

# An Investigation of Top Management Teams' National Career Patterns in the Age of Globalization – Evidence from Eastern Europe\*

Anja Küpper, Tobias Dauth\*\*

## Abstract

Research on European business elites has been dominated by a national career model approach, which argues that each country has a specific top management career pattern embedded in national institutional contexts. Research has focused on applying those patterns to Western European countries while no analysis of Eastern European managers has been conducted to date. In recent years, the line of argumentation on national career patterns has been challenged due to the increasing international circulation of top managers. In this article, we analyse the applicability of these patterns to an Eastern European country, specifically, Poland. For this purpose, we analyse the career paths of Polish top management team members and investigate their development. We collect biographical data and career-related information from the top managers employed by the 30 largest stock-listed companies located in Poland and Germany. Our analysis reveals that the most important career distinctions from existing models are applicable to the Polish market, and our data show similarities with the Germanic national model. These results will likewise shed light on the stability of certain career pattern features of top management profiles.

**Keywords** Top Management Team, Board Internationalisation and Diversity, Germany, Poland

**JEL** F01, J11, M12

## 1 Introduction

Globalization confronts the management of firms with growing complexity. In this regard, internationally seasoned and diversified top managers are particularly qualified to cope with posed challenges (Nielsen 2010). The diversification of managers career paths may occur in many ways and comprises education, experiences, and knowledge, collected during times of international exposure. In existing research across national boundaries, national business elites have been characterized as a group of managers and top managers of the largest companies of a country (Bauer/Bertin-Mouroit 1996; Hartmann 2007; Davoine/Ravasi 2013). A great part of current research assesses the assets and capital held by top managers in relation to educational systems and institutions in

\* Received: 19.12.21, accepted: 19.11.22, 2 revisions

\*\* *Anja Küpper*, Dr., Leipzig Graduate School of Management, Germany. Email: anja.kuepper@hhl.de. Main research interest: Top management team internationalisation and diversity with a focus on Central and Eastern Europe

*Tobias Dauth*, Professor, Leipzig Graduate School of Management, Germany. Email: tobias.dauth@hhl.de. Main research interest: Corporate governance and board structures / Top management team internationalisation and diversity / Internationalisation of small and medium-sized firms / German-Polish economic relations

which they grew up. The structures and careers of those managers are often summarized as national career models. In the academic field there has been an increased focus in the last 30 years, especially on Western countries, on the national career model and the development of high potential managers in these models (Evans/Lank/Farquar 1989; Davoine/Ravasi 2013; Waters-Sobkowiak/Kowalski/Smits 2018). In today's world facing constant change and evolution due to the growing globalization of societies and the internationalization of business environments and relationships, new notions and aspects of these national models are established. The requirements for managers to enter top management positions and the aspects that play crucial roles in gaining those positions are subject to change in the international context. (Li/Huang 2019; Mateos de Cabo/Terjesen/Escot/Gimeno 2019; Tyrowicz/Terjesen/Mazurek 2020) This might affect managers' traditional career paths and their ways to the top. Globalization affects not only business environments, but also managers' ability to move and seek jobs across international borders. The increasing internationalization of companies and markets causes significant changes in Europe's national career models, where traditional modes of recruitment and the selection of top managers are deeply embedded (Staples 2007; Ruigrok/Greve 2008; Ginalski 2020).

Career paths of top managers and the embeddedness and reliance of those in national contexts have been investigated by numerous studies since the late eighties. In 1989, Evans et al., as a research team for INSEAD graduate business school, generated 4 career models of top managers, with a focus on the countries France, Germany, Great Britain and Japan. Although their original study has been conducted in the late eighties, their research was continuously followed up by several researchers. Even 30 years, after the set-up of the national career model, researchers still prove their accuracy today and have shown that they are still strongly present (Bauer/Bertin-Mouroit 1996; Mayer/Whittington 1999; Davoine/Ravasi 2013; Buehlmann/Davoine/Ravasi 2017). Their stability over time made them a milestone in career research (Davoine/Ravasi 2013) and were our key argument for choosing this approach as the basis of our study. No follow up research has been undertaken in the past years, which is the underlying necessity for the first part of our approach, to test the accuracy of the patterns today. Furthermore, the adaptability to other countries has only been extended to Switzerland (Buehlmann/Davoine/Ravasi 2017), which is why we aim for testing further countries' patterns.

Poland is one of Europe's strongest growth economies with no current fiscal downtrends. The market is very attractive for foreign investments from in- and outside Europe. It is therefore interesting and important to understand the markets' employee structures and the potential and probable challenges that lie within. The principal objective of this article is to test the adaptability of distinct patterns of national career models determined by cultural and institutional factors in the Polish market.

The identified research gap is the accuracy of Evans et al.'s (1989) career patterns today and their adaptability on new countries, that haven't been analysed until now. To answer the research question whether the Germanic career patterns is still valid we will study whether and if recent internationalization has altered Evans et al.'s (1989) defined career patterns for existing countries. To have a closer look at the second research questions, whether patterns are adaptable to new countries, we analyse to managers from Polish firms and comparing Poland to the German business elite and their career patterns. We investigate how international managers and international resources have become embroiled in this struggle for top management careers. We will study whether the educational programs, recruitment approaches and career patterns of Poland, a smaller country, follow the Germanic model or have been transnationalized and changed to a more global approach (Hartmann 2007; Staples 2007; Van Veen/Marsman 2008; Buehlmann et al. 2012).

In the first part of this paper, we will present the traditional national models of top management careers and their institutional embeddedness, followed by an analysis of the situation in Polish firms and adaptability of the patterns on Polish TMTs. A description of data and method is followed by an analysis of career patterns in Poland in comparison to Germany and a concluding discussion of the above sets of questions. In the final part we will present and discuss the results of our study by comparing variables on the adaptability of some distinctive national features and by showing points of convergence in the internationalization of profiles.

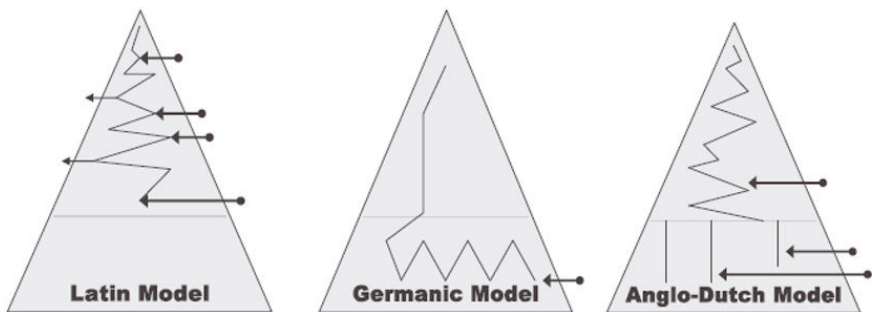
## 2 Top Management National Career Models

The basis of our research on managerial career patterns is a collection of definitions. Form and Miller (1949) "coined the term 'occupational career pattern' to denote the sequence and duration of work positions occupied by an individual". Super (1995) extended this view using a longitudinal perspective and extended the above definition with the number, duration and sequence of jobs. Driver (1979) added a cognitive aspect by including where the actual individual views his or her career at and what they think about their position (Savickas 2002). Career patterns or career models are visible paths of movement through organizations and companies vertically and horizontally from an outside perspective (Arnold/Cohen 2008). A fundamental aspect of the career concept is the movement and development through time (Savickas 2002), seen as a person's sequence of work experience and hierarchical movements (Arthur 1994, Higgins/Dillon 2007). Therefore, careers consist of two dimensions. These two dimensions are time, as the basic dimension, and progress, which represents the direction and movement of a career step, either upward, lateral or downward (Reitzle/Körner/Vondracek 2009). Lateral movement represents a functional

change in position while up- or downward development is often associated with moving from one hierarchical level to the next and therewith changes in pay, responsibilities and status (Ng/Eby/Sorensen/Feldmann 2005). These factors represent traditional objectives of career success. The terms career patterns, paths and models will be used interchangeably in the remainder of this study.

Based on the aforementioned definitions, a career is highly embedded in different contextual aspects. They depend on (1) the work context, such as labour markets; (2) education and work history; (3) society and culture and (4) the global context, such as the internationalization of businesses and companies (Mayrhofer/Meyer/Steyrer 2007; Davoine/Ravasi 2013). Evans et al. (1989) conducted research using high-potential employees in European corporations in the 1980s. They acknowledged four distinctive national career models of top management team career paths that are represented in Figure 1. They are labelled with national stereotypes: the Latin European approach, the Germanic tradition, and the Anglo-Dutch model. We excluded the Japanese Model in our research as it does not encompass the European market.

**Figure 1: National models of top management careers**



Source: Evans et al. 1989; Davoine/Ravasi 2013

## 2.1 Details on National Models in Literature

### *The Germanic Career Model*

In the Germanic model, and also to some extent in Switzerland and certain Scandinavian and Dutch firms, educational elitist recruitment and managerial potential identification, in terms of vocational and trainee job-rotation programs, are a well-rooted historic Germanic tradition for skilled and blue-collar employees, often even in cooperation with local schools and universities (Evans et al. 1989; Opitz 2005; Davoine/Ravasi 2013). After a few years of on-the-job training throughout various areas and functions, employees are guided into the appropriate positions. Then, a manager's career progresses in a single area of expertise to develop function-related and firm-related competencies and to

legitimize future positions, responsibilities, and authorities. This career type is often described as a “mountain climber career”, which means the career is within the chimney of an area of expertise (Stewart/Barsoux/Kieser/Ganter/Walgenbach 1994; Davoine/Ravasi 2013). Mountain climber careers are related to a high degree of “Fachwissen”, which means the technical expertise gained within the company. Stewart et al. (1994) use the expression “Management by Fachwissen” to describe how German management structures the principles of German organizations. The high legitimacy of professional knowledge furthermore explains the cooperative team approach most executive committees of German companies take, unlike their European colleagues who are usually generalists. Solely the high rate of doctorate holders shows a certain elitist approach. German companies value the expertise of university graduates based on the Humboldtian principle of education by research (Davoine/Ravasi 2013).

### *The Latin Career Model*

The career field labelled the “Latin career model” can be found and is preferred in the French career system. Talent is identified from the external labour market outside of the company. As there is no early qualification check, the entry criteria are based on institutionalized cultural capital, such as educational qualifications. The main qualification criterion is one’s diploma, aiming for elitist recruitment, not at the bottom of the pyramid but at a higher level with no trial period (Evans et al. 1989; Walther 2013). Given the importance of the degree and the tertiary institution, symbolic capital plays a crucial role. Diplomas from the so-called grandes écoles have a higher perceived value than diplomas from public universities as they are supposed to prepare people for future managerial positions and are specialized in selecting and preparing future top managers. Society expects predictive qualities from those graduates while management is more believed to be a profession, rather than an occupation, emerging from specialist positions (Evans et al. 1989). This view also reflects the skills taught at elitist schools: the ability to think in an intellectual, abstract way or the rapid and synthetic understanding of complex subjects (Davoine/Ravasi 2013; Walther 2013). The path to top management positions typically occurs in rapid, nonregulated career steps through various managerial positions and functional areas. Besides interfunctional mobility, the Latin model reflects a high rate of intercompany mobility (Evans et al. 1989; Bauer/Bertin-Mouroit 1996). While doctoral degrees do not represent important symbolic capital in the Latin career system, civil service is an important asset as one of the most important sources for legitimizing top management authority. This occurrence is linked to the important role the state plays in the economy (Davoine/Ravasi 2013).

### *The British Career Model*

The most general approach of management development is rooted in Anglo-Saxon culture. This approach is not only limited to the British labour market, but it is also visible in some Dutch and Scandinavian firms. The model presents less educational elite recruitment with potential detection by using assessment centres and standardized tools for performance appraisal (Klarsfeld/Mabey 2004; Davoine/Ravasi 2013). The managerial function in the Anglo-Dutch model is not linked to specific technical expertise or function and is rather expected to be capable of managing any kind of team with generic management skills. After company entry, high interfunctional mobility is projected with regular performance monitoring and verification. While universities do not seem to be a decisive institutional element, professional institutes play an important role in the United Kingdom. Training managers within the frame of vocational training does not follow strict academic requirements, but rather it is an important source of competencies, legitimacy and networks for managers. Especially in Great Britain, the trend of “self-made” managers, sometimes called “mountain climbers”, is visible. However, in contrast to the Germanic model, they only progress in a single area of expertise during the first phase of their careers, the potential identification phase. Once identified as having managerial potential, managers experience greater interfunctional mobility than in Germany.

### *2.2 Actuality of Career Paths Today*

In the last 20 years, the effect of globalization has changed certain national institutional settings and governance practices. It has caused the expansion of North American management models with new postgraduate programs such as MBA degrees and the increasing importance of experience in international Anglo-Saxon audit and consulting companies (Davoine/Ravasi 2013). This questions the effect on national managerial elites and national career models and the evolution of national elite profiles (Heijltjes/Olie/Glunk 2003; Ruigrok/Greve 2008; Van Veen/Marsmann 2008; Maclean/Harvey/Chia 2010). Internationalization is reflected in the enlarged mobility of top managers across Europe, which increases the presence of foreign managers in top management teams. The need for managers with general management skills and international networks represents the most serious threat to national models (Evans et al. 1989; Ruigrok/Greve 2008; Waters-Sobkowiak et al. 2018).

Twenty years after the identification of Evans et al.'s (1989) career models for INSEAD, the globalization trend is expected to have impacted the profiles of top European managers and the stability and convergence of national patterns. The literature shows a strong national institutional embeddedness often with deeply rooted elements in a country's history. This is expected to weaken the effect of internationalization on certain national patterns and the persistent distinctive

processes by which top managers are developed, identified and selected in different countries. Bauer and Bertin-Mourot conducted a study in 1996 to confirm the accuracy of Evans et al.'s models from 1989. The sample consisted of CEOs, not top management team members, and those CEOs' work for 200 of the largest companies in France, Germany and Great Britain. Data collected on educational and professional backgrounds focused on educational career, the impact of civil service, the time spent within an enterprise and the number of employers, all in direct relation to the national institutional context. The data collection took place throughout several years for the three different countries. For Germany and France, data at different time points were collected to determine the career patterns over time for the respective countries. While today's business world is subject to fundamental change due to various phenomena, such as globalization, technological progress and political change, this study aimed to identify whether a single European model of top management careers emerges, and previous studies clearly confirmed the further existence of career models (Heinz 2003; Beck 2009; Obschonka/Silberweisen/Wasilewski 2012). Davoine and Ravasi (2013) conducted a study in 2009 to assess the stability of certain features of national top management profiles and the emergence of a new globalized managerial elite. They analysed biographical and career-related data from 916 top managers of the largest companies listed on the stock exchanges of the respective countries to test the validity of Evans et al.'s (1989) career models. Their data show a certain very slow erosion of national models due to the increasing number of non-national top managers. The authors confirmed the ongoing importance of the *grandes écoles* and the role civil service plays in the Latin model. They further confirmed the minor importance of university education in the Anglo-Dutch model. For the German model, they reinforced the persistent importance of doctorates as symbols of belonging to the educational elite while reporting changes in the characteristics of "mountain climber careers". The top managers of firms in Germany are characterized by the lowest rate of intercompany mobility in the sample but show a trend away from one-company careers towards spending a large part of their career in the company they are leading today. Vinkenburg and Weber conducted a literature review on empirical research on managerial career patterns in 2012. They state difficulties in terms of clarity, consistency and agreement on how to measure and display career patterns. They identify two approaches as the most value-adding avenues: optimal matching analysis and visualization. Visualization offers new innovative venues for exploring career patterns in detail for collection purposes and for representing and clarifying findings. These results will contribute to enhancing the understanding of career patterns and offer interesting avenues for research across time and location (Reitzle/Körner/Vondracek 2009; Vinkenburg/Weber 2012). National career models apply visualization in the way Evans et al. (1989) used the method to visualize their careers.



### 3 Country Choice

The top management teams investigated were chosen from countries that are used as representatives of the Western and Eastern European regions, Germany and Poland, respectively. While Germany's and Western Europe's management career patterns are widely studied, Eastern European countries' top management teams' career patterns have not been explicitly studied. The regions' rapid economic, social and political transformation makes researching their culture, management practices and work relationships more difficult. A convergence of Western and Eastern practices is widely assumed due to the economic transition being considerably advanced (Alam/AnosCasero/Khan/Udomsaph 2008; Skuza/Scullion/McDonnel 2013). However, cultural aspects influencing managerial characteristics are believed to be far from converging (Vaiman/Holden 2011). The growing economic importance of emerging Central and Eastern European (CEE) economies makes research in this area ever more important, and the need to empirically investigate the relevance and operations of constructs critical to organizational issues in non-Western cultures emerges (Skuza et al. 2013). The choice of Germany and Poland for this study has inherent cohesion based on the political, historic, economic, and social ties between the countries. While these linkages can be traced back over hundreds of years—at times peaceful, at times adversarial, and at times connected with horrendous suffering and injustice—the decades after 1989 have brought far-reaching changes to the countries and to their relationship to each other. The following sections consist of different, alternating arguments in the German and Polish contexts.

As Europe's largest economy and second most populous nation, Germany is a key member of the continent's and the EU's economic and political institutions. Characterized as an open economy with a long tradition of internationalization and many large multinationals, Germany has built its international position through the country's strong manufacturing base and its centuries-old tradition of excellence in engineering and science. Its strong export orientation and high degree of internationalization make Germany one of Europe's strongest economies and has been proven remarkably resilient during the Great Recession. The fall of the Berlin Wall resulted in a shift of German economic and political orientation, positioning itself in the geographic, political, and economic centre of the enlarged European Union and towards the East (Kuchinke/Ardichivili/Borchert/Rozanski 2009).

After various difficulties in the Eastern European region, Poland gained its independence in 1918. After World War II, Poland became a Soviet satellite state until 1989. A "shock therapy" program during the early 1990s transformed the country's economy into one of the most robust in Central Europe with solid private consumption (Kuchinke et al. 2009, Popowska/Segreto 2014; Price Waterhouse Coopers 2015). Poland's entry into the European Union in 2004



solidified its position in the nexus of Western European countries. Germany firmly committed to a social market economic model, and Poland underwent strong reforms and changed to a Western-style market economy (Kuchinke et al. 2009). As the sixth-largest economy in the EU, Poland is the only European economy that avoided the late 2000 recession, and Poland has had the highest gross domestic product growth for the last 5 years in the EU. The nation is growing faster than most Western European nations (Aggestam 2003; The World Bank 2010; Popowska/Segreto 2014).

Germany and Poland are both EU member states. While Germany was a founding country, Poland joined the EU in 2004. Located at the heart of the European continent, both nations are not only direct neighbours; Germany is also the largest foreign investor in Poland (The World Bank 2010; Invest in Poland 2015). Germany, as the so-called European powerhouse, represents the economically developed, market-driven countries; Poland, the fastest growing Eastern European economy, represents the Eastern-bloc socialist countries. The economic ties among the two countries have intensified over the past decades. Germany is the largest market and the largest supplier to Poland; each value is close to 30 percent (Kuchinke et al. 2009). Both countries are subject to considerable globalization pressure and have undergone dramatic changes at the macro level during the last two decades, such as political change due to the collapse of socialist regimes and economic and structural change towards knowledge-based and service-oriented economies. From a global perspective, both economies can be considered high-income economies in terms of gross national income per capita, although German GDP per capita is roughly twice as high as Polish GDP per capita. The two states represent interesting cases to analyse the career paths of their top management teams. Due to their geographical closeness and the already established close business ties and investments, we believe in the applicability of most aspects of the Germanic model to the Polish market. The cultural and institutional backgrounds are similar to a certain extent and will be analysed in more detail in the following section.

## 4 Methodology

For our empirical analysis we entailed a rigorous data collection process. With a focus on listed companies, we chose companies that are obliged by corporate governance regulations to publish not only general data, such as turnover, number of employees, corporate governance, but also the biographical data of their board members in a standardized manner. Individual biographical data on TMT members were collected by conducting in-depth analyses of respective curriculum vitae, firms' annual reports, corporate web sites and other public profiles online (e.g., LinkedIn, Xing). Managers who had missing information on one or more characteristics were excluded from the sample, to not distort our findings.

This reliance on bibliographic data is a common approach in upper echelons research (Nielsen 2010; Schmid/Wurster 2017). We generated a database that consisted of all firms listed on the German DAX 30 and Polish WIG30 as of 31 December 2019. By identifying all supervisory board and management board members at this specific point in time, we created a sample of 463 top managers of firms in Germany and 426 top managers of firms in Poland.

To test the legitimacy of Evans et al.'s (1989) career patterns today, we identified variables that we used to derive certain aspects of career patterns and empirically test their validity. As insights into Evans et al.'s (1989) career patterns are limited, we focused on research that followed our stream of investigation to test the validity of the patterns today. The chosen variables are in line with former research on the validity of national career patterns (Davoine/Ravasi 2013). We decided to take this path to be able to compare results and prove assumptions over time and set the basis for future research looking at this field of research.

We chose to analyse a great number of variables in the first step and group certain variables to form overall characteristics. The data collected on board members included a set of more generic aspects: their citizenship, sex and age and more detailed variables, that are especially relevant for career patterns: higher and postgraduate education, career steps, job positions abroad, previous work experience in international audit and consulting firms and lastly senior civil service. To fully assess the characteristic higher and postgraduate education, we derived the following variables: degree, field of study, name of the institution, and country of the institution. Career steps were ranked by counting the following aspects: number of positions within and outside the company and number of employers. The same approach was chosen for job positions abroad, where only jobs were considered in a country that does not correspond to the nationality of the manager.

According to the data retrieved, we derived 5 career characteristics to analyse the similarity between the Polish sample and the national career patterns: 1) university education, 2) elite education, 3) PhD degrees, 4) civil servant positions, and 5) career movements. In the following section, we will investigate the national institutional environment, political institutions, educational system and cultural aspects to analyse the differences and similarities between the top management teams' characteristics and national career models.

In Germany and Poland, large firms follow a two-tiered system of an executive board ("Vorstand" in German and "Zarząd Spółki" in Polish) and a supervisory board ("Aufsichtsrat" in German and "Rada Nadzorcza" in Polish). This separates two board instances: management and control. The governance bodies' roles in both countries are on a comparable level. Significant differences can be found in the supervisory boards of German firms. The German Corporate Governance code demands that up to one-third of all supervisory board members,

depending on the company's size, have to be elected employee representatives. We excluded those members in our study to assure an equal data foundation for both countries (Fleckner/Hopt 2013; GCGC 2015; The Corporate Governance Code for Polish Listed Companies 2015) In relation to noncompulsory recommendations and guidance, each country has developed its own corporate governance code. Although both codes are structured in different ways, they encompass the set of relations between the management and supervisory boards and the share and stakeholders (Gallego/Garcia/Rodriguez 2010).

## 5 Analysis of the Career Patterns of the Top Managers in Firms from Poland

The economy that dominated Poland after World War II was characterized by control through the state with nearly 100 % state ownership of all industry, which resulted in a constant threat for workers and managers if they sought to evade commands. As the Polish economic system slowed in the 1970s and 1980s, a new era began with the first free elections in 1989 (Shama 1993; Sachs 1994). The new government was able to lower inflation and opened the Polish market to the outside world with foreign companies entering the country and the private business sector expanding (Bernard 1993; Weinstein/Obloj 2002). The transition also resulted in some issues, such as a decrease in the value of the Polish currency, a lack of protection for local companies from increasing foreign competition, a rapid increase in interest rates, and rising unemployment rates (Sachs 1994; Schafer 2005).

The growth of emerging markets has resulted in a substantial demand for managerial talent to operate in new culturally complex and geographically distant markets (Li/Scullion 2006; Tymon/Stumpf/Doh 2010). The increased number of newly established businesses, the rapid growth in foreign investment and the increasing number of foreign businesses operating in Poland led to increased competition for already very scarce managerial and professional talent. Poland's ownership structure of the largest listed companies is becoming very similar to other models, such as the German model, where a cross-shareholding structure among large groups and block holders cohabits with models where families or groups of founders are still at the centre. Privatization processes led to a highly centralized ownership structure and in turn to more transparency of the financial market. Poland is currently considered to be one of the most attractive European countries for investment by transnational firms due to its strategic and valuable location, large population, European Union membership, economic stability, relatively low labour costs and fiscal system that is attractive to businesses (Aggestam 2003; Popowska/Segreto 2014).

We expect that the career profiles of the top managers of firms in Poland mostly follow the Germanic model due to the numerous similarities between

the country's institutions and cultures. In the remainder of this section, we will outline a descriptive comparison of our sample, followed by a more detailed analysis of different career characteristics.

### 5.1 Descriptive Analysis

Evaluating the data from 60 firms and 889 curricula vitae enabled us to draw descriptive inferences about the international characteristics of the top management team members in Poland compared to Germany. The Polish sample comprised 30 firms and a total of 426 top management team members. This results in an average of 14.2 top managers per company with an average of 8.57 supervisory and 5.6 management board members. The German sample also comprised 30 firms with a total of 463 top management team members. This results in an average of 15.43 top managers per firm, including 9.03 per supervisory and 6.4 management board members. The average age of the top managers of firms in Poland is 54.59 years, slightly younger than that of the top managers of firms in Germany. The samples' distributions in terms of gender and nationality vary greatly. In the Polish sample, 19.51 % were women and 15.37 % were non-nationals. Those figures are remarkably higher for the German sample with an average of 25.05 % women and 30.02 % non-nationals on boards. The following table provides the descriptive statistics for the general and demographic data of the top managers for both countries.

**Figure 2: Descriptive statistics on top managers of firms in Poland and Germany**

<i>Polish Sample</i>			<i>German Sample</i>		
<b>General</b>	Total Sample	426	<b>General</b>	Total Sample	463
	Total Supervisory Board Members	257		Total Supervisory Board Members	271
	Total Management Board Members	169		Total Management Board Members	192
<b>Nationality</b>	native	336 78,87%	<b>Nationality</b>	native	324 69,83%
	non-native	61 14,32%		non-native	140 30,17%
	not applicable	29 6,81%		not applicable	0 0,00%
	total	426 100,00%		total	464 100,00%
<b>Gender</b>	women	79 18,54%	<b>Gender</b>	women	116 25,05%
	men	326 76,53%		men	347 74,95%
	not applicable	21 4,93%		not applicable	0 0,00%
	total	426 100,00%		total	463 100,00%

### 5.2 Analysis of Different Career Characteristics

The change in national institutional settings, the rise of new educational systems and programs and the deviations in perceived career progress in recent years due to ongoing globalization caused certain diffusion and questioned the stability of Evans et al.'s (1989) career patterns. Relying on the literature that tested the validity of the overall patterns today, we look closer at the present accuracy of the Germanic model. Davoine and Ravasi (2013) confirmed the importance of doctoral studies with 45 % of the managers in their sample having a PhD.

While Bauer and Bertin-Mouroto confirmed the importance of corporate careers in terms of in-house careers in 1996, Bluhm/Martens/Trappmann (2011) found an average employment relationship duration of 27 years with a single firm. Davoine and Ravasi (2013) also confirmed that the number of positions occupied before reaching a top management position is higher and more detailed for the top managers of firms in Germany but noted that intercompany mobility is the lowest with an average of 2.4 firms. The general model of “mountain climber career” is still valid, but most managers do not work for a single company and instead spend a long time and the last steps before reaching a top management position within their company. Research has confirmed the validity and accuracy of Evans et al.’s (1989) Germanic model today. We base our following analysis on this and compare the career aspects of top management teams of firms in Poland to those of the Germanic model.

*University Education* Polish education institutions are less established and are exposed to various modifications due to the changing political and social environments. A real surge in the establishment of new higher education institutions and a massive growth in student numbers occurred after 1990 in the free market economy (Szabłowski 2001; Bluhm et al. 2011; Stepień/Robinson 2017). While the educational sector was tightly planned, budgeted and directed from the central ministry, institutions were not autonomous. The number of schools and their curriculum was therefore limited with business and engineering being the most prevalent fields. Only after 1990 was institutional diversity of schools and teaching offers fostered. The elite universities in the Polish context are the older, more research-oriented universities (Fulton/Santiago/Eduquist/El-Khawass/Hackl 2007). A two-tier system was already instituted well before the Bologna Declaration in 1999, standardizing the European educational system with respect to bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Only since 2007 have Bologna degree structures been mandatory (Filipkowski 2003; Siemienicka 2012). University education and academic degrees do play important roles in determining managerial competencies (Klarsfeld/Mabey 2004). The top managers of firms in Poland traditionally tend to be university educated, such as their European counterparts from Germany. Nearly 100 % of the top managers from the Polish sample hold an academic degree. The proportion of top managers of firms in Germany is slightly lower with 3.67 % of the top managers not being university educated. The higher proportion in the German sample leads back to the concept of apprenticeship, which is well established there.

*Elite Education* Selective academic institutions play an important role in the Latin career model. The identification and selection process of potential top managers often depends on the top managers’ alma maters. Selective academic institutions do not play a vital role in the recruitment process for the Germanic model, which is reflected in the list of schools from where the top managers of firms in Germany graduated. The sample is very diverse, and the school with

the highest number of graduates only accounts for approximately 3,59 % of the total. The picture is slightly different for the Polish sample, where one university dominated, the University of Warsaw, from where 23.55 % of the top managers graduated. The University of Warsaw is followed by the Warsaw School of Economics with 9.7 % and Wroclaw University with 7.2 %. The picture created here could be misleading. Although 3 schools account for over 40 % of the top managers in our sample, the school selection does not lead back to their prestigious image in the country but rather the limited availability of universities in Poland in general (Fulton et al. 2007).

*PhD Degrees* In the German Humboldtian academic system, a doctoral degree seems to play a similar role to grandes ecoles in France. A doctorate is used as a signal for high potential in the educational system and confirms one's membership in the educational elite. In the Germanic model, elitist recruitment exists through the possession of a doctoral degree (Opitz 2005). German companies and society value expertise based on the principle of education by research. In our sample, 35.42 % of the top managers of firms from Germany and 17.84 % of the top managers of firms from Poland hold a doctoral degree. While doctoral studies offer important assets for a career in management in Germany, in terms of an elitist signal (Opitz 2005), in Poland, further degrees, besides doctoral degrees, seem to play a great role (Kuchinke et al. 2008). Although the difference between the top managers from firms in Germany and Poland with PhD degrees is quite high, compared to data from managers following the Latin career pattern, the number of PhD holders is still considered to be high.

*Senior Civil Servant Positions* The communist regime and the later transformation significantly influenced work relationships and managers' mental models. Managers before the market transition showed a high level of conformism to follow rules and regulations imposed by the central fiat. According to Walder, Li and Treimann's (2000) dual career path model, there are two career paths in state-socialist societies, namely, a professional path, where job entry is based on one's educational background, and an administrative path, where selection largely depends on the possession of political credentials and membership in the communist party (Hanley/Treimann 2008). The role doctoral degrees play in the Germanic model for recruitment practices is taken by civil service experience in the Latin model. Linked to the important role the state played in the Polish economy, civil service is an important source of legitimizing top management authority. Managers developed skills and a network during that time that supported them in occupying top management positions in private companies (Davoine/Ravasi 2013). Nearly 20 % of the top managers from firms in Poland have served in civil service positions. This is remarkably higher than the German sample, where only 4.75 % served in civil service positions.

*Career Movements* Brain drain and demographic changes along with the growth of the Polish economy resulted in real shortages in the availability of skilled labour in Poland (Kuchinke et al. 2008); due to a steady increase in the unemployment rate, the landscape of work is changing, and occupational careers become increasingly more de-standardized and individualized, which results in less predictability for the individual. Career uncertainty arises as continuous careers and stable employment are less certain. (Mills/Blossfeld 2003; Beck 2009; Obschonka/Silbereisen/Wasilewski 2012). Expertise, technical and general, is important for managerial career progression. It is especially valuable when gained in a single company throughout various areas and positions within that company. Know how is not easily transferable to other organisations (Stewart et al. 1994). One of the most typical characteristics of the Germanic model is the “mountain climber career” or “chimney career” (Evans et al. 1989). Career paths in the Germanic model focus on gaining competencies and legitimacy in a certain field or firm. Workers either spend their whole career in a single company or climbed the last steps of their career within their company and only spend part of their career outside. The persistence is confirmed by figures on intercompany mobility and on the number of positions occupied before reaching a top managerial position. The top managers of firms in Poland took an average of 7.17 career steps, which is slightly less than the top managers of firms from Germany with 7.96 career steps. Most of these steps are spent outside the current company with 5.25 career steps for the top managers of firms from Poland and 5.29 career steps for the top managers from the German sample. Fewer career steps are spent in the current company. The top managers of the Polish sample held an average of 1.92 positions within the current company before reaching the top position, and the top managers of firms from Germany held an average of 2.65 positions within their current company. However, only 8.02 % of the top managers of firms from the Polish sample spent their whole career in one company compared to 18.79 % of the top managers of firms from Germany. These numbers highlight the importance of acquiring skills and know how within a certain field before reaching a top position. Intercompany mobility is very low for the Polish sample with an average of 2.45 companies per manager, which is comparable to top managers from the German sample with 2.4 companies per manager.

The characteristics evaluated in the previous section will be examined more deeply, put into perspective and compared to existing career models in the following discussion section, which will consequently lead to our conclusions.



**Figure 3: Detailed analysis of top managers of firms from Poland and Germany**  
**Significance of differences: Pearson's chi-square tests**

	<i>Poland (%)</i>	<i>Germany (%)</i>	<i>Poland vs. Germany</i>	
			<i>χ<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>p</i>
Total Sample	426	463		
University Educated	96,33	99,53	13,22	0,06
Selective Schools	32,16	18,36	142,91	0
Doctoral Degrees	17,84	35,42	98,54	0,00
Senior Civil Servant Positions	18,54	4,75	174,38	0,00
International Experience	44,13	64,79	46,82	0
Audit/ Consulting Firm Experience	15,96	17,49	9,60	27,02

**6 Discussion: Cross-National Observations**

After evaluating various aspects of the career patterns of the top management team members of firms from Poland, we detected several similarities between the Germanic career model, as expected, and also certain differences. In the following section, we will discuss interesting aspects of our results with a focus on differences between Polish career aspects and the Germanic model. These differences lead to the question of whether national career patterns still exist and to what extent new career aspects need to be considered. While Evans et al.'s career patterns (1989) did not incorporate Eastern European countries at the time they were assessed, nor did any following research testing the accuracy of the models in today's world, we analysed the adaptability of the Germanic model for the top managers of firms from Poland.

As university education generally plays a vital role, so do PhD degrees in the Germanic model. The number of doctoral degree holders in the Polish sample is smaller than that in the German sample but still substantial and therewith follows the Germanic model. Contrary to the Latin model, selective schools do not play a special role in the Germanic model, as shown by the data of the top managers of firms from Germany. A large number of university degrees in the Polish sample were granted from the University of Warsaw. However, the University of Warsaw does not necessarily have the status of a selective academic institution or elite university. The high number of graduates is due to the school's size, location and history. Therefore, prestigious schools are not relevant in either Germany or Poland. Hence, doctoral degrees have a signalling effect, confirming one's membership in the educational elite (Davoine/Ravasi 2013).

An interesting aspect in terms of education is the field of study of top managers. Bluhm et al. (2011) noted a slight decline in the relevance of an engineering background for elite positions in Germany, with engineering degrees in general still being a very important part of most managers' career profiles; however, they noticed a trend towards business studies in general and more international education in foreign countries. While our data show that the top managers of firms from Poland are to a vast extent university educated, for the managers who gained their education within the socialist system, vocational training and engineering studies play a greater role than they do for younger generations. The Soviet type of vocational training declined after 1989 with business studies becoming more attractive. The share of degrees in business, economics and management is surprisingly high. A total of 54.98 % of the top managers from the Polish sample have business degrees, followed by 16.45 % had law degrees and 14.94 % had engineering degrees. These numbers are comparable with those of top managers in Germany, where 47.7 % have business degrees, 17.56 % have engineering degrees and 14.37 % have law degrees. The number of business degrees is considered high, even compared to other European countries where business studies are always dominant. Davoine and Ravasi (2013) found that 53.5 % of the top managers researched in Germany, 49.5 % of the top managers researched in France and the United Kingdom and 42.5 % of the top managers researched in Switzerland had business and economics degrees. These data show the impact of the political situation on top managers' education and set expectations for an even greater change in the educational background and relevance for the top managers of firms from Poland. The data furthermore show the increasing importance of business and management topics to reach high management positions in stock-listed European firms.

Civil service positions are not important in career assessment in the Germanic model but are an important source of legitimization in the Latin model. The percentage of top managers of firms from Poland having experience in civil service positions is significantly high at 20 % and thus follows the Latin model. The occurrence is yet again linked to the important role the state plays in the economy and the career paths young civil servant members take with demanding assignments and strategic responsibilities that will later be essential for top management positions in private companies (Davoine/Ravasi 2013).

The Germanic model today still comprises a high appreciation of technical expertise and engineers, an in-house or branch career and long company tenure. The so-called mountain climber career aspect has been confirmed by various researchers (Bauer/Bertin-Mourrot 1996; Davoine/Ravasi 2013). We showed that the typical characteristics of a mountain climber career are also visible within the Polish sample. These top managers have worked for fewer companies and held more positions before reaching the top management team. The numbers seem to prove the importance of competencies and legitimacy for top managers

to join the upper echelon of a company. Freye (2009) showed that the mountain climber career model is slowly being adapted and managers working for a single firm are gradually being replaced by managers having only climbed the last steps of their career in a company. The shift from working for a single company towards spending the last steps of a career before reaching the top level within one company was proven for both our data sets for both countries. The careers of the top managers of firms from Poland show this pattern even stronger with fewer career steps.

Four out of five career aspects of the top management team members from the Polish companies analysed follow the Germanic career path and show that there is a high similarity between the top management team members of German and Polish companies. Just one characteristic is different between the top managers of firms from Germany and Poland – civil service. Civil service is an important aspect in the Latin model, but it is the only aspect from the Latin model that is relevant for the sample of top managers from Polish companies. The aspects of British career paths play no role at all.

While researchers confirmed the accuracy of Evans et al.'s (1989) national career models even years after the original assessment (Bauer/Bertin-Mouroit 1996; Davoine/Ravasi 2013), our biographical data collected on top managers of firms from Germany show that mostly all features of the model are still strongly present in 2019. However, our data also show the development of several other facets impacting career development. In the last 20 years, national institutional settings and governance practices have been heavily impacted by the effects of globalization, especially in the EU region. This is assumed to impact national career models and raises the question of an evolution of more global elite profiles (Heijltjes/Olie/Glunk 2003; Ruigrok/Greve 2008; Van Veen/Marsmann 2008; Maclean/Harvey/Chia 2010).

Polish firms in our sample have a remarkably low percentage of women on their boards with women accounting for only 19.51 %. Compared to the boards of firms from Germany in our sample, this percentage is 5 % less since a quarter of the top managers on the boards of German firms are women. The German government introduced a law in 2016 that requires a minimum of 30 percent of board positions to be occupied by women. Poland thus far has not introduced a separate official gender quota. However, the German and Polish Corporate Governance Codes recommend diversity, especially gender diversity and equality (Fleckner/Hopt 2013; GCGC 2015; TCGCFPLC 2015).

Furthermore, the top management teams of firms from Poland have a comparably low rate of non-nationals on their board. Only 15.37 % are non-Polish nationals. No nationality is dominant within this group and is highly dependent on the ownership structure of the firms analysed: 3 % are from Ukraine, 3 % are from France, 2 % are from Germany and another 2 % are from Portugal. This

is very different compared to the top managers of firms from Germany where 30,02 % are non-nationals. The dominant nationalities for German firms are the following: Austrians and US Americans with 6 % each, British with 3 % and French and Dutch with 2 % each.

Following Davoine and Ravasi's study from 2013, we analysed the top managers' experience in consulting and audit firms. Only a limited number of top managers from both samples gained experience in this field during their career with approximately 17 % each. These numbers are slightly higher than those in Davoine and Ravasi's sample, where 15 % of the top managers of firms from Germany had this experience. Although these percentages are low, they show a certain importance for top managers' career development and a potential new characteristic of career patterns.

Given that our data for the Polish market show strong convergence with one of the national career models, the aspects mentioned above show a certain erosion of the national career models in terms of internationality and diversity. A certain erosion occurs in the European career models, but it happens very slowly. The need for managers with general management skills and international networks represents the most serious threat to national models (Evans et al. 1989; Ruigrok/Greve 2008), and their importance is expected to continue to increase.

## 7 Conclusion

There has been an increased awareness of cross-national and cross-cultural management issues. Top managers and top managers' diversity are topics that are receiving increasingly more attention in the academic field. However, little research to date has been undertaken on top managers' careers on a national level. Evans et al.'s (1989) career patterns represent a landmark in career research. Although developed 30 years ago, the career models seem to be highly relevant in today's country-specific institutional settings. Only a few studies have empirically tested the continuity of these patterns, expanded the models to other countries or tested their adaptability to further countries.

We examined the career paths of the top managers of firms from Poland considering various career characteristics and steps. We expected the careers of the top managers from the sample to follow the Germanic career model, and we tested the similarities of the top managers of firms from Germany and Poland. The biographical data collected on the top managers of firms from Germany show that features of the model by Evans et al. (1989) are still strongly present in 2019, and the stability of the Germanic model can be confirmed. While our data for the top managers from the German sample confirmed the presence of the career models today, most of the data analysed show that Polish careers indeed follow the Germanic model. Some aspects, however, show similarities to other

career models, such as the Latin model, which merely leads back to historic developments in the country's past.

Our study provides updated empirical evidence on the continuity of one career profile. We have shown the presence of Evans et al.'s (1989) national career model today in Germany and the visibility of most of the features even in the Polish market. We furthermore provide insights into the top managers and their careers in the Polish market and test the appropriability and topicality of the Germanic career model in the Polish market. Our study is among the first studies to analytically evaluate the Polish market. An empirically driven two-country comparison between a Western and Eastern European country is of great importance as very limited direct country comparison research on TMT diversity in this field exists. Further empirical research on the careers of the top managers from companies in Poland would provide more insights into other aspects of the TMT group incorporating more national aspects.

We provide insights into the human resource management of multinational corporations in culturally diverse environments with a focus on Eastern Europe. It is perceived that there are several commonalities among CEE countries beyond the regional macro perspective. These commonalities deserve systematic exposure and further research to gain a better understanding and clearer view of the differences and similarities.

Beyond the contribution to the theory and literature, our study has several managerial implications for firms, top managers and aspiring executive candidates. The increasing internationalization within the samples underlines the growing importance of an international market for executive labour. This will likely have implications for firms' relationships with internal and external stakeholders. Managers should develop skills and networks that enable them to certainly transcend geographical and institutional boundaries as they need to be aware that currently they are competing with candidates from all over the world (Ruigrok/Greve 2008). Firms will particularly seek experienced candidates with country-specific, culture-specific and broad managerial skills that can be transmitted across contexts. Top management team recruitment is most likely to shift from the domestic to international managerial labour market, which will in turn be the most serious threat to national models (Davoine et al. 2015; Greve et al. 2015).

Our study has limitations, which provide opportunities for future research. First, we are limited by missing background data from Evans et al.'s (1989) original data set for establishing the career models, which restricts our ability to apply the models to today's data. Therefore, we followed Davoine and Ravasi's example (2013). Second, by focusing on the largest stock-listed firms, the numbers presented probably overestimate the real situation and might exclude some country-specific important companies. Additionally, as the dataset is limited to two countries and only 30 firms each, the findings should be viewed as explana-

tory, and more extensive datasets could provide further insights. Third, our data provide a reliable picture of the situation in 2019 and are neither longitudinal nor incorporate the process and change over time. Last, a fruitful expansion of the study would be to add several additional countries from Eastern Europe to have a comparable number of countries from Western and Eastern Europe.

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## Appendix

### *List of firms considered in study*

WIG 30	DAX 30
1 Bank Pekao S.A.	1 Adidas
2 PKO Bank Polski	2 Allianz
3 Powszechny Zakład Ubezpieczeń	3 BASF
4 KGHM Polska Miedz	4 Bayer
5 PKN Orlen	5 Beiersdorf
6 PGE Polska Grupa Energetyczna	6 BMW
7 Bank Zachodni WBK	7 Continental
8 Polskie Gornictwo Naftowe i Gazowigstwo	8 Covestro
9 LPP Spolka Akcyjna	9 Daimler
10 mBank	10 Deutsche Bank
11 Orange Polska	11 Deutsche Börse
12 Tuaron Polska Energia	12 Deutsche Post
13 Jastrzebska Spolka Weglowa	13 Deutsche Telekom
14 Lubelski Wegiel Bogdanka Spolka Akcyjna	14 E.ON
15 Eurocash Spolka Akcyjna	15 Fresenius
16 Asseco Poland Spolka Akcyjna	16 Fresenius Medical Care
17 Bank Handlowy w Warszawie Spolka Akcyjna	17 HeidelbergCement
18 Cyfrowy Polsat Spolka Akcyjna	18 Henkel
19 ING Bank Slaski Spolka Akcyjna	19 Infineon
20 Grupa Azoty Spolka Akcyjna	20 Linde
21 Alior Bank Spolka Skcyjna	21 Lufthansa
22 CCC Spolka Skcyjna	22 Merck
23 Kernel Holding S.A.	23 MTU Aero Engines
24 Synthos Spolka Akcyjna	24 Münchener Rückversicherungs-Gesellschaft
25 TVN Spolka Akcyjna	25 RWE
26 Grupa Lotos Spolka Akcyjna	26 SAP
27 ENEA Spolka Akcyjna	27 Siemens
28 Globe Trade Centre Spolka Akcyjna	28 Volkswagen
29 Netia Spolka Ancyjna	29 Vonovia
30 Boryszew Spolka Akcyjna	30 Wirecard