



Bettina Al-Sadik-Lowinski (Autor)

Typology of career paths of international Top Women Managers - Global orientation pattern for qualified women in management

Typologie der Karrierewege von internationalen Topmanagerinnen - Orientierungsmuster für qualifizierte Frauen im Management



Dr. Bettina Al-Sadik-Lowinski

Typology of career paths of international Top Women Managers -

Global orientation pattern for qualified women in management

Typologie der Karrierewege von internationalen Topmanagerinnen -
Orientierungsmuster für qualifizierte Frauen im Management



Cuvillier Verlag Göttingen
Internationaler wissenschaftlicher Fachverlag

<https://cuvillier.de/de/shop/publications/8457>

Copyright:

Cuvillier Verlag, Inhaberin Annette Jentsch-Cuvillier, Nonnenstieg 8, 37075 Göttingen,

Germany

Telefon: +49 (0)551 54724-0, E-Mail: info@cuvillier.de, Website: <https://cuvillier.de>



1. Typology of career paths of international Top Women Managers - Global orientation pattern for qualified women in management

Women worldwide are still often the minority in top management so the career paths and patterns of successful role models can offer guidance and real inspiration for other women. Career typologies of women in senior management functions can support other women when they set their career plans and need to make decisions.

One outcome of the international research driven from the Global Women Career Lab is an intercultural career typology of top women managers in various countries, which offers valuable insights into women strategies for building careers. The typology analysis role model focuses on how women who achieved top management positions around the world built their careers and the characteristics go with it. The analysis describes the five career types which were most frequent in the research group.

Different to the handful of existing typologies for women in management, the majority of the women researched here show patterns and paths where career decisions are not made with a focus on family or other external conditions. Most women have pursued an unbounded career, often globally and changing employers in order to rise up the corporate hierarchy.

Experienced coaches can use the Global Women Career Lab typology to stimulate reflection on career decisions and shed light on the choices of women in management levels. The typology also shows HR experts that talented women chose companies according to the opportunities they offered for women to rise in senior management.

According to a global study by Grant Thornton, the average proportion of women in senior management positions worldwide was twenty nine percent in 2020 and has risen slowly since 2014. Women remain under-represented at the top of the corporate hierarchy in most countries around the world. In many places, „pioneering female CEOs“ continue to be celebrated and this only highlights the growing stagnation. Even though women worldwide are still a minority in upper management positions the situation differs on the world map. Countries like Russia, China and France have a higher proportion of women in senior management whereas Germany or Japan are on the lower ranks (Thornton 2017,2018,2019).

Having more women in management positions delivers greater benefits for companies and more economic power for countries. Although the proportion of women in middle management positions has increased worldwide, equality between men and women in senior management has yet to be achieved. A Peterson Institute for International Economics survey of 21,980 listed companies in 91 countries found that a higher proportion of female managers in a company equates to higher profitability. Research by McKinsey and Women Matter (2012), Catalyst (2016) and Noland at the Petersen Institute (2016) shows that a higher proportion of women on company boards delivers higher profits and better overall company performance. These findings are confirmed by other research around the world. A variety of studies and

views exist as to the causes, however, the continued dearth of female role models is well-recognized and the number of women in senior corporate positions is still low.

In order to increase the presence of women in C-suite functions various actions have been put into place in different countries on political, societal and organizational levels. Furthermore, the support of qualified women, for example, through tailored coaching for women leaders, can be an effective tool to support women rising on an individual level. Areas like career planning and the right decision making with career alternatives have an important function in coaching women leaders.

The research of the Global Women Career Lab (Al-Sadik-Lowinski 2017, 2018, 2020) offers a wealth of knowledge about female careers and leadership in various cultural contexts. It also provides tools such as the FemCareer-Model and the FemCareer-Assessment for coaching women leaders to rise to their next career level. One result of the ongoing international research is an intercultural career typology of top women managers in various countries such as France, China, Japan, Russia and Germany. Typologies solely focused on women in top management are still rare in literature despite offering valuable insights into women strategies with career building. Career typologies can support women in their career planning and decisions as they offer role model patterns for how women who achieved top management positions around the world built their careers and what characteristics go with it.

Qualified women benefit from more intercultural research into the careers of top female managers

Looking at the available research on women in senior management, it is striking that career research in the field of management has for a long time focused exclusively on the experiences of men. One reason for this is surely the fact that the numbers of women in top management worldwide have historically been limited and were based on a male perspective. More and more international researchers, such as O'Neil (2013) and Lepine (1992), are developing women-specific approaches because they believe that women's careers follow different patterns than those of men. Even if conventional, hierarchically structured careers still predominate in many companies around the world today, career patterns other than the purely traditional ones can already be observed amongst women. This is reflected in the career paths of the high-flying women surveyed in the Global Women Career Lab research. International research on women in top management positions is rare, compared to in-country studies. While several researchers have analyzed the careers of women within countries, multinational observations are rare, partly due to the complexities of data collection.

Women career typologies offer valuable information for coaching women leaders

One result of the ongoing international research is an intercultural career typology of top women managers in various countries. Career typologies can support women in their career planning and decisions. They offer role model patterns showing how women who already achieved top management positions around the world have built their careers and what characteristics go with it. Women in executive management have a number of questions to answer during their career paths. Questions about changing companies or not and if they are changing, based on what criteria, moving abroad or staying local, and questions about pursuing specialist paths versus broader paths are some of the important decisions

which women are facing. These are supplemented by questions connected with the typical determinants of women careers such as gender equality, family organization, women's career orientation and motivation. Each career type combines various determinants which have been identified of being important for the success of women leaders in management. This research-based typology can be used during coaching of women in management functions around the globe to stimulate career decisions and consideration of choices.

The Global Women Career Lab: Research-based analysis of the career paths of female role models in leading economies

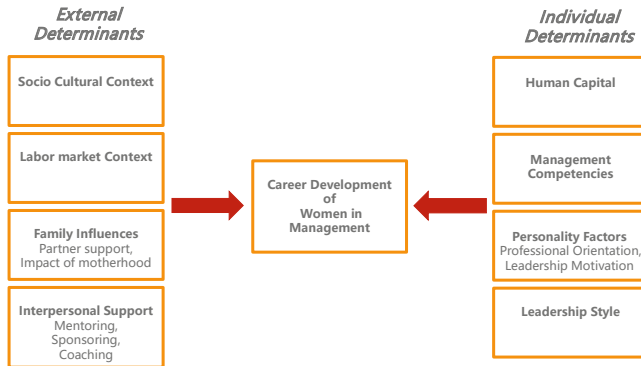
The Global Women Career Lab is a unique international research project carried out in five countries from 2014 until 2020. A total of 110 women in top executive positions at multinational companies participated. To date, women in senior management positions from economically leading nations - France, Germany, Russia, Japan and China - participated. The economies considered in this research represent the upper, middle and lower portions of the global rankings for the number of women in managerial positions.

The career paths of these women involved more than 500 companies worldwide, with work being undertaken in over 21 countries. For the research-based, empirical study the top female executives, qualitative in-depth interviews were carried out.

All of the women interviewed here are executives in leading positions, primarily working in international companies. The women were selected through a process based on theoretical sampling. Semi-structured, problem-centered interviews were conducted to collect empirical data, which was evaluated and analyzed using a scientific approach, with the help of reductive qualitative structured content analysis. Parts of this project formed a dissertation overseen by the University of Burgundy in France.

So how are women's career paths and pattern currently handled? They are being compromised by longstanding tension between society's view of what roles women should play, the opportunities for women in companies and the goals and constraints of the women themselves. A variety of contextual factors influence the progression of a female manager's career. The analysis in the Global Women Career Lab is based on a framework called the FemCareer-Model (Al-Sadik-Lowinski, 2017) in which important determinants of women's careers are encapsulated. The model was the guiding principle for the interviews with 110 top female executives as well as for the evaluation; it helped serve as the road map for the overall research, analysis and typology.

Al-Sadik-FemCareer-Model



SOURCE: Dr. Bettina Al-Sadik-Lowinski, 2017

Figure 1: **The FemCareer-Model** (Al-Sadik-Lowinski, 2017)

The Female Career Model focuses on external determinants and individual influences on the careers of female senior executives that result in different career paths and plans. These paths and patterns are regarded as being tangibly affected – to a greater or lesser extent – by determinants. The paths and pattern have both descriptive and evaluative components. The external influences are ones that impact on women’s careers from the outside in the form of overarching conditions. External influences derive from the cultural traditions of society, the labor market situation, specific aspects of gender policy, familial situations and interpersonal support. Interpersonal support refers to personal support systems such as networks, mentors and supportive superiors. Taken together, these factors form the external framework within which the women’s careers develop.

Individual influences are made up of aspects that are specific to the participants, grounded in their personal backgrounds and personalities, and linked to their career paths. They include their educational backgrounds, particular skills, aspects of their personalities that are relevant to their careers and their specific leadership styles. Career paths are associated with individual assessments of career success and can be expressed through various factors such as individuals’ personal level of satisfaction and the position they have achieved in an organization’s hierarchy. Paths describe the particular positions a person has held over the course of their career and the choices they have made. The model is also informed by findings from current literature on women’s careers and incorporates critical career determinants which are not limited to particular countries.

The total number of interviewed women, 110, is big for a qualitative research project but does not allow for generalizations to be made and must be interpreted in the context of a qualitative research. Quasi-statistical analysis, however, was carried out in subcategories where it made sense to do so and provides a picture of the women’s preferred career types and pattern.

The results by country have been carefully interpreted in the cultural and economic context of each country. Interested readers can learn more about the specific socio cultural and economic

gender situation of each country in the more detailed, overall publication of the research (Al-Sadik-Lowinski, 2020).

Participants of the Global Women Career Lab research - a carefully selected sample with role modeling character

The participants in the Global Women Career Lab come from China, Russia, Japan, Germany and France and represent a wide age range. The 110 women selected for the Global Women Career Lab were between 32 and 63 years old. The majority were 45-55 years old. The women over 60 came from China, Germany and France. The companies in which the women worked at the time of the interviews are primarily global businesses, only some local companies were included. The career paths of the women selected cover more than 500 companies across the globe. It was important that the women chosen to take part in the research represented a broad range of sectors. Overall, the women worked in over 20 different sectors, with a focus on Industry and Service. The Industry sector, for example, covered many different areas of business including automotive, pharmaceuticals, steel processing, household, food, consulting, fashion, travel, luxury goods, telecommunications, media and more.

Theoretical sampling was used to ensure that the appropriate women were selected in keeping with the research questions to be covered. The sampling for the lab was driven by a separate definition of "women in top management" which included hierarchical positions of the level one (CEO, GM) and minus one. In addition, the following areas were important for the selection of women: their freedom of decision making, the degree of influence on corporate strategy, personal responsibility, budget responsibility and the number of employees. Only salaried women, not women entrepreneurs, were considered for the research investigation.

Background from management literature: Women's career patterns exhibit a wider range and variety than those of men

The career patterns developed with a view to women's careers in existing research are of significance to the analysis of the findings of the Global Women Career Lab. Career patterns serve as a theoretical foundation and framework of reference. Several researchers have addressed questions concerning career patterns and paths (Lepine, 1992; Lyness and Thompson, 2000; O'Neil et al., 2008) in order to describe women's career patterns more precisely. A career path is generally defined as a trajectory of work-related experiences in which an individual has engaged over the course of their life. It describes how a person progresses from their first job to their current one. A career pattern can be defined as a consistent and recurring characteristic or trait that helps to characterise a career and serves as an indicator or model for predicting future career behaviour. These two concepts are often used interchangeably in the literature. Vinkenburg and Weber (2012) analysed managerial career patterns in a review of empirical studies. They state that the existing empirical evidence on managerial career patterns is rather limited and that upward mobility is still the norm, even when contrasted with "new" careers. Familiar, traditional paths are typified by strong upwards mobility and leave little space for sideways moves or frequent changes of organisation. These paths demand advancement-oriented executives who strive for a vertical career. Lehnert (1996) describes "serpentine" careers, where employees rise up the ranks by switching between organisations. This career form still follows a fixed path that remains relatively similar to the traditional career path. However, the possibility of changing job requirements is integral to this career type.

Several researchers suggest that women's careers are uniquely different from men's and exhibit a broader range and variety of paths (Hurley and Sonnenfeld, 1997; Lepine, 1992; O'Neil et al., 2008). Patterns range from traditional, hierarchical advancement and corporate ladders (Lyness and Thompson, 2000), to "snake-like" patterns (Richardson, 1996) and "zigzag patterns" (Gersick and Kram, 2002). Research participants of Gersick and Kram described their career paths as zigzag-like. The findings suggest that women experience transitional periods pegged to the turn of each decade of their lives, involving shifts in the content and priority of one or more elements of their life structure. These periods are reflected in their career development and differ in various ways from those of men. Half of the women in Lepine's (1992) research are employed in a traditional upwardly mobile career and the other half in patterns that can be categorised as downward, lateral, transitory or static. A somewhat divergent but fundamentally similar account is offered by Huang and Sverke (2007), who describe women's occupational paths as diverse, exhibiting patterns such as upward mobility, stability, downward mobility and fluctuation. Hurley and Sonnenfeld (1997), meanwhile, investigated the question of whether the tournament model of career as a series of wins and losses in a race to the top is applicable to women's careers. They concluded that the model is not valid for women to the same degree. All these approaches address the distinctive features of women's careers and attempt to express these features in models that replace or expand traditional patterns. These models are associated with dynamism, mobility, flexibility and employability to a greater or lesser extent.

O'Neil et al. (2004) combined sociological factors, path and context, and psychological factors, choice and control, in their career model. Patterns were characterised as a continuum between ordered (planned, organised) and emergent (serendipitous, circuitous). The ordered pattern can be characterised as being strategically planned and executed. An emergent career follows a reactive rather than a proactive path, with unexpected twists and turns and serendipitous events. It is designed to accommodate aspects of one's life other than traditional work. The "kaleidoscope career" exhibits aspects of an emergent career. Loci were characterised on a continuum between external and internal. An internal locus is manifested in the belief that one is responsible for one's own career and is in charge of creating and managing one's career by oneself. An external locus expresses the belief that the course that a career takes is caused by chance or other external interventions, such as networks or contacts from which career opportunities emanate. The career patterns developed with a view to women's careers that have been described above are of significance when analysing the findings of the Global Women Career Lab. They form a theoretical foundation and framework of reference.

The Career typology of top women managers around the globe

The first criterion for developing the typology driving the research of the Global Women Career Lab was the women's career paths. The first step was to assess whether the career path was "bounded" (organizational career constrained to a single company) and followed a traditional linear or ladder-like structure, or if the career path was "boundaryless" (as per DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994) with no ties or only weak ties to particular companies. Boundaryless careers were defined as "sequences of job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of a single employment setting". Traditional bounded or "organizational careers", on the other hand, evolve within the context of a single company (Arthur and Rousseau, 2001).

In accordance with the definitions of O'Neil et al. (2004) it was also assessed whether careers were ordered or emergent. Alongside these criteria, the typology also incorporated geographic mobility as this was of great importance in most of the career paths included in this study. Distinctions are drawn between international mobility, local mobility within one country and career paths confined to one metropole. The career determinants that had a particular impact on different subgroups were taken from among the external and individual factors described in the original research publication (Al-Sadik-Lowinski, 2017). It was assessed which factors had a stronger or weaker impact on the women's career paths. The women's personalities and motivations were criteria that could be derived from the individual determinants. The classification of impact as strong or weak was based on the women's descriptions and, in line with the qualitative character of the study as a whole; the classification is not quantified on a scale. The classification is hence subjective and unsuitable for quantitative comparisons.

Table 1 shows an overview of the five career patterns that emerged from the analysis of the career paths. How strongly the determinants influenced the careers was defined as follows: "(Very) High" refers to factors that are highly and continuously relevant for the career paths of all the women in a particular subgroup. "Medium" refers to career determinants that were described a few times by some of the women in this group. "Low" refers to factors that were described as being of little or no relevance, were not mentioned at all or were mentioned by less than ten percent of the women in the group. The results are presented in percentage, as the country group sizes differ slightly with the Chinese mainland group being the biggest sample and the Japanese group being the smallest. The descriptions incorporate the earlier findings from the qualitative content analysis of the group as a whole. The main characteristics of the different types are described in detail below.

The top women managers feel responsible for their own career advancement and in charge of managing it

The results of the analysis suggest there is a more internal career locus by the great majority of the women, defined as the belief that one is responsible for one's own career and in charge of managing it. Few responses in the group pointed to a more external career locus, whereby a career occurs as a result of chance or other external interventions from which the career opportunities emanate. When the accounts are analysed as a whole, however, such responses are always subordinate to the women's own goal-focused career planning and desire for career advancement.

Another factor that became apparent in the women's descriptions of their planned career steps was how self-reliant they are in planning their careers. Although they attribute a role to factors such as chance and opportunity or being in the right place at the right time for determining the paths their careers have taken, what predominates in the women's descriptions is their own proactive action, initiative and planning: spotting opportunities and then seizing them. These descriptions suggest an internal career locus.

For these women, career planning relates to exposure and looking for allies. The women specifically looked for and accepted positions that promised a high level of exposure in their companies. According to the women, exposure increases their chances of advancing further. Here once again, the women took the initiative and planned how they could maximise their visibility in their companies. They also involved key decision-makers in their career plans and continuously worked to win and retain their support. What is relevant here is the women's

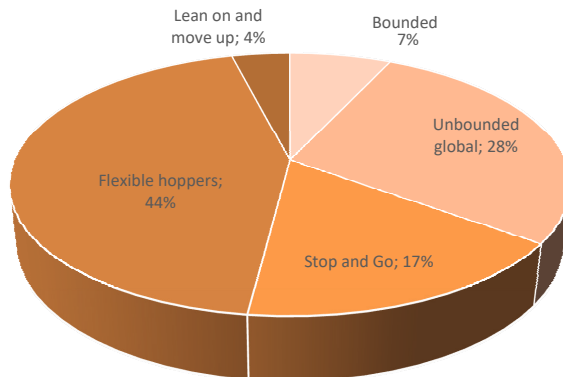
individual planning and the ways in which they exerted influence on these connections. These factors also support the attribution of an internal career locus in keeping with the definition by O'Neil.

Five patterns of women in senior management: Bounded – Unbounded global – Stop and Go – Flexible hoppers – Lean on and move up

The five career types which have been analysed in this global research can stand as exemplary for typical career pattern of successful women who rose to very senior positions over the course of their careers. Women at early stages could use these types to discuss with their mentor or coach which pattern appeals to them more and which one less. In later career stages, women can use the typology to reflect on their choices. Is the chosen path still the right one for their overall direction in life, or is change a better alternative? The typology allows women in management to identify areas which need to be clarified and the best fit pattern for their professional circumstances and their individual life goals. In executive coaching the typology can be a resonant framework to reflect and foster individual choices.

The chart below provides a breakdown of the career types of top women managers interviewed.

Chart 1: Global Career Typology of top women managers- breakdown of five career types of women in senior management



The main characteristics of the different types are described in detail below, followed by an overall conclusion.

Table 1: Global Career Pattern Typology of top women managers

(Al-Sadik-Lowinski, 2021)

	Bounded	Unbounded Global	Stop and go	Flexible hoppers	Lean on and move up
Career path	Bounded	Unbounded			
Mobility	Local/global	Global	Local/global	Local	Local
Pattern	Ordered ladder	Ordered linear	Emergent	Ordered serpentine	Emergent/ordered
Career locus	Internal	Internal	Internal	Internal	External
Determinant					
Individual Motivation	<i>Organisational Loyalty</i>	<i>Achievement orientation Assertiveness</i>	<i>Balance roles</i>	<i>Assertiveness, curiosity and variety</i>	<i>Loyalty to mentor Developing others</i>
Career orientation	<i>very high</i>	<i>very high</i>	<i>high</i>	<i>very high</i>	<i>high</i>
Family orientation	<i>Low</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>medium to high</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>
Mentoring/Sponsoring	<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium (various)</i>	<i>Very high</i>
Networking internal	<i>very high</i>	<i>high</i>	<i>medium</i>	<i>high</i>	<i>very high</i>
Networking external	<i>high</i>	<i>very high</i>	<i>medium</i>	<i>very high</i>	<i>medium</i>
Chinese mainland	10%	29%	23%	29%	9%
Chinese overseas	no	23%	48%	29%	no
German	12%	47%	no	41%	no
French	12%	24%	12%	46%	6%
Russian	no	6%	12%	82%	no
Japanese	no	57%	no	43%	no
Total Research group	7%	28%	17%	44%	4%

1. Bounded

Women with traditional, hierarchical bounded paths, who pursue their whole career in only one company, are a minority in the Global Women Career Lab. Their paths do not reflect the typical HR requirements of today's senior management. Despite this, women in this group can, and do, still rise to the highest corporate levels.

This career type only applies to 7% of all top women managers in the Global Women Career Lab, a distinct minority. These women's career paths are typified by a strong bond with their companies. This is typical of traditional, ladder-like career paths which according to career theory were common in the past and still remain so today in many cases, especially at large companies in countries such as Germany and France. All of the women in this group have only worked at a single company: there has been no intercompany mobility, and their careers can be described as bounded and upwards linear or ladder-like. This type was not found in the Russian and Japanese groups, which was surprising as in Japan bounded careers are usually the mainstream.

The bounded women have often reached highest levels within their company, being GM or CEO level, as well as chief supervisory board levels. They have responsibility for the whole company or major units at a national level. They have held a diverse range of positions in their companies, and hence have wide-ranging experience within the companies.

All women in this subtype of the global typology have internal career loci and plan their careers strategically with a focus on their company's corporate system and what it offers to them. All of the women associate career success with hierarchical advancement. Although there are other factors, the individual motivation of women in this group can be best described by organisational loyalty and adaptation to one corporate culture.

Over the course of their careers, the bounded women have demonstrated a high degree of flexibility and adaptability in responding to their company's requirements. This is evident in the women assuming responsibility for various areas. In doing so, they have developed their knowledge and experience strategically, which is characteristic of ordered career paths. These women got to know the corporate system of their company very well, understand the importance of alliances and used the power system of their specific employer strategically to rise to the highest company levels. All the women have a strong colleague network at their company's headquarters. External networks are also strong, but the focus of building alliances is internal for this group of women.

The careers of bounded women are evenly spread between national and global roles. Very national based careers are evident in some women in Europe, while most Chinese women were globally bounded. Older women typically have locally bounded careers whereas the younger women are more comfortable to change countries with the same company and later return to the head office.

In the group of Chinese women, it is notable that bounded careers pattern were typically showing with women working for German companies. These women were relocating between