

**Talent management and diversity management in the high-tech industry: an exploratory study**

Tony Waugh (s1079936)



**Radboud Universiteit**

### **Abstract**

In an effort to explore the relationship between talent management and diversity management empirically in a high-tech company in the Netherlands, the analysis of 17 semi-structured interviews with practitioners and individual employees have been conducted. Adopting both an organizational and individual level perspective, this paper aims to shed light on how this relationship plays out and is experienced. Adopting a paradox lens reveals a number of tensions both within and between talent management and diversity management. The gendered nature of the industry and workplace is exposed, where an output-oriented culture appears to hold particular impact. Suggestions and further research are called for in efforts to respond to tensions in order to align talent management and diversity management.

## Introduction

The concepts of talent management (TM) and diversity management (DM) appear at first glance to share a number of commonalities (Stewart & Harte, 2010; Baker & Klein, 2017). First, both have become ubiquitous in organizations, attracting a considerable amount of academic attention. This is embedded in dialogue surrounding globalization processes, demographic shifts and the growth of the service sector (Manyika et al., 2015; Wrench, 2005). Secondly, they remain ambiguous in literature, with attempts to define and conceptualize them surrounded by complex commentary (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016; Yadav & Lenka, 2020). Third, both place a great emphasis on the attraction, recruitment, selection, development and retention of employees in their link to potential organizational benefits (Collings & Mellahi 2009; Kossek & Pitchler, 2007). Efforts to understand such benefits, however, suffer from the ‘black-box’ problem prevalent in broader human resource management (HRM) literature (Purcell et al., 2003; Pellad et al., 1999; Son et al., 2020). In spite of this apparent overlap, it has been suggested that TM holds the potential to result in unacknowledged and undesirable long-term consequences for organizational diversity (Sheehan & Anderson, 2015; Collings, 2014). Rather than TM and DM representing complementary practices, this suggests a ‘shadow-side’ of talent management which holds the potential to reproduce existing inequalities in organizations by legitimizing and reinforcing power differentials between dominant and minority groups (Sheehan & Anderson, 2015; Daubner-Siva et al., 2017).

Diversity management from a social justice perspective is broadly centered in notions of inclusion aimed at leveraging differences throughout organizations (Guillaume et al., 2014; Zanoni et al., 2010; Baker & Kelan, 2017), seeking inclusion and establishing greater equality in power relations between different identity groups (Linnehan & Konrad, 1999). Talent management, conversely, is widely defined along exclusionary conceptualizations in which a relatively small group of employees are ‘privileged’ over others (Boudreau & Ramstad 2005; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013). This suggests that talent and diversity management may represent opposing managerial demands (Daubner-Siva et al., 2017). Organizations may on the one hand seek inclusion of difference between identity groups through diversity management (Linnehan & Konrad, 1999) while

simultaneously establishing exclusion through identifying and devoting extensive resources to a small group of individuals via talent management (Swales, 2012).

Dealing with the ambiguous and emergent nature of the relationship between TM and DM may be particularly relevant in the high-tech industry, where largely homogenous employee pools prevail in spite of the continuous need for growth (Brown, 2014). There is strikingly little empirical evidence of how talent management is carried out in organizations and, thus, little interaction with other management practices such as diversity management can be found (for an exception see Festing et al., 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016). The objective of this research is to empirically explore the relationship between TM and DM through a multistakeholder perspective, addressing both the organizational and the individual levels, and responding to calls for research on how talent management is experienced in organizations (Collings, 2014; Thunnissen et al., 2013; Nishii et al. 2008). Thus, the following research question is developed:

*How do the underlying processes and practices of talent management relate to those of diversity management in the particular context of one multinational organization in the high-tech industry in the Netherlands, and how do its members experience this?*

First, a background on the history and central literature topics of talent and diversity management will be detailed. Next, perspectives on gender and its role in this research will be discussed followed by an overview of the potential contribution of the sensitizing concept of a paradox lens. The methodological approach will be described next, leading to outlining the results of the research. Finally, a discussion and conclusion will highlight both theoretical and practical implications of the results, and touch on the limitations and future directions for research.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Talent Management**

Talent management by comparison to diversity management is a relatively young research field, on its way to becoming more mature (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015). Much of the discussion

surrounding talent management often links to the seminal article ‘The War for Talent’ (Chambers et al., 1998) which simultaneously positioned talented individuals as the key for continuing organization success while highlighting the growing scarcity of their availability in the market. The historical background of talent management is linked to work-force succession planning after historical waves of workforce shortages forced organizations to look inward and develop programs to attract, develop and retain workers (Cappelli & Keller, 2017). While contemporary practices of talent management are reported to have been largely developed by the 1970’s, an increasingly globalized and volatile environment has given way to the need for organization adaptation in their approach to anticipating human capital needs and developing plans and practices to meet them (Cappelli, 2008). Talent management was seen as a solution to this where similar to growing disciplines in lean management and just in time production, sophisticated systems of practices aimed to ensure that organizations had the ability to mobilize the right resources at the right time (Cappelli & Keller, 2017). Identification of a unified definition regarding talent in research proves elusive. In attempting to synthesise these perspectives, definitions can be broadly conceptualized into inclusive and exclusive approaches.

### ***Conceptualizing Talent Management***

#### **Inclusive Talent Definitions.**

Inclusive definitions of talent regard all employees as ‘talented’ and thus hold the potential to be of added value for organizations (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). Here the ‘talent as subject’ approach uses talent as an all-encompassing term where all employees are the target of practices such as attraction, retention, and development in order for organizations to meet their goals (Thunnissen et al., 2013). This approach has been labelled as essentially a substitute for the label of Human Resource Management due to its broad approach towards all organizational members (Thunnissen et al., 2013; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Other approaches to inclusive talent management point out the importance of context, highlighting the social and organizational capital which enables performance across levels in organizations (Iles et al., 2010). Empirically, evidence shows that organizations make use of the

inclusive approach, at least partially (Stahl et al., 2012). Talent management researchers, however, appear to favour exclusive definitions of talent in organizations (Thunnissen et al., 2013).

### **Exclusive Talent Definitions.**

Exclusive definitions which regard ‘talent as stars’ adopt a differentiated or segmented approach where a small elite group of employees are regarded as talent, often termed as ‘A Players’, ‘High Potentials’, ‘Star Performers’ and more (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014; Iles et al., 2010). This approach is based on the idea that a small subset of employees represents a disproportionately large amount of strategic value (O’Boyle & Aguinis, 2012). This implies an ‘ABC’ approach to talent management, whereby A players represent the highest (potential) performers, B players as average performers while C constitute poor performers (Cappelli & Keller, 2017). Thus, so-called A players are argued to justifiably receive increased investment in order for organizations to capture or develop these talents in line with the ‘War for Talent’ discourse to leverage their strategic value (O’Boyle & Kroska, 2017). However, this approach has been criticised for essentially negating the influence of context and management practices on performance (Cappelli & Keller, 2017; Groysberg et al., 2011).

‘Talent as positions’ represents an alternative exclusive approach whereby identification of key organizational positions constitutes the starting point for talent management rather than identification of talented individuals (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). This necessitates identifying ‘A positions’ within the organization which are critical to organizational success. Once these positions have been labelled as such in line with organizational strategy, attention then turns to practices which aim at selection or development of the individuals who could potentially hold such positions in the short or long-term (Huselid et al., 2005). This perspective is, thus, extended into the development of talent pools and pipelines in order to ensure succession of such critical positions (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005).

The aforementioned approaches to talent management have been accused of narrow conceptualizations which primarily consider the generation of shareholder value (Collings, 2014). Scholars have called attention to the need for a more balanced understanding of talent management by

orienting towards a more pluralist multistakeholder approach (Collings, 2014; Thunnissen et al., 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016). This echoes the broader human resource management (HRM) field in which such an approach has been championed, emphasizing the importance of incorporating both employer and employee perspectives and institutional factors such as the social and organizational context in research (Paauwe, 2004; Boselie, 2014). Thus, an inclusive approach to talent in adopted in this research to enable the exploration of the relationship with diversity and it's management.

### **Diversity Management**

The historical roots of diversity management are in anti-discrimination legislation which emerged in the United States around the 1960's (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). This legislation which involved affirmative action and equal employment opportunity practices sought to induce compliance against discrimination of historically marginalized groups in the workforce, such as women and people of colour (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Kossek & Pichler, 2007). In attempts to define diversity, distinctions can be made in the approach to conceptualize diversity and the dimensions of interest.

### ***Conceptualizing Diversity***

#### **Compositional Approach.**

Compositional diversity approaches diversity at the unit-level, such as work groups or the organization as a whole, using the collective individual attributes to constitute difference (Guillaume et al., 2014). Defined as “the distribution of differences among the members of a unit with respect to a common attribute, X” (Harrison & Klein, 2007, p. 1200) this approach recognises aspects of difference in a collective manner. Therefore, a unit can be described as diverse in reference to particular shared features of the group, with the implication that it affects unit-level processes and outcomes such as cohesion or decision making (Guillaume et al., 2012). This implicitly assumes that diversity affects all individuals of a unit in the same manner, contributing to a collective numerical representation of such a common attribute (Guillaume et al., 2014; Kossek & Pichler, 2007). This is

often associated with the business case approach to diversity which primarily focuses on the generation of value from diversity and, thus, moves away from approaches which highlight equality outcomes for minority groups (Noon, 2007). In doing so, it neglects to take what have been labelled as 'inequality regimes' into account which hold negative consequences for some social groups within a unit over others (Linnehan & Konrad, 1999; Acker, 2006).

Group differences have been suggested to only become meaningful when they have structural foundations which become embedded in organizations over time through processes of decision making and interaction (DiTomaso et al., 2007). The suggestion of 'inequity regimes' in organizations revolves around dominant groups in particular contexts having greater access to power resources which enable greater influence over behavioural norms in organizations (Linnehan & Konrad, 1999; Janssens & Zanoni, 2014). This holds particularly true when considering intersecting categories of difference which are said to hold "mutually reinforcing or contradicting processes" (Acker, 2006, p. 100). With dominant groups capable of greater influence in organizational settings, this can lead to differentiations of 'us' and 'them' where less powerful groups may be stigmatized or discriminated against (DiTomaso et al., 2007; Linnehan & Konrad, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). An understanding of how this process is *lived* offers consideration of the relational differences between individual and other unit members, considered in the relational approach to diversity.

### **Relational Approach.**

The relational approach takes a more individual approach suggesting that members make comparisons between their own characteristics and those of others within a social unit to establish difference (Guillaume et al., 2012; Riordan, 2000). Through processes of social categorization and power differentials certain categories of relative difference in a unit may hold impact for both individual processes and outcomes, such as their social integration or psychological link to others in the group (Linnehan & Konrad, 1999; Guillaume et al., 2012). While considered superior for understanding how diversity is *lived* in organizations, this approach has received relatively less attention in research compared to that of the compositional approach (Guillaume et al., 2012).



Adopting the talent pool of an organization as a social unit of establishing difference, the relational approach to diversity is adopted in this research allowing for a link between diversity and talent management. This allows for the experience of individual members of the organization to be considered, as they relationally construct and adapt their identities.

### ***Dimensions of Diversity***

While many different dimensions of diversity have been described in research, a separation of surface-level and deep-level offers an approachable manner to understand elements which are readily detectable to others in social groups versus those which are more hidden (Harrison et al., 1998; Yadav & Lenka, 2020; Guillaume et al., 2012). Surface-level differences can be defined as “differences among group members in overt, biological characteristics that are typically reflected in physical features” (Harrison et al., 1998, p. 97) such as age, sex, and race/ethnicity. Deep-level differences by contrast refer to more hidden psychological characteristics, representing differences in values, personality and attitudes which are only visible through interaction (Harrison et al., 1998; Guillaume et al., 2012).

### **Gender in TM & DM**

Literature exploring the linkages between TM and DM are in their infancy, with both of the two empirical studies related to this relationship largely placing the limelight on gender (Latukha, et al., 2022; Festing et al., 2014). Festing et al. (2014) explored the concept of gender-biased TM practices highlighting that practices which embody stereotypes of masculine values can reproduce inequalities in the workplace between men and women. The authors research draws in part on feminist studies, in which the links between gender and technology as well as gender and engineering have received particular attention.

Faulkner (2001) draws attention to how gender and technology are coproduced through their social constructions and enacted through performances and processes of day-to-day organizational functioning. This highlights the notion of organizations and the structures upon which they are built

being ‘gendered’ (Acker, 1990), holding impact for members of the organization as they navigate, negotiate and continuously redefine their identities in reference to others (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). This appears to hold greater emphasis for certain professions, such as engineering, where prevailing male stereotypes and numerical dominance contribute to the potential for such environments to be experienced as *gender inauthentic* for some women (Faulkner, 2009, 2011; Ely & Padavic, 2007). Hatmaker (2013) explores the impact this holds for women’s sense of self and belonging, outlining how strategies related to impression management and coping may be adopted in efforts to navigate identity construction in such environments.

The distinctions amongst terminology and meaning when referring gender, and associated masculine and feminine categories are important, particularly in efforts to avoid essentialist understandings. Distinct interpretations can be identified in literature which highlights gender as sexual differences of a biological nature and gender understood as socially constructed beliefs of male and female difference (Powell & Graves, 2011). The latter is associated with an understanding of masculinities and femininities as they are performed, understood and shaped in this case by members of the organization rather than representing static, innate and homogenous distinctions between men and women (Faulkner, 2009). By adopting both understandings of gender it allows for a relational, fluid and agentic understanding of how gender is performed within organizations whilst acknowledging that gendered differences may be understood or described by interviewees as innate. Through exploring identities within the organization, an understanding may be gained as to how managers and employees lives with tensions in the workplace (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013).

### **Adopting a Paradox Lens**

“Paradoxical thinking is spurred by recognizing a dilemma in which no choice can resolve the tension because opposing solutions are needed and interwoven” (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008, p. 229). Adopting a paradox lens is seen to be particularly useful in sensemaking processes and generating salience around organizational tensions as well as broadening the boundaries of how they can be addressed (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Poole & van de Ven, 1989). Using the

notion of paradox as an analytical tool in the relationship between TM and DM has been advocated by other researchers, wherein a number of tensions, dualisms and dualities in this relationship have been identified (Festing, Konrad, Daubner). This lens has also been highlighted as particularly useful in exploring the ‘doing of gender’ in organizations (Van de Brink & Stobbe, 2009).

**Table 1**

Definitions associated with paradox

Term	Definition
Tension	Straining of the mental powers or faculties; severe or strenuous intellectual effort; intense application
Dualism	Two independent principles
Duality	The condition or state of being dual or consisting of two parts
Paradox	An apparently absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition, or a strongly counter-intuitive one, which investigation, analysis, or explanation may nevertheless prove to be well-founded or true.

Source: Oxford English Dictionary (2022)

In dealing with tensions associated with paradox, reactions can be separated broadly into defensive and acceptance reactions (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). Defensive reactions work on a short-term basis in order to avoid or prolong having to actually address tensions. This can take the form of separating opposing forces or denial of the tension overall (Poole & van de Ven, 1989; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). Active approaches on the other hand represent attempts to deal with the tensions, through attempts to synthesis the differing poles, accommodating consideration of both elements in a more equal sense, offering an adaptive more sustainable approach (Poole & van de Ven, 1989; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). Thus, a paradox lens will be used as a sensitizing concept to guide and act as a point of departure in interpretation (Bowen, 2006).

**Table 2**

Examples of paradoxical linkages identified in research

Identified in Literature	Definition or meaning
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Technical-social dualism	Pits a masculine technology-focus against a feminine social-focus, deemed to be mutually exclusive and in which a technical-focus is valued over the social (Faulkner, 2000, pp. 761-763)
(In)visibility paradox	Women (engineers/science students) are simultaneously visible as women and invisible in reference to their professional competency (Faulkner, 2009; Van de Brink & Stobbe, 2009)
Meritocracy	Organizations that emphasize meritocracy as a core organizational value may reproduce gendered bias in translating employee evaluations into rewards (Castilla & Benard, 2010)
Diversity-meritocracy paradox	Societal level conflicts between groups create an identity validation-threat system for advantaged and marginalized groups whereby events benefitting one group potentially threaten the other group (Konrad et al., 2021, p. 2183)
Exclusion-inclusion paradox	Developing a proportion of the employee pool deemed as high potentials through exclusive TM structures while simultaneously adopting DM principles which work to inclusively allow all to uncover and evolve their particular talents (Daubner-Siva et al., 2017, p.324)

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## Method

### Context of the study

The organization under study is located in the Netherlands, which provides the context of this research. The Netherlands has a population of 17.5 million people and ranks amongst top performers in terms of GDR per capital and production (OCED, 2022). Immigration remains topical in the Dutch context due to relatively recent waves of immigration beginning around the 1960's, with recent trends seeing growing cultural diversity (van Meeteren et al., 2013; Bovens et al., 2020). The Netherlands was ranked number six on the Global Talent Competitiveness Index, which ranks countries on how they grow, attract and retain talent (INSTEAD, 2021) and is among the leading countries in Europe in the performance of research and innovation (European Commission, 2020).

However, the country has found it difficult get more people into STEM industry, with projects and policies specifically targeting girls, women and those with a migrant background (Eurydice, 2011; Techniekpact, n.d.). Gendered stereotypical associations are acknowledged as a major threat to the participation of women in these fields in the Dutch context (Booy et al., 2012). The Netherlands scored highest on male gender-stereotypical perceptions of science subjects in a study of more than 60

countries, with the labour market identified as particularly segmented along gendered domains (Miller et al., 2015). This makes the topic of gender a particularly interesting dimension of diversity in this research. Policies related to work life balance that are deeply entrenched in the Netherlands offers potential flexibility in working hours, representing the highest level of part-time workers amongst OECD countries (OCED, 2019; Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011). A large proportion of this is made up by women, about three times the rate of men (OCED, 2019).

### **The Organization**

Due to confidentiality agreements with the organization, the descriptive information that can be disclosed is limited. The organization employs more than 15,000 people in the Netherlands and operates in Europe, Asia and the US. Recruitment for positions based in the Netherlands is carried out globally, and the organization highlights its particularly large need for individuals trained in the STEM fields compared with opportunities in other disciplines. This presents particular challenges for practices associated with both talent and diversity management.

### **Participants**

In order to explore the relationship between talent and diversity management and understand how this is experienced by employees, I conducted a total of 17 interviews. Two interviews were conducted with those (partially) responsible for Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) topics both for the Netherlands and globally, alongside one interview with a member of the company's Global D&I Council (GDIC). Three interviews were carried out with talent practitioners and a total of 11 interviews were conducted with employees.

### **Procedure**

Adopting a social constructivist framework allows for an engaged approach towards understanding meaning processes within an organization (Gioia et al., 2012). The interview participants were identified during the course of a thesis assignment at the organization involved in this study. I, therefore, had the opportunity to gain a partial insider perspective on how departments

are organized and who is responsible for the topics related to talent and diversity management. In order to recruit the relevant practitioners for this study, my internal network highlighted those responsible for these topics. The identified individuals were subsequently contacted by email to take part in my research. In some cases, I was referred to another colleague who held more knowledge and responsibility for the topics of this study. Transparency of the central topics of my research was offered to the participants who would be involved, and thus, all interviewees were aware that I was researching the dual topics of talent and diversity management. For both sets of practitioners, the approach adopted offered a description of the research study as exploring the relationship between talent management and diversity management, with an explicit focus on our operations in the Netherlands. Those contacted were largely receptive to my proposal to be interviewed, revealing that the subjects under study were particularly relevant due to planning changes in both talent and diversity spaces as well as the recent legislation regarding gender equality in the Netherlands.

**Table 3**

Talent Management and Diversity Management Practitioners Interview Information

No.	Synonym	Gender	Nationality	Tenure (years)	Title
1	DC_1	Female	US	8	Cluster Head and Member of the Global Diversity Council
2	DM_1 & DM_1.1	Female & Female	US & US	1 & 0.5	Diversity Officer & Senior Diversity and Inclusion Project Manager
3	DM_2	Female	Dutch	2	Head of HR Strategy
4	TM_1	Female	Dutch	7	Organization, Talent and Leadership Development Manager
5	TM_2	Female	Dutch	20+	Senior Organization, Talent and Leadership Development Specialist
6	TM_3	Male	Dutch	9.5	Head of HR Talent Acquisition

For respondents being interviewed from the employee perspective, the sole criteria of a technical background was used for inclusion. This allowed me to explore the largest group of employees at the company being particularly relevant due to the particular attention STEM receives for both talent and diversity related topics. The employees were identified by three means. Initially, I

contacted a number of representatives from internal employee networks by email to request the opportunity to interview them for my research. The description given provided the central topics of my research, but focused on their career advancement within the professional context. This approach was adopted through identification of the importance of career advancement and orientation for both talent and diversity topics (Festing et al., 2015). This resulted in four interviews. Secondly, due to the size of the company, an effort was made to gain voices from different departments throughout the organization. The team I am part of at the company works with different departments and, thus, I requested them to connect me with colleagues that would be willing to be interviewed, with the central topics of my research again made salient. Those identified were subsequently contacted by email in the same manner as those within employee networks. This resulted in a further four interviews. Finally, I contacted a number of new colleagues that I had recently meet or started to work with to request an interview with them in the manner described above. This resulted in a further three interviews. Approaches towards interviewees can be found in Appendices 1 and 2.

**Table 4**

Employee Interview Information

No.	Synonym	Gender	Age	Nationality	Highest level of education	Tenure (years)
1	EF_1	Female	No data	South African	Bachelor's	4.5
2	EF_2	Female	No data	Dutch	Master's	4.5
3	EF_3	Female	26	Dutch	Master's	4
4	EF_4	Female	35	Polish	PhD	5
5	EF_5	Female	26	Portuguese	Master's	2
6	EF_6	Female	28	Dutch	Master's	2
7	EF_7	Female	No data	Indian	PhD	4
8	EM_1	Male	No data	French	PhD	3
9	EM_2	Male	28	German	Master's	4
10	EM_3	Male	27	Portuguese	Master's	3.5

11	EM_4	Male	54	Dutch	Master's	20+
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Interviews were conducted between May and July 2022, in private meeting rooms within the company premises when convenient. Alternatively, they were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams. Interviews with practitioners lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, with an average of 47 minutes. Interviews with employees lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, with an average of 40 minutes. The chosen semi-structured interview structure was selected to offer structure whilst allowing for space to dive further into topics which were brought up during the interview. Appendices 3 and 4 present the interview guides which were used. The conversations were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### **Data Analysis**

The software program Atlas was used in order to structure and facilitate the coding process of the transcribed interviews. Initially, open coding was conducted in order to allow interest points and topics to emerge. As this research is exploratory, this step acts as a first stage in generating further meaning from the interviews. This first stage acted as a partial summary of the contents of the interview scripts, and highlighted areas relevant for further consideration during the analysis. Examples of such codes are 'initial interaction with company,' 'clear search for female leaders,' 'diversity as gender and nationality.'

For the second round of coding, linkages and contrasts were identified in the relationship between diversity and talent management, as well as the reactions of employees towards them. This resulted in an iterative process where initial codes and subsequent linkages were considered and reviewed, as certain topics emerged from the research which drew particular attention to different aspects of the data. This resulted in 37 codes such as 'Context,' 'Networks,' 'Stress / Pressure,' 'Intersectionality.'

Finally, acting as a final step, a paradox lens was applied in order to further extract meaning and highlight patterns and points of interest within the data. This resulted in codes being grouped into



larger codes to do with TM and DM alongside five broad codes which have been translated into the results outlined below. This process consisted of a largely manual and iterative process, where I dove into the data and searched for linkages, connections and points of interest.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All interview participants were fully informed and consented to inclusion in this research, offering consent regarding both the purpose of the study and the use of their data. Prior to each interview, it was noted that their data would be anonymized. Following each interview, the participant was further informed on the topic and purpose of my research, with consent always residing with the participant should they have wished to rescind it. I took the responsibility towards members of the organization very seriously considering the personal nature of the career advancement topic. Thus, their privacy was respected, with data related to interview collected permanently deleted following transcription. Interview transcripts were additionally anonymized not just for compliance with privacy agreements, but in line with protecting of the interviewees personal data.

### **Results**

A number of themes emerged from the data on both the management and employee side. First, an overview of the organization of TM and DM will be outlined separately, informed by managerial interviews and documentation provided. Following this the themes of embedding TM and DM, growth, organizational and departmental cultures, visibility and finally the last topic of meritocracy and identity conscious diversity will be outlined.

### **Organization of Talent Management**

#### ***History of Talent Management at Company***

The initial structured approach towards talent management at the company was introduced in or around 2014, focusing largely on development and retention activities. This revolved around annual processes in which the respective team lead would sit with their HR Business Partner (HRBP) and rate

employee's potential as "high, medium or well-placed" (TM\_1) where potential refers to taking on added responsibility and implied largely upward growth. This process resulted in all employees from the middle of the job architecture upwards receiving a potential rating. These ratings were then collectively calibrated amongst managers.

Managers would also have a discussion with each other to em yeah define together where they set the bar, what do we really see as a high potential, em and where they would also look at who are the people that we really want to accelerate their development. (TM\_1)

Those rated as high potential, both then and now, are then added to a "long list of high potentials and then the the list is separated and you're matched towards all kind of solutions" (TM\_2). Acceleration programs and specialized development programs are among development opportunities available for high potential employees following a nomination process by their respective team lead. This process remains largely opaque for employees regardless of their potential rating.

It was also not visible for employees so they would also not know that they were being rated or being discussed and also not in all cases people would know if their ambition was actually in line with the succession plan that they were put on. (TM\_1)

Succession planning was conducted in parallel to potential identification in a similar process involving the team lead and respective HRBP. They would sit with the current position holder to map who in the team "are ready now to really succeed this person or people who could do it in one to three years or could do it at more than three years" (TM\_1). Both processes were carried out once per year in a largely manual process utilizing excel templates and are collectively described as being processes "led by HR and it was a once a year check the box exercise." The resulting data was collected centrally to offer insights into the potential of the organizational employee pool and to perform quality checks.

### ***Structure of Talent Management***

In large part, the original framework of talent management at the company has remained in place until recently. Along the way functions were divided into Organizational Development (OD),

Talent Acquisition (TA), and People Development (PD) Teams. The OD team takes a central role in TM at the company, being responsible for the TM strategy as well as continuous improvement and future development of processes related to topics such as talent, potential assessment and succession management. This provides input for priority setting and strategy of the TA function, which is responsible for the attraction and hiring of 'talent' from the market, as well as sharing labour market and industry insights to other internal teams. The PD function is responsible for developing leadership and training curriculums as well as a focus on development of personal skills among members of the organization in order to meet the current and future needs of the organization.

### ***'Future-Proofing' Talent Management Strategy***

A large-scale project is currently underway in the area of Talent Management at the company, aimed towards future proofing the HR landscape of the company. A number of changes are in the process of being implemented in these efforts, facilitated by an upgrade in the HR systems and tooling related to people management and the integration of all HR processes in one system. The approval structure of this project involved coordination of a project board, the HR management team and the executive committee (TM\_1).

looking at our HR landscape, how can we make that more future proof? We had all kinds of exploration sessions where we collected feedback from key stakeholders through interviews, for example, but also looked at external insights, what's possible in the market. (TM\_1)

One key change relates to the approach being taken towards talent management.

we used to have a more exclusive approach really looking at only those happy few we see as high potentials and then go and invest in their development but we want to go actually to a more inclusive approach where I see more a hybrid approach to be complete. (TM\_1)

### ***Defining Talent and Potential***

In line with this more inclusive approach, a formal definition of talent has been developed, broadly described as being recognized in everyone, and that the company facilitates the maximisation of everyone's capabilities and ambition (slides, development presentation). Potential *identification* has been updated to potential *assessment* appearing to indicate a shift from an innate talent perspective to a developable talent. The current definition of potential is extensive, combining seven plus broad elements including links to organizational values and leadership frameworks, learning agility, creativity and more. In recognition of the need to simplify this definition to facilitate transition to the potential label, three factors are highlighted. The ambition of the employee themselves, learning agility and specific behaviours linked to organizational values to the leadership framework used in the organization.

The current project builds on additions made since the initial approach to TM was put in place, such as the development and introduction of core values to the organization, from which a leadership framework was constructed and introduced in or around 2020. This alongside changing internal dialogues has held influence in various parts of the TM infrastructure.

[acceleration program] already existed from eh 2014. Back in those days wellbeing was not that big part of the discussions within the organization, diversity and inclusion was not a big part of the discussion, values was not a big part and that all came along during the years and of course we need to adapt to that. (TM\_2)

## **Organization of Diversity Management**

### ***History of Diversity Management at Company***

Diversity management marks a relatively recent journey for the company, with formalized efforts in this area beginning in 2020, where on the US side of the organization a Diversity and Inclusion Council was created. This reflected events and dialogue in the wider context of the US around this time. Around this time, dialogue had also been taking place on the Dutch side as a group

of senior women sought to bring greater awareness towards the top management team of the realities of women engineers in the organization.

a lot of that started with you know the awareness of social justice in the US, the increasing awareness of social justice within the US. (DM\_1)

as women that were in senior positions, we were able to get on the agenda of [abbreviation of executive committee] and what we had done is really we did a round table and and shared some of the experiences that women had from the recruiting stand point, from the, you know, retention standpoint, from the network standpoint and from the from succession and growth standpoint. [DC\_1]

Following a change in HR leadership in the US, a diversity officer function was achieved in early 2021 who, while based in the US, has the global overview of the company. Shortly after, a Global Diversity and Inclusion Council (GDIC) was established, consisting of representatives from five of the company's six major locations globally tasked with creating strategic accountability for D&I results whilst providing governance and oversight on these matters (slides DM\_1).

### ***Structure of Diversity Management***

The Diversity Officer heads what is described as the D&I Centre of Expertise (COE) whose role involves providing expertise, creating and executing a D&I strategy and providing a voice for D&I globally (slides DM\_1). The reality of this COE is significantly limited by the resources allocated to this team, where the Diversity Officer explains “we're a team of really just now three [people] (...) and that's for a company of, you know, 30,000 plus people so bandwidth has been an issue.”

The reporting line for this function is within the HR organization of the company, with the Head of HR Strategy based in the Netherlands taking a particular role in diversity management topics. Both the Diversity Officer and the Head of HR Strategy are on the GDIC. This is chaired by a member of the Board of Management who is also responsible for the Environment, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG) function, creating a direct linkage to the top management team (TMT). Currently,

there is no systematic manner in which members are appointed to the council, but requirements centre around seniority to be able to hold influence in their respective organizations, regional representation, demonstrated leadership as well as some level of interest and demonstrated action in the area of D&I (DM\_1.1).

### ***Targets for Diversity & Inclusion***

A number of global targets have been set by the company focusing on D&I efforts, which were first announced in early 2022. The main focus of the targets is on gender, particularly the representation of women in recruitment pools and in senior positions, alongside a target on inclusive culture. These targets appear to have been heavily influenced by the gender diversity bill which was adopted in the Netherlands in September of 2021, and entered into force as of January, 2022 (Government of the Netherlands, 2021). The Dutch legislation placed an appointment quota on Supervisory Boards of listed companies to achieve at least a one-third representation of both men and women via new appointments and extends towards mandating target setting for improved gender diversity among senior management (Government of the Netherlands, 2021).

Yeah so that's been honestly one of the key drivers for us going public with our targets is, you know, we we were doing analytics and research to figure out you know where we had opportunities and when that legislation became official realized that we needed to go public. (DM\_1)

The Dutch legislation was foreshadowed by an amendment to the listing standards of the Nasdaq Stock Market on the US side which placed requirements for diversity representation in Supervisory Boards and public reporting on Board diversity (Securities and Exchange Commission, 2021). The introduction of the legislation in the Netherlands sparked the rapid publication of diversity data and target setting in the company's Annual Report of 2021. "The targets were set in a bit of a hurry because of the Dutch legislation and this is where then the annual report etcetera etcetera, yeah" (DM\_3).

These targets have provided direct input for the work of the GDIC for which the members are split into work groups according to the different targets. The setting of these targets appears to have been informed by consideration of company wide data and potentially some input from the GDIC. When asked about interactions with other stakeholders in both setting and starting to achieve the targets, this appears minimal.

We're not yet at the point where we're engaging actively (...) I think this is part of the discussion on the council of so what does it mean actually? So now that we've split targets, what are the real actions that need to be done? But that requires that there's also clarity within [abbreviation for executive committee] on what targets to set per sector, per business, per region. (DC\_1)

With building external pressures in both the Netherlands and the US, the recent internal emphasis on developing a D&I architecture appears to be grounded in efforts of compliance.

### ***Defining Diversity & Inclusion***

In defining diversity at the company, it is described as incorporating all aspects of diversity. This follows the individualization of diversity approach, focusing on both surface level aspects of diversity and those deep-level aspects including communication styles, cognitive differences, work experience and so on. The importance of a focus on inclusion is made clear amongst practitioners.

two years ago we started this this journey and and we came with a pretty clear definition of diversity and diversity for us is the full spectrum of diversity. And actually, we we also stated that inclusion is maybe even the most important part of the equation. (DM\_2)

And then inclusion is really a behaviour (...) it's really an action and it has to be an intentional action - how we respect, collaborate, work with one another and how we make sure people have a sense of belonging. (DM\_1)

The broad approach to these definitions appears to be challenging, particularly in a global sense of development of a companywide D&I strategy, as establishing a “common understanding of diversity and inclusion throughout [company name], what it means within the organization” (DM\_1) is acknowledged as one of the biggest challenges for diversity practitioners. In comparison with the internal communication and information available about TM, there is little to be found explicitly on D&I.

we're a bit behind on making it public, doing well on communication. That has a resource, only resource constraint there so there is no reason behind not revealing the strategy maybe but it's just really resources to to put it on the Internet and make it clear and logical. (DM\_2)

This suggests that a D&I strategy and corresponding understanding of D&I for the company has already been established, which does not appear to be reflected by other interviews with both TM and DM practitioners. When discussing the approach on both the Dutch and the US side, it is acknowledged that the approaches may be rooted in different aims.

[the] US has decided to actually address this especially after the George Floyd incident last year so I think that they had moved along, spurred by something different, right? Spurred or initiated by something that's a little bit different from the the focus that's here in the Netherlands and overall [company name] and with the council. (DC\_1)

With the foundations of the DM architecture at the company beginning and largely remaining located on the US side, the underpinning identity conscious social justice driven approach appears to render it somewhat of an outlier in comparison to the discourse surrounding the broader company approach.

### **Embedding TM & DM**

The necessity of embedding D&I within TM efforts emerged across practitioners in what appears to be an acknowledgement that behavioural change is central to their combined efforts.



We need to embed this and we need to pay attention to diversity and inclusion every step of the way and not in parallel. (TM\_1)

what we do with diversity and inclusion that we we we want to instill this in everything we do. So, as an example, if we have leadership programs, in our on boarding, in high performing teams, we have a whole tool kit on high performing teams, in our processes. (DM\_2)

One particular challenge in achieving this embedding of these functions is identified as centered in the context of the industry and nature of the work being done at the company, with particular reference to D&I.

What is difficult in my view within technical companies and especially the fast result orientation of [company name] eh people love to reduce the complexity of the problem and really making it very clear, what is now the problem we want to solve and then go for a solution and solve the problem. Diversity and inclusion is not a, you cannot isolate one element. (DM\_2)

This hints that the key to embedding TM and DM may be a recognition of the need for larger scale cultural and structural change over quick technical fixes, where the company is described as being predisposed to the latter. The challenging reality of initiating such large-scale changes, however, has necessitated prioritizing in terms of focus areas and resource-allocation for the short-term, particularly in reference to the ‘newness’ of the D&I function at the company. Thus, spurred by the Dutch legislation, the imperative of organizational growth and analytics related to numerical representation of men and women, the decision has been made to focus on the topic of gender in the short-term. “So this is why we say OK let's focus now, for now, for the coming years specifically on the female male eh eh numbers. This is where we set targets” (DM\_2).

In discussing the current collaboration between TM and DM this, much like the broader D&I infrastructure at the organization, appears in its infancy. When asked directly about D&I topics as part

of the future plans of TM at the company, this was described as largely separate, despite acknowledging the importance of embedding these topics.

Tony: how or to what extent if any diversity and inclusion topics are are part of that picture?

*TM\_1: Yeah, so actually we have a separate project running on diversity and inclusion dedicated so [Diversity Officer] is the lead of that project.*

In highlighting the progress which has been made in this regard, the recruitment or TA function is highlighted from the DM side as being the “most advanced” currently (DM\_2). In talking to the head of the TA function, however, the need for a greater structure for D&I efforts is highlighted.

So now you see that there are ad-hoc here and there some initiatives that that that might that might help a little bit but to really to really be effective I think we should have a more integrated plan where all initiatives are let's say more connected and building upon each other.

[TM\_3]

This is first and foremost acknowledged as the need for a strategy on D&I for which the head of TA has yet to be made aware of. This highlights a lack of clarity surrounding discourse on DM at the company, and whether this D&I strategy is indeed finalized or rather forthcoming.

## **Growth**

One of the key drivers of changes in TM and DM is the continuous growth of the organization and this appears to hold clear links with the setting up of diversity management structures.

the main driver for going to a more inclusive approach is the the huge growth that we have to go through as a company. (TM\_1)

we are in an industry that's fighting for talent, right? And talent will be, so regardless of what you think about diversity or inclusion or what you say about that, in the end as a company we're going to hit that as a problem (...) we will need to grow. (DC\_1)

The head of TA describes how the company continuously underestimated and even attempted to resist growth over the years. However, market forces such as digitalization and the internet of things means that demand has been on a steep upcurve.

if you work in an organization that has growth as an objective, as as as a target/goal, then that organization organizes itself for growth because they understand hey we want to grow 10% or 20% so let us organize for that. [Company name] did not did not have that intent and growth more or less happened to us (...) So we were questioning always the growth, is it really necessary? And that meant and in practice it meant meant that that TA was always actually lagging behind, we, growth happened, we try to avoid it and then we could not avoid it so we have to accept that we have to grow. (TM\_3)

This resulted in an “ad-hoc, scattered way” of working where the function was constantly playing catch up. The challenges which accompany the management of this growth appears to be reflected throughout the organization as identified by some of the employees.

if I look at the team I'm now in, where just about every month somebody new starts... I'm training people in the work I do and I've been doing it for half a year now and I got trained by somebody who did it two months before me and he got the training from somebody who did it two months before him. That's, that's pushing the boundaries. (EM\_4)

we grow very fast, teams are very big and the managers I think they also I think lost a bit the focus on the people, sometimes. (...) there are some managers are more focused on projects while they should be focused on the people and that sometimes can be lost. (EF\_5)

This focus on projects or output over people was identified by multiple employees, where rapid growth appears to exasperate pressures on what is described by some as an output culture.

### **Organizational and Departmental Cultures**

“I think the culture there is deliver, deliver no matter what” (EF\_7). This “very high output related” (EF\_1) pressure was identified among employees where the combination of this pressure and the dominance of masculine norms appears to contribute to “a more masculine energy” (EF\_7) within some teams.

There's the business side of things and there's the engineers like the people side of things, right? And ideally, they're going together very harmoniously but more often than not they are at conflict because the business wants way more things than the engineers can deliver. So I feel like as a as a as a manager or as a project leader, yeah it's it's good if you can strike a balance but sometimes one something pushes you more than the other. (EF\_7)

they should feel more concerned about the wellbeing of the people in their team and get this in their target as well eh and focus on not what should be done in the immediate task but ask the persons when that can be done. (EM\_1)

In its simplest terms this pits an output focus against a more heterogenous socio-technical focus, where the proclivity towards an output culture in the organization appears to represent a particular value mismatch for some as they navigate their identities within their teams.

I try to be this output manager and I can be that for eh an amount of time in a specific situation, that's no problem but doing that consistently also just doesn't match with my values. (EF\_1)

it's not about the number of men versus number of women, it's about the energy of the project itself and then it has a more masculine energy let's say, which is a bit conflicting with my energy. (EF\_7)

Yeah I I prefer having people to speak with a well explained opinion and not just like over shouting each other like I have the highest vision, I have so so we need to listen to me but I'm not sure if that's like men culture or culture in companies but that is something I I yeah, that's not really who I want to be. (EF\_6)

The subtext here suggests that at the centre of the tension mentioned above are stereotypical gendered conceptions of work in which those representing a masculine output or technical focus are the dominant in-group while those who focus on the broader social elements at play represent a peripheral or out-group (Faulkner technical dualism reference). Linking such behaviours to reward structures serves to legitimize and normalise this behaviour in such team cultures.

I mean a good person, someone that gets what they promote what they, what they appreciate, are all the people who run escalations well, who push people until they get what they need and then we've done a good job. (EF\_1)

Leadership is acknowledged by the Head of HR Strategy as central to why some parts of the organization give greater energy and emphasis to D&I topics over others. Describing some "pockets" of the organization as in need of greater awareness of the impact of their behaviour, it is acknowledged that while leaders value systems are often well intended their behaviour can be different.

I really believe that in the value system of a lot of the leaders it is really there - in their day-to-day behaviour sometimes they act a bit different which means that it's good to give them a little bit more mirroring (...) sometimes it's a bit shock therapy and sometimes it's just doing that, we have a very nice unconscious bias training that already for some creates that ah-ha. (DM\_2)

One employee shared a particularly interesting experience having held managerial positions for a number of years before having a burn-out triggered specifically by one these sessions likely intended to create the 'ah-ha' moment described above.

Eh most of my career I spent in [sector] so I've been team lead, group lead, project lead eh until [year] and had ran into a burn out. It was during a training leadership capability program and basically, it's a mirror so they ask questions 'how are you?' and 'why are you leading people?' and I kind of eh I don't know [vocal sounds denoting confusion]. Em yeah, it's really

a good training to reflect but I think I'm not the only one who eh yeah kind of fell into a burnout trap. (EM\_4)

Representing all demographic markers of the “Dutch white men community” (EMPLYF\_6) in reference to the largely homogenous group in the upper levels of the organization, this interviewee reflects on the impact of assuming such an output focus in a project where this was explicitly necessary.

So really yeah use power, and force, yeah basically a tank, ripping them apart and getting the job done. And I'm not a project lead like that, so I flagged, I started flagging and say [sound effect for processing] and escalated up to two / three levels higher than the guy I was working for and still no support. And then I found myself on the, on my bike to [company name] throwing up at the side of the road thinking hmm, what's going on here? (EM\_4)

This perspective shifts the focus away from a purely intervention oriented ‘fix’ related to unconscious bias awareness for leaders towards the need for a greater consideration of the systemic and culturally embedded nature of the orientation towards work in the company. It also highlights the need to look outside of essentialist understandings of gender in terms of natural or inherent differences between men and women in dealing with the relationship between output/technical and social orientations. Rather, this example points towards the dynamic and evolving nature of ‘doing gender’ in the workplace (Van de Brink & Stobbe, 2009).

### **Visibility**

One of the most prominent themes which emerged from the interviews with employees is their experience with the people performance management (PPM) cycle at the company. The notion that evaluations need to be normally distributed across the teams lead to some feeling that their efforts go largely unrecognized.

They also don't fully appreciate what employees are doing and how they differentiate themselves (...) and I think that ends up with a lot of frustration when it's not being recognized. (EM\_1)

The tricky part comes when the staff has only a certain amount of greens, reds and blues to give to the employees [signalling above, below and average performance] (...) when you have a lot of people that you know, are doing a great job and are doing a lot of work but you are limited in the in this ... (EM\_3)

I really hate it because like everyone knows it's skewed, it doesn't work it's like they will say John had an exceed (above average evaluation) last year, I want to compensate that by giving him a below (below average evaluation) this year, and that means that someone else can have an exceed so so it's all planned up front. (EF\_2)

The topic of unconscious bias surfaces again in relation to line managers who are critical to the evaluation and potential rating of employees. This role is set to become increasingly important as greater responsibility is to be placed on these managers as they assume leadership of the PPM cycle, devolved from HR. “So that’s the second key change and of course that fact that we do that that in workday and so that is automated, that HR is not in the lead but actually the manager is in the lead...” (TM\_1). In describing the current process, however, it is noted that together with the growth of the company and, therefore, teams, visibility towards the line-manager and relevant upper-level peers becomes essential for being evaluated positively.

all these visibility games, all these these things start to be actually more relevant than the job that you are doing. And so it's so to a certain extent it seems that you know, not just doing your job is relevant but also you know to show off your job, to play for your PPM, to do these kind of things which, you know, it's frustrating. (EM\_3)

there is certain things that makes you be closer to a manager, certain projects that you do that actually is more relevant to him so of course he knows you a bit better. (EF\_5)

I think it's really difficult to to understand whether people are really that high potential or is it because your manager really likes you. I I don't know or is your manager so critical that you'll never reach that high potential grade. (TM\_2)

As interviewees largely describe line and upper managers as Dutch males, the topic of visibility appears to be particularly pronounced for employees based on their felt or perceived difference from this group. “I'm in meetings with other managers and other higher-level people. I do hear, I don't hear very good things, let's say, when it comes to speaking about yeah women and men” (EF\_7). This hints towards the visibility paradox, being visible as women and simultaneously invisible or undervalued in terms of professional capabilities, thought to be particularly pronounced in gendered professions such as engineering (Faulkner, 2009). When discussing further a more complex picture emerges.

Tony: OK, OK, and where yeah where do you think that comes from or or?

*EMPLYF\_7: Yeah, I I think like yeah it's easier to connect to somebody who looks like you and eh speaks the same language, than to somebody who is completely different, different gender, different nationality, different language.*

What is described and appears initially as gendered difference broadens to a consideration of intersecting difference brought up by other interviewees.

it's an expat problem, eh you know it's an inclusion problem it's not even a woman problem em (pause) maybe women feel it more because they are easier, just less assertive but, and they don't like (pause) less confident maybe by default. (EMPLYF\_1)

So one of the things you'll see loads of people I want to say on the neurodiversity spectrum is is oh you're you're flying under the radar, you're not visible enough, you should work on your visibility (...) things that at least autistic people prefer not to do. (EF\_2)

Multiple identities are described as holding a potential barrier for visibility for employees such as age, ethnicity, and neurodiversity. The intersection of these identities with gender appears to



amplify the challenge for women, who already stand out due to their relatively low numerical representation. The implication is that in order to be visible in a beneficial manner, having your work and potential recognised within the current TM development structures linked to your line manager, employees need to be more assertive, louder, and more dominant in team processes. Not adapting to these prevalent stereotypically masculine norms holds the potential to result in less recognition and opportunities for development as they appear to, in some sense, signal technical or professional competency. Adopting them, on the other hand, may represent a values mismatch or the feeling of inauthenticity in the understanding of the self (Faulkner inauthenticity ref). While aspects of these identity tensions were found in interviews across employees, this appears to necessitate significantly greater work on the part of women, as they ‘do gender’ in the workplace (ref, I think van something). Some of the strategies described within these processes are displayed in table X.

**Table 5**

Strategies adopted in navigating intersection identities

Strategy Adopted	Intersecting Identities	Example quotes
Conforming	Gender, age, ethnicity	“For me I learned Dutch so I speak Dutch 90% of the time, that’s fine. I decided I’m young and a woman, I can’t be non-Dutch as well. I can’t...that’s the only one I could change (laughs).” (EMPLYF_1)
	Gender, age, autism	“...you kind of act like your environment wants you to act and like my main thing is survival I will push through ... and then at a certain stage I realized if I was my manager, I would be worried about me. I was not coming – I was not liking coming to work, I was very often ill, I completely lost my motivation for multiple months.” (EMPLYF_1)
Concealing	Gender, age, ethnicity	“... they were talking about the Tour de France, they were talking about race cars, cycling, football, their kids ... like OK this does not interest me a bit and then I would try to like watch sports so I could have a connection with them but that didn't work ... Em so maybe it was just like my bad luck but I felt really socially inept in that group.” (EMPLYF_2)
	Gender, age, autism	“To be very honest with you, I avoid saying my age to people. And I know other woman within [company name] that also do the same ...” (EMPLYF_5)
	Gender, age, autism	“... in my mind I'm just going through this whole flow chart and subscript of things I can or can't say whereas what

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		you usually hear is that autistic men are more direct and they're like yeah but this is the fact, I'm not sugar-coating it this is just how it is. Whereas women go for the more social aspect." (EMPLYF_2)
Confronting	Gender, age, ethnicity	"I started talking about it and I kind of knew eh everyone feels the same as nobody dares say that it's a problem and dare say that's its not supposed to be this so I actually went to managers and directors and I said to them listen if I was in your position I'd like to know this..." (EMPLYF_1)
	Gender, age, ethnicity	"I have this new manager, I also talked with his own manager because I told him OK I had a very experienced (manager), now I don't. I told him that because I told him then also if I see it as a barrier for my career then I probably wouldn't stay or would do something different and then he was very supportive to me." (EMPLYF_5)

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These three particular employees begin to build an image of the adaptive identity process they go through in their teams, which appears initially to be a phase of conformity, attempting to adjust their identities in line with the prevailing (masculine) norms of their teams and thus increase their visibility in the 'right' way. When this doesn't work, alternative strategies are engaged, attempting to conceal non-salient identities or actively confronting the threat. Confrontation appears to be particularly risky in some teams.

good people start saying if I can't handle it then I'm weak, subconsciously. I think consciously they'll never say that but subconsciously I'm weak if I'm the one who says that's not possible or I'm not managing it. (EF\_1)

For this employee, shining a light on what is described as a toxic team culture of constant escalations and aggression appeared to simultaneously shine a light on her identity as a woman. In voicing her experience to her manager, a regulation process ensued where she carefully manoeuvres around being portrayed as a victim or as being the issue herself.

I remained constructive, right? I did not go into the victim role (...) if I acted very differently it probably wouldn't have helped, that would have been worse for me. So I did it in a way that it's not like you're the problem. (EF\_1)

This highlights the precarious nature of utilizing voice in some parts of the organization, particularly for women. In dealing with this, employees highlight the size of the company as a means for separating their relational identity in a particular team or department from their identity as a member of the larger organization. This facilitates what I term ‘internal-opt out’ whereby five of the seven women interviewed emphasized that in situations where they could not adjust in order to feel part of their team or wider department, or they did not feel their value was recognized, opted to or are thinking of moving to another department rather than leaving the company altogether.

I wouldn't easily leave the leave the company (...) I think it's also just the mentality in this specific department. I think [company name] is really big so you can't base everything on one manger or one line of managers even. (EF\_1)

**Table 6**

Internal Opt-Out as Strategy for Navigating Intersecting Difference

Intersecting Identities	Example quotes
Gender, age	“...there was really a lot of stress and I'm more of structural improvements, really taking time to improve things on forehand and not solving because something is on fire [...] I think that's the reason I changed faster in the first position than should be. (EF_6)
Gender, age, ethnicity	“...doing that consistently also just doesn't match with my values. So I just moved into a different position where there are less escalations...” (EF_1)  “... I'm still constantly trying to see if there's gonna be a possibility or then I will really have to go to [internal department] because the minute you move to [internal department] you see woman as a GL (group lead). You see a lot of women being GL's there, a lot of women in very different positions that also don't speak Dutch.” (EF_5)  “...it's not really sustainable because it's quite stressful to be in this environment and then I think yeah people will seek out let's say other less stressful, high recognition places to go to, yeah. They will not remain within this [department name] environment for long.” (EF_7)
Gender, age, autism	“I, yeah, I'm just gonna leave and just just yeah I was actually and that's what they said you were living in your bubble, my own bubble where I'm not talking to anyone and that's true because I didn't know how to act in front of them 'cause I felt like a loner. So then I I left for the different job.” (EF_2)

**Meritocracy and Identity Conscious Diversity**

The introduction of the Dutch Gender Bill, as highlighted previously, appears to have been a catalyst for the largely identity conscious D&I targets set by the company, the majority of which explicitly seek to address the underrepresentation of women, particularly within senior levels. Concern was raised about this explicit focus on women among practitioners.

I'm not pro OK add women to the program because they're women, I really think it's really important that that we nominate people or women because we really think they're they're the good ones so not because they're female. (TM\_2)

you always have to be careful because positive discrimination will backfire, so we really want to do this fair but we do think that in this area we have to help the females a little bit more. (DM\_2)

my concern about targets of course is I don't want there to be the bias of 'oh you only got the job because you're the diversity hire', right? (DC\_1)

This highlights the tension between enacting practices and interventions which specifically target women whilst simultaneously maintaining perceptions of fairness. The Diversity Officer acknowledges the importance of employee perceptions when discussing the need to offer greater internal clarity on the organizational approach to D&I.

what is our internal em internal clarity so employees understand that this is about creating an inclusive environment, it's not about taking anything from anyone and giving it to someone else, right? It's about hey let's make sure that we all have em equal access to opportunities within the organization. (DM\_1)

As accountability for the representation of women is emphasized it directly influences perceptions of 'fair' procedures which offer equal opportunities to all (Self et al., 2015). This is in line with the diversity-meritocracy paradox, which highlights that diversity and meritocracy co-exist in organizations and 'events' which highlight either side signal validation or threat to the respective groups (Konrad et al., 2021). The practitioners appear to place the largest emphasis on meritocracy in

terms of the company approach, where employee networks act as the central base for more identity conscious practices.

The identity conscious diversity approach is facilitated in a largely bottom-up manner, housed in employee networks explicitly organized around particular identities, although aimed towards being inclusive to all. It is here where the full-spectrum definition of diversity is seen to be captured. These networks have a strong association with the D&I COE team, with events associated with employee networks taking up a lot of their resources currently, although largely on the US side.

they are formed by the employees so it's really organic in that sense (...) these have specific missions and goals that benefit the employees and the organization so it's about you know employee engagement, volunteerism and giving back to the community, helping to recruit, you know things like that so there is a a business benefit to these organizations as well.

(DM\_1)

because it's Black History Month, because it's women's month, because it's pride, you know like it's so just trying to keep our head above water with all of these you know big things.

(DM\_1.1)

It becomes apparent that involvement in such networks can hold significantly rewarding and fulfilling experiences for employees, providing networking opportunities and eliciting feelings of meaning in their work through efforts to improve the lives of employees at the company. Those involved in these networks, however, aim towards influencing a higher-level, companywide approach to the topics that are involved in, which they acknowledge as largely missing currently.

I'm still expecting somehow that there would be some policy driven at company level, at top down, to actually improve different aspects. (EM\_1)

we need to improve more on the higher level I guess like higher management and stuff that they're involved as well because right now what you see is people who are interested in diversity are actually the people who are affected by diversity. (EF\_2)

The company appears cautious to engage with these identity conscious practices. The recent legislation, however, forces their hand in this regard, creating greater salience around the relationship between meritocracy and diversity.

One aspect highlighted within the discussion of the D&I targets is that achieving a greater number of women in senior positions will assist in attracting women from the market as well as create aspirational images for women already within the employee pool.

So I think if if we could already start there and having a few role models, female senior leaders in place and yeah I think that would already be a be a big help. (TM\_3)

I really try to find examples like oh she is in this position so you know I can also get there if I want, or. So for me it's actually really important to have examples on the right positions.

(EF\_3)

This also appears to premise the implicit assumption related to the numerical targets that having a greater balance of men and women in senior positions will facilitate less bias in decision making, and therefore, may bolster merit-based arguments of evaluations and performance. The topic of unconscious bias appears to be a discussion point for upper management with a suggested reluctance to broadly acknowledge this as a concern within the company.

*DC\_1: (...) that was definitely one of the proposals actually trying to make people more aware of their unconscious bias but I was surprised actually that eh there wasn't eh there wasn't consensus that that was a problem.*

Tony: OK and eh yeah and and establishing these things as a problem I I imagine comes from the highest level down I can imagine?

*DC\_1: (shakes head in agreement)*

This unspoken nod contrasts with other accounts which suggest there has been a change in the attitudes towards the topic of diversity. “this is even a topic where there's a lot of energy on the shop floor and not always recognized on the top of the organization, and that changed now” (DM\_2).

Employees indicate a hopeful outlook of broader change within the company, although this is accompanied with some significant reservations. As one practitioner describes, the implementation of these practices, politics and intended changes may be crucial in succeeding in the efforts to attract, develop and retain diverse talent with these outcomes holding implications for the long-term perspective of the company.

I'd like [company name] to be there for the long game and if we continue to have people who feel like that, whether they're women or they're ethnic ethnically diverse or religiously diverse or sexually orientated diverse, if we continue to have that kind of behaviour then I think we not succeed in the long game. (DC\_1)

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

### **Contribution to research**

This research represents one of the first to empirically investigate the relationship between TM and DM, and the first attempt to explore this within the high-tech industry. This contributes to calls for greater attention in aligning these two fields (Sheehan & Anderson, 2015; Daubner-Siva et al., 2017). Particularly in reference to TM, a contribution is made to calls for expanding the scope of talent management to include multi-stakeholder perspectives through adopting both the organizational and individual employee perspectives as well as situating this study in the specific context of the Netherlands (Collings, 2014; Thunnissen et al., 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016). The context-based approach also adds to diversity research where this was been highlighted as crucial for generating greater understanding (Joshi & Roh, 2009).

### **Aligning TM & DM**

The current linkage between the TM and DM structures at the company are in their infancy. Opposite to the academic space, TM has a much longer history at the company, while efforts in DM mark the beginning of a formalized approach both for the base in the Netherlands and broader in the global company. Despite this, the company has taken a number of steps in establishing DM structures, most notably in the creation of responsibility structures with a direct linkage to the executive committee. The planned changes in the approach and structure of TM offers increased potential alignment between TM and DM moving forward as the exclusive structures currently in place are adapted towards the inclusive talent definition which has been adopted. The necessity of maintaining elements of what can be seen as ‘exclusive’ elements highlight the tension inherent in TM between embracing all organizational members as talent and the reality of limited resources for which allocation decisions have to be made in terms of development opportunities. Aligning the back and forth between the poles of this tension with the approach to DM would offer greater opportunity to achieve the embedded TM and DM relationship that practitioners on both sides appear to advocate for.

The (lack of) resources currently allocated to the DM space proves to significantly limit the contribution and legitimacy of the team. Approaching diversity from a full-spectrum approach offers a clear alignment with an inclusive TM definition where the talent and difference of all current and perspective members of the organization are heralded as valued by the organization. Looking under the surface of the current DM structures, however, appears to point towards a lack of conceptual clarity around the meaning of diversity in the organization. This may be centered in the spatial distribution of the function, with the D&I COE located in the US where diversity has been driven both contextually and in the company by largely social justice arguments. Thus, adopting the conceptualization of diversity which aims towards embracing difference across the spectrum offers rather limited space for social justice interventions which tend to highlight specific differences linked to inequalities prevalent in wider society. This tension is further exasperated as legislation related to gender diversity has removed some of the power from decision makers by necessitating an explicit focus on gender, which is largely operationalized as a focus on women within the organization. contextual approaches with the function largely situated in the US while establishing the global



approach appears to use the Netherlands to frame the approach to be adopted. This combined with the short history of DM in the organization, being largely situated on the US side as well as the limited resources currently allocated towards these efforts offer partial explanation to the apparent lack of strong linkages and limited relations between talent and diversity structures currently.

### **Employee Experiences of TM & DM**

Looking first to the broader context, the work-life balance and access to flexible work arrangements Netherlands, such as taking a weekly mama or papa or mental health day off, appears to have informed the meaning given to career commitment in the organization. Other research highlights conflicts with family responsibilities related to necessity to work long hours and the like in order to signal commitment for work related matters (Jorgenson, 2002) which appears to hold particular impact on the careers of women. In this case, however, a more inclusive approach is revealed in which taking time for family responsibilities appears normalized across men and women.

In the linkage of TM and DM the organization has adopted a narrative in which is centered in the discussion of growth, as an imperative and as a driver of change in order to make the organization fit for the future. This appears to provide an approachable narrative for employees to frame their experiences, acknowledging on the one hand pride associated with the success of the company while also raising the challenges which accompany this growth. While there are many positive aspects of the culture experienced within the organization, there is a clear link across parts of the company which places an output orientation above broader considerations related to team functioning and well-being. A link can be made to the notion of masculinist rationality, whereby traits such as assertiveness and aggression appear to be conceived within the organization to represent neutral behaviours, normalizing their perpetuation (Bierema, 2009). This presents barriers for increasing the inclusivity of TM as evaluations of performance appear to reinforce this focus. While the perspective of line management goes beyond the bounds of this research, it appears that this output orientation goes beyond employees and line management where this can be seen as structurally embedded.

In explaining the broader nature of such norms, van de Poel et al. (2001) describes what is labelled as a “hidden curriculum” in engineering studies which is seen to place greater value on rational, technical disciplines over more heterogeneous ‘soft’ disciplines (p. 278). This contributes to the labelling of engineering as ‘gendered’ where “cultures incorporate and reproduce aspects of gendered socialisation” holding impact for gender identities (Gilbert, 2009, p. 33). In the workplace, this is said to inform understandings of what ‘real engineering’ is (Faulker, 2007), which aligns with a narrower business centered approach highlighted in this study as opposed to the greater consideration for the people side of the business which employees portray as largely absent currently. This was seen to be particularly impactful for women as they navigate their identities as part of teams and broader units, with a number of strategies adopted in attempts to cope with marginalizing interactions and experiences.

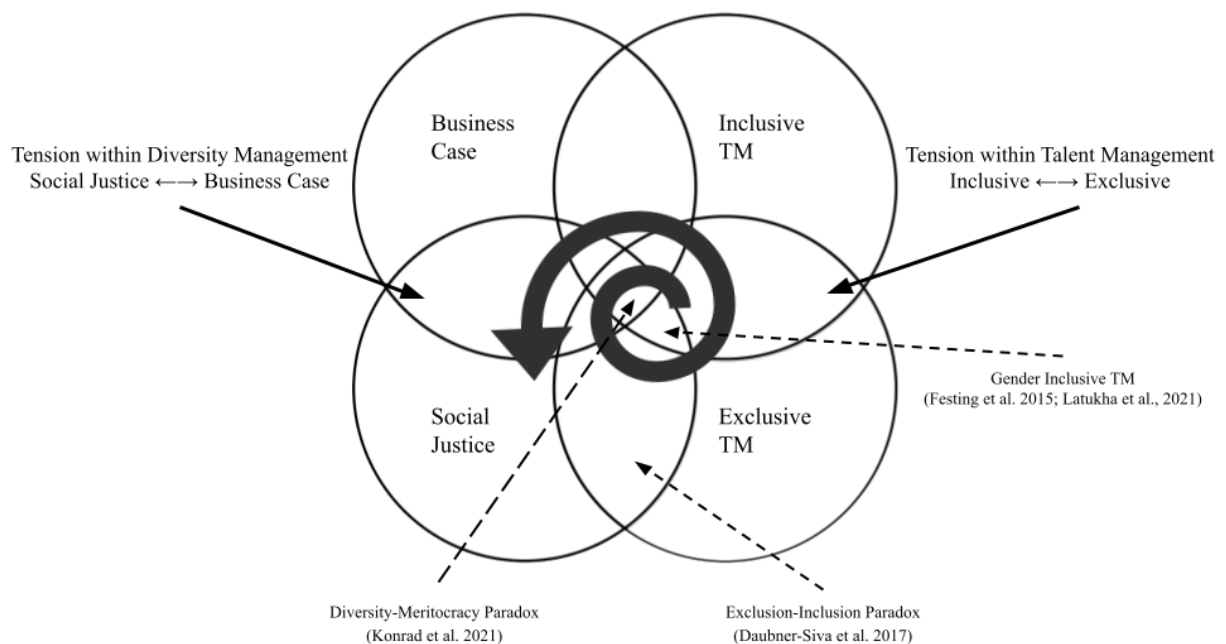
Acknowledging marginalizing interactions at the organization appears to be largely centered in particular ‘pockets’ of the organization which partially align with what Faulkner (2007) describes as ‘nuts and bolts,’ highlighting blue-collar, hands-on environments in which displays of masculine norms are more blatant. In other parts of the organization which are seen to hold greater energy surrounding diversity topics, marginalizing interactions appear to present in rather more nuanced and even benevolent ways, making voicing such experiences particularly difficult. It is this discourse and open critique, however, which is encouraged in order to engage in processes of sensemaking surrounding these tensions and their implications for TM and DM (Lewis, 2000). The underlying norms highlighted begin to piece together an explanatory image of how the homogeneity in the upper levels of the organization are maintained as they hold influence for a range of TM practices, particularly on visibility and access to development opportunities for minority groups.

Sheehan and Anderson (2015) highlight the potentially detrimental impacts of TM for organizational diversity, and this is highlighted further by Daubner-Siva et al. (2017) in formulating the exclusion-inclusion paradox. Both of these approaches shine light on the potential ‘shadow-side’ of talent management. Within this, they approach DM from an inclusive ‘valuing differences’ perspective which aligns with social justice arguments through conscious efforts to understand and

address structural inequalities of minority groups in the wider societal context (Liff, 1997). In reality, however, critical diversity management scholars have highlighted the increasing ‘dissolving differences’ approach adopted in both research and practice, which heralds business case arguments which individualize diversity definitions in aligning efforts primarily towards the generation of shareholder value. Such approaches have been criticised for the lack of attention they give to structural issues (Baker-Klein ref). Konrad and colleagues (2021) call attention to the need for balancing ‘identity-conscious’ and ‘identity-blind’ diversity practices in efforts to align DM with meritocratic arguments which are central for TM.

### Figure 1

Mapping the tensions within and between TM and DM as identified in research



### Practical Implications

Konrad et al. (2021) highlights that key to navigating tensions related to advantaged and marginalized groups is the balancing of threat perceptions, particularly as advantaged groups tend to represent decision makers in such matters. This study has created salience around the potential threat

which the gender conscious targets recently introduced in the organization may hold for advantaged groups. The suggestion is that by acknowledging the influence of unconscious bias and structural inequalities it calls into question the current holders of positions in the higher levels of the organization, with particular emphasis on the Dutch male group identified in such positions. This creates a tension with arguments of merit-based functioning. Increasing the transparency related to TM practices to create a more engaging experience for employees offers an approachable way to mitigate bias and create accountability for performance evaluations and access to development opportunity without triggering further threat by directly calling into question the decision-making of line managers (Konrad et al., 2012).

While the numerical targets offer clear action for the organization, the proclivity towards reducing such cultural problems to technical fixes holds a risk for these targets to be treated as an end goal with which to ‘solve’ the underrepresentation of women in higher levels of the organization. This may subversively cloud dialogue related to the broader perspective of why women continue to face discrimination in the workplace (Buzzanell, 1995). Employees involved in employee networks represent a group which have already adopted a proactive approach to deal with what are often personal experiences navigating particular identities within the organization. Engaging this group in processes related to TM and DM offers the opportunity to engage to a greater extent with the tensions within and between these domains. This can allow for an exploration of polarized aspects of these tensions, enabling sensemaking and further salience in dealing with TM *and* DM (Lewis, 2000).

### **Reflections, limitations and future research**

While this research offers a number of insights into the relationship between TM and DM, it also features a number of limitations. First, the lack of conceptual clarity in both talent and diversity makes attempting to connect the management of these topics particularly challenging. Further research is needed in adopting theoretical models in exploring this relationship, such as organizational justice theories which could provide a both/and perspective when looking into TM and DM which is advocated for in this research (Harris & Foster, 2010). Second, and connected to the first, this research

engages with a limited elements of TM and DM due to the broadness of these domains and to allow for the multi-stakeholder perspectives to be engaged with. Further exploration of the interactions between particular TM and DM practices as well as reactions of both dominant and minority groups would advance understanding of how both managers and individuals navigate tensions (Konrad et al., 2021; Festing et al., 2015). Third, while managerial interviewees were collectively labelled as ‘practitioners’ throughout this research, D&I topics were only a (small) element in the portfolio of two of the interviewees on the DM side who hold broader roles and responsibilities. Investigating the TM and DM relationship in an organization where both domains are more established may serve to offer greater understanding as to how the TM and DM functions relate and align with one another. Fourth, while this research was situated in the particular context of the Netherlands, the realities of MNC’s makes the institutionally influential environment situated across national boundaries. An exploration of how the TM and DM relationship plays out at the global perspective would advance research and practical implications for practitioners in this space (Özbilgin et al, 2013; Mellahi & Collings, 2010).

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Email to request interview – Talent/Diversity Practitioners

From: Interviewer

To: Interviewee

Subject: Talent & Diversity Management Thesis Topic

Hi [interviewee],

I am a new member of the [team name] and am currently writing my thesis on the topic of Diversity Management and Talent Management, exploring the relationship between the two at [company name]. This is part of my master's degree specializing in Strategic Human Resource Leadership at Radboud University.

With the approval of my manager [manager's name], I would like to request the opportunity to interview you related to the topic of talent management / diversity management for our operations here in the Netherlands. This is with the aim of getting a high-level overview of the policy / strategy making involved. I would like to contribute to our internal pool of knowledge about talent management / diversity management.

I am becoming more and more aware of the very busy agendas we all have, so if there is any moment in your schedule in the coming weeks I can arrive in person, coffee in hand or virtually is of course perfectly fine too.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

[Interviewer]

**Appendix 2: Email to request interview – Employee**

From: Interviewer

To: Interviewee

Subject: Master's Thesis Interview Request

Hi [interviewee],

I am a new member of the [team name] and am currently writing my thesis on the topic of Diversity Management and Talent Management, exploring the relationship between the two at [company name]. This is part of my master's degree specializing in Strategic Human Resource Leadership at Radboud University.

I saw you are a member of the [employee network] / my colleague [name] passed on your name to me.

I would like to request the opportunity to interview you as part of my research. In this interview, I would like to have an open discussion about your own career, with a particular focus on your time within [company name]. The interview will be anonymized and is one of a number I am conducting at [company name].

I understand you may have questions before moving forward, so please reach out to me if this is the case.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

[Interviewer]

### **Appendix 3: Semi-structured Interview Guide – Talent Management and Diversity Management Practitioners**

- As this is for my research project, I will need to transcribe this interview. Is it ok for me to record the conversation? It will be deleted once it has been transcribed and all of your information will be anonymous.
- Short introduction including information regarding my current role, how long I have been with the company, and the title of my Master's Degree.
- You have already received some information on the topic of my research. I would like to gain a high-level overview of talent management / diversity management at [company name] for our operations here in the Netherlands.

#### General Overview:

- Please introduce yourself and tell me about your current role.

#### Defining talent / diversity and how its management is organized.

- Tell me about talent / diversity at this branch of [company name]?
- How has talent management / diversity management evolved over time at [company name]?
- How do you collect information on talent / diversity?

#### Talent Management / Diversity management policy and practices

- How are strategies / policies related to talent management / diversity management created?
- Tell me about the practices used in diversity management at the company?

#### Relationships with other departments

- What other departments do you collaborate with in work related to talent management / diversity management?
- How does talent management / diversity management strategy / policy interact with other managerial policies?

#### Context of the Netherlands

- How does being located in the Netherlands relate to talent / diversity?

#### Challenges / Opportunities

- What are currently the biggest challenges / opportunities of talent management / diversity management at [company name]?

#### Closing

- Thank you for making time to speak with me

#### **Appendix 4: Semi-structured Interview Guide – Employees**

- As this is for my research project, I will need to transcribe this interview. Is it ok for me to record the conversation? It will be deleted once it has been transcribed and all of your information will be anonymous.
- Short introduction including information regarding my current role, how long I have been with the company, and the title of my Master's Degree.
- You have already received some information on the topic of my research. I would like to have an open discussion with you about your career, with a particular focus of that part of your career with [company name].

##### General Overview

- Please introduce yourself.
- Briefly tell me about your career path.
- Tell me about your decision of choosing a technical field of study.

##### Attraction

- How did you first become aware of [company name]?
- Describe the recruitment process.

##### Challenge / Support

- Describe the challenges you have encountered throughout your career. How do you experience this at [company name]?
- Describe the support you have encountered throughout your career. How do you experience this at [company name]?

### Company Culture

- Describe the culture of the company. How does this relate to your career development?
- Tell me about the social groups or networks you are part of at [company name]. How did you come into contact with them?

### Diversity

- Describe diversity at [company name].

### Talent

- Have you been involved in / heard of development programs / acceleration programs? Who is typically involved in such programs?
- Does the company see you as a top performer/high potential?

### Closing

- Thank you for making time to speak with me





