

The underrepresentation of women in Austrian leadership positions

Submitted to Mr. Davis Gibbs

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Vienna, 15 June 2022

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.

15 June 2022

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Abstract

Not only globally, but also in Austria, there are far fewer women in leadership positions than men. This occurs despite the fact that the distribution between working women and men in Austria is almost equal. Moreover, the share of women and men holding university degrees is equivalent. In the Austrian society, the phenomenon of men dominating leadership positions has become ingrained to such an extent that it is widely accepted. One result of this underrepresentation of women for instance is the gender pay gap. Women are struggling much more climbing the career ladder due to barriers that prevent them from entering management boards. This can also be described as a glass ceiling.

The aim of this thesis is to identify the barriers women face when climbing the career ladder and, in the workplace, as well as how those can be overcome. In the first place, the literature provides a better comprehension of the problem. Subsequently, 10 qualitative interviews with female executives were conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding as well as to explore possible approaches on how to overcome this problem.

This paper successfully examines the barriers and gives advice for overcoming them. The interviews demonstrate that women still have difficulties in being taken seriously in the workforce and face obstacles in achieving a management position. Moreover, the results show that there are several barriers existing such as work-family barriers, those that women create in their own minds or those that are caused by a lack of networks, social pressure, or the organizational climate. Support from home and external help are the best ways to overcome these barriers due to the interviewees and the literature. There are still potential areas for further improvement, such as childcare systems mothers need or assistance from the corporate side, such as mentoring or seminars.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background Information

It is well known that women are significantly underrepresented in leadership positions, which causes gender inequality and results in the gender pay gap (Fortin et al., 2017). It has become so accepted in society that men have more suitable qualities and character traits that a skilled manager is supposed to have, than women (Grove & Montgomery, 1999). The issue of the underrepresentation is evidenced by numerous statistics, such as those from the "Frauen Management Report", which presents the official figures of the proportion of female managers for Austria. According to Hager & Wieser (2021) women occupy only 8% of executive positions in Austrian listed companies and just 26% of supervisory board positions in ATX companies are held by females (Hager & Wieser, 2021). Smith (2021) states that just 5,5% of leading positions of the 300 biggest companies in the United States of America are staffed by women. Thus, the question arises how it is possible, that even though in many areas more women than men nowadays have university degrees, women rarely occupy leadership positions in companies and other organizations (Kark & Eagly, 2010). This is a serious problem, as women are employed in every second job but are often never even considered for a management position. It has become so ingrained that many women underestimate themselves and don't even attempt it (Pande & Ford, 2012).

Pande & Ford (2012) explain that family related issues are one of the main factors that keep off women from holding a senior position due to the fact of career disruptions caused by children.

Stereotypes and Society are often causing another problem. It has been proven that many people are prejudiced against women, and female characteristics are seen as not appropriate for leading positions (Gallagher & Morison, 2019). Men are in general viewed and described as more dominant, assertive, and self-confident while women tend to be classified as quiet, helpful, friendly, and subordinate (Kark & Eagly, 2010). Frequently, this is not the case at all, but stereotypes make it difficult for women to prove otherwise.

Another barrier is the so-called male atmosphere that prevails in many companies, particularly in top management positions. This makes many women feel uncomfortable and out of place (Campuzano, 2019).

Despite the fact that we live in the year 2022, it is still a highly relevant concern to treat women and men equally in the workforce. In comparison to former times, nowadays women have the same rights and opportunities as men. Therefore, equal treatment in professional life is supposed to take place. In order to understand why this is still not happening, it is crucial to discover what the challenges and the barriers are that women face when they aspire to a leadership position. The readers will be informed about these obstacles and at the same time this thesis aims at suggesting what can be done to overcome these hurdles.

It can be said in advance that a change in thinking is needed in society as well as in politics and organizations in order to work against the underrepresentation of women at management levels. Austria is a country which is mainly characterized by traditions and society is reluctant to try out new things or different approaches in general. However, diversity in the workplace has proven to be associated with success and combats stagnation. Female managers lead companies to success, strengthen personalities and self-fulfilling perspectives in women, combat societal issues and open up new opportunities.

1.2 Aim of the Study

This thesis aims to demonstrate that women are just as suitable for leadership positions as men. They can be complementary and ideally such positions are fairly distributed between males and females. The paper elaborates the inequalities women face in the workplace during the hiring process, in terms of salaries, discrimination, and when already occupying a leadership position. It aims to elaborate what measures women themselves, as well as companies and the government, need to take to ensure a fair distribution. Interviews with women who are in leadership positions will help to find out the above-mentioned and, as a result, propose solutions. Since women in Austria are significantly more underrepresented than in other countries, this research will focus on women in leadership positions in Austria.

The above-mentioned issues lead to the first research question on this paper:

What kind of inequalities and barriers do women face in the workplace in Austria?

The second research question deals with the question how women can overcome these barriers and is called:

How do women overcome the barriers they face in leadership positions?

The next section includes the supporting literature and will give a more detailed insight into the topic.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Term Introduction

Before going into the details of the entire literature, it is useful to mention and elaborate on a few important terms in preliminary.

2.1.1 Leadership

Due to the Oxford Dictionary (2021), the term leadership can be described as leading several people or a whole organization. Due to Drath et al. (2008), leadership is about leader the interaction with followers and the process of striving for a same goal. It is also important to know that leadership is a process in which the leader and the people being led that can also be called “follower” interact with each other. Additionally, not only the characteristics and traits of the leader are of high importance, but also the attitude and, as mentioned above, the relationship with the led. Leadership and Management are two terms which are often compared to each other. The most important difference between those is that leadership is more about the mindset and the interaction and inspiration that happens between the leader and the followers while management focuses on compliance with regulations and aims to minimize risks (Day & Antonakis, 2012). According to Kibort (2004) leaders are concerned with initiating change, taking risk, and spreading energy in order to motivate and involve the follower. Moreover, leaders listen actively to the employees and try to support them, respect their values, and wishes and above all appreciate and praise outstanding work. All the above mentioned should generate intrinsic motivation among the employees (Kibort, 2004). The term “Management”, on the other hand is mainly about maintaining the status quo, keeping the company running and ensuring efficiency. At the present time, it is known that both managers and leaders are needed, and a leader can be a manager and vice versa (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

In general, leadership can be sorted into three categories. One should be a visual thinker, act as a role model, and lastingly enhance the value of the company (Hinterhuber & Krauthammer, 2005).

2.1.1.1 Visual thinking

Understanding how to deal with complexity, innovation, uncertainty, as well as a variety of perspectives is essential for aspiring leaders. It is important that leaders think visually. A psychologist namely A. Housen created visual thinking strategies, which have been further developed over time by other research scientists (Kakim & Priest, 2020). To a large extent, visual thinking is about having pictures in one's head instead of numbers and words. This visual thinking is also closely related to visual communication, which is about putting oneself in the other person's position by thinking in pictures. Through this practice, the actual information that one wants to share is communicated in the most effective way. Through visual thinking, it is easier for others to understand what someone else is trying to express. Visual thinking is also about showing empathy and truly trying to understand the opinions and views of others (Cherches, 2022).

2.1.1.2 Function of a role model

A leader is in charge of leading a group of people to achieve a common goal. Therefore, that person is supposed to be a role model for those being led and should inspire and motivate them (Hinterhuber & Krauthammer, 2005). There are several aspects that a leader must consider in order to be a strong role model. First and foremost, it is essential to be self-reflective. This is an important process as it sets standards for themselves but also for others, i.e. the whole team. Only those who are self-reflective can recognize, prevent and avoid mistakes. Secondly, it is important to be self-aware. There must be a fundamental openness to new approaches, ideas and criticism. In addition, empathy is an indispensable factor. A good role model must be able to put oneself in the shoes of others and know what effects one's behavior has on others. Moreover, a successful role model needs to have a vision, through which others know exactly where and what the goal is (Webster, 2021). No one expects a leader to be perfect, it is merely a matter of being authentic and approachable (Baumgartner, 2021).

2.1.1.3 Enhance value of the company

Leading a team, a group or an entire company is nowadays even more important than it used to be in the past. It is the case that most organizations value and seek employees who are willing to go over and beyond the call of duty and put passion into

their tasks. Leadership can have positive ripple effects and, most importantly, can boost the morale of a company and therefore positively impact a healthy organizational culture and a workplace where all employees have a feeling of belonging and being valued (Zwilling, 2015). This does not only lead to a better harmony but also increases productivity and thus the overall value of a company. Especially due to increasing competition, this is more important than ever (Prosoft, n.d.)

2.1.2 The Glass Ceiling

It is worth noting in advance that the invisible barriers women face on their way to the top are professionally known as glass ceilings. This phenomenon describes that women often do not get any promotions and consequently cannot occupy higher positions. This term was first mentioned in the Wall Street Journal in 1986 and has appeared in science ever since. It can be observed that the term consists of "glass" on one side and "ceiling" on the other side. Glass stands thereby for the fact that women perceive and see higher positions, but cannot reach them, which ceiling stands for. Summed up, women know that they have the qualities the certain top-position needs but cannot break through the glass ceiling (Omran et al., 2015). A study has shown that the higher the occupied position is in terms of hierarchy, the more gender-specific disadvantages increase. According to this principle, there is less gender bias in lower-level positions. It was also found that the more advanced the career, the worse such disadvantages become (Cotter et al., 2001).

2.2 Gender inequality

Gender inequality is a phenomenon that can be seen in almost every sector of life. Gender equality in fact it is a fundamental human right, but women still face discrimination even though progress has been taking place recently (United Nations, 2022). Even though the term is called "Gender inequality" it is mostly the female sex that is facing disadvantages instead of both genders being affected. Feminism stands for a social movement which aims to fight inequality and tries to achieve equal rights regardless of gender. Women rights that are taken for granted today. Such rights as the right to vote, to go to university or to own property were fought for in the 19th and 20th century (Lorber, 2010).

Although the Equality of Opportunity Law has been in force for decades, the proportion of women at management level in all different kinds of sectors is still relatively far too low such as in politics and in business (Rhode, 2017). It is also worth mentioning that the quotas for women are far behind not only in companies but also at universities, schools, religious institutions, or non-profit organizations (Hill et al., 2016).

2.2.1 Gender inequality in the workplace worldwide

It is widely acknowledged that women are underrepresented in leading positions in the business world (Pande & Ford, 2012). It has become ingrained in society that only men are appropriate for leadership positions (Growe & Montgomery, 1999). People in leadership positions have power and therefore the potential to change matters. Furthermore, leaders are given privileges and high positions create new possibilities. One should also not forget that money and general compensation play an important role here, as leadership positions are simply better compensated (Hill et al. 2016). Women do want to hold leadership positions. This is the result of a survey conducted in the USA among senior-level employees. It is also worth highlighting that there appears to be no difference between women who have children and those who do not (Pande & Ford, 2012).

If one observes the development of women in managerial positions in America or else in Europe, an increase is noticeable in the years between 1970-1990. Then, however, stagnation set in. This is the fundamental driver of gender inequality in the workplace (Padavic et al., 2020). The issue of gender inequality in the workplace continues with the fact that most companies and organizations are structured in such a way that men have an easier time occupying certain jobs or experience advantages in general. Male norms are embraced and supported resulting in women being automatically excluded and disadvantaged (Dashper, 2018).

2.2.1.1 Data on women in senior positions worldwide

A recent study that was conducted in 2021 shows the percentage of women in senior management positions around the globe and the data is presented in table 1. It can be seen that those figures vary by region (Catalyst, 2022).

Region	Women in Senior Management (in %)
Africa	39%
Southeast Asia (ASEAN)	38%
Latin America	36%
European Union	34%
North America	33%
Asia Pacific (APAC)	28%

Table 1 Women in Senior Management

created by the author on December 2, 2021

The numbers revealed in table 1 are the highest figures that have ever been recorded. It is also worth mentioning that a shift of position roles has taken place. While most women in leading positions around the globe occupied positions in the Human Resource sector, the figures have decreased in 2021. However, more women are now holding positions such as Chief Financial Officer, Chief Executive Officer or Chief Information Officer (Grant Thornton, 2021). Additionally, it must be noted that even though the figures that can be seen in table 1 represent the average of all countries within the region. Certain countries however reveal numbers that are far below the region's average. For example, India only has a proportion of 10% females in leading positions, the Russian federation 6% and South Korea 8% (Catalyst, 2022). In 2020 a different study which was released by Mercer observed 1.100 organizations worldwide. The findings revealed that the higher up the career ladder one observes, the fewer women can be found (Edwards et al., 2020).

2.2.2 Gender inequality in the workplace in Austria

Austria is generally seen as a country which is strongly influenced by traditions and customs. Even though the country per se is one of the most developed countries in the world in all areas of life, one field in particular has hardly developed at all in recent years, namely gender equality, especially in the workplace (Palucki & Ratzer, 2021). Compared to other European countries, Austria has an extremely high gender pay gap. The Global Gender Gap Report 2021 shows that Austria has moved up from 35th to 21st place in the overall ranking of 156 countries, but that this is mainly due to women being in ministerial positions (Crotti et al, 2021).

According to Palucki & Ratzler (2021), in Austria, traditional thinking is a decisive factor for the difficulty in changing anything in terms of gender equality in the labor market. It is Austria's identity that distinguishes the country from all the pioneering countries in Europe, such as Finland or Sweden, when it comes to gender equality. Austria attaches great importance to what has been tried and tested and is reluctant to change or progress. Statistical evidence and facts and figures are presented below.

2.2.2.1 Data on women in senior positions in Austria

Approximately 46.1% of all employed individuals in the European Union were women in 2019. They are therefore significantly underrepresented in management positions: Female managers accounted for only 34.4% in 2019. The proportion has risen only moderately by as much as 1.2 percentage points compared with 2012. The number of women in leading positions in Austria amounts to 33,3% which is slightly underneath the European average (Eurostat, 2022). It is nevertheless important to recognize that for these statistics, all leading positions were included, regardless of the management level. The proportion of women in top management is significantly lower.

A report conducted by the Austrian Chamber of Labor and published on statista.com confirms the severe underrepresentation of women in management positions in Austria. For this chart, the 200 companies with the highest turnover were selected and the respective female percentages of management and supervisory board members were determined. For those companies that did not have such a board the largest operating subsidiary in terms of sales and numbers of employees was taken as reference. In order to include banks and insurance companies as well, the 15 largest banks and the 17 largest insurance companies in Austria were included as well. The years 2012 - 2022 were observed as a comparison period. While the proportion of women in supervisory board positions has more than doubled, the proportion in management has increased by less than 3% (Statista, 2022). The belonging graphs can be found underneath, namely figure 1 and figure 2.

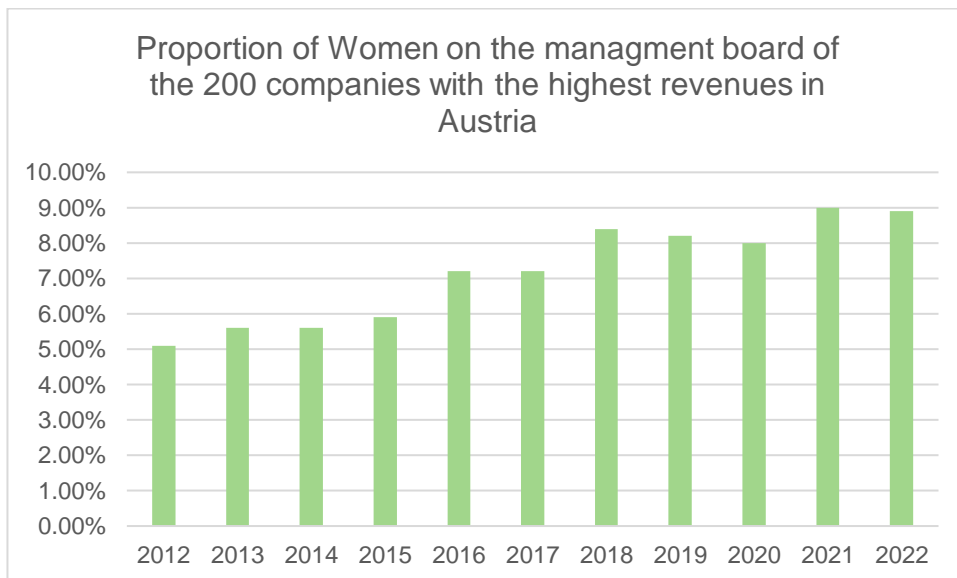


Figure 1 Women on the Management board

created by the author on December 4, 2021

Figure 1 represents the proportion of women on the management board of the 200 companies with the highest revenues in Austria. In 2022 only 8,9% of those positions were held by women (Bundeskanzleramt, 2022).

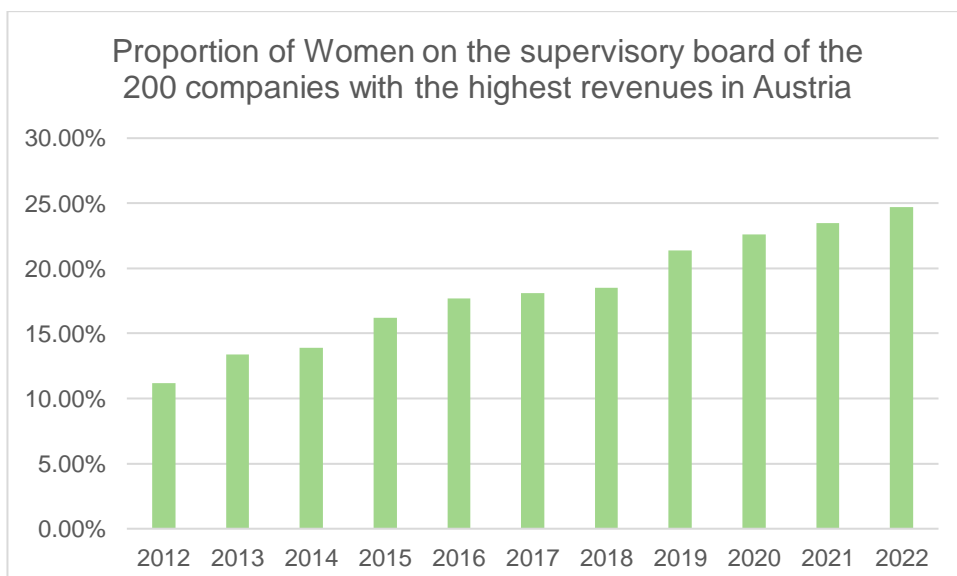


Figure 2 Women on the supervisory board

created by the author on December 4, 2021

Figure 2 illustrates the proportion of women on the supervisory board of the 200 companies with the highest revenues in Austria. The data of 2022 reveal that 24,7% of the supervisory board positions were occupied by female leaders (Bundeskanzleramt, 2022).

2.2.2.2 Women in listed companies and supervisory boards in Austria

Figure 3 illustrates the percentage distribution of board positions between men and women in Austrian listed companies. In 2021, out of 225 executive positions, only 17 women occupied such a role. Considering only the 20 companies listed in the ATX, the female quota amounts to only 6,8%. In the majority of companies, not a single woman is a member of the board. There are only three companies in which a woman is employed on the board all by herself, namely the Gurktaler AG, the Vienna Insurance Group AG and the BKS Bank AG (Haager & Wieser, 2021).

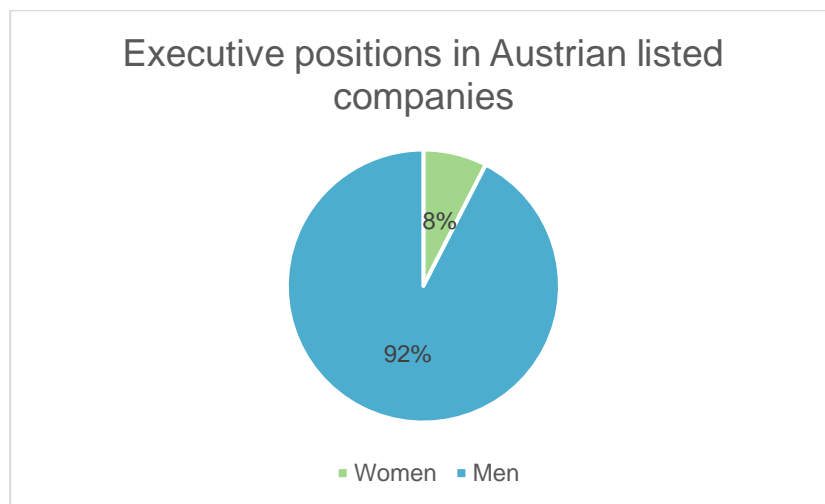


Figure 3 Executive positions

created by the author on December 8, 2021

Figure 4 presents the distribution between men and women in supervisory board positions in companies listed on the Vienna Stock Exchange. Out of 588 positions in 2021, 155 were held by women. In the previous year, 2019, there was only a share of 22% women who were in supervisory board positions. Overall, 14 companies that are listed on the Vienna Stock Exchange manage to achieve a gender balance since they have a female representation of 40% or more on their supervisory boards. One fifth of all those companies are only represented by men in their supervisory boards. The companies that are listed on the ATX show a female representation of 31,5% in the

mentioned sector. This value is even higher than the legally required quota (Hager & Wieser, 2021).

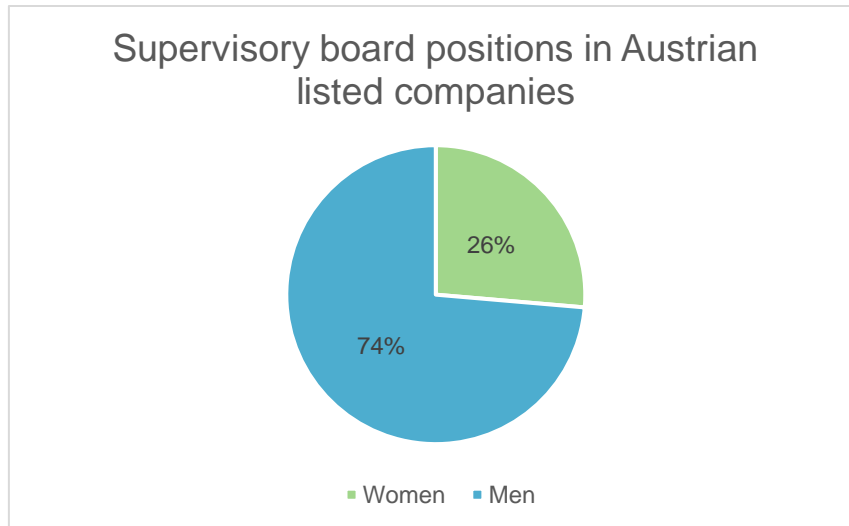


Figure 4 Supervisory board positions

created by the author on December 8, 2021

2.3 Means to improve the underrepresentation

2.3.1 Quota Regulations worldwide

In recent years, a mandatory gender quota has been introduced in several countries in order to increase the number of women in management positions. There are also quota systems in politics in a number of countries. The result of these quotas is that more attention is paid to issues relevant to women and that the population perceives political events differently and women in particular have more trust in politicians (Yoon, 2012).

Table 2 summarizes the 10 countries in the European Union in which it is required by law to have a certain quota of women. It also indicates the year in which the law was passed, and the positions affected. Aside from the individual target values, the regulations of the individual countries differ in terms of introduction (transition periods, phased plans), the size of the company, the target group, and the consequences of non-compliance. While sanctions prevail in each of the countries listed, in Iceland and Spain there are statutory quotas, but these go unpunished in the event of failure to comply. It has been proven that in those countries where there are

penalties, fulfillment is more likely to occur than in those where there are no consequences (Hager & Wieser, 2021).

Country	Year of law enactment	Quota	Committees concerned
Norway	2003	40%	Administrative council
Spain	2007	40%	Administrative council
Iceland	2010	40%	Supervisory board
Italy	2011	20% / 30% / 40%	Supervisory board / Executive Board / Administrative council
France	2011	20% / 40%	Non-Executive / Manager
Belgium	2011	33%	Administrative council
Netherlands	2013, 2019	20% / 30% / 40%	Supervisory board / Executive Board / Administrative council
Germany	2015, 2021	30% / 40%	Executive board / Administrative council
Portugal	2017	20% / 33%	Supervisory board / Administrative council
Austria	2017	30%	Supervisory board

Table 2 Quota regulation

created by the author on December 21, 2021

2.3.2 Quota regulations in Austria

In Austria, such an obligation has been in existence since January 2018. The share of women in supervisory boards of listed companies must be at least 30%. This rule also applies to all companies that employ more than 1.000 people. Those which do not comply with this quota are subject to penalties (Hager & Wieser, 2021). Furthermore, a quota system for state-nominated members of supervisory boards and state-owned companies has been introduced and they need to have 50% and 40% of women in those positions. This regulation is valid until 2024 and voluntary (Federal Chancellery Republic of Austria, 2022).

2.3.2.1 Drawbacks on quota regulations

While a mandatory quota system may sound like a positive solution for the time being, the disadvantages it entails should not be ignored. For instance, Schleicher (2021), argues, that a mandatory quota for women can be treated as the equivalent of discrimination. By such a promotion it is admitted that women would not be able to succeed on their own. Equal rights only function under the same framework conditions for everyone. A further point is that these regulations apply to the very end of the career ladder. How women can get there in the first place is not considered.

2.4 Barriers women face

It is important to understand that women face many different barriers throughout their career development. These barriers start at the very beginning, in the recruitment process. However, most female employees encounter the most significant barriers during their professional careers. In principle, these obstacles can be divided into different categories namely work-family barriers, societal barriers that are connected with institutional mindsets, psychological barriers that are also known as individual mindsets, structural barriers, as well as barriers that exist within the organization (Andrews, 2022).

2.4.1 Work-Family barriers

In most cases, women who aspire to a leadership position have a number of barriers to overcome (Pande & Ford, 2012). It has been proven that in many areas, especially in western regions, more women than men are now graduating from universities. Accordingly, women are not inferior to men in education. The only factor in which women are behind men is the time spent in the workplace, and the consistency of that time (Kark & Eagly, 2010). It needs to be considered that women often experience career disruptions that are mainly due to the childbearing years. As a result, mothers work fewer hours for a couple of years, which leads to less work experience and thus reduces the chances of entering the management level (Pande & Ford, 2012). Furthermore, it needs to be stated that flexibility may decrease due to children's education or due to the working situation the partner may have (Gallagher & Morison, 2019). Mostly executive positions require long working hours. Due to the fact that women, in contrast to most men, are committed to family obligations, they either

cannot accept such jobs if offered or quit after some time. This phenomenon can be described as the work-family narrative (Padavic et al., 2020).

Although the distribution of parents in terms of who stays at home and who goes to work has changed slightly in recent years, with more fathers now applying for parental leave. In most cases it is the mother who takes care of the child and the household (Kark & Eagly, 2010). Logically, single mothers or fathers do not have the same opportunities, as they must work and earn money and at the same time have to take care of the children. In this case, however, a study has shown that the hours worked by single mothers are significantly lower than those worked by men. This is due to the fact that most single fathers live with relatives or parts of the family (Kark & Eagly, 2010). The circumstance that women almost always have to choose between their work and a family life causes a lot of pressure and related stress for them. For this reason, many women decide against having a child, or even against a rising career (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The amount of support that companies and organizations provide to women during a career break for child-related reasons varies greatly from country to country. It is important that women take the initiative and find out what is available (Gallagher & Morison, 2019).

2.4.2 Societal barriers / Institutional mindsets

The company's attitudes and culture often pose another problem. According to society, men tend to have the qualities that a good leader should have. It has even been proven that if a woman has these qualifications, they are often considered negative (Gallagher & Morison, 2019). And even if a woman has all the characteristics needed for a management position, there are often prejudices as to why she should not be given the position. Gender bias in particular continues to be an issue in job staffing. Although discrimination is illegal, it can often go unnoticed due to preconceptions. Women are classified as helpful, calm, friendly and empathetic, while men tend to have a reputation for being dominant, egotistical, task-oriented and assertive. (Kark & Eagly, 2010). Due to the fact that most of the character traits that men exhibit is exactly those that are supposedly sought after in leadership positions, women are often at a great disadvantage because of these stereotypes (Kark & Eagly, 2010).

A further concern is the difference in language between men and women. Men are more dominant, aggressive and assertive in their manner, men also have a different use of language compared to women. If women try to jump on this "train", they are quickly perceived as a control freak or unpleasant. Another problem with stereotyping is that women often influence these biases and cause anxiety. This results in women often being afraid to propose themselves for a senior position, or to take the initiative in general (Davies et al., 2005). It is crucial to note that the same phenomenon applies vice versa. Jobs that are commonly seen as female are often not accepted by the society to be occupied by men (Andrews, 2022).

2.4.2.1 Microaggression

The term microaggression itself can be defined as discrimination by actions, statements that are happening unintentionally against a minority (Oxford, 2021). When talking about gender microaggression, the indirect discrimination is meant. Women experience this unpleasant discrimination mostly from superiors, colleagues, and even subordinates. It is important to note that gender microaggressions are not apparent to all. It is presented in the literature as "air that is around you". No one can see it, but it can be felt. This discriminatory treatment subsequently leads to women not being taken serious and thus not being considered for election to leadership positions (Paranjape, 2021).

2.4.3 Psychological barriers / Individual mindsets

A woman's own thoughts and psyche also contribute a great part to why she cannot occupy a leadership position. Women often stand in their own way. Many females are afraid of taking a risk, of failing, of not living up to expectations and therefore stop themselves from accepting or striving for a C-level job position (Andrews, 2022).

The term "imposter phenomenon" explains the feeling some women experience when they think they are "not good enough". This feeling can be so strong that it strongly affects the performance readiness. A study revealed that females that already managed to hold a high position often experience this phenomenon and think that they have "fooled" everyone and that they do not really deserve holding the certain position because deep inside they believe they are not actually intelligent (Clarence & Imes, 1978).

2.4.4 Organizational barriers

Another problem that women encounter when they want to climb the career ladder is the "male climate". In a male-oriented culture, many females feel discomfort and exclusion (Campuzano, 2019). The fact that many organizations are designed by their own internal structure to promote men can already be noticed in the recruiting process. One study followed a company which is part of the engineer industry through its hiring process and asked why more women were not hired. The result showed that the profile of an ideal candidate was created in advance, who should fit well into the team, be able to work extended hours and unpleasant schedules, and have that particular quality (National Research Council, 1994). In addition, many companies have an almost non-existent support system when it comes to family related issues. The structure of organization is mostly stiff and not flexible enough for women managing both, family, and work responsibilities. Also, the regulations for parental and maternity leave are poorly designed (Chrisholms-Buns et al., 2017).

2.4.5 Structural barriers

Structural barriers are understood as the lack of networks or the exclusion of women from various social events. It is often the case that women are still denied access to various social occasions, often unnoticed. For instance, after-work drinks or sporting activities or events such as golfing. In most cases, men tend to assume that women do not want to be a part of it (Andrews, 2022). Another point worth mentioning is that women often do not have as large a network as men. This includes, above all, reference persons such as mentors. Often, such role models are also male and, as a result, feel an enhanced connection with men (Greguletz et al., 2018). Especially in the beginning of an individual's career, a mentor or a sponsor can play a major role in encouraging to make career steps. Mentors act as a kind of assistant, advisor, and motivator. They can help career technically and support at decision making (Chrisholms-Buns et al., 2017). According to Castrillon (2019), men use different techniques when it comes to networking. In contrast to women, they feel comfortable to combine friendship and professional working life. Another study that was published by the Kellogg School of Management explains that women often make the "mistake" and do not exchange information with other women in similar situations. According to this study, women who have a strong female network in the background have more

success than those without such contacts. 77% of the most successful participants in this study reported having such a support system (Kindelan, 2019).

2.5 Why more women are needed in leadership positions

A person's self-actualization and urge to feel recognition and appreciation is placed at the top of Maslow's pyramid. Maslow's pyramid includes 5 subdivisions. The following "level" can only be reached after the previous stage is achieved. In the first layer are the Basic Needs, followed by the Sense of Security, Belonging and Love. The top 2 columns contain Esteem Needs and Self-fulfillment (McLeod, 2007). These are called psychological needs. The feeling of belonging is one of the most important that an individual can experience at this stage. However, the fact that women are repeatedly and explicitly excluded from working life and especially from management levels makes it much more difficult for women to reach this level of "happiness" (Paranjape, 2021).

It is not just that women feel disadvantaged and unable to fulfill their individual full potential, it is also that more women in leadership positions would have a highly positive impact on the development of businesses, industries, and the work environment as a whole (Lindley, 2019). Women bring different perspectives and also tend to have a different approach when it comes to managing a team which often proves to be more successful. Diversity in the workplace is becoming increasingly important and recent studies have found that new ideas can be developed, and critical thinking can function best, in a diverse group. Furthermore, research that was conducted by the Harvard Business Review showed that women have important manager qualities, take initiatives, are resilient which means that they are able to recover fast from challenging circumstances, and prove to be result driven. Further research compared women-led businesses with male-led organizations, and the results demonstrated that the organizations with female executives achieved higher success such increased revenues and profits (Association of MBAs, 2019).

According to the Rockefeller Foundation (2022), having more women in top management positions does not only support a diverse workforce but also helps to change company intern policies such as flexible working schedules which will have a positive impact on both, women, and men. Additionally, it would solve societal issues,

for instance the wage gap (Rockefeller Foundation, 2022). Diversity in the management board is proven to have a positive impact on the overall business performance. It is needed in order to combat homogeneity of approaches since too much sameness leads to a stagnation of critical thinking. A study that investigated leadership behaviors found, that nice certain leadership behaviors influence a company in a positive way. The research revealed that women tend to have 5 of those behaviors, namely inspiration, rewards, role modeling and development, more often than men. Due to 70% of the study participants, those mentioned behaviors were currently underrepresented in their company's management board (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017).

As Ms. Geraldine Ferraro the first women ever, who run for the position as U.S. vice president once stated once "Some leaders are born women" (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017, p.1).

2.6 Initiatives, Projects and Policies

2.6.1 Initiatives, Projects and Policies worldwide

Logically, the government plays an essential part in promoting women in leadership positions. A publication named "2013 OECD Gender Recommendation" includes different policies which should support women in the working world in various ways. These measures are intended to contribute to gender equality by promoting topics such as flexible working time models. Furthermore, problems such as sexual harassment, the gender pay gap and discrimination are addressed (OECD, 2013).

A step in the right direction, according to Thévenon & Solaz (2014), is the payment of parental leave. Women should be able to return to the same company and continue working in the same position. Not only women should have those rights, but also men should also be provided with a paid parental leave in order to ensure gender equality and break out of the traditional gender roles.

UN Women is also actively involved in promoting more women in leadership positions. In cooperation with UN Global, UN Women has introduced 7 principles for the advancement of women. These principles include matters such as fair treatment,

nondiscrimination, safety, the promotion of education, communities and professional training or the regular measurement on the progress (UN Women, 2022).

2.6.2 Initiatives, Projects and Policies in Austria

In June 2015, the "Women are top" website was launched to demonstrate how Austria is taking the initiative to support and promote women in leadership positions. This concerns 2 projects that were started together with the Institute for Gender and Diversity of the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration and the Vienna Life Working Research Center from 2013 to 2015 (Federal Chancellery Republic of Austria, 2015). The goal of the website is to present an online testimonial, various surveys, and reports, as well as good representative companies and further links. A testimonial is generally understood to mean the promotion of a particular product, service, or idea by a well-known person (Esch, 2021). Its main purpose is to have an informative and educational role (Federal Chancellery Republic of Austria, 2015).

In the following section, the research method used in this thesis will be explained, followed by the sample size and the procedure. Additionally, the data of the interview will be explained and analyzed.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Research designs are essential structures for activities that fill in as a scaffold between the research and research questions (Durrheim, 2006). A research design provides a frame for the layout of the study and assists in determining what kind of analysis is the most appropriate one for the research problems (Perumal, 2010). In general, there exist three different research designs a researcher can choose from. In the first place, there is quantitative research, which is based on dependent and independent variables as well as hypotheses which are then completed by a theory (Creswell, 2014). Secondly, there is qualitative research, on which this work is based. The last research design is mixed methods, a variation which shows elements of both: quantitative and qualitative research.

3.1.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative Research aims to find out about human experience and gaining in depth knowledge about personal thoughts, believes and feelings (Silverman, 2021). The most significant difference between quantitative and qualitative research is most likely the flexibility. In qualitative methods, the researcher can elaborate on answers and the respondent can provide answers in his or her own words, whereas in quantitative ways, each participant must answer the same questions in the same way (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is being used to address social problems and human behaviors in general (Koppel & Telles, 2021). The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions is one such issue, which is why this research method suited perfectly. Since this work concerns a sensitive matter, the somewhat more personal basis of inquiry that raised during interviews was of great advantage.

There are different common types of qualitative research a researcher can choose from. Those are grounded theory, phenomenology, historical study, ethnography and case study, while case studies are the most common used designs when it comes to qualitative approaches (Hoover, 2021). Case Studies are used to find out more about individuals, a group, an institution or a community. The researcher often has different sources of data, for instance through interviews, documents or observations. This study was based on a case study which includes asynchronously E-Mail interviews. The literature stated that interviews in general can be held face-to-face, via telephone, via E-mail or online as well as in a focus group (Creswell, 2014).

3.1.2 Asynchronously E-Mail Interviews

In this work, qualitative, asynchronously E-Mail interviews were conducted for the data collection. This research method was chosen because interviews are the best way to question women in leadership positions about their personal experiences and opinions in order to gather deeper insights. In recent years, the internet has been gaining more and more popularity. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the specific advantages of online communication were found out (Gibson, 2021). While qualitative research methods were seen as very expensive and time consuming in the past decade, the internet has helped to overcome some of those issues (Ratislavová & Rasislav, 2014). Asynchronous E-Mail interviews provide numerous benefits to both the researcher and the respondent. Many of experts being interviewed have limited time and are more likely to agree to an interview if they can answer the questions at any time they prefer. This is not only an advantage for the interviewees but also for the researcher since many interviews can be sent out at the same time, which saves time as well as money (Ratislavová & Rasislav, 2014).

Moreover, this type of interview strongly protects the privacy of the interviewees. Especially in the case of sensitive interviews, more participants will agree to an interview as it is more confident to answer the questions honestly in written form than orally, for example, face to face.

A specific reason why this type of interview was selected for this study is because only Austrian women were interviewed. Since this thesis was written in English language, it was more convenient for the interviewees to have more time to answer the

questions. In this way, miscommunication due to linguistic inefficiencies could be avoided.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that bias or other negative influences can also occur when conducting asynchronous E-Mail interviews. The researcher does not have the ability to ask directly when an answer is unclear but must reach out to the participant. Another drawback worth mentioning is, that the interviewees need to have the ability to use a computer and must be able to answer the questions via E-Mail. While the researcher and the respondent have the opportunity to connect during face to face interviews as well as the researcher could capture emotions, this part is omitted in asynchronous E-Mail interviews (Saunders et al., 2009).

During the research process, the questions for the interviews were elaborated. The questions were semi-structured which means that even though they were prepared in advance, the interviewees could express themselves and their ideas freely.

3.2 Sample Selection

When research is done, data collection takes place, and a certain population is being analyzed. Rather than collect data from all people belonging to a certain target group, a sample gets investigated. It is particularly important to ensure that the sample selected is representative for the group of people to be studied. In general, there exist two different types of sampling methods, namely probability sampling and non-probability sampling (McCombes, 2022). While probability sampling is more often used in quantitative research since every individual has a chance of being included, non-probability sampling is more adequate for qualitative research where not every individual is being included. Even though non-probability sampling has several advantages like being cheaper and easier to access, the high risk of sampling bias must be considered (Acharya et al., 2013). A non-probability, convenience sampling method was used in this thesis.

A classic characteristic of qualitative research is a small sample size number (Creswell, 2014). For this study, a total of ten women in leadership positions were interviewed. As above mentioned, the researcher used a convenience sampling method and acquired participants from personal contacts as well as the author's social environment in general. The interviewees are listed in table 2 underneath.

Interviewee Number	Company / Institution	Position Held
1	Omnipus	Head of Spare Parts Management
2	Raiffeisen Regionalbank Mödling	Bank Manager
3	Vienna Business School	School Principal
4	ÖBB Personenverkehr AG	Head of IT Delivery Support
5	Firstbird GmbH	Lead of Brand and Communication
6	Ottakringer Getränke AG	Chief Financial Officer (CFO)
7	EHL Wohnen GmbH	Managing Director
8	Lohmann & Rauscher	Human Resource Manager, Austria
9	VKB Bank	Marketing Manager
10	Electrolux	Director of Events, PR & Licensing

Table 3: Interviewees

created by the author on February 7, 2022

3.3 Interview Question Development

As the interview is an essential part of the paper, the selection of questions is essential. The thesis examined the barriers that women face when they aspire to a management position. Moreover, it investigated how women can overcome these barriers. All the above-mentioned aspects could be answered at the end of the work. Based on literature and research, an interview questionnaire consisting of 12 questions was designed to answer the research questions. The research questions were:

What kind of inequalities and barriers do women face in the workplace in Austria?

How do women overcome the barriers they face in leadership positions?

In the following one can see the 12 questions that were asked in the interviews held with women in leadership positions. The interviews were done in the period between 25th of April and 15th of May 2022. These questions were created to answer the

research questions and to gain a more detailed insight from women who have managed to reach the management level. Thus, the results helped and will help to understand what measures can be taken to encourage more women into management positions. The exact interview guide as well as the answered interviews can be found in the appendix.

1. In which company are you working, what is your current position, for how long have you held it now and what are the primary responsibilities you have?
2. Was it always your plan or wish to become a leader?
3. What do you think makes a good leader, does a leader need to have specific characteristics?
4. Throughout your career, who were your biggest inspirations, or did you have a role model or a mentor?
5. What lessons and experiences can you share as a female leader?
6. Over the years, what were the biggest barriers you faced during your growth as a female leader, how did you overcome them and what barrier do you think is the strongest one to female leadership?
7. Has there ever been a situation at work where you felt discriminated against or disadvantaged because of your gender?
8. What is the best advice you have ever received when it comes to climbing up the career ladder?
9. What advice would you give to other women who wish to become a leader?
10. Would you wish for more support from companies or the government for females in the working world and do you have any ideas to share how the support could look like?
11. Are you a mother?
Yes: How have you balanced being a mother and a professional?
12. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share on this topic?

Table 4 shows the used sources for the interview question development.

Question Number	Source
1	<p>Beaupre, J. (2014, April 4). <i>An Interview with Jessica Schedin, Sergeant, Department of Correction.</i> https://iwl.nichols.edu/category/interviews/</p>
2	<p>Goldstein, J. (n.d.). <i>Leading Women: Interview with Irene Buhrfeindt.</i> Page Executive. Retrieved April 24, 2022 from https://www.pageexecutive.com/asia-pacific/leading-women/maintaining-femininity-and-grace-in-a-male-dominated-world</p>
3	<p>KPMG. (n.d.). <i>An interview with KPMG's present and future women leaders.</i> https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2021/03/an-interview-with-kpmgs-present-and-future-women-leaders.html</p>
4	<p>Goldstein, J. (n.d.). <i>Leading Women: Interview with Irene Buhrfeindt.</i> Page Executive. Retrieved April 24, 2022 from https://www.pageexecutive.com/asia-pacific/leading-women/maintaining-femininity-and-grace-in-a-male-dominated-world</p> <p>Beaupre, J. (2014, April 4). <i>An Interview with Jessica Schedin, Sergeant, Department of Correction.</i> https://iwl.nichols.edu/category/interviews/</p>
5	<p>Goldstein, J. (n.d.). <i>Leading Women: Interview with Irene Buhrfeindt.</i> Page Executive. Retrieved April 24, 2022 from https://www.pageexecutive.com/asia-pacific/leading-women/maintaining-femininity-and-grace-in-a-male-dominated-world</p>
6	<p>Goldstein, J. (n.d.). <i>Leading Women: Interview with Irene Buhrfeindt.</i> Page Executive. Retrieved April 24, 2022 from https://www.pageexecutive.com/asia-pacific/leading-women/maintaining-femininity-and-grace-in-a-male-dominated-world</p>

	SQM Group. (n.d.) <i>An Interview with SQM's Women Leaders</i> . https://www.sqmgroup.com/resources/library/blog/interview-sqms-women-leaders
7	Ruzycki, S.M., McFadden, C., Jenkins, J., Kuriachan, V., Keir, M. (2022). Experiences and Impacts of Harassment and Discrimination Among Women in Cardiac Medicine and Surgery: A Single-Centre Qualitative Study. <i>InPress</i> . https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cjco.2022.04.003
8	Goldstein, J. (n.d.). <i>Leading Women: Interview with Irene Buhrfeindt</i> . Page Executive. Retrieved April 24, 2022 from https://www.pageexecutive.com/asia-pacific/leading-women/maintaining-femininity-and-grace-in-a-male-dominated-world
9	Beaupre, J. (2014, April 4). <i>An Interview with Jessica Schedin, Sergeant, Department of Correction</i> . https://iwl.nichols.edu/category/interviews/
10	-
11	SQM Group. (n.d.) <i>An Interview with SQM's Women Leaders</i> . https://www.sqmgroup.com/resources/library/blog/interview-sqms-women-leaders
12	-

Table 4: Interview Questions

created by the author on February 7, 2022

The interview questions could be divided into four sections. The first section included questions 1 – 4. Here, the researcher aimed to find out more about the background of the interviewees and about their opinions concerning a good leader, special traits, and characteristics. Furthermore, the interviewed women had to indicate whether they had a mentor or a role model.

The next section included question 5 – 7. This was an essential part of the interview as here the researcher asked about the barriers the women have encountered and

how they can be overcome. Moreover, personal experiences as well as lessons and encounters with discrimination were to be described here.

The third section aimed to determine what useful advice the respondents have received when it comes to climbing the career ladder, as well as what personal advice they would give to young female professionals. In addition, they were asked whether more support was needed from companies or the government, and how this might look like.

The last section dealt with motherhood and how motherhood and career can be reconciled. Although this question was related to barriers, it was intentionally placed at the end, as not all respondents may have children and this question could therefore be irrelevant in some cases.

The last question also gave the women the opportunity to express further thoughts, suggestions or wishes.

3.4 Data Analysis

When doing qualitative research, the data is mostly rich and consists of several different in-depth information. A proper analysis can often be challenging since large amounts of textual data which can for instance be gained from transcripts, observations, records, or interviews must be processed, understood, and rendered in a compressed form (Won, 2008).

The data analysis process started with collecting the data from the interviews and bringing them all together into the same format. As mentioned before, asynchronously E-Mail interviews were first sent to the interviewees and then filled out by the respondents and returned to the researcher.

The analysis was carried out by first printing out the interviews for the researcher to gain a better overview and by then finding thematic similarities and drawing connections between the respondent's answers and the research questions. The researcher proceeded with the analysis of the questions in a structured manner, focusing on one category at a time. Each question was taken one at a time, all answers were reviewed several times and thoroughly, the most important points were noted

and summarized in the presentation of the findings. The data has also been partially supported by graphics, such as word clouds or statistical charts, to enhance the textual content.

3.5 Limitations of the study

This thesis has addressed the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Austria with research questions focusing on the types of barriers women face in their career development and how these can be overcome. The researcher has accomplished to answer the two research questions detailed in this paper. First of all, adequate literature was retrieved and utilized to establish a strong foundation. Subsequently, the author conducted empirical research in the form of qualitative interviews in order to gain an even more detailed overview.

However, due to the fact that the paper is an undergraduate thesis and time, and resources were very limited, there are certainly some limitations in this paper. For time reasons, only 10 interviews were conducted. Although this is a reasonable number and promises reliable results, it would still have been interesting to receive more different opinions. It would also have been helpful to interview women who would like to reach a leadership position but have not succeeded yet. This would have given the author even more insight and would have allowed to draw comparisons. It would have moreover been interesting to hear the opinions men have on this topic, in order to achieve even more reasonable findings.

A further limitation was a partial lack of literature in the field. Especially in the detailed presentation of the above-mentioned barriers and how they arise, there was limited literature that the author had access to. Presumably, this is due to the fact that the problem of the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, respectively the fact that this is a concern, is not yet as long-standing and researched topic as some others.

4 Results

This chapter aims to explain and analyze the data which was gathered through qualitative research in the form of asynchronous E-Mail interviews. The findings should help to answer the research questions which are about barriers women face when it comes to achieving a leadership position and how they can be overcome.

To ensure data security and to preserve the anonymity of the participants, the interviewees are referred to in the following as "Interviewee X". Table 3 shows which particular interview was conducted and which position the interviewee holds in the company.

4.1 Section 1

Section 1 includes the findings of question one to four.

4.1.1 Question 1

The first question was: "In which company are you working, what is your current position, for how long have you held it now and what are the primary responsibilities you have?" The first thing one notices when analyzing the answers from the 10 interviewees is, that no one has been holding the leading position for more than 5 years. In fact, only two of the respondents have been occupying their positions since 2017. This is particularly surprising since most of the respondents (according to the researcher's personal assessment) are more than 50 years old. This could be the first indication showing the difficulty women have in reaching a leadership position. Fortunately, almost all interviewees are employed in a variety of different industries and hold a diverse range of positions. That is helpful for this thesis, as it provides a wide range of insights and also prevents any industry-specific bias.

4.1.2 Question 2

The second question aimed to find out whether it has always been a wish of the interviewees to obtain a leading position. Only two of the respondents stated that it was their goal right from the beginning to achieve a management position, namely interviewee 2 and 9. The other eight women claimed that this wish or the opportunity itself has evolved over the years. Additionally, interviewee 5, 7 and 10 stated that it has been their main goal to become better, to grow and to a good job. Interviewee 10 also added that the jobs she would like to do all incorporated leading a team. When analyzing the responses, the term “responsibility” was mentioned several times. Many of the female leaders expressed the opinion that they aspired to responsibility first and foremost, which then brought with it the leadership position.

In conclusion, it can be said that the majority of respondents have not always desired a managerial position. Rather, their goal was to do a good job, to constantly improve and to be given responsibilities. Moreover, it is important to mention that most of them expressed that it was a process of development and that the desire or the opportunity has only come in the course of time.

4.1.3 Question 3

Question 3 addresses the question of whether the women think that a good leader needs specific qualities and how a good leader should be in general.

Interviewee 1 stated that a good leader should be a role model, stand by agreements and needs to make decisions. For the important qualities it was mentioned that a leader needs to be trustworthy, needs to have a sense of responsibility and commitment.

Due to interviewee 2 an excellent leader needs to have long experience and must be good with people.

Interviewee 3 stated that above all humanity is in the foreground. Trust in employees is essential, they should be encouraged, and their strengths should be used in the best way possible. In addition, flexibility is crucial and new ideas and approaches should be listened to and possibly also used.

“Leadership means taking responsibility for tasks and people and standing up for them” is what interviewee 4 expresses in the first place. She also mentioned that leaders must be self-reflected and stay focused. She also thinks it is important to have the courage to make changes, to take time for the employees, to respond to their needs and to try to alleviate their fears. In general, she thinks that employee development is essential, employee coaching, leadership and trusting cooperation are important. Respectful interaction is also a top priority for her. In her opinion, the most important qualities for a leader are team orientation, communication skills, conflict management, flexibility, and the willingness to accept change.

The next interviewee, interviewee 5 believes that empathy is particularly important. In addition, one must be able to communicate, use logic, but also act intuitively when it comes to decisions. Moreover, one must be able to work well under stress and pressure.

Interviewee 6 raised the importance of taking responsibility. Qualities that are most relevant in her eyes are communication skills, empathy, integrity, being a role model, and above all, having specific knowledge.

According to the 7th respondent, a balance of challenging and encouraging employees must be achieved. She also mentioned how important social skills like empathy and clear communication are.

Good communication skills, the ability of motivating employees, recognizing the potential of employees and being consistent and credible are necessary skills a good leader must have due to interviewee 8.

Interviewee 9 stated that the most important thing when it comes to leadership is to actually lead. The employees’ competences must be recognized and need to be promoted. A leader should be fair but rigorously. She also explained that good communication is crucial, which she especially noted during the COVID-19 pandemic when the whole team was in home office.

The last interviewee thinks that a leader needs to be brave and dare to take decisions. She believes that a good manager must be there for his employees when things are not running according to plan, ideally support should also be offered when problems

arise in private life. Additionally, she believes that a manager should be able to explain complex issues in a simple and understandable way for everyone.

Figure 6 summarizes the terms in the form of a word cloud that were mentioned the most in order to give a brief summary and a better overview on the findings.



Figure 5: Terms good leader

created by the author on May 18, 2022

4.1.4 Question 4

In the fourth question, the researcher attempts to find out whether the female leaders had a role model, a mentor or inspiring personalities. Six out of 10 from the respondents claimed, that they had a mentor or inspiring person that thrilled and enthused them. In five cases, a former boss was mentioned by interviewee 1,2,6,8 and 10. One of those four, namely interviewee 10 stated that besides her recent chief a director of a hotel where she had spent holidays with her parents already inspired her a lot when she was a child. Interviewee 3,5 and 7 expressed, that they did not have a single person as a mentor but rather met different inspiring people in different situations during their career development where the respondents picked certain traits or characteristics they liked and tried to apply them on themselves. Only one of the interviewed women, namely interviewee 3, the school principal, declared that she did not have any role model. The inspiration she had was the joy and enthusiasm in her student's education and her willingness of changing something in the school she works for.

In conclusion it can be said that 9 out of 10 female leaders had one or more inspiring people throughout their career.

4.1.5 Conclusion section 1

Questions 1-4 are introductory questions. It was determined in which companies the respondents work and since when they have held the management position. Furthermore, it was asked whether the women had always wanted to occupy a management position. The third question dealt with what the interviewees felt a manager should be like. The last question in this section was intended to explain whether the women had a mentor or other inspirational people in their careers.

In summary, the women interviewed almost all come from different industries and hold different positions there. It is worth mentioning that none of the women interviewed has held the position mentioned for more than five years. In addition, it was found out that very few of the women interviewed have always had the dream of holding a management position. Rather, opportunities have arisen that have been taken advantage of. According to the respondents, a good leader must above all have good communication skills, take responsibility, be flexible and show empathy. These are the most frequently mentioned qualities. Almost all respondents also reported having been inspired by either one or several individuals. These role models have helped the females to learn, develop and adopt positive traits.

4.2 Section 2

4.2.1 Question 5

The fifth question asked the respondents to share any experiences and lessons as a female leader. This question was answered differently by everyone. Most of the answers, however, were about not letting oneself get down, standing up for oneself and believing in oneself. It was also often mentioned that challenges should be seen as opportunities. One statement from Interviewee 5 is particularly captivating. According to her, "women have jobs and men have careers," and that there are many barriers for women in Austria in the workforce. Another interviewee added that women need to be louder and that networking in particular is very important. Another

view of another interviewee is to have a strong team and to connect with the employees and create trust.

4.2.2 Question 6

Question 6 is one of the most essential questions of the interview. This one particularly focuses on answering the research questions. The question asked was: “Over the years, what were the biggest barriers you faced during your growth as a female leader, how did you overcome them and what barrier do you think is the strongest one to female leadership?” Since this question is crucial for drawing results, it makes sense to elaborate all answers in detail.

Interviewee 1, a woman that works for a bus transportation company and holds the position “head of spare parts” explained the dilemma she experienced as a part-time worker. She stated that as a mother for a long time she was only able to work part-time. According to her own experience, part-time employees are often seen as auxiliaries by both the management and other colleagues. Moreover, she claimed that this has prevented her from developing and that she had hardly been given any tasks with responsibility. She also mentioned that as a woman, it is very difficult for her to be seen as competent in a male-dominated industry. To overcome these barriers, she asked directly for responsible tasks and projects. In addition, she tried to be as flexible as possible regarding the working hours and above all to be prepared to work overtime sometimes.

The second interviewee stated that she had not encountered any major barriers. Her management was always 100% behind her and tried to support her. The interviewee is a bank branch manager and reports that the only major challenge was the safe raid at RBB Mödling in November 2020.

The third respondent mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic was the biggest challenge she had experienced during her career. It was difficult for her to change all the legal requirements for the education sector. Furthermore, she states that it is generally difficult to make decisions as in most cases they do not coincide fully with the positions of the 45 staff members employed at the school. According to the principal, the only way to solve these conflicts is to argue, communicate and discuss.

The fourth interview was held with the CFO of a beverage company. She thinks that especially the balance act between family and career is a big barrier. According to the interviewee, society and thus also the women concerned have the image in their heads that women who are successful in their careers are bad mothers. She has managed this barrier with a lot of organization, commitment, and support of her family.

The fifth respondent also stated that the biggest barrier was having children. She specified her experience in two different aspects, the professional and the private. One experience the manager had at a previous company was that as soon as she announced her first pregnancy, she was treated as if she had already left. For the rest of the time, she was more or less ignored and "put in a corner". After her maternity leave, despite her ambition and hard work, she was dismissed after only one month for no good reason. According to her, this was very damaging to her self-confidence. The interviewee states that especially part-time workers have no possibility to grow or to get promotions. However, if a woman works full time with a child, society sees her as a bad mother. Should problems occur, such as the child's illness, the problem arises as to who can look after the child and take care of it. The interviewee says she gave birth to 2 children within 5 years and was on maternity leave for 12 months each time. Comparing her progress with her husband's, who in the meantime has a better position and a higher salary, she says it feels as if he is now 5 years further ahead. In her personal life, she said she experienced the second barrier related to the child-career dilemma. Although her husband was a great support, it always felt to her as if her job was the less important one and when it came down to it, she had to take a back seat. Logically, this raises the question of how she can ever be promoted, taken seriously in her job (when she regularly must stay home because of the children), and grow.

Interviewee 6 also described the problems of balancing career and child. These can only be overcome with external help and support at home. Furthermore, she stated that women often lack networks - exchanging ideas with fellow professionals can be very important, and generally speaking, in many positions it is important to have a large network in order to get ahead.

The seventh interviewee works in the real estate industry and reported that it is particularly difficult for women in male-dominated industries. Especially at a young age, it is hard to be given responsibility. She was able to overcome this by showing her authenticity, honesty and uncompromising competence.

The 8th interviewee also complained about not being taken seriously for years as a half-time employee, although they provide the same services as full-time employees.

Interviewee 9 stated that she also had problems with career and child. She became a mother when she was quite young and 30 years ago no one wanted to offer her a part-time job, which is why she completed her studies with the support of her family. By chance, she ended up at an advertising agency where the boss himself had 4 children. She was offered a half-day job there.

The last respondent, interviewee 10 also struggled with the family-work barrier. She felt disadvantaged compared to her male colleagues since they did not have any child-related concerns. She stated that the key to overcoming this was a good support network. She is also sure that if there were more networks, there would be more women in leadership positions. However, the biggest barrier she still has is her own head. Often, she feels too insecure to dare to apply for jobs where she does not have all the qualifications. She is always surprised how men with fewer qualities have more self-confidence and are bolder.

Comparing all interviews, it can be noted that one barrier was mentioned the most often: Family-work related hurdles. Also, the problem of not having a superior network was mentioned as well as barriers that women create for themselves in their own heads.

4.2.3 Question 7

Question 7 asked if the female leaders had ever felt discriminated or disadvantaged because of their gender. Interestingly, 8 out of 10 women reported that they had never felt discriminated against at work because of their gender. Two respondents however stated that they had experienced discrimination as a mother. In the hiring process questions such as “How do you think you can manage this function with a young child?” and “How do you expect to work when a child is sick?” were asked. Also,

as already mentioned, one interviewee got fired one month after returning from maternity leave. This respondent also explained that women get treated differently and that certain traits, for instance being sensible or too emotional are only expected from women and never from men.

4.2.4 Conclusion section 2

Even though most of the respondents claimed to never have felt discriminated against, it can be pointed out that the biggest obstacle women face on their way to a leadership position is the family-work barrier. Particularly often it was mentioned that half-time employees are not taken seriously, are not given responsibility, and are treated differently. Another major issue is society's and women's own thinking that working women are bad mothers. In second place is the missing network. Men are connected far better, and women have a lot of catching up to do here. It was also stated that it is particularly difficult for women to establish themselves in male-dominated industries. To overcome this barrier, flexibility and support from home and externally is necessary.

4.3 Section 3

The third section includes question 8, 9 and 10. This part of the questions aims to give advice to women who would like to aspire to a leadership position. On the one hand, it is intended to answer which best advice they have received in the past and which they would like to pass on to others. In addition, they are asked whether they would like more support from companies or the government and how this could look like.

4.3.1 Question 8

Question 8 asked the respondents to talk about the best received they have ever received when climbing up the career ladder. Most said they had been given advice to trust themselves, to work on themselves and to learn and grow from their own mistakes. It was also mentioned that they were told to be competent, take opportunities, be consistent and show interest. A few interviewees provided quotes that were shared with them which are illustrated in figure 7.

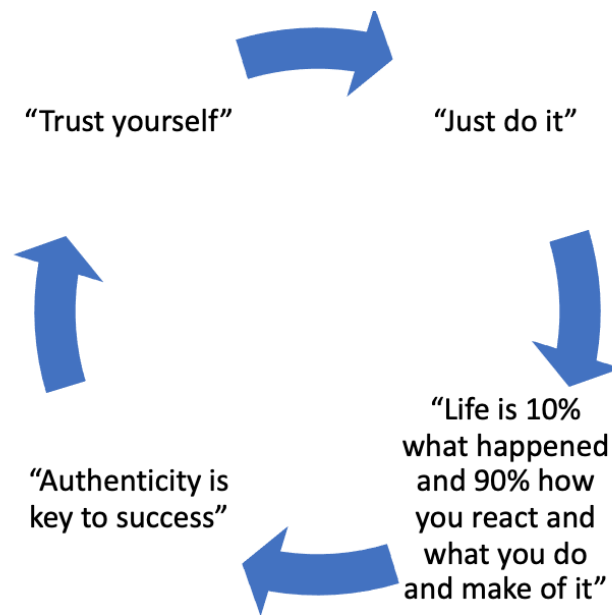


Figure 6: Quotes

created by the author on May 20, 2022

4.3.2 Question 9

Question 9 is slightly related to question 8. Here, the women were asked to give advice to other females who would like to reach a leadership position. Particularly often it was mentioned that it is important to be self-confident and to trust in one's own strengths and abilities. In addition, women have to be willing to invest a lot of effort, to constantly develop themselves and to break out of their comfort zone. Two of the interviewees also stated that networking is extremely important in order to achieve a leadership position. Some respondents indicated that women need to "clear their heads" and not be permanently aware of the fact that they are women or that they might be discriminated against. In this respect, they should learn something from the men and live out and show the self-confidence that was already mentioned above.

4.3.3 Question 10

Question 10 invited the respondents to indicate whether they would like to receive more support from companies or the government, and if so, in which form this support could be provided. Respondents gave a variety of answers here. It is striking that opinions differed on mandatory gender quotas. While two respondents were clearly against it, one of the interviewees thought it would be a valid solution. The first respondent that was against quota regulations stated, that those were a wrong

approach since it is somehow admitted that women would not make it without help. The second interviewee who opposed quotas, however, stated that she was against quotas in private companies, but in favor of quotas in supervisory boards, since these elect the management board. She herself is part of the management board of an ATX company. Another point often mentioned is the desire for a better childcare system. One suggestion interviewee 10 made is that childcare in the office building would be a splendid concept, whether it was kindergarten or after-school daycare. This would give women more security. Moreover, it was mentioned that there must be a change that also makes it more attractive for fathers to take parental leave. According to interviewee 1, this starts with equal pay for equal work. Other possible solutions include more flexible working hours and home office. The support of women by companies with mentoring programs and communication seminar was also suggested. Another approach of a respondent is so-called divisions of management positions. Figure 8 illustrates the main suggestions for further support for a better overview.

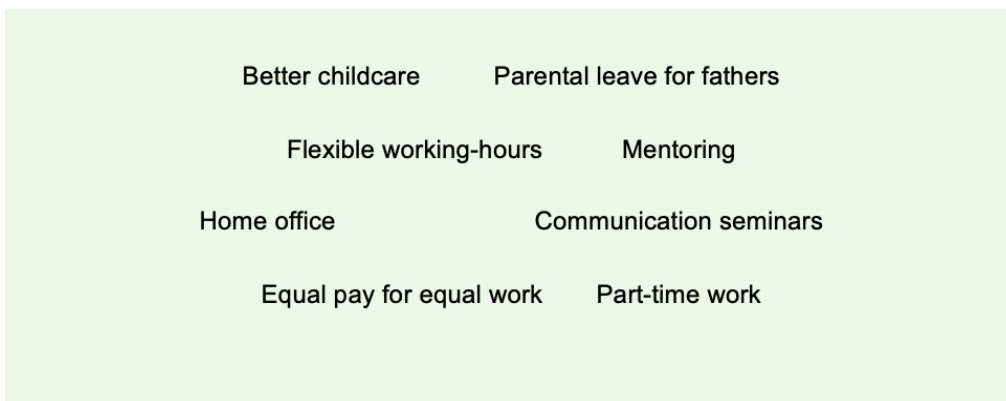


Figure 7: Suggestions for more support

Created by the author on May 20, 2022

4.3.4 Conclusion section 3

In brief, the interviewees recommend other women to believe in themselves, to forget the barriers that arise in their minds and to always develop themselves. They should network, believe in their goal and be self-confident. It can be said that the recommendations and advice have mainly to do with one's own personal development. When it comes to requests to the government and companies, as with

almost all issues, the children's issue is revisited. There is an urgent desire for a change in mindset and for more opportunities for flexible working, better childcare, and equal rights both in payment and when it comes to parental leave.

4.4 Section 4

The last section only includes two questions. The first questions figure out whether the interviewee is a mother or not. If the answer is yes, the following question is “How have you balanced being a mother and a professional?” As briefly mentioned above, even though this question thematically may belong to section 2 it makes more sense to ask that separately since not all interviewees may be a mother and therefore the question would be irrelevant. The last question only invites the respondents to share any other thoughts on this topic.

4.4.1 Question 11

Question 11 first elaborated if the females are a mother and then asked how professional and personal life can be balanced when being a mother. Nine out of 10 of the respondents admitted to being a mother.



Figure 8: Mother quota

created by the author on May 22, 2022

If the respondent answered with “yes” the following question asked them to explain how they managed professional and private life when being a mother. The analysis showed that almost all of the respondents solved this situation by working part-time. Furthermore, it was reported that there was a lot of support from the family, especially from their husbands. The word "organization" also emerged. With proper

planning and coordination, they stated, it was all manageable. Also, it was stated that childcare played a major role.

4.4.2 Question 12

Only two of the 10 respondents shared additional thoughts at question 12. One shared a saying namely "Everything comes in its own time" and the other mentioned that young women should plan, travel, gain as much experience as possible and above all go abroad if somehow possible. Nowadays, this would be very important according to her.

4.4.3 Conclusion section 4

In summary, 9 out of 10 of the respondents are mothers and therefore strongly affected by family related issues and their consequences. Nevertheless, with good planning and support from home, everything would be manageable. Furthermore, it is important to gain experience and to be patient in order to be successful in the workforce.

5 Discussion

The analysis and discussion of this thesis aims to include all components of this study in order to answer the research questions. Rather than providing simple answers to the questions, this review will provide an in-depth analysis. Before going into details, it makes sense to reiterate the research questions which are:

What kind of inequalities and barriers do women face in the workplace in Austria?

How do women overcome the barriers they face in leadership positions?

In advance, a SWOT analysis will be conducted in order to analyze the current state of the situation. The SWOT analysis is a technique to assess the "strengths", "weaknesses", "opportunities" and "threats" of any organization, plan, project, person or business activity (Gurl, 2017). The aim of this analysis is to evaluate the current situation of the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Austria. Various factors are taken into account, such as what the government, companies, individuals and society are currently doing to support women in their

careers, but also where there is still a need to catch up. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities (what are the advantages of more female executives?), and threats are therefore examined.

5.1 SWOT Analysis

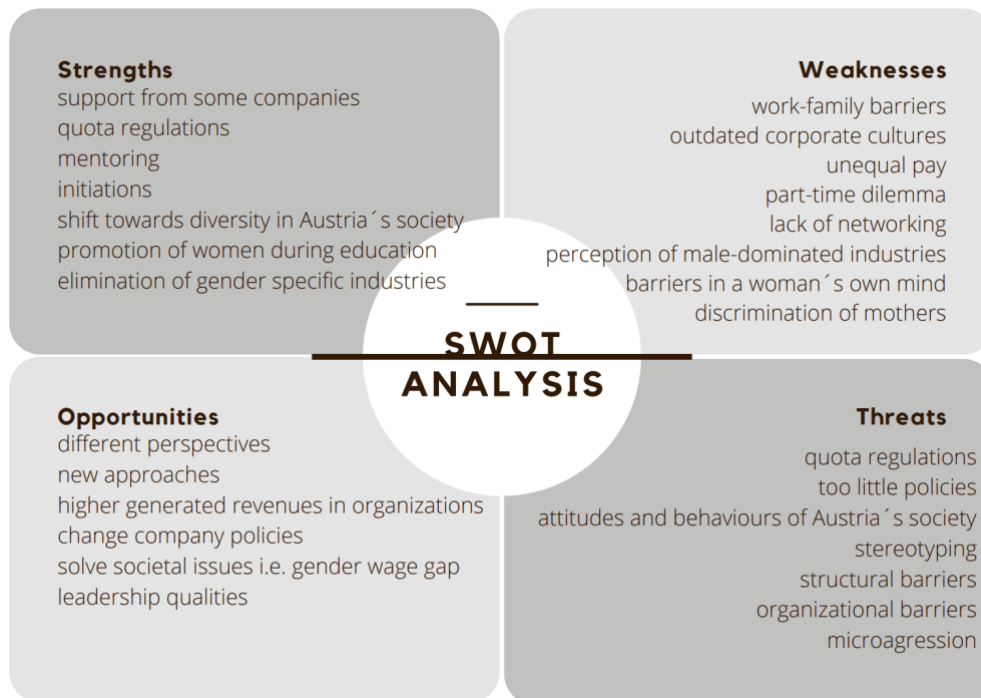


Figure 9: SWOT analysis

created by the author on June 8, 2022

Figure 9 displays a SWOT analysis the researcher created for the sake of explaining the current situation. The findings of the SWOT analysis will already draw some connections between the research questions, the literature, the qualitative interviews and theories.

5.1.1 Strengths

There are several strengths that need to be mentioned. On the one hand, there are some companies that actively support women in their professional development. This was also stated by some of the interviewees. Accordingly, it cannot be generalized that women have a difficult time in all companies or industries to take on a

management position. Furthermore, there are mandatory quota regulations that call for a certain division between men and women. However, this is associated not only with positive but also with negative aspects. This has already been discussed in more detail in this paper. Also, some women indicated in the interviews that they had a mentor. It was also mentioned in the literature that mentoring is an important way to get support in one's career. This can be seen as an opportunity to overcome barriers. Next in line are the policies and initiations mentioned in the literature. In Austria, universities such as the Institute for Gender and Diversity and the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration support women in their professional careers. There are also websites set up to provide information and assistance. It should also be mentioned that a shift in support and promotion of diversity can be seen especially in the younger generations. There are now also numerous initiatives to support women in education and school and, above all, to encourage them to enter "atypical industries for women".

5.1.2 Weaknesses

Although there has been an improvement in many areas, there is still a lot of catching up to do in Austria. The literature has revealed various barriers, but the biggest one, confirmed by qualitative research, is the work-family related barrier. It is still difficult for women to reconcile family and career, and being a mother often leads to the so-called half-time trap. In general, mothers are often discriminated against, which already starts during the hiring process. Currently, half-time workers are not taken seriously in many companies and little or no responsibility is given. It should also be mentioned that many corporate cultures are outdated and only allow (want) men at the top. In addition, there are still male-dominated industries, and the interviews have often shown that it is particularly difficult to advance professionally in such industries. Another major weakness is unequal pay. It is still the case that women are often paid less for the same work. This leads to a gender wage gap and social inequality.

5.1.3 Opportunities

A higher number of women in leadership positions provides many opportunities and possibilities. As mentioned in the literature, diversity in the workplace brings varied perspectives, new approaches, and combats stagnation. It is also worth noting that studies have shown that women have many characteristics that make a leader

successful. In the empirical research, interviewees were asked which characteristics were especially important. The terms communication skills, flexibility, empathy, responsibility and commitment were mentioned particularly often. A good manager must not only have traits that are more common in men, such as authority, dominance, or aggressiveness; he or she needs much more, and interpersonal skills in particular are becoming increasingly important. According to this, the company is enriched by more women in management positions, not only interpersonally but also in terms of sales. Another opportunity is a change or a conversion of the company policies. A higher proportion of women could bring benefits for all. This means more flexibility for all employees, more liberal working time arrangements, new leadership models such as shared management positions, and a better work-life balance. However, a change could above all solve societal issues such as the gender wage gap.

5.1.4 Threats

While quota regulations can also be seen as something positive, they also bring disadvantages, as already discussed in the thesis. Although there are already some initiatives, they are far from sufficient. Another threat is the Austrian population and its attitudes and behaviours. Working mothers are considered bad mothers by society, and many still believe that women should stay at home and men should earn money. This is also associated with stereotyping. Such outdated ways of thinking hinder change. Structural barriers, such as lack of networks, stand in the way, as well as barriers created by organizational cultures. The concept of microaggression, namely an uncomfortable feeling for women among men, can also be seen as a threat.

5.2 Further discussion

The glass ceiling is a metaphor standing for barriers women face that prevent them from climbing the career ladder and reaching leadership positions. This theory is linked to the first issue that is being explored. When answering the first research question which is “What kind of inequalities and barriers do women face in the workplace in Austria” the literature already indicates that women face a wide range of barriers when aspiring leadership positions. The most significant one is as already mentioned called the “Work-family” barrier. This obstacle is arguably the one that represents the greatest challenge for most women. It is difficult to reconcile

motherhood and career. The problems associated with this, such as the career gap and the part-time dilemma followed by unequal payment have already been mentioned in the literature. Empirical research has confirmed that this is certainly the primary barrier. Almost all the interviewees stated that the biggest hindrance when aspiring for a leadership position and when already obtaining one for them was to manage child and career. Above all, the associated part-time trap had occurred. The next barrier that has been revealed by secondary research is psychological barriers. These occur when women scare themselves through their own thoughts and minds and therefore have no confidence in taking risks. This then stops them from accepting a management position (Andrews, 2022). The qualitative interviews have also revealed this. Not only have interviewees already noticed that men are much more confident and are not afraid to accept positions for which they do not have all the qualifications needed, but the respondents also reported that salary negotiations lead to "fear" among women and that they do not have the courage to negotiate for higher salaries. Several women have stated that they advise young women who aspire to a leadership position to be courageous, fully confident and broad-minded. The preliminary research also uncovered so-called structural barriers. These indicate that women have inferior networks and link up less than men. Men are also more communicative and open beyond their professional lives and establish contacts in their free time such as for example at sporting events or other occasions (Greguletz et al., 2018). During the interviews, the female executives also stated that networking is particularly important for women and that they do it far too rarely. Inequality is, above all, unequal pay for the same work. This was also mentioned by one of the interviewees. Equal pay for equal work would encourage more fathers to take parental leave, which in turn would relieve the burden on mothers and give their careers the opportunity to develop. The other barriers described in the literature are societal barriers and organizational barriers. Societal barriers are social hurdles such as people's bias that women do not "have what it takes" to be a leader. This also includes stereotyping, as women tend to be described as quiet and loving while men are seen as dominant and controlling (Kark & Eagly, 2010). Even though the interviewees did not mention this challenge as a barrier they have experienced, when giving advice on how to achieve a managerial position, they stated that women need to be a bit louder, show their competence and convince others that they have what it takes. Also, the leadership theory explains what special traits, behaviours and

attitudes a leader need in order to be successful. As already mentioned in the SWOT Analysis as well as in the interviews, a successful manager should have communication skills, needs to be good with people, has to be flexible, must be responsible and empathetic. The last hurdle, namely the organizational barrier implies that women often experience it as uncomfortable to work at management level, or in some companies in general, due to the fact that there is a "male only" climate (Campuzano, 2019). Two of the persons interviewed stated in their responses that they worked in a male-dominated industry or company and therefore sometimes had a more difficult time. This was mainly because they reported that they were given less credit. In conclusion, it can be said that in relation to the first research question, the biggest barrier is the work-family barrier, followed by other challenges such as the structural barrier, organizational barrier, psychological barrier and societal barrier. The literature can also be reported to have been confirmed through the empirical research. The biggest inequality is certainly the difference in pay, as women in Austria still earn less than men for the same work in many cases. As the SWOT Analysis states, more women in leading positions would have enormous positive impacts on organizations, individuals, and societal issues.

Examining the second research question, which is "How do women overcome the barriers they face in leadership positions?" One primary result emerged from this paper is the importance of support from home. Since the biggest hurdle by far is balancing family and career, it is essential that the child's father also takes responsibility and contributes. Empirical research has indicated that equal salaries, regardless of gender, may also convince more fathers to take parental leave. Beyond private support at home, a good childcare system is particularly important. For example, one approach taken in one survey was to establish such facilities in or near workplaces. This would provide security and save commuting time. The third important point, which applies to all the other hurdles, is to be self-confident, to believe in oneself and to know one's strengths. Nowadays, women can accomplish anything and are just as capable of being a successful leader as men. It is important that females have confidence in themselves and communicate this to the public as well. Further concepts that have emerged from the empirical research are seminars and mentoring programs to support women and help them overcome hurdles.

It is also important to revisit the controversial quota system. The literature states that set gender quotas in companies significantly increase the number of women in management positions. Companies must pay penalties if they fail to comply with the quotas. While this system has proven to increase the quota of women in some countries, including Austria, it must not be forgotten that it also brings disadvantages. The biggest disadvantage is that such a regulation confirms that women would not make it on their own. Furthermore, it can lead to vacancies not being filled by the best-qualified person, but rather to women being given preference in the event of a dispute. It is important that the number of women in management positions is not only increased by introducing penalties but that companies also take proactive measures to support women in their career paths. Companies and other organizations must understand that women can make excellent managers and that they are not a burden but a valuable addition to the company. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that women and men can lead equally well, and leadership qualities do not depend on gender but on the character traits of individuals. The interviews did not reveal any clear for or against either, and opinions diverged when it comes to the quota system.

6 Recommendations

In the following, recommendations are made using a multi-stakeholder approach. Advice is given to the political level, to the corporate level, but also to individuals in order to combat the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. In order to achieve a long-term increase in the number of women in leadership positions in Austria and thus to ensure gender equality, several important steps need to be taken, by both society and by the individuals themselves, as well as by companies and other organizations. Qualitative research has provided recommendations and advice directly from female leaders on how women can climb the career ladder. The literature has also supported some of these approaches, such as women needing to be confident, putting a positive spin on their own thoughts, networking, and believing in themselves.

6.1 Stakeholder Recommendations

The subsequent recommendations aim to improve the current situation, namely the lack of female managers.

6.1.1 Political level

The introduction of mandatory quota regulations is a first political step toward getting more women into upper management. However, this regulation does not only bring advantages, as often not the best person for the position is hired, but the quota woman. One recommendation, however, for companies listed on the stock exchange is to introduce a mandatory women's quota in supervisory boards instead of quota regulations for management board positions, as these are the boards that determine the management boards. Moreover, it is important to provide more support, especially for mothers. This starts with better childcare facilities and ends with contact points for support, advice and information. An introduction of parental allowance or reforms of the tax system could also influence the employment and wages of mothers and thus the gender wage gap. Also making parental leave for fathers attractive as well can be an important suggestion. This is however only realistic if women earn the same amount of money as men do for the same work.

6.1.2 Organizational level

Companies are largely to blame for the fact that there are too few women in management positions. Numerous suggestions could be implemented by companies to combat inequality. In the first place, more flexibility helps. Offering more adaptable working hours, independent scheduling and, above all, the option of home office are approaches that can help mothers in particular to manage their work better, even with children, and not to decide in favour of either a career or children. Furthermore, it would make sense to introduce mentoring programs in companies as well as to ensure better networking among women. Extra-occupational events such as company celebrations or joint activities would also be of great benefit here. Returning to the matter of childcare, it would be helpful if organizations could locate daycare centers in the immediate vicinity or even on office premises, if possible. This would save parents commuting time and provide more security. Above all, it is important to ensure a more open climate between employees and to treat women equally to men. A "male climate" in companies must be combated, and women should receive extra support. In addition, it is important that women who work part-time are also taken seriously and are given responsibility. New models, such as shared leadership positions, could also be a solution to the problem and are worth trying.

6.1.3 Individual's level

It is essential that women believe in themselves and have confidence in their abilities. Being able to stand up for oneself is vital and it is important to not hesitate when asking for more responsibility, new tasks, when applying for a higher position or negotiating for higher salary. Another important piece of advice is to break out of the comfort zone and try something new. Furthermore, it is particularly important for women to network, because in comparison to men they do this much less often and less pronounced. Another important point is that women do not constantly have their gender in mind and therefore may have fewer opportunities from the bottom up. Openness and especially grabbing opportunities that arise can open up new paths.

6.2 Future research opportunities

For further future studies, it would also be interesting to analyze the perspective of men regarding the issue of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Furthermore, it would be worth investigating to see how the general public in Austrian society perceives this problem, which could be analyzed with the help of quantitative research and a survey. Another interesting approach for a relevant study would be to compare men and women in leadership positions. Moreover, it could be determined how they can complement each other and whether there are really gender-specific strengths and weaknesses or if these characteristics depend on individual to individual, independent of gender.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Overall Conclusion

This paper deals with the barriers women face when they aspire to a leadership position and tries to explain how female leaders can overcome these barriers. In Austria in particular, the underrepresentation of women in management positions is striking. Far more men reach management positions and only rarely a woman make it to the top of a company. In summary, it can be said that women face different barriers when they want to climb the career ladder.

These barriers on the one hand arise from external influences such as corporate culture and on the other hand in the minds of women. This study found that the biggest barrier is the work-family barrier. Old traditions in society still dictate that a woman must stay at home with the children and is a bad mother if she works too early after giving birth, or too much. Also, external circumstances such as inadequate childcare and inflexible company structures complicate the situation. It is important to understand that women in leadership positions are an enrichment and not a burden. This work has shown that being a good leader does not depend on gender, but rather on characteristics and behaviour.

Diversity is in demand in all areas of life and so it should be in professional life. There are definitely ways to break through the glass ceiling as a woman, however a change in thinking is needed from the perspective of society, organizations and women themselves.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview Guide

Dear Participant,

my name is Viktoria Julia Heinzl and I am currently a student at the Modul University Vienna, enrolled in the International Management (BSc) program. For my bachelor thesis, which explores the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Austria, I am conducting qualitative research in the form of asynchronous E-Mail interviews. This interview consists of 12 questions. The main focus is to find out about the barriers women face in the workforce and when aspiring or being in a leadership position as well as ways of overcoming those. All the responses will remain anonymized and are only used for the purpose of this thesis. Thank you in advance for taking part.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge and conscience.

13. In which company are you working, what is your current position, for how long have you held it now and what are the primary responsibilities you have?

14. Was it always your plan or wish to obtain a leading position?

15. What do you think makes a good leader, does a leader need to have specific characteristics?

16. Throughout your career, who were your inspiring personalities, or did you have a role model or a mentor?

17. What lessons and experiences can you share as a female leader?

18. Over the years, what were the biggest barriers you faced during your growth as a female leader, how did you overcome them and what barrier do you think is the strongest one to female leadership?

19. Has there ever been a situation at work where you felt discriminated against or disadvantaged because of your gender?

20. What is the best advice you have ever received when it comes to climbing up the career ladder?

21. What advice would you give to other women who wish to achieve a leading position?

22. Would you wish for more support from companies or the government for females in the working world and do you have any ideas to share how the support could look like?

23. Are you a mother?

Yes: How have you balanced being a mother and a professional?

24. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share on this topic?

Many thanks for your support! ☺

Appendix 2 Interview 1

Interviewee 1

Dear Participant,

my name is Viktoria Julia Heinzl and I am currently a student at the Modul University Vienna, enrolled in the International Management (BSc) program. For my bachelor thesis, which explores the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Austria, I am conducting qualitative research in the form of asynchronous E-Mail interviews. This interview consists of 12 questions. The main focus is to find out about the barriers women face in the workforce and when aspiring or being in a leadership position as well as ways of overcoming those. All the responses will remain anonymized and are only used for the purpose of this thesis. Thank you in advance for taking part.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge and conscience.

1. In which company are you working, what is your current position, for how long have you held it now and what are the primary responsibilities you have?

Company: EvoBus Austria GmbH (sales and service for omnibuses)

Position: Head of spare parts management (spare parts procurement, logistics & sales)

Since: beginning of 2020

Main Tasks: Key account customer support; pricing & marketing; employee management/staff planning (35 employees); organization.

2. Was it always your plan or wish to obtain a leading position?

It was always my wish to be given responsibility and to get involved in the company. I didn't aim for the management position from the outset, but grabbed it when it was within reach.

3. What do you think makes a good leader, does a leader need to have specific characteristics?

Important for me: Being a role model, standing by agreements, making decisions.

Important qualities: sense of responsibility, commitment, trustworthiness

4. Throughout your career, who were your inspiring personalities, or did you have a role model or a mentor?

My role model and mentor was my former boss

5. What lessons and experiences can you share as a female leader?

Don't try to please everyone; as a female manager in a company in the automotive industry you are confronted with prejudices, you must not be discouraged by this; just do it, recognition takes time

6. Over the years, what were the biggest barriers you faced during your growth as a female leader, how did you overcome them and what barrier do you think is the strongest one to female leadership?

If one works "only" part-time as a mother, one is labeled as an auxiliary by many superiors and colleagues (i.e. half-day = auxiliary) and this often hinders further development because it is difficult to be assigned responsible tasks.

My recipe was: to ask directly for responsible tasks/projects; as far as working hours are concerned, to be flexible as far as possible and also to be prepared to work overtime if necessary.

Complete tasks reliably, make suggestions and support colleagues

Obstacles: above all, that a woman is not considered to have much competence in a male-dominated industry

7. Has there ever been a situation at work where you felt discriminated against or disadvantaged because of your gender?

No, at least not directly; I deliberately never put the gender in the foreground

8. What is the best advice you have ever received when it comes to climbing up the career ladder?

"Just do it" - you have to trust yourself to competently complete new/unfamiliar tasks

9. What advice would you give to other women who wish to achieve a leading position?

Perseverance; knowing and showing one's own abilities; willingness to perform; one must be aware that one must first give before one gets something in return
"The (wo)man on the top of the mountain did not fall there".

10. Would you wish for more support from companies or the government for females in the working world and do you have any ideas to share how the support could look like?

Unfortunately, the ratio of men/women in management positions has NOT been self-regulating for more than 30 years - so I am in favor of some kind of women/men quotas, but they should reflect the ratio of all employees in the company.

Transparency in pay culture - implement commitment to equal pay for equal work. With equal pay, it is also more attractive for fathers to take on childcare time.

11. Are you a mother?

yes

Yes: How have you balanced being a mother and a professional?

Through part-time employment; a partner who was actively involved in childcare; flexible working hours; a good network for childcare outside of school and kindergarten.

12. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share on this topic?

Many thanks for your support! ☺

Appendix 3 Interview 2

Interviewee 2:

Dear Participant,

my name is Viktoria Julia Heinzl and I am currently a student at the Modul University Vienna, enrolled in the International Management (BSc) program. For my bachelor thesis, which explores the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Austria, I am conducting qualitative research in the form of asynchronous E-Mail interviews. This interview consists of 12 questions. The main focus is to find out about the barriers women face in the workforce and when aspiring or being in a leadership position as well as ways of overcoming those. All the responses will remain anonymized and are only used for the purpose of this thesis. Thank you in advance for taking part.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge and conscience.

1. In which company are you working, what is your current position, for how long have you held it now and what are the primary responsibilities you have?

I have been employed at Raiffeisen Regionalbank Mödling for 32 years and have been managing the bank branch in Mödling for 5 years.

My tasks include branch management, staff management and coaching, risk responsibility, budget responsibility, but of course also customer service, acquisition, PR & representation of RRB Mödling and local complaint management.

2. Was it always your plan or wish to obtain a leading position?

Yes, after I graduated from high school, that was already my plan, but since I worked part-time for 17 years because of the children, it was no longer important to me.

However, our manager definitely wanted me to succeed him as bank branch manager, and since the children were grown up by then, I was happy to accept the full-time job.

3. What do you think makes a good leader, does a leader need to have specific characteristics?

Long experience, gut feeling and a good way with people

4. Throughout your career, who were your inspiring personalities, or did you have a role model or a mentor?

Yes, I had a mentor... that was my bank branch manager at the time in the Leopoldsdorf branch... above all, he had fun with the customer and the employee - and thus the sale of the products functioned as if by itself and the employees had all the freedom (private phone calls were never an issue).

5. What lessons and experiences can you share as a female leader?

My strength is in sales and acquisition and for that you need empathy and gut feeling (to assess the risk), product info and the art of winning a customer's trust in a short time (then the conditions are secondary).

6. Over the years, what were the biggest barriers you faced during your growth as a female leader, how did you overcome them and what barrier do you think is the strongest one to female leadership?

There were no major obstacles - my superiors (management) were always 100% behind me and that gave me support - it is exciting when there are personnel changes in the management and thus strategy changes - you always have to be flexible! A big challenge was the safe raid at RRB Mödling in November 2020.

7. Has there ever been a situation at work where you felt discriminated against or disadvantaged because of your gender?

No - there is no such thing in our social enterprise, we are far too loyal to all employees -

an attractive workplace brings successful employees
60% women - 40% men

8. What is the best advice you have ever received when it comes to climbing up the career ladder?

Ambition is the key to success (as well as motivation and commitment) but patience, trust and fun all work much easier

9. What advice would you give to other women who wish to achieve a leading position?

Do not be dogged and never lose the fun at work!
Hardworking, efficient, brisk and friendly ... then everything comes by itself, because the superiors see the commitment and it is certainly rewarded

10. Would you wish for more support from companies or the government for females in the working world and do you have any ideas to share how the support could look like?

Since I am with body and soul also "mother", I would never have wanted to take the time with my children, thus I have worked for 17 years only 25 hours - so encourage part-time work!

"Career - children - marriage - household " is a difficult balance the whole life and itself one should also not come too short (burnout)

11. Are you a mother?

Yes my daughters are now 22 and 25 years old

Yes: How have you balanced being a mother and a professional?

I was on maternity leave for 1.5 years and then gave the children to a childminder (because kindergarten is only possible from 3 years) and worked 25 hours in the morning.

12. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share on this topic?

Everything comes in its time!

Many thanks for your support! 😊

Appendix 4 Interview 3

Interviewee 3

Dear Participant,

my name is Viktoria Julia Heinzl and I am currently a student at the Modul University Vienna, enrolled in the International Management (BSc) program. For my bachelor thesis, which explores the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Austria, I am conducting qualitative research in the form of asynchronous E-Mail interviews. This interview consists of 12 questions. The main focus is to find out about the barriers women face in the workforce and when aspiring or being in a leadership position as well as ways of overcoming those. All the responses will remain anonymized and are only used for the purpose of this thesis. Thank you in advance for taking part.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge and conscience.

1. In which company are you working, what is your current position, for how long have you held it now and what are the primary responsibilities you have?

I am the head of a vocational middle and high school BMHS, Vienna Business School - Handelsakademie und Handelsschule Mödling.

Duration: since 2 years, but 30 years at this school in the school service with many special functions.

Main task:

- Coordination of 20 classes with about 500 students* and about 45 professors*.
- Implementation of the legal framework
- staff management
- meetings with parents
- Advertising for new students, PR work
- Personnel policy and selection
- School development
- Implementation of school plans - organizations
- Quality management

2. Was it always your plan or wish to obtain a leading position?

This has only developed over time - as I have held many positions at this school and have been involved in school development. The penultimate station was deputy head and representative for quality management.

3. What do you think makes a good leader, does a leader need to have specific characteristics?

If you can respond to "your workforce", have consistent ideas but implement them humanely.

The ability to recognize and promote the "jewel" of the employee, to use him where his strengths are.

Ability

- in conversation and rhetoric
- To also discuss and "praise" good performance, to recognize it
- To delegate responsibility
- Allow new ideas/approaches
- Trust employees and have confidence in them
- Flexibility for each working day (organizationally, thematically and temporally)

4. Throughout your career, who were your inspiring personalities, or did you have a role model or a mentor?

I actually didn't - it was the enthusiasm and joy for the profession of student education itself that never waned. The interest to move something for THIS school and to create a place where the customers (students), the employees (professors) and the stakeholders like to go increased. Only then can an optimal working environment - learning environment be created. Everyone should treat each other with respect in order to have a pleasant place to work.

5. What lessons and experiences can you share as a female leader?

To pursue one's goal with passion, even if it becomes difficult, to always see this as a new challenge and not as an obstacle or to give up. There will always be situations in which you have to make decisions that are not to everyone's liking - but must be made in the interest of the whole. The team idea and the common goal must always be in the foreground, not individual views/advantages.

6. Over the years, what were the biggest barriers you faced during your growth as a female leader, how did you overcome them and what barrier do you think is the strongest one to female leadership?

Since I have not been in this role for so long but have been involved with Corona from the beginning, this is a difficult question to answer. The biggest challenge was therefore the changing legal requirements of the Corona guidelines for the education sector. In my case - to inform the many people concerned in time, i.e. to be the mouthpiece and motivator.

Another challenge is to make decisions - which do not harmonize with all opinions of the 45 employees. But this can be somewhat compensated for by good discussion and argumentation.

7. Has there ever been a situation at work where you felt discriminated against or disadvantaged because of your gender?

No - not in this division of the management level

8. What is the best advice you have ever received when it comes to climbing up the career ladder?

To be consistent, fair, get a lot of information, show interest, show a certain amount of extra commitment - to perform his role with passion, then nothing will stand in the way of climbing.

9. What advice would you give to other women who wish to achieve a leading position?

If you want this or plan to follow through with your tasks and do not think about gender

10. Would you wish for more support from companies or the government for females in the working world and do you have any ideas to share how the support could look like?

This problem was not up for debate with me, but I think in many areas one would finally have to banish this idea of gender from one's mind and focus on the person's abilities.

11. Are you a mother?

Yes, 2 times

Yes: How have you balanced being a mother and a professional?

Yes, very good - I was only in maternity with both children - I wanted this and thus had the right attitude - the working hours as a teacher are accommodating here.

Now as the head of the school, my children are already independent and finished with their own schooling - so there were no problems here.

12. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share on this topic?

No - just that I enjoy my job as a school principal and hopefully will be allowed to do it for some time 😊

Many thanks for your support! 😊

Appendix 5 Interview 4

Interviewee 4

Dear Participant,

my name is Viktoria Julia Heinzl and I am currently a student at the Modul University Vienna, enrolled in the International Management (BSc) program. For my bachelor thesis, which explores the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Austria, I am conducting qualitative research in the form of asynchronous E-Mail interviews. This interview consists of 12 questions. The main focus is to find out about the barriers women face in the workforce and when aspiring or being in a leadership position as well as ways of overcoming those. All the responses will remain anonymized and are only used for the purpose of this thesis. Thank you in advance for taking part.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge and conscience.

1. In which company are you working, what is your current position, for how long have you held it now and what are the primary responsibilities you have?

ÖBB PV AG; Position Head of IT Delivery Support; 3 years;
before, head of project portfolio management, IT portfolio management, license and supplier and partner management

2. Was it always your plan or wish to obtain a leading position?

Desire: To take on responsibility, to have interesting and varied tasks and to be able to manage interesting topics with primary responsibility, to be able to work independently and self-organized, to work with interesting people;
Leadership comes when you show leadership and have the confidence to do so.

3. What do you think makes a good leader, does a leader need to have specific characteristics?

Leadership means taking responsibility for tasks and people and standing up for them.

Making decisions and standing by them. Self-reflection and the courage to make changes.

It is also important to take time for people (employees), their needs and fears, and to understand what makes them tick.

Strong focus on cost (effort) - benefit and goal consideration, clear goal setting and task setting incl. room for maneuver, needs-oriented employee management, employee coaching, establishment of a positive organizational culture (trusting cooperation, appreciative, open and clear communication, independent and autonomous working methods, ...),

focus on employee development, respectful treatment of employees, ability to deal with conflict, solution orientation, open, positive and constructive handling of errors (positive error culture),

Management is carried out by the manager with the active involvement of the employees;

Important: Enabling employees to be able and willing to do their work independently and on their own responsibility; Ongoing development of the organization with retrospective and drawing up and implementing lessons learned;

Characteristics: Employee and team orientation, independence, self-organization, goal/solution orientation, ability to communicate across all levels (interface between own team and other areas), ability to deal with conflict, always maintaining an overview, constantly questioning oneself and one's own work as well as tasks and goals and changing them if necessary, living agility, flexibility, willingness to continuously develop and change (optimization);

4. Throughout your career, who were your inspiring personalities, or did you have a role model or a mentor?

Different people in different situations; role models were all those managers who were noticeably appreciated by their employees and supported in difficult situations and thus "carried" and those who quickly went into activity and solution.

5. What lessons and experiences can you share as a female leader?

Nobody is 100% perfect, even we don't have to be (note: women tend to focus more on what they are not so good at or where they see weaknesses themselves), trust yourself and stand by yourself and your opinion, stand by your convictions and state your convictions openly and clearly on the matter level, even if you think others don't want to hear it that way, give employees the benefit of the doubt and also dare to lead loosely; important: Schedule regular checks, see criticism exclusively on a factual level, do not let it go to the emotional level; see factual criticism as an opportunity for improvement;

IMPORTANT: people work in every team, including the manager. This aspect must never be forgotten.

6. Over the years, what were the biggest barriers you faced during your growth as a female leader, how did you overcome them and what barrier do you think is the strongest one to female leadership?

Still the balancing act between family and career, i.e. family planning and the tasks that come with it; leadership is not a 9to5 job;
Always wanting to be 100% perfect and without "flaws";
Society's or women's own view of women in the professional world (terms like career woman, bad mother, ...);

7. Has there ever been a situation at work where you felt discriminated against or disadvantaged because of your gender?

Not because of gender, but as a mother with young children in the course of a job interview; question: How do they think they can manage this function with young children? How do they expect it to work when a child is sick? What do they do with the children during the vacations?

8. What is the best advice you have ever received when it comes to climbing up the career ladder?

Life is 10% what happens and 90% how you react to it and what you do and make of it.

9. What advice would you give to other women who wish to achieve a leading position?

Being clear about what you want, what you can and want to be responsible for, with all the consequences, and what is worth fighting for (at all times).
To be authentic. To constantly want to develop and to be ready to break out of the comfort zone again and again and to want to face new tasks and challenges.
Being active and courageous, not waiting to be asked or for someone else to do something.
Being ready to face a competition and a competitive situation.

And... losing once in a while is also ok, life goes on and there will be another chance.

10. Would you wish for more support from companies or the government for females in the working world and do you have any ideas to share how the support could look like?

Better childcare, better schools and better training, flexible childcare hours for men and women to maintain joint responsibility for the children, better vacation care, good training program in companies, more actions to break up the classic women's/men's training and professions (e.g. arouse interest in girls for technical professions), measures to support equal treatment already in the development of girls and boys.

11. Are you a mother?

yes

Yes: How have you balanced being a mother and a professional?

With a lot of organization, support in the family, a lot of commitment

12. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share on this topic?

Many thanks for your support! 😊

Appendix 6 Interview 5

Interviewee 5

Dear Participant,

my name is Viktoria Julia Heinzl and I am currently a student at the Modul University Vienna, enrolled in the International Management (BSc) program. For my bachelor thesis, which explores the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Austria, I am conducting qualitative research in the form of asynchronous E-Mail interviews. This interview consists of 12 questions. The main focus is to find out about the barriers women face in the workforce and when aspiring or being in a leadership position as well as ways of overcoming those. All the responses will remain anonymized and are only used for the purpose of this thesis. Thank you in advance for taking part.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge and conscience.

1. In which company are you working, what is your current position, for how long have you held it now and what are the primary responsibilities you have?

I am currently working at Firstbird. My current position is Lead of Brand and Communication, which I have held officially since January 2022. My primary responsibilities are:

- leading and managing the content team
- designing and executing the content strategy
- overseeing that all internal and external company materials are in line with our brand
- ensuring a smooth transition of our brand over to our new brand Radancy (due to a merger)

2. Was it always your plan or wish to obtain a leading position?

No, I would not say directly. I have always wanted to do very well in my work though, to be the best in what I do, and I think working in a leading position is naturally part of that journey somehow.

3. What do you think makes a good leader, does a leader need to have specific characteristics?

Definitely. I think empathy is crucial. It's also important to be a good communicator and to be able to use logic, mixed with intuition to make decisions. The ability to work well under pressure and in stressful situations is also essential.

4. Throughout your career, who were your inspiring personalities, or did you have a role model or a mentor?

Yes and no. I never had a specific model or mentor, but rather I liked to pick out certain traits, or experiences that I've really admired about someone, and taken them with me.

5. What lessons and experiences can you share as a female leader?

People and companies might be open to it, and they might say they encourage female leadership but you will still face many, many mountains on the way, particularly in Austria. Although things are slowly changing, it is still well embedded in the systems, policies and procedures that "woman have jobs, and men have careers". Don't let this get you down, as there are still possibilities and ways for growth, but usually, it takes a little bit longer. The best way to start is by educating the people closest to you.

6. Over the years, what were the biggest barriers you faced during your growth as a female leader, how did you overcome them and what barrier do you think is the strongest one to female leadership?

I think the biggest barrier was having children.
There were two aspects: the professional and the personal.

Professional:

Once I announced I was pregnant, I was treated like I was already on leave and gone - I was more or less just put in the corner for the rest of the time until I had my first baby (this was not at Firstbird, but a previous company). I returned after 1 year of maternity leave, in a parttime position and although I was extremely eager to work and continue my career path (and eventually increase my hours) I was suddenly let go after only one month of being back. I was offered very little reason for my dismissal, other than I did not participate enough in the company Skype channel. This had a huge impact on my self-confidence as a new working mother and it took me quite a long time to recover.

There is great difficulty in returning to work as a mother, as your identity has changed for most people. If you work part-time, very rarely will you be given more opportunities for growth or offered a promotion. And if you are working full time with young children, this is very often looked on quite critically by society. And then on top you have the care: when the baby is sick, it is up to you to take time off to care for them, each and every time. How are you meant to get ahead? How are you meant to ask for a promotion? In comparison, over the 5 years that I had

two children (with my first, I took the full 12 months of maternity leave, with my 2nd I took only 5 months off), my husband made significant steps in his career, increasing his position and his salary, compared to me. It was almost like he was now five years ahead of me.

Personal:

The second barrier I faced was at home, usually behind closed doors. My husband was quite supportive in the early days of me wanting to work (that was before we had kids). However, once the reality of having children came and he realised that this would mean that he would have to “sacrifice” working time, for example, to take care of the children when they were sick sometimes, things became increasingly difficult. My job was always the less important one - I earned less money and I had a lower position, and his was more important so I should be the one to take time off. But then again, when I cannot be taken seriously in my job due to taking time off for the children constantly, how will I ever get ahead? How will I ever perform well and grow my career? It was almost like a catch 22. And although it was never anything intentional from his side, it required significant work to help him really “support” me in my career. It was almost like it was up to me to educate the people closest to me what having a career really meant.

7. Has there ever been a situation at work where you felt discriminated against or disadvantaged because of your gender?

Absolutely. As I mentioned above, I was fired very shortly after coming back from maternity leave for the first time.

Additionally, I think women are often overlooked because they might be too emotional, or too pushy, or too sensitive (for example). These are words I very rarely hear about men, and I think the perspective of these traits and talk like this needs to be changed.

8. What is the best advice you have ever received when it comes to climbing up the career ladder?

The best advice I received was to forget about my weaknesses, and instead work on building on my strengths and potential strengths. I think we are told a lot that we should “do all and be all” so it was refreshing to think that I can be ok with my weaknesses and let them be, and focus on the things that I am really good at.

Also it’s not really advice, but the things that picked me up and help me on my way was when other women, usually much younger than me would let me know that I inspire them by being a working mum. They would tell me that it’s very refreshing to see someone doing it, and they hoped that they can do it when they have children. At the time, I didn’t realise that I was doing something so unique, but I guess that shows how much the stigma is still there (as this happened quite a lot).

9. What advice would you give to other women who wish to achieve a leading position?

I guess be comfortable with being you, and be confident with what you bring to the table. Don't worry too much about your weaknesses or how you are perceived as a female. Always approach things calm and logically, and present your ideas or arguments well.

And also, for the working mothers, I would say to do things that help you and make life easy for you. There will be a lot of opinions, but you should just do things your way.

10. Would you wish for more support from companies or the government for females in the working world and do you have any ideas to share how the support could look like?

Remove the stigma of mothers having to take years off for caring for young children. Open childcare centers later. Give paternity leave. Make it normal for fathers to share the workload. Make it normal for woman to have careers.

11. Are you a mother?

Yes: How have you balanced being a mother and a professional?

See above :) it takes a lot of work!

12. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share on this topic?

Not at the moment, thank you for letting me participate!

Many thanks for your support! 😊

Appendix 7 Interview 6

Interviewee 6

Dear Participant,

my name is Viktoria Julia Heinzl and I am currently a student at the Modul University Vienna, enrolled in the International Management (BSc) program. For my bachelor thesis, which explores the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Austria, I am conducting qualitative research in the form of asynchronous E-Mail interviews. This interview consists of 12 questions. The main focus is to find out about the barriers women face in the workforce and when aspiring or being in a leadership position as well as ways of overcoming those. All the responses will remain anonymized and are only used for the purpose of this thesis. Thank you in advance for taking part.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge and conscience.

1. In which company are you working, what is your current position, for how long have you held it now and what are the primary responsibilities you have?

Company: Ottakringer Beverages AG
Position: Member of the Management Board / CFO
Duration position: since 1.1.2017
Main responsibilities: Responsible for the areas: Controlling, Accounting, Treasury&Risk, master data, purchasing, technology, internal audit, Risk Management

2. Was it always your plan or wish to obtain a leading position?

No, that was NOT on my wish list, but has evolved in that direction over the years and many years of affiliation.

3. What do you think makes a good leader, does a leader need to have specific characteristics?

From my point of view, it is above all the will and the willingness to take on responsibility. In addition, it is above all the qualities: decisiveness, good communication, empathy, integrity, the ability to learn, acting as a role model and, of course, a specialist knowledge is also an advantage

4. Throughout your career, who were your inspiring personalities, or did you have a role model or a mentor?

I had a mentor right from the start: my boss and co-owner at the time, Siegfried Menz, and subsequently my current head of the Supervisory Board and also co-owner, Christiane Wenckheim. Without these two mentors and their encouragement, I would not have said YES to this step.

5. What lessons and experiences can you share as a female leader?

Above all, to trust yourself, maybe to jump into the "deep end" once in a while, to believe in yourself more. The will to share your experience and knowledge and above all to listen to your intuition. And especially important: to form a good team!

6. Over the years, what were the biggest barriers you faced during your growth as a female leader, how did you overcome them and what barrier do you think is the strongest one to female leadership?

Personally, I didn't have any major obstacles. In our owner-managed family group, female managers have always been very supported and the return after maternity leave also worked very well. During my maternity leave, I always kept in touch with the company. What I would perhaps like to share is that in certain functions it is important to build up a network, but there is often a lack of the necessary time to do so... the often mentioned "balancing act between family and career" is only

possible with appropriate support within the family or also external support. Nevertheless, the network can be important, especially to find women with whom you can exchange well!

7. Has there ever been a situation at work where you felt discriminated against or disadvantaged because of your gender?

No!

8. What is the best advice you have ever received when it comes to climbing up the career ladder?

To believe in oneself, to have confidence in oneself - to learn a little bit from the "self-confidence" of men.

9. What advice would you give to other women who wish to achieve a leading position?

.) believe in one's own strengths
.) speak confidently about one's own performance or successes.
.) to network within the company or externally - exchange of knowledge and experience
.) to look for a mentor
.) to remain true to oneself
.) not to be too modest in salary negotiations - the men are not either. ;)

10. Would you wish for more support from companies or the government for females in the working world and do you have any ideas to share how the support could look like?

I am one of the few female board members of listed companies in Austria. Nevertheless, I am AGAINST a mandatory quota in private companies, but I welcome a quota in the supervisory board, because the supervisory board appoints the members of the management board.

I am in favor of more flexibility in working hours and a comprehensive offer of day care from kindergarten age.

I would also very much welcome more financial education in schools, as this is very important for women's independence.

11. Are you a mother?

YES, I have an adult son (age 24) and an adult daughter (age 21).

Yes: How have you balanced being a mother and a professional?

Through the willingness of my family to support me.

My company's willingness to make it easier for me to return to work on a part-time basis.

Through the realization that you can't do everything 100% perfectly.

12. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share on this topic?

I wish women to be brave, to dare more, to not immediately think about what you CAN'T do when you get a job offer, but what you CAN DO, the willingness to get involved in a job and to try new things and very important: to stay true to yourself and it's also okay to show EMOTIONS!

Many thanks for your support! 😊

Appendix 8 Interview 7

Interviewee 7

Dear Participant,

my name is Viktoria Julia Heinzl and I am currently a student at the Modul University Vienna, enrolled in the International Management (BSc) program. For my bachelor thesis, which explores the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Austria, I am conducting qualitative research in the form of asynchronous E-Mail interviews. This interview consists of 12 questions. The main focus is to find out about the barriers women face in the workforce and when aspiring or being in a leadership position as well as ways of overcoming those. All the responses will remain anonymized and are only used for the purpose of this thesis. Thank you in advance for taking part.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge and conscience.

1. In which company are you working, what is your current position, for how long have you held it now and what are the primary responsibilities you have?

Since June 2021, I have held the position of Managing Director of EHL Wohnen GmbH, a real estate brokerage company specializing in residential real estate brokerage in the areas of rental and sales as well as developer consulting. My main tasks are company management and leadership, company representation, real estate acquisition, staff management, process optimization, budgeting, holding professional lectures, defining marketing concepts and strategies as well as property developer consulting.

2. Was it always your plan or wish to obtain a leading position?

I am a very self-critical and self-reflective person, with a tendency towards perfectionism. My ambition has therefore always been to grow - to become better at what I do and thus to work on my own high quality standards. It has therefore always given me great pleasure to rethink processes and approaches and to get more involved with ideas and suggestions for improvement. I did not have in mind the step into a management position or even into the management. Rather, I believe that such opportunities and possibilities can arise if you pursue your profession with a lot of passion, joy, curiosity and commitment.

3. What do you think makes a good leader, does a leader need to have specific characteristics?

A good manager works on clearly defined goals. These goals are not achieved alone, but together with a team and the individual employees. Whether the goal can be achieved depends on the way to get there - this is exactly the task of the manager. It is therefore important to find a good balance between encouraging and challenging employees and to create a suitable working environment to enable good work. In a management position, it is therefore important to work with people and to have the necessary social skills, empathy and clear communication.

4. Throughout your career, who were your inspiring personalities, or did you have a role model or a mentor?

In the course of my working life, different inspiring people have always come into my life, who of course have also taken on a role model role. I have learned a lot from these people and therefore also like to surround myself with them.

5. What lessons and experiences can you share as a female leader?

To have courage and confidence in yourself, to face new and sometimes unfamiliar situations. Because it is precisely in such moments that you grow the most and get to know yourself better. In addition, it is absolutely okay to ask for support from others in challenging situations, such as from work colleagues.

6. Over the years, what were the biggest barriers you faced during your growth as a female leader, how did you overcome them and what barrier do you think is the strongest one to female leadership?

Especially at a young age, it is more challenging to take on responsibility, even more so as a woman in a rather male-dominated industry. That's why I think it's important to be authentic and honest in everything you do, to convince people with absolute professional competence and to assert yourself.

7. Has there ever been a situation at work where you felt discriminated against or disadvantaged because of your gender?

No, fortunately I have not experienced that. Fortunately, I work in a company where everyone - regardless of gender, faith, sexual orientation, etc. - is treated with equal opportunity and great respect. This is a basic prerequisite for a good working atmosphere and therefore important for the employees' job satisfaction and performance.

8. What is the best advice you have ever received when it comes to climbing up the career ladder?

Always work on yourself, develop yourself further and don't stand still. If mistakes happen, you learn from them and grow with these experiences. This will extend throughout life and is therefore no reason to be shy.

9. What advice would you give to other women who wish to achieve a leading position?

See question 5 and that everyone is the architect of his own fortune and that you can achieve anything if you really want to.

10. Would you wish for more support from companies or the government for females in the working world and do you have any ideas to share how the support could look like?

-

11. Are you a mother?
Not yet

Yes: How have you balanced being a mother and a professional?

12. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share on this topic?

Many thanks for your support! 😊

Appendix 9 Interview 8

Interviewee 8

Dear Participant,

my name is Viktoria Julia Heinzl and I am currently a student at the Modul University Vienna, enrolled in the International Management (BSc) program. For my bachelor thesis, which explores the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Austria, I am conducting qualitative research in the form of asynchronous E-Mail interviews. This interview consists of 12 questions. The main focus is to find out about the barriers women face in the workforce and when aspiring or being in a leadership position as well as ways of overcoming those. All the responses will remain anonymized and are only used for the purpose of this thesis. Thank you in advance for taking part.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge and conscience.

1. In which company are you working, what is your current position, for how long have you held it now and what are the primary responsibilities you have?

Lohmann & Rauscher, Head of HR Austria, since September 2018
Leadership of the HR team Austria /HRBP, payroll accounting.

Responsible for all HR relevant topics in Austria
Interface GF/works council
HR development topics
Labor law information

2. Was it always your plan or wish to obtain a leading position?

No, this has developed over the years.

3. What do you think makes a good leader, does a leader need to have specific characteristics?

Recognizing and utilizing the potential of employees
Good communication skills
Motivate employees
Being consistent and credible

4. Throughout your career, who were your inspiring personalities, or did you have a role model or a mentor?

My first boss, WirtschaftsBlatt editor-in-chief
Very successful man, but always remained a human being

5. What lessons and experiences can you share as a female leader?

As a woman, you have to be louder to be heard
Women are usually less well networked or not networked at all.
Men very often have good networks, women need to catch up here

6. Over the years, what were the biggest barriers you faced during your growth as a female leader, how did you overcome them and what barrier do you think is the strongest one to female leadership?

I worked as a part-time employee for many years. It was therefore impossible to get into a management role. Colleagues and supervisors treat part-time employees differently, and although they perform the same, they don't take them seriously.

7. Has there ever been a situation at work where you felt discriminated against or disadvantaged because of your gender?

No

8. What is the best advice you have ever received when it comes to climbing up the career ladder?

Authenticity: being authentic is the key to success!

9. What advice would you give to other women who wish to achieve a leading position?

Network with each other!

10. Would you wish for more support from companies or the government for females in the working world and do you have any ideas to share how the support could look like?

Companies should promote women. Particularly nowadays, when it is difficult to find good skilled workers, women are a very interesting target group for employers. It can also be possible to take over management on a part-time basis. For example, one full-time management position can be converted into two part-time management positions.

Special mentoring programs for women should be offered
Communication seminars for women as well

11. Are you a mother?
yes

Yes: How have you balanced being a mother and a professional?

As a mother, I worked part-time for the first 15 years. That was a lot more demanding and exhausting than now, when I work full time. The famous part-time trap has struck, the multiple burden for such women is very strong.

12. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share on this topic?

Many thanks for your support! 😊

Appendix 10 Interview 9

Interviewee 9

Dear Participant,

my name is Viktoria Julia Heinzl and I am currently a student at the Modul University Vienna, enrolled in the International Management (BSc) program. For my bachelor thesis, which explores the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Austria, I am conducting qualitative research in the form of asynchronous E-Mail interviews. This interview consists of 12 questions. The main focus is to find out about the barriers women face in the workforce and when aspiring or being in a leadership position as well as ways of overcoming those. All the responses will remain anonymized and are only used for the purpose of this thesis. Thank you in advance for taking part.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge and conscience.

1. In which company are you working, what is your current position, for how long have you held it now and what are the primary responsibilities you have?

Volkskreditbank AG / VKB Bank AG, cooperative bank operating exclusively in Upper Austria / divisional director for marketing for 4 years / 9 employees responsible for marketing and communications (market research, events, corporate communications, social media, advertising, digital)

2. Was it always your plan or wish to obtain a leading position?

Yes it was! 2-3 employees were the goal, in the short term it was even 18, for a year the department was halved! It was always my desire.

3. What do you think makes a good leader, does a leader need to have specific characteristics?

The most important: to lead! That means the big challenge is to recognize competencies and to promote them! The leadership style is also important - you should be tough but fair. Do not lead too laxly, there must be a line inside. Open communication is also very important. Especially during Corona it was important to lead properly because half of the department was in the home office.

4. Throughout your career, who were your inspiring personalities, or did you have a role model or a mentor?

My greatest role model were my parents, I come from a business household and entrepreneurial thinking was ingrained in me.

5. What lessons and experiences can you share as a female leader?

The world is open, there's no such thing as can't!

The work must be fun, you have to enjoy it! Not just because something has to be done or just to earn money, an added value must be there for you personally! Passion for the job is an important keyword. When negotiating salaries, it's okay to ask for something and have the courage to do it.

6. Over the years, what were the biggest barriers you faced during your growth as a female leader, how did you overcome them and what barrier do you think is the strongest one to female leadership?

In any case, the biggest obstacle at that time was my child. Not my child itself but the circumstances. My son is almost 30 years old and at that time the circumstances were different than today. There was no home office or half-day job for me and no one wanted to take me on. I overcame this hurdle by finishing my studies with the support of my parents. Then there was actually already the next hurdle because there was no half-day job for a woman Magister. So I was overqualified. By luck I got a job in an advertising agency, where the boss himself had 4 children and offered me a part-time job. So luck is also part of it.

In my opinion, the biggest hurdles today are still the family-work barriers that women face.

7. Has there ever been a situation at work where you felt discriminated against or disadvantaged because of your gender?

No. And that's despite the fact that I'm the only woman on the second management level alongside 18 men.

8. What is the best advice you have ever received when it comes to climbing up the career ladder?

Competence is a basic requirement! You have to prove yourself and see this as an opportunity and not as something negative. Many women create hurdles for themselves in their own heads.

9. What advice would you give to other women who wish to achieve a leading position?

Clarify for yourself early on how your private life should be organized, plan in advance! What will I do during the maternity leave? How do I use the time? Do internships as early as possible. During your studies! Work every summer and gain experience in different industries. Go abroad! Gain experience in another country as well.

10. Would you wish for more support from companies or the government for females in the working world and do you have any ideas to share how the support could look like?

I don't think much of the quota system, for example. I even find it humiliating for women, because it means they admit that they can't make it on their own.

I think that the policy is a very wrong approach! It should get the best job, whether woman or man. Also from supports like nurseries where you can give his child from 6 months I am not a fan.

11. Are you a mother?

yes

Yes: How have you balanced being a mother and a professional?

By being such a young mom, studying young with child and then entering the workforce

12. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share on this topic?

As a young woman, you should think about life and planning early! Have a plan, set goals and ask yourself where do I want to be in 10-15 years? Also: do additional training, gain experience! Nowadays, studying alone is no longer enough. In this day and age, all women have a chance!

Many thanks for your support! 😊

Appendix 11 Interview 10

Interviewee 10

Dear Participant,

my name is Viktoria Julia Heinzl and I am currently a student at the Modul University Vienna, enrolled in the International Management (BSc) program. For my bachelor thesis, which explores the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Austria, I am conducting qualitative research in the form of asynchronous E-Mail interviews. This interview consists of 12 questions. The main focus is to find out about the barriers women face in the workforce and when aspiring or being in a leadership position as well as ways of overcoming those. All the responses will remain anonymized and are only used for the purpose of this thesis. Thank you in advance for taking part.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge and conscience.

1. In which company are you working, what is your current position, for how long have you held it now and what are the primary responsibilities you have?

I work at Electrolux, a Swedish company that produces household appliances under a multitude of brands, such as Electrolux, AEG and Zanussi.

I head the Events, PR & Brand Licensing department and have held this position since 2019. There are 4 people on my team: a PR manager who orchestrates our

PR campaigns across Europe; an Events manager who organizes big internal and external events and trade shows; a Brand Licensing manager who ensures that our licensing business supports our brand ambitions and a specialist who works with the various teams. My responsibility is to see that each of the managers has what they need to succeed and that they can grow and prosper. I take the difficult decisions, sell in our ideas to senior stakeholders in the organization and manage the department financials. I also jump in when we are squeezed for resources and am the sounding board if my team needs to let off steam.

2. Was it always your plan or wish to obtain a leading position?

Not intentionally, but the positions I wanted to have were always of the kind that required leading people (my first wish when I was young was to become a hotel director).

3. What do you think makes a good leader, does a leader need to have specific characteristics?

A leader needs to be brave and dare to take decisions even if he/she isn't sure whether they are the right ones.

He/she needs to have the team's back - even if they did something wrong – in front of other people.

He/she needs to be there for them when things are not going so well, maybe even in their personal lives, and ensure that they get adequate rest to be able to perform at their best. But also challenging them when they get too comfortable



One big additional bonus is when a leader is also a gifted speaker and can break down very complex topics to make them easily understood by everyone.

4. Throughout your career, who were your inspiring personalities, or did you have a role model or a mentor?

My first inspiration was a female hotel director at a resort I used to regularly go to with my family. Her name was Barbara Mayer and she has sadly passed away, but she was everything I wanted to be: efficient, having everything under control and cool in times of stress.

Most recently, I had a boss who was a brilliant speaker and was the first person in our organization to make Marketing understood and appreciated by the rest of the leadership team.

5. What lessons and experiences can you share as a female leader?

I sense I have a different level of connection with the members on my team, especially if these are other women, but I am not sure if that is due to my being a woman or because I have a different personality and leadership style. I just know that I enjoy a great deal of trust from my team members and they will reach out to me whenever they have a problem that will impact their performance. Just one

example: during a recent team meeting one of the team broke down and started crying because she felt she couldn't manage to deliver the project on time and in full. I managed to calm her down and give her back the confidence to continue executing the project. We also discussed how other members of the team could take over some of the activities, but in the end that was not even necessary. All she needed was someone to tell her that it will be alright.

6. Over the years, what were the biggest barriers you faced during your growth as a female leader, how did you overcome them and what barrier do you think is the strongest one to female leadership?

A challenge was definitely the phase when I had young children and I felt at a complete disadvantage to my male peers who did not have to worry about that part. Key to overcoming that was a good support network and if there were more of that I am sure more women would embrace a leadership position.

I think the biggest barrier I faced – and still face – is in my own head. To dare to apply for positions for which one does not hold all the qualifications is really difficult for me and I have regularly been surpassed by men with less qualifications, but who were bolder and more self-confident.

7. Has there ever been a situation at work where you felt discriminated against or disadvantaged because of your gender?

No, never.

8. What is the best advice you have ever received when it comes to climbing up the career ladder?

I can't remember receiving or asking for this kind of advice, I just always took of opportunities that were offered to me or that I identified.

9. What advice would you give to other women who wish to achieve a leading position?

To dream big and be brave to take on positions and roles for which they do not feel 100% equipped.

10. Would you wish for more support from companies or the government for females in the working world and do you have any ideas to share how the support could look like?

For me it would have helped to have support with childcare on site at the office, for example a kindergarten or after school care. It being onsite means they are close in case of any issues, and I wouldn't lose time in picking them up from another place.

11. Are you a mother?

Yes

Yes: How have you balanced being a mother and a professional?

It wasn't always balanced and at times I have been close to a burn-out. What did help me was the support I got at times from my husband and mother-in-law.

It got better over the years and as the children got older, but I still have times when I feel squeezed between the two i.e. when I am in a stressful situation at work and feel that one of my children is in a bad spot as well and needs me.

12. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share on this topic?

Many thanks for your support! 😊