

Abstract

The number of female employees occupying top executive positions has slowly but continuously been increasing during the past years. This year, the last standing all-male board on the S&P 500 companies accepted women in their ranks. The changing public sentiment, pressure from investors, and various legislations have incentivized organizations all over the world to add more women to their executive boards. Furthermore, research has shown that board gender diversity is also related to improved financial performance. However, achieving a leadership position is not automatically connected to the level of education, skills for innovation, nor professional achievements. Many studies have shown that leadership ability is wholly subjective, depending strongly on how your colleagues see you. There are unique challenges that women face when it comes to being perceived as leaders. Even though not many people would consciously support the idea that men are better leaders, when asked to draw a portrait of a leader, it is almost always a male figure.

The literature review identified three social phenomena that are Imposter Syndrome, the Double-Bind Paradox, and Unconscious Bias. This project will investigate the presence of this phenomenon in Austrian public companies. Although there are many studies about the diversity gap in executive positions in Austria, none of them analyze the reasons behind the difference.

With the help of structured questionnaires, primary data was collected from women occupying various positions in large companies with branches in Vienna. One hundred women holding positions in different levels in publicly listed companies in Austria are invited for the survey study. Eighty-nine of the invited persons participated in the survey by giving 84 valid questionnaires. After the data is analyzed, the results show the presence of all three social phenomena in all the participants of the study. Although on the bright side, most of the companies have started to notice these issues and take measures against them.