Increasing Gender Diversity in Organisations: What Works?

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Summary

Research questions: Which practices were effectively implemented by organisations in Germany to promote and manage gender diversity and which key performance indicators (KPIs) did they implement to support gender diversity management? What is the maturity level of this implementation? Which practices for the promotion and management of gender diversity contributed more to advancing the participation of women in the workforce and in management?

Methods: Empirical primary research and quantitative analysis were used to answer the research questions and test hypotheses. Data on the implementation of 22 diversity and inclusion (D&I) practices and 12 supporting KPIs to promote and manage gender diversity were collected through a survey with 139 D&I or human resources (HR) professionals and managers in large organisations in Germany that are publicly committed to D&I.

Results: Practices to promote and manage gender diversity and supporting KPIs are widely used in the surveyed organisations. The maturity of the implementation is on intermediate to advanced levels. Organisations that reported an increase in the female workforce have more diversity practices and more maturity in the use of targeted recruitment and bias reduction in promotion decisions, as well as in the use of KPIs to monitor new hires and attrition rates by gender. Organisations where the proportion of women in management increased use more diversity practices, more supporting KPIs, and have higher maturity in the implementation of both. Particularly, these organisations are more mature in the use of women's networks, measures to raise the visibility of role models, diversity/anti-bias trainings and practices to manage diversity, such as D&I staff, D&I committees, and reporting mechanisms to the CEO. A correlation analysis showed that higher increases in the proportion of women in the workforce are associated with higher maturity in using gender-diverse interview teams.

Structure of the article: Introduction; Literature Review; Research Questions & Methods; Empirical results; Conclusions; About the Author; Bibliography

Introduction

The value of workforce diversity for the performance of organisations has been demonstrated by several studies (Catalyst, 2018; Ely & Thomas, 1996, 2020; Hunt et al., 2015, 2018; Krentz et al., 2016; Lorenzo et al., 2017, 2018; Tsusaka et al., 2019).

Besides that, diversity and inclusion (D&I) is a matter of social responsibility. As the importance of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors in business rise, companies are going under growing public scrutiny regarding D&I. Gender diversity, in particular, is an important component of sustainability reporting and sustainability ratings that influence investment decisions (Cho et. al., 2021; Global Reporting Initiative, 2016; EcoVadis, 2020).

For these reasons, several companies and governments around the world have introduced practices to promote and manage D&I in the workplace, with a special focus on gender diversity. Nevertheless, despite the investments, progress in the diversification of the workforce, particularly at the leadership levels, has been slow (Williams, 2021; Sander et al., 2021; Brink, 2020; Ely & Thomas, 2020; Hunt et al., 2018; OECD, 2015, 2019).

Increasing the effectiveness of D&I efforts is relevant for advancing both the performance of organisations and societal aspirations. This article engages in the discussion about the effectiveness of diversity management in organisations and contributes to the knowledge about diversity management by investigating the implementation of practices for promoting and managing D&I in large organisations, with a focus on gender diversity. The purpose is to identify what kind of D&I practices have actually been implemented and to understand their effectiveness in advancing gender diversity in the workforce and in management.

Literature Review

Diversity and diversity management

In the context of organisations, diversity means the differences among the workforce in terms of social demography and social identity categories. These differences can be visible or invisible, and the most commonly analysed categories are age, ethnicity, belief or religion, disability, sexual orientation, and gender. They are inscribed in the anti-discrimination directive of the European Union and most companies use them in their efforts to promote D&I (Mensi-Klarbach & Risberg, 2019).

The existing differences among groups in society can manifest inside organisations as separation, disparity, or variety. Separation happens when individuals identify with similar others and exclude different others – in this case, differences in values and attitudes can originate conflict. Diversity as disparity happens when resources (e.g., pay or power), are distributed along group lines, creating inequalities/disadvantages tied to group differences. As variety, differences allow access to a larger pool of information, knowledge, and resources. Because diversity as separation or disparity has negative consequences and hinders the benefits of diversity as variety, companies adopt diversity management and strive not only for diversity but also for inclusion, *i.e.*, an environment where different people can belong, thrive, and fully contribute, not being constrained to conform to a single exclusive norm (Mensi-Klarbach & Risberg, 2019).

Diversity management is defined by Cox (1994) as "planning and implementing organisational systems and practices to manage people so that the potential advantages of diversity are maximized while its potential disadvantages are minimized", with the goal of "maximizing the ability of all employees to contribute to organisational goals and to achieve their full potential, unhindered by group identities such as gender, race, nationality, age, and departmental affiliation". Three organisational goals are achieved through diversity management: 1) ethical and socially responsible corporate behaviour; 2) compliance with legal obligations and; 3) performance (Cox, 1994, p. 11).

Eliminating discrimination and unfair treatment along group lines is at the core of diversity management and a condition for diversity to be able to contribute to performance. The ultimate purpose of diversity management is, thus, the transformation of the organisational culture, from one whose practices exclude women and other minority groups to one characterised by inclusion (Mensi-Klarbach & Risberg, 2019).

Bias and other barriers to gender equality in the workplace

Women face mutually reinforcing social, organisational, and personal barriers to professional insertion and development (Vokić *et al*., 2019).

Social barriers are, for example, traditional views of women's roles in society, stereotypes about female competencies, the double burden of professional and family/care work, or the lack of female role models.

Personal barriers are influenced by socialisation and refer to the choices that individuals make, for example personal judgments about career options or time for networking.

Organisational obstacles, in turn, refer to the workplace's formal and informal practices, rules, and cultures that disproportionally affect women's career prospects. Examples of organisational barriers are explicit or implicit reluctance to hire and promote women, insensitivity to family/care responsibilities, poor work-life balance practices, insufficient investment in training women (particularly for leadership roles), and lack of gender awareness in the existing training programmes and other corporate practices (Vokić *et al*., 2019).

Consequently, women's employment is characterised by horizontal and vertical segregation. Horizontal segregation, also called occupational segregation, is the disproportionate participation of one gender in specific occupations or sectors. In the case of women, besides their concentration in "care occupations", they are more likely to be employed in precarious or part-time jobs. Inside organisations, they are over-represented in support functions, such as human resources, communications, accounting, or clerical jobs, and under-represented in jobs related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Vertical segregation, or hierarchical segregation, refers to the disproportionate under-participation of women in managerial positions, which increases the higher the organisational level is (Vokić *et al*., 2019).

As an example, in the European Union, 27% of the female workforce, compared to 15% of the male workforce is employed in precarious jobs and, although the female share in employment is 48%, the female share in management is 36% – in Chief Executive Officer (CEO) positions, only 6.3 % (Eurofond, 2018; European Comission, 2018, 2019).

Vertical and horizontal segregation are reproduced by many instances of bias over the course of women's careers (Vokić *et al*., 2019). Williams & Dempsey (2014) describe the most frequent types of bias encountered by women in their professional life according to a four-fold typology: 1) "prove it again bias"; 2) "tightrope bias"; 3) "maternal wall bias"; 4) "tug-of-war bias" (Williams & Dempsey, 2014).

The "prove it again" bias refers to the fact that women must prove their competence repeatedly, much more than men, to be seen as equally competent. It is a descriptive bias based on the deep-rooted association between professional success and maleness, which leads most people (both men and women) to implicitly associate professional competence with men. Consequently, women tend to be evaluated as less competent. This bias plays out in organisations in two main ways: first, women receive fewer professional opportunities and, second, women are held to higher standards than men are. For example, objective rules governing the organisation are applied strictly to women but leniently to men and, in general, the same behaviour is interpreted as professional or unprofessional depending on the gender of the performer. As is usual in automatic thinking patterns, information that confirms the stereotype tends to be noticed, and information that contradicts the stereotype tends to be ignored. For example, men's successes are commonly attributed to skill, while women's successes are often overlooked or attributed to reasons other than skill. Mistakes tend to be perceived the other way around: women's mistakes are noticed and attributed to lack of skill, while men's mistakes are overlooked and attributed to reasons other than lack of skill (Williams & Dempsey, 2014; Bohnet, 2016).

In selection processes, this bias plays out, among others, through shifting the relative importance of evaluation criteria depending on the gender of the candidate – whichever criterion is fulfilled by the male candidate tends to be perceived as the most important (Williams, 2021). With identical application materials, male applicants are rated as more competent and hireable than women. Most discrimination takes place at the stage of deciding whom to call for an interview (women being less likely to be called), not when the interview takes place, *i.e*., before the actual performance of the candidates can be assessed (Vokić *et al*., 2019). On top of that, there are assumptions about the appropriate gender of the person to perform the job.

Jobs are often seen as requiring the same characteristics of the group that already dominates it, *i.e.*, employers tend to prefer women for female occupations and men for male occupations (Bohnet, 2016; Vokić *et al.*, 2019). This results in fewer opportunities for women since most well-paid jobs are in male-dominated occupations. (Sander *et al.*, 2021).

This bias manifests also in performance ratings/promotion systems. Raters tend to lowball women even when their qualifications and skills are identical to men's. For example, the judgment of men's performance is usually based on potential, while demonstrated achievements are required for the acknowledgment of women's performance. Besides that, men tend to be evaluated more favourably than women because managers expect men to be more reactive to (and women to be more accepting of) deviations in their performance ratings (Williams, 2021; Bohnet, 2016).

The "tightrope" bias refers to the double bind that women face in responding to the conflicting expectations around femininity and masculinity in the workplace. It is a prescriptive bias based on assumptions of what a woman should be. Stereotypically, it is expected that women be feminine and men masculine, and those who violate these expectations are perceived as less likeable. Once competence and success are associated with masculine traits, women cannot be feminine (likeable) and competent at the same time. They often have to choose between either being respected but not liked or being liked but not respected. Women acting in feminine ways may be accepted, but not perceived as top-performers or leaders. Women adopting masculine traits, in turn, may be considered competent, but will be deemed "hard to work with" or "lacking social skills". This bias manifests in organisations, for example in that assignments that do not translate into pay or career advancement are disproportionately distributed to feminine women. Masculine women cannot make it to the top either, for they are considered "not cooperative enough". In any case, in the workplace, there is always a risk for women to be perceived as "too feminine" or "too masculine" (Williams & Dempsey, 2014).

The "maternal wall bias" is a descriptive bias based on assumptions of negative professional commitment and competence associated with motherhood and, also, a prescriptive bias based on assumptions of how ideal mothers and workers should

be. The ideal worker is expected to be fully available and dedicated to work and the ideal mother is expected to be fully available and dedicated to her kids. Stereotypically, it is not possible to be an ideal worker and an ideal mother at the same time. This bias plays out in the workplace in various ways. Mothers are sidelined in hiring, promotion, or access to relevant assignments. If they prove to be strongly committed to work, they are penalised too (considered less likeable for not being good mothers). Women without kids are also affected. On the one hand it is assumed that they will become mothers and neglect work, which is taken for a reason why they do not receive the same opportunities as their male counterparts; on the other hand, they are considered less likeable for not having kids. The perspective of motherhood entails a wage penalty for mothers and not-mothers alike, while fatherhood usually entails a wage bonus for fathers (Williams & Dempsey, 2014).

The "tug-of-war" bias regards female rivalry in the workplace. Gender bias against women tends to fuel conflict among women. In workplaces with few women, they are faced with the choice between assimilating into the male norms and networks or being confined to the limited roles reserved for women. Women's different ways of assimilating into the masculine world generate conflicts around femininity (the right way of being a woman in the workplace) and divide them. Tokenism, *i.e.*, giving members of a minority group the role of a representative of the whole group, further complicates the relationship among women. They may distance themselves from other women or engage in competition to secure the few token positions reserved for women. Both men and women alike reject women that adopt masculine traits, but while conflict and competition among men are seen as healthy, among women it tends to be pathologised (*e.g.*, the depiction of ambitious competitive women as "queen bees"). Because of this, women's conflicts over gender play a much larger role than men's conflicts over gender in the development of their respective careers (Williams, 2021; Williams & Dempsey, 2014).

Altogether, these biases make office politics much more awkward for women than they are for men. Women constantly have to prove themselves, balance their behaviour to avoid being too feminine or too masculine, navigate tricky relationships both in their out-group (men) and in their in-group (other women), and motherhood – real or imagined – further

complicates it. Moreover, these gender biases may lead to a perception of "lack-of-fit", *i.e.,* a mismatch between the assumptions about the attributes of a given group (in the case, of women) and the assumptions about the requirements for success in a given role. Since the requirements for most jobs are gendered, perceptions of lack-of-fit severely affect women's professional prospects (Williams & Dempsey, 2014).

Practical consequences of these biases on women's experiences at the workplace are: 1) constraints to promotion, especially for decision-making or top-level positions, which women encounter regardless of their qualifications or achievements; 2) curtailed mobility, *i.e.*, women are assigned to non- or lower-managerial roles, and seldom further advance; 3) reduced likelihood of receiving on- and off-the-job training or job assignments that provide the exposure and experience required for advancement and promotion; 4) increased likelihood of being in leadership positions associated with greater risk of failure or criticism; 5) increased drop out of career paths, resulting in very few women emerging at the end of the talent pipeline, particularly in male-dominated fields such as STEM; 6) higher tension between working and non-working life, especially in management positions. (Sander *et al*., 2021; Vokić *et al*., 2019; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021; Bohnet, 2016).

Theories about the effectiveness of diversity practices

There are a few theories explaining the effectiveness of D&I practices. The theory of *institutional decoupling* describes the diffusion mechanisms through which organisations adopt structures and behaviours in response to their institutional environment. By complying with institutionalised environmental expectations, organisations seek to grant legitimacy to their operations (Süβ & Kleiner, 2008).

Societal pressures, regulatory demands, professionalisation of occupational groups, as well as cooperation and benchmarking are ways through which new practices – like diversity practices – are assimilated by organisations. Nevertheless, either because the environmental expectations are not in line with the practical demands of their activities, or because of conflicting environmental expectations, or even due to

resistance to changing long-established routines, organisations may incorporate these new practices only symbolically, decoupling their public commitment from their real operations. Through decoupling, organisations announce policies to promote a positive image and gain legitimacy in the eyes of their stakeholders without implementing any substantive changes (Süβ & Kleiner, 2008; Dobbin & Kalev, 2017, Schoen & Rost, 2021).

Decoupling, thus, manifests in organisations as "window-dressing" behaviour, i.e., the creation of "façades of legitimacy" to comply with environmental expectations while, internally, deviating from these expectations. Decoupling manifests also as adopting "rationality myths", i.e., beliefs that are prevalent in the environment about the benefits of the new practices, but which are not verified. For example, in a survey of German companies, 58% of the companies ascribed strategic and economic importance to diversity management, but only 24% had systematic control of its implementation – so any actual benefit was not verifiable (Süβ & Kleiner, 2008).

According to this theory, diversity practices have not been effective in creating change in gender equality because organisations resort to decoupling strategies, i.e., they pay "lip service" to diversity and diversity management, but do not integrate it into their organisational processes (Süβ & Kleiner, 2008).

A second theory focuses on the role of *networks*. Access to opportunity requires access to high-value networks. Differences in network contacts – and differences in resources resulting from these contacts – explain differences in finding jobs and advancing careers between white men and other underrepresented groups (Dobbin, Kalev & Erin, 2006; Dobbin & Kalev, 2017).

In workplaces where there are fewer women, particularly in leadership positions, women start from a situation of informational disadvantage, having fewer opportunities to acquire relevant career information (Bohnet, 2016).

Moreover, in the workplace, in-group favouritism does not work the same way for men and women, especially when men outnumber women by far. Instead of in-group support, women often encounter the tug-of-war bias described before. A man can advocate for another man under the assumption that he is doing this based on merit, but the advocacy of women (and other minorities) for people of the same group may be

perceived as unprofessional favouritism (Williams, 2021).

According to this concept, the perpetuation of gender inequalities in the workplace can be attributed to the perpetuation of network inequalities. Consequently, improving gender equality implies improving social contacts and networking opportunities for women.

A third approach attributes the perpetuation of the existing patterns of gender (and race) inequality in organisations to *managerial bias* and explains the success or failure of diversity practices according to how organisations deal with it.

The stereotypical thinking behind bias is a natural cognitive mechanism, and the unconscious/automatic associations that individuals make between gender and social roles influence managers' personnel decisions. Additionally, in-group favouritism is also pervasive and leads managers – currently, by and large, (white) men – to prefer hiring and promoting similar ones. Improving diversity, thus, implies curbing bias (Dobbin, Kalev & Erin, 2006; Bohnet, 2016).

Nevertheless, making managers aware of how bias affects their behaviour and correcting their actions is no simple task. Attempts at controlling individuals are deemed to fail, not only because stereotypical thinking is inevitable, but because control tactics clash with job autonomy and self-determination principles. In the face of intrusive controls, people resist and seek to re-assert autonomy through various subterfuges, like circumventing the new rules. Moreover, these approaches can activate bias rather than mitigate it (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016, 2017; Bohnet, 2016).

In the light of this theory, diversity practices that aim at changing the behaviour of individuals, either based on the premise that individuals will control their own bias if they have the right information (e.g. from some sorts of D&I training), or based on the idea of controlling the behaviour of managers through incentives/punishments/rules (like performance evaluations on D&I or grievance mechanisms), are not going to be effective. This is particularly true if these incentives/punishments/rules single out individuals as "culprits", interfere with their perceived personal sphere of decision-making, and convey negative messages like the threat of legal consequences (Dobbin, Kalev & Erin, 2006, Dobbin & Kalev, 2016, 2017).

Rather, this theory proposes that managerial bias is not a matter of motivation (and thus of incentives or beliefs at the level of the individual), but a matter of structure; and the remediation of inequalities in organisations requires responsibility to be placed at the organisational level. When it comes to bias, change only happens when organisational practices and processes are intentionally designed to minimise the biased behaviour – which is a collective, not a personal issue (Dobbin, Kalev & Erin, 2006; Bohnet, 2016; Williams, 2021).

Organisations should, then, structure the responsibility for reducing inequalities by creating specialised positions and appointing specialists within the organisation with the authority to achieve this specialised goal (Dobbin, Kalev & Erin, 2006, 2007; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016, 2017).

This is expected to be effective for two reasons. First, the presence of a specialist with assigned responsibility for devising goals, applying means, and monitoring progress reduces the likelihood that decoupling tactics occur. In organisations without assigned responsibility for D&I, managers will dedicate their attention to other competing demands and D&I will be neglected. Second, it creates social accountability and activates evaluation apprehension. When people know that they will be held accountable to others, they self-monitor their decisions to do the "right thing" and be perceived as fair in their social environment. A further development of this theory also affirms that, in general, practices that positively engage managers in the search for solutions and turn them into change agents will be effective. (Dobbin, Kalev & Erin, 2006; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016, 2017; Williams, 2021).

Summing up, according to this theory, the traditional management approach of setting goals, assigning responsibility, and engaging managers is more effective for increasing diversity in organisations than approaches directly aimed at changing the behaviour of individuals or controlling managers.

Another answer to the question of why progress in gender diversity in organisations has been elusive focuses on the *gendered working cultures*. According to this view, the cause for the perpetuation of imbalances between men and women in the workplace is the failure of organisations to question and change the dominant notions about the proper way to accomplish work, recognise and reward competence, and interpret behaviour (Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

The current working cultures, including formal and informal work policies and practices, patterns of social interaction, workplace narratives and symbolic expressions, have been originally created by men and for men and, thus, reflect and support men's experiences and life situations. Although appearing gender-neutral at the surface, these work practices have differential impacts on men and women. Examples of apparently neutral but gendered work practices are the definition of job descriptions that emphasise masculine traits and overlook other traits that could be equally relevant to the job requirements or the tenure clocks in academia, which coincide with women's biological clocks. Another example is the criterion of unrestricted availability to work – or the culture of overwork – as an unspoken measure to evaluate one's commitment to the organisation. Although this affects also men, women are disproportionately affected (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Ely & Padavic, 2020).

According to this theory, gender inequality is reproduced through organisational processes and practices that lead to differentiation along gender lines and the initiatives that have the potential to bring about gender equality are the ones based on assessing and reviewing the work culture to remove gender as an axis of difference and power, making the way the organisations function really gender-neutral (Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

Empirical findings about diversity practices

Diversity practices creating structures for accountability, authority, and expertise about D&I were found to be the most effective in increasing diversity at the management levels. Moreover, practices to promote diversity that target individual behaviour or network isolation, like diversity training, women's networks, and mentoring, were more effective in organisations with responsibility structures for managing diversity (Dobbin, Kalev & Erin, 2006; 2007).

Additionally, employee reactions to diversity practices are more favourable in the presence of such structures (Nishii et al., 2018).

The implementation of a set of practices – instead of single or isolated practices – increases the likelihood of positive change in the participation of women in the workforce and leadership positions (Schoen & Rost, 2021). Besides that, stand-alone diversity initiatives are perceived as less credible than diversity practices that are aligned with other diversity practices and HR processes (Nishii, 2018).

For example, a survey with German and Swiss companies found that the more diversity practices were used by an organisation, the higher was the proportion of women in management (Schoen & Rost, 2021). Data from American companies also found this relation. (Dobbin, Kalev & Erin, 2006).

Although D&I practices had been extensively implemented, the practices implemented the most were the least effective. For instance, data from American companies revealed that 76% of them had implemented D&I practices, but only 11% had implemented diversity staff, which was one of the most effective practices. Therefore, the lack of progress in D&I can be attributed also to lack of information for organisations about what works to increase diversity (Dobbin, Kalev & Erin, 2006; 2007).

Initiatives addressing the lack of equal opportunity and the structural and organisational barriers to women (like revising recruiting/promotion procedures and creating flex-work and work-life balance policies) have yielded better results in terms of increasing women's hiring, retention, and promotion compared to initiatives that focuses on individual women (like female leadership courses, negotiation courses, assertiveness training programmes, etc.). But the potential of work-life balance policies to further advance women's careers is limited, because these programmes are framed as accommodations for women and prevent organisations from addressing the traits of the organisational culture that causes gender inequality (Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

For example, data from a global professional service firm showed that both men and women experiment difficulties in balancing work/family demands, but only women use flex-work/work-life balance schemes, which were stigmatised as a choice for family over work. In this case, the careers of both the users of these programmes and of working mothers not using them were derailed. The real problem, identified as the overwork culture, was not addressed by the organisation, perpetuating the narrative that long hours are necessary and that women's stalled professional advancement and men's alienation from family are inevitable (Ely & Padavic, 2020; Padavic, Ely & Reid, 2020).

Among Swiss and German companies, flex-work schemes had no effect upon the advancement of women, but family-friendly arrangements, like provision of childcare, did have positive effects (Schoen & Rost, 2021).

Research Questions & Methods

This research aimed at answering the following questions: 1) which practices to promote and manage gender diversity were effectively implemented by organisations in Germany and what is the maturity level of the implementation?; 2) Which KPIs to support gender diversity management were effectively implemented by organisations in Germany and what is the maturity level of the implementation?; 3) Which practices to promote and manage gender diversity contributed more to advancing the participation of women in the workforce and in management?

The dependent variable is, thus, "advancement of gender equality at the workplace," measured in terms of the increase in the proportion of women in the workforce and management in the last five years (2016/2021). Management was defined as "managers with disciplinary responsibility in all management levels". The independent variables are the organisational practices to manage and promote diversity.

A survey instrument was developed to collect the data to answer the research questions and test the following hypotheses: 1) the number and the maturity of the practices to manage and promote gender diversity, as well as of the supporting KPIs are high, signalling effective organisational commitment; 2) the number and the maturity of the practices to manage and promote gender diversity are positively associated with increases in the proportion of women in the workforce and in management; 3) practices to promote diversity based on organisational responsibility contribute more to advancing the participation of women in the workforce and management than other practices.

The first section of the survey instrument collected data about the organisational profile, including the necessary information to measure the dependent variables. The subsequent sections collected data about the independent variables: 22 questions about practices to promote and manage gender diversity, 12 questions about KPIs that support gender diversity management, and four questions about cultural aspects that influence the effectiveness of the practices to manage and promote gender diversity.

These questions were aimed at measuring the adoption and the maturity of the diversity practices and KPIs in the organisations, as well as the respondent's perception of the organisational culture. In the first case, they were structured with a fully labelled 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "in planning stage" to "fully implemented" (the higher the scale, the greater the maturity). The residual answers "not implemented" and "unknown" were also possible. The option "not implemented" allowed for clearly distinguishing organisations that have or have not adopted a certain practice. In the questions about culture, the Likert scale was labelled from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Since the main concern is the effectiveness of the practices to foster and manage gender diversity, the research focused on large organisations that have publicly committed to D&I. This target group was reached out via the public online signatory database of the *Charta der Vielfalt,* a non-profit organisation that aims to promote the recognition, appreciation, and integration of diversity into Germany's business culture (Charta der Vielfalt, 2022a). In this database, large organisations are defined as those with more than a thousand employees (Charta der Vielfalt, 2022b).

Email invitations to participate in the online survey were sent to 637 individuals in charge of, or involved with, diversity management in these organisations (mostly diversity managers, HR managers, or sustainability managers), resulting in 154 valid responses (response rate of 24%). The database was further treated to remove inconsistent answers/outliers, resulting in a total sample size (*N)* of 139 organisations. Since not all respondents have answered all questions, the sample size for different analyses (*n*) may vary.

Finally, to choose the appropriate statistic tools, the collected data was tested for normality and found not to be normally distributed. For this reason, nonparametric tests were used for the data analysis (Mann-Whitney test and Spearman correlation). Nonparametric statistics make fewer assumptions about the distribution of the data and are appropriate when the sampling distribution is not normal (Field, 2018). Additionally, nonparametric tests are recommended for

analysing data measured in Likert scales, such as the ones in this survey (Corder & Foreman, 2014).

Empirical Results

The sample description according to the general trend of change in the participation of women in the workforce and management and the percentages of change in the participation of women in the workforce and management (the dependent variables) is shown in table 1.

In this sample, approximately 95% of the respondents ($n = 133$) had information about the trend regarding the proportion of women in the workforce. Of these, 54.6% reported that the feminine workforce had increased between 2016 and 2021. As for women in management, around 96% of the respondents ($n = 134$)

had the information and, of these, 71.9% reported a trend of increase in the proportion of women in managerial positions in this period. Chi-squared tests of independence were performed to assess the relationship between the categories "increased" and "not increased" and the sector and size of organisations, but no statistically significant association between the variables was found.

Concerning the percentage of women in the organisation, only 41 respondents (29.5%) had information about women in the workforce and 51 (36.69%) about women in management in the year 2016. Regarding the year 2021, 63 respondents (45.32%) knew the percentage of women in the workforce, while the information about women in management was available to 77 (55.4%)

Table 1
Organisations' profile – general trend of change in the proportion of women (2016/2021)

General trend 2016/2021		*n*	*% n*
Proportion of women in the workforce	Decreased	2	1.44
	Remained the same	55	39.57
	Increased	76	54.68
	No information	6	4.32
Proportion of women in management	Decreased	10	7.19
	Remained the same	24	17.27
	Increased	100	71.94
	No information	5	3.60

N = 139

Descriptive statistics were run to answer the first and second research question, which asked about practices and KPIs to promote and manage gender diversity that had been effectively implemented by the organisations. The frequency and the mean values in the maturity scale are described for: 1) each practice and KPI; 2) the number of practices and KPIs per organisation and; 3) the overall maturity of practices and KPIs within organisations.

The results are seen in tables 2 and 3. Diversity practices span the whole HR management cycle. Due to departmentalisation in organisations, not all the respondents had information about all the items; in these cases, the respondents could choose the residual answer "unknown" and this is the reason for the variation in *n* in these tables.

Table 2
Implementation of practices to manage and promote gender diversity

Practice	Implementation (n)			Mean	SD.	Group
	No	Yes	Yes (%)			
Gender diversity policy	9	125	93.2	3.51	1.36	Organisational responsibility (structures for D&I)
Dedicated diversity staff	13	119	90.1	3.92	1.27	
Diversity committee	25	105	80.7	3.29	1.38	
Reporting to the CEO/Board of Directors	27	94	77.6	3.33	1.42	
Transparency of gender KPIs	21	104	83.2	3.36	1.25	
Gender-neutral job descriptions and advertisements	3	135	97.8	4.34	1.06	Organisational responsibility (D&I in processes)
Targeted recruitment programs	12	122	91.0	3.46	1.11	
Objective evaluation of CVs and interviews	14	104	88.1	3.77	1.24	
Percentage of women in the candidate pool or final short-list	35	91	72.2	3.29	1,33	
Gender-diverse interview teams or interview panels	28	91	76.4	3.41	1.20	
Gender-neutral performance evaluation process	20	97	82.9	3.31	1.38	
Bias reduction in promotion decisions	19	96	83.4	3.03	1.33	
Monitoring of promotion patterns	27	73	73.0	2.84	1.33	
Formal flexible work policies regardless of gender	0	138	100	4.21	.89	
Measures to support caregiving duties, regardless of gender	1	134	99.2	3.90	1.08	
Professional networks for women	13	118	90.0	3.81	1.19	Network deficit
Minimum nomination of women in professional development programs	25	96	79.3	3.49	1.31	
Measures to raise the visibility of role models	15	118	88.7	3.33	1.18	
Reoccurring diversity/anti-bias training	15	118	88.7	3.18	1.31	Individual responsibility
Integration of diversity/anti-bias training in various company trainings	15	116	88.5	2,99	1,38	
Grievance mechanisms	3	129	97.7	4,11	1,14	
D&I items in the performance evaluation/compensation of managers	50	67	57.2	2,87	1,44	
Number of practices per organisation	–	–	–	17,31	4.47	
Maturity within organisation	–	–	–	3,49	.79	

All the diversity practices investigated had been implemented, and all organisations had implemented at least some of them, ranging from a minimum of four practices to a maximum of 22. On average, the organisations in this sample had implemented 17 practices.

The higher implementation rate corresponds to "formal flexible work policies", which was implemented in all the organisations for whom this information was available ($n = 138$). The second most implemented practice was "measures to support caregiving duties", implemented by 99% of the respondents ($n = 135$), followed by "gender-neutral job descriptions and advertisements" and "grievance mechanisms", adopted by 97% ($n = 138$). The least implemented practices refer to "D&I items in the performance evaluation/compensation of managers", adopted by 57% ($n = 117$) of the organisations, "percentage of women in the candidate pool or final short-list", implemented by 72% ($n = 126$) and "monitoring of promotion patterns" present in 73% ($n = 100$). Of the 22 practices investigated, more than half (12) showed implementation rates above 80%.

The maturity of the implementation of the different practices ranged from $M = 2.84$ ("Monitoring of promotion patterns") to $M = 4.34$ ("Job descriptions/advertisements in gender-neutral language"). As for the overall maturity of diversity practices within organisations, the average score in this sample was $M = 3.4$ (*Std. Dev.* = .79). Scores above $M = 4.0$ were found in 32% of the organisations and approximately 27% have scores below $M = 2.99$.

Table 3

Implementation of KPIs to support gender diversity management

KPI	Implementation (*n*)			Mean	*SD.*
	No	Yes	Yes(%)		
Proportion of men/women in job applications	19	104	84.5	3.85	1.26
Proportion of men/women in interviews/final job selection rounds	27	91	77.1	3.67	1.33
Proportion of men/women in new hires	14	113	88.9	4.13	1.21
Proportion of men/women in new hires for management	11	115	91.2	4.12	1.27
Proportion of men/women by function/business area	15	116	88.5	4.33	1.11
Proportion of men/women by leadership level	5	128	96.2	4.38	1.04
Training in hours per capita/year by gender	45	56	55.4	3.59	1.28
Training expenditure per capita / year by gender	51	48	48.4	3.19	1.36
Promotion gap	34	66	66.0	3.42	1.66
Turnover/attrition rate by gender	32	75	70.0	3.43	1.53
Turnover/attrition rate by gender, by leadership level	36	68	65.3	3.41	1.50
Turnover/attrition rate post-parental leave	46	49	51.5	2.94	1.42
Number of KPIs per organisation	–	–	–	7,40	3,63
Maturity of KPIs within organisation	–	–	–	3.85	1.05

All KPIs had been implemented across the sample. Four organisations (2.9%) reported not having implemented any of them. On average, respondents implemented seven out of the 12 KPIs investigated. Five KPIs have implementation rates above 80%.

The higher implementation rate corresponds to the KPI "proportion of men/women by leadership level", which is used by 96.2% of the respondents (*n* = 133). The second most used KPI is "proportion of men/women in new hires for management", implemented by 91.2% of the respondents (*n* = 126). The least used KPIs are "training expenditure per capita/year by gender" (48.4%, *n*= 99), "turnover/attrition rate post-parental leave" (51.5%, *n* = 95) and "training in hours per capita/year by gender" (55.4%, *n* = 101).

The maturity of the implementation of the different KPIs ranged from $M = 4.38$ (proportion of men/women by leadership level) to $M = 2.94$ (turnover/attrition rate post-parental leave). Considering the maturity within organisations, the average score in this sample was $M = 3.85$ (*Std. Dev.* = 1.05). Approximately 18% of the respondents have scores below $M = 2.99$ and almost half of them (48%) have scores above $M = 4.0$

The perception of the respondents about the cultural factors that influence the effectiveness of implementation is shown in table 4.

Table 4

Presence of cultural aspects in support of gender diversity

Aspect	Mean	*SD.*
CEO leadership	3.76	.97
Flex-work culture	4.04	.80
Availability culture	3.05	.99
Authority and resources of diversity staff	3.03	1.10

$N = 139$

All the respondents answered all the questions about work culture. Only one aspect, "flex-work culture" (about cultural norms regarding career

prospects for employees that use flex-work schemes), scored above four (*M* = 4.04)

To answer the third research question, about which diversity practices contributed the most to increasing the participation of women in organisations, the data was analysed regarding the trends of change and the magnitude of change in the participation of women. Additionally, the contribution of diversity management practices to practices that directly promote diversity was assessed.

In the first approach, it was analysed if there were differences in the adoption of diversity practices and KPIs between organisations that had not increased the proportion of women in the workforce (*n* = 133) and in management (*n* = 134) and those that had. Table 5 shows the differences found and the results of the Mann-Whitney tests that indicate that they are statistically significant. Other differences were not statistically significant.

Summing up, organisations that reported a trend of increase in the proportion of women in the workforce have higher maturity in "targeted recruitment programmes" (*M* = 3.57 compared to *M* = 3.17) and "bias reduction in promotion processes" (*M* = 3.27 compared to *M* = 2.65), as well as more diversity practices implemented (*M* = 18.38 compared to *M* = 16.07). Their maturity is also higher regarding the use of the KPIs "proportion of men/women in new hires" (*M* = 4.39 compared to *M* = 3.72), "turnover/attrition rates by gender" (*M* = 3.76 compared to *M* = 2.66) and "turnover/attrition rates by gender by leadership level" (*M* = 3.70 compared to *M* = 2.72). Organisations that reported a trend of increase in the proportion of women in management have higher maturity with "professional networks for women" (*M* = 3.95 compared to *M* = 3.41), "measures to raise the visibility of role models" (*M* = 3.44 compared to *M* = 2.93), "diversity/anti-bias training" (*M* = 3.31 compared to *M* = 2.61), integration of these trainings in other company trainings (*M* = 3.10 compared to *M* = 2.48). These organisations also have stronger diversity management regarding "dedicated

diversity staff" (*M* = 4.08 compared to *M* = 3.43), a "diversity committee" (*M* = 3.50 compared to *M* = 2.53) and "reporting to the CEO/Board of Directors" (*M* = 3.54 compared to *M* = 2.60). The number of diversity practices implemented and the overall maturity of diversity practices was also higher (*M* = 17.90 compared to *M* = 15.94 and *M* = 3.59 compared to *M* = 3.16, respectively). These organisations have more KPIs implemented (*M* = 7.80 compared to *M* = 6.32) and higher overall maturity of KPIs (*M* = 3.98 compared to *M* = 3.44). Namely, they have higher maturity in the use of the KPIs "proportion of men/women in interviews/final job selection rounds" (*M* = 3.85 compared to *M* = 3.00), "promotion gap" (*M* = 3.61 compared to *M* = 2.45), "monitoring of turnover/attrition rates by gender" (*M* = 3.79 compared to *M* = 2.33), and "monitoring of turnover/attrition rates by gender by leadership level" (*M* = 3.75 compared to *M* = 2.37).

In the second approach, Spearman correlation coefficients were calculated considering the magnitude of change in the proportion of women in the workforce and management between 2016 and 2021 and all the practices to promote/manage gender diversity, as well as the number and maturity of practices within organisations.

As seen in next table 6, correlation coefficients between the magnitude of change in the proportion of women in the workforce and diversity practices indicate a positive strong correlation with the use of "gender diverse interview teams or interview panels" (r_s = .632, *p* = .000, *n* = 29). Correlation coefficients between the magnitude of change in the proportion of women in management and diversity practices indicate a positive moderate correlation with "bias reduction in promotion decisions" (r_s = .321, *p* = .049, *n* = 38) and "identification/monitoring of promotion patterns" (r_s = .388, *p* = .031, *n* = 31). Coefficients with other practices were not significant. There was also no correlation with the number or overall maturity of practices within organisations.

Table 5

Differences in the implementation of D&I Practices and KPIs according to the trend of change in the proportion of women in the organisation –Mann-Whitney statistic test results for selected cases

D&I Practice and KPIs	M		U	z	p
	Increased	Not increased			
	Women in the workforce				
Targeted recruitment programs	3.57	3.17	1265	-2.18	.029
Bias reduction in promotion decisions	3.27	2.65	780	-2.11	.034
Number of diversity practices	18.38	16.07	1436	-3.34	.001
KPI proportion of men/women in new hires	4.39	3.72	1111	-2.36	.018
KPI turnover/attrition rates by gender	3.76	2.66	335	-2.66	.008
KPI turnover/attrition rates by gender, by leadership level	3.70	2.72	285	-2.18	.029
	Women in Management				
Professional networks for women	3.95	3.41	929	-2.14	.032
Measures to raise the visibility of female role models	3.44	2.93	943	-2.01	.044
Reoccurring diversity/anti-bias training	3.31	2.61	808.5	-2.32	.020
Integration of diversity/anti-bias training	3.10	2.48	810	-1.98	.048
Diversity staff	4.08	3.43	950	-2.20	.027
Diversity committee	3.50	2.53	617	-2.84	.004
Reporting to the CEO/Board of Directors	3.54	2.60	444	-2.62	.009
Number of diversity practices	17.90	15.94	1252.5	-2.23	.025
Maturity of practices in organisation	3.59	3.16	1173	-2.63	.009
KPI proportion of men/women in interviews/final job selection rounds	3.85	3.00	422	-2.53	.011
KPI promotion gap	3.61	2.45	169	-2.18	.029
KPI turnover/attrition rates by gender	3.79	2.33	221.5	-3.5	.000
KPI turnover/attrition rates by gender, by leadership level	3.75	2.37	185	-3.25	.001
Number of KPIs	7.80	6.32	1277	-2.17	.030
Maturity of KPIs in organisation	3.98	3.44	1059.5	-2.34	.019

Table 6

Spearman correlations between the magnitudes of change in the proportion of women and diversity practices

Variables	r_s	p	n
% Change in workforce			
Gender-diverse interview teams or interview panels	.632**	.000	29
% Change in Management			
Bias reduction in promotion decisions	.321*	.049	38
Identification and monitoring of promotion patterns	.388*	.031	31

Significance level = $p <0.05*$ p<0.01**

Finally, to allow for a better understanding of the results, the presence of correlations between the cultural aspects and the practices to manage and promote diversity was also verified. Table 7 shows the correlations encountered.

Table 7
Relevant correlations of cultural aspects

Variables	r_s	p	n
CEO Leadership			
Maturity of practices in organisation	.497**	.000	70
Maturity of KPIs in organisation	.492**	.000	79
Reporting to the CEO/Board of Directors	.485**	.000	94
D&I items in the performance evaluation/compensation of managers	.450**	.000	67
Dedicated diversity staff	.441**	.000	119
Measures to raise the visibility of role models	.417**	.000	118
Flex work culture			
Measures to raise the visibility of role models	.408**	.000	118
Minimum nomination of women in professional development programs	.407**	.000	96
Formal flexible work policies regardless of gender	.401**	.000	138

Significance level = p <0.05* p<0.01**

Summary of Findings

On average, organisations had implemented 17 out of the 22 diversity practices listed, and seven out of the 12 KPIs investigated. The implementation rates of the different diversity practices ranged from 100% (formal flexible work policies) to 57% (D&I items in the performance evaluation/compensation of managers) and the implementation rates of the KPIs ranged from 96% (proportion of men/women by leadership level) to 48% (training expenditure per capita/year by gender).

Although the perception of the respondents about the sufficiency of the authority and resources available to carry out the implementation of diversity initiatives in the organisation is neutral ($M = 3.05$), intermediate to advanced levels of maturity were found in the implementation of both diversity practices and supporting KPIs within organisations ($M = 3.4$ and 3.85, respectively). Only 27% of the organisations had overall incipient implementation (means below $M = 2.99$) for diversity practices. Regarding KPIs, overall incipient implementation was found in only 18% of organisations.

Given the breadth and depth of the utilisation of diversity practices and KPIs to support diversity management, it is not possible to affirm that the low progress in advancing gender diversity is due to symbolic adoption and decoupling tactics. Rather, there is organisational commitment, confirming hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis two expects that, if diversity practices are effective, their number and maturity will be associated with an increase in the proportion of women in the workforce and management. Small but statistically significant differences regarding the number and the maturity of diversity practices were found between organisations that increased and organisations that did not increase their female participation. The average number of diversity practices was higher in organisations that increased the overall proportion of women in the workforce ($M = 18.38$ compared to $M = 16.07$) and in management ($M = 17.90$ compared to $M = 15.94$). The average maturity of diversity practices was higher in organisations that increased the proportion of women in management ($M = 3,59$ compared to $M = 3,16$), but not in organisations that increased the overall proportion of women in the workforce. A reason for that may be the fact that the proportion of women in management is more responsive to companies' actions than the overall proportion of women in the organisation, since, in this case, there may be supply-side restrictions that are not under the control of organisations (Azmat & Boring, 2020). This hypothesis is, thus, partially supported.

As discussed in the literature, the third hypothesis expects that practices to promote diversity based on organisational responsibility will contribute the most to advancing the participation of women in the workforce.

In organisations that reported increase in the proportion of women in the workforce, the use of targeted recruitment and bias reduction in promotion decisions is more mature. Organisations that reported an increase in the proportion of women in management are

more mature in the use of professional networks for women, measures to raise the visibility of role models and diversity/anti-bias training, together with more maturity in managing diversity (D&I staff, D&I committee and reporting mechanisms to the CEO about diversity). These practices are either based on organisational responsibility, or, in the case of the practices based on mitigation of network deficit, accompanied by structures of responsibility for D&I. No practice based on individual responsibility was identified.

The correlation analyses (Table 6) indicated that higher increases in the proportion of women in the workforce are associated with higher maturity in using gender-diverse interview teams or interview panels. Higher increases in the proportion of women in management, in turn, are associated with having higher maturity in reducing bias in promotion decisions and in monitoring promotion patterns. These three practices are based on organisational responsibility: they require expertise and place authority and accountability in the organisational structures. Moreover, they imply changing specific organisational processes, so that bias is mitigated at the level of the rules that govern them and not in the level of the individual decision-maker. This hypothesis is, thus, supported.

Conclusions

While there is an abundance of research documenting the barriers to women's careers, the research into the remedies or solutions for this is scarce, and even scarcer are the evaluations of the effectiveness of these solutions. The empirical evidence available does not show a consistent pattern of results (Hideg & Kristic, 2021; Schoen & Rost, 2021; Nishii et al., 2018).

This research contributed to the knowledge about diversity management by investigating the implementation of practices for promoting and managing gender diversity in large organisations in Germany. It identified which D&I practices and which KPIs to support D&I management have been actually implemented, what the maturity level of this implementation is and which of the implemented D&I practices have been more effective in advancing gender diversity.

It was demonstrated that practices to promote and manage gender diversity and supporting KPIs are widely used in the surveyed organisations and that the maturity of their implementation is on intermediate to advanced levels – which signals that D&I management in these organisations is more than mere "window-dressing".

Nevertheless, in this sample, a mismatch was found between practices that are most effective and practices that tend to be implemented by the organisations. The three practices found to correlate with higher increases in the proportion of women are among the least implemented and the least mature overall. Monitoring of promotion patterns is the third least implemented practice and the least mature of all practices ($M = 2,84$). The use of gender-diverse interview teams, although having average maturity ($M = 3,41$), was the fourth least implemented practice. Bias reduction in promotion processes was the fourth least mature practice ($M = 3.03$) and is also among the bottom 10 implemented. Practices that are considered ineffective, like grievance mechanisms, or those whose effectiveness is not yet fully understood, like women's networks or diversity trainings, though, are among the top ten with higher implementation rates and more advanced implementation.

Similar mismatches were also found in previous research (Dobbin, Kalev & Erin 2006; 2007) and suggest the relevance of strengthening the research into the effectiveness of diversity practices to help companies achieve better results in D&I management and more value for money in their diversity investments.

Another finding of this research is connected with the discussion about the effect of flexible work and family-friendly arrangements on women's professional advancement. In this sample, these practices were implemented in virtually all organisations, but they made no difference between organisations that increased and those that did not increase the participation of women either in their workforce or on their management levels. Moreover, even among the organisations that did increase the participation of women, no correlation was found between higher maturity in these practices and higher increases in the proportion of women in the workforce or in management.

Previous works have found a similar widespread usage of these arrangements, with a similar lack of effect of flex-work upon the advancement of women, but positive effects regarding family-friendly

schemes, like provision of childcare (Schoen & Rost, 2021). This research went a step further, investigating two cultural aspects associated with flexible work and family-friendly arrangements: 1) the relationship between the use of these arrangements and the perception about leadership perspectives and; 2) the association of professional values to expectations about workers' availability/face-time. A clear positive perception that flexible work and family-friendly arrangements do not block professional development was found ($M = 4.04$), but together with a more hesitant evaluation regarding how professionalism is associated with a culture of constant availability ($M = 3.05$).

These results do not authorise a conclusion that flexible work and family-friendly arrangements are not important to the advancement of women. Nevertheless, together with evidence from other studies (Schoen & Rost, 2021; Padavic, Ely & Reid, 2020; Peters & Blomme, 2019; Nishii *et al.*, 2018), they indicate that these arrangements may be necessary, but not sufficient to create gender equality in the workplace and that more attention should be paid to work cultures to understand the lack of progress in women's careers. Organisations may be over-relying on the work/family narrative and concentrating their efforts in creating accommodations for women, while overlooking aspects of the corporate culture that may be the real cause of women's stalled careers – and the meagre effectiveness of their diversity efforts. This topic deserves further academic research.

Practical Recommendations

This research revealed some other mismatches between diversity initiatives and diversity management, showing that organisations can benefit from an enhanced use of HR data analytics to generate knowledge about where in the employee journey inequality is being reproduced. For example, although practices to facilitate work/life balance are widely adopted, there is low implementation of the KPIs measuring turnover after parental leave. Likewise, there is a focus on using lagging KPIs (like the proportion of men/women by leadership level) while leading KPIs (like training measurements by gender) or related practices (like monitoring promotion patterns), are

neglected. With a data-driven enhanced understanding of its gender dynamics, organisations can be more effective in the design and implementation of diversity practices.

By the same token, it can be useful to adopt a gender perspective in the design and analysis of the employees' surveys to generate insight into the differentiated impacts of a company's practices and culture upon men and women – and, thus, be able to intervene to create more gender-neutral organisational practices.

Limitations of this study

This study was based on a small number of organisations ($N = 139$). This considerably limited the sample size for some statistical analyses, particularly those that required information about the magnitude of change in the proportion of women in the workforce and management. Therefore, the results cannot be considered representative of the German corporate landscape and the findings cannot be generalised.

Additionally, the small sample size limited the possibility of applying more advanced statistical methods, like multiple regression, which could have provided a more precise evaluation of the contribution of the different diversity practices to the observed changes in the composition of the workforce.

The fact that only HR or diversity and sustainability professionals were surveyed is also a limitation. Since they are usually responsible for implementing most practices for managing and promoting diversity, their evaluation may be different from the evaluation of the recipients of these practices, i.e., the other managers and employees in the organisation. Surveys or interviews also with the employees on the front line, where the implementation of the policies and initiatives is effectively felt, could bring in other perspectives and nuances about the maturity and the perceived effects of the implementation, and, above all, about the cultural aspects that influence it.

About the Author

Coming from an academic background in the social sciences, Luciana Vieira has extensive professional experience with corporate management, organisational development and management of cross-cutting teams and projects, particularly in the field of public policy and public management. She is passionate about organisational transformation and completed her MBA in International Business Management and Leadership at Kempten Business School, Kempten University of Applied Sciences, Germany.

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