

Women in leadership¹

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Women in leadership positions play an important role for the hotel industry as well as for society. The Pompidou Hotel Group wants to increase the number of female employees in leading positions. The purpose of this research was to find out the main reasons that women hold back from applying for senior leadership positions at the Delightful Hotel Germanton. The literature states that factors like the job vacancy, the work-life balance and women in leadership campaigns offered by companies play an important role in the application process of women. In order to gain any data, qualitative research was undertaken and interviews with a sample of five female employees of Delightful Hotel Germanton took place. The results of these interviews had interesting outcomes. Three out of the five participants can imagine climbing up the career ladder and working in a senior leadership position. Moreover, all interviewees are afraid of using power in their job at this moment, but also believe in themselves to manage specific situations with experience. Comparing the outcomes with the literature, a few similarities, but also many differences were found.

Keywords: application, career goals, use of power, women in leadership campaign

Introduction

The Pompidou Hotel Group implemented the campaign “Women in Leadership” as the company’s equal opportunities philosophy. The main goal of this campaign is to remove barriers in business in order to improve the company’s long-term growth. Furthermore, the goal of this campaign is, similar to the ongoing world discussion, to increase the senior female management positions in Europe. The end of the current strategy aims to increase the number of female employees in senior management positions to 30 per cent. The campaign works on the development of different opportunities for female employees to work in senior management position. Optional examples are flexible working hours, job sharing and part-time jobs. However, research about this topic in the Pompidou Hotel Group has already shown that there are big gender differences in the motivation to apply for a senior leadership position, as well as in the position an employee wants to achieve during their career. However, the Pompidou Hotel Group is making slow progress and at current levels of growth the goal will not be achieved. This report explores some of the issues influencing the move towards more female participation in senior management positions.

Women in management

Sandberg (2014) states that women only apply for a vacancy if they meet 100 per cent of the requirements. On the other hand, men hand in their application when they only meet 50 per cent of the qualifications. Evidence indicates that women are less self-confident than men are. Furthermore, this research shows that to succeed, a good level of confidence matters as much as suitable competence. In a similar way, Sturdy, Brocklehurst, Winstanley, & Littlejohns (2006) describe self-confidence as

the basis for someone’s life, career and satisfaction. It is the belief in someone’s ability to activate motivation in order to meet set expectations. Especially at work, self-confidence is one of the most important requirements for self-advancement in career performances or adopting to a new role. However, in the conclusion of her former research, Buecker (2014) concentrates not on the confidence levels of women, but more on misunderstandings of the vacancies. Women think that the requirements in vacancies are the basis for the job instead of being a guideline. They do not see the application process as one where a good motivation letter and a confident interview overcome missing skills or experiences. The suggestion is to break rules, although young girls have been taught to stick to rules during school. The advantage of applying for a job that seems to be too ambitious is that this will be an interesting and challenging job. An employee who meets all requirements might be overqualified.

Janker (2014) and Wondrak (2015) share the same outcomes in their studies. The formulation of an advertisement for a vacancy matters a lot for women. Formulation in which many masculine words such as assertive or analytic are used attract less women to apply. Women are more likely to apply for a position in which words like communicative or supporting are listed in the vacancy advertisement. In an experiment, Janker (2014) showed that a recruiter hired more men than women who apply for the same position when the recruiter knew the gender of the applicant during the process. In the second round of the experiment, the recruiter did not know the gender and the outcome was almost equal for hired women and men. Barton, Devillard and Hazlewood (2015) found that men are promoted mostly based on their potential, whereas women are promoted based on past accomplishments.

Felfe (2011) explains that women are already more afraid to fail in leadership positions before they even apply for a

leadership position. In addition, women have more inhibitions to using their power in a specific position at work although they want to lead as much as men do. Personality and individual motivation are the key aspects that need support in human resource development. In a similar manner, Demmer (2010) found that power and the pursuit of power are common objectives for men. Women still have difficulties with power. On the other hand, power and influence at work are the basis to change and advance things in a company.

According to Baran (2016), almost 65 per cent of the employees in the hospitality industry are women. This is a higher proportion than in other industries. However, only 13 per cent work in a senior leadership position in the hotel industry. In addition, Felfe (2011) found that only four women out of 184 positions in executive teams work in a senior leadership position in the top thirty index companies in Germany.

Often, women reduce their own expectations of what they can achieve and compromise their "career goals to make room for partners and children who may not even exist yet" (Sandberg, 2014, p.10). Moreover, Sandberg (2014) mentions a woman who declined an offer for a higher position because she planned to have kids within the next two years. Internal research by the Pompidou group shows that almost fifty per cent of the women working for Pompidou Hotel Group are happy when they achieve a position as department head. Only thirty per cent think to work as a general manager or a higher position. Nowadays, it is still common that women stop working after given birth (Zeger, 2005). Many return to work as part-time employees in order to combine their domestic roles with employment. Men expect women to stay at home temporarily or completely; or the women want it themselves. This work break and reduction of women's work is typically a career barrier. On the one hand, women think they do not have a chance to get promoted, because they are less flexible. On the other hand, women are happy with what they have achieved and do not want to climb up the career ladder (Barton, Devillard & Hazlewood, 2015). Baran (2016) suggests women need to become better self-promoters in order to be noticed and to make the first step up the ladder. Women were asked about how they promote themselves and nine out of ten women stated that they did not promote themselves in their work organisation.

The gender pay gap is still a common problem in Germany. Typically men earn 21 per cent more money than women (Mischler, 2016). It is assumed the reasons for the gap are that many women work in the service industry, have a part-time job or are in other low paid industries. However, there is still a seven per cent of salary difference that cannot be explained. Gehalt (2016) suggests that women do not discuss the salary differences with their bosses, because they are afraid of losing their jobs. In line with that, Sandberg (2014) observed that women do not negotiate their salary. Women often underestimate themselves and are trained to be nice and pleasing to others by the wider culture and this makes it difficult for them to negotiate, or to risk something in an unknown field. Goldschmidt (2016) points out that one of the main reasons for salary differences is still that fact that women leave their jobs for a period of time to have kids. Whereas men's salaries continue to grow continuously through time, career-breaks taken by women managers due to pregnancy result in lower salaries. Nevertheless, the trend in the gender

pay gap is going down. In the last ten years, the difference between the salaries decreased from 23 per cent to 21 per cent in Germany. These two per cent points were only achieved after ten years, but at least it is a trend in the right direction (Mischler, 2016).

Pompidou Hotel Group's "women in leadership" campaign focuses on individual development plans and flexible working conditions. Also, a "Lean In Circle Central Europe" has been developed where members can share their personal stories about the "women in leadership" campaign. Those members are also mentors and provide role models for other employees from the company (Conzelmann, 2015). Eckermann (2016) found that McKinsey Consulting offers a female leadership programme that focuses on mentoring. Women can build a network, see different career opportunities and get support from a female mentor. In line with that, Groll (2015) found that many female employees of the Commerzbank that participated in a mentoring programme benefited from it and also recommended this programme. However, Groll (2015) also states the shadow side of those programmes. While women participate in mentoring programmes for around twelve months, the men already get and take the job opportunities.

In contrast, Slaughter (2013) claims that the world is focused on increasing the number of women in senior leadership positions at this moment, but an important aspect is forgotten: their male colleagues. Most of the men still have the same opinion about their lifestyles and responsibilities as before. There must also be a focus on that. However, some men already stay at home or think about being more flexible. In line with that, the Pompidou group offers the women in leadership campaign not only to women but also to men. This means, they employ men who have a part-time job, work from home or take paternity leave for a period of time. In Scandinavia it is already common that fathers have three months off for paternity leave. The government concentrates on the infrastructure of care as much as on other topics.

Research approach

Qualitative research method was chosen for this study because it gave a more detailed insight into women's way of thinking about the research topic and their former experiences. Qualitative methods are more "open and flexible" (Verhoeven, 2011, p. 31). Research at the Delightful Hotel involved semi-structured interviews that were informed by a series of themes identified in the literature on women's manager careers. However, these served only as a guide as few spontaneous questions arose in the interview. This type of interview is also called an "individual depth interview", because of an interaction between the interviewer and the participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The following problem statement was developed:

In what way do "job vacancies", "work-life balance" and the "women in leadership" campaigns offered by the Pompidou Hotel Group stimulate women working at the Delightful Hotel Germanton to apply for a senior leadership position?

In order to answer the defined problem statement, four research questions were developed:

- In what way does the wording of a vacancy influence female employees of Delightful Hotel Germanton when searching for a new job?

- Do female employees of Delightful Hotel Germanton feel like they need to compromise their work-life balance?
- How does the women in leadership campaign of Pompidou Hotel Group support women in their application for a senior leadership position?
- What barriers do female employees of Delightful Hotel Germanton encounter in senior leadership positions?

This research project about women in leadership focused especially on women of the Pompidou Hotel Group. The participants chosen for the research consisted of all female employees of Delightful Hotel in Germanton not yet in a senior leadership position. There were 74 women, including employees in leading positions as well as trainees. Based on the population, the chosen sample was seven female employees at the Germanton hotel. The sample included women working in different positions as well as in different departments. For a number of logistical reasons, five interviews were conducted with women at the hotel.

An individual meeting with each participant was scheduled during working hours. The interview took place in one of the restaurants or the canteen at the hotel to create a comfortable atmosphere for the participants. A time period of approximately twenty minutes was scheduled with each interviewee.

After each interview, the taped conversation was transcribed and the text was analysed with the help of a coding system. In order to give a clear overview of first outcomes, a table was set up to demonstrate the open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The open coding table gives a clear overview of the general information given in the interview. This includes examples of single words the participants used, the idea behind it, as well as an open code such as an emotion. Afterwards, the axial coding found connections between those open codes. The selective coding defined a main variable about the outcomes (Verhoeven, 2011). Finally, the gathered data was compared, analysed and discussed with the data from the literature review.

Findings

Five detailed interviews took place in order to gather data for the formulated problem statement and research questions. As shown in Table 1, all interviewees were female and between the age of 24 and 32. Some differences can be found between the current position of the interviewees within the Pompidou Hotel Group and their private status.

Career goals

All interviewees have already thought about the future career goal they want to achieve. Three of the participants definitely want to have a leading position within the next ten years. As Person B states, *"I definitely want to climb up the career ladder in the next ten years. At least being a cluster revenue manager or nearly a senior cluster revenue manager"*. Interviewee A stated that she hoped *"to have a leading position, hopefully in human resources. I am not sure if it should be in a hotel or somewhere else, but at least a leading position in HR"*. One of the interviewed women was insecure at that time and explained her plan as follows: *"it depends on my future career, of course. But actually, I am thinking about leaving the hospitality industry and to find my career more in the tourism industry such as working for a travel agency or something like that"* (Person C). One interviewed woman already works in a leading position: *"so the next step would be to work for a hotel with more rooms and employees. Then I would have more employees to lead and guide which can be challenging"* (Person E).

Vacancies

The application process starts with searching for vacancies. The requirements of the post and the type of company itself are the main features that these interviewees look at when they want to apply for a new job. Person A declared that she wants to *"meet at least most of the requirements. It depends on the feeling I have. I always check if I meet at least, I think, 80 per cent of the requirements before I apply. And I also check what kind of company it is, what kind of benefits you get and also what kind of tasks are mentioned"*. Person D underestimates herself a little and would be more critical when applying for a new position. She said: *"first of all I check, if I meet all the requirements and if I do not meet all the requirements, I think about if it is the real thing for me and I think I underestimate myself a lot"*. However, Person E shares that *"if I meet all the requirements, then it might be the same job as I am doing at the moment, and that is not what I want. When I search for a new job, I also want slight differences to extend my working knowledge and experiences"*.

Furthermore, all of the interviewed women prefer female and emotional words in the text of a vacancy. Words that are in line with their character and personality are more interesting for them. Person C said: *"Due to the fact that I am a communicative person, I prefer words like polite and*

Table 1: Interviewee profiles

	Person A	Person B	Person C	Person D	Person E
Age	28	25	24	30	32
Current position	HR executive	Revenue support coordination	Office trainee	Assistant reservation manager	Front office manager
The Delightful Hotel	February 2014 and again April 2016	January 2015	November 2015	September 2013	March 2012
Private status	Relationship	Single	Single	Engaged	Married
Children	0	0	0	0	0

friendly. I would look for a position that suits my personal characteristics. Since I am not an analytical person, I would not apply for vacancies that require that". In addition, Person A made a similar point, "I like more emotional wordings, because they are the ones that are more interesting, that are more interesting to apply for". Person E confirmed this approach, saying that "when you read them and just think, yes that's me".

Association and fear of power

Power in the job has two different effects for women. On the one hand, all of the interviewed women appreciate having power in the job in order to make decisions by themselves and to have more freedom. "Well, I like making decisions by myself. Not asking everybody if I can make a decision and also to have a certain authority towards other employees that they think you are on a higher level" (Person A). In addition, Person B associates "to make changes, to work self independently, be allowed to make own decisions" with having power.

On the other hand, three of the women were afraid of using the power they have or might have over other employees in specific situations, but they were all optimistic about handling it. Person A stated: "I didn't have a real situation where I had to do that in the moment. But I think in the beginning it might be hard, but when you are used to it, it could do it". Person B has a similar opinion, but also more doubts as this has something to do with, for example, other people: "I think I am a bit afraid...I think you have to do things two or three times in difficult situations in order to get used to it. But I think you shouldn't feel too good about it, because you are doing something that is not good and has an impact on people". Person D already works in an assistant manager position in which she has power and also has to use this from time to time, therefore her fear of power is slightly different in comparison to the other three women's opinions. Person D stated: "Yes, sometimes it is hard, because you want to be nice and I want the people not even to like me, but to see me as a role model. Maybe sometimes it is hard for me to stand behind my words or to clarify what I really want from the employee. I want to be nice, I want to tell them in a nice way and sometimes I wish I would be more like a man. Like, this is my opinion and that's it". Person E also has to use power in the job and explains that "sometimes it is difficult to use power, because you cannot be everyone's darling in that situation".

Work-life balance

The women were asked if they currently need to compromise their work-life balance. The collected answers varied. Person A and Person C have to compromise a lot in their work-life balance. Person A explained: "I had to move to another place for my job. During the week I have to drive to Frankfurt and on the weekend I have to drive to another place that is 200km away where my boyfriend lives". Another interviewee said: "sometimes I wish I would have more free time. As I said, I am a trainee right now, so I am earning not that much money. That's why I have another side job and I am really working a lot and I think there could be some more free time sometimes and time for myself" (Person C). But Person D is happy with her current balance and said: "No, everything is fine. I live together with my boyfriend, but we or I don't need to compromise". Person B wishes to have more free time as she said: "I definitely

would like to go on holiday more, that's where I need to compromise. I like to see my family and friends more often. I don't want to get up that early in the morning, things like that. So, I don't really need to compromise".

In the interviews, one of the questions was about salary differences. What would happen if the women earn a lot more money than their husbands? The outcomes of all women were similar. At this point, the women think that they would go to work and their men would work in a part-time job or stay at home if the couple has children. As Person D shared: "It might be definitely an option. He doesn't stick to the old roles and would be also fine with that", and Person A stated: "Yes, I think that would be an option. We are on the same level, it might be different first, but if I earned more he would stay at home".

"Women in leadership" campaign and mentorship

The opinions about the "women in leadership" campaign of the Pompidou Hotel Group differed among the interviewees. Three of the women appreciate the opportunity and can imagine participating in it during their career at Delightful Hotel Germanton. As Person A said: "I think especially in the future it will help to have a better career for myself, because they try to make it possible to have a family and to have a high position". Person D agreed: "That's a very good idea of Pompidou. I think in a lot of positions there are too many men working and you also get the feeling that the men are preferred for higher jobs, sometimes. So, I think that's a good idea and maybe I will be part of it soon or in the future". Person E was also positive: "It is a great idea of Pompidou to support their employees".

However, Person B and Person C were more critical and not so interested in it. As Person B stated: "I know from other female colleagues that participated in this programme. I never really got personally in touch with it. Of course, I have seen the presentation about it in the beginning, but it is not that I feel I get extra training or mentorship or something like that in order to be promoted when I am older and have more experience in my job", and Person C shared this: "Not for me personally, because I didn't hear that much about it. I saw once a poster and someone introduced it to me when I entered the company, but then I actually never heard about it again. However, I can imagine that women in higher positions are more committed to it as they hear more about it. I think if it were more presented it might motivate me".

Paternity leave for men is an opportunity that is getting more and more common nowadays. All of the interviewed women like the idea that their partners or their future partners stay at home for a period of time when they have children. Person C and Person D like the idea, but both of them shared: "You have to make the decision in the situation itself" (Person C), and "I never thought about that so far, so I think that it is a decision which you are in the situation then you think about it. At this point, I think I will be definitely at home for a period of time, but also my partner will have this, I guess" (Person D). Whereas Persons A, C and E have more concrete plans, as Person A explained: "Maybe for one or two months, but I think he will stay in his job during that time. I think he might take those one or two months to support me and spend time with the baby to see it growing up". Person B observed: "I definitely would encourage this, because I think not only the women should take care of potential children, but also the men. I mean

that are the children of you both and I think that can help for the relationship for the children and the father. Furthermore, I think that the father shows them something positive when he raises the children" (Person B). Moreover, Person E explained: "This time is very important for the relationship to the children as well as between the parents".

Next to the campaign itself, the interviewed women appreciated the idea of a mentor who helps women to apply for higher positions, is able to answer the questions women might have, but also to reduce the doubts women can have. However, the understanding of this idea varies among the woman. "Yes, I think it would be helpful. Especially one, that is also female and who has experience with having a career and a family. She might have had the same doubts and questions that I have now. So, she can imagine how I feel and what my questions are" (Person A). While Person B did not care about the gender of the mentor as she said: "First of all, I don't think that it matters that the mentor is female or male. I wouldn't mind, but I definitely would like to have a mentor just to grow in my job and to learn more. And I think it would motivate me to apply for higher positions as I also would have more knowledge and expertise" (Person B). Person D said: "For me it would be helpful. It is an opportunity to get extra support". However, Person C has two opinions. On the one hand she thinks that a mentor "could be a role model, but I have no idea how it could work that someone is taking you by his or her hand to motivate you. I think it has to come from yourself. Either you want it or you don't want it" (Person C), and on the other hand, she asks: "but don't you think that this is the task of your supervisor, because if your supervisor sees that you are ready for the next step, he or she should tell you to go the next step" (Person C). Person E was also positive: "You always have many questions in a new stage of your life, so it would be great to have a direct contact person who can help you through the first sorrows".

Conclusion

The main purpose of the management research project was to find out in what way "job vacancies", "work-life balance" and "women in leadership campaigns" stimulate female employees at the Delightful Hotel Germanton regarding the application for senior leadership positions. Therefore, interviews with women working at the Delightful Hotel took place. The outcomes show that the interviewed women are critical about choosing suitable vacancies, as well as that they underestimate themselves sometimes. However, three out of five interviewed women can imagine working in a senior leadership position. On the other hand, the gender pay gap is still a big issue in Germany, which makes it hard for women to switch roles with their husbands. Moreover, half of the interviewed women feel more motivated to apply for a higher position due to the women in leadership campaign of the Pompidou Hotel Group. The other half of the interviewed women need more information about the campaign and might think about it when they are in a suitable situation.

Overall, it can be said that the abovementioned sub-topics have an impact on women's decisions about an application for a senior leadership position. However, it still depends on the current position of the woman and her personal career goals.

After conducting the research, some limitations can be mentioned. Firstly, a number of questions were pre-formulated and asked during the interview. The idea of conducting a semi-structured interview was to come up with more questions during the interview itself. However, it seemed to be more difficult than expected to extend the interview. Therefore, the answers given were mostly based on the formulated questions and had less variety of extra questions. In addition, the interviewed women were asked to participate in the interview by the author. An idea would have been to make the performance of these interviews more public. A possible result could have been to get more participants and also women that are really interested in the chosen topic and are willing to share opinions about possible plans. Moreover, the interviewed women were all childless. It would have been nice to have one interview from a woman who has at least one child already.

Note

¹ This paper is informed by research undertaken by Helga Tweebeck for her management project submitted in support of her Bachelor of Business Administration (Hotel Management) at Stenden University of Applied Science.

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