Methodology: Span of Control

The last aspect of our research, Span of Control, should be understood separately from the previous three aspects; Typology, Constellation and Manager Characteristics. The aspect Span of Control is only added after that initial stage in order to evaluate if there is a solid reason to assume that there is one or more additional influencers in the responsible departments of the Top Management Team Members. We do admit that this aspect is ignoring the possibility that even if team size is only two (head and subordinate) there is the possibility that this specific subordinate has a significant voice when it comes to decision building. Our approach is builds on the principle of Span of Control, where depending on the size of a company paired with the complexity of the corresponding team a limitation is given upon which one team leader can keep the overview. Once this limitation is reached, there is a reasonable ground to assume that a second force, an influencer, is officially or unofficially installed to support the team leader. Given the common situation that Managers are overloaded with the tasks assigned, that 'second' voice in the might be the source for the reports given to the CEO. If the CEO is following the advice of his/her most influential Top Management Team Member then at the end an 'official decision of the CEO' is literally steered by a regular staff.

The results are visualized in a grid of nine fields whereas from left to right the three classifications of size and in vertical direction the three classifications of the complexity of work are shown. Both tables below actually show the same results, just that in the following table the exact average figures with the +/- Delta are shown,

		Size of the Company/Department		
		Small	Medium	Large
Complexity/Hierarchy	High	Ø 4.86 ± 1.03	Ø 6.38 ±1.75	Ø 8.73 ±1.25
	Medium	Ø 5.38 ± 1.00	Ø 11.32 ± 3.00	Ø 23.16 ± 3.26
	Low	Ø8.4 ± 1.25*	Ø 22.22 ± 5.00	Ø 35.33 ± 6.38

Table 7: Abstracted 'ideal span of control' findings with Average and +/- Delta

and the following table visualizes the results in abstracted numbers to show the similarity in diagonal axis.

		Size of the Company/Department		
		Small	Medium	Large
Complexity/Hierarchy	High	5	5	10
	Medium	5	10	20
	Low	10	20	35

6 15 40

As an example: in a small company a head of department dealing with a high complexity of tasks will ideally have not more than a span of control of 5 people (Ø 4.86 ± 1.03). Should we now encounter in our data analysis a situation in which the span of control is more than 6 we would then have to assume that the Head of Department is losing control and delegating some of his work to an influencer.

The interview is aligning three parameters to evaluate if the corresponding head of department has lost the control over its staff: size of the company, whereas this information is relative to the industry the company is in, complexity of work, which on the other hand is set in relation to the other departments and the number of staff in the department itself. The first two parameters will define the field in the table above whereas the third question then quantifies if the maximum span of control is exceeded. Wherever this is the case, it will be indicated with (+influencer) that the head of this department is unlikely to manage the whole department by itself and therefore has to delegate some leadership tasks or bases his leadership on the influence of some team members.

It is fundamental to understand that we are only searching for a potential influencer of a department which is achieving more than 16%. Only those departments are strong enough to form a dominant coalition with the CEO (34%). In a situation where a CEO is deciding on a recommendation of his or her strongest department and exactly that department is headed by someone who has exceeded his or her span of control, it would mean that decision taken by the CEO is based ultimately by the influencer of that specific department.