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Diversity and Inclusion in the European Boardroom: Examples from 14 Countries

The board of directors is the highest decision-making body in every European firm. It consists of experienced individuals who may or may not be employees of the company (executive vs. non-executive directors) and may or may not have a financial interest in it (affiliated vs. independent directors). In the academic literature, there is relatively little about the chairs of such boards, however, as most of their work is done behind closed doors. Chairs deal with highly delicate matters but rarely appear in public, except in special cases, such as the scandals involving Volkswagen's diesel emissions or the German financial service provider Wirecard.

Two recent studies have shed light on this sensitive and under-researched topic (Shekshnia and Zagieva, 2019 and Shekshnia and Zagieva, 2021). A group of scholars and practitioners, including myself, has conducted a survey (n=400) and expanded it with in-depth interviews (n=90) with board chairs in fourteen European countries with different governance models: Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. Having assembled such an extensive dataset, we compare the chairs' practices through the lens of national cultures using the "culture map" model developed by Erin Meyer (2014) and describe our study outcomes – the practices that the boards' chairs employ to get things done – using the informality framework suggested by Alena Ledeneva (2018).

In my presentation, I will discuss the most interesting findings on diversity and inclusion in the European boardroom.