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“Main Job Criteria: Male”

Can women take control seats within DAX companies? What qualifies board members anyway? A look at large German businesses.

By Angela Hornberg

This quota makes everyone nervous. Some women claim that the guys are fearful of losing the territories they (unlawfully) hoard while some men say that women are hoping for careers for which these gals do not qualify. According to the plans of the big political coalition, by 2016 a third of all board member positions must be filled by women. This pertains actually only to 110 - in words; one hundred and ten- co-determined business enterprises listed on the stock exchange. That is about 1500 supervisory board positions of which 500 must now be given to women or remain unoccupied. About 200 women have already landed such a position. Only another 300 women must now be found who have what it takes to control some of the largest companies in the stock market.

Too much commotion about nothing? Apparently this issue has enormous symbolic value. All hysteria would break loose should the government decide to contract a quota which would mandate that 20 percent of all football team players be homosexual. Perhaps this even reflects the status quo but is at least not overtly noticeable to the general public. Now women mandated in supervisory board positions? Where will this take us?

Until now the subject of supervisory boards has not been a theme of public debate. Who cares which forces watch over the big players of business anyway? All we get in the media is the following sentence from the protocols of self-proclaimed experts: “Whomever aspires to obtain a choice position on the board of any DAX company must at least have already occupied a comparable position in a company or acted as director of such a middle sized DAX company before.”

Exactly. Only very experienced managers sit on German supervisory boards! The kind of machos with rolled up sleeves, ready for hard work and who know all the tricks of the trade. Those tough guys able to keep their board brothers in check so that our heavily laden ships of billions can navigate safely through the global waters of commerce. For instance, someone like former FDP General Secretary Patrick Doering who occupies a supervisory board position with the German Rail. No one questions his qualifications? He is a man. Men can do this.

That is why also Friedrich Merz sits on a supervisory board. After his legal studies he was initially with the European Parliament for 23 years and thereafter in the Bundestag. During which time he obviously collected endless amounts of business experience. Surely he was capable of steering more than just his car correctly, perhaps even that of his child’s sled or the shopping cart in the supermarket. He is unquestionably capable of greatness and that is why he not only sits on the supervisory board of the German stock exchange but also on the supervisory boards

of Axa, Borussia Dortmund and HSBC Trinkhaus & Burkhart. He is even the chairman of the supervisory board for the holding company Wepa. He undoubtedly possesses great knowledge of their major business – toilet paper.

A whole roster of former politicians have joined the supervisory board positions at RWE such as the mayor of Dortmund, Ullrich Sierau, the district administrator of the Rhein-Seig-Kreises, Frithjof Kuehn, the former district administrator of the Eifelkreises Bitburg-Pruem, Roger Graef and surprisingly to note, also the former Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel. Is it not common knowledge that politics and energy are the same thing?

Now to continue...when pulling the comb of competence through the hairy braid of the DAX supervisory boards, certain aspects become surprisingly visible:

There is a social educator who runs a project for delinquent teenagers sitting on the supervisory board of Heidelberg-Cement. Not one of those business geeks but a personal shareholder! Tobias Merckle is his name and he runs it together with his brother Ludwig. After their father entrepreneur Adolf Merckle's suicide, the one brother saved the world and the other, the inheritance. These after all, are the kind of business skills which supervisory boards of the largest German building companies deem highly important. How could a woman do the same job? Impossible!

Lawyer, business consultant and tax advisor, Wilhelm Haarmann sits on the board at SAP since 1988 and swimming world champion Alexander Popow sits on the board of Adidas. Other than his gold medals and knowledge gained at the Academy of Sports, he has little business sense to bring to the table. A chemist from the ETH in Zuerich called Francois Diederich is responsible for the laboratory for organic chemistry and is in control of the supervisory board at BASF. He understands volumes about the initial synthesis of carbon hydroxides (Kekulen) which are special polycyclical aromatic compounds - incalculable assets for a supervisory board!

The astro-physicist, Kaspar von Braun controls the board at Henkel together with banker Ferdinand Groos as well as asset managers Boris Canessa and Theo Siebert. It would be fun to be a fly on the wall during one of their board meeting reports regarding the product development of wallpaper paste, shampoo and underarm deodorants.

Another example of the indispensable male competence among German supervisory boards? Yes, we have another one for you:

BMW is a prime example of German engineering artistry combined with the highest level of management expertise. And who sits upon the supervisory board of this global company whose products transport this industrial nation's fame throughout the world? Reinhard F. Huettl, a German forest and soil scientist, Stefan Quant, the son and Susanne Klatten, the daughter(oops, a woman, can she do this?) (note-son and daughter of who?) as well as chairman of the board Joachim Milberg, an experienced scientist who got his doctorate at the tender age of fifty at the Technical University and then changed over to BMW. Totally understandable- because the man



is a man! He went directly into a board position and after only six years rose to become the chairman thereof. So nine years total of practical experience was enough for one of his gender. It is also absolutely normal that such a man will exercise his influence on other boards such as Festo, Bertelsmann, with John Deere and SAP, at ZF Friedrichshafen and Allianz, at the Leipziger fair and at MAN and Shell. And these guys should leave now just to make place for women to take over supervisory board positions? Perhaps a woman from the 438 university professors of MINT fields of study (Math, Computer Science, Physics, Biology, Chemistry and Technology) or someone from the thousands of highly qualified women who in the last twenty years have worked on the faculties of international business schools and who received the best management degrees and have since endeavored upon diverse careers? Okay, let's not all get too uptight now!