



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

How do female leaders address challenges associated with their role in a male-dominated organizational environment?

Sophie Sabine Brunner

152117167

Dissertation written under the supervision of Tommaso Ramus

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ABSTRACT ENGLISH

Title: Women in leadership positions

Keywords: Leadership, female leadership, change agent, institutional change agent

Author: Sophie Brunner

In today's fast moving business environment outstanding leaders are needed. However, women have a significant under-representation in executive positions in many European countries. The aim of this dissertation is to identify the challenges that female leaders have to address in a male-dominated environment and the strategies they can perform to overcome them. For this purpose, the literature dedicated to female leadership was analyzed and a qualitative research was conducted, which comprised of ten interviews with female executives. The findings show that female leaders follow different strategies that play at individual, group and network level in order to overcome emerging challenges when ascending in their business environment. As a result, these strategies enable women in leadership positions to act as institutional change agents. This research might be of relevance for women which are currently addressing challenges and also for young females who aim to achieve an executive position. Consequently, this master thesis contributes to the academic literature by offering strategic responses to emerging challenges while simultaneously providing a new perspective on women in leadership positions.

ABSTRACT PORTUGUESE

Title: Mulheres em posições de liderança

Keywords: Liderança, liderança feminina, agente de mudança, agentes de mudança institucional

Author: Sophie Brunner

O atual ambiente empresarial encontra-se em rápida evolução e, como tal, são necessários líderes extraordinários. Contudo, em diversos países Europeus, as mulheres estão sub-representadas em posições executivas. O objetivo desta dissertação passa por identificar as estratégias que as líderes femininas têm de adotar para ultrapassar os desafios que lhes são lançados num ambiente dominado por homens. Para tal, foi analisada literatura sobre liderança feminina e foi realizada uma análise qualitativa, onde dez mulheres executivas foram entrevistadas. Os resultados indicam que as líderes femininas seguem diferentes estratégias a nível individual, de grupo e de network para superar os desafios emergentes quando ascendem de posição no ambiente empresarial. Como tal, estas estratégias possibilitam que mulheres em posições de liderança atuem como agentes de mudança institucional. Este estudo pode ser relevante para mulheres que se encontrem perante estes desafios e, também, para mulheres jovens que ambicionam alcançar uma posição executiva. Consequentemente, esta tese de mestrado contribui para a literatura académica, uma vez que revela soluções estratégicas para desafios emergentes, ao mesmo tempo que proporciona uma nova perspetiva sobre mulheres em posições de liderança.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In many European countries, a great gender imbalance in leadership positions can be observed in several areas: politics, economics, science and research. However, this gender difference is most evident at corporate management levels (Ernst & Young, 2017). Nearly 7.3 million people hold a leadership position in companies with at least 10 employees in the European Union: 4.7 million men (65% of all executives) and 2.6 million women (35%) (Eurostat, 2017). In other words, women, although they make up about half of all employed people in the EU, continue to be underrepresented in management positions (Eurostat, 2017). The proportion of female managers in companies in Austria is only 23%, ranking it forth to last among the 28 EU countries. Only Germany, Italy and Cyprus (each 22%) rank even lower (Eurostat, 2017). Moreover, the women's quota on executive levels has stagnated for two years, hardly anything has happened regarding the proportion of women. In 40% of the companies, not a single woman is employed on the executive level (Ernst&Young, 2017). However, a positive aspect of this finding is that increasingly more companies see a positive connection between a higher proportion of female executives and the company's performance (Ernst&Young, 2017), for example increased dynamics among the leadership, a strengthened governance and a driven change in the corporate culture (Liswood, 2015).

In connection with this result, undoubtedly several natural barriers exist for women in the work environment, which lead to the low percentage of female executives. The division of labor within the family and the associated compatibility problem between family and carrier is more often an obstacle for women. Thus, women are more likely confronted with deciding between "child or career" than men (Annies, 2008).

However, instead of only looking at the barriers for women in executive positions, a growing number of researchers is already focusing on what transpires when women achieve leadership roles, recognizing the danger of stereotypes, and whether women and men have different management styles (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). But, this ongoing research in gender and leadership shifts the attention towards the individual abilities of female leaders rather than on the situational and contextual factors that affect the organization. Thus, the link between the gender-based leadership styles and challenges, women must face, has not been fully established.

The scarce research on this topic demonstrates that it is important to address this paper's re-

search question: *how do women in executive positions address challenges associated with their role in a male-dominated organizational environment?*

The main goal of this paper is to consider the individual strengths of the female leadership styles that derive from the feminine culture and how to use them purposefully in order to address various challenges. This includes different ways of communicating, assuming authority and defining morality (Fondas, 1997). In order to fully exploit these competencies, it is essential to support and promote female role models in executive positions and to legitimate and normalize the strengths of female culture (Carroll, 1993). One main problem for many organizations is that women are often more isolated from the dominant traditional male culture and cut off from the required network and encouragement, which they could give other women in similar organizational levels and roles (Carroll, 1993). In other words, having a role model for other female colleagues or driving a change in the male-dominated culture is a major challenge.

The outcome of the study provided a methodological and empirical explanation from ten top level female leaders, who told about their career and development, the challenges they had to face and their strategic responses in order to overcome these barriers. Finally, the interviewed women gave examples, how they were and are unconsciously able to drive a change in their organization and how other women can follow their example.

The dissertation contributes to recognizing and increasing the knowledge of the affecting characteristics of female executives, within the scarce literature on women in leading positions, and especially conduct empirical study on a woman's capability to overcome challenges resulting from being a female leader and finally, resulting from the research question, how their strategies effect being a change agent in their work environment and how they will be able to influence and possibly change the institution.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Stereotypes & ideological barriers

Due to the circumstance that women are underrepresented in management positions, it can be stated that female leaders have to face various additional barriers on their carrier path, especially in order to access executive positions. As previously mentioned, several structural barriers exist because of her double role as mother and manager. But, several ideological barriers and stereotypes of women in leadership positions exist, which females have identified as a significant difficulty on their way to the top (Catalyst, 2002).

Stereotypes are generalized observations about the qualities that distinguish categories or groups of people (Schneider, 2004). People make use of stereotypes as an energy-saving device and as cognitive short-cuts in anticipating the abilities, behaviors, and motives of others (Allport, 1954). Stereotypes about women in leadership roles are based on familiar female roles such as mothers, nurses, wives, etc.; and the characteristics of these roles are often inconsistent with people's perception of traditional competences of a good business manager (Lee & James, 2007). Women are regularly characterized with communal traits such as being selfless, friendly, sympathetic, gentle and warm, whereas men are characterized with agentic traits such as being instrumental, assertive, self-reliant and emotionally stable, what people perceive as attributes of a successful leader (Catalyst, 2007; Paris et al., 2009). These attitudes and prejudice hinder females from being assigned to leadership positions, where instrumentality and assertiveness are required to succeed (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Rhode, 2016). Moreover, through the long history of the male-dominated top levels, action-oriented characteristics, social status, and power are associated with gender and seen as important, so that a judgment has already been made for a female leader, before she can even begin to act as one (Yoder, 2001).

Women have to behave like men in order to be successful, but on the one hand, if they adapt to male characteristics they are considered too harsh and too masculine, on the other hand, if women maintain their female characteristics they are considered too feminine: too nice and thus not capable or competent enough for a leading position (Catalyst, 2007, Fiske & Stevens, 1993). This shows that the line of an accepted behavior of women in an executive position is very thin (Hannover & Kessels, 2003), because the same behaviors are assessed differently depending on gender (Müller, 1999; Hannover & Kessels, 2003).

Several researchers provide theoretical support for the perception of women in leadership roles and Schein (1996) even wrote about the think manager- think male paradigm, which studied the fact that the characteristics ascribed to leaders yielded a considerably higher correlation with the description of a typical man than with the description of a typical woman (Schein 1996, 1975). A woman might be rejected just because of her lack of agentic characteristics, which people associate with an effective leadership style (Fiske & Stevens, 1993). Through all these stereotypes another phenomenon arises that women have to face. The “stereotype threat” (Steele, 1997) occurs when a positive or negative stereotype appears about a certain group and which members might perform in a manner that simply approves this stereotype. The “stereotype threat” results in the impression that women are less capable of holding a leadership position and it has been proven that this negatively impacts females in their professional aspiration (Roberson & Kulik, 2007).

As a result, these stereotypes undermine motivation and potentially lower performance, leading to a lack of identification of females as potential managers, which is seen as the male territory and as a male-dominated environment (Roberson & Kulik, 2007). It reduces the effectiveness of females who could occupy leadership roles and who could be an asset to the organization. Taking the female potential into account when filling senior positions ensures a gender-balanced leadership team, which creates opportunities for institutions, companies, and for the economy. It provides access to a larger workforce, diversified experiences, different mindsets and to a broad set of leadership characteristics, which is important in a fast-changing economy (Sedlmayr, 2017).

2.1.1 Glass ceiling and glass wall

Noting the phenomenon of a significantly decreasing proportion of women the higher one looks up the hierarchy level in large companies, a new term was integrated into the language usage in the 1980s by Marylin Loden (1987) who quoted that it seemed to her that “*there was an invisible barrier to advancement that people didn’t recognize*” and called the theory “glass ceiling”. It describes seemingly invisible horizontal and vertical boundaries, which are not directly recognizable, in organizations that prevent women from reaching the highest leadership positions (Pasero, 2013). The theory refers to organizational processes of ascension, however, the described barriers can also be applied across organizations (Pasero, 2013). "Glass ceilings" are horizontal barriers that make it harder for women to enter areas where they can move up to senior management positions (Haslam & Ryan, 2007). Ohlendieck

(2003) describes several glass ceilings in organizations, which separate the management levels and are increasingly difficult for women to overcome as they ascend. Some of these obstacles are an assumed desire of childbearing, part-time employment (Ohlendiek, 2003), but also prejudiced beliefs, such as women are not able or not willing to work long, they do not want to travel and they are less committed to the corporation and their career (Carr-Ruffino, 2005).

Another phenomenon called "glass wall" explains barriers that mainly exist within the vertical corporate structure and limit women in their career opportunities. "Glass walls" represent gender segmentation within organizations between departments as obstacles that are difficult to break (Ohlendiek, 2003). It denotes the invisible barrier for women to areas that make a significant contribution to career advancement, as they are strategically central to the organization. Anyone who breaks through the "glass ceiling" and "glass walls" can expect another difficulty behind it (Haslam & Ryan, 2007). The two psychologists (Haslam & Ryan, 2007) describe the phenomenon as "glass cliff", which means that once a woman achieved a leadership position, it is even harder to hold it. Especially in times of crisis or when the company is in a downtrend, women are appointed to the top. If the company struggles, the executive chair is shaky and the risk of failure is particularly high (Tolk, 2009). However, assigning women to leadership positions in unstable and risky circumstances shifts the focus to their charismatic leadership style and so their abilities in stress management (Geller & Dunahoo, 1997). This will be discussed more precisely in the following chapter.

To sum up, on the carrier ladder to a leadership position, women have to face various stereotypes and barriers, due to their natural feminine role and characteristics. They need stamina, hard work and a strength of will to reach their goals and achieve a top position (Eagly & Carli, 2007). However, once they reached a top level of the company, their competence and ability to manage the organizations, especially in times of crisis, are highly demanded and appreciated. Schein's paradigm "think manager-think male" was transformed by Ryan & Haslam (2007) in "think crisis-think female".

2.2 Differences between male and female leadership styles

2.2.1 The feminine leadership style

In general, most studies suggest that one is either born as a leader, whereas others state that management abilities are taught (Doh, 2003). This gives men as well as women the same

chances to develop leadership skills (Sedlmayr, 2017). However, as stated previously, even though stereotypes and other factors are perceived as barriers for women's career progression, it is clear that the female role within the society has developed over years. Due to the hindering factors, women who try to reach a senior position have started during the 1960s to pursue higher education opportunities and invest more in knowledge and skills, work harder, and are performing strongly within their leadership styles (Moran, 1992; Chemers, 1997). To define the perfect leadership style, it is important to understand the characteristics of a successful leader (Eagly & Carli, 2003), because behaviors that are effective for men are not always sufficient for women and vice versa. It depends on contextual variables, supportive strategies, and the nature of the task (Miner, 1993). Furthermore, researchers underline that there is no uniform leadership style across all situations (Haslam & Turner, 2014). Nonetheless, the Globe Study (House et al., 2004) discovered six effective leadership characteristics, which are universal worldwide, such as being charismatic, team-oriented, participative, and humane-oriented; but, also being autonomous (individualistic, independent) and self-protective, competitive, self-centered, and status conscious. Within this study they found out, that women are more likely to contribute the charismatic, team-oriented, and participative leadership, while men are more likely to provide self-protective and autonomous leadership (House et al., 2004:388). In recent years many researchers (Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990; Adler, 1993) have focused on the female management style with their entry into the earlier male-dominated environment; Rosener (1995) for example, defined women's leadership as involving collaboration, interaction, and empowering of employees. Konrad et al. (2000) valued that females attach particular importance to job qualities such as challenge, leadership, freedom, prestige, and power; Haque et al. (2017) studied that women in management positions have a higher people-orientation. Taking these findings into account, Bass (1985) presented new leadership styles named transformational and transactional leadership. He proposed that leaders who cause a change in individuals and social systems, and who enhance the morale, performance, and motivation of followers interact through a transformational leadership approach. Given these aspects, researchers argued that for women especially the transformational leadership may be advantageous (Eagly et. al 2003; Yoder, 2001), because it covers many behaviors that are consistent with the feminine gender role and their charismatic, interpersonally-oriented leadership (Yoder, 2001). Moreover, the feminine, transformational oriented managerial style focuses on teamwork and a decentralized structure (Bartunek et al., 2000). It shapes decision making based on diversity and consensus of ideas that result in an increased cooperation especially during times of crisis (Bartunek et al., 2000). Powell et al. (2008) mentioned that

women's leadership traits such as empathy, care, and her people- rather than task orientation characterize an advantageous crisis preparation. Females tend to be more attentive and prepared than their male counterparts in balancing all organizational responsibilities in order to achieve sustainability (Powell, 2008). Lastly and importantly, a woman's higher sensibility to welfare and social justice issues empowers her to serve as a real change agent (Alonso-Almeida, 2013; Karam & Jamali 2013).

2.2.2 Comparing the feminine and masculine approach

In the previous chapter, the feminine leadership style was studied and clarified, but in order to understand the characteristics of a male-dominated environment, it is necessary to have knowledge of the masculine approach to leadership. In any case, it is important to identify the differences between the gender's leadership styles especially in light of the general tendencies towards team-based management, flatter hierarchies, and increased globalization (Adler, 1993; Rosener, 1995). Various researchers consistently verified the masculinized behavior such as being autocratic or directive (Eagly et al., 1992; Jago & Vroom, 1982), commanding-and-controlling (Rosener, 1995), self-promoting (Rudman, 1998), and constructing a structure to guide group interaction (Petty & Lee, 1975); the researchers proved the effectiveness of these characteristics of men in leadership positions rather than of women. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, women tend to pursue the transformational leadership style, whereas men are more likely to act through the transactional style, which is management by expectation, clarifying responsibilities to subordinates, and task oriented (Bass, 1985). Transactional leadership is based on an exchange relationship between management and employees and a rather factual exchange (transaction) between performance (of the employee) and reaction of the supervisor (payment, praise and blame) is practiced (De Cenzo et al., 2011). A manager who acts through the transactional style pays attention to time constraints and productivity, maintains control and is especially effective in mechanistic organizations, where the manager has many institutionalized substitutes (Bass, 1985). For example, men and the transactional leadership style are more effective in traditional masculine environments such as the military, whereas women are more effective in social service organizations and educational or governmental institution, where the transformational leadership style motivates to a performance beyond expectations (Eagly, 2007; Lowe et al., 1996). However, even though, or even because, women and men have different leading practices, research shows that it is essential for an improved corporate board governance to hire high qualified women as managers and board

members (Kramer et al., 2006). Women breaking into the earlier all-male territory often scares their male counterparts (Kramer et al., 2006) and additionally, in masculine environments, prejudicial and predetermined beliefs about women, not only limit their access to senior positions, but can also reduce the effectiveness of females who have achieved these roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In sum, besides all the barriers, biases and stereotypes women have to face when ascending to the top, once they reached a senior position, the male domain and their leadership style becomes another major challenge, where women again have to prove themselves, that they have the high ability required to being a leader (Oakley, 2000).

2.3 Challenges in a male-dominated environment

Not only do women face several difficulties in male-dominated environments, due to views of the traditional female role and the prejudgments and biases of their performance as decision makers (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Martell, 1999), it is also because higher wages and higher levels of authority are concentrated in these settings and are mostly primarily controlled by men (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Manly characteristics are bundled in higher levels, thus it is often difficult for females to feel comfortable and to gain acceptance and authority at these levels (Alvesson & Billing, 1992). Research and experiments, such as a meta-analysis of the Goldberg paradigm, confirmed the generalization that in male-dominated leadership roles women received less favorable evaluations than the equivalently ranked male managers (Eagly et al., 1992). Other research demonstrated that women expressing disagreement, showing dominance, or being highly self-promoting in senior positions, have to face more rejection and dislike than men (Carli, 1999; Rudman, 1998). Due to these findings, a double-standard requirement arises: on the one side, women have to behave competently as a leader, while similarly meeting the expectations concerning suitable female behavior; on the other hand, female leaders often need extra competences and higher credentials to get into this senior role (Weyer, 2007), as previously demonstrated. Women in top positions are more likely to hold not only a Master of Business Administration or a doctorate degree, but also women in executive positions are more likely to have career experience in philanthropic, nonprofit, and community organizations (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Thus, it is especially challenging and exhausting for females to gain the same recognition for great ability and outstanding accomplishments, as their male counterparts (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997; Foschi, 2000).

Another challenge women executives often report is that their male collaborators feel uncomfortable or sometimes even threatened by females in top positions; this feeling is connected to

the failure of men as managers to maintain their traditional values about sex roles (Gutek, 1985). Furthermore, this discomfort might result from a fear of being beaten by a woman, threatening their masculinity. This results in a sense of embarrassment some male leaders feel when losing in competition to female executives (Oakley, 2000). Moreover, some men fear a loss in payment, when women enter and penetrate the formerly “all-male domain”, since female managers are still significantly paid less than men in almost all organizational levels (Oakley, 2000).

Another theory for why women in leadership positions are sometimes seen as a threat by their male colleagues is the “break through” into their “old-boy network”. It is an informal male social system, which originally comes from a male network, where men, who went to the same university or school, benefit from each other in finding a good job or other advantages (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). In the entrepreneurial world it stands for an informal male system, where men from a lower level and especially women are excluded from membership. A critical mass of females in executive positions would be a danger to this well functioning network and it would be a challenge in keeping and promoting the rewards for male managers at the top (Gordon, 1992). Nevertheless, many researchers studied that it is frequently difficult for women in male-dominated environments to gain acceptance in significant networks or to build advantageous relationships (Timberlake, 2005). If women ascend to the top in large numbers, it is plausible that they may challenge the dominant masculine cultural norms with their feminine culture (Oakley, 2000). However, paradoxically, some females have already shown and proven better performance and leadership efficacy on masculine executive tasks, when reacting against the gender leadership stereotypes (Bergeron et al., 2006). The discriminatory disadvantage that females face in male-dominated environments sometimes offer a competence advantage for women. Females in high-level leadership positions are typically the survivors of these discriminatory and biased procedures and thus tend to be highly competent, skillful and persistent (Eagly et. al., 2003; Sharpe, 2000). They avoided the threats to her self-confidence, which other people’s criticism and doubts might have provoked (Eagly, 2007). Moreover, over time traditional leadership roles have changed and thus, more and more corporations offer an environment that welcomes women’s managerial competencies (Eagly & Carli, 2003). In general, it is more difficult to gradually change society’s attitude towards traditional characterizations of leadership roles than emphasizing qualities which harmonize more the feminine gender role in leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

Even though women are still underrepresented in management positions, more and more manage to overcome obstacles and barriers during their carrier and occupy top leadership positions. As a result, diversity increases and the female characteristics get a higher importance and value. The certain male-dominated executive level is undergoing a transformation. The empirical study of this paper aims to encourage the need of women in leadership positions and to use the collected information as a basis to gather new knowledge, in order to answer the research question: how do women address challenges associated to their role in a male-dominated organizational environment? And how are women (as a result) capable of transforming and changing organizational structures and culture?

3. EMPIRICAL STUDY

3.1 Methodology

The foundation of this thesis is a qualitative research design. To answer the research question and analyze how women in leadership positions address challenges resulting from their role in their organization, I adopted an inductive research approach. I have collected data through personal interviews, which have provided deeper insights into the capacity of women in high positions addressing challenges in organizations in the male-dominated Austrian labor market. For this dissertation, Austria reflects a good example, as it replicates the low percentage of women in leadership positions very well, as already shown in the introduction (Ernst & Young, 2017). Hence, the data and information collected only captures one labor market, in order to narrow and limit the dissertation focus and also to specialize in a geographical area to minimize sample variation because of environmental factors (Zott & Huy, 2007). The purpose of this study was to interview ten different women in the business sector in order to gain qualitative data and understanding of the underlying issue and to give a reasonable example and significance for this research. In accordance with the sampling strategy, all interviewees selected for this study have a solid background in leadership and have been working in top positions for several years. Studying such a diverse set of women will offer a grounding of the theory. The interview sample selection was based on three criteria: The (1) level of their management position, top management or middle management, in order to obtain a functional and hierarchical variety, (2) the sector, in which the women were working, whether the public or the private sector, which allows a deep understanding of the Austrian organizational culture and (3) the business branch, in order to obtain a variety of perspectives. 30% of the participants come from the public sector, 20% founded their own company, 20% are middle manager and head of an organizational department and 30% are Managing Director and CEO of their company. The names of the interviewed women are listed in Appendix A. With this sample selection, different backgrounds and sectors are very well covered and represented by these carefully selected women, which can best help to understand the phenomenon.

3.2 Data Collection

Creswell noted, that in qualitative research “the intent is not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2002). Whereas the sampling strategy for this study required a deep knowledge in the topic of leadership, numerous women in management positions were taken as experts and were contacted through my extended personal network in August. For the purpose of this study, a set of guiding questions was compiled in September to ensure the discussion of the research questions and to provide a certain frame for the interview process. After consultation with the supervising professor, the final interview guide was ready in the beginning of October. The interviews were gathered through a guided conversation and a semi-structured format. This method is commonly used to gain data from professionals about complex topics, as it takes into account the overall picture, opinions and beliefs of industry experts (Barriball, 1994). Moreover, the advantage here is that through this adaptable structure, the interviewer has the flexibility to react to the given information and adjust the interview according to the answers provided (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The interview protocol was divided into four parts; (1) introduction, to identify the woman’s work environment, (2) characteristics, to categorize the woman’s personal strengths and characteristics, and also, which traits she can contribute to her current position (3) challenges, she had to face during her career and particular as a female leader, and (4) strategies, how she overcame these specific challenges, which resulted from the questions before, and also, how she possible was and is influencing her organizational environment. The interview questions are listed in the interview guide in Appendix A. Overall, a total of ten face-to-face interviews with an average duration of 40 minutes were conducted in October, which resulted in a total amount of material of about six hours. All interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription and data analysis. The material was reviewed in November, and themes and general patterns were developed and interpreted. The combination of the literature review and the interview data enabled a rich and relatively accurate understanding of the phenomenon of women transforming their organizations by establishing strategies in order to overcome arising challenges.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data evaluation process was separated into two parts. First, the raw data and interview answers were summarized in the table and segmented into interview one to ten (Appendix B-E). The goal was to identify similarities, longitudinal patterns within each interview and rela-

tionships between different answers with respect to the research question. The ten interviews helped to reach an acceptable level of theoretical saturation and provided evidence for the four categories I had compiled. Second, when analyzing the outcome of the interview, I developed four aggregate dimensions: (1) similar characteristics and strengths of female leaders, (2) challenges most women in executive positions were facing, independent of their industry, (3) the strategies, various women had established in order to overcome these challenges. For that, I asked open ended questions and requested the participants to provide concrete examples or to describe specific situations, where they had faced a challenge and how they managed to overcome it. And (4) how women transformed into change agents while working on and fighting against various barriers. The last finding became evident in the course of the interviews and resulted during the evaluation of the data. It was interesting to see, that while aiming to achieve clarification of the research question, another research gap in this field could be filled: the influence female executives have on their organization and how they resulted in being a change agent.

4. RESULTS

This section will summarize the findings yielded in the interviews. It is divided into four areas of analysis, resulting from the answers to the interview questions: (1) characteristics and leadership style, (2) challenges faced, (3) strategies to overcome these challenges and (4) women becoming change agents. The interview protocol was designed to obtain data on situational, individual, and institutional factors affecting women on their way to a leadership position, as well as each interviewee's subjective sense of being a change agent.

The following data structure (Table 1) illustrates an accumulated overview of the interview results.

Illustration of women in leadership positions		
Category	Interviewee	Data Example
<i>Subcategory</i>	<i>Woman 1- 10</i>	<i>Raw Data, Interview Quote</i>

Table 1 – Interview analysis process

4.1 Characteristics and Leadership Style

The table in Appendix B illustrates the characteristics and leadership styles the sampled women mentioned in the interviews. Interestingly, some women talked about their childhood and personal experiences, and how they influenced their personal leadership style as it is today. Some women specifically gave credit to their parents who pushed them or who have been role models for them, some others also stated the value of growing up with siblings. These interviews also showed how much the women valued the contribution of those people who had supported and helped them. This humility and appreciation of others explains some of the following selected competencies. The most frequently mentioned characteristics, which at least three women talked about, are listed in the table and are divided into the following subsections: (1) curiosity, (2) persistence, (3) straightforwardness, (4) empathy, (5) diversity, (6) team orientation, (7) being networked, and (8) foresightedness. Some characteristics are consistent with those stated in the literature, some are very specific for female leaders and some are mentioned due to their frequency, even though they might not be typical for women only. For example, curiosity and persistence are two qualities, which a significant number of interviewees mentioned, but which are not seen as uniquely female characteristics.

Four women mentioned **curiosity** and about the desire to try something new. Half of the in-

interviewed women were hired away by a headhunter from another company and were asked through direct approach, if they wanted to be the new manager or managing director of the (new) company. The women said that the appeal of a new challenge made them curious. Woman 1 said: *"You have to be curious, what else is there, what could I try? I always liked to investigate new areas."* Woman 3 said: *"I am curious and I love to try something new. There is nothing I do not want to try at least."* And woman 4 stated: *"You have to be curious and have the courage to try something new and to go out of your comfort zone."* The other half promoted or established their own company, which can be also connected to curiosity and the eagerness to take on with unfamiliar situations.

Persistence was one characteristic, which can be connected to the statement from the literature, that women in leadership positions are the "survivors" and managed to overcome all the barriers and stereotypes when ascending. *"I am persistent and I do not give up at the first 'No'. I am able to convince the men with my charm, persuasion and persistence"*, said woman 7, who rose in her current organization to the very top, and woman 8 mentioned: *"I have a lot of energy and consistency to run the extra mile too. I also have the toughness, do not give up."*

Straightforwardness can also be connected to the exhausting way to the top. It was mentioned by three women: *"My personal strengths are definitely being straightforward, empathic, sustainable and being convinced of what you do."*, said woman 2. Woman 1 mentioned; *"You have to know, what you really want! Then you will manage to do it!"* And woman 6 simply said: *"I am straightforward"*, when the interviewer asked about her personal strengths.

The following characteristics are consistent with the academic scholarship on female leadership styles, which are described in chapter 2.2.1. Several researchers underline that women often have a higher team orientation, that they are more charismatic within their transformational leadership style and regularly base their decision making on diversity and increased cooperation. The outcome of the conducted interviews supported these assumptions:

"Being empathic" was mentioned by four women as one of their personal strengths and leadership style. *"I learned to see people as individuals and to recognize and empathize with their differences. With my different employees, I have to work differently. And they really appreciate it"*, said woman 1. Woman 3 shared this strength: *"I am in the communication sector. It is important to listen to your clients and to have the necessary human and empathic sensitivity."* Woman 5, founder of the personnel department in her organization, said: *"I am empathic and I am aligning employees' goals and needs. I do not just want to take, but I want to give."*

“Being diverse” was how four women described themselves, like woman 2: *“As a leader, it is important to be diverse, rather than simple minded.”* Woman 4 confirmed this opinion with: *“Be various and not single minded!”* and woman 7 described her personal strength: *“I am able to bring together numerous requirements. You have to be diverse and have the ability for multitasking.”*

Another typical female trait three women talked about was the strength and leadership style of **team orientation** which can be seen as by the high value they place on the contribution of others. *“I have a strong team orientation”,* said woman 6 and woman 9 mentioned: *“I do not feel better just because I am the manager. I have a really strong team orientation and I think that the only way to success is cooperation.”* Woman 7 connected this personal trait to her childhood and said: *“I think that women have a greater team orientation. I grew up with three brothers, I was born with this orientation.”*

One of the most important characteristics that women mentioned was **“to be networked”** and the importance of building strategic networks in a senior position. Four women described it as one of their main strength, some others talked about it as a strategy to overcome challenges, which will be described in the next chapter. *“One of my strengths is to be networked”,* said woman 3. *“I am very well networked and very cooperative”,* said woman 5 and woman 9 answered: *“I am networked and also able to think networked.”* Woman 10 explained: *“My huge network is definitely something I could always benefit from!”*

Foresightedness was a characteristic more than half of the interviewed women mentioned. Several studies have written about this female characteristic, which constitute an advantageous preparation and is especially needed in times of crisis. Woman 10 quoted: *“It is extremely important to think about the future, about coming trends, what will the next 5-10 years bring? It is important to be foresighted!”* Woman 3 answered: *“I think that women have more foresightedness than men.”* Woman 6 and woman 9 said: *“I have a foresightedness with problem-solving”,* and *“One of my strengths is my foresightedness.”* Woman 4 mentioned foresightedness in a different way: *“At first, women need an all-round view and they are foresighted. They think first about their partner, their family, their children. Am I an uncaring mother, when I am pursuing my career?”*

Other personality strengths like creativity, communication, internationality, honesty and ambition were also mentioned by individual women, but not with the frequency or detail of the other characteristics.

4.2 Challenges

The table in Appendix C summarizes the diverse challenges the sampled women faced during their career as a manager or on their way to this position. Although the women were from a diverse range of backgrounds and organizational cultures, they faced very similar challenges. It is important to mention that all interviewed women were the first female manager in their company, in the executive board or the first female manager after a long period of only male managers. In general, the majority were exceptionally motivated to take risk, to establish something new, to deliver results and to drive a change. As a result, all interviewed women were confronted with several common difficulties during their careers. This section was further divided into four sub-sections: (1) addressing stereotypes as a female “newcomer”, (2.1) group gender discrimination in the workplace, (2.2) individual gender discrimination, and (3) work-family-balance.

4.2.1 Addressing stereotypes as a female newcomer

The first sub-section demonstrates the challenges new managers are facing in the beginning. The interviewees mentioned that, especially as a female leader, addressing and facing stereotypes was a major difficulty at the start. Woman 1, who was the first woman on the executive board of an international company, for example, said: *"I was the first woman in the executive board. Everybody else had more experience than I had. It was a challenge to stay calm and not trying to eliminate things, I was just not able to eliminate. For all the men in the board it was new, having a woman on the board."* Similar said woman 2: *"I used to be my team's colleague and then suddenly from one day to the next I was their boss. The employees came into the office and suddenly there was a woman instead of a man sitting in the boss' chair. I was very concerned how my team was going to deal with this change."* Woman 10 said something comparable: *"Of course, one challenge was that employees, who yesterday were your colleagues, today are your subordinates. You are eyed more critically, but this is part of the process."* Woman 8, managing director of her company, also experienced a challenge with her different female leadership style: *"At the beginning many employees had problems, because they were used to a different leadership style. It would have been easier, if I had changed several things a little bit slower, but that is not my style."* Furthermore, some women talked about the challenge of addressing female stereotypes and trying to prove oneself in the beginning, like woman 3: *"Women are expected to have a lot of soft skills. If they do not deliver these skills in the beginning, people are disappointed and the most disappointed one is the woman*

herself." Woman 7 also had to deal with the work-family balance: *"At the beginning, of course, everybody thought "how is the new boss?" I had to prove myself, especially because I became a leader and had two small children at home. I could deal with that and the adrenaline pushed me."* Lastly, two women talked about the barrier many women are facing on their way to a leadership position, the glass ceiling. Woman 1 faced this challenge and said; *"In one company, I knew that there existed a glass ceiling. I also knew that there was nothing I could do about it. It made it easier for me to change to a new company."* Contrarily to this statement was woman 9, who said: *"In this company, a glass ceiling exists but everybody is aware of it. The world is as it is..."*

4.2.2 Group gender discrimination in the workplace

The sub-category "gender discrimination" was subdivided into two parts: group gender discrimination, which stands for gender discrimination within their own team, by colleagues or in this thesis by a group of men. The individual gender discrimination stands for discrimination by a single person. Several women mentioned one or both types of gender discrimination. For example, three women quoted in their interview that they sometimes had problems obtaining the necessary respect for themselves as a female manager. Woman 2 said: *"Sometimes I ask myself; "Am I too nice to my team? Do I have the necessary respect as a woman? How would it be, if I were a man?"* but she also described a situation, where women in her company were not given the proper respect by her previous boss: *"In this work environment, women are sometimes depreciated and devalued. They are sometimes seen as their secretaries, who have to work for the manly bosses. Women are called "girls" instead of "women" or "ladies". This was something, that really bothered me and made me angry. I once talked to my boss and told him, that this was not okay, but he just denied it. I was too shy and did not have the confidence to discuss it with him..."* Differently to this participant was woman 9, the first managing director in her company, who handled this kind of challenge in another way: *"I do not want to be heard even though I am a woman, I want to be heard because I am a human and I have personality. I do not want to waste my energy for some gender fights."* She also mentioned a specific situation, where she faced the challenge of a pure men group: *"Once I could not overcome the challenge, I wanted to conduct a study and had the core ideas, but the team of only male researchers did not accept it. [...] The team was not used to be led by a woman."* Similar to this situation, woman 4, who founded a professional academy for women talked about her challenge: *"I had to convince eight men of my project. They did not really*

care about it, said it was meaningless, and wanted to finance something else. They did not want to support my project at first. [...]”

4.2.3 Individual gender discrimination

The individual gender discrimination in this paper is seen as discriminatory statements by a single person. Four women demonstrated situations, where they had to deal with discriminatory statements, often said by men, but also by other women. Woman 2 said: *"Once there was a client who was sitting in the waiting room and saw the pictures of my team, which are only women. He asked me if it were cheaper, because there were only women working in the office."* She also mentioned in the interview; *"I grew up in this town, where I am now working. There might be some people who thought; "Will she be able to make it? Can she deal with this responsibility?"* Woman 5, who built the first personnel department in her organization and is now managing it, supports the other woman's story when she heard a male team colleague say: *"You look nice but you are not."* Unlike the others, woman 5 also had to deal with a harsh statement by another woman: *"Other women have accused me too! She said to me: 'You are too soft and too ready to compromise.'"*

4.2.4 Work-Family-Balance

The last sub-section demonstrates the challenge of balancing the time-consuming job as a top manager in a leadership position, while simultaneously managing the role as a mother, wife or friend. All sampled participants were hard working women and gave up several things for their career. However, most of the interviewees also talked about their desire for work-family balance, since the majority has children at home. Woman 1 mentioned that *"as a leading woman you have to be ready to give up certain things. You have less time for friends and family!"* and so did woman 7, who had two little children at the time she was assigned as the managing director of her organization. She quoted; *"For a leader, it is a prerequisite to show commitment and more effort. That also means to be present at different events, and most of them are in the evening..."* Similar to this woman was woman 6, who confirmed the challenge of the work-family-balance and was confronted by a discrimination by her supervisor; *"Once I wanted to leave earlier on a Friday so I could go back early enough to pick up my son. I was told by my male chef that, if it gets too much for me, there have been other changes, I could just say it, if I wanted a change. [...]"* Some other women talked about the work-family-

balance and how it was easier for them to reconcile, for example having a 35-hours work-week.

4.3 Strategies to overcome the challenges

In general, this chapter summarizes the strategic behaviors and responses to the previous mentioned challenges and how the sampled women managed to dismiss or overcome them. Given the frequency of the answers, this category was divided into three types of strategic responses, which is shown in Appendix D: (1) build diverse teams, (2) build external networks, and (3) balance between straightforwardness and adjustment.

4.3.1 Build diverse teams

The first strategy, which 9 of 10 women mentioned in any manner, was to leverage and maintain diverse teams. Seven women emphasized the importance of a mixed team, which supports the existing literature from Kramer et al. (2006) about having a critical mass of women on corporate boards. He published in his study that having more women on the board, a discussion is more collaborative, more open to include various perspectives and more likely to involve multiple stakeholder. Woman 1, 9 and 10 were all managers of a big company or a department within the company said: *"It is important to have a mixed team in the executive board. The atmosphere is different and more topics are discussed"*, Woman 1. *"Sometimes men had a power struggle among each other, I believe that I was a good balance, as a woman. However, more women would have been better here,"* stated woman 9 and woman 10 mentioned: *"It is important to have young and old employees, to have newcomer and "old hands" and thus, it is important to have men and women on board! Diversity is essential!"* Woman 6 and 7, both from the public sector agreed with the other women: *"It needs men and women on an executive board! A mixed team is good!"* said woman 6 and woman 7 confirmed this: *"A mixed team is more productive. The atmosphere is more positive."* In addition to this team thinking, which is proven as a strong female characteristic in leadership positions, two women talked about strengthening the own team through teambuilding. Women 2 answered: *"I used to be their colleague and from one day to the other I was their boss. I organized a teambuilding seminar with external coaches and an adult trainer who helped us become a real team. It was important for them to realize a new beginning emotionally."* Woman 3, who founded her own company fostered this too: *"I always pictured my company as a team. I never put myself in the foreground. It is important to me doing things together. We cook together,*

we go to the theater together and so on..." Lastly, within this subcategory of maintaining diverse teams, four women talked about the importance of the communication style. Woman 1, first woman on the executive board of her current company said: "You have to know what to say at which time. You have to say the right word at the right time. You have to listen to your collaborators and to always have open doors for them."

4.3.2 Build external networks

More than half of the interviewed women mentioned the strategy of building and maintaining external networks, about getting help from externals and about the stakeholder management, which can be connected to the often mentioned female crisis management and also about how important it is to participate in networks, e.g. women's promotion programs, which several women already stated when talking about their personal characteristics. Some interviewees told, once women "survived" the barriers and stereotypes and reached a management position, they had the erroneous belief that they are alone and have to handle everything by themselves. Woman 1 said: *"If I did not know something or if I could not do anything, I just sought for help and support from somebody else. I was new and I needed help to form my opinion and to be able to make decisions."* Woman 4 emphasized this: *"Women do not have to do everything by themselves! Ask men for help! Do not ask for it, claim it. Say 'I need your help and you are good at it. Please help me out!'"* Woman 5 had a similar experience: *"Sometimes, difficulties arise, which you are not able to solve alone. I get support through external help such as coaches or consultations."* Woman 7 managed her double role as manager and mother by getting help: *"When you want to balance your job and family it is important to trust others and to rely on other team colleagues. Get some help if necessary."*

Different to this approach, three women talked about the weight of the stakeholder management. Woman 7, managing director of her political organization said: *"You also have to think about the external stakeholders! It is important to harmonize the various expectations."* Woman 9 confirmed this: *"It is important to weigh damages and to have a good crisis management with all stakeholders."* Woman 5 had a specific strategy to overcome her challenges: *"Care about all stakeholders, especially about them who are against you. Get your enemies on board."* Finally, the importance of being in networks and the need of creating strategic networks within and outside the company was mentioned by almost all women, when talking about how to overcome various challenges. Woman 4, who leads the women's promotion program, talked about the difficulty women often face when building networks. Women are

repeatedly too shy to approach someone with an offensive attitude and to show their full competence and strengths. *"The most important thing is to be in networks, to socialize, to maintain business contacts, to be a member of various working groups and networks and to use them!"* said woman 5. Woman 7 agreed with this: *"Being in networks is especially important. Sometimes distant acquaintances are more helpful than family members."* And also: *"Young women should be in women networks. It pushes their self-confidence and they can help each other."* Women 10 also talked about special women's networks: *"One thing women always forget is to be in networks. Use women's networks and women's promotion programs."* On the other side, woman 4 underlined the importance of diverse networks: *"Be in networks! Men often have a natural advantage and hold the upper hand. Build diverse and many networks and use them."*

4.3.3 Balance between straightforwardness and adjustment

This chapter aims to describe the balance women have to find between their own straightforwardness and strong female traits and the adjustment to the organization and the male leadership style. More specifically, finding balance is the institutional approach to achieve parity among different interests and expectations. This subchapter demonstrates, how the interviewees attached value on being true to themselves and remaining authentic. Because once all of the challenges are vanquished, the phenomenon of the glass cliff arose and the new challenge was to stay in the leadership position and to retain the established reputation and standing. A strong sensitivity for the combination of the particular female characteristics and the male-dominated environment is needed and explained by the interviewed women. First, women talked about intentions, their ambition and the importance of a strong self-awareness: Woman 2 said: *"You have to be convinced about your own ideas and to believe in you. It is possible to realize your dreams, that is what I did!"* Women 6 agreed: *"Do not think too long about whether you really can, but rather rely on your own skills."* And woman 10 talked about her self-confidence: *"Do not think too much about 'what will the men think about me, because I am a woman?' because in some way you show your fear. It is not an issue for me because I do not make an issue out of it."* Many women talked about the challenges of addressing stereotypes and having the impression to prove oneself because of their gender. Again, their own straightforwardness and authority was their strategy. Moreover, establishing credibility and building reputation was an important tactic in the beginning of the career: *"Trust and dare to make decisions and then pull it through. Do things and hands on mentality! You are in this*

position for a reason", said woman 6, a high political personality. Some women stated, that even though they were very open for differences, they could not give 100 percent for something, they did not believe in or could not identify themselves with. Woman 1 mentioned: *"I tried to stay "myself". It is important not to represent or to play somebody else. I have to admit, that was not easy in the beginning!"* Woman 8 confirmed this: *"Be yourself as an original! Do not change, that does not help. Do not try to be somebody else."* Also, woman 10 quoted: *"It is okay to say no and to reject offers. I also rejected job offers just because I could not arrange it with myself. I thought 'This is not me!'"* Several interviewees added to this thought that a lot of women lack self-awareness and self confidence. The majority of female managers are scared at the beginning and start explaining why they achieved this high position. The participant's strategic response was to have courage: *"You must have the courage to step out of your comfort zone, to do something, even though not everybody likes it",* said woman 4, who founded her own company. Woman 6, who occupies a completely different role said something similar: *"If asked - say yes! Do not question forever. Grow with challenges and do not stay in fear! Believe in your own abilities!"* and woman 7 stated: *"Sometimes you just have to try it. I was surprised how much is possible, if you put effort into it."* Another challenge women had to overcome was the lack of respect in the beginning and also handling some discriminatory comments. As a strategic response, four women emphasized the importance of the separation between facts and relations and a specific way of avoidance: *"I learned to not take everything personally. Some things are said and I do not even perceive it",* said woman 1 and woman 5 confirmed this, when she was confronted with several discriminating statements: *"You have to have a thick skin. Focus on a topic-oriented collaboration."* Half of the participants added, that as a leading woman, you do not have to put up with everything. Woman 5 said: *"You cannot please everybody. Sometimes you lose, but this is part of the game. And if something gets too much, you are always free to go."* Woman 7 emphasized this: *"Sometimes you must have the courage to say no. Nobody expects you to work 60 hours a week."* Woman 3 stated: *"Sometimes it does not matter, what other people say. You have to listen to yourself and do not become dependent on anybody else."* Avoiding the gender issue is also a way and strategy of addressing this topic. A clear evidence of the participants did not mention specific challenges or something about being excluded or hindered by being a woman. They adjusted to the company and found the balance between the "gender importance" and the "company's and position standing". *"I just do not care too much about being a woman. I do not want to highlight this or put it in the limelight. I am a person and I have personal-ity. It does not matter if I am a man or a woman!"*, was woman 10's specific strategic re-

response to the male-dominated environment, she is currently working in. Finally, a strong female quality led to a strategy, four women quoted: being empathic and adjust to your employees: *"I ask my employee: "Do you really want this?" because if I realize, that she or he is not really ready for it, I do not force him or her to do it"*, said woman 1 and underlined the importance of not trying to push too hard in the beginning. Woman 8 experienced something similar, adapting to her employees: *"Some steps I would have liked to make bigger and faster, but I realized that it was not possible. I never tried to whip something through and tried to force something or someone."* Finally, woman 7 highlighted the adjustment-strategy of compromising: *"Women sometimes have an urge to perfection. It is never 100% perfect... You have to be ready to compromise."*

4.4 Specific linkage of strategic responses to emerging challenges

The two chapters above summarize the various challenges and conflicts women were confronted with during their career and the different strategies they were using to overcome these barriers and obstacles. This chapter aims to describe and align specific strategic responses to emerging challenges in an attempt to connect the given answers to the research question. Various strategic behaviors in the short term lead to an active change in the long term and disrupt the "taken-for-granted" institutional rules, values, beliefs, myths and culture. Almost all strategies had one purpose which was to create a more positive working culture. Nobody spoiled for a fight, aimed to break existing structures or tried to stir up the organization.

Woman 7 mentioned: *"I had one year as a probation period. I think that this is comprehensible because they wanted to be sure that they can trust me and so did I"*, and she also said: *"I think that it is helpful for women in leadership positions to show more commitment in the beginning."* Woman 5 could rely on her good reputation when she established a new department in her organization: *"[...] My boss trusted me and I already had a good reputation because I have technical competence and expertise. But the beginning was tough because I had no idea."* Two women had the strategy of doing a teambuilding, to earn or re-earn the respect of their own team before aiming to drive a change. Woman 1 added to this: *"If you are changing some things, you have to have the courage to accept the consequences. Sometimes it is hard and difficult to get new team members, if some do not want to go along with you. It takes time to adapt to changes and it is very important that your employees understand the changes."*

Table 3 provides an overview of the linkage between specific challenges and the women's strategic responses, which will be explained in more detail.

Challenges as a female leader	Strategic response
Work-family balance	Get help from somebody else
Problems within the team	Get external help
Group gender discrimination	Build and use external networks
Individual gender discrimination	Being straightforward and having self-confidence
Addressing stereotypes	No gender fight, use male partner
Addressing stereotypes as a newcomer	Build diverse teams

Table 2 – specific linkage between challenges and strategies

Most women had one important accomplishment: contribute value, shape the culture and in the long run drive a change. The aim was to bring the female characteristics into the company and to fully realize the role as a female CEO. For example, their high sense for empathy and their people-orientation were key drivers for several strategic responses. The interviewed women repeatedly made note of somebody who helped them and prepared them to become a manager. *"When you want to balance your job and family it is important to trust others and to rely on other team colleagues. Get some help if necessary"*, said woman 7 and solved with this personal strength and strategic approach her key challenge of the work-family-balance. Also, woman 5 talked about the importance of realizing, not everything has to be done by herself alone. She experienced difficulties in her team and it was essential for her, to rebuild the team dynamic: *"Sometimes difficulties arise, which you cannot solve alone. I get support through external help such as coaches or consultations."* Furthermore, the women's competence of curiosity and courage helped them to go out of their comfort zone and to build strong networks and professional relationships. Woman 4 talked about her experience: *"I had to convince eight men of my project. They did not really care about it and wanted to finance something else. Then I just did lobbying and talked to everybody separately. I used my network,*

which I have established for the last ten years. This worked out quite well and in the end, my project went through." The challenge of the pure men groups was significant for several women. The strategic response to this was to be and use external networks. *"Take part in networks! Men often have a natural advantage and hold the upper hand. Build many diverse networks and use them"*, quoted woman 4. Woman 3 had a strategic response for pure men groups and group gender discrimination and said: *"Look for niches! Look for something, where you are good at and where there is nobody else."*

Another challenge, regularly resulting from a man's statement, was the challenges of individual gender discrimination. In order to address this humiliation, several women were performing through their straightforwardness and self-awareness. Woman 6 was asked, if she wanted to change the department, because she wanted to leave earlier on a Friday: *"[...] I said that this has nothing to do with content, or that it gets too much during the week. I did not move back one millimeter."* Also, woman 5 made use of this strategic approach when she experienced a similar situation: *"At the beginning I had to argue a lot to push my project through, because they saw my project as "meaningless debt". You have to stick to it and be ambitious. My attitude was: 'I'll show you!'"* Woman 2, who was asked if the project would be cheaper because there were only women working in her office, agreed with the other woman's strategy: *"As a woman you really need perseverance and persistence. It is so important to never make compromises in case of setbacks!"*

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, a clear evidence of the participants either never experienced any challenges because of their gender or were not willing to *"waste energy for a gender fight"*. Woman 9 said: *"Once I could not overcome the challenge. I wanted to conduct a study and had the core ideas, but the team of only male researchers did not accept it. I had to play it by the male partner, which was additional effort for him, but I felt like this was the only way. The other team was not used to be led by a woman."*

However, the majority has established various strategies during their careers and while navigating their leadership roles, the interviewed women unconsciously transformed into change agents. While being a leader the women focused on pushing the best out of their team, supporting collaborators, breaking up existing structures, contributing value and acting as a role model while inspiring other women in their organizations.

4.5 Women being a change agent

The last and most important category resulting from the interviews is consequential from the performance of the leading women. By performing the established strategies in order to overcome the challenges, it happened that they were pushing their organizations towards a change. Women were and are unconsciously able to act as a change agent in their institution. Acting as an institutional change agent was explained by DiMaggio in 1988, who stated that institutional entrepreneurs are “actors who initiate changes that contribute to transform existing, or creating new institutions” (Battilana et al., 2009). Institutional change agents or entrepreneurs engage in key activities, where they initiate deviating changes including breaking the status quo and thus transforming existing procedures and traditions or build new ones (Battilana et al., 2009). The Cambridge dictionary states that a change agent is someone, who encourages others to change their opinions or behaviors (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018).

Although all interviewed women came and worked in different organizations and environments, each one of them talked about a change, which they have established or pushed through different approaches but equally effective. The given answers can be further subcategorized into two major parts: internal and external change. Internal change comprises how women changed and adapted the organization, which cannot be seen directly by others. External change includes what women clearly brought into their company and how they disrupted the status-quo. Three women talked about an internal change of openness, which is attributable to being the first woman on the executive board: *“Being the first women on the management board, the company became more open for new things, they have not thought about before”*, stated woman 1. Woman 4 and 10 mentioned a change in the communication style, which they brought into the company: *“This company has my personal note. I am always open, clear and in particular transparent about what is going on”*, so woman 4 and woman 10 said: *“One thing, which is on my agenda is to change the communication style in this company. My style is to be open, to communicate everything openly to my team and to be honest. This is my personal style and I would like to bring this more into the company.”* Almost half of the women were passionate about being a role model for other women and thus increasing a future female representation. *“Those women who are courageous have to show the rigid and scared women, that every change is an opportunity. The courageous women who stick to their ideas and go through walls no matter what should act as role models for the “scared” ones”*, quoted woman 4. Woman 7 agreed with this: *“I hope that I am a role model for my team. I try to pass on my interest and my curiosity”*, which was similar to woman 3: *“I always try to*

stimulate my team to try things out, to be open and to discover new things. This is definitely something I brought into this company." Woman 10 is not only acting as a role model in her own company but is also engaging in activities by other institutions especially for younger women: *"Of course in a lot of ways I am a role model for other women. I am also a mentor for young female students at university because I want to be a role model for them too!"* The sub categorization "external change" was mentioned by all interviewed women in different ways. First, a clear evidence talked about the understanding for family situations. *"With me being in the executive board, some topics became more relevant. I managed to enforce that women in part-time employments are able to become a leader"*, said woman 1. Woman 7 quoted: *"For me it is extremely important to be a family friendly company. I have understanding for family situation. Since I also have two little children, I know how you are able to organize the job and family."* and woman 9 even tried to break up traditional structures: *"Almost everybody is a parent in this company, this is why I push men to go on parental leave. I also try to establish a 4-days-working week (Mon-Thu), although it is not easy legally, I really want to enforce that."* The second change three women talked about, was a change in the leadership style through their specific female characteristics: *"It is very important to me to appreciate every person in my team. Everybody is an essential asset and a treasure for me, I appreciate and value the work of everyone, unlike some others in this field..."* said woman 2 and highlighted her strong people-orientation. Woman 1 mentioned: *"I soon recognized that this way was not my style of leadership, so I simply changed it to my personal style. Employees were assigned more responsibilities, departments and the divisions of labor were broken up and newly mixed."* Third and last, the majority of the interviewees talked about the importance of pushing and empowering other women, how they inspired them and how they proved their strong people-leadership skills: *"Many women have too little confidence in themselves. If I recognize a woman with potential, I always push her."* said woman 1 and woman 7 quoted something similar, about building strong and diverse teams: *"If a woman and a man are applying for a position, I always take the woman if they are ex aequo good."* Moreover, woman 2 already has a female successor and similarly opens a leadership door for another woman: *"I really care about bringing women into this job. This is why I have a woman as candidate."* Woman 3 also mentioned how she pushed her female colleagues and recognized the importance of giving women honest feedback and to tell them what potential they have: *"Women need more attention and more encouragement than men. Men like to hear "you did that very well", women want to hear why they did it well. I give my employees more encouragement and attention."* Woman 5 added: *"If a woman is at the top, equal treatment is*

strengthened. I push other women and encourage them to cause change. I believe women promote other women." And finally, also woman 7 supported the other women's statements and believed in a future female representation and solidarity: *"I think that women have a greater empathy and sensitivity. They know how to lead and push employees, especially other women."*

In sum, there were various ways, how these women's strategies resulted in acting as change agents. The main goal of all women was to inspire others, to empower female colleagues, to disrupt the given-for-granted status quo, to bring the female culture into their organizations and to open doors for future top female leaders.

5. CONTRIBUTION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The goal of this thesis and the inherent research conducted was to identify the challenges female leaders are facing when ascending to the top, especially in a male-dominated environment, and the various strategies women are establishing in order to overcome these challenges and barriers. The exact formulation of the research question is the following: ***“How do female leaders address challenges associated with their role in a male-dominated organizational environment?”***

In order to deeply understand how the above-mentioned findings contribute to the existing literature about women in leadership positions, the outcomes of the results will be summarized. After studying the literature about the challenges women specifically have to face, such as the glass ceiling, the double role as mother and manager and several stereotypes, biases, and prejudices, the female leadership style was analyzed. Resulting from this research, women do have several characteristics, which on the one side enables them to overcome the emerging challenges, and on the other side serve as perfect basis for a management position, such as being empathic, having a strong people-orientation and being capable of balancing all corporate responsibilities, which is particular needed in times of crisis. However, the existing research had a descriptive approach on women facing several challenges in executive positions and it lacks the providence of strategic solutions for female leaders. As a result, this thesis investigated in establishing strategic responses to the emerging challenges and furthermore found out the effect on an organizational change. This is interesting because the link between gender-based leadership styles and their impact and effects on the organization has not been fully explored yet. The following three contributions aim to give the interviews' outcome a managerial twist and to provide specific recommendations for female leaders as well as for organizations.

First, based on already existing research and many practice examples the challenges, women have to face in their daily work were (mostly) already known. However, by analyzing the outcome of the conducted interviews, I have been able to identify three strategies that female managers can perform to overcome these challenges. First, it is highly important for women to build diverse teams, since it is proven, that a heterogeneous team performs better than a homogenous team. For organizations, including women in decision-making boards encourages diverse opinions, different thinking and various ideas and competencies and a better representation. Second, it is highly recommended to leverage external networks. Nowadays, men

often have a natural advantage and hold the upper hand, especially in male-dominated environments. Strategic networks and strong professional relationships outside the company help women to convince external regulators, mergers, investors and also introduces to people who can help her and whom she can help. And third, finding the right balance between adjustment and straightforwardness is the third strategic response and advice. Given all the barriers, which hinder women on their career progression, it is extremely important for female executives to clarify their values, vision and core purpose and to make strategic career decisions. Nonetheless, knowing when to adjust to the company and to accept compromises enhances their leadership effectiveness and organizational success.

Second, out of the conducted analyses, specific recommendations and managerial implications for future female leaders can be made, also in order to help increase the amount of women in leadership positions. Research and practice have shown several barriers for women in male-dominated environments. However, linking the right strategic response to emerging challenges help women to “survive” until the very last and top position. Strategies on three different levels have been emerged: First, focusing on the individual level, being a mother and a manager and balancing both jobs often becomes challenging. The strategy is to get help. Being courageous to step out of one’s comfort zone and to not have the feeling, that everything has to be done by oneself. Another strategy, which has to be developed on the individual level and what women can implement in masculine settings is to have a great self-confidence, to be exceptionally competent and to maintain their straightforwardness, which already helped them to occupy a top level business position. The second level is the “team-level”; When addressing stereotypes becomes a challenge, the specific strategy is to build diverse teams. It gets more women on board and helps to break the all-male territory and given-for-granted structures and beliefs. And lastly, the strategy on the “networking level” is to build external relationships, when facing gender discrimination becomes a major barrier for women and hinder a female career progression. These are three particular strategies and skills female leaders have to develop and use in order to overcome emerging barriers and challenges.

Third and last, by addressing challenges and establishing strategies, women result in being and acting as change agents and transforming organizations. In this thesis, an institutional change agent is seen as an individual (one female leader) or a group (females on an executive board) which transforms and changes the organizational culture in a gradual and subtle way over time across and within organizational fields. A change agent does not know the concrete outcome nor a clear destination, it is more an evolving process (Khavul et al., 2013) of reorganizing the resources to transform the institution in favor of their interest (Pacheco et al.,

2010). Resulting from the findings, the interviewed women happened to act as change agents in various ways; changing the leadership style by giving the female characteristics a higher value; being more open and having a higher people- and team orientation. And also, being a role model for other women and empower followers, motivate and support younger female colleagues. Pushing other women by helping them in their career progression and similarly increasing the number of female leaders and thus the influence and importance of female characteristics and leadership styles in the executive board.

To sum up and provide a precise answer to the research question, no single formula can be given for making women more efficient as leaders and no single theory can be provided to perform across all situations and to manage all emerging challenges. In practice, making the work environment more pleasant for women and giving the same opportunities irrespectively of gender simplifies a woman's career path to the top. A higher number of women in leadership position breaks up all-dominated male territories, focuses on a broader range of perspectives and makes female leaders able to act as role model for younger women within their organization and thus transforming the organization towards a gender-balanced institution.

6. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

To sum up the dissertation, the research question about “how do female leaders address challenges associated with their role in a male-dominated organizational environment?” can be answered with three possible strategies: build diverse teams, leverage external networks and find the balance between adjustment and straightforwardness. The analyzed literature and findings have shown, that women perform a very effective leadership style in many situations. Given the established strategies from this research, women will have the same chances as men to master leadership obstacles and to perform well as a manager irrespectively of gender. Lastly, this study opens another interesting dimension of female leaders acting as change agent and transforming their organizations.

However, this research entails several limitations.

First, one important boundary condition is that this dissertation only focuses on one labor market, which is Austria, since it represents a male-dominated environment very well. As a result, the contributions can be transferred to country with similar characteristics in terms of structure of the labor market, and representation of women in leadership position. Second, as the interviews were conducted with females who are already occupying managing positions, the results may be prone to another information bias. The interviewed women were only able to talk about challenges when ascending to the top in a retrospective evaluation. Future research can complement this study adopting a longitudinal approach, and following women in leadership position over several years.

Third, the interviewees were all successful female leaders who managed to overcome all emerging challenges on their way to the top. A more diverse set of women may have yielded different results. Women, who could not overcome several challenges and which had to give up an executive position were not included in the analysis. These females would have provided interesting perceptions and remarkable insights in order to answer the research question. Therefore, the gathered results cannot represent the total female workforce in Austria. Consequently, this topic presents a substantial area of exploration for future research.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Interview Guide

Interview form: Semi-structured

Problematic:

In many organizations, men are dominating the leadership positions and women are rarely seen in top management roles. These organizations often miss valuable qualities, exceptional skills and leadership competencies, women could contribute.

Research Question:

How do women in leadership roles address challenges associated with their role in a male-dominated organizational environment?

Warm Up:

Good Morning/Afternoon /Evening, Miss X, thank you very much for your time!

My name is Sophie Brunner and I am currently a master student in International Management at Católica Lisbon University. As part of my master thesis, I am conducting research related to women in leadership positions and how they address challenges associated with their role in a male-dominated environment. For this purpose, I would like to interview you for approximately 30- 45 min, by means of a semi-structured interview, which means that I will ask you several questions to which there are no right or wrong answers and you are free to say whatever comes to your mind on the subject. For the purpose of analyzing the interviews later on, I would like to record and transcribe our conversation – would that be okay? The answers can be anonymized or your name/company can be mentioned, what do you prefer?

Thank you! Let us start.

Intro:

- 1. What kind of education do you have?**
- 2. How many years of working experience do you already have?**
- 3. What is the exact title of your position?**
- 4. How many employees are you leading? / For how many employees are you fully responsible?**

PART I**Career:**

5. Can you tell me how did you get to this position?
6. What values and interests or motivators guided your career decisions?
- 6.1 Why do you think that your motivators might not be motivating for other women?

Characteristics:

7. Do you think, that there are differences between the behavior of men and women in leadership positions?
8. What strengths do you believe, women can bring more or better into your present position, than if a man had this position?
- 8.1 What are your strengths and strongest personality traits, that you can bring into your current position?

PART II**Challenges & Strategies:**

9. You said earlier, that your strongest personality traits are ... As a managing woman in your company, have you ever tried to influence the organizational culture with your (specific) strength?
 - 9.1 If yes – How?
 - 9.2 If no – Why?
10. How were you capable to reconcile your values and characteristics with those of the (men- dominated) organization?
11. And what were the main challenges, when changing and influencing the organizational culture as a leading woman?
 - 11.1 Can you give me a specific example of a challenge, you had to overcome as a woman?
 - 11.2 Many people do not accept women in leadership positions. Do you agree with that? Have you ever experienced something similar?
12. How are you motivating other women (to pursue a similar career path or to aim for a leadership position in order to act as a change agent)?

How can other women become a change agent as well?

The names of the interviewees are listed below along with the description of their positions.

- **Andrea Schneider** – Founder and CEO of PRIMA Public Relations and image marketing Agency LTD since 1992
- **Dr. Angelika Moser** – Public notary in Salzburg and member of the notarial chamber in Salzburg
- **Mag. Brigitte Gruber** - Founder and Head of the women- specialized academy in Mondsee and Business Consultant since 2005, also a mentor for personality development for women
- **Dr. Daniela Werndl** - Head of Human Resources Development of the University of Salzburg
- **Mag. Elisabeth Leiter** – Director of Marketing of Miele Austria since 2013
- **Mag. Irene Schulte** – Managing Director of the Federation of Austrian Industry in Salzburg since 2003
- **Mag. Karoline Edtstadler** – State secretary of Austria since the legislative period 2017
- **Mag. Sandra Kolloth** – First Managing Director of Miele Austria since 2018
- **Mag. Sigrid Hubl** – Managing Director of “Forum Verlag Austria” since 2014 and coach of executives and high potentials
- **Veronika Gmachi, MBA** – Managing Director of Brockhaus & NE Austria LTD since 2015

APPENDIX B: Characteristics

Illustration of women in leadership positions: Leadership Style and Characteristics		
Characteristic	Woman	Quote
Curiosity	woman 1	"You have to be curious, what else is there, what could I try? I always liked to investigate new areas. "
	woman 3	"I am curious and I love to try something new. There is nothing, I do not want to try at least."
	woman 4	"You have to be curious and have the courage to try something new and to go out of your comfort zone."
	woman 7	"I was curious for the technical sector that helped me to adjust rapidly to the new situation."
	woman 7	"I am curious and eager for new situations."
Empathy	woman 1	"I learned to see people as individuals and to recognize and empathize their differences. With my different employees I have to work differently. And they really appreciate it."
	woman 2	"My personal strengths are definitely being straightforward, empathic, sustainable and being convinced by what you do."
	woman 3	"I am in the communication sector. It is important to listen to your clients and to have the necessary human and emphatic sensitivity"
	woman 5	"I am empathic and I am aligning employees' goals and needs. I do not just want to take, but I want to give."
Straightforwardness	woman 1	"You have to know, what you really want! Then you will manage to do it!"
	woman 2	"My personal strengths are definitely being straightforward, empathic, sustainable and being convinced by what you do."
	woman 6	"I am straightforward."
Diversity	woman 2	"As a leader it is important to be diverse, rather than simple-minded."

	woman 4	"Be various and not single minded!"
	woman 5	"You have to be diverse, not single minded!"
	woman 7	"I am able to bring together numerous requirements. You have to be diverse and have the ability for multitasking."
Being networked	woman 3	"One of my strengths is to be networked."
	woman 5	" I am very networked and very cooperative."
	woman 9	"I am networked and also able to think networked."
	Woman 10	"My huge network is definitely something I could always benefit from!"
foresightedness	woman 3	"I think that women have more foresightedness."
	woman 4	"Woman need first an all-round view and they are foresighted. They think first about their partner, their family, their children. Am I an uncaring mother, when I am pursuing my career?"
	woman 6	"Women have a higher foresightedness than men."
	woman 7	"As a leading person it is necessary to have a foresightedness."
	woman 9	"One of my strengths is my foresightedness ."
	Woman 10	"It is extremely important to think about the future, about coming trends, what will the next 5-10 years bring? It is important to be foresighted!"
Team orientation	women 6	"I have a strong team orientation and I strongly reconsider and involve others and my team."
	woman 7	"I think that women have a greater team orientation. I grew up with three brothers, I was born with this orientation."
	woman 9	"I do not feel better just because I am the manager. I have a really strong team orientation and I think that the only way to success is cooperation."
Persistence	woman 7	"I am persistent and I do not give up at the first "No". I am able to convince the men with my charm, persuasion and persistence."
	woman 8	"I have a lot of energy and consistency to run the extra mile too. I also have the toughness, do not give up"

APPENDIX C: Challenges

Illustration of women in leadership positions: Challenges		
Challenge	Woman	Quote
WORK - FAMILY-BALANCE: Be ready, to give up certain things	woman 1	"As a leading woman you have to be ready to give up certain things. You have less time for friends and family !"
	woman 7	"For a leader it is a prerequisite to show commitment and more effort. That also means to be present at different events, and most of them are in the evening..."
	woman 6	"Once I wanted to leave earlier on a Friday so I could go back early enough to pick up my son. I was told by my male chef that if it gets too much for me, there have been other changes, I could just say it, if I wanted a change. I said that it has nothing to do with content, or that it gets too much during the week."
NEWCOMER: Being the first	woman 1	"I was the first woman in the executive board. Everybody else has more experience than I have. It was a challenge to stay calm and not to try to eliminate things, I was just not able to eliminate. For all the men in the board it was new, having a woman on the board."
	woman 2	"I used to be my teams' colleague and then suddenly from one day to the next I was their boss. The employees came into the office and suddenly there was a woman instead of a man sitting in the boss' chair. I was very concerned how my team was going to deal with this change."
	woman 7	"I had one year as a probation period. I think that this is comprehensible because they wanted to be sure that they are able to trust me and so did I."
	woman 8	"At the beginning many employees had problems, because they were used to a different leadership style. It would have been easier, if I change several things a little bit slower, but that is not my style..."

	woman 10	"Of course, one challenge was that employees, who were yesterday your colleagues are today your subordinates. You are eyed more critically, but this is part of the process."
ADDRESSING STEREOTYPES / NEWCOMER: Prove oneself	woman 1	"In the beginning you want to prove yourself, that you are able to manage your new position. It is hard, if you are eyed critically from everybody around you. Do not come and think, that you know everything!"
	woman 3	"Women are expected to have a lot of soft skills. If they do not deliver these skills in the beginning, people are disappointed and the most disappointed one is the woman herself."
	woman 5	"At the beginning I had to argue a lot to push my project through, because they saw my project as "meaningless debt". You have to stick to it and be ambitious. My attitude was: "I'll show you!""
	woman 5	"It is dangerous, to always try to give 120% percent and to loose sight of oneself."
	woman 7	"At the beginning of course everybody thought "how is the new boss?". I had to prove myself, especially because I became a leader and had two small children at home. I could deal with that and the adrenaline pushed me."
	woman 7	"I think that it is helpful for women in leadership positions to show more commitment in the beginning."
NEWCOMER: Being scared	woman 4	"So many women have a high need for security. They do not want to change anything because they are too scared and they freeze in their fear. There are just a few women, which have the courage and just do it."
	woman 5	"At the beginning I was scared an I asked myself "Am I going to make it?" My boss trusted me and I already had a good reputation because I have a technical competence and expertise. But the beginning was tough because I had no idea."
	woman 6	"In the past I often was too scared to say my opinion. Nowadays I do not wait anymore to say what I think. Women tend to always question themselves."
ADDRESSING STEREOTYPES / NEWCOMER:	woman 1	"In one company, I knew that there existed a glass ceiling. I also knew that there was nothing I could do about it. It made it easier for me to change to a new company."

Glass ceiling		
	woman 9	"In this company a glass ceiling exists but everybody is aware of it. The world is as it is..."
GENDER DISCRIMINATION: Discriminating statements	woman 2	"Once there was a client who was sitting in the waiting room and saw the pictures of my team, which are only women. He asked me, if it were cheaper, because there were only women working in the office."
	Woman 5	"I grew up in this town, where I am now working. There might be some people who thought "will she be able to make it? Can she deal with this responsibility?"
	woman 5	"At the beginning they told me; "you look nice but you are not..."
	woman 5	"Other women have accused me too! "You are too soft and too ready to compromise."
	woman 9	"Leadership decisions are tough and as a woman, you are seen as bitchy or bad-tempered. For men it is natural..."
	woman 10	"One woman said to me: "I really like, that we have a woman now as a director! Even though a lot of employees were really critical when they heard, that there will be a woman now on the top!"
GENDER DISCRIMINATION: Respect	woman 2	"Sometimes I ask myself; "Am I too nice to my team? Do I have the necessary respect as a woman? How would it be, if I were a man?"
	woman 2	"In this work environment, women are sometimes depreciated and devalued. They are sometimes seen as their secretaries who have to work for the manly bosses. Women are called "girls" instead of "women" or "ladies". This was something, that really bothered me and made me angry. I once talked to my boss and told him, that this was not okay but he just denied it. I was too shy and did not have the confidence to discuss it with him..."
	woman 6	"The society has to change the attitude towards women. Women have proven often enough that they are at least as good as men. That is also undisputed."
	woman 9	"I don't want to be heard even though I am a woman, I want to be heard because I am a human and I have personality. I don't want to waste my energy for some gender fights."

	woman 10	"Of course, at the beginning I had sometimes a macho sitting in front of me who thought "what does she want from me?""
GENDER DISCRIMINATION: pure men groups	woman 3	"It is extremely difficult for a woman in pure men groups. The strategy is to find a niche to go on."
	woman 4	"I had to convince eight men about my project. They did not really care about this and wanted to finance something else. Then I just did lobbying and talked to everybody separately. This worked out quite well and in the end, my project went through."
	woman 4	"Men often have the control and sit on the longer end of the lever."
	woman 5	"Women are reflected, this is seen as too weak by men. They think women procrastinate, are unviable and not hard enough to be a manager."
	woman 9	"Once I could not overcome the challenge. I wanted to conduct a study and had the core ideas, but the team of only manly researchers did not accept it. I had to play it by the male partner, which was additional effort for him, but I felt like this is the only way. The other team was not used to be led by a woman."
	woman 9	"Do not play women against men and vice versa, you will not get very far..."

APPENDIX D: Strategies

Illustration of women in leadership positions: Strategies			
Strategy	Woman	Quote	
BALANCE: Be authentic	woman 1	"I tried to stay "myself". It is important not to represent or play somebody else. I have to admit, that was not easy in the beginning!"	
	woman 4	"It is important to talk about what you can do, and not about what you cannot do. Dare to! Focus on what you're good at and not, what you're not good at"	
	woman 4	"If you took a decision- pull it through. Do not lose credibility!"	
	woman 5	"I lead as I would like to be led. Reach out for different opinions but then make a decision."	
	woman 6	"Trust and dare to make decisions and then pull it through. Do things and hands on mentality! You are in this position for a reason."	
	woman 8	"Be yourself as an original! Do not change, that does not help. Don't try to be somebody else."	
	woman 10	"It is important to be authentic. To be honest to your team and to know what to say at the right time."	
	BALANCE: To know, what you want	woman 1	"Some people become into leadership roles with the wrong motivation, because somebody is expecting them to be a leader or someone is pushing the wrong person. It is important to know, what you want, then you will manage to do it!"
		woman 2	"You have to be convinced about yourself and to believe in you. It is possible to realize your dreams, that is what I did!"
		woman 5	"If you like, what you do - you are good at it!"
woman 6		"Do not think too long about whether you really can, but rather rely on your own skills."	
woman 8		"If you know what you want, you can do it."	
woman 10		"Do not think too much about "what will the men think about me, because I am a woman?" because in some way you show your fear. It is not an issue for me because I do not make an issue out of it. "	

BALANCE: Separation between facts and relations	woman 1	"I learned to not take everything personally. Some things are said and I don't even perceive it."
	woman 5	"You have to have a thick skin. Focus on a topic oriented collaboration."
	woman 7	"Be hard in the fact but decent and friendly in the behavior."
	woman 9	"It is important to address the topic separately from the emotion. Name and address the problem directly in an appropriate tone."
BALANCE: Have courage	woman 1	"You have to have courage. If you are changing some things, you have to have the courage to accept the consequences. Sometimes it is hard and difficult to get new team members, if some don't want to go along with you. It needs time to adapt to changes and it is super important that your employees understand the changes."
	woman 4	"You have to have the courage to go out of your comfort zone, to do something, even though not everybody likes it."
	woman 6	"If asked - say yes! Do not question forever. Grow with challenges and do not stay in fear! Have courage to your own abilities!"
	woman 7	"Sometimes you just have to try it. I was surprised how much is possible, if you put effort into it."
	woman 10	"Have courage! Dare to try something new."
BALANCE: You do not have to put up with every- thing	woman 1	"I have always been critical and I always said my opinion."
	woman 3	"Sometimes it does not care, what other people say. You have to listen to yourself and do not get dependent on anybody else."
	woman 5	"You cannot please everybody. Sometimes you lose, but this is part of the game. And if something gets too much, you are always free to go. "
	woman 7	"Sometimes you must have the courage to say no. Nobody expects you to work 60 hours a week."

	woman 7	"Sometimes dare to pull the ripcord, if it is too much."
	woman 10	"It is okay to say no and to reject offers. I also rejected job offers just because I could not arrange it with myself. I thought "This is not me!""
BALANCE: No compromises just because of gender	woman 2	"As a woman you really need perseverance and persistence. It is so important to never make compromises in case of setbacks!"
	woman 10	"I just do not care too much about being a woman. I do not want to highlight this or put it in the limelight. I am a person and I have personality. It does not matter if I am a man or a woman!"
	woman 6	"Once I wanted to leave earlier on a Friday so I could go back early enough to pick up my son. I was told by my manly chef that if it gets too much for me, there have been other changes, I could just say it, if I wanted a change. I said that it has nothing to do with content, or that it gets too much during the week. I did not move back one millimeter."
BALANCE: Do not push too hard	woman 3	"I always try to push my employees but sometimes I realize, that I reach their limits."
	woman 1	"I ask my employee; "Do you really want this?" because if I realize, that she or he is not really ready for it, I do not force him or her to do it."
	woman 7	"Women sometimes have an urge to perfection. It is never 100% perfect... You have to be ready to compromise."
	woman 8	"Some steps I would have liked to make bigger and faster, but I realized that it was not possible. I never tried to whip something through and tried to force something or someone."
DIVERSE TEAMS: Communication style	woman 1	"You have to know what to say at which time. You have to say the right word at the right time. You have to listen to your collaborators and to always have open doors for them."
	woman 5	"Show nicely boundaries, and do not postpone it too long if something does not fit."

	woman 7	"I think that women are positive in teams because they are often more communicative but not necessarily goal-oriented..."
	woman 10	"I definitely see my strength in my open communication style. I have a high confidence and trust from my team because I openly communicate with them. That is also something, which I brought into the company culture."
TEAMS: mixed team	woman 1	"It is important to have a mixed team in the executive board. The atmosphere is different and more topics are discussed."
	woman 3	"For women it is difficult in pure men groups. It is important to have a mixed team, where everything is represented and different interests can be pursued."
	woman 6	"It needs men and women on an executive board! A mixed team is good!"
	woman 7	"A mixed team is more productive. The atmosphere is more positive."
	woman 8	"Sometimes men had a power struggle among each other, I believe that I was a good balance, being a woman. However, more women would have been better here."
	woman 9	"It is important to have individuality in teams. Homosexual teams are not expedient."
	woman 10	"It is important to have young and old employees, to have new comer and "old hands" and thus it is important to have men and women on board! Diversity is essential!"
TEAMS: Teambuilding	woman 2	"I used to be their colleague and from one day to the next I was their boss. I organized a teambuilding seminar with extern coaches and adult trainer who helped us becoming a real team. It was important for them to realize emotionally a new beginning."
	woman 3	"I always pictured my company as a team. I never put myself in the foreground. It is important to me to do things together. We cook together, we go to the theater together and so on..."
EXTERNAL: Get help	woman 1	"If I did not know something or if I could not do anything, I just sought for help and support from somebody else. I was new and I needed help to form my opinion and to be able to make decisions."
	Woman 4	"Women do not have to do everything themselves! Ask men for help! Do not ask for it, claim it. Say "I need your help and you're good at it. Please help me out!"
	woman 5	"Sometimes, difficulties arise, which you are not able to eliminate alone. I get support through external help such as coaches or consultations."

	woman 7	"When you want to balance your job and family it is important to trust others and to rely on other team colleagues. Get some help if necessary."
EXTERNAL: Be in networks	woman 4	"Be in networks! Men often have a natural advantage and hold the upper hand. Build diverse and many networks and use them."
	woman 5	"The most important thing is to be in networks, to socialize, to maintain business contacts, to be in various working groups and networks and to use them!"
	woman 7	"Being in networks is especially important. Sometimes distant acquaintances are more helpful than family members..."
	woman 7	"Young women should be in women networks. It pushes their self confidence and they can help each other."
	woman 10	"One thing women always forget is to be in networks. Use women's networks and women's promotion programs."
EXTERNAL: Stakeholder management	woman 5	"Care about all stakeholders, especially about them, who are against you. Get your enemies on board. "
	woman 7	"You also have to think about the external stakeholders! It is important to harmonize the various expectations."
	woman 9	"It is important to weight damages and to have a good crisis management with all stakeholders."

APPENDIX E: Be a change agent

Illustration of women in leadership positions: Being a change agent		
Being a Change Agent	Woman	Quote
EXTERNAL: Having understanding for family	woman 1	"With me being in the executive board, some topics became more relevant. I managed to enforce that women in part-time employments are able to become a leader."
	woman 7	"For me it is extremely important to be a family friendly company. I have understanding for family situation. Since I also have two little children, I know how you are able to organize the job and family."
	woman 9	"Almost everybody is a parent in this company, this is why I push men to go on parental leave. I also try to establish a 4-days - working week (Mon-Thu), although it is not easy legally, I really want to enforce that."
INTERNAL: Openness	woman 1	"Being the first women in the management board, the company became more open for new things, they have not thought about before."
	woman 4	"This company has my personal note. I am always open, clear and in particular transparent about what is going on."
	woman 10	"One thing which is on my agenda is to change the communication style in this company. My style is to be open, to communicate everything openly to my team and to be honest. This is my personal style and I would like to bring this more into the company."
EXTERNAL: Change the leadership style	woman 1	"I soon recognized that this way was not my style of leadership, so I simply changed it to my personal style. Employees became more responsibilities, departments and the divisions of labor were broken up and newly mixed."
	woman 1	"Some jokes are not told anymore, because I am now also sitting on this table. But I think that this is not a problem for my manly collaborators."
	woman 2	"It is very important to me to appreciate every person in my team. Everybody is an important asset and a treasure for me, I appreciate and value the work of everyone, unlike some others in this

		field..."
	woman 4	"I really care about the "all-round" appreciation. I am open and caring for my employees and my seminar participants."
EXTERNAL: Push other women	woman 1	"Many women have too little confidence in themselves. If I recognize a woman with potential, I always push her."
	woman 2	"I really care about bringing women into this job. This is why I am having a woman as candidate."
	woman 2	"I push my female employees and I expect a lot. I expect independency and common sense."
	woman 3	"Women need more attention and more encouragement than men. Men like to hear "you did that very well", women want to hear, why they did it well. I give my employees more encouragement and attention."
	woman 5	"If a woman is at the top, equal treatment is strengthened. I push other women and encourage them for change. I believe women promote other women."
	woman 5	"I always give the impression: "I trust you to do that, but you have to trust yourself!"
	woman 7	"I think that women have a greater empathy and sensitivity. They know how to lead and push employees, especially other women."
	woman 7	"If a woman and a man are applying for a position, I always take the woman if they are ex aequo good."
INTERNAL: Be a role model	woman 3	"I always try to stimulate my team to try things out, to be open and to try new discoveries. This is definitely something, I brought into this company."
	woman 4	"I want to pass on my experiences, I want to inspire people about themselves, everybody should be aware of what he or she is and what potential someone has!"
	woman 4	"Those women, who are courageous have to show the rigid and scared women, that every change is an opportunity. The courageous women, who stick to their ideas and go through walls no matter what should act as role models for the "scared" ones."
	woman 7	"I hope that I am a role model for my team. I try to pass on my interest and my curiosity."
	woman 10	"Of course in a lot of ways I am a role model for other women. I am also a mentor for young female students at university because I want to be a role model for them too!"

	woman 6	"The women in my team have an "all-round-thinking". I think that this tears the men and they adapt to it."
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Appendix F: Data Structure



