

Astrid Susanne Lang

Examining Expatriation

A Survey about Female Austrian Expatriate "Man"agers

Diploma Thesis

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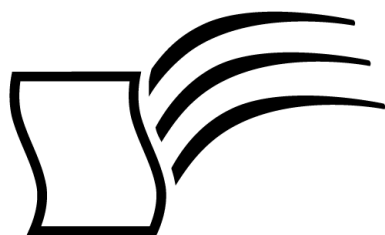
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Diplomica GmbH _____
Hermannstal 119k _____
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Fon: 040 / 655 99 20 _____
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1. INTRODUCTION

Despite women’s increased investment in higher education, their greater commitment to management as a career, the shortage of international managers and equal opportunity legislation, female managers in every country remain ‘only a tiny fraction’ [...]. (Izraeli & Adler, 1994, cited in Linehan, 2000, p. 11)

1.1. Situation

The placement of managers who can meet both local and international business challenges is of particular significance to the competitiveness of multinational corporations. Since the internationalization process of Austrian companies is still fledgling, human resource executives widely lack experience in expatriate issues; particularly when it comes to assigning women. Therefore, the selection and decision-making process frequently relies on assumptions, perceptions, and clichés. Although the number of women in management has slowly been increasing, female managers are still scarce in Austria – they are even more so in the international arena. This situation calls for exploratory research in order to ameliorate expatriation issues in the future.

1.2. Goals

The aim of this thesis is to portray the situation of Austrian female expatriate top and middle managers and to deduce knowledge about obstacles and biases women had to master in order to break into the male domain of foreign assignments and – above

all - to perform successfully in the international context. Research in the area of international human resource management has mainly been conducted by Americans and has primarily dealt with expatriation from the Northern American area. It therefore rather provides an American than an international perspective. Thus, the practical validity of results deriving from the existing literature will be empirically examined as regards their applicability to Europe and especially to Austria. Since the experience of female Austrian expatriates has only been analyzed in some studies (such as Fischlmayr, 1999, 2002; Fischlmayr & Hofbauer, 2002; Fischlmayr & Schroll-Machl, 2003 in print), this study valuably contributes to domestic research on female expatriation.

1.3. Questions

In order to portray the situation of female Austrian expatriate managers, problem oriented narrative interviews were conducted. Even though qualitative research evokes some critique, it is ideal to gather data to provide valuable insights into individual perceptions and experiences. Prevailing literature has led to the following key questions, which will be answered in the empirical survey:

- Did the female Austrian expatriates attribute being female as generally (rather) advantageous or as (rather) disadvantageous with regard to their foreign assignment?
- Which particular advantages and disadvantages did the interviewees experience by virtue of their femaleness?
- How did the interviewees perceive the different roles (both from a professional and private viewpoint) they took in the host countries compared to the domestic environment and how did they handle these differences?
- Did the interviewees encounter prejudice on the part of their domestic human resource executives?
- Did they encounter prejudice in their host countries by virtue of their identities as women/foreign managers/female managers?

- Which problems did the interviewed female Austrian expatriate managers face in foreign countries?
- Is the proportion of single Austrian female expatriates higher compared to married ones?
- Which typical barriers did the female Austrian expatriates encounter who relocated either as singles or without their partners and how did they feel about being alone?
- Which overall impression did arise about the interviewed female Austrian managers’ self-esteem and behavior?
- Which coping strategies did the surveyed female Austrian expatriate managers apply?
- Which resources did the interviewees use to cope with their problems?

1.4. Procedure

As announced above, this thesis is based on a theoretical examination of literature about women expatriate managers and an empirical survey of female Austrian management expatriates. The theoretical part comprises a literature review as well as background facts and figures about the situation of female (international) managers in Austria and serves as a means to set up a framework for the interviews.

In order to develop an understanding of the topic, the theoretical part first examines Austria’s traditional foreign interweavements, the “typical” company organization structure of both private and public corporations, and its impact on women in management. Beyond that, facts and figures indicating the economic, educational and labor situation in Austria, as well as labor force participation rates will be analyzed and compared to EU average. A glimpse will be provided at the Austrian culture following different cultural index models. An explanation for the relative scarcity of female (international) managers in Austria will be sought.