

**Mona Haug**

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Career-Coaching of prospective female top managers in organizations**Aim of the study**

The aim of this study is to investigate and enhance our understanding of the nature, purpose and desirability of gender diversity in German automotive organisations and the use of legally binding quota systems from a business leader perspective.

The principal objective of this research is the collection of business leaders' perceptions from the German automotive industry, in order to understand business leader's attitudes towards female board representation and the introduction of quotas as well as to explore influences on the desirability of gender diversity at board level.

The current political situation in the EU, reflected in Germany and the German automotive industry

Women occupy 15% of non-executive director positions (NEDs) on the boards of directors of European companies. To rectify this situation, Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the European Commission's Justice and Fundamental Rights Commission, suggests the EU mandates a 40% quota to empower women and accelerate their process of attaining leadership positions (EU, 2012).

Review of the Literature

Gender and leadership research indicates that female executives are advancing to managerial positions in the US (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012,) but are still under-represented in top leading positions in the Fortune 500 companies and in worldwide organizations (Zenger & Folkman, 2012; Catalyst, 2010). Researchers have taken different vantage points to come up with explanatory responses. Studies by evolutionary psychologists argue that evolutionary evidence of male dominance is explained by distinct selection mechanisms (Buss & Kenrick, 1998), assumptions that were challenged by Wood & Eagly (2002). Men do not make better leaders due to an inherent set of unique leadership traits (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Women, on the other hand, face different barriers to attaining leadership positions in male-dominated areas.

The quota debate

There is disunity at the notion of desirability of gender quotas not only in politics, but also in organisations. Dorner (2013) reports that introducing the quotas system as an affirmative action scheme, considered by some as positive discrimination, fuels the controversy.

**Barriers and perceptions**

Vinnicombe (2011) emphasizes that 60% of highly educated female graduates enter the world of employment, but the numbers of women on boards are small in the 18 contrasted global countries (Deloitte, 2011). Ely et al. (2011) contribute manifold aspects to gender disparity, such as business leaders gravitating to those who are like them and organizational hierarchies in which men predominate.

Awareness of power games

Huse and Solberg (2006) provide strong arguments that women need to know the impact and necessity of participating in power games in all respects as part of skilfully influencing the dynamics of board work. Being aware of the axiom of perceived strong (male) leadership characteristics and their own female traits may be the masterstroke. Collinson (2011) argues that values, cultural and societal aspects influence leadership practices and need to be evaluated in their context.

Main Research Questions

Whilst the research project aims to contribute to the understanding of generic aspects of gender and leadership by analyzing participants' points of view from the German automotive industry, I am especially intrigued by Collinson and the notion of embedded images that frame our perspectives. Allowing for life stories to be told by business leaders could hint at embedded images.

Methodology

Two pilot surveys of business leaders' perceptions will be conducted to look at different aspects of gender, quotas and the notion of diversity. The findings of the pilot surveys will inform the final online survey to be used for analysis, envisaging 20 pilot responses and 80-100 online responses. The findings will advise the approach to the 20 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews which will provide an in-depth view of business leaders' perceptions from the German automotive industry by means of purposively sampling.

Angaben zur Person

Mona Haug, MA in Coaching and Mentoring Practise (2010), Oxford Brookes University, Executive Coach und Trainer. PhD Candidate, Bristol Business School.

E-Mail: info@monahaug.de

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