



DIVERSITY IN THE PALEO EXECUTIVE SUITE

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Over the past decades, women have become increasingly vocal about the glass ceiling in companies, politics etc. – but what happens when women make it all the way to the board? And: is the glass ceiling really a phenomenon that men aren't exposed to? Some reflections on who is likely to encounter glass ceilings, why that is, and how to outsmart that construct.

I have worked with a handful of women in Germany who had made it to the board of DAX 30 companies. Great personalities, remarkable success stories - no doubt reaching the board was the crowning of their professional ambitions, right? Not quite: I met all these women at a point where they were more or less considering throwing in the towel. They were unimpressed with decision-making processes and other behavioural patterns demonstrated in board meetings. They felt they weren't making the impact they had hoped for and had lost their clout, while disappointing

the expectations of their influential supporters. And they resented falling back into immature behaviours themselves, among other issues. What kept them hanging in there was the loyalty they felt for the company, and for key mentors who had opened doors for them. Now, understandably, they hesitated to let them down and give up. These were all women, and the boards in question mostly male, but I'd like to highlight a different divide:

Behavioural mismatches

Today's glass ceilings are more about diversity than about gender. Of

course diversity in gender, nationality, age, and social class is important to reflect the changes in the consumer society within which companies operate. But limiting the diversity discussion to these easily observable characteristics is a trap, because these are unchangeable. This can lead to a victimisation mentality, and make us overlook underlying, more fluid dynamics. For in a corporate world that "theoretically" embraces diversity, it is often behavioural mismatches that feed rejection of individual players. This can and will change when the behaviour changes... It's always inspiring to look at those who "made it" despite being visibly different, and ask what allowed them to leave their mark, all while keeping their authentic voice.

People who have succeeded despite being "somehow different" are naturally a minority. They often are high achievers with excellent social skills and a natural presence. In many ways, they have all it takes to succeed in the new role – but mental roadblocks can