Bachelorarbeit

Maike Winkler

Women's advancement in the German hospitality industry despite of the glass ceiling

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1 Introduction

Today, women represent 40 % of the labor force worldwide and continually climb up the hierarchical ladder of organizations. However, they do not overcome 20 % with regard to higher management levels. Interestingly, a share of only two to three percent of women is represented in executive management positions within globally relevant corporations. This number points out that the lack of females in top levels is a global phenomenon. (Wirth 2001, 25.)

According to Wirth, the situation of females in the labor market has enhanced in the last decades (Wirth 2001, 4). However, reports of the German Federal Statistical Office (2006, 28) show that in 2004, only 1.7 million female workers were holding senior positions in comparison to 3.3 million male workers in the service industry throughout Germany. Consequently, these figures lead to the assumption that obstacles in terms of the glass ceiling metaphor seem to exist. Knutson and Schmidgall (1999, 64) characterized a glass ceiling as "an invisible, generally artificial barrier that prevents qualified individuals such as women from advancing within the organization and reaching their full potential." Prior researches indicated that obstacles that result in the glass ceiling effect are linked to disparities in, for instance, gender stereotypes as well as equal employment opportunities (Bell, McLaughlin & Sequera 2002, 68). In addition, according to Oakley (2000, 322), organizational, behavioral, cultural and structural explanations mirror barriers that lead to the glass ceiling.

"The more senior and well-paid the post, the more likely it is to be filled by a man, despite women's numerical predominance in the industry" (Purcell 1996, 21). Keeping this meaningful quotation in mind, this research was conducted in order to provide women in the hospitality sector in Germany with ideas and promising steps to advance in their career by breaking the glass ceiling. Therefore, in combination with a literature review, in-depth and open-ended interviews with females working in leadership positions in the German hospitality industry were executed in order to identify personal experiences and interpretations of the issue.

Therefore, in the first step, detailed information about the meaning of the research topic will be given enabling the reader to understand the current relevance and necessity of the issue. Hence, the reader will become familiar with the research problem, objectives and receives an idea of how the topic is analyzed and discussed while simultaneously suitable solutions are being developed. For the gradual achievement of this aim, primarily, this introductory chapter

begins with a general background of the subject to underline its importance as well as revealing further insights towards the justification of research, methodology and structure.

1.1 Analysis of background

Nowadays, the service industry gains special importance when taking into account that a considerable amount of four million women were employed in the hospitality, transport and trade sector in Germany in 2004. Thus, the branch seems to be of particular interest for a large amount of women. Nevertheless, only one third of the executives of the service industry were women in 2004. (Federal Statistical Office 2006, 28.) According to Rolus (2002, 98-115), German companies appear to neglect women from being promoted. Koller-Teijero referred to the Hoppenstedt analysis about women in management in 1995 which revealed that only 8.2 % of the total management in companies in Germany were women. Actually, only 6.9 % of women worked in top management and 3.2 % of the highest top executives in large companies. (Weidner 1999, 22.)

Despite of adjustments by women in terms of higher educational levels, 70 % of the leading positions in 2006 were still held by men (Droßard 2008, 3-4). In 2004, 49 % of over 231,000 successfully passed exams at German universities were written by women. 42 % of the graduation year had a university degree, but only 3 % Bachelor and 2 % Master degree. The share of women in academic studies has increased in the last years. (Federal Statistical Office 2006, 16-23.)

Interestingly, Wirth did not doubt that the situation of women in the labor market has enhanced over the last decades as their admittance to education and development opportunities has improved. As a consequence, women nowadays possess the required qualifications to adopt jobs in higher management positions. However, although a greater amount of female employees enters higher-job levels, they remain underrepresented in senior management positions. These inequalities are reflected, for instance, in their participation in decision-making, payment differences and family commitment. Indeed, women tend to possess part-time or temporary jobs with lower value, status and insecure future prospects. Thus, one might hypothesize that women face constraints due to the glass ceiling effect in their advancement as their chances of being promoted seem to be limited to a certain degree. (Wirth 2001, 4-6.)

Female newcomers who have actually managed to advance to directors are given special attention by the media as they affirm the assumption of the fading of the glass ceiling. However, it was argued that leadership is still dominated by men. (Singh & Vinnicombe 2003, 349-351.) With regard to Germany, Professor Dr. Volkert of the University of Pforzheim was convinced that the German leadership elite is stamped by men since women virtually do not appear in top positions. Apparently, women obtain better A-levels and complete university studies earlier than men; after this point however, they are confronted with constraints. According to Volkert, the higher they attempt to climb up the career ladder, the more difficult it becomes. (Focus online 2009.)

Germany meets with 30 % of female executives the European average (see appendix 1). Indeed, the EU report 2009 stipulated gender inequality related to pay and leadership positions despite of some notable progress. The share of women in leadership positions remained constant; women stay in female sectors and seem to have fewer prospects than men. More than six million women between 25 and 49 years have mentioned their inability to perform work or only part time work due to family reasons. (Commission of the European Union 2009, 4-6.)

Furthermore, in Germany, the number of women in important economic areas still does not correspond proportionally to their share of the total population (Federal Statistical Office 2006, 3). Statistics reveal that the share of women of the entire population represented approximately 51 % meaning 42.1 million women out of 82.5 million in 2004. In Germany, women have an average of 1.4 children. It was argued that women generally select different occupations than men. Concerning the hotel business, approximately 23,000 women decided to learn "management assistant for the hotel industry" in 2004 in comparison to approximately 8.000 men. (Federal Statistical Office 2006, 10-19.)

1.2 Research problem

In correspondence to the preliminary discussed background of the topic, the research in this thesis is concerned with the question of how women can break the glass ceiling in order to advance to executive positions in the German hospitality industry. The background analysis revealed that women seem to be underrepresented in valued and powerful jobs. Thus, taking this into consideration, one might hypothesize an interconnection between the glass ceiling and a scarcity of females in powerful positions in terms of stereotyping, equal employment opportunities and work-life balances.

In general, the human resources topic is related to the broader field of gender studies referring to differences in treatment, development and advancement of women in their profession. In particular, for the purpose of revealing the significance and relevance of the glass ceiling in the hospitality branch in Germany, this paper aims at obtaining specific findings from women in hotel leadership positions first hand, in order to properly discuss the topic. Hence, the reseach problem and its subquestion have been defined in figure 1.

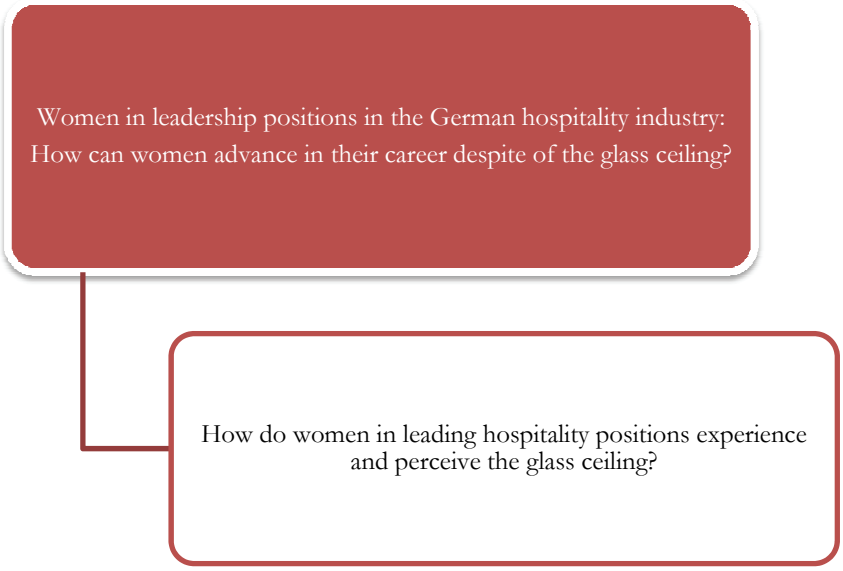

Figure 1. The main research question followed by a supporting sub-question

The research questions (figure 1) were developed from the sensitive and wide-ranging complex area of gender egalitarianism. I specifically intended to research the possibility for women to break the glass ceiling and advance to top positions. This purpose is reflected in the formulation of the research question starting with the interrogative pronoun "how". Actually, the question was consciously phrased positively on the one hand while hypothesizing that women are able to ascend to higher levels in order to reveal ways of how female advancement can be realized. On the other hand, rather pessimistic associations can be derived from the term glass ceiling that refers to potential obstacles that hinder women from their professional development.

Hence, this combination of optimistic and pessimistic aspects mirror the predetermined directions and the potential of the research question in order to complete a lack of knowledge concerning female advancement tools in the German hospitality industry and making contributions to the research area in this context.

1.3 Aims/ objectives

This thesis focused on one major objective: the identification of opportunities to break the glass ceiling. The dissertation objectives presented in figure 2 focus on the following elements.

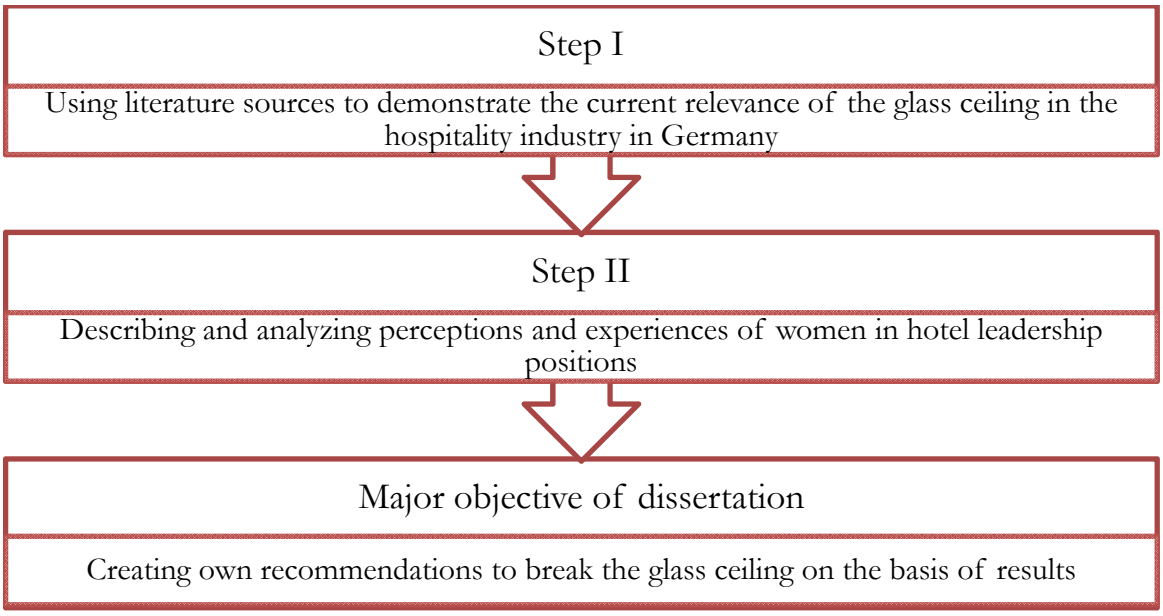

Figure 2. Summary of steps and aims that indicate the necessary steps in order to concentrate on the main objective of the dissertation

As a prerequisite, the objectives (figure 2) included portraying the current situation of women in the hospitality industry in Germany while simultaneously examining reasons for a lack of females in executive positions. Therefore, the process entailed the revelation of concrete problems that Germany seems to face when taking its low rate of females in the highest decision-making positions into account. Hence, underlying patterns of the characteristics that either encourage or limit women's career development on the basis of experiences and perceptions will be identified leading to the third point in which focus will be laid on appropriate solutions. Consequently, in order to suggest ways for women to advance in their career, this research aimed at portraying tools with which women can manage the breaking of the glass ceiling.

1.4 Purpose and justification for the research

Since the aspect of diversity in the hospitality industry gradually becomes a significant factor for global corporations, there is a definite need to successfully manage people and provide