is controversially discussed between the interviewees.

Table of Contents

Affidavit	2
Abstract	3
Table of Contents	4
List of Tables	6
List of Figures	6
1 Introduction	7
1.1 <i>Background Information</i>	7
1.2 <i>Austria and Gender Developments</i>	8
1.3 <i>Research Question</i>	9
1.4 <i>Outlook on the Subsequent Chapters</i>	10
2 Literature Review	12
2.1 <i>Main Models</i>	12
2.1.1 Business Culture	12
2.1.2 Organizational Structure	15
2.1.3 Diversity Management	18
2.2 <i>Gender Differences in Working Setting</i>	19
2.2.1 The Social Construction of Gender	20
2.2.2 Gender Gap	21
2.3 <i>Summary</i>	24
3 Methods	26
3.1 <i>Sample</i>	26
3.2 <i>Interview Guidelines and Interviewees</i>	28
4 Research Results	30
4.1 <i>Interviewees' Position and Work Experience</i>	30
4.2 <i>Interviewee's Profiles</i>	31
4.3 <i>Observations of the Gender Gap</i>	33
4.3.1 During the Career	33

4.3.2	Current Position Experiences	35
4.3.3	Differences in the Industries	36
4.3.4	Observations of the Gender Pay Gap	36
4.3.5	Observations of the Gender Gap - Conclusion	37
4.4	<i>Work-Life-Balance</i>	38
4.5	<i>Overcoming the Gender Differences</i>	39
4.6	<i>Advice for Young Females (Future CEOs)</i>	41
5	Conclusion	43
	Bibliography	48
	Appendices	51
	<i>Appendix 1- Interview Guideline German</i>	<i>51</i>

List of Tables

Table 1- Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods Procedures	27
Table 2- Interview Partners.....	31

List of Figures

Figure 1- Austria's values for the six dimensions	9
Figure 2- Business in different Levels	14
Figure 3- Gender Pay Gap Austria in comparison to EU Average.....	24

1 Introduction

1.1 Background Information

Gender inequality is still a matter of debate that has been in the center of the interdisciplinary academic discourse over decades. While inequalities between the two sexes in some fields improved drastically over the second half of the last century, other aspects of the gender gap failed to keep pace of these positive changes. To give an example, percentages of under 10% in female first year students in professional programs (such as medicine, law, dentistry, etc.) were the norm until around 1970. Due to an increasing acceptance in society from this point on and heavily fostered by the introduction of the contraceptive pill, these numbers climbed to before unimaginable heights of up to 40% in the 1990s. (Goldin & Katz, 2001) But as mentioned previously, these positive examples were not able to accelerate gender equality in all aspects of life, especially when it comes to the development of career and remuneration of women in professional environments. To be precise, there is still a significant gap between male and female executives when it comes to preferment in career contexts and wages in general (Seebacher & Wieser, 2018). Recent statistics (e.g. the “Gender Pay Gap” indicator, which is computed every four years by Statistic Austria as part of a EU-wide harmonized testing) prove that discrimination against women at the workplace is still an often-encountered phenomenon, even though societies all over the world have been developing public awareness for the issue over the course of the last century. This view is supported by Due Billing and Alvesson (1994), who acknowledge that “women are virtually absent from leading positions in most public and private organizations. They are almost totally absent from top positions and strongly underrepresented at the higher middle levels...in most countries in the western world” (p. 3).

Today, in 2018, we are still confronted with similar statistical results and findings, which is a disappointing state of affairs, if the fact is considered that 25 years have passed ever since the aforementioned data was gathered. In light of the extensive awareness that the discussion had in this time period, hope for drastic change in the near future requires a rather optimistic point of view on the topic.

1.2 Austria and Gender Developments

When narrowing the focus down to the specific geographical focus of this thesis, Austria, we also see interesting developments in the elaborated topic. To give an example, historically seen, Empress Maria Theresa, who controlled the fate of the Austro-Hungary Empire more than 300 years ago, can be seen as a one of the initial role models for Austrian women of the twenty-first century. She is often said to be among the first modern women who was able to reconcile her family responsibilities with her multifarious duties as an empress (Plank, 2017). This is to name only one showpiece-emancipated female out of many successful women, which comprehensively shaped Austria's history. But even though Austria has been a pioneer in some aspects ever since, gender inequalities are still a current topic of discussion.

This becomes extensively clear, when taking a closer look at the Austrian labor market per se, as it seems to be obvious that gender equality in business environments has yet to be achieved. To be more accurate, in Austria's leading companies, only a minority group of approximately 8.4% of top executive managers are female. What is more, the situation is even clearer for exchange-listed companies, where only a total of ten women (approximately 5.1%) are occupied in management boards (Seebacher & Wieser, 2018).

Hofstede (2018) maps cultures according to six dimensions representing the different values in workplace environments, ranging from national culture, power distance, masculinity versus femininity, orientation and indulgence versus restraint.

When applying these dimensions to Austria, the country can be described as a masculine society (see Figure 1). In other words, Austria's culture is to a high degree success oriented and the emphasis is put on performance. Hence, the focus in Austrian business environments predominantly lies on "wanting to be the best within a reference group", in comparison to a so-called feminine culture, where self-appreciation and individual fulfillment are in the center of attention, rather than focusing on competition with others. What is more, the Dutch scientist describes Austria as an individualist society with a high degree of independence for each member, i.e. to what extent the individual identifies as "I" compared to "We", which

indicates how much the individual is left to take care of itself. Furthermore, Austria did also score very high on uncertainty avoidance (which determines to what degree previously unknown situations are threatening to members of the society), long-term orientation (which describes how and if challenges of today are linked with past experiences) and indulgence (the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses). Austria received its lowest score in the dimension of power distance, which means that Austria's society generally dislikes control and puts high emphasis on ensuring equal rights for every member. In light of this cultural understanding of workplace cultures, the gender problem becomes even more interesting to observe, hence, the next section will present this thesis' objectives.

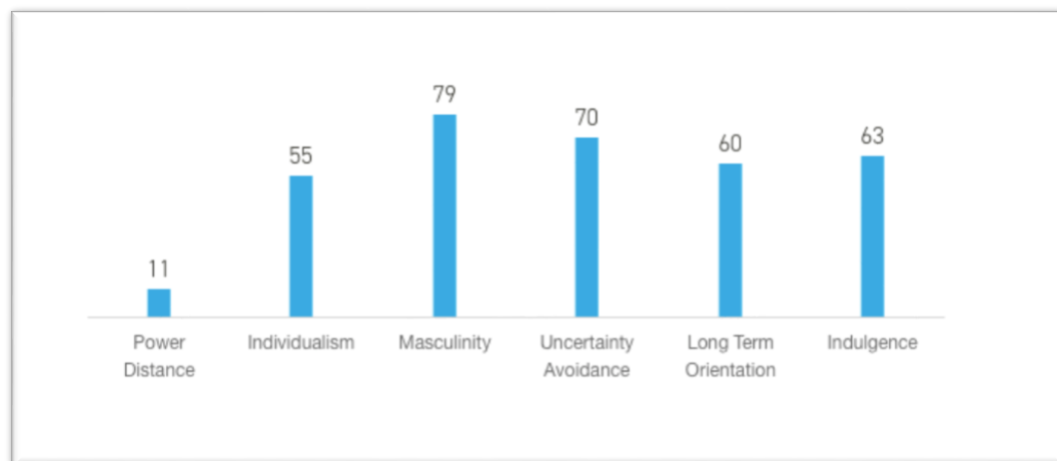


Figure 1- Austria's values for the six dimensions (Source: Hofstede Country Comparison Tool)

1.3 Research Question

Based on the preceding discussion, the central examination of this thesis elaborates the question of which advantages and disadvantages women face during their professional career, as well as in a high management position, because of their gender in Austria. The main research question central in this thesis is as follows:

What are the main challenges women face in an organizational culture and when operating in a leadership position in Austria and how are they trying to overcome those challenges?

In doing so, the aim of this thesis is to give a clear picture of the current situation in Austria, whether women feel discriminated against or not in business and if so, in what way. Another goal is to conclude what Austria's female high-level managers suggest from a governmental, as well as from a social perspective in order to raise the number of females in leading positions over the coming years.

Based on current literature and statistics, the author assumes in this context, that women struggle more throughout their corporate career than their gender counterparts. This hypothesis will be verified or refuted at the end of this examination. The paper will fulfill the requirement of reaching a scientific standard by spotlighting latest trends in the academic discussion regarding the subject matter and by conducting qualitative research by interviewing various females in management positions in Austria, which have been carefully selected on the basis of their career paths. This examination will put an emphasis on having women from a broad spectrum of industries taking part in the aforementioned interviews, in order to gain an in-depth insight into the covered topic as a whole. Furthermore, governmental interference into the feministic economy will be discussed. To be precise, similar to the survey published by the Harvard Business Review *What Board Directors really think of Gender Quotas* (Wiersema & Mors 2016), which has a focus on Denmark and the U.S., this paper will give insight into the Austrian managers' perception on this subject matter.

For research, such investigation will provide new insights into the roots of gender inequality in Austria and will also pave the way for the derivation and drafting of scientific recommendations for action. For managers, this thesis is able to show which challenges women face and how employers can try to reduce barriers or loosen specific regulations in order to advance women's career developments.

1.4 Outlook on the Subsequent Chapters

This section will briefly introduce the systematic and structure of this thesis, in order to ensure clarity and comprehensibility for the reader.

As a first step, the already existing body of literature on the extended field of topics will be examined and the most valuable findings, in regards to gender inequality, will

be concisely presented. While the first part of the *Literature Review* will discuss broad terms such as business culture, organizational structure and diversity management, the second part will narrow these key results down to the issue of discriminatory treatment because of gender. What is more, various phenomena, which specifically occur in the aforementioned context, will be covered.

As the second step, common scientific methods to ensure a high academic standard in papers like this will be presented. Subsequently, the approach chosen by the author will be introduced and the rationale behind this decision will be set forth. As interviews, which have been conducted for the special purpose of this thesis, play a crucial part in the upcoming chapters, a walk-through over the main parameters of these will also be performed.

The next up on the agenda will be the centerpiece of this thesis, the *Research Results*. In the first instance, the eight interviewees and their work experience and other traits of them will be presented. Thereafter, the women will be compared with one another, in order to create a deeper understanding of the sample group. Afterwards, the interviewees' observations of the gender gap during their careers and their current positions, as well as their perception of differences between industries, will be recited and extensively interpreted. The chapter will also elaborate the question if women naturally suffer from disadvantages in their work-life balance, because of their family commitments. In a final step, the women's experiences with measures for overcoming gender differences will be examined and their advice for young women will be shared.

To appropriately round out the thesis, a conclusion will review the key findings of this paper and elaborate their implications.

2 Literature Review

In order to gain a deeper, more profound understanding of the gender gap's nature and why it is still possible to observe this phenomenon in professional business environments, it is essential to apprehend the hierarchic system and the corporate culture of individual enterprises. Additionally, it is also of great importance to gain a wide-ranging insight into the initial origination of gender differences and their development from a historical, as well as from a psychological perspective. Thus, the main models of business culture, organizational structure and diversity management will be examined as a first step. Second, the social construction of gender, as well as the subject area of gender in working environment will be discussed.

2.1 Main Models

2.1.1 Business Culture

The word *culture* itself can be defined as *“the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.”* (“culture”, 2018) Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) state, that culture is not a phenomenon that can be explained easily, but has to be analysed in different layers; outer, middle and inner layer. The outer layer would be the explicit perceptions one has, when first experiencing a new culture. This layer comprises concrete, observable habits. The middle layer describes the norms and values of an individual group. It determines people's perception of what is right or wrong and good or bad respectively. The inner layer is described as *“assumptions about existence.”* This layer encompasses the most basic assumptions of each individual. When challenging those assumptions, questions arise that never before crossed people's minds (Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner, 1997).

Culture can also be analysed in different levels in the context of business. People's culture is an aspect of a person's personality and therefore determines one's attitude towards work itself. In a wider perspective, culture is a factor that connects people and is an instrument of distinguishing between different groups of people (Needle, 1994).

This section deals with the way an organisation's culture might shape a business, and how an individual company's success might depend on how a firm manages these aspects.

Although it might seem logical to pin down the concept of business simply by looking at different operational levels and internal company activities, an analysis extending beyond this initial, intuitive approach proves to be necessary. Firstly, it is of great importance to get one's head around the fact, that these processes take place in a set of intertwined contexts. Logically, a firm's functional activities, such as Marketing, Human Resource Management or Finance and Accounting, constitute the inner core of the concept as a whole. Closely related to this so-called "Activities Level", is the accordingly dubbed "Strategic Level", which circumscribes the functions ordinarily fulfilled by the management and leadership board respectively as well as the subject of business ethics. On the similarly called "Organizational Level", a company's pursued goal, its size and structure, as well as the actual prevalent organizational culture play an important role. The last level, which encloses all the other levels, is the "Environmental Level". The term broadly encompasses the surroundings in which the business operates in, e.g. the country's economy, the technological environment as well as the cultural and institutional frameworks (Needle, 1994). A figurative exposition of these aforementioned levels can be identified in Figure 2.



Figure 2- Business in different Levels (Source: Needle, 1994)

Of course, the economic performance of an individual business is influenced by multiple different factors. Beside the more obvious ones, such as financial aspects, a business' culture is also often identified as an important issue impacting the effectiveness of companies. This opinion is among others shared by Casson (1991), who acknowledges that *“An effective culture has a strong moral content. Morality can overcome problems that formal procedures- based on monitoring compliance with contracts- cannot. A strong culture therefore reduces transaction costs and enhances performance- the success of an economy depends on the quality of its culture”* (p.3).

Undoubtedly, the relationship to employees is a key instrument and potential game-changer in managerial practices. By way of example, creating and obtaining a valuable working environment and thus being able to trust and rely on the company's workers, might be the decisive factor in creating a competitive advantage over rivaling businesses. The basic concept underpinning this observation suggests that a satisfied employee is more likely to stay at an individual company in the long run (Casson, 1991). Conveniently, that approach can be put into direct context with the concept of the importance of intellectual capital. In this case, the term *intellectual capital* refers to the *"intangible creations of human intellect which include technical expertise, problem-solving capability, creativity and managerial skills..."*(Jordan & Jones, 1997,p 392) Undeniably, this concept is a more urging issue for some companies than for others, whereby the field of expertise of the firm usually proves to be the decisive factor, as some are more knowledge-based than others. Nevertheless, even companies that do not operate in an industry where know-how and intellectual capital has an obvious impact on the firm's success, the concept of knowledge management plays a role that shouldn't be underestimated (Jordan & Jones, 1997).

To conclude, the way management deals with its employees and the kind of organizational culture within the business it is aiming to create, may not only affect the company's employees, but may also determine the economic success of the business. In many cases, it might be more useful to create a confident atmosphere within a company, in order to have faithful and engaged employees and subsequently gain potential competitive advantages.

2.1.2 Organizational Structure

Needle (1994) determines that *"an organizational structure is a grouping of activities and people to achieve the goals of the organization"*(p. 107). This structure might vary due to several factors, such as technology, management strategy and size of a firm. The key to organizational success is the ability to find the individual optimal structure, in order to create an employee-friendly atmosphere, maximize business opportunities and minimize the number of operational problems as much as possible (Needle, 1994).

Academic literature and studies respectively suggest that researchers tend to lay their focus on three major factors, which are primarily known to influence the organizational structure: *technology, size and environment* (Child, 1972).

In the majority of cases, *technology* is identified as the most important aspect, as it said to be the key driver in determining an organization's structure. Consequently, researchers developed the concept of *technological determinism*, which states that "*differences in manufacturing [...] result in corresponding differences in such factors as the extent of the management hierarchy, the proportion of management to other employees, the proportion of direct to indirect labour, and the number of subordinates controlled by any one manager.*" (Needle, 1994, p. 108) The discussed term can be further subdivided into the so-called *operations technology*, which refers to equipping activities within an organization's daily working cycle, and the *materials technology*, which describes the material that is used, both physical and informational. Both are said to have a major impact on an organization's structure (Child, 1972).

However, other researchers hold the opinion, that a *company's size* is the most important factor influencing the organizational structure. To be precise, it can be observed that the degree of specialization is linearly dependent on the size of a company, i.e. the larger an enterprise grows, the more opportunities a firm has in terms of differentiation. As a result, a business' structure changes significantly, as more departments are emerging with different fields of attention (Child, 1972). Often, such transformations might result in problems in terms of controlling and coordinating these diverse units. As a firm grows, more delegation from the owner will be necessary and therefore a hierarchical structure will inevitably emerge (Needle, 1994).

The *environmental aspect* refers mainly to the communication between a company and its surrounding environment. Since a company is usually heavily dependent on external interactions, but the business environment normally proves to be a factor that can hardly be controlled by a firm itself, the organizational structure should be flexible enough to overcome potentially arising problems. This phenomenon can both be observed with a holistic view, with the company as a whole interacting

within its environment, but also in greater detail, observing a company's different departments. Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), cited by David Needle (1994), acknowledge that an organization's structure should be able to reflect that different departments of an organization are confronted by different environmental problems (Needle, 1994).

Beside these three aspects, a *firm's strategy* and interest groups, so-called *stakeholders*, also play important roles. The strategy states where a company puts the most emphasis on and how it aims to achieve its goals. Depending on the strategic goals of the firm, such as cost control in contrast to being the leader in one specific field, the enterprise will most likely develop a different structure. Another way to figure out the different strategies a firm can focus on is by looking at department sizes. While the marketing department of one company might be large in terms of funding and employees, another company of the same size might run a comparatively small marketing department but lays more emphasis on activities such as research and development (Needle, 1994). As already mentioned, different interest groups and their needs might also impact a firm's strategy. Needle (1991) states that *"the preference of the dominant coalition can exert considerable influence on the structure as can the demands of major stakeholders"* (p. 113). Thus, the dependence on stakeholders has a great influence on a firm's development and directions.

However, a firm's culture should not be unnoticed in this context. To be precise, the structure of an organization might vary depending on country-specific business traditions and structuring styles of firms respectively. As a way of example, the aforementioned six dimensions by Hofstede (2018) greatly influence an organizations' structure. To give an example, it is proven that American firms tend to focus more on their finance and marketing departments, while German businesses tend to put more emphasis on production processes and the corresponding compartments. In addition, the hierarchies in some countries tend to be steeper than in others (for example France and the UK) (Needle, 1994). Moreover, the culture inside a business might also have an impact on the organization's structure. A firm with a homogenous workforce might have other needs than a company with a diverse personnel, in terms of age, gender, religion etc. (Vedder, 2006) Markides and

Williamson (1996) acknowledge that *“It is also necessary that the diversified firm have an organizational structure in place that is more efficient in realizing the benefits of sharing and competence transfer than alternative models of transaction...”*(p. 346). Therefore, the next section will explain diversity management in greater detail.

2.1.3 Diversity Management

Diversity, as the Cambridge Dictionary describes, is the condition or fact of being different or varied, or, seen in a social context, the fact of there being people of many different groups in society, within an organization (*“diversity”*, 2018). Within an organization, diversity can be referred to demographic data, such as age, gender, religion and ethics, but also organizational dimensions, such as hierarchical status or place of work. In a business context, the focus mostly lies on biological circumstances, and those that cannot be changed by its own power. Especially gender, age and ethnicity revealed to be a central topic of diversity management (Krell & Wächter, 2006).

Diversity within an organization might bring great advantages, as well as pose a huge challenge for a firm’s management. *“Cox (1991) suggested that organisations will become more fluid and adaptable as diversity increases, and organisational structures, policies and operating models broaden”* (Baker, Kelan, 2015, p84). However, as Mor Barak et al. (2003) state it is evident *“that individuals from diverse backgrounds experience greater exclusion, more job stress, less social support, and a sense of unfair treatment, all of which lead to reduced job satisfaction and, ultimately, a significantly poorer sense of well-being in comparison to those in the mainstream”* (Mor Barak et al., 2003, p. 145).

One of the most preferable effects is the creativity that a diverse workforce naturally provides. In modern days, firms have to adapt to changes extremely quickly, due to technical advancements or economic alterations. Consequently, encouraging the employees to think in a different, creative way is desirable (Grabenhofer, 2013). Mark Casson (1991) also confirms this theory by stating that *“Cultural diversity provides the ability to adapt to changing conditions”*(p. 240). He concludes, that a country with a broad variety of cultural backgrounds can adapt to changes more

easily, as it can take advantage of different concepts that had been used in the past. A country that does not have those opportunities will simply have to take ideas and thoughts from somewhere else. Nevertheless, a diverse community might provide space for discrimination and exclusion. The aforementioned kind of creative thinking due to diversity has to be achieved on basis of a linking unity. Tolerance against differently minded people and openness to new ideas is fundamental for a vital community (Casson, 1991, p240).

Diversity Management in a business context is therefore, as the name already suggests, the management of personnel variety within a company. The goal is to set a framework and create a climate where creative ideas can be expressed and evolved, but where exclusion has no acceptance. Racism, sexism, discrimination because of age, exclusion because of religion or sexual orientation or discrimination because of physical attributes cannot be accepted or tolerated, instead those habits have to be detected and changed (Krell & Wächter 2006).

A company with a successful diversity management will not only gain advantage due to increasing creativity, but will also be more attractive to applicants from minority groups in the long run. In these modern and tough times with lots of competitiveness, this might also be a factor of invaluable importance. An open-minded culture might also create a positive image for the firm as a whole, and promote the employee's loyalty towards the company (Vedder, 2006, p14).

Thus, one can state that diversity management is a tool of guiding a diverse workforce within a company, in order to gain competitive advantages by creative thinking and new ideas and preventing exclusion and discrimination in any form.

2.2 Gender Differences in Working Setting

The previous section gave an overview on business culture, organizational structure and diversity management in general. The aim of this section is to narrow that information down to the context of gender. Not only the social construction of gender will be discussed, but also current models relevant to the topic in business contexts will be named and explained. While in the previous section discrimination was mentioned mainly in contexts of minority groups, this section focuses on

discrimination because of gender. Problems with regards to the female gender, that arise in common organizational structures, will be expounded.

2.2.1 The Social Construction of Gender

The social construction of gender is a central point of the academic discussion regarding this complex topic. Over the course of time, a broad spectrum of models has been developed, with the mutual aim of identifying *“some of the potential reasons for these differences between women and men, both in relation to the choice of education/training and career, the position within organizations, and the labour market, and also with regard to power and influence in society generally.”* (Billing & Alvesson, 1994, p. 25).

Macro-sociological explanatory models, including the so-called *Marxist Approach* and the well-known concept of *patriarchy*, as well as various middle range and micro-sociological explanatory models are commonly discussed models in the extensive field of socialization theory.

The aforementioned Marxist Approach derives its origin from the Marxists’ criticism on the capitalistic society and has been developed by Karl Marx and exhaustively elaborated in his book *“Das Kapital”* (1947). As his basic assumption, Marx adduces the concept of the so called *gender blindness*, which addresses the issue that *“gender has generally not been a central concept, instead the relation between wage labour and capital has been emphasized and is the central concept in the analysis of capitalism”* (Billing & Alvesson, 1994, p. 26). Similar to the class concept, gender is analysed as a social category, which are based on hierarchy. (Hermann, 2003)

The concept of Patriarchy, to name another example, is simplified a model, where the father is the dominant member of a family and is responsible for the economic production of the household (Billing & Alvesson, 1994). This concept was used by Max Weber (1968), in order to provide a contrary model to the Marxist approach to feminism. Nevertheless, the concept of patriarchy is not a single concept, but is a set of varying perceptions. It can be specifically referred to the women’s role of reproduction within the family, but also seen as determined hierarchy of the sexes (Beechey, 1979).

These two concepts are only two examples, representative for many other concepts that have been developed over time in the field of macro-social explanatory models. While those concepts deal with the society as a whole, middle range and micro-sociological explanatory models look at different positions of females and males within an organization in a hierarchical context. To be more precise, so called *meso* structural (middle range level) explanations deal with gender differences, “*for instance with regards to their interest in work, career, etc. and location in the social structure*” (Billing & Alvesson, 1994, p31). These differences are said to be consequential to the current situation of male and female on the labour market, rather than a result of century-lasting evolutions. (Billing & Alvesson, 1994) In literature gender in a structural context is discussed from different perspectives. The most basic model examines each individual and analyses where gender differences originate from, both in a biological, as well as in a social context. As a response to this, another model was developed, which investigates how social structures create gender behaviour. The latest publications explain gender as a socially constructed hierarchical system. (Risman, 2004) Lorber, cited in Risman’s article “Gender as a Social Structure” (2004) acknowledges, that “*gender is an institution that is embedded in all the social processes of everyday life and social organizations*” (p 430).

2.2.2 Gender Gap

Many European countries currently take action against the continuously observed gender inequalities within most companies. Since January 1st 2018, Austria requests a 30% woman quota in supervisory bodies of exchange listed companies and of other big enterprises. Nevertheless, common phenomena like the glass cliff, the glass ceiling and the gender pay gap can still be observed in Austria and the rest of the world. The following section will help understand what these concepts mean and where they come from.

2.2.2.1 The Glass Ceiling

As already mentioned earlier, women are still underrepresented in higher management positions. This effect is commonly known as *the glass ceiling*. The term was first used by the two journalists, Hymowitz and Schellhardt in 1986. The expression itself refers to invisible barriers within companies that prevent women

from moving up the hierarchic ladder and reaching top-level positions. In literature, it mostly refers to an organization's structure and to an organization's culture respectively (Dreher, 2003).

Hanappi-Egger and Mensi-Klarbach, cited in the Women Management Report 2018 by Austria's chamber of labor, state, that the main problem is that women are often not even taken into account as candidates. The reason behind that is, that they do not tend to be part of the relevant networks, in comparison to their male competitors. The roots for this structural problem might lie in the aforementioned Austria-specific business culture. Organizations' structures within this country, especially the climbing of career ladders and promotions, tend to be unclear and obscure. Top-level positions, especially in supervisory boards, tend to be occupied by people with the necessary connections and a high visibility (Seebacher & Wieser, 2018). Literature identifies this as *presence-based culture*, in contrast to a *performance-based culture*. Sander and Hartmann determine, that in a presence-based culture, all part-time workers are excluded from the pool of potential leaders. Emphasis is put on physical presence, which is directly linked to performance and commitment. In a performance-based culture, on the other side, the results are more important. Leaders are inconclusively full-time employees, but also reduced working hours per week are possible, as long as they are accessible when it comes to major decisions (Sander & Hartmann, 2016).

The glass ceiling does not only pose a problem with regards to the social aspect, but might also cause avoidable costs for a company. Women that feel constantly disadvantaged might lose motivation and phase down productivity and might also lose their loyalty to the company. As a result, many women leave the company out of frustration; some even leave to build up their own competing firms (Ragins, Townsend and Mattis, 1998).

The contrast to the *glass ceiling* is the concept of the *glass escalator*, which refers to men's experiences with this subject matter. Male employees often encounter pressure to move upwards the career ladder very quickly and being pushed in higher positions disproportionately fast. (Williams, 1992)

2.2.2.2 *Glass Cliff*

The *glass cliff* is a rather new concept, which appeared when the number of women in high management positions started to rise significantly. It describes the observation that the female's positions tend to be unsecure and risky. Women's performance in their leading position is often closely monitored. In many cases, the results showed that female leadership is less effective than men's when the measurement is defined in masculine terms. (Ryan, Haslam, 2005) In another article, Ryan and Haslam (2007) acknowledge, that "*when [...] failure occurs, it is then women (rather than men) who must face the consequences and who are singled out for criticism and blame.*" (p. 550) This view is also supported by Mulcahy and Linehan (2014), who were able to find evidence that "*women are more likely to achieve board positions when those positions are associated with a state of crisis and a high risk of failure.*" (p. 425-426)

2.2.2.3 *Gender Pay Gap- Austria*

The concept of the *glass ceiling* mentioned above cannot only be referred to women's hierarchal status, but it can also be related to inequalities with regards to wages. In this context, a gender gap in wage distribution between sexes in high-level positions is called glass ceiling, while a gender pay gap in lower levels is known as *sticky floor*. (Arulampalam, Booth and Bryan, 2007) The *gender pay gap indicator*, as already mentioned earlier, is based on an EU-wide harmonized testing with the purpose of illustrating current imbalances in wages between men and women. (Statistic Austria, 2018)

When looking from a narrower perspective, specifically at Austria, the above-mentioned phenomenon appears to be much more pronounced. In particular, current statistics show, that Austria is among the EU-countries with the highest inequalities with regards to the gender pay gap. When looking at Figure 3, the distinctive difference of the Austrian percental gender pay gap (depicted in form of the purple line) from the EU average (depicted in form of the grey line) can clearly be detected. However, it is evident that a slow convergence of the Austrian indicator to the European average can be observed over time. Between 2008 and 2015, the Austrian indicator steadily dropped from 25.1% to 21.7%, while the European average stayed roughly constant during this time period.

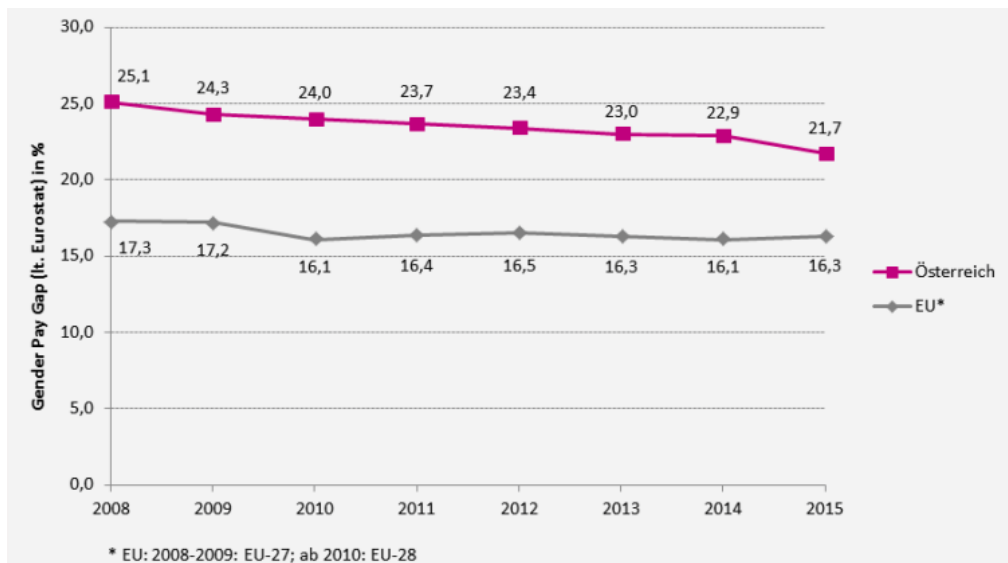


Figure 3- Gender Pay Gap Austria in comparison to EU Average (Source: Federal Chancellery Austria, n.d.)

2.3 Summary

In the previous section, the most important models with regards to gender inequalities have been discussed. To sum up, the most important aspects of each concept will be briefly revised in this section.

Business culture is closely related to a company's success, in terms of trust policy and employee satisfaction. Only employees in a company with a healthy culture will stay loyal and help extending the business' competitive advantages. The *organization's structure* is dependent on the company's individual goals as well as on influences like technology, size and environment. Furthermore, a coherence between culture and organizational structure cannot be denied. Diversity inside an organization might lead to advantages in terms of creativity and knowledge sharing, but does also bear undeniable challenges. *Diversity Management* is a tool of guiding a diverse workforce within a company.

When taking a look at gender discrimination itself, three main models have been developed: the glass ceiling, the glass cliff and the gender pay gap. The concept of the glass ceiling describes the invisible barriers that keep women from rising up into high management positions. The glass cliff, however is the often observed phenomenon, that women get promoted more often into positions that are risky

and uncertain. Tendentially, men keep a leading position longer and with less effort. The gender pay gap is the computable unequal wage distribution between men and women, both in leading positions and at the hierarchical bottom. Furthermore, many models have been developed in order to explain the social inequalities between men and women. The concept of patriarchy, as well as the Marxist Approach are two of the most discussed models in literature.

3 Methods

3.1 Sample

The word *research* itself is often referred to the action of “finding something out”. What is commonly often forgotten is *how* the scientists investigate. Different issues might require specific methods in order to be able to work scientifically valuable (Silvermann, 2014). Bryman (2016) describes research design as “*a framework for the collection and analysis of data*” (p40).

Creswell (2003) acknowledges, that when talking about designing academic research, three main approaches can be distinguished: *Quantitative, qualitative* and *mixed methods*. In order to decide upon one of these methods, a framework has to be developed based on several questions. He developed three central questions :

1. *What knowledge claims are being made by the researcher?*
2. *What strategies of inquiry will inform the procedures?*
3. *What methods of data collection and analysis will be used?*

Source: Creswell, 2003, p. 5

As each scientific issue calls for another research approach, the researcher has to decide on the right research method as a first step. Quantitative Research methods can be briefly explained as “*a strategy that emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis*” (Bryman, 2016, p32). Focus lies on testing or verifying of theory, rather than generation of theory. Quantitative research typically uses closed-ended questions and analyzes the answers in a statistical way (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative Research in contrast, concentrates more on words rather than numbers (Bryman, 2016). Often, personal value is put into the study as the collected data is not evaluated in a statistical way, but instead content-wise interpreted. Mixed Methods are basically a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Table 1 provides better understanding of these three research methods.

Quantitative Research Methods	Qualitative Research Methods	Mixed Methods Research Methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predetermined • Instrument based questions • Performance data, attitude data, observational data, and census data • Statistical analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging methods • Open-ended questions • Interview data, observation data, document data, audio-visual data • Text and image analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both predetermined and emerging methods • Both open- and closed-ended questions • Multiple forms of data drawing on all possibilities • Statistical and text analysis

Table 1- Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods Procedures (Source: Creswell, 2003, p17)

The research question in this thesis calls for a qualitative research approach, in order to explore why and how women perceive to be treated differently throughout their career advancements. Within the qualitative data collection, various methods can be chosen from, ranging from documents and audiovisual materials to observations and interviews. When deciding for conducting interviews, again, several options arise: face-to-face, telephone and group interviews (Creswell, 2003). For this examination, face-to-face interviews were chosen.

Interviews can be unstructured, with only a few open-ended questions, mostly with the goal of evoking opinions and views of the interviewees (Creswell, 2003). Nevertheless, in many cases a semi-structured interview seems more appropriate. Semi-structured means, that the interviewer uses an interview guide with fixed questions in a particular order. This is especially useful when more than one interview is conducted and a comparison of the results is planned. Even though there is a questionnaire, the interviewer has the opportunity of varying some of the questions during the interview (Cohen, Crabtree, 2006). This thesis focuses therefore on semi-structured interviews.

3.2 Interview Guidelines and Interviewees

For this research, eight Austrian women in high management positions in different companies have been interviewed. Emphasis was put on having women working in different industries, in order to gain a broader insight into this topic.

The author asked successful women from her personal environment, and via snowball technique other women were involved. *“With this approach to sampling, the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others”* (Bryman, 2016, p188). The female managers were chosen based on their managerial function within their company.

Each interview took about 20 minutes, where the interviewees reported their individual observations and experiences. The interview questions were semi-structured and were conducted face to face, with the exception of two interviews, which had to be conducted via telephone due to scheduling issues.

The women are of different ages, which goes hand in hand with their years of working experience. Also, the interviewees have different backgrounds in educational, as well as in cultural contexts. These criteria make objective, widespread assumptions on the subject matter possible.

The following questions were asked in the interviews:

- 1.) Profile
 - a. Career path
 - b. Personal background
 - c. Aspirations
- 2.) During their career:
 - a. Have you heard about the concept of the glass ceiling? Have you experienced this yourself? If yes, how?
 - b. Gender gap:
 - i. Please talk about your observations and experiences.
 - ii. Did you notice a change over the last years?

- iii. Do you think the gender gap has an influence on promotions and wages? Have you felt discrimination in context to these issues?
 - c. How do you balance your family (if applicable) and your career?
 - d. Do you feel that raising your children (if applicable) had an impact on your career compared to your male colleagues? If so, how and why?
- 3.) In current position:
- a. Do you notice a discrimination against women in your particular industry? And if so, in leading positions? Do you think the issue differs from industry to industry? If so, how?
 - b. Do you face any challenges in your function because of being female?
- 4.) Overcoming the gender differences (i.e., gender pay gap)
- a. Can you think of any initiatives or actions that should be taken to overcome the gender gap? Can you provide an, in your opinion successful, initiative in Austria and/or globally?
 - b. Did you try or are you trying to change these gender differences yourself, given your position? If so, how? If not, can you explain why not?
- 5.) Closing
- a. What you would recommend to future generations and young women like me when dealing with gender differences and when entering professional life?
 - b. Do you have anything else you would like to share with me on this topic?

As all of the interviews were held in German, the German Version of the Interview Guideline can be found as Annex 1.

4 Research Results

In this section, the results of the conducted research will be explained and discussed in detail. The interview outcomes will be clustered into the following subchapters: profile, observations of the gender gap during the career and in the current position, differences between industries, work-life balance, overcoming gender differences and advice for young women. At first, a table will provide a brief introduction of the interview partners, as well as their hierarchic position at their company. Based on this information, the women's profiles will be briefly compared. Emphasis will be put on their educational background, as well as on their family status. Second, the women's observations of the gender gap during their career and specifically in their leading position will be discussed. In this context, their experiences of the glass ceiling will also be discussed, as well as their observations of any possible changes in the handling of the issue over the years. Based on these conclusions, possible differences between the involved industries and the women's perception of a good work-life balance will be explained. As some of the questions were quite personal, most of the statements are anonymized. However, in order to underpin some of the conclusions, several specific examples will be given. These assertions will be assigned to the concerning woman and the involved company. The section *Overcoming the Gender Gap* will deal with the women's opinion on what can be done, in order to overcome inequalities in general, as well as answer the question if the interviewees generally appreciate or neglect mandatory female quotas. Lastly, some personal statements of the women will be provided, for the purpose of giving various advises to young females in their first working years. This section will examine the individual learnings of each woman, which they gained during their professional career.

4.1 Interviewees' Position and Work Experience

Table 2 provides information about the women who took part in this research. Because of different organizational structures, it is not possible to state the number of employees that are managed by each woman. While one woman might be in a chair function in a firm with more than 1000 employees, she might be in direct responsibility for a team of only 3 employees. Therefore, giving exact numbers in this context would create bias on the importance of each woman within the

company. The age is indicated, as some questions that were asked aimed to see if significant changes over time could be observed. Obviously, a woman in her fifties has a longer working experience than a younger woman, and some perceptions of this topic might also be different. Emphasis should also be placed on the different industries the women work in, as they will play an important role as well.

Name	Position	Company	In the position for/since
Mag. Christa Grabner	Chief executive	Pierre Fabre- Dermo-Cosmétique	7 years (2000-2017)
Mag. Claudia Handl	Director Public Affairs	Pfizer	10 years
Dr. Yvonne Holper-Schichl	Chief executive	Drehm Strategies GmbH	9 months
Heidi Hrusa	Agency head	Yield Public Relations	4 years
Mag. Elisabeth Pelzer	Managing Director	Publicis Vienna	4,5 years (2013-2017)
Mag. Sabine Radl	Managing Director	Sanofi Austria	2,5 years
Manuela Türk, BA	Director	Bildungszentrum der Sicherheitsexekutive Wien (Educational center of police corps Vienna)	7 years (2011-2013 interim)
Dr. Veronika Zügel	Head of Corporate Human Resources	ÖBB Holding AG	1,5 years

Table 2- Interview Partners

Source: Author's table

4.2 Interviewee's Profiles

In order to create a deeper understanding for the following sequence, the women's profiles will be discussed and compared as a first step. Emphasis will be put on the educational background, as well as on the individual career paths compared to one

another in general. Keeping the factor in mind, that each of the women has had a different career path, as well as a differently intensive working experience, will make it easier to make conclusions from each of the questions asked. Furthermore, the women's family status will be mentioned and compared to the Austrian average household.

7 out of 8 women have an academic background. The field of studies was not in all cases management, but ranged from scientific university courses, such as biology, to social sciences, like journalism and theater studies. Most of the career paths can be described as "*traditional*", which means that the woman started at the hierarchic bottom of a company and received promotions into higher positions over time. In this context, it is important to state that one of the women in the sample has a noticeable different career background than all the other interview partners. Before starting her professional career in business, she worked as a researcher on the faculty of biology at a university, which is a rather uncommon starting point for initiating a showpiece career in the private sector.

Two of the interviewees (Christa Grabner and Elisabeth Pelzer) are currently not in a leading position due to personal reasons. Nevertheless, the section *Observations in the current position* refers to their period in a high managerial function.

Another perspective that should not be unmentioned in this section is the women's family status. In 2016, the average of children per woman in a reproductive age in Austria was 1.53. That number did not change drastically over the last two decades (Statista, 2018). However, the average number of children per woman in this research paper is approximately 0.75. This is significantly below the Austrian standard. In light of the above, the women's family status should be kept in mind, when concluding from the women's perceptions about work-life balance.

Nevertheless, it seems that one personality trait is shared by all of the interviewed women: When asked if they have any goals for the future, all of them answered confidently with "*yes*". Every interviewee in the sample either has ambitions in educational respect or with regards to their career development itself. Three women stated that they feel easily bored, if they are stranded in one occupation for too long.

4.3 Observations of the Gender Gap

4.3.1 During the Career

In order to analyze female manager's perceptions about the gender gap, one has to start with their experiences and observations during their career. Depending on each individual career path, networks and how they got into the final, leading position, the opinions on the topic "*gender inequalities*" might vary. In this section individual stories that were told by the interviewees will be expounded with regards to their observations on the aforementioned topic during their careers. The focus will lie on their personal experiences of the so-called glass ceiling, their observation of any changes in the handling of the discussed issue throughout the years and to what extent they ever (if so) felt discriminated against men.

Overall, 7 out of 8 women are convinced that a gender gap is existent in Austria. Nevertheless, all of the women have troubles to put in words in what way they experienced inequalities on their own. It seems that existing inequalities between men and women are predominantly a general perception that cannot easily be narrowed down to specific situations. However, the majority of the women confirms that the topic *Gender Gap* is often discussed in their personal networks of female leaders. In this context one interviewee stated, that young women in their first working years can hardly understand the true nature of the set of issues. In order to be able to fully comprehend an organization's structure, years of experience are typically needed and it is often noticeable that the perceptions of young females regarding the discussed topic regularly change over time. However, two women of the interviewed sample did not confirm an existing glass ceiling in Austria. Both did never feel discrimination because of their gender against themselves or against other female colleagues.

When the interviewees were asked about their observations of the glass ceiling, some of them did not automatically think of this concept only in the context of gender. An example for this can be illustrated by the following quote: "*The glass ceiling does also exist in other terms than gender. In an international environment, a candidate from Austria has definitely less chances to be promoted into a leading position than someone from a larger country.*" (n.n., 2018) 2 other women

supported this specific observation. Furthermore, all women, regardless of their perceptions of the Austrian situation, shared the opinion that gender inequalities are also strongly existent in other parts of the world.

A topic that also seems to be of great importance to some of the women is *networking*. It seems evident that Austria's culture puts high emphasis on personal networks and that the business environment is heavily dependent on agreements initiated via these connections. Thus, business decisions are often not clearly comprehensible and transparent to outsiders. Assumptions are being made, that in general, men are better networkers compared to their female counterparts. This circumstance is also amplified by the lack of time, for activities like these, that women often experience, as family duties are traditionally delegated to them. 4 out of 8 women agree to this conclusion.

However, most of the women are confident that the right steps are taken in order to overcome these inequalities and that a general awareness for this topic is steadily developing. 6 out of 8 women were able to recognize a clearly positive change over the last years. Women are being promoted more often and male colleagues seem to get used to having a woman as a direct superior.

A good example for an extremely positive change over time is what has happened within Vienna's police. When Manuela Türk started working for this public institution in 1991, she was one of the very first women employed by this institution. In fact, there were only 3 women in contrast to 120 male colleagues. Türk acknowledges that *"these days women in uniform seemed to be exotic for the Viennese population, and, even more, for the own colleagues."* (Türk, 2018) Especially when it comes to night duty and driving with a patrol car, she recognizes major development in terms of equality. She categorizes these observations in decades, and is confident to say, that women in uniform in a patrol car are almost the norm these days. By now, about 50% of police officers in training are female. Nevertheless, when it comes to higher levels within the institution, this percentage declines drastically. *"This is what has to be developed within the next decade"*, says Türk. (2018)

4.3.2 Current Position Experiences

This section describes the women's observations in their individual managerial function. Especially the question if the women have ever felt taken less serious by their male colleagues will be discussed. Furthermore, female leader's key competences will be explained.

This topic was the most controversial of all questions asked during the interviews. When it comes to negotiations with men, the women's experiences divide completely. Half of the women are sure, that gender does not play any role in this context. Business meetings should be based on knowledge and competence, rather than on genetic factors. Two of the women even stated that they have never felt taken less serious by men, if anything, that negotiating with men is easier than with other women. They added that the reason for their observation is the fact that men tend to have a more direct nature, while women often do not say clearly what they think and initially intend.

In contrast, the other half of interviewees mentioned, that being the only woman at a negotiation table with many male colleagues can be a huge challenge. They stated, that they often feel excluded by men and do not have the necessary self-esteem to stand up for their opinion. *"Women have another way of thinking in many contexts"* (n.n., 2018) , explained one of the women. Therefore, they learned that it needs at least 3 women in order to being able to stand up against men. Furthermore, Heidi Hrusa referred to this problem not only in context of male colleagues, but also with male clients. She feels that her male colleagues are clearly taken more seriously in situations that include such counterparties.

One of the women stated, that not only differences in the way of thinking between males and females are observable, but that there are also great differences in leadership styles between men and women. Nevertheless, she did not want to classify this topic in clichés and name any specific examples. However, she sees these differences as opportunities. A key competence of each manager should be expertise; discussions should take place on a highly professional basis. *"In this scenario, gender is always secondary"*, stated one of the women. Another woman named experience and a strong personality as key competences for a successful

female leader. A lot of routine and many years of practice are also said to be major traits for a female leader's appearance.

4.3.3 Differences in the Industries

After having explained the women's perceptions about their own industries in the last section, this section will focus on the female leader's observations of other industries. The aim is to answer the question if there are industries in Austria where women are particularly fostered, and in contrast, where women face intensively drastic discriminations.

The interviewees' answers on this questions brought back a distinctive way of consensus between the interviewees. To be specific, all of the women can imagine, that the situation looks different in other industries. All of them agree, that finance is a good example for an industry that has a bad reputation in terms of emancipation. Nevertheless, none of the interviewed women feels confident to make concrete statements in this context, as they could only talk about subjective presumptions, rather than objective observations.

However, some of the women feel lucky to work in a specifically women-friendly industry. To give a concrete example, Christa Grabner, who works in the cosmetic industry, acknowledged, that women in her industry are particularly fortunate, as the whole market is dominated by women. Consequently, women have fewer problems with not being taken seriously by colleagues, and typically more females are promoted. Also in the area of marketing, women tend to be highly represented and therefore advantaged.

4.3.4 Observations of the Gender Pay Gap

As already explained in detail, the gender pay gap refers to a distinctive difference in wages between male and female. The interviewees were asked if they can confirm these inequalities in wages in Austria, which look to be very drastic and obvious in the statistic shown above (Figure 3).

Most of the women working in the corporate sector stated, that they do not have enough insight into the wages of their colleagues in order to make concrete assumptions on this critical subject matter. Nevertheless, the subject opinion

prevails, that a noticeable gender pay gap is not observable in Austria. However, 2 women share the opinion that wage inequalities are still strong in Austria. One woman even experienced this phenomenon on her own, in a previous position, where she earned considerably less than her male colleague in the same position, even though she was better educated and had more experience. The women generally think that the main problem is still a cultural one. It is in some way self-evident that men earn more and get into higher salary classes quicker. Moreover, women often have too little self-esteem to ask for a better payment and therefore accept these inequalities towards the employer.

All of the other women deny an existing gender pay gap in their personal environment. Manuela Türk, for example, is convinced that inequalities between wages are not possible within the interior ministry, as the salary pattern is completely visible and comprehensible and only refers to the officer's position. Even though the salary class systems are differently structured in the private sector and not publicly accessible, these women confirm the absence of inequalities.

4.3.5 Observations of the Gender Gap - Conclusion

To sum up the main findings in this section, it can be concluded that gender inequalities are still an often-discussed topic between female leaders. Even though these discriminations are not easily to detect, the general opinion on this topic is unambiguous. Networks seems to play an important role in Austria's businesses, where women are often less integrated than their male colleagues. However, an improvement of the situation in the labor market could be observed over the past years.

Furthermore, it is not possible to make any clear assumptions about the women's perceptions of discrimination in the leading position. The opinions of the interviewees divide strongly on this subject matter. Half of the women did never experience any problems when it comes to assertiveness against men, while the other half underwent the complete opposite. Possible reasons might be the individual woman's personality traits and number of years in their high management position, but also the industry she works in and the kind of decisions that are being discussed.

However, the women agree that the inequalities between men and female vary in different industries. Some industries seem to be more conservative than others and the interviewees coincide that in some industries, women have still evidently less chances than men.

Finally, the gender pay gap does not seem to be a central topic of discussion. Only 2 out of 8 women confirm the existence of unequal wage distributions between men and women. Especially in public institutions, these inequalities are absent due to clearly structured and visible salary class systems.

4.4 Work-Life-Balance

The question if women are disadvantaged by nature because of family commitments, creates a broad discussion in context of work-life balance. Depending on their own personal experiences, each of the interviewees' answers appeared to be slightly different. For some, family and work life seemed to be easier to arrange than for others. Also the way their companies deal with this subject matter differentiates.

Overall, the women agree that *work-life balance* is a central topic for every female manager. Creating a healthy balance between family and work is a daily challenge for each of them, whether they have children or not. Being in a leading position requires a lot of commitment and withdrawals in terms of individual time management.

Moreover, all of the women share the opinion that work-life balance is something extremely personal, which cannot be forced by anyone else. A company can only support women in their time management, but the balance itself has to be created by each woman on her own. 7 out of 8 women agree, that women are underprivileged by nature, for reasons such as child delivery or breastfeeding. Nevertheless, not all of the interviewees feel disadvantaged compared to men. *"Nowadays, evermore models are being developed, that make it possible for women to arrange these problems extremely well,"* (n.n., 2018) states one of the women. 3 women agree to this.

Claudia Handl states in this context, that Pfizer developed a reasonable concept for this common problem: Meetings are never set before 9 am, and never after 4 pm. This makes it possible for parents to have enough time for their children and do not have to miss out an important business meeting. It is important to create an environment, where both men and women do not have to choose between work and family.

However, it seems that a problem still exists from a cultural perspective: All of the women agree, that household duties, as well as childcare are still seen as mostly female duties. *“While my men colleagues often go for a drink after work, me and my female coworkers usually have to go home in order to do some household chores and cook,”* acknowledges one of the interviewees. This fact goes hand in hand with the aforementioned missing networks of many females. Furthermore, men in paternity leave are still single cases in most companies, even though there is no biological explanation why women have to stay at home in the first months and not men.

One of the women even admits, that she was not able to create a healthy balance between her family and her work in some periods of her life. In order to be successful, she neglected her children in some ways and that is what she regrets by now. She strongly supports the fact that was already mentioned before: a company cannot force a healthy work-life balance. Even if the business provides the best options for parents, it’s the women herself who decides how to use her time. *“If I could turn back time, I would do it differently.”*, she admits.

To conclude, the problem with finding a good balance between work and family is not a structural, but rather a cultural one. Societies perceptions on childcare and household duties have to change, in order to solve this often discussed problem.

4.5 Overcoming the Gender Differences

Even though many actions have been set over the past years, it is evident that inequalities between men and female still exist. The opinions, if governmental interference, for example by introducing mandatory gender quotas for big companies, or by several other equality laws, is expediently divide. This section’s aim is to give insight into the interviewees’ perceptions on this topic. Also, it

describes some concrete actions that some of the respective companies, where the women work in, launched in order to minimize gender imbalances.

One of the women stated, that she always tries to promote women. She often experienced women to be better suitable for certain positions than men, mostly because of flexibility and adaptability. Nevertheless, she has to admit that she even found herself several times in the situation where she had to decide against a young woman in prolific age. This certain problem seems to be bigger in smaller companies than in larger ones, mostly because of budgeting and time issues. In order to overcome this difficult situation, the woman highly recommends a job sharing system.

Furthermore, 3 of the women are convinced, that another helpful way of supporting women during their career is mentoring. Having a supportive expert might help establishing higher self-esteem, and therefore reach personal goals quicker. Furthermore, a mentor may help building up the right aforementioned network that might be necessary in Austria's businesses. Nevertheless, they agree that it is of great importance to have someone from the same field of expertise, who has experienced similar things and had a comparable career path.

A concept that is regarded as extremely positive by 7 of the interviewees is the flexible part-time model. Giving women the opportunity to stay in their jobs even while raising their children is a major step in the process of emancipation.

Nevertheless, one of the women states that she would appreciate a job-sharing model rather than a part-time model. In smaller companies, it is oftentimes hard to employ women that are planning on working only part time. When a team is smaller, each employee has to undertake more responsibilities and a delegation of work that has to be done is often not possible. In many cases, the company is pressed for time and tasks have to be done within a certain time period. Having several women employed who only work a few days per week makes a suggestive time management in some cases impossible.

What is more, the opinions on a mandatory quota of females in companies were also not homogenous. Only 3 women share the view that a governmentally enforced

gender quota is necessary and a positive progress. The other interviewees had a critical look on this topic for several reasons. First, two of the women stated that a governmental interference is not necessary anymore, as companies are already taking enough steps to overcome these inequalities on their own. Second, one woman stated, that a gender quota might lead to a discrimination against men when female applications have to be treated preferential. The equal treatment of men and women has to develop from peoples' minds and perceptions, and cannot be forced by politicians. Again, they stated that the problems arise from a cultural perspective, which has to be changed in peoples' heads. Nevertheless, the women agree that a mandatory quota can be used as a last resort when no other actions show a significant enhancement.

In conclusion, it seems that a huge factor within this discussion is, again, the size of the company a woman is working in. A smaller company faces more problems in overcoming the gender gap, as it has fewer possibilities in being flexible. Expanding the part time model opportunities for women seems nice in theory, but might not always be possible. A smaller company with limited human resources often does not have the necessary budget to accomplish special sources of employment, especially when it comes to working hours and schedule. A job-sharing model could help solving that problem. A mandatory gender quota within companies is viewed highly controversial. 4 of the interviewed female leaders do not see a reasonableness in this concept.

4.6 Advice for Young Females (Future CEOs)

In the last section of the interview, the women were asked if they have any advice for younger generations in their first working years. The answers on this question were quite homogenous, anyhow each statement on this topic was inspiring and encouraging for both young women and men.

Young women should not be afraid to stand up for what they believe in and follow their goals for their professional career. Discrimination should never be tolerated and whenever inequalities against a minority group are observed, they should be reported and prosecuted immediately. Future female leaders should be self-confident and should definitely not bow down to intimidation. They should

persuade with knowledge and professionalism, rather than with the help of outer appearances. Furthermore, one of the female leaders interviewed advises to always keep away from unserious and unprofessional arrangements. In order to cause a change in peoples' minds and force them to rethink sexual stereotyping, women have to contrast themselves strongly from those century-lasting, old-fashioned perceptions.

However, besides building up the career based on professional knowledge and performance, the private life should not suffer. Creating a personally healthy work-life balance is essential, as the work should never be taken as more important than leisure. Young mothers should never put their children and families back, in order to be more successful at work.

Diligence and working experience will help young women reaching their personal goals and will make them climb up the career ladder as high as they plan to. Nevertheless, as the interviewed women admit, luck is also a factor that should not be disregarded in that context.

5 Conclusion

The main focus of this thesis is the question if, and if so, in what way women in leading management positions experience discrimination in business environments because of their gender. After having intensely dealt with literature, such as books and academic journal articles referring to this topic, and combining these results with the findings obtained through the study conducted by the author, numerous assumptions can be made.

Right at the outset, the broad conclusion can be drawn, that the gender gap does indeed still exist in Austria. In the light of the relevant literature, such as current statistics and the conducted interviews, there is no room for any doubt regarding this subject matter. In this examination, the insights that have been theoretically read and revised are being extensively supported by the female leader's answers, which were collected by way of semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Nevertheless, these inequalities seem to be hidden from outsiders and are not easily observable. To the contrary, the gender gap in businesses can be described more accurately as an overall feeling, rather than a circumstance that can be explained by using concrete examples from the women's personal experiences. However, the female leader's general opinion seems to be that discrimination happens in other countries too, and if so, in a more obvious way than it takes place in companies based in Austria.

Many of the aforementioned phenomena that were observed and described by the interviewees overlap extensively with what has already been discussed in scientific literature. When looking for the underlying roots of the issue of the gender gap, the two main drivers turned out to be an organization's structure and culture. To be specific, occurrences such as the glass ceiling in businesses commonly arise from structural problems. Women are often prevented from climbing up the career ladder to high-level management positions, for reasons that are not related to their professional performance or their expert knowledge. In the contrary, the decisive factors which influence who gets promoted and who does not, are instead closely linked to personal networks and the candidates time availableness. To be specific, Austria's culture is heavily presence based, rather than performance based, putting

females at a disadvantage, which are often occupied in part-time working conditions due to their family chores.

Several steps have already been taken in order to overcome these inequalities, especially Austria's government started to set actions to target this subject matter. Nevertheless, it is sad to say that recent statistics show that Austria is a long way from joining up to the leading countries when it comes to gender equality.

To conclude, the examined research question, which was: *“What are the main challenges women face in an organizational culture and when operating in a leadership position in Austria and how are they trying to overcome those challenges?”* cannot be answered easily. When comparing the latest statistics in this field published by Statistics Austria and the opinions provided by the interviewees, some of the incongruities between the two input sources seem to be surprising. By way of example, even though the women did not deny the general existence of gender inequalities in Austria, their observations did not seem to be as drastic as one would derive from the aforementioned statistics. Especially when it comes to the gender pay gap, recent statistics show that Austria is one of the countries in the EU with the highest degree of inequality in wage distribution between men and women. However, the interviewee's observations on this topic were broadly deviating from this fact. 5 out of the 8 interviewed women shared the opinion that they do not have any indication to think that a gender pay gap does exist in their company at all. What is more, only one woman from the sample group experienced a discrimination in terms of remuneration on her own.

All of the women stated that they try to be extremely supportive to other women in their companies. Some of the interviewees even claimed to have experienced a better working climate with female colleagues than with male counterparts. Moreover, the interview partners are of the opinion that women tend to be more adaptable and flexible.

To meet the scientific requirement of relevancy, this thesis provides new insights into gender discrimination in the Austrian labor market. As a matter of fact, the combination of industries that have been compared is unique and the findings obtained through the conducted interviews with top-level executives are surprisingly

incoherent with data already in existence. What is more, the manager's personal advice for young women in their first working years can be seen as a new contribution to literature. Each answer that was given to the regarding question was quite private and individual, but the picture that emerged when aggregating the responses was in general surprisingly homogenous.

Interestingly, it turned out that the interviewed female leaders had fewer children on average than the general Austrian fertility rate would suggest. However, 8 women are not representative to make general assumptions based on that statistic. Further research could be done in this field by conducting interviews with a higher number of female managers and asking them about their family status. Afterwards a conclusion could be drawn to examine whether Austrian female managers have to decide between having children and their career or not. Another interesting aspect in this context is the twelve-hour business day, which is currently being discussed by Austria's politicians. Since women are, as already mentioned before, already heavily influenced by inflexible and long working hours, further research could be done to better assess the effects of the current debate on women's success in regards to emancipation and their work-life balance respectively.

In respect to the mandatory 30% quota of females in supervisory boards of exchange-listed companies, it is important that the government starts to address the issue of gender inequality in a broader, more general perspective; i.e. since the concerning law primarily targets multinational corporates and supervisory boards specifically, smaller businesses might feel like they are let off the hook. Considering that the majority of Austrian enterprises falls under the category of small businesses, the bulk of Austrian women doesn't experience any improvement of their situation.

In order to overcome the gender gap from a company's point of view, a clear and reasonable hierarchical system has to be developed. The concerning enterprise should introduce a policy which supports young women in creating a healthy balance between their family and their work life. Offering part-time models, introducing job-sharing concepts and launching flexible working hours are major keys in order to keep more successful women in their positions in the company. Furthermore, a transparent wage system has to be developed so that the possibility of an unequal wage distribution can be rooted out as far as possible. Moreover, as

soon as discrimination in any form is being detected in the organization, an immediate prosecution has to take place.

However, the general situation in Austria's labor market will only change, if a cultural change, in the way in which the majority of people thinks, takes place. Household, as well as familial duties must not longer be seen as female responsibilities only, but should be divided equally between men and women. Men in paternity leave must no longer be a curiosity, but should become something completely ordinary in every company. Nevertheless, these changes will only be possible, if society changes its obsolete perceptions of gender stereotypes. On the one hand, men should have the ability to accept women as their superiors, and have to take action themselves when it comes to raising a family, cooking, cleaning and other household chores. On the other hand, women have to learn to stop accepting this outdated way of thinking and start to oppose against the stereotypical perceptions in which they are forced in. Furthermore, women should put an emphasis on staying professional when it comes to their career development and impress exclusively with their professionalism and knowledge. As long as some women try to accelerate their career by taking advantage of their own sexist treatment, other females, that don't resort to such practices, are held back in their emancipation by individuals of their own gender.

However, this thesis' conclusions have some limitations that might make general assumptions difficult. First of all, the small sample size of 8 women is not representative of Austria's leading women as a whole. Second, not all industries that can be found in the country are included in this research, which might lead to a biased result. Business areas typically dominated by men, such as the finance industry, are not represented at all, which might vitiate some of the assumptions. Thirdly, the interviews were conducted on the basis of a questionnaire that included only 5 groups of themes. Since the author defined the questions, which were asked in the semi-structured interview, herself, a bias towards her own beliefs and assumptions regarding the topic might be naturally given.

Although the examination is subject to certain limitations, the main findings in this thesis certainly balance out these constraints. Not only is the author able to underpin the majority of his findings with previously drafted scientific literature, but

she also provides extensive explanations for results of her qualitative research that are not congruent with the outcomes of research conducted by other authors. Although it is obviously necessary to fill gaps in the scientific literature with examinations like this, the more important aspect is to raise public awareness for the topic of discrimination against women. The author holds the firm opinion, that every step that is taken in order to overcome these unsubstantiated differentiations is a valuable one. Hence, she hopes that this thesis is at least a small contribution to the process of overcoming the gender gap.

Bibliography

Arulampalam, W., Booth, A. and Bryan, M. (2007). Is There a Glass Ceiling over Europe? Exploring the Gender Pay Gap across the Wage Distribution. *ILR Review*, 60(2), 163-186.

Baker, D. T. & Kelan, E. K. (2015) Policy and practice of diversity management in the workplace. In Syed, J. & Özbilgin, M. (Eds.), *Managing Diversity and Inclusion: An International Perspective*. London: Sage Publication

Beechey, V. (1979). On Patriarchy. *Feminist Review* 3 (1), 66-82.
Doi:<https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1979.21>

Billing, Y. D., & Alvesson, M. (1994). *Gender, managers and organizations*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Casson, M. (1991). *The economics of business culture: Game theory, transaction costs, and economic performance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Child, J. (1972). Organizational Structure, Environment and Performance: The Role of Strategic Choice. *Sociology*, 6(1), 1-22. Doi:10.1177/003803857200600101

Cohen, D. & Crabtree, B. (2006). *Qualitative Research Guidelines Project*. Princeton: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. London: Sage Publications

culture.(2018) in *Cambridge Dictionary Online*. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/culture>

diversity.(2018) in *Cambridge Dictionary Online*. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/diversity>

Dreher, G. (2003) Breaking the Glass Ceiling: The effect of sex ratios and work-life programs of female leadership at the top. *Human Relations* 56 (5), 541-562

Goldin C, Katz L.F. (2001). On the Pill: Changing the Course of Women's Education. *Milken Institute Review*. 3 (2). 12-21.

Grabenhofer, H. (2013). *The Influence of Leadership Style and Management Control Systems on the Creative Team Environment in Consulting Teams- An Overview* (Master's thesis)

Hermann, A. (2003). *Karrieremuster im Management als Ergebnis geschlechtlich gesteuerter Austauschprozesse- Die Sozialtheorie Pierre Bourdieus als*

Ausgangspunkt für eine geschlechterbasierte Karrierebetrachtung (Doctor's dissertation)

Hofstede, G. (2018). *Country comparison*. Retrieved from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/austria/>

Jordan, J., & Jones, P. (1997). Assessing your companys knowledge management style. *Long Range Planning*, 30(3), 322-398. doi:10.1016/s0024-6301(97)00019-8

Krell, G., Pantelmann, H. & Wächter, H. (2006). Diversity (-Dimensionen) und deren Management als Gegensätze der Personalforschung in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz. In Krell, G. & Wächter, H. (Eds.), *Diversity Management: Impulse aus der Personalforschung* pp 25-56, München: Rainer Hampp Verlag

Markides, C. & Williamson, P. J. (1996). Corporate Diversification and Organizational Structure: A Resource Based View. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 39(2), 340-367

Mcdonagh, K. J. (2010). Secrets of the Labyrinth: Insights Into Career Advancement for Women. *Nurse Leader*, 8(4), 41-43. doi:10.1016/j.mnl.2010.05.010

Mor Barak, M. E., Findler, L., & Wind, L. H. (2003). Cross-Cultural Aspects of Diversity and Well-Being in the Workplace: An International Perspective. *Journal of Social Work Research and Evaluation*, 4(2), 145-169.

Morrison, A. M., White, R. P., & Van Velsor, E. (1992). *Breaking the glass ceiling: Can women reach the top of Americas largest corporations?* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub.

Mulcahy, M. & Linehan, C. (2014). Females and Precarious board Positions: Further Evidence of the Glass Cliff. *British Journal of Management*, 25, 425-438. doi: 10.1111/1467-8551.12046

Needle, D. (1994). *Business in Context- An Introduction to Business and its Environment*. London: Chapman & Hall.

Plank, D. (2017). Ein Vorbild für Frauen heute? Retrieved from *ORF Science* <http://science.orf.at/stories/2839880/>

Ragins, B., Townsend, B. and Mattis, M. (1998). Gender gap in the executive suite: CEOs and female executives report on breaking the glass ceiling. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 12(1), pp.28-42.

Risman, B. J. (2004). Gender as a social structure: Theory wrestling with Activism. *Gender & Society* 18(4). pp 429-450

Ryan, M. K. & Haslam, S. A. (2005). The glass cliff: Evidence that women are over-represented in precarious leadership positions. *British Journal of Management*, 16, 81-90. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8551.2005.00433.x

Ryan, M. K. & Haslam, S. A. (2007). The glass cliff: exploring the dynamics surrounding the appointment of women to precarious leadership positions. *Academy of Management Review*. 32 (2), 549-572

Sander, G. & Hartmann, I. (2016) Einführung einer Diversity-and-Inclusion-Kultur. In: Genkova P., Ringeisen T. (eds) *Handbuch Diversity Kompetenz*. Wiesbaden: Springer

Seebacher, L. M., Wieser C. (2018.) *Frauen Management Report 2018*. Wien: Kammer für Arbeiter und Angestellte für Wien.

Silvermann, D. (2014). *Interpreting Qualitative Data*. London: Sage Publications

Statista (2018). *Fertilitätsrate in Österreich von 2006 bis 2016 (Geborene Kinder je Frau)*. Retrieved from:
<https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/217432/umfrage/fertilitaetsrate-in-oesterreich/>

Statistik Austria (2018). *Einkommen*. Retrieved from:
http://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/menschen_und_gesellschaft/soziales/gender-statistik/einkommen/index.html

Trompenaars, F., & Hampden-Turner, C. (1997). *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding cultural diversity in global business*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Vedder, G. (2006). Die historische Entwicklung von Diversity Management in den USA und in Deutschland. In Krell, G. & Wächter, H. (Eds.), *Diversity Management: Impulse aus der Personalforschung* pp 1-24, München: Rainer Hampp Verlag

Wiersema, M. & Mors, M. L. (2016). What Board Directors really think of Gender Quotas. *Harvard Business Review*

Williams, C. (1992). The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the "Female" Professions. *Social Problems*, 39(3), 253-267.

Appendices

Appendix 1- Interview Guideline German

- 1.) Profil
 - a. Karriereweg
 - b. Persönlicher Hintergrund/Bildung
 - c. Ziele
- 2.) Während der Karriere:
 - a. Haben Sie von dem Konzept der Gläsernen Decke gehört? Haben Sie es selbst erlebt? Wenn ja, bitte erläutern Sie Ihre Erfahrungen.
 - b. Gender Gap
 - i. Bitte erläutern Sie Ihre Erfahrungen und Beobachtungen
 - ii. Haben Sie eine Veränderung im Laufe der Zeit empfunden?
 - iii. Glauben Sie, dass der sogenannte Gender Gap einen Einfluss auf Beförderungen und Gehälter hat? Haben Sie in dieser Hinsicht selbst schon Diskriminierung erfahren?
 - c. Wie schaffen Sie eine gesunde Balance zwischen Familie und Arbeit?
 - d. Haben Sie sich je aufgrund Ihrer familiären Verpflichtungen gegenüber Männern benachteiligt gefühlt? Wenn ja, wie?
- 3.) In Ihrer aktuellen Position:
 - a. Haben Sie in Ihrer Industrie Diskriminierung gegen Frauen erlebt? Und in Führungspositionen? Gibt es zwischen den Industrien Unterschiede? Wenn ja, welche genau?
 - b. Haben Sie manchmal Schwierigkeiten sich als Frau gegenüber Männern zu behaupten? Wird man als Frau bei gewissen Verhandlungen weniger Ernst genommen?
- 4.) Den Gender Gap überwältigen:
 - a. Fallen Ihnen Initiativen und Aktionen ein die ein- oder durchgeführt werden sollten um den Gender Gap zu bewältigen?
 - b. Haben Sie selbst versucht etwas an der Situation zu ändern? Wenn ja, wie und wenn nicht, können Sie erklären warum nicht?

5.) Abschluss

- a. Was können Sie jüngeren Generationen wie meiner zu diesem Thema raten wenn wir in unseren ersten Arbeitsjahren stehen?
- b. Gibt es sonst etwas was Sie mir zu diesem Thema erzählen möchten?