

**Radboud University**



***The Effectiveness of Diversity Networks***

*How do members and non-members of diversity networks perceive the effectiveness of diversity networks?*

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## **Preface**

Within the scope of my studies, I took the course ‘Gender and Diversity in Organisations’ which was instructed by Yvonne Benschop.

This course aroused my interest in gender-related studies and topics. I wanted to dive deeper into this academic field and decided to choose the master specialisation in ‘Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Management’. After attending this specialisation, I can say that I have made the right decision.

I want to thank my supervisor, Yvonne Benschop, for instructing the course ‘Gender and Diversity in Organisations’ which aroused my interest in gender and diversity-related topics. I would also like to thank her for challenging me during the process of writing the master thesis and for providing me with enough time. During the supervision, I have learned a lot — furthermore, thanks to my fellow students Ariadna and Koen, for sharing their feedback and support.

At least, I would also like to take the opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to my family and friends, who always believed in me and on whom I can always rely on. Thank you for being there!

## **Abstract**

I investigated the perceptions of diversity network members and non-members about the effectiveness of those networks and on the networks' capacity as effective diversity management instruments. Since limited research has investigated multiple perspectives on the effectiveness of diversity networks, I involved two perspectives. The results of the present research indicate that the perceptions influence the effectiveness of diversity networks. Diversity network members and non-members both perceived diversity networks to have beneficial effects on the individual and organisational levels. Furthermore, network members' motives for joining a diversity network influenced their perception of the effectiveness of diversity networks. The motives of non-members for not joining the networks had no influence on their perception of diversity network effectiveness. The findings of this research reveal that network members and non-members perceive the formulation of network goals, the structuring of the network, and the execution of network events as important for the enhancement of diversity network effectiveness. In addition, diversity networks were perceived as supportive instruments for the development of members of marginalised groups and as effective in increasing awareness of diversity-related issues. However, to implement equality, diversity networks would need the support of other diversity management instruments.

### **Keywords:**

Diversity networks, effectiveness of diversity networks, diversity management instruments, equality

## Table of Content

<b>Chapter 1 - Introduction</b> .....	7
<b>Introduction to Diversity Networks and Their Effectiveness</b> .....	7
<b>Introduction to Perceptions of Diversity Networks</b> .....	9
<b>Problem Definition and Research Questions</b> .....	10
<b>Academic Contribution</b> .....	11
<b>Managerial and Societal Contribution</b> .....	11
<b>Outline</b> .....	12
<b>Chapter 2 - Theory</b> .....	12
<b>Diversity Networks</b> .....	12
<b>Reasons to Join the Diversity Networks.</b> .....	14
<b>Characteristics of Diversity Networks.</b> .....	15
<b>Goals.</b> .....	15
<b>Structure.</b> .....	17
<b>Activities.</b> .....	18
<b>Effectiveness of Diversity Networks.</b> .....	20
<b>Reduction of Turnover Intentions.</b> .....	20
<b>Optimism for Careers.</b> .....	21
<b>Learning Results.</b> .....	22
<b>Perceptions</b> .....	24
<b>Chapter 3 - Methodology</b> .....	28
<b>Research Design</b> .....	28
<b>Data Collection</b> .....	29
<b>Case Description - The Company.</b> .....	29
<b>Selection of Interviewees.</b> .....	30
<b>Interviews.</b> .....	32
<b>Research Analysis</b> .....	33
<b>Deduction and Induction</b> .....	34
<b>Research Ethics, Reflexivity, and Research Quality</b> .....	37
<b>Research Ethics.</b> .....	37
<b>Reflexivity.</b> .....	38
<b>Research Quality.</b> .....	39
<b>Chapter 4 - Findings</b> .....	41
<b>Introduction to the Findings</b> .....	41

<b>Diversity Network Members .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Network for Young Employees (Diversity Network 1). .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Reasons to Join a Diversity Network. ....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>History. ....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Characteristics of Diversity Networks. ....</b>	<b>44</b>
<i>Goals. ....</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Structure. ....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Activities. ....</i>	<i>46</i>
<b>Perception of the Effectiveness of Diversity Networks. ....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Perception of Diversity Networks as an Instrument for Diversity Management. ....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Diversity Network for Women (Diversity Network 2). ....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Reasons to Join a Diversity Network. ....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>History. ....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Characteristics of Diversity Networks. ....</b>	<b>52</b>
<i>Goals. ....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Structure. ....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Activities. ....</i>	<i>54</i>
<b>Perception of the Effectiveness of Diversity Networks. ....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Perception of Diversity Networks as an Instrument for Diversity Management. ....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Non-Members of Diversity Networks .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Perceptions of the History of the Two Diversity Networks. ....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Characteristics of Diversity Networks. ....</b>	<b>60</b>
<i>Goals. ....</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Structure. ....</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Activities. ....</i>	<i>62</i>
<b>Perception of the Effectiveness of Diversity Networks. ....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Perception of Diversity Networks as an Instrument for Diversity Management .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Perception of the Effectiveness of Diversity Networks. ....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Reasons to Join or Not to Join the Network. ....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Network Characteristics .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Diversity Networks as Diversity Management Instruments. ....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Limitations of the Research. ....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Future Research .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Reflexivity .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>71</b>

<b>Reference</b> .....	73
<b>Appendix 1 – Questionnaire – Diversity Network Members</b> .....	79
<b>Appendix 2 - Questionnaire – Non-Diversity Network Members</b> .....	81
<b>Appendix 3 – Overview of groups of codes, codes and indicators resulting from literature review</b> .....	82

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

An organisation can consist of diverse populations, differentiated by social identities, such as gender, race, ethnicity, or social class. Diversity (management) represents a leading interest in organisational studies (Benschop, Holgersson, Van den Brink, & Wahl, 2015). Diversity in the workforce can be advantageous for organisations since it could lead to, for example, the inclusion of more perspectives in decision-making situations or to a better ability to consider solutions (Allen, Dawson, Wheatley, & White, 2007). Previous research has supported the assumption of the beneficial effects of a diverse population of employees. It is, for example, claimed that a diverse population could increase the likelihood of innovation, which in turn contributes to a better chance of company survival (Hoobler, Basadur, & Lemmon, 2007). Other advocates have argued that a combination of diverse employees empowers the company to understand local markets or varied customer interests (Subeliani & Tsogas, 2005). The term ‘diversity management’ is, in academic literature, often tightly associated with being effective in improving employee and organisational performance. Diversity management appears in several shapes and uses different instruments. An example of diversity management instruments are diversity networks.

### **Introduction to Diversity Networks and Their Effectiveness**

Diversity networks primarily connect employees and are intended to support diversity and the inclusion of historically marginalised minority groups within companies (Welbourne, Rolf, & Schlachter, 2017). Diversity networks have developed over the last 30 years and received a great amount of academic attention. Depending on the research context, distinct names have been used to describe the concept of diversity networks (Welbourne & McLaughlin, 2013). For example, in a US research context, the terms ‘employee resource groups’ or ‘minority network groups’ have been applied (Welbourne et al., 2017), while in the UK, the term ‘employee network groups’ has been more commonly used (Colgan & McKearney, 2012). ‘Diversity networks’ has been more frequently applied in the Dutch context (Dennissen, Benschop, & van den Brink, 2018). The present study applies the term ‘diversity networks’ but also refers to sources that assign different names to the concept of diversity networks.

In the 1990s, large technical companies became aware of the beneficial value of diversity networks (Witeck & Combs, 2006). Based on these assumptions of value, they implemented and financially supported diversity networks. However, in return, companies

expected diversity networks to foster the improvement of organisational processes, such as recruiting new employees (Council, 2006), testing new products (Medina, 2007), or sharing information (Benschop et al., 2015).

A growing body of literature has focussed on the beneficial effects that seemingly accompany the introduction of diversity networks in organisations. Cross and Armstrong (2008), for example, noted that access to networks leads to more structured and effective collective learning processes. In addition, Gremmen and Benschop (2011) reaffirmed that networks support organisations with their expertise in diversity policies, talent development, or product development. However, critical opinions regarding the effectiveness of diversity networks have appeared in the literature as well. Foldy (2002; Benschop et al., 2015) argued, for instance, that diversity networks have little power to initiate any changes in organisations and that these networks merely follow the management team's plan. Furthermore, Bierema (2005) stated that the success of a network is contingent on, first, the attitude of the network members and, second, the widespread existing organisational culture. Furthermore, Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly (2006) found that diversity networks aimed at involving minorities, such as women or employees from ethnic minorities, have only a moderate effect on businesses. Kalev et al. (2006) also noticed that this effect was even weaker in organisations with responsibility structures. These critical studies suggest that the effectiveness of diversity networks depends on a multitude of factors.

Assessing the findings of both research stances on the effectiveness of diversity networks, we conclude that the results are ambivalent. Milliken and Martins (1996) stated on the one hand that groups composed of diverse employees could include more perspectives in problem-solving situations. On the other hand, too much diversity within a group can result in lower integration of the group.

In this present study, I consider the effectiveness of diversity networks to be the capacity of diversity networks to diminish inequalities in organisations. To research whether this understanding is shared in practice, I analyse the perception of network members and of non-members. Studying the perception is important as perceptions of diversity networks significantly contribute to the definition of the effectiveness of diversity networks. Prior research has shown that perception and construction of the value – or as related to this research, the effectiveness – of the networks demonstrate how the observers legitimise the existence and functioning of the diversity networks (Dennissen et al., 2018). Based on these findings, I assume that individual employees might perceive the effectiveness of diversity networks differently. I



also assume that employees' relations to the diversity networks influence their perception of the diversity networks' effectiveness as well. Furthermore, I also presume that particular diversity network characteristics and circumstances impact the effectiveness of the networks. I expect that the goals, structure, and activities of the diversity networks are characteristics which might influence the effectiveness of diversity networks.

### **Introduction to Perceptions of Diversity Networks**

I begin by briefly outlining the literature on perceptions of diversity networks and their effectiveness. Exploring the literature on perception follows the assumption that individual employees perceive the effectiveness of diversity networks differently. The studies by De Meuse, Hostage, and O'Neill (2007) and Benschop (2001) serve as orientation sources. In their study, De Meuse et al. (2007) developed a multidimensional framework for conceptualising perceptions of and attitudes towards workplace diversity. They distinguished between five components: emotional reaction, judgements, behavioural reactions, personal consequences, and organisational outcomes. In addition, Benschop (2001) found that diversity Human Resource Management (HRM) activities lead to beneficial emotional, cognitive, symbolic, and communicative outcomes, which also influence individuals, groups, and organisations. The present study defines a diversity network as one type of diversity HRM activity since diversity networks fall under strategies addressing discrimination against minority groups and which aim at eliminating discrimination in the long term (Pini, Brown, & Ryan, 2004).

This present study investigates the perception of diversity network members and non-members of diversity networks about diversity networks and their effectiveness. Therefore, this study includes several perspectives. The perception of diversity networks, diversity network characteristics, and the effectiveness of the networks are subjected to human senses. Being actively involved within the network shapes, for instance, the perceptions of the diversity network members about the diversity networks. While assessing the diversity networks, the members consider their personal experiences and emotions related to the network. The network members perceive the effectiveness of the diversity networks from within the diversity networks. By contrast, non-members of diversity networks perceive the effectiveness of the diversity networks from outside the networks. Furthermore, the perceptions of the non-members are subjective assessments as well; however, their non-network membership does influence their perceptions. The inclusion of multiple frames of references allows the organisation to create a broader picture of the perceptions of diversity networks. The inclusion

of both perspectives enables the involvement of a broader social context, which in this research is the diversity network internal and external social contexts.

As I describe in Chapter 3 of this research, I conducted interviews with five employees of the Human Resources (HR) department of a company. The five employees were both diversity network members and non-members. However, employees of an HR department might be familiar with the advantages of diversity networks as they also are founders of the diversity networks, who act in the name of the company. Consequently, their perception of diversity networks and their effectiveness could be biased, or these employees might only give socially desirable answers so that diversity networks appear exclusively as beneficial.

The literature about the perceived effectiveness of diversity networks has revealed contradictory results as well – the debate has centred mostly around the capacity of diversity networks to include minorities within organisations. Several studies concluded that diversity networks are perceived as effective in promoting equality among diverse groups (Dennissen et al., 2018). Pini et al. (2004) also argued that network members feel more integrated into the company. Furthermore, diversity network members perceive more career motivation as a consequence of their network membership (Friedman, Kane, & Cornfield, 1998).

While there is agreement on the positive perception of the effectiveness of diversity networks for minorities, there are negative perceptions of the effectiveness of diversity networks as well. Gremmen et al. (2011) found, for instance, that members of diversity networks for women are discriminated against. Dennissen et al. (2018) also found that the leaders of the networks tend to link the value of such networks to promoting the careers of individual network members and to forming communities which should protect the members from isolation. However, the networks fail to eliminate barriers for the inclusion of minorities within the company. Dennissen et al. (2018) viewed diversity networks as non-supportive in treating the core of the problem, which hinders the inclusion of minority groups. Furthermore, Dennissen et al. (2018, p. 13) claimed in their study that ‘future studies could include a broader range of members and non-members to sketch a fuller picture of the tensions and contradictions in the effects of the networks’.

### **Problem Definition and Research Questions**

This study investigates the effectiveness of diversity networks in their capacity as instruments for diversity management. To start, I examined the literature on diversity networks and the effectiveness of the networks. Furthermore, I observed how the effectiveness of diversity

networks unfolds in practice by capturing the perception of diversity network members and non-members. This research aims at analysing whether the effectiveness of diversity networks is independent from the perception of them. I investigated the influence of the perception of the effectiveness of diversity networks. I arrived at the following research question:

*How do members and non-members of diversity networks perceive the effectiveness of diversity networks?*

To answer this research question, I collected the data qualitatively by conducting semi-structured interviews to explore the perceptions of diversity network members and non-members on the effectiveness of diversity networks as diversity management instruments. This study applied inductive and deductive approaches to analyse the data. The analysed data should provide information to organisations about the perceived effectiveness of diversity networks as a diversity management instrument. The data should furthermore serve as an orientation for the diversity networks to improve those characteristics, which in turn should increase the effectiveness of the networks.

### **Academic Contribution**

To my knowledge, the vast majority of work in this area has focussed on the perception of one stakeholder on the effectiveness of diversity networks. There is limited research investigating multiple perspectives and references on the characteristics of diversity networks and their effectiveness (Dennissen et al., 2018), especially in their capacity as diversity management instruments. This study examines the perceived effectiveness and essential characteristics of diversity networks by two stakeholders, namely, the members and non-members of diversity networks. This research provides data that could contribute to the literature on diversity networks. My findings could contribute to the extension of the literature on the effectiveness of diversity networks, which should support the inclusion of diverse groups within organisations.

### **Managerial and Societal Contribution**

This research is important from a societal and managerial perspective based on the following aspects: First, this research provides an overview of the perceptions of the effectiveness and the required characteristics of diversity networks in an organisation. The organisation and the diversity networks within the organisation can receive impressions on how diversity networks could support the organisation with the management of a diverse workforce. Have diversity

networks been seen as beneficial for organisations, or are they seen as hindering the integration of diverse employees within the organisation? This research explores whether diversity networks are perceived as instruments for diversity management.

Furthermore, following Benschop et al. (2015), this research is of interest for *'today's globalised world'* because *'organisations need a diverse workforce in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities'*, for which diversity networks may play a crucial role. This research demonstrates how networks can promote the potential of each diverse employee and how everyone can benefit from diversity.

## **Outline**

This study continues in the following order: Chapter 2 provides a theoretical introduction to the literature on diversity networks and their effectiveness as diversity management instruments. Within the second chapter, I review existing literature on diversity networks, diversity network effectiveness and their characteristics, and the perception of such networks. The methodology applied in this research is explained in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents a concise analysis and interpretation of the gathered data presented. Chapter 5 consists of the discussion and the conclusion of this study.

## **Chapter 2 - Theory**

This chapter discusses the literature which is relevant for this study. The literature examines topics on diversity networks, the reasons employees in an organisation decide to join diversity networks or not, characteristics of diversity networks, and the effectiveness of diversity networks. Additionally, this chapter presents the literature on the perception of diversity and especially of diversity networks. Figure 1 demonstrates the results of the literature review. The figure combines individual topics of this chapter. The figure explains the connection between the topics.

### **Diversity Networks**

Diversity networks in organisations are unsophisticated initiatives; they have developed over a few years as instruments for diversity (management) (McCarthy, 2004). Companies have increased their awareness of the benefits of diversity management (Friedman et al., 1998) and

thus shifted their interest to diversity networks. This shift has been seen in companies throughout the entire globe in recent years (Welbourne et al., 2017).

However, the actual founders of diversity networks were not the organisations themselves but were predominantly the employees of the organisations. Female employees established the first diversity networks for women as a reaction to the exclusion of women from informal men's networks, also called 'old men networks', which still nowadays represent an obstacle to the career promotion of women in organisations (McCarthy, 2004). The women's networks were set up to support other women (Friedman & Holtom, 2002), which in turn could help them to improve their career opportunities (Friedman et al., 2002; Borgatti & Foster, 2003).

Other minorities, for instance, ethnic minorities or LGBTs, followed this movement as well and developed their diversity networks. Friedman et al. (2002) described the network founding employees as the basis of diversity networks because they act (within diversity networks) out of personal interest. Activists, HR managers, or employers were network founders as well. However, networks founded by them followed different interests compared to networks that were founded by 'minority' employees. Human Resources managers, for instance, established the networks to defend diversity efforts in the name of the company, whereas employers who supported the establishment of the networks were just following the developing trends in the market, to which the companies needed to adapt (Biscoe & Safford, 2010) to stay competitive.

Thus, various actors founded networks out of different interests, which leads to my suggestion that personal engagement within the networks influences one's definition of the effectiveness of diversity networks. According to this assumption, it may be expected that diversity network members define the network as capable if their careers develop based on their membership. In contrast, employees who set up a network on behalf of the company may declare diversity networks as useful, comparing their efforts to those of other companies which also apply diversity networks as diversity management instruments. Those employees may define the effectiveness of diversity networks less in terms of eliminating barriers which hinder the inclusion of minorities within the company. Several studies have even revealed that the implementation of diversity networks leads to more social exclusion of minority groups within the company instead of their inclusion (Friedman et al., 1998). Furthermore, various minority groups benefit to different degrees from diversity networks; thus, more disparity than equality exists between the minority groups (Kalev et al., 2006). This study provides an overview of the perception of diversity network members and non-members on the effectiveness of the diversity

networks. According to prior research on this topic, it may be expected that the interviewees make a different assumption based on a different level of network engagement.

**Reasons to Join the Diversity Networks.** Before I dive deeper into the literature on the characteristics of diversity networks which may contribute to their effectiveness, I explore the literature on employees' reasons to join a diversity network. I contemplate the literature on this subject as necessary since I consider network membership as influential for the perception of the effectiveness of diversity networks. For example, diversity network members may ascribe greater effectiveness to diversity networks, compared to non-members, considering the time they invest in the network as a network member. Related to this topic, recent studies have addressed the issue of the recruitment of new diversity network members (Knoke, 2019). Before the founders of the diversity networks establish diversity networks, they must identify the reasons for the employees to join diversity networks. Based on these arguments, they can create the networks (for example, networks can help employees with problem-solving or having a sense of community) (Friedman & Craig, 2004).

Most scholars argue that employees tend to join or stay in a network based on shared social identities and a high level of uniformity among the members (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). Connecting network members on the basis of uniformity leads to the continuation of the debate on whether diversity networks promote diversity – or whether these networks only form new (separated) groups without managing diversity-related issues. Employees expect personal growth and development, which predetermined the factors for their decision to join a diversity network (Githens & Aragon, 2009). In the literature review of a study by Welbourne et al. (2017), it is concluded that employees identify more with their companies after the formation of diversity networks, although cognitive and emotional components are of essential relevance. Reflecting upon this statement leaves open the question of how the sense of identification within a diversity network simultaneously stimulates the sense of identification within the entire organisation. Other investigations have demonstrated that employees join diversity networks merely for the improvement of their careers (O'Neil, 2011); they are more likely to feel less connected to the diversity network and thus feel less attached to the organisation in general (Welbourne et al., 2017).

The reasons employees decide not to join an internal diversity network have been investigated in the literature as well. Friedman and Carter (1993), for instance, found the following reasons: first, employees decide not to join a diversity network as they are afraid of other employees who may call them radical; second, they also expect to find political struggles

within the groups as well; and, finally, they have a lack of interest. The fear of being devalued by others and of being labelled as a member of a radical group (Friedman et al., 1993) allows the networks to appear more as instruments which rather create the isolation of minorities instead of create the inclusion of them within the organisation. A recent line of research has investigated the influence of employees' attitudes and expectations towards diversity networks on their choice to join or not join a diversity network membership. The present study proceeds one step further and examines employees' attitudes and expectations also as meaningfully related to their perception of the effectiveness of diversity networks.

**Characteristics of Diversity Networks.** In this section, I discuss the literature on diversity network characteristics, such as the goals, structure, and activities of diversity networks, which are, according to the literature, defined as crucial for diversity networks. Furthermore, I interpret whether these characteristics are crucial for creating an effective diversity network that serves as a diversity management instrument and that stimulates equality among minority employees.

**Goals.** As I illustrate in this section, numerous scholars have recognised the importance of defining diversity networks. I refer to the literature that discusses network goals. After presenting the literature on diversity network goals, I interpret to my knowledge which goals may contribute to the enhancement of the effectiveness of diversity networks as diversity management instruments – or to put it another way – which network goals are aimed at introducing equality within organisations.

According to the literature, diversity networks are essential for functional, organisational, and individual efficiency (career, guidance, exposure, and upper management) (Ibarra, 1993). In her 1993 study, Ibarra differentiates between expressive networks, which aim to exchange friendships or to provide social support, and instrumental networks. She supported the notion that instrumental networks serve to exchange job-related resources, such as information, competencies, consultations, and material goods (Ibarra, 1993; Van Emmerik, 2006). Other scholars such as Forret and Dougherty (2001) found that the networks aimed at enabling the exchange of information about current topics within the organisation. The literature on that goal seems to indicate that expressive networks grant the members the feeling of connectedness, whereas instrumental networks are more about supporting the careers of the individual members. The interpretation of the network goals presented by Ibarra (1993), Van Emmerik (2006), and Forret and Dougherty (2001) confirms that their descriptions of diversity goals relate mostly to the support for individual network members by sharing information,

which in turn should stimulate the socialisation process for the network members. However, diversity networks restrict their goals to a certain level; the networks do not seem to implement equality.

Githens et al. (2009) went further and argued that diversity networks also pursue learning successes on individual, group, and organisational levels through formal and informal learning, awareness training, and organisational change work. To draw more attention to the goal of increasing awareness on diversity issues and topics, scholars such as Bell, Özbilgin, Beauregard, and Sürgevil (2011) stated that diversity networks might increase the awareness on these topics by offering a platform for discussing diversity-related topics. Furthermore, Colgan et al. (2012) have advanced the hypothesis that diversity networks are beneficial in providing network members with more voice, visibility, and activity. They outline in their research that diversity networks create the opportunity for network members to share their concerns. This finding is congruent with the work of Wilkinson et al. (2011), who argued that giving the network members a voice enables them to participate and influence decisions in their organisations. However, McFadden and Crowley-Henry (2018) went even further and claimed that the ability for network members to use their voice is only valid when they believe in the power of their voice.

Examining the results of the studies by the scholars has shown that diversity networks may be useful in implementing equality only if the networks achieve their aims in interaction with organisations. The entire organisation ought to learn about diversity topics by, for instance, as Bell et al. (2011) mentioned, increasing awareness in the form of an interactive platform. The knowledge about diversity topics must be expanded to the entire organisation. Expanding the knowledge may be a first step towards the cultural development of an organisation which acts for equality.

In the findings of Raeburn (2004), the diversity network goals are divided into four subcategories. According to Raeburn (2004), networks aim at the following: providing the network members with support, socialisation, and opportunities to network; gaining official corporate recognition; educating employees about diversity-related topics and issues; and introducing inclusion policies and practices for minority groups.

The diversity network goals presented by Raeburn (2004) appear as steps. According to Raeburn (2004), the first step concerns the networks demonstrating respect and support towards individual employees. Raeburn (2004) described the last step as almost succeeding in reaching the goal of implementing equality. However, it is necessary as well that the networks receive



support by the organisation to introduce policies and practices which assist minorities. According to my interpretation of the literature on diversity network goals, diversity networks may be perceived as useful in implementing equality if the diversity networks pursue it by using Raeburn's (2004) specified network goals (or steps), especially the last one.

**Structure.** My approach in this section is the same as in the prior one. I present first the results of recent studies, and then I continue with the interpretation of the structural aspects which may increase the effectiveness of diversity networks as diversity network instruments.

Recent studies have explored the structure of diversity networks within an organisation. Within this area of investigation, some studies confirmed that diversity networks are more or less formally organised. The structure may vary in different degrees of connections with other parties, for instance, the management team. The connection between the diversity networks and the management team may lie on a spectrum from hostile to cooperative (Biscoe et al., 2010).

At first glance, it appears that networks that have a cooperative relationship with the management team are more successful in implementing their goals as they gain support from influential employees. In contrast, the appearance of a hostile relationship leads to the suggestion that the pursuits of those networks are aimed at changing the organisational culture, which might be advantageous for the implementation of equality. However, changing the organisational culture does not necessarily imply that networks with hostile relations with management are less effective, but they may encounter more resistance when they attempt to implement their goals. According to this argumentation, I embrace that networks that the management team is listening to are one step ahead regarding the improvement of their effectiveness as a diversity management instrument.

Most studies on diversity network structures have specified that the members of diversity networks tend to avoid hierarchical structures. Welbourne et al. (2017) have argued that diversity networks are more likely to function in a horizontal way in which each member receives the same status. Ibarra (1993) posed additionally that diversity networks structure themselves less based on occupational functions and more based on similarity, in other words, certain similar characteristics of members.

I interpret the structure of diversity networks as essential for the effectiveness of diversity networks since a network's structure may ensure that the network continues to exist. It should be noted, given the findings in the literature, that no hierarchical structuring is required. Ibarra (1993) mentioned in her research that similarity is the binding element. I argue that the networks should stay connected to the organisation in the best-case situation with the

management team to ensure equality. In this way, the organisation may become aware of minority groups' needs and may implement changes to meet those needs.

*Activities.* As in the goals and structure sections, I begin by discussing the literature, in this section, about activities that are organised by diversity networks. Here too, I interpret which activities may increase the effectiveness of diversity networks.

Activities that are organised by diversity networks have received a great amount of research attention. Welbourne et al. (2013), for instance, supported the notion that network activities should influence the individual member, the network, and the entire organisation. Which activities are organised by diversity networks has been investigated by Douglas (2008). According to Douglas (2008), the development of the diversity network appears in phases; she associated various activities with these phases. In the first phase, which Douglas (2008) calls the 'Awareness' phase, the education of diversity network members is an essential determinant. For this purpose, networks organise events that are accessible to all employees, who can learn and understand cultures, lifestyles, and experiences. The second phase, which is called the 'Affiliation' phase, is about community building and connecting the main goals of the network activities. Therefore, networks invite speakers to presentations where they talk about issues and concerns.

To have enough participants at network events as well, diversity network members need to maintain communication inside and outside the networks. Maintaining contact could be stimulated by sharing flyers or by administrating the network websites. Diversity networks that operate in the third phase, the 'Access' phase, connect with network members and employees by, for instance, organising mentoring programmes. Networks in the last phase, the 'Advancement' phase, organise education and training programmes. Here, the diversity network members can learn, for example, how to 'brand' themselves and their capacities (Douglas, 2008).

Douglas (2008) described activities which are related to certain phases that leave open the question of whether every network passes through each phase. Furthermore, the first two phases resemble the diversity network goals of socialisation, which Ibarra (1993) also described, as mentioned in the goal section, as did Van Emmerik (2006) and Forret et al. (2001). I argue here as well that socialising may be beneficial for individual employees but does not guarantee the implementation of equality. Diversity networks which are operating in the last two phases and which are organising events related to the phases (Douglas, 2008), may, according to my interpretation, act more closely in terms of advocating for equality for the

minority groups. However, if these activities remain in the scope of the network and do not reach the rest of the organisation, the diversity network would need to organise more events intended to implement equality. How these events may appear to persist is unknown from the literature review. Based on prior literature, I can assume that these events need to involve the organisation or at least influential employees as well.

Most of the researchers studying diversity network activities reflect in their findings the same diversity network activities as Douglas (2008). Friedman (1996) and Friedman et al. (1993), for instance, listed the following diversity network activities: meeting people, discussing topics, and planning events. The network meetings are usually held once per month, during lunchtime or after work. The work of Friedman et al. (2002), in addition to the research of Friedman (1996) and Friedman et al. (1993), has demonstrated that network meetings are held on an annual basis with guest speakers who give speeches or who present workshops. Within the network, event participants are, in some cases, senior executives and HR employees. From time to time, even men are allowed to attend the meetings of diversity networks for women (Friedman et al., 1998).

The research findings presented in this section dive deeper into the topic of who the diversity network event participants are. These results illustrate that networks also invite non-members of diversity networks to their activities, which is, to my interpretation, necessary to widen the scope of the network's effectiveness. More employees might become informed about diversity-related topics, which again might convince the organisation to change the organisational culture towards equality. In addition, inviting guest speakers to the network events seems beneficial for increasing the network's effectiveness as the guest speakers provide the network with new input and inspiration. The networks might learn new approaches to managing diversity, which again might influence the organisation as well to implement equality.

Finally, I summarise the research findings on diversity network characteristics, which might, according to my interpretation, be essential for increasing a diversity network's effectiveness as a diversity management instrument. Regarding the diversity network goals, I notice the following: Diversity networks should achieve their goals in interaction with the company to demonstrate the meaning of equality. Furthermore, networks need to distribute knowledge about diversity within the entire organisation. Diversity networks might achieve this by organising awareness trainings or by arranging interactive discussion platforms. Introducing

policies and practices in favour of diversity networks might be, according to my interpretation, one of the most effective diversity network goals which could lead to equality. However, participation in awareness trainings (by diversity network members and also non-members from the entire organisation) on diversity-related topics should be a precondition for the appropriate implementation of policies and practices.

By interpreting the literature on diversity network structures, it becomes clear as well that diversity networks should, at best, communicate or interact with the management team of the organisation to be effective in terms of implementing equality. Within a diversity network, no hierarchical structure is needed or preferred. The structure within the network should maintain the organisation of diversity network events.

Network activities and events which invite several participants ideally might lead to more equality. Education and training programmes are activities that are the closest to events that act in favour of equality. Furthermore, guest speakers might provide the networks with new insights on diversity management approaches as to how the networks could improve their effectiveness.

**Effectiveness of Diversity Networks.** The previous section provided an overview of the literature on diversity network characteristics, which serve as foundations for the networks to increase their effectiveness as diversity management instruments. In this section, I review existing literature on the effectiveness of diversity networks and on how the effectiveness is expressed. According to prior research, the effectiveness of diversity networks is organised into three (main) parts – reduction of turnover intentions, optimism for careers, and learning results. However, I assume that the effectiveness of diversity networks appears in different manifestations as well, which this research investigates.

***Reduction of Turnover Intentions.*** Previous research observed the relationship between diversity network membership and reduced turnover intentions. The study executed by Moynihan and Pandey (2007), for instance, revealed that networks, which are characterised by good relationships between members and which are defined by obligations to other network members, influence the intention of network members to stay in the company. Friedman et al. (2002) went even further and compared the turnover intentions of diversity members with those of non-network members. They claimed that among minority employees, the effect of joining a diversity network emerged beneficial on reducing turnover intention at all levels of management, but not at the non-managerial levels.

As shown in previous research, the effect of joining a diversity network on reducing

turnover intentions only applies for minority employees on the management level. According to these findings, I assume that employees who are already on the management level perceive network membership as an additional motivator to remain in the company. Minority employees who do not operate at a management level might perceive their membership within a company as not determining their decision to leave the company or not. They may decide based on various other determinants.

Past studies have yielded some critical insight into the effectiveness of diversity networks as a means to reduce the intention to leave the organisation of employees who are not working at the management level. For example, the work of Groeneveld (2011) demonstrated that diversity management has a slightly moderate effect on the turnover intentions of the employees. Furthermore, Pandey, Wright, and Moynihan (2008) argued that the intention to leave a company is mostly subject to the non-alignment of company values and the values of the individual employee.

This research confessed the concerns on whether a diversity network membership solely determines the decision to leave a company. I consider other factors such as salary or working conditions as incentives, which are of even more importance while employees decide to leave or to stay in the company. Pandey et al. (2008), for instance, mentioned that value alignment might favour the choice of staying in the company. If I interpret this in the context of diversity, I state the following: If employees would feel a strong sense of equality and if they might recognise an approach of the organisation to implementing equality, the employees would be likely to stay in the company and vice versa.

***Optimism for Careers.*** From the literature review, it follows that a few studies have drawn parallels between diversity network membership and optimism for one's career. The study by Friedman et al. (1998) can be considered as an example of describing these parallels. The researchers argued that network members show more optimism about their careers. The researchers state that this effect may occur because network members tend to work with mentors who can support them during their careers. This finding is congruent with the work of Friedman et al. (2002) and of Borgatti et al. (2003), who argue that diversity network members exchange mutual support within the networks, which, in turn, could provide them with better career opportunities. Mutual support and better career opportunities may have a beneficial effect on their optimism to advance their careers. In a similar vein, Friedman et al. (2002) and Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, and Tsai (2004) found that network members who are influenced by their

network membership also have increased access to information and resources which can have a positive impact on their motivation, on their careers, and even on their performance.

Previous studies have recognised the importance of membership within a diversity network on network members' optimism for career improvement. Optimism for career improvement is, according to the literature, mostly related to the interaction with other employees, whereby they can exchange information that could benefit their careers. For this purpose, I interpret diversity networks as a way that diversity network members can have additional possibilities to interact with other employees outside their usual work environment. My interpretation follows the reasoning that employees' optimism for their career increases by sharing information and resources with other employees; however, employees could also have a broad network with collaborators without being enrolled in diversity networks. Consequently, I assume that the optimism for career improvement relates more to the number of collaborators who can provide employees with valuable information and resources.

Critical studies on the relation between network membership and optimism for career, for instance, the study of Friedman et al. (1998), have argued that grouping within a network could also lead to isolation from colleagues who are not diversity network members. The isolation of the groups can be explained, according to my opinion, by the time network members invest in a network meeting, which restricts the remaining time to cooperate with other colleagues. Overall, I interpret that a diversity network membership cannot directly influence optimism for career improvement.

***Learning Results.*** There is a growing body of research on the influence of diversity networks on learning results or learning processes. Green (2018), for instance, has argued that learning processes that are stimulated by diversity networks vary and that these processes may focus on leadership development or on informal learning processes, such as mentoring. The learning processes described by Green (2018) can be interpreted as processes that influence the development of individual diversity network members.

While previous studies have indicated that diversity networks display learning effects on the individual network member level, learning effects on the organisational level have been less demonstrated. A few attempts have been made to investigate the role of diversity networks on learning processes on the organisational level. The investigation of Colgan et al. (2012), for instance, revealed that learning about diversity topics occurs by formal learning processes such as by presentations or the development of strategies for the inclusion of new employees. The diversity networks organise these formal learning events to pay more attention to topics related

to diversity in organisations (Colgan et al., 2012).

In addition, Githens et al. (2009) showed that members of diversity networks integrate their knowledge about diversity into organisational development processes. Furthermore, they spread their knowledge about the benefits of diversity in organisations through non-intentional learning within the company; they promote understanding of these topics and provide support by interacting informally with colleagues or managers (Githens et al., 2009). This finding is congruent with the work of Green (2018), who found that members of the diversity networks accompanied new employees in organisations and introduced them to the norms and cultures of the organisation. Green (2018) also outlined that the diversity network members learned from each other: Employees with different expertise explained their specific fields to each other, which led to a better understanding of the organisation (and of different departments) among the diversity network members. Green (2018) has also gone further and stated that lectures on cultural differences or coaching programmes that encourage discussions between the network members and non-members stimulate learning.

Current research seems to indicate that the learning effect can appear in the interactions between employees, whether they are network members or not. Network members learn from each other, but they also educate (intentionally and also unintentionally) the organisation and, therefore, other employees outside the network. Furthermore, the research has provided evidence on the fact that the networks transfer knowledge on diversity topics throughout the entire organisation. According to the literature, I interpret diversity networks as effective in accomplishing learning effects. Accomplishing learning effects is comparable with the goals of diversity networks to increase awareness on diversity-related topics. Thus, diversity networks may pursue the goal of increasing awareness by teaching the organisation about diversity topics, which, in turn, may change the organisational culture in the direction of equality.

According to the interpretation of the literature review on the effectiveness of diversity networks, I summarise the following: Diversity networks have no direct effect on decreasing turnover intentions. Congruency between network members' values and values of the organisation has more influence on employees' intentions to stay in the company. Thus, if the organisation meets the values of (minority) employees, the employees instead tend to stay in the company. Furthermore, diversity networks are instruments that offer network members the opportunity to get to know more employees from their company, which could increase career

optimism. However, diversity networks do not increase the optimism for careers of network members directly; diversity networks might instead mediate optimism for career improvement. In addition, learning effects occur by interactions between network members but also by interactions between network members and non-members. Therefore, the organisation can (intentionally or unintentionally) learn from network members about diversity-related topics.

## **Perceptions**

This section provides an overview of how the literature defines the perception of diversity networks. Most of the research on the perception of diversity has acknowledged the fact that the interpretation of the perception consists of several components. As an example of an attempt for the definition of the perception of diversity, the study by Allen, Dawson, Wheatley, and White (2007, p. 22) can be considered. They describe the following:

*By considering perceived diversity as opposed to actual diversity we can capitalize on the intricate and multidimensional nature of diversity. Not only are visible diversity traits telling in an organization, but traits that are not visible to the naked eye provide important information as well. It is the perception of diversity that drives individual interactions within an organization, and this broad perspective captures the components that individuals feel are important as they define diversity. (Allen et al., 2007, p. 22)*

Allen et al. (2007) argued that it is a misconception to view perception as only consisting of clearly visible components without non-tangible elements. Kottke and Agars (2005) confirmed the centrality of perception of diversity (initiatives) as well. They claimed that the initiatives to support minority groups do not lead to achievement alone; the perceptions that all employees in a company, both women and men, have on the initiatives are more crucial for the success of these initiatives. They add the notion that the initiatives require that they are welcomed by the employees as well.

The existing literature has noticed that the perception of the diversity networks influences the effectiveness of the diversity networks. As an example, consider the study of Oswick and Noon (2014), which claimed that the success of initiatives aiming at eliminating discrimination against minorities is subject to discursive positioning about *quality*, *diversity*, and *inclusion*. This leads to the understanding that the perception of the effectiveness of diversity networks depends on the eye of the beholder. Other scholars, such as Hoobler et al.



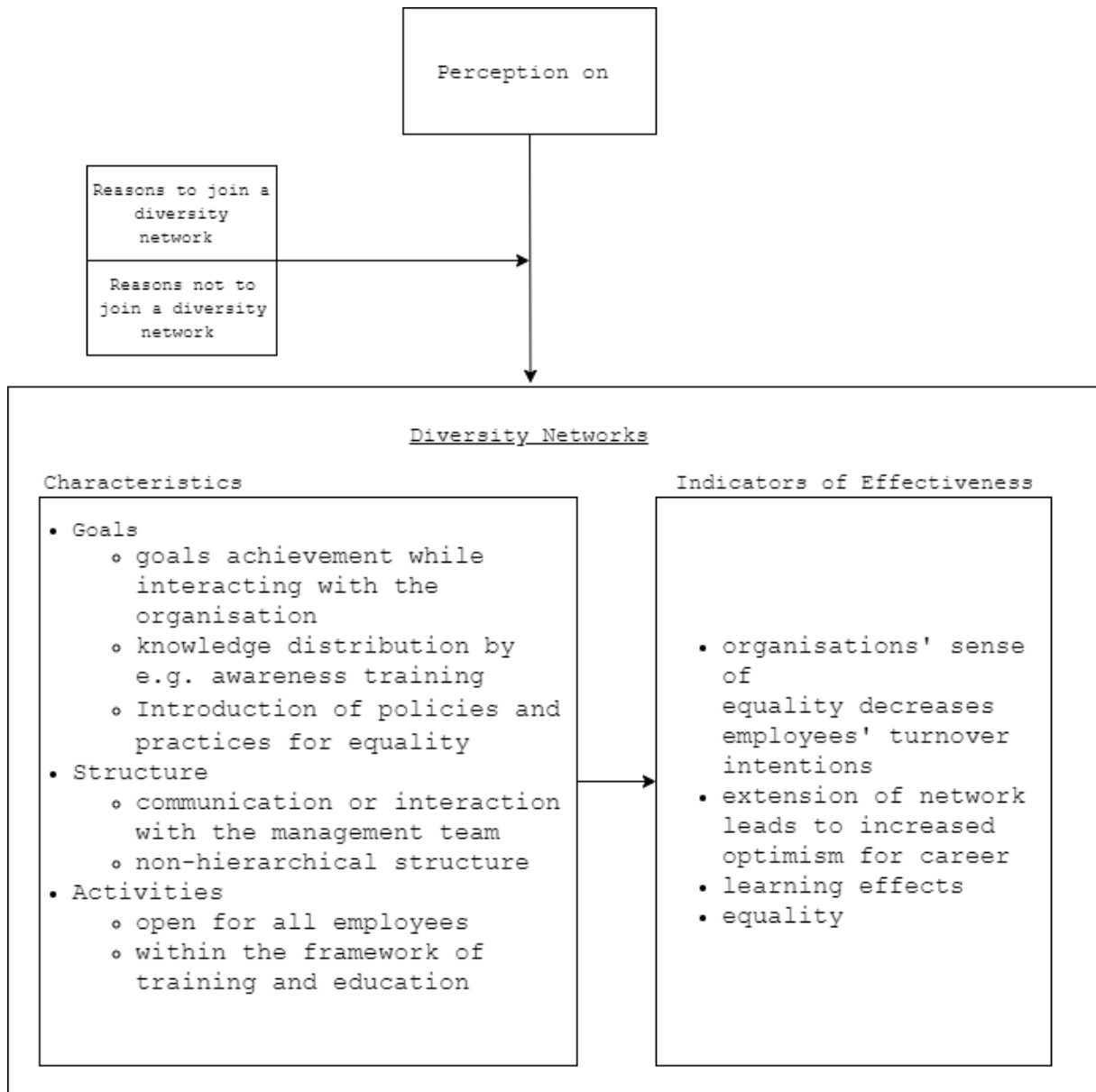
(2007), have further analysed perceptions on diversity networks and found that companies assume that the treatment of diversity-related topics and issues can be tackled easily within short seminars and that organisational changes can be handled quickly. However, she argued that this is not as easy as it sounds in theory as power relationships affect change processes. Bierema (2005) went even further and investigated whether networks enhance organisational processes such as recruitment, retention, or advancement for minority groups. She found that there was no improvement in these processes as patriarchal cultures determine the creation of these processes. She concluded that networks contribute less to eliminating patriarchal structures and more rather to reproducing them.

Overall, past studies have yielded some important insight into the perception of diversity networks. Based on this finding, I interpreted that the implementation of diversity appears at first glance as no challenge to companies and their employees. Rather, it appears that companies that implement diversity management strategies follow (diversity) trends, whereas these companies do not seem to be aware of the underlying mechanism and barriers which hinder the ultimate implementation of diversity. The barriers which hinder the implementation lie more in the existing organisational culture and on the perception of powerful employees of diversity and its benefits. According to this interpretation, it can be concluded that diversity networks require the support of powerful employees who perceive the networks as effective instruments for the implementation of equality, which results in a positive perception of the effectiveness of diversity networks.

Milliken et al. (1996) found evidence of the differences between perceived short-term effects and perceived long-term effects. They found that affective (i.e., satisfaction, commitment), cognitive (e.g., range of perspectives), symbolic (behaviour), and communication-related effects (e.g., external communication) have a relation to short-term consequences. In contrast, according to them, the long-term effects are caused directly by diversity or mediated by the short-term effects. These long-term effects include effects on the individual (e.g., absenteeism, turnover), group (turnover, performance), and organisational levels (turnover, performance, and strategic changes).

I interpret the four short-term effects as underlying components of the organisational culture. Based on this, it can be concluded that if these four components are positively directed towards diversity topics, the organisation could accomplish cultural changes in the form of, for instance, openness towards minorities. However, to reach this change, it would be necessary that these effects not only occur at the network members level but also trigger every employee

of an organisation. Furthermore, I discuss whether these effects should be named short-term effects, because, to my knowledge, cultural changes are difficult to implement and cost a great deal of time. While analysing the long-term effects, I noticed that they affect organisational processes, such as the retention of current employees. Based on this observation, I assume that the so-called short-term effects must be achieved first by each employee before the so-called long-term effects occur. For example, if employees continue to behave negatively towards minorities (symbolic) and if they maintain a practice of excluding them, strategic changes only exist on paper and would not lead to the inclusion of minorities. Therefore, I conclude that a new line of research should stress the importance of the perceptions of diversity networks and their effectiveness.



**Figure 1.** This figure represents an overview of the findings which resulted from the interpretation of the literature review in the second chapter.

Literature about the perception of diversity networks – including the characteristics (goals, structure, activities), which in turn influence the effectiveness (indicators – organisations’ sense of equality decrease employees’ turnover intentions, extension of the network leading to optimism for career, learning results, and equality) – was analysed. It is concluded that employees’ decision to join or not join a diversity network affects their perception of diversity networks and their effectiveness.

## **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

The methodological chapter provides an overview of the methodology I apply in this study. This chapter consists of five parts. Part one is dedicated to the research design. The second part discusses the data collection of the research, which addresses the case description, selection of the interviewees, and the conducting of the interviews. This part is followed by the third part, the research analysis. Part four consists of the data analysis – deduction and induction – of this research. Part five of this chapter covers the research ethics, reflexivity, and the quality of the research.

### **Research Design**

This empirical study analyses the perception of diversity networks by members and non-members on the effectiveness of diversity networks as a diversity management instrument. The perception of the two target groups, diversity network members and non-members, was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews. The usage of semi-structured interviews is a way of seeking knowledge of all kinds of phenomena which human beings can perceive – such as, related to this research, the phenomena of diversity networks and their effectiveness. Asking the interviewees to share their own perspectives and experiences with this phenomenon of diversity networks is an indication for respondent interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

The interviews were conducted to understand how the effectiveness of diversity networks is unfolded in practice, which values and beliefs the interviewees hold on diversity networks and the effectiveness of the networks, and to convey what they perceive as ‘true’ or as ‘real’ regarding the phenomenon of diversity networks.

Conducting interviews requires the researcher to make a critical and self-conscious epistemological reflection. To explain epistemology, I mention the following: It is a philosophical discussion that focusses on knowledge about knowledge (Johnson & Duberley, 2000); it is the study, which guarantees us scientific knowledge. Furthermore, it determines whether assumptions, including our own, are categorised as true or untrue, which can lead to the refutation of previously valid truths. Concerning this research, I assume that diversity networks (the social phenomena the interviewees deal with) have no real, independent status separated from the act of knowing (Symon & Cassell, 2012). While we as human beings perceive or know the common word, consequently we create the world, but we are not aware

of our role in this creative process (Symon et al., 2012).

From a subjectivist (relativist) epistemological stance, I analysed whether everyday talk creates the effectiveness of diversity networks. I needed to be aware of the fact that when I perceive diversity networks I also make assumptions about the effectiveness of diversity networks. The assumptions I make about the effectiveness of diversity networks has as a consequence that I partly create the effectiveness of the network. This means that the perception of the effectiveness occurs within me in the role of the observer. While epistemology discusses the existence of knowledge about knowledge (Johnson et al., 2000), ontology, in comparison, deals with the origin of phenomena and their aspects, and as linked to this study, the aspects are the origins of diversity. It determines whether a phenomenon is real or illusionary (Symon et al., 2012). This means, with regards to this study, that I should explore the origins and aspects of the diversity networks and their effectiveness. I should decide whether the effectiveness of diversity networks is real or if it is illusionary.

For this research, I critically analysed and interpreted pre-existing literature on diversity networks. Furthermore, conducting interviews enabled the understanding of how diversity networks operate as diversity management instruments in practice, how they have developed, and how network members and non-members legitimise them.

I selected two target groups as interview participants to comprehend the social constructions of reality. The construction of realities is located in varying practices, interests, and motives that result from communities' sense-making (Forester, 1993). I assumed that the two target groups have different interests and motives regarding the phenomena of diversity networks. Involving both groups might create a broader picture of the reality of diversity networks and their effectiveness. I analyse the picture, which results from the interview session, from a critical philosophical standpoint to receive a better understanding of diversity networks.

## **Data Collection**

**Case Description - The Company.** The company in which I conducted the interviews is active in the semiconductor manufacturing industry. The products produced by the company are used in the safety, identification, automotive, networking, radio frequency, analogue design, and power management industries. The company employs 30,000 people worldwide. The company is represented in 30 countries, including the Netherlands, where I held the interview sessions.

The company states on its website that it is aware of the value of each employee;

according to this statement, the company appreciates each employee for his or her unique background. Furthermore, the company presents itself as a company that treats employees with respect. The website presents the company's approach towards diversity and inclusion and focusses on the following areas: creating an inclusive work environment to which the best talent can be attracted and in which everyone feels welcome, valued, and comfortable. Additionally, the company promises never to make decisions to hire, fire, demote, or transfer employees based on employee demographics.

The company has integrated into its workforce several diversity networks which focus on different target groups. In this study, I conducted interviews with members of a network for young employees, which is called in this research 'Diversity Network 1', and with members of a diversity network for women working in the technology industry, which is called 'Diversity Network 2'. The following section explains how I selected diversity network members and non-members.

It is also of importance to mention that I worked in one of the local HR departments of the company during this research. Being an employee of the company and having access to the company's intranet enabled me to receive information about the diversity networks.

**Selection of Interviewees.** To start, I selected members of the diversity networks as interviewees. I spoke to active network members I knew from my own network within the company and asked them if they could participate in my research and if they could share with me contact details of other active diversity network members. This method of sampling I applied in this research is called snowball sampling (Noy, 2008). After receiving the names of other active network members, I asked them via e-mail communication to participate in my research. I asked a total of 10 active members of the network for younger employees and three members (two of them participated in activities which were organised by both networks) of the network for women to participate in this research. Nine out of 10 members of the network for younger employees and all three members of the network for women in technology declared their willingness to participate in this research, which enabled quick planning and conducting of the interview sessions. One of the members of the network for young employees also declared his willingness to participate in this research. However, he cancelled the appointment due to sickness leave.

For the selection of members and non-members, I asked HR employees I knew if they were diversity network members or not. Two of them identified themselves as network members and three of them as non-members. I planned interview sessions with them.

Interviewing employees from the HR department might lead to a biased input because HR employees are aware of the concept of diversity networks. They could also be defined as the founders of diversity networks if the organisation has entrusted them to build a diversity network (Friedman, 2002). The fact that they act in the name of the company and are responsible for the implementation of the diversity networks might cause them, as a consequence, to only report the advantages of diversity networks and to perceive the networks exclusively as effective. They might hide any disadvantages related to the diversity networks so that the network could be sustained. Thus, they could offer only socially desirable answers.

I selected the other three non-members I interviewed in this study via the snowballing method as well. Therefore, I asked the diversity network members after their interview sessions whether they knew employees who would meet the criteria of potential network members but who were not registered or who did not want participate in any networking event. They indicated three employees in total who were not enrolled and who were not active participants of diversity network events. I contacted all three employees via e-mail as well. They responded to my request quickly and agreed to participate as interviewees in this research. One of the non-members defined herself as a non-member of the network for women in technology but reported during the interview session that she was attending meetings of the network for young employees. In response to her own assessment, I defined her as a non-member. However, her perception of the diversity networks' effectiveness was influenced by her participation at diversity network events, which consequently might cause her perception of the effectiveness of the diversity networks to be biased due to her involvement one of the networks (Roulston & Shelton, 2015).

Selecting and asking diversity network members to start this research and then asking them for additional contacts of further network members and non-members is, according to Noy (2008), an example of the snowballing method. According to Blanken, Hendricks, and Adriaans (1992), snowball sampling appears to be an 'informal' procedure. However, Noy (2008) found that various studies perceived the snowball sampling as an effective method to receive information and access to 'hidden populations'. As an employee of the HR department, I only had information and access to a restricted number of diversity network members. To conduct interviews with enough diversity network members, I needed to reach out to the network members to receive more names of network members. Non-members were also, in the beginning of this research, a 'hidden population'. Here, the network members

could also help me with selecting potential network candidates who were not identified as diversity network members.

When I reflect on my role as the researcher of this investigation, who was also employed in the HR department of the company, I need to mention the following: I was primarily the researcher, but some of the interviewees also knew me as an employee of the HR department. Knowing that I was an employee of the HR department might have influenced them during the interview sessions. They might have provided me with socially desirable answers to prevent giving me the ‘wrong’ answers. However, I explained at the beginning of every interview session that the interview material would be treated confidentially and would have no influence on their performance.

Interview Number	Diversity Network Member	Network	Department Where Interviewee Works
1	Yes	1	Engineering
2	No	No	Human Resources
3	Yes	1	Engineering
4	Yes	1	Human Resources
5	Yes	2	Information Technology
6	Yes	1	Engineering
7	Yes	1 and 2	Engineer
8	Yes	1	Engineering
9	No	No	Information Technology
10	No*	No	Engineering
11	No	No	Human Resources
12	Yes	1	Engineering
13	No	No	Human Resources
14	Yes	1	Engineering
15	Yes	1 and 2	Human Resources
16	No	No	Engineering

**Table 1.** Overview of all interviewees of this research. 1 = Diversity Network 1 (for young employee interests), 2 = Diversity Network 2 (for female employee interests); in interview 7 and 15, the employees mentioned that they perceive themselves as members of both networks

\*The interviewee is not defined as a member but is attending events of Diversity Network 2.

**Interviews.** The data for this study resulted from semi-structured interviews. I conducted a total of 16 semi-structured interviews with employees of one organisation. All interview sessions ranged between 25 and 70 minutes. I met with the interviewees face-to-face and audiotaped them. I conducted all interviews in either one of two languages, English and Dutch. I fully transcribed the audiotaped interviews after each interview session and coded them for this investigative analysis.

I introduced the interviewees to the topic of this study for the first time via our first e-mail communication. I explained the research topic for the second time briefly at the beginning



of each interview session. Furthermore, I also clarified at the beginning of each interview session the subsequent steps of this investigation. In addition, I informed the interviewees on their freedom to leave the study and to ask questions, and I assured them that I would treat the interview material confidentially and anonymously. After clarifying all these points, I started the interview sessions.

Members and non-members received similar interview questions, which I designed in advance. However, the questions were per target group and, in some cases, formulated differently. The interview questions are in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

The interview questions were semi-structured, which left room for formulating follow-up questions that related to the answers given by the interviewees. Using a semi-structured interview method ensured, on the one hand, that I asked all interviewees the same predetermined question. On the other hand, the follow-up questions (which were not predetermined) allowed me to ask for more precise explanations and to discuss sensitive topics (Fylan, 2005).

## **Research Analysis**

The study at hand employed a qualitative method to examine the perceptions of diversity network members and non-members on diversity networks and the effectiveness of diversity networks. I collected the data through the use of semi-structured interviews and transcribed them afterwards. Furthermore, I analysed and interpreted the transcribed material critically. Forester (1993) argued that the qualitative researcher should be concerned about developing a new model of engagement that allows the participants to pursue interests and objectives that are currently excluded by the dominant management discourse. By analysing the perception of the interviewees on diversity networks, I could learn more about the diversity network characteristics, which I considered as essential for the improvement of diversity networks' effectiveness, and I could learn about how the effectiveness of diversity networks was, in general, constituted. Based on this analysis, I reflected on the role of diversity networks as capable diversity management instruments to implement equality.

The study employed content analysis (Altheide, 1987) combining data collection, analysis, and interpretation. I first collected the data. Then I analysed the data. The first step of the analysis, data reduction, refers to the process of selecting, coding, and categorising the data. To begin, I created an initial list of codes and categories upon the interpretation of the pre-existing literature about diversity networks, which I display in Figure 1 of the second chapter

and which I approached deductively (Miles & Haberman, 1994). I list the applied codes in the next section of this chapter. Furthermore, I tested new emerging codes and categories inductively (Miles et al., 1994).

The last step, interpretation, helped me to answer the research question of this investigation. I discovered how two target groups, diversity network members and non-members, perceive the effectiveness of diversity networks.

### **Deduction and Induction**

Empirical studies on diversity networks and their effectiveness serve as an orientation for the analysis. I created categories and codes based on the interpretation of the literature (Hyde, 2000). I present the categories, codes, and indicators, which resulted from the literature, in Appendix 3. I uploaded the transcribed material of 16 interviews in the software programme ATLAS.ti. Within the framework of the deductive analysis, I coded the uploaded material by the categories and codes that resulted from the interpretation of the literature on diversity networks.

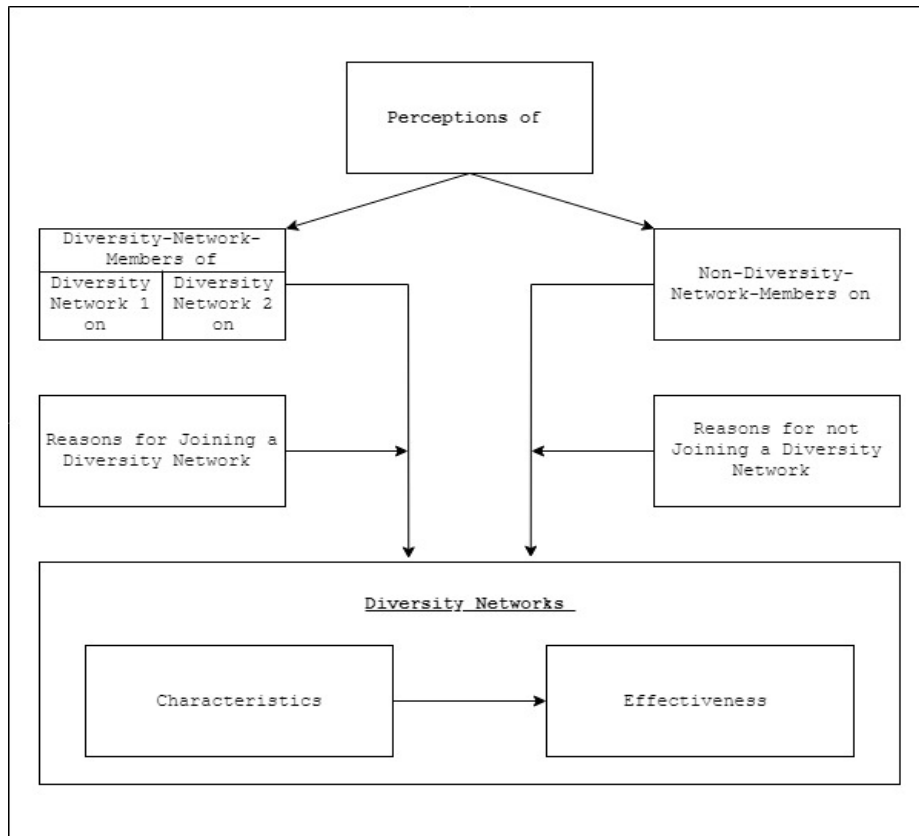
I covered further a thematic field, which did not result from the interpretation of the literature, for instance, the interviewees' demographics or the history of the networks during the interview sessions. Hence, also, new codes arose while coding the transcribed material. Finding new code groups and codes is an indication of the inductive analysis approach. The table, which follows, illustrates the code groups, codes, and examples of quotes developed from the analysis of the material.

### **Overview of code groups, codes, and examples of quotes resulting from the research material**

<b>Code Group</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Examples of Quotes</b>
1. Basic demographics of the interviewees	Work experience in years; Function within the company; Cultural background; Age	<i>Originally test process engineer and then now more and more leading projects with a local span and global span (Interview 1; [...] my function title is HR manager. (Interview 4)</i>
2. Information about the participation in diversity networks; Reasons to join a diversity network or not	Membership within a diversity network (yes/no); (In case of membership) name of the diversity network; Interviewees role within the network (in case	<i>[...] people I do not want just to say, Oh yeah, we work together. That is it because sometimes I like to have a drink after work [...] (Interview 6); And if this is</i>

	of membership); Reasons to join a diversity network (or not)	<i>not something like I will say it is one of my top five priorities, let me put it this way. (Interview 9)</i>
3. History of the diversity networks	History of the diversity network	<i>Yeah, it was because our management – we were preparing for the goals of the year, and then the management asked us to put something personal how we could contribute to (name of the company anonymised) without our daily job. (Interview 5); Not so much. (Interview 13)</i>
4. Characteristics of diversity networks	Goal (or strategy) of the diversity network; Structure of the diversity network; Activities/events organised by diversity networks	<i>So basically there is – we want to organise a platform for (repeated word ‘for’ deleted) the young employees to (repeated word ‘to’ deleted) hang out and to socialise and to network with each other. (Interview 6); In my humble opinion, the goal is to boost women in technology, and what I mean by boost women in technology is that – OK, that it is to show to the younger generation to say, OK guys. Look, it is possible. We do see these women that are working in a field which was a taboo for us. (Interview 9); Let us say the board is only here to make sure the structure is there. (Interview 7)</i>
5. Effectiveness of diversity networks	Interviewees’ definition of the effectiveness of a diversity network; Impact which diversity networks might have according to the interviewees (different levels); Learning effects of diversity networks on organisations; Image represented by diversity network(s); Communication (channels) of the diversity	<i>But I think that it is only effective within a company if the network also contributes to the culture of the company or if it can bring change within a company itself. (translated from Dutch to English; Interview 4); I think, in general, you feel more and more attached to the company. (Interview 15); So I think it is a great</i>

	<p>network; Organisational processes affected by the diversity networks;  Interviewees' perceived feelings related to diversity network membership;  (Experiences or assumed) feelings related to membership within the diversity network;  Interviewees' judgement of diversity networks</p>	<p><i>help for them to (repeated word 'to' deleted) learn from us how to start a structured group and then how to get funding and how to always have someone to bring this group forward. (Interview 6); You know, having such a community brings visibility to the upper management. (Interview 9); First of all, I think you are able to retain the people by (repeated word 'by' deleted) offering different networks. (Interview 15)</i></p>
<p>6. Interpretation of diversity networks as instruments for diversity management</p>	<p>A diversity network is effective as a tool for diversity management (?)</p>	<p><i>Yeah, networking does not mean diversity, I do not think so. Because in our case, for example, you have a network of X, right? Then the commonality is that X. But it does not always bring diversity. (Interview 5); I think it can help. I certainly do not think it is the only one. (Interview 13)</i></p>



**Figure 2.** Application of the data schema, which was built based on the literature about the perception of diversity networks. This research analyses the perception of both target groups, network members and non-members, on diversity networks. I assumed that their decision to join a diversity network influenced their perception of the networks. I asked the interviewees how they perceive the diversity network characteristics and the influence of the characteristics on the effectiveness of the networks. Furthermore, I asked them how they define the effectiveness of diversity networks.

## Research Ethics, Reflexivity, and Research Quality

**Research Ethics.** I approached the participants for this research via e-mail and asked them to participate in the investigation voluntarily. I informed them that they were allowed to refuse their participation at any time. Additionally, I introduced them to the research topic two times: during the first e-mail contact and at the beginning of the interview session (Lincoln, 2009). Furthermore, I asked them for their permission to record the interview session via my mobile telephone.

To prevent harm to the participants and to create a feeling of safety, I conducted the interview sessions in an isolated meeting room. Conducting interviews in an isolated setting offered them also the opportunity to express themselves freely without any fears of being judged. At the end of the interview session, I offered them the opportunity to receive their

interview transcripts via e-mail to reread them.

During the first e-mail contact and at the beginning of the interview sessions, I informed the interviewees about the anonymous processing of the data. I communicated to them that the results of the data analysis would only be applied in the context of this scientific study. I also deleted names and precise information on the identities of the interviewees, whereby no identification of the interviewees was possible and which maintained confidentiality. Only I exclusively, as the researcher of this study, and the supervisor of this research project had access to the data.

The researcher, in this case me, had to be aware of the danger of using biases (Roulston et al., 2015). Biases can steer the investigation process in a particular direction. Being unaware of the application of biases increases the risk of interpreting the data according to the biases. Searching exclusively for confirmation of the literature in the researched data and not being open to new insights might be an example of biases.

**Reflexivity.** Reflexivity is the awareness the researcher has of his or her role and of the influence the researcher has on the process and outcomes of the research process. Reflexivity also refers to the condition that a researcher's social-historical location shapes the orientation of the researcher. It is furthermore of importance for the researcher to ask about his or her interest in the topic, about his or her presumptions and pre-knowledge. I, as the researcher of this project, have gained knowledge on diversity networks and the effectiveness of the networks by reviewing and interpreting the literature on this topic. Thus, before conducting the interviews, I already had an impression of how the effectiveness of diversity networks might be defined and expressed. These factors might influence the interaction of the research process (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). A researcher must reflect on his or her experiences and question the way of doing the research (Hibbert, Coupland, & MacIntosh, 2010).

Alvesson et al. (2000) defined interpretation and reflection as the two main elements of reflexive research. Researchers need to keep in mind that their interpretations are affected by their assumptions, their values, political positions, and their use of language. The second element of reflexivity, according to Alvesson et al. (2000), is reflection. At this point, the researchers turn their attention onto themselves. Reflection is defined as a form of interpretation of the interpretation. The last step leads to reflexive research. I needed to reflect on my background and maintain this in my mind while interpreting the data. My interpretation of the data is influenced by the knowledge of diversity networks that I have gained by interpreting the literature on diversity networks. Furthermore, I needed to be aware of the fact that I also worked

in the HR department of the company. I might also be a potential diversity network member. Thus, I could not be objective.

I already knew, according to the literature, what might create an effective network. However, I was observing the effectiveness of the network from the outside, whereas for instance, the network members perceived the network from the inside. I analyse whether the theory supports the conclusions they have made. Furthermore, combining my knowledge with the perception of the network members might result in recommendations for the networks on how they can improve the effectiveness of the networks. Involving the perceptions of non-members as well might also extend the picture on the effectiveness of diversity networks.

Being reflexive enables the research process and the outcomes to be open to change (Symon et al., 2012). The conclusion I draw results from the analysis I have made on the literature and the interview material, which could change over time.

**Research Quality.** Qualitative and quantitative research differs in the sense that both apply different qualitative criteria. In this criteria, it is a matter of validity and reliability. Validity refers to the ability of a research instrument to demonstrate that it will discover what the researcher designed, whereas reliability refers to the consistency of the finding when the instrument is used repeatedly. In qualitative research, the application of these standards remains questionable. Schwandt, Denzin, and Lincoln (1994) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) developed a framework of four criteria as part of the constructivism paradigm paralleling validity and reliability in qualitative research. While assessing the goodness of the quality of qualitative research, they spoke about *trustworthiness* and *authenticity*. Guba and Lincoln divided the term ‘trustworthiness’ into four indicators, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. As an example of parallel criteria in quantitative and qualitative research, consider the research of Trochim and Donnelly (2007), who have created the following overview:

Traditional criteria for judging qualitative research	Alternatives for judging qualitative research
Internal Validity	Credibility
External Validity	Transferability
Reliability	Dependability
Objectivity	Confirmability

The criterion of credibility refers to the establishment that the results are credible or believable from the perspective of the participants of the research (Trochim et al., 2007). It is assumed that

participants are the best at assessing whether the findings of the research reflect their opinions and feelings correctly. Thus, the participant of this research should check whether the output of his or her interview confirms with what they intended to say. To increase the strength of this criterion requires confirmation, congruence, validation, and approval of the participants of the research. Transferability is the criterion which defines if the findings of the research can be generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings. Dependability is similar to reliability and refers to the questions of whether the same results would be acquired if the researcher observed the same concept for a second time. Both transferability and dependability are difficult to ensure in qualitative research because it would mean that the entire process would be extensive and detailed and recorded for others to replicate the findings. The last criterion is defined as confirmability and indicates the degree to which the results can be confirmed or substantiated by others. Here again, to improve the degree of this criterion, it is necessary to replicate the process identically.

First, I conducted interviews with human beings. Repeating the interviews for a second time might lead to different results. Furthermore, I am also a human being, and I might receive different signals compared to other researchers. Accordingly, other researchers might also interpret the data differently. Nevertheless, I consider this research also as proper qualitative research because I respected the criteria for suitable qualitative research. I interpreted the data according to my prior knowledge of diversity networks, which I have gained by analysing the literature about diversity networks; thus, I needed to consider that while assessing the data, I already had an impression about diversity networks. Furthermore, I used, per group, the same semi-structured questions.

Other researchers could apply the same questionnaire. Accordingly, the interpretation of the data could be simplified. I also tried to explain my manner of interpreting the data to the reader as clearly as possible. Furthermore, I explained to the interviewees that their participation in this research was not obligated. In addition, I offered them the opportunity to reread their interview material to control whether I captured their perceptions of diversity networks appropriately. By creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere during the interview sessions, I tried to ensure dependability. I would also apply the same manner in follow-up research; however, I cannot guarantee that I would receive the same results again because of several components, such as, for instance, the setting, the mood of the participant or of the researcher, or the relationship between the participants and the interviewer could be different compared to the first interview session.



## Chapter 4 - Findings

### Introduction to the Findings

This study used qualitative techniques to analyse the perceptions of two groups – diversity network members and non-members – on the effectiveness of diversity networks. I asked the members and non-members to share their perception of the effectiveness of diversity networks and the function of diversity networks as diversity management instruments. This chapter is structured as follows: I present the results per target group, members of Diversity Network 1, members of diversity network 2, and non-members. Per target group I present the results of the analysis which arises out of the interviews with the network members.

I present the results according to the topics areas, which are also introduced in Figure 1 (reasons to join or not to join a diversity network, characteristics of diversity networks [goals, structure, activities], perception of the effectiveness of the diversity networks), plus the topics resulting from the inductive analysis (history, perception of diversity networks as an instrument for diversity management).

As I mention the results of the interviews per topic, quotes from the interview scripts serve as illustrative examples. After presenting the results per topic, I analyse the data according to the literature about diversity networks and according to the question of this research '*How do members and non-members of diversity networks perceive the effectiveness of diversity networks?*'. I make a transparent division between the results of the interviews and my interpretation of the results.

### Diversity Network Members

I present in this section the results of the interview material from the interview sessions with the diversity network members. I start with the results of the interviews with the diversity network members from Diversity Network 1. I continue with presentation of the results of the interviews with members of Diversity Network 2.

#### Network for Young Employees (Diversity Network 1).

*Reasons to Join a Diversity Network.* I mention at the beginning of the analysis the motives of the network members to join a diversity network as I assume that these influence their perception of the effectiveness of diversity networks. The interviewees from the first

diversity network mentioned that they joined this diversity network to get to know other employees in the same age since the average age of the employees is around 50 years (*'So the average age is very high. There are so many people above 50... so I said, OK, I want to stay in contact with the young people.'*; Interview 1). Employees from abroad could not connect with other older co-workers as their co-workers pursue different interests (*'So when I say, "Shall we have a drink"? or "Shall we do this or that?", it is not very, let us say, excitingly accepted because people have family obligations or just have all kinds of things.'*; Interview 6). Employees in the age class under 36 years preferred to invest extra time alongside their work (*'... I always liked to do something alongside my work.'*; Interview 8). Additionally, the activities of the network met the taste of the network members (Translated from Dutch to English: *'... the activities which are organised by the network are extremely nice ...'*; Interview 12).

One interviewee was already familiar with the concept of a diversity network within the company of his previous employer (*'I have been at a different employer, and they also had a network for young employees.'*; Interview 3). Joining a diversity network was also perceived as beneficial for improving the careers of the network members, as the network organises events with senior managers (Translated from Dutch to English: *'And you meet people from higher layers ...'*; Interview 8).

Based on these findings, I conclude that employees join diversity networks because they expect to receive social support. Having exclusively formal contact with co-workers seems not to be sufficient to socialise within a company for younger employees. Friedman et al. (2004) also talked about community aspects as a conducting thread of a network. The results of this research have also shown that collective social identity and a high level of uniformity among the members facilitate the decision to join a diversity network, which is congruent with the findings of McPherson et al. (1987).

However, employees also consider the possibility for career improvement while deciding to join a diversity network (O'Neil, 2011) as the network events enable interactions with, for instance, senior managers. The motives for joining a diversity network were influenced by social aspects and career-related aspects. The diversity network members might perceive the effectiveness of the diversity networks according to their motives of joining a network.

**History.** Before I start with the analysis of the network characteristics, I look at the background and history of the first diversity networks in the company studied. I assume that mentioning the history of the networks is also of importance because it might deliver information on the motives for the foundation of the diversity network. I assume that the motives to establish a diversity network predefine the criteria for an effective diversity network. When the diversity network meets these predefined criteria, I define the diversity networks as effective.

In the company studied, the diversity network for younger employees was founded in 2015 by employees of a technical leadership traineeship programme, who were located at two company sites, one in Germany and the other in the Netherlands. The HR department coordinated the traineeship and formulated for the trainees an abstract assignment: Start a project which should lead to better connections between young, highly educated employees and which, in turn, should make the company more attractive for young employees in the metal and electronics industry (*'And the reason I created it was – well, the first reason was because there was an assignment in our – during our traineeship to gather [a] young community and to make sure it is a sustainable community.'*; Interview 7). The trainees realised the project by founding two networks at the locations, Nijmegen and Hamburg, for young employees. They also established within the networks a board to create a sustainable network (*'It is, like, self-sustainable and self-supportive.'*; Interview 6).

The HR department of the company had indirectly initiated the founding of the network. I interpret the involvement of the HR department as an indication of a top-down initiative. The network founders established the network to make the company more attractive for young employees and to stay competitive compared to other companies, which already followed the trends of implementing diversity networks. External forces tempted the company. Thus, the foundation of this network appears more as a marketing strategy instead of a diversity management strategy.

However, the formulation of the assignment was relatively vague, but the trainees accomplished the assignment by introducing a diversity network for young employees. Thus, the implementation of the tasks assigned to them follows the personal interests of the trainees as described in Biscoe et al. (2010).

The goal of the assignment was the connection of young employees within the company, which they achieved. The company might evaluate the network as effective, as the company might define the connection of young employees as a criterion for an effective network. However, including the young employees within the company or creating awareness on diversity-related topics was not aimed for by the company and the trainees. The inclusion within the company has unintentionally prevailed in recent years as the network members consider themselves as part of the company, which is partly due to the network membership.

### ***Characteristics of Diversity Networks.***

*Goals.* The main goal of the first diversity network was connecting young employees between the age of 20 and 35 years (‘... connecting young employees, getting to know each other ...’; Interview 3). The network was to serve as a platform for the young employees, where they could get to know each other and where they could have fun (‘that they get to know each other... that they have fun.’; Interview 1). The interviewees perceived the network as supportive for the members in a work environment where they could feel lonely since they did not belong to the dominant age group and since some of them were expatriates who came from abroad (‘... in order not to feel lonely in a company where relatively many old employees are.’, Interview 3; ‘... even when you came here as an expatriate, the goals are than you can get to know other people faster.’, Interview 8). Improving the soft skills of the network members by attending courses was also perceived as a further aim of the network (‘A further goal is to [improve] soft skills, maybe, [by] giving courses and lectures, which are organised by us.’; Interview 8). The interviewees perceived these aims as beneficial for the individual network members.

Some other interviewees also mentioned as additional goals of the network the improvement of the visibility of the network to the external world, which they considered as beneficial for recruitment processes of the organisation (‘... we wanted to connect better to the outside world or to improve our visibility in the external world of our community. So then we also wanted to help HR. We are recruiting, for example, ...’; Interview 6).

While comparing these findings with the literature on diversity network goals, it appears that networks for young employees aimed at connecting, supporting, and increasing the recognition

of the group, as mentioned by Raeburn (2004). The findings of this research are also confirmed by those of Ibarra (1993), who stated that the supportive character of the network on the emotional and the social level might be an indication for an expressive network. I also conclude that networks which the organisation has founded also act in support of the organisation. These networks support the organisation by, for instance, assisting recruitment processes or by attracting certain groups as future employees.

However, further aims, for instance, the enhancement of awareness on diversity-related topics or the introduction of policies and practices (Raeburn, 2004), should lead, as I concluded, to the most effective network goals to implement equality. According to my interpretation, the implementation of equality seemed to be overlooked in this organisation in which networks should improve the reputation of the organisation.

*Structure.* The diversity network for young employees had 170 registered employees as network members ('... *the young community is around 160/170 members.*'; Interview 1). A board with seven board members managed the maintenance of the network. Every board member was attributed to a specific board function. Some employees were responsible for the formulation of the network strategy; other board members managed the communication within the company. One board member was responsible for the financial resources and remained in contact with the management team of the organisation. Two board members were accountable for the organisation of network events and maintained contact with public relations ('... *we have two people for activities and two people for PR ... Then we have someone who is doing the finances. Somebody, who is the strategic advisor ...*'; Interview 3). The board members supported each other and shared their responsibilities during stressful phases. Usually, the board members resign after a term of office of one to three years to '*... get new blood into the young board.*' (Interview 6). The interviewees reported that this network tried to prevent a hierarchical structuring ('... *we want to be as flat as possible. Let us say the board is only here to make sure the structure is there.*'; Interview 7).

Some of the registered members participated at the events on a regular base, and some were registered but did not participate at any network event ('... *there are a few [members], who are normal members but we never see them.*'; Interview 3). The network welcomed active members to share their ideas on future events ('... *you need to have active members, involved members who feel like their contribution is valuable and also possible.*'; Interview 7).

The implementation of a network board lends to the look of a professional diversity network. However, the network might need a board to sustain itself. Preventing a hierarchical structure within the diversity network also confirms with the finding of the literature (Welbourne et al., 2017). Hence, the structure of the organisation in which the network is located, which was, in this case, hierarchical, does not determine the structure of the diversity network.

Having a cooperative relationship with the management team, as described by Biscoe et al. (2010), appears at first glance as beneficial for the diversity network, as the network receives support utilising financial resources. However, depending on the management team might also be disadvantageous as management decisions determine the maintenance of the network. However, the support of the management team was, in this research, not perceived as restrictive for network goal achievement. The interviewees perceived it instead as an indication for appreciation on the part of the management team since the management team recognises the network as having added value.

*Activities.* The network for young employees organised events of different natures throughout the year. The activities from this network differed between social events; professional activities; and external, community events (*'So all our events are for three categories. So the professional events, yeah, the social event and external or community event.'*; Interview 6), which were organised by the network.

The social activities included, for instance, having drinks together (*'Thus, social activities. Then you have to think about regularly having drinks with each other ...'*; Interview 12), visiting a brewery (*'... you want to visit a brewery.'*; Interview 1), organising a yearly barbecue event which is accessible for every network member (*'Barbecue is popular ... it is during summertime and (it) brings people together ...'*; Interview 7), or meeting other members weekly for a coffee (*'... they have sent a coffee ... invitation to all the [] members...to just gather together for some coffee.'*; Interview 15).

The organisation of, for instance, a factory tour, was defined as one of the professional network events (*'... professional is like we organise like tours to our factory ...'*; Interview 6), as well as the organisation of workshops (*'... there will also be a professional event where some workshops [are organised] ...'*; Interview 6) or the yearly lunch breaks, where a few network

members could have an exchange with senior managers of the company regarding their career development (*'The MT [management team] lunches or dinners I think are very valuable because they give an opportunity for members to talk to the management team and see what they are dealing with.'*; Interview 7).

Events, which diversity networks organise within the framework of the last category, relate to the external communication the networks maintain with other company networks for young employees. Therefore, the organisation arranged with the other networks inter-company visits (*'... then you also got things as company visits, where other employees could have a look at how other companies deal with the same problem ...'*; Interview 8) or having drinks with the other company networks (*'..., they have intercompany meetings they organised at this event, and there are also some drinks [during] the intercompany events.'* Interview 1). The network also participated in external events on request of the management team to represent the company (*'For example, next week there is the technology week ... So then the Netherlands management team will only come to us to say, "Hey. Can we have some members to represent [name of the company anonymised] to show the outside world our young face?"'*; Interview 6).

As previously mentioned in the interpretation of the literature review, diversity networks which might perform in the, as Douglas (2008) described, Affiliation phase benefit the socialisation of individual network members by connecting them. Furthermore, the last two phases described by Douglas (2008) are certified by the findings of this research as well. It was perceived that maintaining contact with the management team of the organisation might have several advantages. On the one hand, the network might attract attention, and on the other hand, the management team might integrate the minority groups for the support of organisational processes, such as, in this research, recruitment processes. In addition, organising events with similar diversity networks of other companies might lead to better learning results, as the networks could discuss problems with each other.

Additionally, while interpreting the findings of this research, it became clear that the Advancement phase described by Douglas (2008) can also be understood as an organisational strategy. Learning, for instance, how to 'brand' themselves as network members can be, as related to the context of this study, interpreted as a strategy of the organisation to improve the image of the company in the sense of being an attractive employer for a specific group of employees. Inviting senior managers as guest speakers and as inspiration for the network members is also found in the research of Friedman et al. (2002).

However, the educational effect for more awareness of diversity topics remains within the scope of the network, if the network restricts the activities to only network members. Hence, it might be necessary to invite employees of all layers to network events to gain more attention to equality.

Thus, as deduced from this research, it can be summarised that diversity network activities might be beneficial for the improvement of the network effectiveness when networks also invite non-employees to the network events, when the networks cooperate with the management team, and when networks also collaborate with similar comparable diversity networks from other companies. Hence, the network might find a balance between the organisation of social, professional, and external activities to be perceived as effective.

***Perception of the Effectiveness of Diversity Networks.*** I asked all interviewees of this research project how they would define an effective network. The interviewees of this network mentioned the following aspects: A network could, according to one of the interviewees, lead to more satisfaction, which in turn might lead to the retention of employees within the organisation (*'I think all the networks have an impact on the retention of the employees ... That your people or maybe, as I mentioned, [are] more satisfied with everything.'*; Interview 15).

Furthermore, if a diversity network could reach the interest in network activities of every network member, the members would classify the network as effective (Translated from Dutch to English: *'... as everyone who wants to be reached by the network will be reached ...'*; Interview 8). In addition, some members perceived a network as effective when the network and other network members could support them in receiving a permanent contract of employment (*'... it would be effective when I could use this network in order to get a permanent contract within the organisation.'*; Interview 3). Moreover, the organisation might also learn from the diversity networks which values the network members pursue, which could attach the network members more to the organisation (*'... but how to maybe attach them also to the company ... I sometimes feel like at least big organisations always have the same values ... But are these the values that each employee, a single employee has? So I think that would maybe help the company also sometimes too [...] look into, OK, what [...] do young employees, for instance, very much value?'*; Interview 15).

Networks were perceived as effective when the network members could learn something and when they also contribute to the community (*'For me, it's when I say when people from within the group come with the realisation that they have learned something ... We have done*



*something. We contributed to the community.*’; Interview 1). The network members can learn from each other by networking and they can also learn about the organisation (‘... *that they can learn more about the company, the environment among themselves.*’; Interview 1).

A network was also perceived as effective when network members could, according to their expectations, connect. Thus, if network members receive from the network what they anticipated, they would define the network as effective (‘*I think a network is, on the one hand, effective when it is doing something for the members what they are searching for.*’; Interview 3).

The diversity network members also considered determining the vision, mission (‘*I think having a specific vision and mission makes it more clear, and having a board usually helps with that because a group of people thinks about what is the purpose of having this network.*’; Interview 7), and network strategy (‘... *you need to have the right strategy of course.*’; Interview 15) as prerequisites for an effective network. Furthermore, structural aspects were also perceived as essential for an effective network as the structure simplifies the organisation of activities (‘*but the structure is there in order to make [the organisation] easier ...*’; Interview 8) and might create a sustainable network.

By interpreting the findings of this research, it becomes apparent that network members perceive the effectiveness of diversity networks in terms of satisfying the network members, which might lead to their decision on remaining within the organisation. This finding is similar to the results of Moynihan et al. (2007), who stated that a good relationship between the network members might influence employees’ decisions on staying in the company. However, as also stated in the literature, membership within a diversity network is not of direct influence on this decision; it mediates the decision. In addition, it can be concluded that a diversity network could serve as a means to introduce the organisation to values that are preferred by specific peer groups. The introduction to values, in turn, could attract and retain members of these peer groups who perceive an alignment of their values with the values of the organisation, which Pandey et al. (2008) also found. Furthermore, members might perceive more optimism for their careers if they connect with other employees of the organisation who could provide them with better access to resources, which in turn could lead to better career opportunities.

The learning results of a diversity network were related to the interaction between the network members. Network members could learn from each other about their functions and other departments of an organisation. Thus, a diversity network might stimulate learning about

organisational processes, which could be interpreted as beneficial for the development of individual network members, as also described by Green (2018), and also as beneficial for the entire organisation. The beneficial learning effect for organisations is perceivable in the form of employees who share their knowledge about their departments, whereby, for instance, organisational problems could be resolved more quickly. Other networks could also share their knowledge of being efficient. However, the perceived learning effects of diversity networks, which were found in this research, were not related to learning about diversity-related topics and issues.

Structural aspects, as well as the implementation of a mission and a vision, were, in this research, perceived as necessary for an effective network. This confirms the findings on the network characteristics that might be essential for the improvement of the network's effectiveness.

The interviewees of this research did not speak about the effectiveness of diversity networks in terms of increasing the awareness of diversity-related issues and topics or in terms of implementing policies or practices on behalf of equality. The effectiveness of diversity networks was rather individually defined; therefore, experiences were, in this research, perceived more as beneficial for individual employees and less as beneficial for a particular minority group.

***Perception of Diversity Networks as an Instrument for Diversity Management.*** In the evaluation of diversity networks as instruments for diversity management, the network members stated the following arguments: Diversity networks enable the socialisation of newly hired employees, especially of those who came from abroad (Translated from Dutch to English: '*... people ... who are new and who came from abroad ... you can get in contact with them faster.*'; Interview 3). Furthermore, diversity networks might help employees who differ from the dominant group to express themselves in the work environment ('*So I think it helps them maybe also to express themselves in a different way than they would do it in their daily jobs.*'; Interview 15).

Diversity network members perceived the networks as an instrument which might stimulate diversity within the organisation; however, diversity within the network was instead not noticed (Translated from Dutch to English: '*I think that the diversity networks exist to stimulate diversity. But I miss diversity within the network.*'; Interview 4) as the network connects their members based on a shared component. Other interviewees perceived the network not as the crucial intervention for diversity but as a supportive means, which let the

organisation appear as attractive for a specific group of employees (*'... it will help because then, for any newcomer, they will see that it is a fun or open organisation.'*; Interview 6).

According to the findings, I conclude that diversity network members perceive the networks as assisting instruments for diversity management. Networks might take care of the development of employees who have not identified themselves as members of the dominant group. The foundation of a diversity network might be, as a consequence, that the management team of the organisation recognises the needs of minority employees. However, to implement equality and diversity, the organisation should implement and apply more tools than just diversity networks. To reach an appropriate level of equality, policies and practices in favour of diversity might need to be implemented.

### **Diversity Network for Women (Diversity Network 2).**

***Reasons to Join a Diversity Network.*** Why the women decided to join the events of the second diversity network was answered as follows: One of the employees mentioned that she was already familiar with the concept of a diversity network for women (*'... when I was working in my previous company, they had a group that were called Women Leadership ...'*; Interview 5) which the company of her prior employer had implemented. Another woman reported that she decided per event topic if she would experience an added value or not, which influenced her decision to join a diversity network event or not.

According to the findings of this research, it might be interpreted that diversity network members decide to join the diversity network solely due to their interests, which might be associated with the expectations of personal growth and development, as described by Githens et al. (2009). Furthermore, seeing other companies succeed with diversity networks for women is also perceived as a cause for joining or even founding a diversity network. Other companies in the same industry face similar challenges, whereby these companies serve as role models for other companies.

***History.*** The diversity network for women developed due to a request from the management team, which asked the participants of a meeting how the participants could to contribute on a personal level to the company during the next year (*'... it was because our management – we were preparing for the goals [...] of the year, and then the management*

*asked us to put something personal how we could contribute to [name of the company] without [just doing] our daily job.*'; Interview 5). One of the participants was thinking about the foundation of a diversity network for women because other companies in the metal electronics industry in the Netherlands had already established a diversity network for women. Additionally, the lower percentage of women than of men across the metal electronics industry in the Netherlands is also present in the company (*'Because also [name of the company], especially in the Netherlands, we are a very few women and we are not always visible.*'; Interview 5). Based on these facts, the participant considered founding a diversity network for women to bring women together and to discuss topics. The management team confirmed its support, as did the HR department of the company, which provided a list with the names of female employees.

While interpreting the history of the diversity network, it becomes clear that employee of the company who personally felt touched by the idea of starting a network for women initiated the foundation, which is congruent with the literature of Biscoe et al. (2010) and Friedman et al. (2002), who stated that the employees who found the diversity network are the basis of the network. The findings of this research reveal that employees who found a diversity network might feel the need to create more visibility for minorities as they are part of the minority. Consequently, diversity networks founded by minorities might pursue different goals and interests than diversity networks founded by top management. According to this idea, the assumption occurs that diversity network members define and perceive the effectiveness of diversity networks per network type and network interest differently.

### ***Characteristics of Diversity Networks.***

*Goals.* Related to the diversity network goals is that most of the women who operated in a work environment with a higher percentage of men reported having difficulties in expressing themselves (*'... what I notice is that some woman and [...] in independent areas, if you have too many men, then they do not speak up.*'; Interview 5). Based on this fact, this diversity network aimed at creating a platform for women to discuss sensitive topics (*'... to have an environment where a woman could be able to discuss things without having too many men ... to have an environment where we could discuss serious stuff.'*; Interview 5). A further aim considered the deliberation about changing the low population of women in the metal

electronics industry (*'Also to help us proceed with how we could do things in order to break this since we have so very few women.'*; Interview 5). Thus, as summarised by one interviewee, this diversity network was also concerned with creating awareness of diversity-related topics to alter the current situation (*'So awareness and diversity, and what we realise is that, yeah, awareness, we need to bring it to our work environment for sure but also to try to see how we can promote technology to girls.'*; Interview 5).

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that diversity network members perceive networks for women as useful in benefitting several target groups. On the one hand, the diversity network aimed at the exchange of social support for minority groups within a company, which is similar to the findings of Ibarra (1993) and Colgan et al. (2012). On the other hand, the diversity network also aimed to increase the awareness on dissimilarities, which in turn should prevent the reproduction of the status quo, as also described in Bell et al. (2011). The second aim serves in favour of future generations. The effects of lectures that should increase the awareness of inequalities might be recognisable in the external organisational environment and also in the long-term future.

To reach an appropriate level of awareness on diversity-related issues within the organisation, it would also be necessary for the diversity network to distribute the knowledge on diversity-related topics throughout the entire organisation. Thus, diversity networks which are aimed at implementing equality should involve diverse target groups, which might go far beyond the scope of the organisation.

*Structure.* This diversity network was still in its infancy and had no formal structure (*'But it is not very structured right now.'*; Interview 5). Participants of this diversity network were not officially registered. The people who were on the distribution list received information via an online platform. The network board asked them to share the information about the network and network events with additional employees. Three people took responsibility for the shaping of the network events, of whom one was managing the content or taking care of logistics. To assume a more professional shape, the network was discussing the forming of future vision, mission, and goals (*'... we are starting to say, OK, what do we want to do? What will be our vision, mission, goals? Which kind of activities, which kind of roles do we want to have in the project board?'*; Interview 5) as well as the implementation of

a board with even responsibilities (*'... we have different roles, but nobody is more than the other. It is more like a cooperation.'*; Interview 5).

The interpretation of the findings of this research has once again shown that the structure of a diversity network is essential for the existence of a diversity network. The finding of Welbourne et al. (2017) is also confirmed – a diversity network prefers the implementation of a flat structure in which board members equally share their responsibilities. The requirement of being officially enrolled within a diversity network still needs to be questioned. An argument in favour of an official registration might be that registered employees feel committed to attending diversity network events.

*Activities.* The diversity network organised events and workshops for awareness creation (*'... doing a workshop about awareness.'*; Interview 5). Guest speakers conducted the workshops (*'... had a guest lecturer and then we just shared some [...] experiences ...'*; Interview 15) or they were led by internal employees who were familiar with a specific topic (*'... the first event, we did it internally because I wanted to see it.'*; Interview 5). The events were readily accessible for both women and men. However, men who attended the network meetings were already familiar with the topics the participants discussed during the network meetings. These men could relate to these topics on a personal level as they are, for example, fathers of a daughter. (*'Of course, people, men that come to these events are already kind of aware of these.'*; Interview 5). Men who were not familiar with these topics attended fewer events. To arouse the interest in technology of those who belong to the future generation, the network visited schools (*'... we need to go to schools. We need to make technology sexy, and by sexy I mean interesting, exactly.'*; Interview 15). It was a significant concern of the diversity network to increase the interest in technology, especially of young girls (*'And also change the minds of the parents of these girls, right? Because if you are constantly being told you are not going to succeed there because there are very few women ...'*; Interview 5). The network was in discussion with the management team of the organisation about how to attract more attention to the network events within the entire organisation (*'... we are now preparing to meet with management to see which kind of, yeah, how we can [...] this into the whole company.'*; Interview 5).

Welbourne (2013) stated that diversity network events should influence individual network members, the network, and the entire organisation. However, based on this investigation, the notion can be supported that diversity network events may also influence the external environment of an organisation by conducting external workshops.

According to the data of this study, it can also be stated that the development of diversity networks should not unfold in phases as studied by Douglas (2008). The phases could easily merge into one another. A network that is, according to the definition of Douglas (2008), in the Awareness phase could also organise network events that were related to the Advancement phase.

Inviting also no minority group members to the diversity network events is congruent with the findings of Friedman et al. (1998), which I interpret as necessary to capture the attention of as many employees as possible on equality, which, in turn, should lead to the implementation of equality-related policies and practices.

***Perception of the Effectiveness of Diversity Networks.*** The interviewees of this network perceived a diversity network as effective if they could learn from the interactions with other members from different departments (*'That put you in contact also with people ... And it gives you more visibility of what the company is doing.'*, Interview 5; *'... but they understand the company better by talking to people in different departments.'*, Interview 7). In particular, the interaction with the management team of the organisation enabled the network members to receive some information on essential topics the organisation has to deal with (*'Talking to management team people, understanding what the bigger [...] topics are that [name of the company] at large is dealing with.'*; Interview 7) and on what might cause some problems (*'... to understand the imbalance better, the inequality.'*; Interview 7).

Having a better knowledge of the functioning of the organisation might also motivate the network members to stay in the organisation (*'... you understand better that it is easier to work somewhere you understand, what you are working for, what your company is and for whom you are working. If you are more engaged, you are also more likely to stay.'*; Interview 7) as the network members felt more optimistic regarding their career development (*'Than it has, of course, maybe also on their motivations, so career path development.'*; Interview 15).

The interviewees recognised that diversity network board members could be responsible for developing the vision and mission of the network, which in turn defines the purpose of the diversity network (*'I think having a specific vision and mission makes it more clear, and having a board usually helps with that because a group of people think about what is the purpose of*

*having this network.*'; Interview 7). Thus, an effective network depends on its members who are motivated to invest their time in the network and their network functions ('... *to be successful on that and effective, you need someone who has a lot of – who has enough time for it at least and is also committed and willing to do so and have has much motivation.* '; Interview 15).

Furthermore, diversity network might be perceived as effective by the interviewees if the network contains the right balance of people who are responsible for the organisation of the events and of people who are attending the diversity network events ('*So you always need to have a balance.* ', '*For me, an effective network is when everybody feels related and not in the same percentage, but in, let us say, more than 50 percent, everybody contributes.* '; both quotes from Interview 5). To achieve a better balance, it was necessary, according to the interviewees, that the network members give and receive feedback on the network events ('*So if you do not have this feedback loop, what can happen is that next time I may make the same mistake, right?* '; Interview 5) via appropriate communication channels ('... *I think you need to find a good channel of communication.* '; Interview 5). Therefore, every network member should be involved in the network ('... *for me, an effective young network would be that they are all involved one way or the other.* '; Interview 7), everyone can contribute to the effectiveness of the diversity network ('... *everyone can either participate in or contribute in makes the most out of a group ...* '; Interview 7), and everyone can gain advantages out of the network according to their needs at the same time ('... *there is something in it for everyone even if you are not interested ... You are not interested in a social aspect but would like career information, then there is something there for you ...* '; Interview 7).

According to the results, it might be concluded that diversity network members perceive the networks as effective if the network members can learn from the interaction with other network members about the function of different departments, which is similar to the findings of the investigation of Githens et al. (2009), who found that non-intentional learning processes spread knowledge. Green (2018) also outlined that learning occurs within a diversity network during the interaction of the network members.

According to the findings of this investigation, it might be of importance that the diversity networks interact with the management team as organisational processes and causes of problems could be better understood. Thus, the management team could increase the knowledge of the network members by interacting with them. I assume that the network



members could also help the management team to understand problems from a different perspective. Based on that assumption, it might be concluded that both the management team and the diversity network might expand their perspective while interacting with each other.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that a better understanding of the organisation might also increase network members' optimism for careers and their development within the organisation. Brass et al. (2004) mentioned in their investigation as well that more access to information and resources increases the optimism for one's career positively. Furthermore, they also perceived a diversity network board as crucial as the board could discuss in which direction the network should develop itself. The board members should also feel intrinsically motivated to organise the diversity network events. In addition, it is also of importance that the networks have a balance between network members who organise events and network members who participate at these events. Both groups should be open for feedback, whereby the right communication channels are crucial elements. Thus, to summarise, diversity networks are effective if almost every network member participates in his or her own way to the diversity network.

#### ***Perception of Diversity Networks as an Instrument for Diversity Management.***

Concerning the question whether diversity networks serve as an instrument for diversity management, one of the interviewees answered that diversity in general leads to a wide range of opinions and skills which we would normally not encounter (*'Diversity is going to help us also to think about options that we thought because they are not in our way of thinking and diversity can improve that.'*, *'But having diversity it brings more different skills into the table.'*; Interview 5). Examining several opinions and skills is particularly crucial since unconscious bias defines the way we think and act. When it comes, for instance, to the function description of a principal, we tend to apply masculine pronouns (*'What concerns me a lot is the unconscious bias that we have, stereotypes ... Is the fact that how much we have assumed when we give examples. We always give men examples like we talk, yeah, director [...], never say a director she [...].'*; Interview 5). Training programmes of diversity networks that act with a sense of awareness creation could help to bring the unconscious thinking more to a conscious level (*'And specifically to the awareness part. So awareness and diversity and what we realise is that, yeah, awareness, we need to bring it to our work environment ...'*, Interview 5; *'... you reach out to schools and change the perception of what women in technology can and cannot do. That can help promote diversity.'*, Interview 7). Furthermore, training programmes organised by

diversity networks could teach the network members to express themselves (*'... if you offer them [minority employees] such a network and they can really express themselves as they are of course ...'*; Interview 15).

However, a diversity network does not concomitantly mean that it contains diversity within because a diversity network connects the members based on similarity (*'I do not think that networking brings diversity. It empowers the commonality, ...'*; Interview 5). According to interviewee 7, the connection of members based on similarities is dangerous because it could lead to the exclusion of people who do not exhibit similar characteristics (*'Because you are sectioning off a group of people and excluding a group of people. So you are not necessarily improving diversity by that.'*; Interview 7).

I conclude, based on these findings, that the training programmes which are organised by diversity networks might help to increase the awareness of gender-related topics and issues. Here again, it is of importance that a broad range of people attend these training programmes to learn about their subconscious application of stereotypes and its effects. This might, in turn, be a first step for the formation of policies and practices in favour of equality.

Equality per se is not guaranteed by the implementation of a diversity network as the network members connect based on similarities between each other. Friedman et al. (1998) agreed upon this argumentation as well and stated that diversity networks might rather exclude or isolate a diversity group that connects its members based on similarities.

To summarise, diversity networks are perceived as effective diversity management instruments as they support the awareness creation processes on diversity-related topics, which, again could be the first steps towards the implementation of policies and practices which promote equality. However, it is necessary that the network acts as part of the entire organisation instead of being a separate group from the organisation.

## **Non-Members of Diversity Networks**

**Reasons Not to Join a Diversity Network.** The motives of the non-members of diversity networks for not joining a diversity network were the following: A few interviewees mentioned that they perceived both diversity networks as not relevant for them; they did not identify themselves as potential diversity network members because they were not in the categories of the target groups (*'...it is not relevant for me ... I am not in the technical field ...*

*and I am too old for the network for young employees.*’, Interview 2; *‘...the network for young employees was founded when I did not belong to the target group anymore.’*; Interview 11).

One female interviewee mentioned that she did not perceive the need to join a diversity network for women because she came from a country where a socialistic system reigned and no gender differences in the technology industry and no discrimination between women and men existed (*‘... for me [it] was like a shock when I saw in [the] Netherlands what happens or in Finland where there were like 90 to 10 percent [...] women in the technical fields.’*, *‘One of the good things [...] was everyone was equal. There was no discrimination like you are male, and you cannot do this job or female, you cannot do – you should go like this way. Not everyone had equal opportunity.’* (both quotes from Interview 9). One of the interviewees mentioned that the diversity network for women would *‘offer no real surplus value’* (Interview 16) for her because she did not perceive any differences from her male co-workers.

Furthermore, the interviewees also mentioned that they did not join the networks as members because they had no time, thereby joining diversity networks was not assigned as a key priority (*‘... I’m extremely [...] busy. This is not something like I will say is one of my top five priorities ...’*, Interview 9; *‘I have a family. I have [...] children, who already fill my day.’*, Interview 16).

While interpreting the data resulting from this research, I concluded that employees choose not to join a diversity network based on a primary justification. They justify their decision, for instance, based on a feeling of not belonging to the target group of a diversity network. Due to the determination of a target group, a diversity network automatically excludes employees who do not possess the characteristics of potential members. Furthermore, employees decide not to join a diversity network because they experience no personal need for being a member of a network. Whether employees experience a personal need is shaped by their social and political background as well as their self-identification.

A membership within a diversity network was not perceived as key priority in a work environment in which little time for additional activities is available. Lack of time was also perceived as a reason for not joining a diversity network. In conclusion, non-members' arguments were based on several justifications of why a diversity network would not be effective for them, which finally resulted in them not joining a diversity network.

**Perceptions of the History of the Two Diversity Networks.** The non-members replied to the question of whether they are familiar with the history of the diversity networks as follows: Some of them did not know anything about the history of the diversity networks. They only remembered the history of the diversity networks which were implemented within the organisation years ago and of which they were members (*'Not so much.'*; Interview 2). Other non-members received some information about the foundation of one of the diversity networks via the official newsletter of the company (*'It was at that time founded by [name anonymised]. I have seen this in a newsletter.'*; Interview 10). Another non-member mentioned that she knew about the foundation of one of the diversity networks on a, as she called it, *'high level'* (Interview 11). She was familiar with the fact that network members founded the network (*'... I knew that a few people started the network on their own ...'*; Interview 11).

According to findings from this investigation, it becomes clear that non-members barely receive information about the diversity networks' history. Non-members have an idea of who was the initiator of a diversity network, but they might know less about the motives of the diversity network founders. According to these findings, I conclude that the history of the diversity networks is, to a lesser extent, communicated to the external world.

### **Characteristics of Diversity Networks.**

*Goals.* Non-members perceived *'personal development, attaining knowledge, acquiring experiences'* and *'getting to know people'* (Interview 2) as diversity network goals. They believed diversity networks should enable the connection of people who usually do not work with each other (*'... that people could find each other outside their regular work.'*; Interview 11). Furthermore, formulating a problem collectively and trying to solve the problem together was also perceived as a diversity network goal (*'... that you have a collective task, that you try to work in a more or less structured way of working at the task ...'*; Interview 16).

Regarding the diversity network for women, this network could, according to one of the non-members, aim at supporting women in the technical industry while setting examples of women who operate in the technical field (*'... the goal is to boost women in technology, and what I mean by boost women in technology is that – OK, that it is to show to the younger*

*generation to say, OK guys. Look, it is possible. We do see these women that are working in a field which was a taboo for us.*; Interview 9).

Non-members of diversity networks perceive diversity network goals as efficient for individual network members. This is in line with the findings of Ibarra (1993) and Van Emmerik (2006), who emphasised the social aspect of diversity networks. The results of this research are also partially in line with the findings of Raeburn (2004), who stated that network goals aimed at the socialisation of network members. The finding of this research also support the notion that non-members perceive the goals of diversity network members as collectively constructed and solved. Furthermore, the goals of networks for women in the technical field were, in this research, perceived as supportive for the future generation of women.

However, the socialising aspects of diversity network goals are restricted to the network level and do not refer to the interaction of the diversity network with the management team of the organisation. Furthermore, the non-members did not define the effectiveness of diversity network goals in terms of the introduction of equality.

*Structure.* The question of how a diversity network might be structured was answered by the non-members as follows: It was difficult to perceive the structure from outside of the network. The assumption on the structure of the networks was made based on the networks' communication to the outside world (*'... I think it is difficult for me to say something meaningful about it because I only see it from the outside ... sometimes I see more of it compared to in other moments.'*, Interview 2; *'No, I do not know.'*, Interview 13). One of the interviewees made a difference between formal and informal diversity networks. According to her, formal diversity networks differ on account of the board of the network and the financial budget the networks receive from the management team of the company (*'... a formal network ... there is a board ... also because they request a budget ...'*; Interview 11). The board of a diversity network should be the *'driving force'* (Interview 16), which determines to which direction the network should develop.

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that non-members of diversity networks build their assumption concerning the structure of diversity networks upon the communication between the diversity network and the external environment of the network. Furthermore, non-members also perceive the network board as crucial as it assures the

preservation of a diversity network. Non-members perceive the cooperative relationship with the management team as determining the financial support the diversity network receives; Biscoe et al. (2010) has also referred to this cooperative relationship. However, my interpretation of the literature on diversity network structures confirmed the assumption that diversity networks need to interact with the management team. Interacting with the management team might be useful in implementing equality within the organisation. This interpretation I gave regarding the relationship with the management team was not confirmed or mentioned by the interviewed non-members of this research.

*Activities.* Non-members perceived the activities which were organised by the network for younger employees as formal as these activities enabled moments of contact between senior and junior employees (*... what I have seen from the network for younger employees is that they are organising more formal activities ... young people can get in contact with the senior management.*; Interview 2). However, the non-members also perceived more informal events of the diversity network for young employees, for instance, a factory tour or *'a barbecue'* (Interview 11).

In comparison to the diversity network for women, which organises *'workshop-like'* (Interview 10) events or which participates at events to encourage young girls to become fascinated about technology (*'... something as the girls day ...'*; Interview 11), one of the interviewed non-members stated that the nature of the events depends on the goals the diversity networks pursue (*'... that is I think dependent on what is the goal of a network.'*; Interview 16).

Non-members differentiate between formal and informal diversity network events. Furthermore, non-members also differentiate between diversity network events which can only be attended by diversity network members and events to which the network also invites an external audience. This interpretation is partly similar to the findings of Welbourne et al. (2013), who stated that diversity network activities influence individual members, the network, and the organisation. From the results of this research, it can be concluded that diversity network activities also influence an external audience.

Introducing diversity-related topics and the advantages of diversity in the form of a workshop is comparable with the Advancement phase recorded by Douglas (2008) and with the findings of Friedman et al. (1993). However, again the support of the upper management is needed to organise network events, which might lead to policies and practices within the

meaning of equality. Furthermore, whether non-members perceive the diversity network as effective in organising events depends on the goal definition of the diversity networks.

**Perception of the Effectiveness of Diversity Networks.** According to one of the non-members, a diversity network could be effective as it stimulates a faster exchange of information during, for instance, the implementation of *'cultural changes'* (Interview 2), which might *'save time or a feeling of frustration'* (Interview 10). Again, a good relationship with the organisation or the management of the organisation would be required (*'... they should take care that they are well connected during decision [processes] within the organisation.'*; Interview 2). Furthermore, diversity networks were also perceived as beneficial for the network members because they can share their experiences with like-minded people (*'... then we can share the experience.'*; Interview 9), which could also have an inspiring effect on them (*'Someone who inspires you in your life ...'*; Interview 16).

In particular, non-members believed the network for women could be effective in the long-term future. Being successful as a woman in the technical industry can *'set an example for the younger generation'* (Interview 9). According to Interview 11, there might be a further effect of a diversity network in the development of *'creative or innovative ideas'*. The non-members also perceived the fun factor as beneficial for the diversity network members (Interview 13) as well as the creation of awareness (*'You could create awareness ...'*; Interview 16) concerning *'certain themes'* (Interview 2) such as *'being a woman in a male team'* (Interview 13). Furthermore, a diversity network might create *'positive energy within the organisation'* (Interview 11). Being a member of a diversity network and being aware of the possibilities within company could also stimulate the members to remain in the company (*'... because you are a member of a network ... this could be an incentive to remain in [name of the company anonymised].'*; Interview 2).

Furthermore, the non-members also recognised that network members could perceive a *'sense of belonging'* and a feeling of *'engagement'* (both quotes from Interview 11) as the effects of having a diversity network membership. Being better connected with different employees from different departments might also be advantageous for the career of the network members as they could collaborate with these colleagues and solve problems faster (*'... it is easier to ask someone who might know this ... I think this could make your work faster and easier.'*; Interview 10) or as they could receive information on *'vacancies'* (Interview 13) first hand. A diversity network membership could also be perceived as impactful on the members' emotions as a membership triggers a feeling of *'pleasure'* (Interview 13).

A few non-members shared the opinion that the network members could learn about different *'interesting functions'* (Interview 10). An organisation could also learn to understand interests and problems of certain peer groups, whereby these groups would gain more visibility within the organisation (*'I have this whole community. Let us see what is going on between them and to see maybe I can help you to understand what is their main problem. It is just providing visibility.'*; Interview 9), which in turn could help the organisation to address these specific interests during *'recruitment'* (Interview 11) and *'on-boarding'* (Interview 13) processes.

According to the analysis of this section, it can be concluded that non-members of diversity networks define diversity networks as effective because the networks support organisational processes, for instance, cultural changes. Once again it needs to be noted that non-members perceive an increase in the effectiveness of a diversity network if it cooperates with the management team of the organisation. Furthermore, non-members perceive the effectiveness of diversity networks on the individual network members as well as on the organisational level.

However, I conclude that non-members do not perceive every diversity network as equally effective. Diversity networks aimed at connecting young employees were perceived as effective because individual network members profit from their membership, whereas non-members perceive the networks for women as effective because these networks approach a wide range of listeners and, at best, increase their awareness of diversity-related topics.

As the research of Moynihan et al. (2007) analysed, the relationship among diversity network members is crucial for their decision to remain in the company. This present study also supports this notion.

I also found in this research that network members associate with their membership a feeling of belonging. This feeling might increase their optimism for career improvement. Furthermore, the relationships between the network members are also effective for individual network members since the network members might support each other and their careers. The findings of this research correspond with the results of the studies of Friedman et al. (2002) and Borgatti et al. (2003) and also with the findings of Friedman et al. (2002) and Brass et al. (2004), who stated that the exchange of information and resources enhances network members' optimism for their career.

In addition, it can also be concluded that non-members of diversity networks perceive diversity networks as effective when the networks accompany learning effects. Non-members



perceive the learning effects of networks on the individual network member layer, which Green (2018) also found, as well as on the network layer and the organisational layer (also as found in studies by Colgan et al., 2012, and Githens, 2009). Receiving more visibility was also indicated by Bell et al. (2011).

**Perception of Diversity Networks as an Instrument for Diversity Management.** The non-members perceived the diversity network for women as an effective instrument for diversity management as the network would be more active in organising events for an external audience (*'Maybe not now, but if the network for women [name anonymised], indeed, would be more active to the external world ...'*; Interview 10) and as the network could support recruitment processes (*'... I think possibly that the network could be actively used for recruitment goals.'*; Interview 11). In addition, one of the interviewees mentioned that diversity should be part of the company's policy (*'For me, it is more the policy ...'*; Interview 13), whereby the networks could provide the management with feedback (*'... give as group feedback to the management what could help, if you want to do something with diversity.'* Interview 13). However, the implementation of more diversity within the organisation is, according to Interview 11, not the primary goal of a diversity network but rather a *'side effect'*. Another non-member argued that the implementation of diversity depends on the attitude of every individual employee (*'It all starts with yourself.'*; Interview 9).

In contrast, the opinion of one of the interviewees was that parents influence the approach of their children towards diversity (*'I think that the parents of the children, there it should begin.'*; Interview 10). Another interviewee mentioned that teachers at schools already affect the students' work choices because teachers assign, according to stereotypes, different strengths to boys and girls (*'... girls like it more, or they think that they are more suitable for auxiliary professions as for technical professions.'*; Interview 16). According to interviewee 16, the society influences students' work choices. Other influential persons such as the *'parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, friends of the parents and (...) teachers'* (Interview 16) also have influence on the students' choices.

The results of this analysis lead to the interpretation that non-members perceive diversity networks which also act outside of the framework of diversity networks as effective diversity management instruments. Thus, a diversity network is effective if it, for instance, supports

organisational processes or if it introduces specific topics to the public even outside the organisation.

To develop and implement equality-promoting policies and practices, once again it can be concluded that the interaction between the management team and the diversity networks in the form of mutual feedback is perceived as required. Furthermore, I also conclude that non-members perceive the diversity networks as inefficient in implementing diversity and equality since the causes of inequalities are recognised as deeply rooted in social systems. Interactions between human beings of the systems repeat the establishment of those inequalities. However, diversity networks which raise the awareness on those inequalities might be effective in taking the first step in the direction of equality.

## **Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion**

This chapter covers the discussion and the conclusion of this research. This study aimed to investigate the influence of perceptions on the effectiveness of diversity networks. It was analysed whether the effectiveness of diversity networks was independent from diversity network members' and non-members' perceptions. Furthermore, this study researched whether the diversity network members and non-members perceived the networks as capable diversity management instruments. The data were submitted to content analysis to answer the following research question: How do members and non-members of diversity networks perceive the effectiveness of diversity networks?

In this study, I analysed the literature about diversity networks and their effectiveness to gain an overview of the definition of diversity network effectiveness according to researchers. Scholars have neglected to define the effectiveness of diversity networks in terms of equality. In interviewing 10 members of two diversity networks and six non-members, and analysing the findings, I achieved an impression on how the effectiveness of diversity networks is displayed in practice. The two diversity networks distinguished themselves by the fact that they approached different target groups. One diversity network was founded for young employees in the company, and the other network served as a platform for women in the technology industry. While presenting the conclusions of this research, later in this chapter, it should become clear that the perception of the effectiveness of diversity networks differs per network type.

## **Perception of the Effectiveness of Diversity Networks**

In line with the literature (Friedman et al., 1998; Freidman et al., 2002; Brass et al., 2004) the findings of this research show that the members of diversity networks for young employees perceive the effectiveness of diversity networks in terms of the career development of individual network members. They identify network meetings as opportunities for individual network members to connect to other employees and to share resources, which could lead to career promotions. They also define the effectiveness of diversity networks within the scope of the learning effects individual network members could experience. This was in line with theory of Green (2018).

Members of diversity networks for women also refer to the learning effects while defining the effectiveness of diversity networks (Githens et al., 2009). They perceive network meetings as opportunities to meet other network members, whereby they could share their knowledge about different organisational departments and about essential topics on issues the organisation must deal with (Githens et al., 2009; Green, 2018). They define the learning effects as beneficial for the entire organisation because the interaction between several employees enables faster solutions of operational problems (Douglas, 2008). Generally, I observed that members of diversity networks construct the effectiveness of networks as it stimulates the development of individual network members (Green, 2018). However, the members of the network for young employees construct individual development in terms of career enhancement (Dennissen et al., 2018) and social integration since the members of this network are in the initial stages of their career, whereas the members of the network for women perceive the development of individual members as an important component for the functioning of the entire company because they are aware of the mutual dependency of every employee, which could benefit the company.

In contrast, non-members were not personally affected by the effectiveness of these two networks. However, they perceived the effectiveness of diversity networks as active at the individual network member level as well on the organisational level. They define the effectiveness of the networks, which individual members might perceive by interacting with other members, in terms of inspirational effects (Friedman et al., 2002); the effectiveness at the organisational level was, according to them, observable as the organisation received support by the networks during cultural change processes. Furthermore, the non-members perceived the two networks as differently effective because the two networks referred to different target groups with different needs.

Thus, the findings of this research reveal that the effectiveness of diversity networks is influenced by the perception of them. It was also found that the effectiveness is independent from a network membership, as both groups perceived the effectiveness equally.

### **Reasons to Join or Not to Join the Network**

The motives of the diversity network members influenced their perception of the effectiveness of diversity networks. Members of the network for young employees, who expected to be socially connected with other network members, perceived the network as effective as they could build a connection with other network members. In contrast, the motives of non-members for not joining the networks had no influence on their perception of diversity network effectiveness. Their resolution for not joining the network was that they would not gain personal advantages from a network membership. However, they perceived the diversity networks as effective on the individual and on the organisational level.

### **Network Characteristics**

The findings of this research demonstrate that network members and non-members perceive the formulation of network goals, the structuring of the network, and the execution of network events as important for the effectiveness of the networks. The formulation of network goals specifies when a network is defined as effective. The implementation of a network board was perceived as essential for the survival of the diversity network as the board is responsible for the organisation of network events. Both stakeholders perceived the relationship of the network with the management team of the company as essential for the maintenance of the diversity network. At this point, they referred to the diversity network for younger employees, which was financially supported by the management team. However, the diversity networks, which need financial approval, were also dependent on the management team. This dependency might restrict the diversity networks' power to change organisational processes or cultures. Furthermore, the diversity networks' events were also perceived as essential for the effectiveness of the networks. The execution of network events leads to the achievement of the diversity network goals or, more specifically, the enhancement of diversity network effectiveness.

### **Diversity Networks as Diversity Management Instruments**

In this research, it was also analysed whether members and non-members perceive the diversity networks as effective instruments for diversity management. Instruments for diversity management have been, in prior research, perceived as effective as they are capable including marginalised groups in organisations and promoting equality (Dennissen et al., 2018).

I observed that members of the network for young employees perceived the diversity networks as an assisting instrument for diversity management. They argued that networks support the socialisation process of employees from marginalised groups which did not belong to the dominant group in the organisation. Forret et al. (2001) also discussed the socialisation aspect. According to the network members in this research, diversity networks could support marginalised groups in receiving more recognition by the organisation, which Colgan et al. (2012) has also found. However, members mentioned that diversity networks might need other measures to implement equality in organisations, such as, for instance, the implementation of policies and practices in favour of equality, as mentioned in Raeburn (2004).

I observed that members from the network for women perceived the network as capable of increasing the awareness of diversity-related topics and problems. However, they perceived it as necessary that a broad audience attends the network events, an audience which is not yet familiar with diversity-related topics such as the advantages of the implementation of equality.

The non-members saw in the organisation of events for a broad public the strength of diversity networks as management instruments. However, non-members also perceived the causes of inequality embedded in social systems and reproduced by human beings of those social systems who apply stereotypes in their daily conversations. The non-members perceived the strength of diversity networks in increasing the awareness of the causes of inequalities.

### **Limitations of the Research**

This research was limited in the sense that the proportion of network members and non-members was not evenly distributed. I experienced fewer difficulties while selecting diversity network members as interview partners for this research. Establishing the relation with one diversity network member resulted automatically in receiving more names of network

members. The selection of non-members was more difficult. I had, at the beginning of the research, no list of names of non-members. However, in applying snowball sampling, which means asking the interviewees after each interview session for names, I could create a list of a few non-members. Future researchers need to be more explicit in selecting diversity network members and need to use more information to create a list of non-members.

Furthermore, based on the restricted maximum number of interviews in total, 16 interviewees were selected. A higher number of interviews from both stakeholder groups would be needed for further research.

Moreover, I conducted all interviews within the organisation I worked for. Accordingly, the interviewees might have answered my questions in a socially desirable way. In addition, it must be considered that the interviews were conducted between human beings. Every human being responds differently to an interviewer and his or her questions. In this research, for instance, I briefed the interviewees on my background as a student of a master's programme with a specialisation in gender equality, diversity, and inclusion in management, which might have resulted in responses from the interviewees that they thought as desirable contributions to this research field.

## **Future Research**

Future researchers could conduct interviews in other organisations with a different industrial background in which other disparities are assumed to exist. Hence, future researchers could analyse whether the definition of the effectiveness of diversity networks depends on the industrial context.

In addition, future researchers should choose an organisation to which they have a neutral relationship. Furthermore, future researchers could also extend the number of interviewees of both target groups. An equal number of interviewees from both target groups would enable an appropriate comparison between these two groups.

Additionally, future researchers should also decide whether to focus on the perception of the members of one diversity network and compare it to the perception of non-members because it would enable them to create a more detailed picture of the perception of one diversity network. Alternatively, future researchers, for instance, could focus on several diversity networks as it would develop the opportunity to sketch a fuller picture of network tensions and conflicts (Dennissen et al., 2018).

## **Reflexivity**

As already explained in the reflexivity section of Chapter 3 in this research, it is of importance that the researcher reflects on his or her role and his or her influence on the outcomes and process of the research. The knowledge I gained by analysing literature about this topic formed my impression of the effectiveness of diversity networks. Thus, I created the list of questions according to my interpretation of the literature.

To avoid steering the answers of the interviewees in one direction, I asked open-ended questions on the effectiveness of diversity networks. Furthermore, during my analysis and interpretation of the data of the research, I kept in mind that my interpretation would be affected by my previous knowledge on the effectiveness of diversity networks. Furthermore, I was also aware of the fact that the results of this research would cover the perception of network members and non-members at one moment in time, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of diversity networks might change over time.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the analysis of the findings, the following points could be recommended to the diversity networks to enhance their effectiveness, which might be observable in the organisation in which the diversity networks are integrated as well: Diversity network members could discuss the network goals of the network with each other. While discussing the network goals, the networks could integrate the definition of diversity and equality. Communicating the network goals to the external context of the network might be necessary for the networks to receive more registration of potential network members. Furthermore, it could also be recommended for the enhancement of the effectiveness of the network to apply a careful structural approach for the achievement of the network goals, which might result in a good organisation of events which could be attended by enough visitors.

Diversity networks should be aware of their supportive strength for the creation of more awareness of diversity-related topics and issues. I also recommend, according to the findings of this research, that the audience of diversity network events could be positioned inside and outside of the organisation in which the network is embedded. Thus, by inviting a broad audience to network events, more people might become aware of equality-related topics. Furthermore, diversity networks should be aware of their relationship with the

management team of the organisation. They need to consider whether the relationship with the management team reveals itself in the appearance of interactions or in the form of an independency in which the networks need the approval of the management team. They should be aware that a dependency on the management team could restrict them in achieving their goals or in changing the organisational culture.



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## **Appendix 1 – Questionnaire – Diversity Network Members**

### Questions related to demographics of the interviewee

1. How many years do you work at the company?
2. What is your current function in the company?
3. What is your cultural background?
4. How old are you?
5. Are you a member of an ERG?
  - a. Which one?
  - b. Others?
6. Why have you decided to enter a diversity network?
7. Do you have a specific (board) function within the diversity network?

### Questions related to the diversity network characteristics

8. Do you know something about the history of the diversity network?
9. What are the goals of the diversity network?
10. How is the diversity network structured?
11. Which activities/events does the diversity network organises?
12. Have you joined an activities/event which was organised by the diversity network?
  - a. (In case of yes) which activity/event have you joined?
13. Which impact does the diversity network have?
14. How would you define an effective diversity network? / What creates for you an effective diversity network?

### Questions related to perceptions

15. How do you feel about being a member of a diversity network? (emotions)
16. How do you evaluate the diversity networks? (judgment)
17. Which personal outcomes do you perceive by joining a diversity network? (individual outcomes)
18. How does the diversity network influence the organisation?
19. How does the diversity network represent itself to the organisation? (image)
20. How does the diversity network communicate with the external world?  
(communication)
21. Would you define a diversity network as an effective diversity management instrument? If yes or no, explain why?

22. How could an organisation learn from a diversity network?



## **Appendix 2 - Questionnaire – Non-Diversity Network Members**

### Questions related to demographics of the interviewee

1. How many years do you work at the company?
2. What is your current function in the company?
3. What is your cultural background?
4. How old are you?
5. Are you a member of an ERG?
6. Why have you decided not to enter a diversity network?

### Questions related to the diversity network characteristics

7. Do you know something about the history of the diversity networks within the company?
8. What do you think could be the goal of a diversity network?
9. What do you think how a diversity network is structured?
10. Do you know which activities/events does the diversity network organises?
11. Have you joined an activities/event which was organized by the diversity network?
  - a. (In case of yes) which activity/event have you joined?
12. Which impact does the diversity network have?
13. How would you define an effective diversity network? / What creates for you an effective diversity network?

### Questions related to perceptions

14. What do you think how a diversity network member would feel about being a member of a diversity network? (emotions)
15. How do you evaluate the diversity networks? (judgment)
16. How does a diversity network influence the organisation?
17. How does the diversity network represent itself to the organisation? (image)
18. How does the diversity network communicate with the external world?  
(communication)
19. Would you define a diversity network as an effective diversity management instrument? If yes or no, explain why?
20. How could an organization learn from a diversity network?

**Appendix 3 – Overview of groups of codes, codes and indicators resulting from literature review**

<b>Group of Codes</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
Diversity networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Networks for diverse minorities</li> <li>▪ Founder</li> <li>▪ Reasons for network foundation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Women, ethnic minorities or LGBTs (Friedman et al. 2002)</li> <li>▪ Activists, HR managers, or employers (Friedman et al. 2002)</li> <li>▪ to support other women (Friedman et al., 2002); establishment of the network proceeded more due to market development trends (Biscoe et al., 2010); pursuing learning successes on individual-, group-, and organisational levels (Githens et al., 2009); providing network members with more voice, visibility, and activity (Colgan et al., 2012)</li> <li>▪ connection between the diversity networks and the management team may lay on a spectrum from hostile to cooperative (Biscoe et al., 2010); horizontal structuring (Welbourne et al., 2017); binding based on similarities (Ibarra, 1993)</li> </ul>
Reasons to (not) the diversity network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reasons to join a diversity network</li> <li>▪ Reasons not to join a diversity network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ social identities and a high level of uniformity among the members</li> </ul>

		<p>(McPherson &amp; Smith-Lovin, 1987); expectation on improvement of their careers (O'Neil, 2011)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ being afraid of other employees who may call them radical (Friedman et al., 1993); expectation on political struggles (Friedman et al., 1993)</li> </ul>
<p>Characteristics diversity networks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Goal</li> <li>▪ Structure</li> <li>▪ Activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Providing social support + exchange of job-related resources (Ibarra, 1993; Van Emmerik, 2006); pursuing learning successes on individual-, group-, and organisational levels (Githens et al., 2009); providing network members with more voice, visibility, and activity (Colgan et al., 2012)</li> <li>▪ connection between the diversity networks and the management team may lay on a spectrum from hostile to cooperative (Biscoe et al., 2010); horizontal structuring (Welbourne et al., 2017); binding based on similarities (Ibarra, 1993)</li> <li>▪ activities should influence the individual member, the network, and the entire organization (Welbourne et al., 2013); Friedman (1996) and Friedman et</li> </ul>

		<p>al. (1993), for instance, listed the following diversity network activities: meeting people, discussing topics, and planning events (Friedman. 1996; Friedman et al., 1993);</p>
<p>Effectiveness diversity networks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reduction Turnover Intension</li> <li>▪ Optimism for career</li> <li>▪ Learning Results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ joining a diversity network emerged beneficial on reducing turnover intention at all levels of management (Friedman et al., 2002); diversity management had a slightly moderate effect on the turnover intentions of the employees (Groeneveld, 2011); alignment of values of company and employee (Pandey et al., 2008)</li> <li>▪ more optimism about their careers (Friedman et al., 2002)</li> <li>▪ gaining knowledge about diversity in organizational development processes (Githens, 2009); learning about diversity topics occurs by formal learning processes (Colgan et al. 2012); lectures on cultural differences or coaching programs that encourage discussions between the network members and non-members stimulate learning (Green 2018).</li> </ul>