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Gender and Career: A Mixed-Methods Study of Attraction and Retention of Women in a Global Technology Company

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Abstract

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Despite notable advancements, women remain underrepresented in technology, especially in leadership. This thesis examines how Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) influence the attraction and retention of women in a global technology company. Grounded in the historical trajectory of women's rights and the institutionalization of DE&I, the study positions its inquiry as part of a wider continuum of equality efforts.

The study is situated in a Fortune-listed multinational technology currently operating in 44 countries. While DE&I principles are embedded in strategic frameworks and operational processes the company reflects the wider industrial situation in gender imbalance. Key objectives of this research include identifying enablers and barriers to attraction and retention, comparing managerial and employee perspectives, and highlighting actionable opportunities for improvement.

The research uses a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with HR experts and quantitative surveys among employees and managers. This methodology enables an exploration of how organizational practices, culture, and support mechanisms influence the attraction and retention of women in technical roles.

Findings reveal structural and cultural constraints in talent pipelines, recruitment processes, development pathways, and work–life flexibility. Retention is linked to application of inclusion policies, career development, and the influence of unconscious bias. Integrating the qualitative and quantitative results, the thesis outlines several priorities: strengthening external employer branding and recruitment partnerships from D,E&I perspective, enhancing mentoring and leadership engagement and improving transparency around flexible work options. These interventions aim to consolidate internal strengths while addressing gaps that hinder gender balance.

The study concludes that advancing women's representation in technical roles requires sustained, and evidence-based efforts but the application may vary depending on the maturity of D,E&I activities between different parts of the organization

Keywords Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Technology, Gender
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1 Introduction

In the turmoil what is today, progress in areas perhaps once taken for granted is faced with new kind of uncertainty. I myself was born in 1990 to a Nordic welfare state and have been privileged to live a safe childhood where progress that was better for all felt inevitable. Naïve, but something that the Western world commonly believed in after the 20th Century. The century withheld multiple major events and inventions for humankind: World Wars, Cold War followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union, accelerating technological development which introduced the internet among other things – all matters affected or accelerated by globalization. Through these events and simultaneous development also women's rights progressed; many countries enforced women's rights to inherit, own, study, work and vote for example.

In the big picture it is evident that in the present moment women are better off than for example before the 20th century. But considering how the gains of the progress have been distributed reveals that the rights of some developed more than the rights of others. As a consequence, in the first decade of the 21st century Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (D,E&I) was formalized into a concept. The origins of D,E&I are in the development of earlier century and centuries: and it builds up on not only rights of some (e.g. women) but of humans and our diversity more broadly. Often, the origins of diversity, equity and inclusion are seen in the United States Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination in various areas and stems from the segregation of the black community (Jaiswal, 2024).

The year 2025 marks 30 years since the Beijing Conference, where UN member states committed to promoting a gender perspective in all their decision-making, reflecting the progress that was already done by many countries in enforcing equality and non-discrimination legislations. At the same time, in 2025, progress in matters related to equality seem more indistinct and uncertain than in many decades before. Particularly D,E&I has become increasingly politicized and criticized. As Trump's second administration came into power early 2025, it immediately targeted D,E&I initiatives as a "dangerous and wasteful topic" leading to abandoning D,E&I initiatives in the US not only in public sector but in education and private sector too (Schneid, 2025).

Politization and polarized discourse challenges the study of D,E&I agenda from an objective and unbiased starting point. For that reason it's important to make a distinction that this thesis takes a standpoint that development of D,E&I is a consequence of previous wins gained on equality, rather than a separate concept that could be distinguished from other progress in equality and anti-discrimination. Therefore diversity, equity and inclusion is not explored in this thesis as an ideology but as a continuous evolution built on prior gains, while simultaneously acknowledging that this view is not universal.

1.1 Women in Technology

Although in many areas women have gained same rights and opportunities as men there are industries and occupations that are gendered. Many technology companies have made progress in terms of addressing gender disparity within their business and wider industry context, but women still remain underrepresented in technology roles, particularly in leadership positions. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023 by World Economic Forum, women make up 29 percent of all workers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields. In addition, women make up only 14% of technology leaders, according to the 2023 Nash Squared Digital Leadership Report.

The underrepresentation of women in technology is not merely a statistical concern; it reflects our history and gender norms, as well as systemic issues not only within the industry but our societies as whole. In the recent years many organizations have enhanced their diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, but understanding the expectations of female employees and their views on what is important in pursuing and advancing technology careers is still not unambiguously clear. In addition, the ways to attract and retain aren’t any good, unless those who are in charge and can influence meet the expectations. Thus people managers perspective on attracting and retaining females is crucial. To provide insight on the disparity, this thesis will explore the views of HR experts and employees within a global technology company regarding attracting and retaining women.

This thesis employs a mixed-methods research methodology. Firstly, semi-structured interviews with specialists (HR experts) is conducted to gather qualitative insights in order to validate key concepts and themes, as well to refine following survey questions. After refining the survey questions based on the insights gained from the expert interviews, a survey is distributed to a larger audience to collect quantitative data. Survey data is collected from employees and people leaders within the commissioning company. After the data is analyzed, this survey aims to contribute to the development of practical tools and strategies for creating a more inclusive workplace benefiting the business as well as the employees.

Both the interviews and the survey are conducted in a large global technology conglomerate, with a European context.

1.2 Organizational context

This context of this research is within a company that is a global leader in the field of motion and control systems, headquartered in the U.S. The company specializes in the development and manufacturing of innovative technologies that enhance operational efficiency across various industrial and aerospace markets. The company is a Fortune-listed company with a strong commitment to engineering excellence. In the most recent fiscal year, it reported revenues of nearly 20 billion US dollars, underscoring its position as one of the largest and most successful companies in its industry.

The company operates in diversified markets, including mobile, industrial and aerospace sectors, providing a comprehensive range of products and solutions designed to meet the evolving needs of its customers. Its portfolio includes hydraulic components, filtration systems, and a variety of other advanced technologies that support applications ranging from large-scale machinery to everyday consumer products.

The company employs over 61,000 individuals across 44 countries. It serves a diverse customer base, offering more than 3,000 unique products to half a million clients worldwide. In its latest sustainability report from fiscal year 2024, the company reports that of it's global workforce 31% is women, and 20% of leaders is women. 70% of the company's Board of Directors is diverse, based on gender, race or ethnicity.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Our Workforce Diversity[3,4]

Segment	Demographic	FY24 Workforce
Global	Women	31% of Total Workforce
		20% of Leaders
U.S.	People of Color	32% of Total Workforce
		17% of Leaders

Figure 1. D,E&I statics from Company's 2024 Sustainability Report. Adapted from Company Website.

The company has a Win Strategy which is an integrated operating system that aligns people, customer value, and performance to drive sustainable growth through engaged teams, a premier customer experience, and continuous improvement. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are embedded as a business fundamental. Especially within the "Engaged People" focus by strengthening education and awareness, talent development, and team member engagement. These inclusion actions are viewed to create a culture of belonging where all team members can contribute at their best, which in turn improves collaboration, innovation, and service quality. In short, from D,E&I perspective it enables the Win Strategy by enhancing how the company attracts, develops, and retains talent.

Figure 2. Company WIN Strategy 3.0. Adapted from Company website.

The company has a Strategy Deployment Annual Process. In this process, Annual Improvement Priorities (AIP) are first developed and implemented. This is followed by operationalization after which the AIP becomes a Business Fundamental. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion became an AIP in fiscal year 2022. Fiscal year 2025 has been about operationalizing D,E&I and from fiscal year 2026 onwards D,E&I is treated as Business Fundamental. Following this, going forward the Company will have inclusion focus areas which are Education and Awareness, Talent Development and Team Member Engagement.

These focus areas include:

- Education & Awareness: creating opportunities to strengthen a culture of inclusion and belonging
- Talent Development: supporting all team members in achieving their potential
- Team Member Engagement: engaging team members to drive a culture of inclusion and belonging

Progress measures align to each area: deploy Inclusion Framework actions, talent retention, and increased engagement. These efforts are supported by Processes & Tools, and are anchored by the belonging statement, “I Belong, I Matter, I Make a Difference.” In the company’s overall strategy framework first pillar has been “Engaged People” since 2015. This reflects the acknowledgement the importance of employees as a driver of with the belonging statement (“I Belong, I Matter, I Make a Difference.”).

The commissioning company exhibits several attributes common to technology and engineering firms—R&D-led functions, technical workforces, manufacturing operations and exposure to global competition—which support limited comparability with similarly structured, large engineering organizations. Nevertheless, the technology sector is very broad, and for example a software firms internal and external environment can differ significantly from the context of this study, even though both represent technology. Thus there is a clear constrain the extent to which the observations made in this study can be taken as sector-typical and consequently, insights derived are most appropriately interpreted as illustrating mechanisms and processes that may operate in comparable organizational context rather than as broadly generalizable sector-level findings.

A single-company design of the study therefore entails clear limitations: external validity is restricted, context-specific drivers may bias inference, sample composition reflects one employer’s workforce, and institutional or regulatory features unique to the commissioning company’s sites may condition outcomes. Insider access can both enrich contextual understanding and introduce observer effects and interpretive bias, which will be further discussed in the methodology chapter of this thesis alongside with possible ways to mitigate these.

1.3 Research objectives and research question

While the company has made strategic commitments to reinforce gender balance, through for example beforementioned inclusion focus areas such as education and awareness, talent development and team member engagement, there is still a clear gap for example in representation, which is the rationale to study this topic in the given context.

The primary objective of this thesis is to examine how employee and manager perceptions of organizational practices, culture and support mechanisms influence the organization’s ability to attract and retain women in technology.

Specific objectives are to:

- To map employee and manager perceptions of factors that influence attraction and retention of women within the given context.
- To identify organizational practices, cultural features and structural constraints that support or hinder gender balance.
- To compare and contrast employee experiences with leadership views to detect areas of alignment and misalignment.
- To surface priority gaps and opportunities for practical interventions to improve attraction, development and retention of women in the given context.

The central research question guiding this study is how do organizational practices, cultural features, and structural conditions within the commissioning company shape the attraction, development, and retention of women, and where do employees’ lived experiences align or diverge from the perceptions and practices of people experts and leaders? To address this, the study compares viewpoints from aspects that arise from the initial theoretical research.

Attention is paid not only to whether perceptions match, but to explanatory factors that may be the underlying contributing factors. Examples of these could include differences in priorities between operational targets and people priorities, variations in managerial behaviors and routines or structural constraints in recruitment or work-time models. By identifying both points of alignment and the organizational conditions that may drive misalignment, the research aims to surface actionable practical, tailored actions to better attract and retain women.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has established the topical and organizational context for examining the attraction and retention of women in a global technology company and has presented the background for the study from the perspective of women in technology and the specific organizational setting, together with the research objectives and questions. This thesis will move on to build from theory to method and then to analysis and conclusions.

This thesis will move on to literature review which first examines corporate responsibility, the Triple Bottom Line, stakeholder theory and corporate citizenship, and then addresses D,E&I scholarship with focused sections on work–life balance, the international organizational context, intersectionality, leadership and culture, and maturity frameworks for diversity, equity and inclusion. The methodology chapter describes the mixed-methods design, presenting the qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews more in detail, as well as he quantitative survey methods with consideration of the limitation and ethical discussion regarding chosen methodology framework. The analysis chapter outlines the analytic approach for the interviews and survey. Both data sets are first analyzed separately, with subsequent integration comparing interview and survey findings. Finally, the thesis concludes with a discussion that includes main findings, identifies theoretical and practical contributions and offers recommendations. The conclusion also reflects on study limitations and proposes directions for future research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores key concepts and frameworks relevant to understanding the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion (D,E&I) within contemporary business environment. Sustainability is the overarching framework guiding this study, and the impacts on sustainability corporations may have are reviewed from multiple concepts: Corporate Social Responsibility, Corporate Citizenship, Stakeholder Theory, and the Triple Bottom Line. This literature review then moves on to discuss women's underrepresentation and D,E&I framework. Further, this chapter considers the challenges and opportunities of implementing diversity, equity and inclusion in international organizations and intersectionality as a concept providing ways to further review diversity, equity and inclusion. Finally, this chapter reviews leadership and organizational culture in advancing D,E&I initiatives and outlines criteria for assessing leadership maturity in the given subject.

2.2 Acknowledging the impacts of businesses in the contemporary business environment: Corporate Social Responsibility, Triple Bottom Line, Stakeholder Theory and Corporate Citizenship

The contemporary business environment for technology industry companies is dynamic and multifaceted, characterized by rapid innovation, increased competition and globalization. In this rapidly changing business environment, companies are under increasing pressure not only to achieve their financial goals, but also to assess the impact of their operations on the environment and society (Cote, 2021). In the last years and months, the sustainability focus of certain companies have shifted due to global political turmoil. However, assessing the wider impact that companies have has been a topic of interest and research for many decades. This chapter reviews four main ways of assessing the impact: Corporate Social Responsibility, Corporate Citizenship, Stakeholder Theory and Triple Bottom Line. These frameworks provide analytical lenses for understanding why organizations should engage with workforce composition and inclusion, including the underrepresentation of women in technical roles, and help identify the organizational drivers and constraints examined in this study.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Corporate Citizenship, Stakeholder Theory and Triple Bottom Line (TBL) are interconnected concepts in the business realm, yet they each emphasize different aspects of a company's impact on society and the environment. Sustainability, while often overlapping with these concepts, was defined in 1987 “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” by the United Nations Brundtland Commission (United Nations, n.d.). Together, these terms reflect the recognition of the importance of responsible business practices in fostering a sustainable future.

2.2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

When businesses seek internal changes to respond to external demands that necessarily don’t directly increase profits, it recognizes that companies are not solely for profit-making; they are also accountable more widely on their impacts and results. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is refers to companies “actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law" (Mcwilliams & Siegel, 2001). Organizations that prioritize CSR often recognize the importance of fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace as part of their ethical commitment to social good. According to Gokulan (2021), movements like #MeToo and Black Lives Matter have compelled organizations to commit to internal changes in response to societal demands. For this study, CSR and related sustainability frames signal why organizational attention to gender balance is not only ethically justified but may also be strategically relevant for long-term organizational performance and legitimacy.

Organizations respond to the demands of society in varying level. These expectations are illustrated in Carroll's (1991, p.42) CSR pyramid (see Figure 3). The pyramid outlines four types of responsibilities that companies should fulfill to be socially responsible. At the base are economic responsibilities, which emphasize that a business must be profitable to survive and provide value to its shareholders. Above this are legal responsibilities, requiring companies to comply with laws and regulations established by governments. The third level consists of ethical responsibilities, which go beyond legal requirements and involve doing what is right, just, and fair even when not mandated by law. At the top of the pyramid are philanthropic responsibilities, where businesses voluntarily contribute to the community and improve quality of life through charitable activities and support for social causes. Carroll's model highlights that true corporate responsibility encompasses all these layers, suggesting that companies should balance economic success with legal compliance, ethical conduct, and social contributions for sustainable business practice.

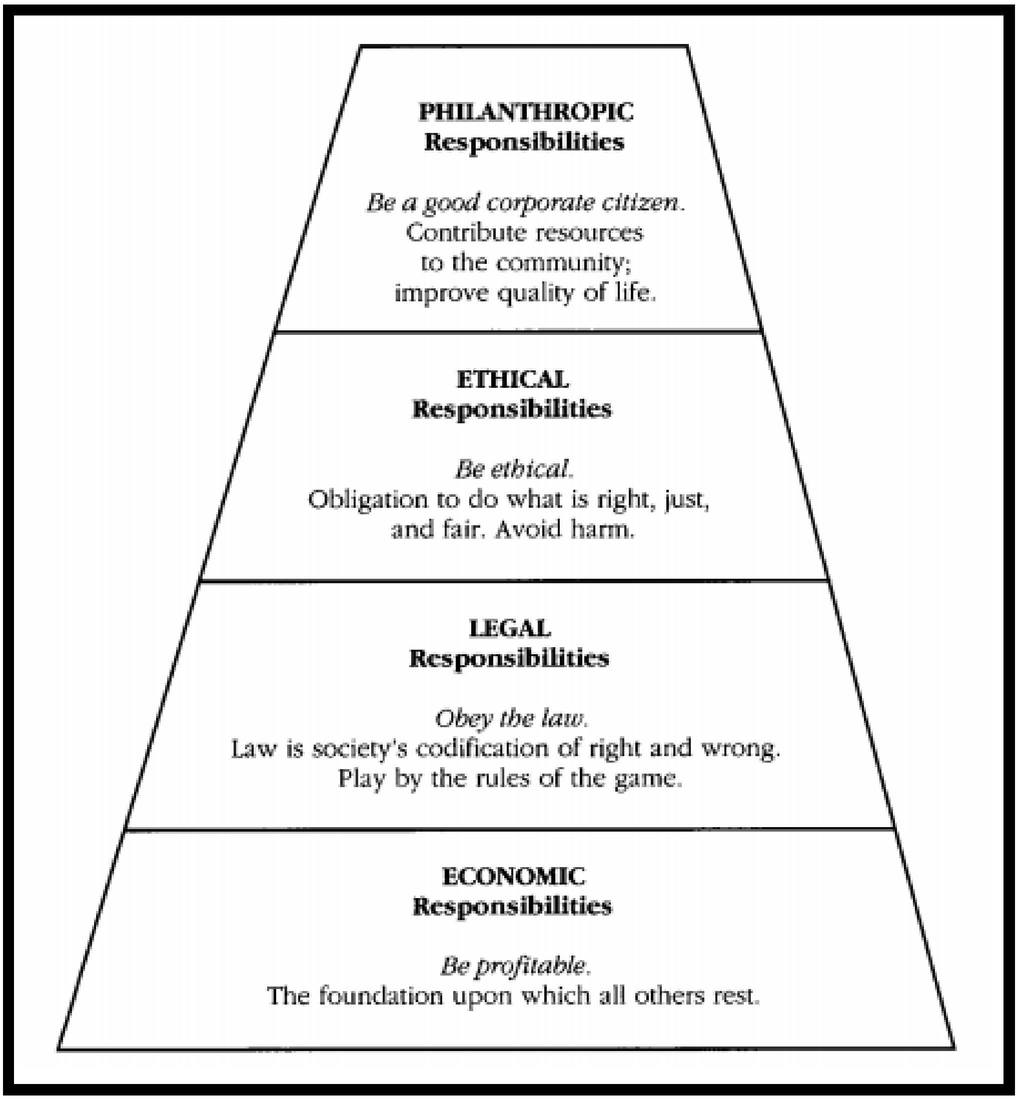

Figure 3. The Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility. Adapted from Carroll, 1991, P. 42.

2.2.2 Triple Bottom Line

Triple Bottom Line (TBL) builds on the concept of CSR. The framework assesses a company's performance based on three pillars: people (social responsibility), planet (environmental impact), and profit (economic viability), providing “a total costing approach that includes social and environmental revenues and costs in addition to the usual accounting revenues and costs” (Katona, 2024, p. 627). Elkington (1997) argues, that by integrating the three dimensions, firms can create long-term value, foster positive community relationships, and contribute to sustainable development. In relation to gender balance, the ‘people’ pillar of TBL implicates workforce composition and inclusion outcomes as material components of corporate performance that can and should have systematic measurement and managerial attention.

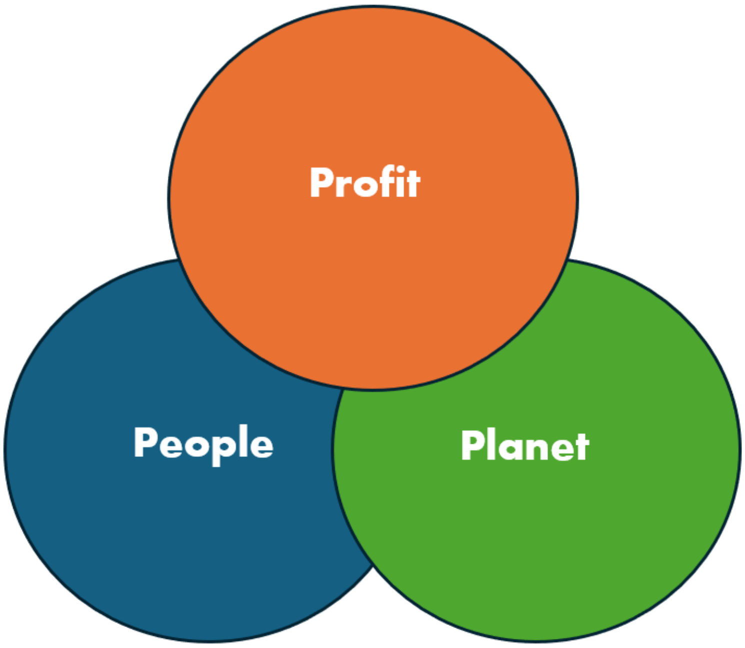

Figure 4. Illustration of the Triple Bottom Line, made by the thesis author.

The primary liability of a business is to make profit. Profit, or economic viability, is the only way to ensure the continuity of a company's operations – and this is done by improving its profitability and long-term viability. The concept includes not only profitability but also competitiveness, efficiency and meeting the return expectations of the owners. In practice, everything the company spends money, assets, and other resources on falls within the scope of economic responsibility (Liappis et al, 2019). Like Carroll's pyramid of CSR, TBL encompasses legal responsibilities, as legal compliance is the basis of economic viability; profitability and profit-making are guidelines for a company that are derived from the law. In addition, the law requires that the means by which a company strives to make a profit and create the conditions for long-term success must be lawful (Liappis et al, 2019). In the case of the commissioning company, all employees must undertake an annual training regarding Code of Conduct to prevent any unlawful actions or violations that might jeopardize the economic viability.

People -pillar reflects the company's impact on people and society. Social responsibility ranges from providing fair working conditions to supporting communities and charitable actions. It has viewed to include factors such as employee relations, human rights, ethics, community engagement, and environmental concerns. Proponents of social responsibility may emphasize enlightened self-interest, where socially responsible actions enhance reputation, employee loyalty, and long-term sustainability (Moir, 2001). This perspective links directly to employee attraction and retention: inclusive practices can enhance employer attractiveness and effect retention outcomes, which the empirical work measures.

Planet-pillar, referring to environmental responsibility, involves actions that reduce the negative effects of human activities on the environment. Businesses committed to environmental responsibility often focus on preserving natural resources and improving environmental quality (Harmaala & Jallinoja, 2012). This can include investing in cleaner production methods that lower emissions and energy use, as well as creating eco-friendly products that help consumers reduce their environmental impact. Waste management and recycling are also important factors, with companies striving to minimize waste and encourage material reuse to cut costs and environmental harm. Additionally, protecting biodiversity through activities like forest planting and habitat restoration may be included as part of these efforts (Harmaala & Jallinoja, 2012).

2.2.3 Stakeholder Theory

Perspectives on the view of the firm vary. The neo-classical view, exemplified by Milton Friedman, limits business responsibility to profit-making and legal compliance – essentially the Profit-pillar of TBL. In contrast, behavioral theorists have argued that businesses have moral obligations to address social problems. The degree of responsibility that businesses have to society can also be assesses through stakeholder theory. The theory was initially introduced by Freeman in 1984, who defines stakeholder as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 2010, p.46). The stakeholder theory emphasizes that a company’s social responsibility extends beyond shareholders to include employees, customers, the wider community and even less visible stakeholders like future generations and the environment. Stakeholder theory therefore provides a rationale for treating employee subgroups (such as women in technical roles) as legitimate claimants on corporate attention and resources, supporting both the ethical and business reasons for investing in diversity, equity and inclusion.

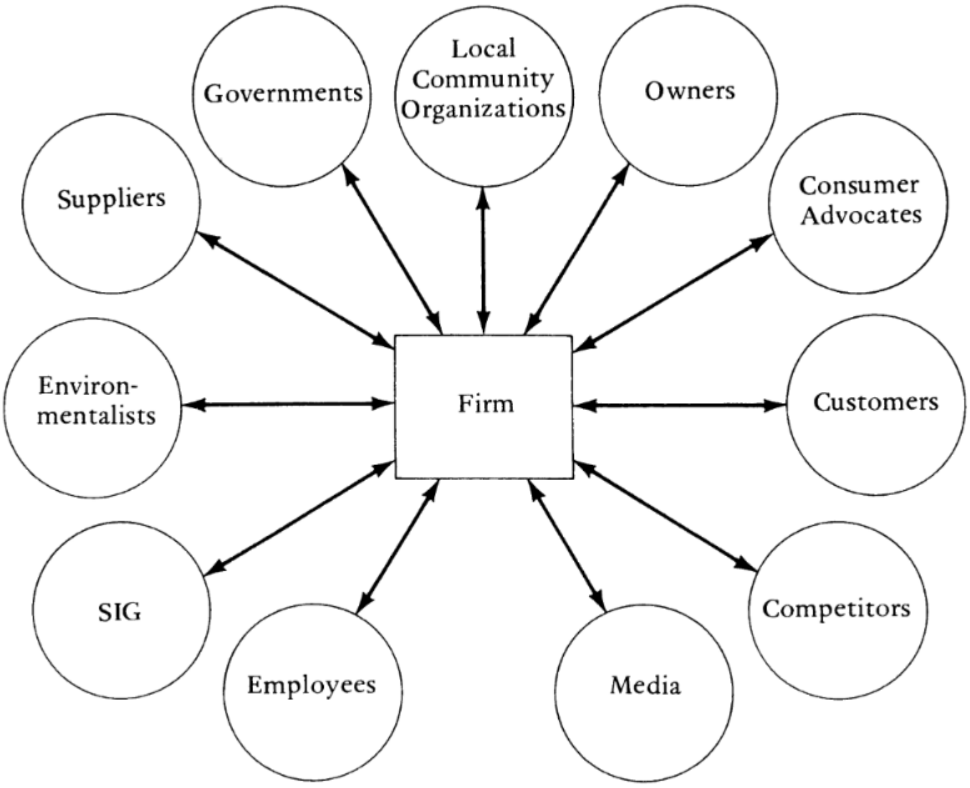

Figure 5. A stakeholder view of the firm. Adapted from Freeman, 2010, Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach, p. 25.

2.2.4 Corporate Citizenship

Schmeltz (2014, p. 234) argues that indeed businesses are no longer just legal entities focused solely on generating profits by providing goods or services and creating jobs - instead, they are now seen as “responsible co-citizens of the community.” This perspective can vary depending on the size and scope of a company, whether it operates locally or globally. From a global standpoint, which this thesis explores, Andriof and Macintosh (2001, p. 68) define global corporate citizenship as “the process of identifying, analyzing, and responding to the company’s social, political, and economic responsibilities as defined through law and public policy, stakeholder expectations, and voluntary actions aligned with corporate values and business strategies.” They emphasize that corporate citizenship encompasses not only what businesses achieve (i.e., their actual results) but also how they reach those outcomes (i.e., the processes involved). Corporate citizenship may then encourage companies to recognize and address the diverse needs and expectations of various stakeholders, such as employees as a group and female employees as a sub-group. Focusing on both outcomes and processes is central to this study, as it enables examining how managers’ everyday practices and routines shape attraction and retention.

2.2.5 Overall significance of the different principles

The principles of CSR, TBL, stakeholder theory and corporate citizenship framework are relevant when addressing the underrepresentation of females in technology industry, as they provide the very basis of the justification on addressing the matter as an issue gender segregation in the technology industry. Recognizing the wide impact of businesses have is the justification why they should confront the glaring underrepresentation of women in technology roles. However, the true impact and importance of these concepts can be critically reviewed, even though research in organizational psychology and human resource management (HRM) indicate that CSR and sustainability initiatives can lead to a variety of positive outcomes. These include enhanced job performance, greater job satisfaction, improved green performance, increased creative performance, stronger in-role performance, and elevated organizational citizenship behavior (Ahmad, Jamali & Khattak, 2025; Fatima & Elbanna, 2022). Yet translating these potential gains into concrete improvements in gender balance requires attention to implementation gaps and to the often subtle organizational practices that determine whether policy becomes practice. This notion is a core concern of the empirical chapters and are hence later re-visited.

Criticism for these concepts often relate to authenticity and measurability. CSR has been critiqued for being more symbolic than substantive, having a “chameleon nature”, which refers to having a “vacuous or an utterly meaningless concept” (Sakar & Searcy, 2016, p. 1423). CSR initiatives can serve as a tool by which companies promote socially responsible images without making meaningful changes to their core operations – a form of greenwashing, which can reduce the overall effectiveness of CSR initiatives (Parguel, Benoit-Moreau & Larceneux, 2011). And even with genuine aims, the concepts may prove to be difficult to operationalize. Without clear metrics or regulatory frameworks, they risk becoming a rhetorical device rather than a driver of systemic change (Katona, 2024). The difficulty to quantify and assess social and environmental outcomes alongside financial metrics can lead to challenges in transparency and comparability (Thabrew et al., 2017), ultimately compromising the effectiveness of the concepts overall. For this study, such critiques highlight the need to examine not only stated policies but also measurable practices and managerial usage of diversity, equity and inclusion data as indicators of real organizational commitment.

2.3 Why is underrepresentation an issue? Diversity, Equity and Inclusion framework as basis

As companies expand their operations across borders, they encounter diverse workforces and customer bases reflecting various cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds. Moreover, social movements such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter have amplified calls for social justice, prompting employees to engage more proactively in discussions about discriminatory hiring practices, workplace procedures, shared experiences and the overall climate of their work environments (Russen & Davson, 2023). From gender perspective, gender inequality in employment remains evident today through issues such as the gender pay gap and occupational segregation. Occupational segregation can be categorized into vertical and horizontal forms. Vertical segregation refers to the predominance of men in the highest-ranking occupational positions, while horizontal segregation involves the distribution of men and women into different specializations, roles, and tasks (Joyce & Walker, 2015).

The concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion (D,E&I) are distinct but strongly interconnected, and in the work-life context aim to foster a more just and representative workplace. According to Fitzsimmons et al. (2023, p. 1404) “Equality, diversity, and inclusion represent different but interconnected approaches to incorporating excluded social identity groups.” A McKinsey article from 2022 explains that the three terms are often grouped together since “they are interconnected and it is only in combination that their true impact emerges” (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Below the each of the terms is defined more in detail.

Diversity refers to presence of varied backgrounds and perspectives. According to Wagdi and Fathi (2024), diversity can be assessed using various criteria in demographics including gender, race, age and nationality. However, the concept of diversity in business has evolved significantly over the decades. Historically, workplaces have been homogeneous, reflecting the societal norms. To this date, many traditional businesses and industries are relatively homogenous – for example in Technology Industries of Finland, which provides the Finnish context for this thesis, the sector is strongly gendered: only 23 percent of the industry’s personnel were women in 2022 (Teknologiateollisuus, 2024). In recent years, the focus on diversity has expanded to encompass a broader range of identities, including age, sexual orientation, disability, and cultural background.

Equity refers to the fair treatment and access to opportunities for all while also considering individual needs. April (2021, p.119) defines equity as “the fair treatment, access, opportunity and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to eliminate barriers that have prevented everyone from participating equally in achieving the organizations’ and stakeholders’ goals”. Thus equity recognizes that certain groups are disadvantaged and this needs to considered; as contrary to equality, where people are put in the same line without this consideration. Inequity in the workplace has historically manifested in various forms, including discrimination based on race, gender, and socioeconomic status, which in result has led to unfair working conditions and limited opportunities for many employees. However, over the past few decades, businesses have made significant strides toward promoting equity. This shift has been driven by social movements, demographic changes as well as changes in stakeholder expectations (Freeman & Kocak, 2023). This research includes investigation on how equity is operationalized in talent processes (recruitment, development, promotion) and whether current practices produce equitable outcomes for women in technology.

The creation of environment where everyone feels valued and engaged is in the core of inclusion. According to Fitzsimmons et al. (2023, p. 1405) “the concept of inclusion focuses on the extent to which all groups of employees feel fully accepted and included in the workplace, as well as the subsequent implications for people from excluded groups”. Thus inclusion in business means creating a workplace culture where all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds or identities, feel welcomed, respected, and valued. It involves actively engaging diverse perspectives and ensuring that everyone has equal opportunities to contribute, participate, and advance within the organization. Schreane (2021) argues, that companies that commit to inclusion commit in putting people first. This research therefore examines not only representation but the qualitative experience of inclusion as reported by employees and managers.

The history of D,E&I is linked to the evolution of “societal values, legal frameworks and cultural attitudes” (Kushwaha et al., 2024, p. 227). It has a strong relation to the civil rights movements aiming to address systemic discrimination and promoting equal rights for marginalized groups, including black, women, and the LGBTQ+ community. Over the following decades, the concept of diversity expanded to encompass not only race and gender but also other dimensions such as age, disability and socioeconomic status. Going forward, organizations began to recognize the importance of creating inclusive environments that actively engage diverse populations, leading to the formalization of D,E&I initiatives in workplaces around the world (Tessema et al., 2023).

Diversity, equity and inclusion have been discussed from both a business case perspective—highlighting the organizational benefits they provide—and from an ethical standpoint. When addressing profound human issues such as gender, race, disabilities, and sexual orientation, one might question whether it is appropriate to assess the benefits of inclusion or to recognize its intrinsic value in respecting human dignity. Nevertheless, over the past decades the business case for D,E&I has been supported by various studies. For instance, Phillips et al. (2005) found that “racially diverse groups outperformed racially homogeneous groups in decision-making.” More recently Barnes & Luke (2021) reported that numerous studies have demonstrated positive correlations between a group’s racial diversity and the quality of decision-making. Linking these findings to the current research, this thesis explores whether and how organizational practices translate such theoretical advantages into observable gains in recruitment and retention in the given context.

Regardless of justification of diversity, equity and inclusion, it has faced increasing criticism and negative reactions in the western and global arena, especially after President Donal Trump’s second administration came into force. The Trump administration has targeted diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives throughout the US government as well as private sector and education in order to have the initiatives ended (Mohan, 2025). Trump argues that D,E&I initiatives are against the prosperity of all – indeed they discriminate those who represent majority. In his rally that marked his 100th day at the office, Trump stated: “I ended all of the lawless, so-called diversity, equity and inclusion bullshit all across the entire federal government and the private sector” (Guynn, 2025). Critics of D,E&I argue “women and people of color are being handed jobs and promotions at the expense of more qualified and deserving candidates” (Guynn, 2025).

But has Trump succeeded in abolishing diversity, equity and inclusion? At least he has made concrete progress. Multiple large American companies such as Pepsi, Goldman Sachs and Google (Alphabet) have aligned their policies and initiatives with Trump’s views (The Associated Press, 2025). Some companies, such as Meta and Amazon, did so very early on. According to BBC, Meta sent a memo to it’s staff explaining abolishing D,E&I with "shifting legal and policy landscape" (Sherman, 2025).

While the United States has witnessed regression of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives under President Donald Trump’s second administration, Europe has also witnessed more conservatism and rise of "anti-woke". The response in EU level has been not to abolish initiatives, but in national level this differs. Corporate Europe has also seen mixed responses, but from progression point of view, The World Economic Forum’s

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lighthouses 2025 report highlighted several European companies that have achieved measurable impact through inclusive hiring, leadership development for underrepresented groups, and equitable workplace policies. These "lighthouse" organizations serve as models for others, demonstrating that diversity, equity and inclusion can drive both ethical progress and business performance (World Economic Forum, 2025).

D,E&I has evidently become a charged acronym. Therefore companies which recognize the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives may abolish the usage of the term "D,E&I" and formalize the initiatives under a different name to avoid politicization. In the global and interconnected world of today, similar tendencies are also gaining popularity with leaders in other countries than US, too. The direction of development in this area is clearly slowing down or going backwards. This raises the question did organizations ever truly believe in the initiatives, or are they adjusting as the risk is too high to continue?

It is also notable that the development process is not unidirectional: it seems that we are at a turning point and there are multiple possible futures, and the outcomes also depend on the companies true values and long-term goals. If and when a corporation believes in the basis of diversity, equity and inclusion, the values will remain, even if formal initiatives have to be altered due to political demands.

2.3.1 Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance directly influences employees' ability to integrate their professional and personal lives, impacting wellbeing, productivity, and retention across diverse groups. Yadav (2014) defines work-life balance as the organization of work and life in such a way that neither interferes with the other; essentially, it is the boundary between one's profession, career, or business and all other aspects of life. In contrast, work-family conflict arises when these two domains clash, creating incompatible role pressures (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). From the standpoint of this research, it is especially interesting as work-life balance and work-family conflict are experienced differently by men and women. Emslie and Hunt (2009) highlight that women are often perceived as responsible for maintaining seamless transitions between home and work, a perception deeply rooted in gender norms. These expectations not only shape the experience of work-life conflict but also influence how family-friendly policies are accessed and utilized. Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) found that the use of such policies is partly determined by individual characteristics, especially gender and family circumstances.

A clearly uneven gender distribution of unpaid care and housework, often called the 'gender care gap,' persists in most countries. Even today, tasks such as childcare, elderly care, cooking and cleaning remain unequally shared in different-sex couple households (Samtleben & Muller, 2022; Kitterod, 2016; Ferrant & Thism, 2019). This can promote a problematic expectation in organizations, which often define commitment by long hours and flexibility, fostering the notion of the "ideal worker" who works full-time without family interference (Kelly et al., 2010; Lewis, 2001). Women are more likely to be disadvantaged because they carry the bulk of domestic responsibilities yet are expected to prioritize paid work. Liff and Cameron (1997) argue that striving for equal treatment often upholds a male standard, linked to the ideal worker concept. In dual-earner families, one partner (often the woman) may be less able to reach this ideal due to lower earnings and greater household burdens. Solutions include not only offering but normalizing career breaks for all genders. As Liff and Cameron note, changing the association of career breaks with women requires men to take them up widely and management to accept non-linear career paths. Ultimately, organizational culture must shift to view family care or career breaks as compatible with work commitment.

2.3.2 D,E&I and an international organization

D,E&I initiatives, as all operations and strategies in general vary depending on the context of the organization. Alvesson and Due Billing (2009) argue that organizations experience a pressure for uniformity and culturally adept behavior. On the other hand, operating in the global marketplace means that businesses will encounter various ideologies, languages, institutions, customs, beliefs, social systems, and business practices (Georgiadou et al., 2019). These two perspectives were explored by Wang (2019) who states that as the world becomes more interconnected, it also tends to become more standardized, which can reduce uniqueness and increase vulnerability. She argues that this means diversity is essential for making the world stronger, while reducing diversity weakens it. Thus embracing diversity enhances resilience, while limiting it can lead to fragility in a business context (Wang, 2019).

A study by Georgeac and Rattan (2023) analyzed publicly available text from Fortune 500 companies' (which also provides the context for this thesis) websites, diversity reports, and blogs using a machine learning algorithm to categorize the content into two types: "business case for diversity" and "fairness case for diversity". The business case organizations justified D,E&I based on its benefits to the company's bottom line, and the fairness case organizations justified diversity on moral grounds of fairness and equal opportunity. According to the study, eighty percent of the Fortune 500 companies justified their focus on diversity by linking it to improved financial performance. This kind of approach could be viewed as having similarities to green washing, where companies exaggerate or falsely claims their environmental benefits or sustainability efforts to appear more environmentally friendly than it actually is. Furthermore, this could mean that the initiatives can be easily abandoned. With the recent counteractions towards D,E&I activities in the global political arena, it may well be that companies refrain diversity, equity and inclusion in the wake of global leaders. Zheng (2022) argues that D,E&I activities were co-opted by corporate leaders who seek the reputational advantages of claiming to be engaged in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts without having to implement any meaningful changes – making the initiatives easy to ditch, too.

The set up of D,E&I activities are context dependent. According to Newburry et al. (2022) exploring diversity, equity and inclusion within an international business context emphasizes that various influences on the topic operate at multiple, often interconnected levels. As illustrated in Figure 6 below, D,E&I policy influences can originate from a global level (e.g., from the U.N.) and extend down to team dynamics within firms, as well as individual interactions, encompassing numerous levels in between. Thus in an international company's context diversity, equity and inclusion occur in multiple levels and these need to be considered.

Influence Level	Example	Potential Multinational Firm Impact
Global	UN SDG5 – Gender Equality.	Does having a global mandate related to a DEI policy influence MNC policy adoption?
Regional	Regional expectations or policies regarding DEI (e.g., European Union rules).	How do MNCs manage tensions when host country cultures' DEI expectations differ from those of a regional governing body?
Country/ Society	Societal differences in the ability to recognize, tolerate, and adapt to various types of (social) differences and diversity (e.g., Zanakis et al., 2016).	Do MNCs adapt DEI policies based on differing societal expectations where they operate?
Within-Country	U.S. states differ in LGBT HR practice support (e.g., Gardberg, Newburry, Hudson, & Viktora-Jones, 2022).	Do MNCs make location choices based on within-country DEI policy differences?
Organization/ Firm	MNCs develop individual DEI cultures, which are influenced by policies of their home countries, their industries and other factors.	How do MNCs create a global DEI identify for the firm?
Within-Firm Team	Global Virtual Teams include members from different cultural and psychological backgrounds, potentially leading to differing expectations regarding DEI practices.	How does DEI impact the effectiveness of virtual global teams?

Figure 6. D,E&I influence levels in international business. Adapted from Newburry et al., 2022., p. 2

2.3.3 Intersectionality

D,E&I may also backlash for companies – and not only because the initiatives may be targeted by political campaigns or disagreeing groups. Georgeac and Rattan (2022) argue that the business case for diversity conveys a nuanced but significant message: organizations see employees from underrepresented groups primarily as tools for achieving goals. This can ultimately weaken diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives even before employers have the opportunity to engage with prospective employees. On the contrary, organizations that successfully showcase the complete range of diversity in their external branding and marketing initiatives are more likely to draw a diverse pool of talent into their recruitment pipelines (Deloitte, n.d.). This suggests that the genuineness of the diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and the wider operational culture is essential. According to Auger-Dominguez and Juarez (2024) establishing a sense of shared purpose is essential for fostering genuine and enduring inclusion and belonging in the workplace, and this can't be achieved by detached actions.

A study by Pew Research Center (Minkin, 2023) showed that the majority of U.S. workers viewed D,E&I focus at work as a good thing. However, the views differed significantly based on demographic and political factors (see Figure 7).

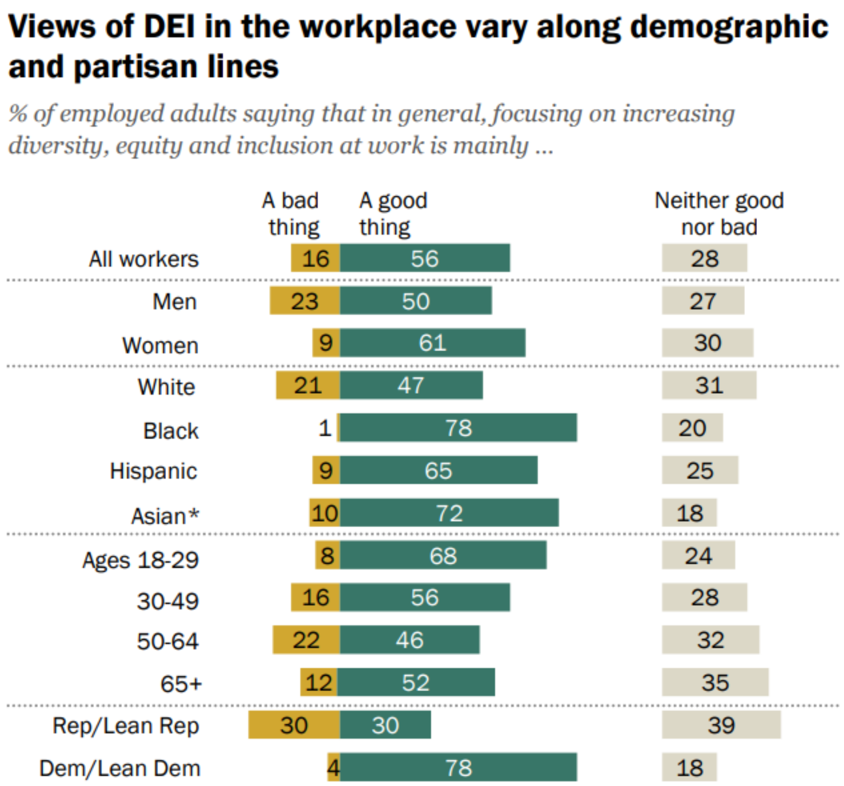

Figure 7. Views of D,E&I in the workplace vary along demographic and partisan lines. Adapted from Minkin, 2023.

This disparity can be addressed by considering intersectionality in D,E&I efforts. Intersectionality recognizes that individuals hold multiple identities that intersect and influence their experiences and perspectives. Bowleg (2012, p.1267) defines intersectionality as “a theoretical framework that helps to understand how various social identities—such as race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and disability—intersect at the individual level, reflecting interconnected systems of privilege and oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism) at the broader social structural level." Therefore, intersectionality serves as an effective framework for examining how the cumulative effects of privileges or barriers, taking into account the multiple identities of each person (Thomas et al., 2021).

2.3.4 The role of leadership and culture in D,E&I

Rutherford (2011) argues that although formal legal barriers to women’s equality in the workplace have been removed, they have been replaced by more subtle, less tangible obstacles. These barriers then may stem from organizational culture, which can manifest as a preference for ‘macho’ dominance. Organizational culture itself comprises complex values, beliefs, and assumptions that shape how a company operates (Wallace, Hunt & Richards, 1999). Furthermore, the concept of culture can be understood through two distinct perspectives. On one hand, culture can be seen as something an organization ‘has’—a variable that all employees experience similarly and that managers can change if they choose (Liff & Cameron, 1997). On the other hand, culture can be viewed as something an organization ‘is,’ where culture emerges from social interactions, with shared meanings and symbols deeply embedded in the daily interactions among organizational members (Liff & Cameron, 1997, p.36).

More recently, organizational culture has been defined as “collective values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors of an institution” and it influences decision-making, shapes employee attitudes, and determines the organization's trajectory (Jerab & Mabroukj, 2023, p.1). From this standpoint, the role of culture in how employee’s experience D,E&I is substantial. According to the famous quote by management consultant Peter Ducker, “culture eats strategies for breakfast”. Evidently, assessing the culture before implementing strategies is crucial for effectiveness.

Culture is intangible yet has a great impact on individuals. Managers on the other hand have direct, and also tangible ways to influence their team member's; whether it's regarding the job itself, their wellbeing or lookout for the future. Of course, the direct manager is not solely responsible for a team members experience, but according to Robinson (2008) at least 75% of the factors contributing to voluntary turnover can be influenced by managers. According to Hassan (2024, p.35) "the evolution of diversity and inclusion in business has been accompanied with a growing emphasis on inclusive leadership", due to inclusive leaders being able to utilize the strengths of diverse teams while minimizing potential conflicts and biases.

Different frameworks to assess leadership include transformational leadership, servant leadership, systems leadership and sustainable leadership. Leadership theories have evolved significantly over time, reflecting the changing needs and complexities of organizations and societies – and their relevance depend on the applied context (Wallace, Hunt & Richards, 1999).

Traditionally in business, transactional leaders guide their followers through a system of social exchange, offering rewards and recognition in return for creativity and productivity (Bakker et al., 2023). In contrast, transformational leaders provide personalized support and inspiration, encouraging individuals to reach their full potential and cultivate their own leadership abilities (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Servant leadership then focuses primarily on serving others—prioritizing the needs of employees, customers, and the community above organizational goals. van Vugt and Ronay (2014) and explain the rise of servant leadership from human needs arising from far from the past: humans still have needs that stem for the times we were hunter-gatherers, and these needs may become unmet in modern work life. Historically, we worked in small tribes and leaders were known intimately, with no separation between their private and public selves (van Vugt & Ronay, 2014; Eva et al., 2019). Modern large organizations can lack this sense of close-knit belonging, but servant leadership addresses this gap by fostering social identity and creating team environments that resemble the supportive kinship of early human societies. Servant leadership may be particularly effective in inclusive leadership.

Systems leadership is a particularly interesting framework for a global conglomerate, as it views organizations as complex, interconnected systems. Systems leaders understand that change in one part of the organization affects the whole and therefore emphasize collaboration, adaptability, and long-term thinking. This approach encourages leaders to address root causes rather than symptoms and to engage diverse stakeholders in co-creating sustainable solutions (Burke, McDonald & Stewart, 2018).

Building on these ideas, sustainable leadership integrates environmental, social, and economic considerations into leadership practice. Many organizations struggle to balance economic gains with social responsibility and environmental protection; and leaders play a pivotal role in it by embedding sustainable development principles into their organizations and adopting sustainable leadership behaviors (Liao, 2022).

Organizational culture profoundly shapes employees' experiences, and this also includes how employees experience diversity, equity or inclusion. Leadership frameworks and styles can be used to review the effectiveness of for example D,E&I initiatives. If the initiatives are in paper, they will remain in paper, until they are put into life – and it’s often the line manager who can do it for their team members.

2.3.5 What does good look like – How to assess leadership maturity in leading D,E&I

We now have justification to address the underrepresentation of women in technology as an issue, and also understanding of the contributing factors. But how to know what does good look like?

Washington (2022) categorized D,E&I maturity into five stages: aware, compliant, tactical, integrated and sustainable. The first stage, awareness, marks the beginning of intentional D,E&I efforts, often triggered by external or internal events. The second stage, compliance, involves meeting legal diversity requirements through initiatives like training and mentorship but requires moving beyond mere compliance to achieve meaningful progress. In the third tactical stage, organizations implement diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives such as employee resource groups but may lack a unified strategic approach. The fourth stage, integration, sees diversity, equity and inclusion fully embedded into all operations and culture, aligning internal and external efforts and incorporating D,E&I into decision-making and policies. Finally, the fifth stage, sustainability, is reached when D,E&I is an inseparable part of the organizational culture, supported by strong leadership, data analysis, accountability systems, and a commitment to continuous learning and improvement, enabling the organization to maintain an inclusive culture over time (Washington, 2022).

According to DeMattia (2023) organizations are able to the gain maturity in D,E&I through regular communication about D,E&I strategies between leaders and team members and co-ownership of the initiative between HR and business leaders. Furthermore, clearly set goals to meet targets as well as accountability for success throughout the organization and employee enablement were found to be crucial for having transformational impact.

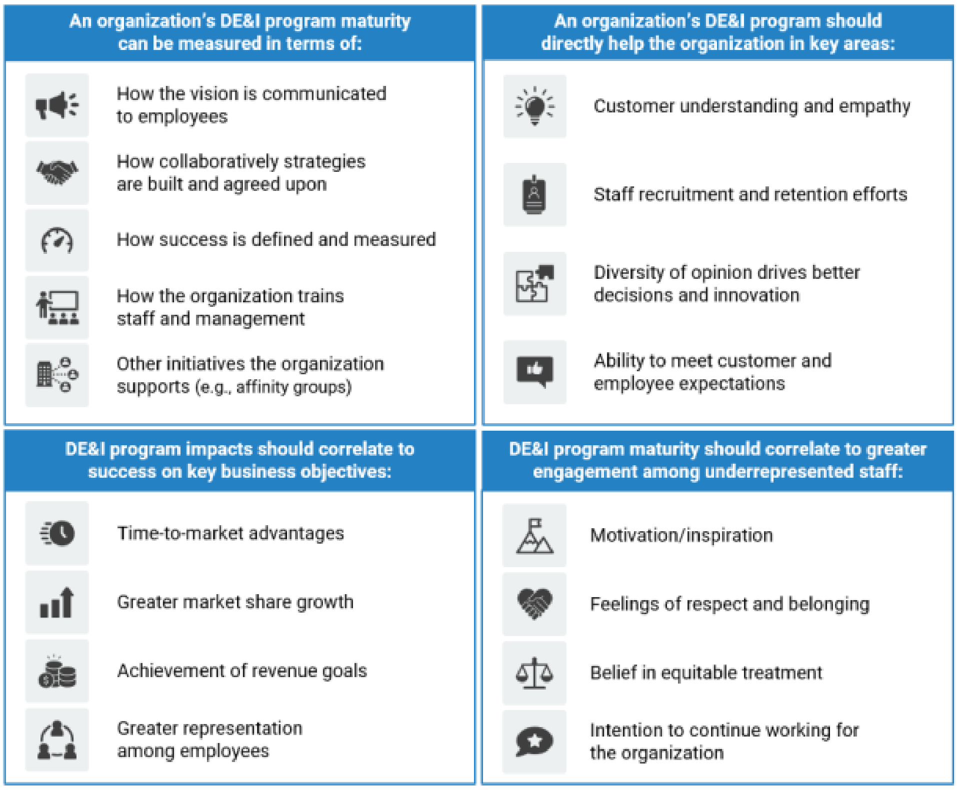

Figure 8. DE&I Maturity and Outcomes Explored. Adopted from DeMattia, 2023.

Frameworks provide a structured approach to evaluate where an organization currently stands in its D,E&I journey, highlighting strengths and identifying areas needing improvement. Such tools can help leaders set realistic goals, prioritize initiatives, and allocate resources effectively. Maturity assessment also promote accountability by enabling organizations to track progress over time and measure the impact of their efforts. It can also help communicating about the direction where the organization wants to head. One simple framework can be adopted from Technology Industries Finland.

	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
Confirming organizational commitment	Discussions about diversity, equity and inclusion and their importance are only just starting in the organization.	Some people have identified the need for discussing and advancing diversity, equity and inclusion, but discussions are limited to certain people or certain teams, eg. the HR, legal or recruitment team.	There is leadership team buy-in for advancing the diversity and inclusion agenda, and the importance of it is regularly communicated to employees. There is documentation in place to demonstrate the commitment.
Diversifying leadership team & board	The importance of having diversity in the leadership team and board has been recognised, but concrete actions have not yet been taken to improve diversity.	Some actions have been taken to increase diversity in leadership, but these are limited to a certain type of diversity category (eg. gender).	Wider diversity and inclusion aspects have been taken into account in the composition of both the leadership team and the board.
Building inclusive leadership skills	Inclusive leadership is still a new topic to leaders and there has been no formal discussions or training on the topic.	Some leaders have taken part in basic introduction to diversity and inclusion -training to build their awareness about the topic on a general level. The senior leadership team has been offered their own training session.	Inclusive leadership practices are integrated into ongoing leadership development and training is offered on a regular basis to both new and existing leaders. All managers have received the support needed to build inclusion and lead diverse teams.

Figure 9. Table to evaluate leadership maturity in leading inclusion. Adopted from Technology Industries Finland.

Leadership maturity can be utilized as an operational test of the sustainability frameworks introduced earlier (Corporate Social Responsibility, the Triple Bottom Line, Stakeholder Theory and Corporate Citizenship). The sustainability frameworks establish expectations on how organizations should treat people and society. Assessing leadership maturity can be used as a mean to examine whether these commitments are translated into managerial behaviors, governance arrangements, and data-driven accountability. The empirical analysis that follows investigates the presence and effectiveness of such practices and asks whether they materially support the attraction and retention of women in the given context. In this way the study evaluates not only stated policy but the everyday leadership actions that determine whether sustainability and inclusion objectives are realized in practice.

2.4 Conclusion

This literature review has situated diversity, equity and inclusion within a sustainability-oriented framework, drawing on CSR, corporate citizenship, stakeholder theory and the Triple Bottom Line to justify organizational responsibility for addressing women’s underrepresentation in technology. The review has examined the multifaceted causes of underrepresentation, including occupational segregation, work–life imbalances and intersectional dynamics, and has highlighted the contextual complexities of implementing diversity, equity and inclusion in international organizations. It has further emphasized the central role of leadership and organizational culture and reviewed maturity models that provide diagnostic and developmental pathways for D,E&I work. The discussion also acknowledged substantive critiques, such as the performative use of Corporate Social Responsibility and diversity, equity and inclusion, measurement challenges and recent politicization—that complicate both practice and evaluation. These insights establish the theoretical for the research that follows.

3 Methodology

In this section the research approach, data collection methods and data analysis methods are reviewed. It also includes an assessment of the researcher's role in the commissioning company and how this affects the choice of an effective approach and my opportunities to obtain essential information for the study.

The chosen methodology is chosen to meet the needs of this study. The chosen method is a mixed-methods approach. This study employs a mixed-method research approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current state of diversity, equity and inclusion activities and maturity within the organization. This begins with semi-structured interviews with HR professionals within the company to explore key themes and perspectives. These interviews with HR experts serve multiple purposes: they provide in-depth qualitative insights, help validate the design of subsequent survey questions, and assist in defining the appropriate survey population.

Following the interviews, a survey will be distributed to gather quantitative data directly addressing the research question: What are the key components of employee experience related to attraction and retention of female employees within the organizational context? Additionally, the survey aims to capture leaders' views on these topics and assess whether leadership expectations and practices are aligned with the expectations of employees.

Once the survey data is collected, statistical analysis will be performed to identify patterns and relationships, providing the basis for conclusions and recommendations. This mixed-method approach ensures that both qualitative depth and quantitative breadth are integrated to comprehensively address the research objectives. The mixed-methods design allows to approach the research problem from both contextualized understanding (why and how leaders and employees interpret attraction and retention) and quantification (how widespread identified perceptions or practices are). Qualitative interviews generate hypotheses and refinement of how to measure, and the survey allows gathering from a wider sample, allowing findings to be checked against each other and giving more reliable conclusions than using just one method.

The choice of methodology has been influenced by my own role in the commissioning company and previously acquired knowledge of the research topic. Working in the commissioning company's HR myself and working closely with leaders has given me prior knowledge and understanding of the topic. My role offers an excellent position to conduct research from the perspective of both quality information and relevant networks.

However, considering both the prior knowledge of the topic and my position within the company being studied, it is important to recognize how subjectivity might influence various stages of the research process. While being an "insider" offers contextual understanding that can deepen the analysis, it also comes with a risk of bias. Qualitative methodology acknowledges that the researcher's subjectivity is deeply intertwined with the research process, and this subjectivity influences every stage, from selecting the research topic and developing hypotheses to choosing methods and interpreting the findings (Ratner, 2002).

Potential methodological limitations and biases include for example:

- Sampling bias. This refers to purposive or self-selected participants may not represent the full population or choosing incorrect sample may "not represent the true distribution because of non-random reasons" (Panzeri, Magri & Carraro, 2008, p.4258)
- Social-desirability bias, which "refers to the tendency of research subjects to give socially desirable responses instead of choosing responses that are reflective of their true feelings" (Grimm, 2010, nd). Thus respondents may answer in a way they think is socially acceptable with regards to sensitive topics such as politics. As discussed earlier, diversity, equity and inclusion has become a political matter
- Acquiescence bias. This refers to the "tendency for survey respondents to endorse any assertion made in a survey question regardless of content" (Hill & Roberts, 2023, p. 575)
- Common Method Variance (CMV), which refers to "the estimated impact of one variable on other variable is at risk of being biased due to CMV which is the systematic variance shared among the variables" (Tehseen, Ramayah & Sajilan, 2017, p. 142).

Further limits include external validity due to the single-company, cross-sectional design. In addition, response rates and data quality (for example incomplete records) may further constrain statistical power and the accuracy of analysis.

To address these, I will reflect my own assumptions and perspectives to remain aware of how they may shape the research. In addition, the chosen methodology (mixed methods) provides a way to cross-check findings and may help reduce the influence of personal bias. Additionally, openly acknowledging my role and relationship to the organization (I am an HR Leader myself and employed by the commissioning company) in the research report, allows readers to consider how my positionality may have impacted the results. In addition, objectivity and subjectivity can be viewed as complementary goals that enhance the quality and relevance of statistical methods, as “objectivity replaced by transparency, consensus, impartiality and correspondence to observable reality, and subjectivity replaced by awareness of multiple perspectives and context dependence” (Gelman & Henning, 2017, p. 967). Further mitigation of the biases include purposive but balanced sampling across units to capture variation, anonymized responses to reduce social-desirability effects and careful question wording and validation of questions to minimize measurement error.

The study adopts a pragmatic research philosophy. A pragmatic approach to social research recognizes both the persistent nature of facts and the inherent subjectivity and context-dependence of all knowledge. This perspective offers a foundation for establishing common ground around useful knowledge while "also avoiding science as an ideology beyond critical questioning" (Gillespie, Glavenau & Saint Laurent, 2024, p. xi). Pragmatism allows flexibility in combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, focusing on what works in the context of the research problem rather than adhering strictly to a single methodological paradigm. This approach supports the goal of generating actionable insights that are relevant and useful for the organization’s ongoing development in diversity, equity and inclusion. Pragmatism also recognizes that trade-offs exist (depth versus breadth, insider access versus potential bias) and guides the choice of methods that best address the research aims while transparently documenting limitations.

The objective of this thesis is to create practical recommendations on how to close any identified gaps. These recommendations will be informed by the insights gained from the interviews and survey. By providing this insight, this thesis aims to contribute to the ongoing efforts to close the gender gap in the commissioning company.

Ethical considerations are central to the study. Participation in interviews and surveys is voluntary and based on informed consent. All participants receive a clear information describing the study aims, use of data, and their rights, including the right to withdraw without consequence. Data collection will prioritize anonymity and confidentiality. Thus survey responses will be collected anonymously, interview transcripts are anonymized and all identifying details removed and reported quotations will be presented in aggregated or de-identified form. Data storage complies with GDPR and organizational policies: raw data and consent records will be held on secure, access-restricted location and retained only for the required period and securely deleted following thesis publication. Any required organizational permissions will be sought prior to data collection.

Finally, in relation to my dual role as an HR leader and researcher, I acknowledge both the advantages (access, contextual knowledge) and the responsibilities (managing dual roles to avoid conflicts of interest). The conflict is minimized also from time-usage perspective as research activities (with the exception of interviews and steering from direct manager) happen outside of office-hours and is thus distinct from my daily HR work. In addition, disclosing the research purpose when contacting possible interviewees or survey respondents should reduce conflict and misunderstandings.

3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is a method used to explore and understand human behavior, experiences and social phenomena through non-numerical data. It can involve collecting information via interviews, focus groups or observations to gain insights into participants' perspectives, motivations, and emotions, allowing for a deeper understanding of complex issues (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Qualitative methods allow for the collection of in-depth information on the topic, although this may result in limitations concerning the sample size. Qualitative research in this thesis is utilized for the researcher to deepen understanding of the research topic and in order to validate the survey questions that ultimately answer the research question.

Thus firstly interviews will be conducted with HR leaders within the company. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012), a minimum sample size of 5-25 interviewees is recommended for semi-structured interviews; however, this minimum can be lower with a homogeneous sample. HR Leaders within a company represent a homogenous sample. While the small interview size can pose challenges in ensuring representativeness, it can effectively represent a specific subgroup, as is the case in this study. Nevertheless, this limits the broader applicability of the findings.

In this dissertation, a small sample size is justified due to the limited number of professionals in this field with relevant experience. Therefore, the expertise of these professionals and the researcher’s ability to thoroughly gather their insights become crucial for obtaining relevant data. Additionally, conducting fewer in-depth interviews can provide valuable insights while yielding a manageable amount of data for finalizing and validating the survey questions (Weinberg, 2002).

The respondents in this study represent a homogeneous subgroup, sharing similar attributes such as industry background, hierarchical level, and experience. Interviewing such a subgroup, known as homogeneous sampling, allows for deeper exploration of the selected participants' characteristics (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012, p. 288). To enhance the insights gained, the interviewees will include both genders.

Qualitative research aims to deepen the understanding of a particular subject, typically by exploring "how" and "why" questions (Maylor & Blackmon, 2005). In management studies, this approach provides valuable insights not only into organizational structures but also into the people within or impacted by them. Various methods can be used in qualitative research, such as observations, interviews, and focus groups. This study adopts a cross-sectional design, meaning it captures data at a single point in time, unlike longitudinal studies that collect data over a longer period to analyze changes and trends.

3.1.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews lie between two extremes: open interviews and pre-coded (structured) interviews (Fisher, 2010). Open interviews are informal and flexible, while pre-coded interviews are highly guided with predetermined questions. Semi-structured interviews combine elements of both, covering key topics and questions while allowing respondents the freedom to answer in their own way. For this dissertation, the interviews will include essential questions but offer flexibility in their order, adapting to the natural flow of conversation. This format also allows for follow-up questions, enabling deeper exploration of topics when relevant, which has helped gather richer and more detailed data.

Regarding question design, interviews can include both closed and open questions (Biggam, 2011). Closed questions provide fixed response options, such as gender categories (female, male, prefer not to disclose), while open questions allow participants to respond freely. This study primarily uses open questions to let participants express themselves in their own words, though some closed questions about background information are asked at the beginning. It is important that questions are clear and easy to understand to encourage thorough responses and minimize misunderstandings (Biggam, 2011; Horn, 2009). Additionally, the language used aligns with the academic foundations of this dissertation; Ketokivi and Mantere (2013) emphasize that using natural language to express theory supports methodological validity, even if formal validity is not strictly necessary.

3.1.2 Practical conduct of the semi-structured interviews

Participants were identified through an internal networks and consultation to determine which HR professionals possessed relevant experience and perspective for the study. A purposive sampling strategy was applied: six experts were selected based on their background in the field and within the organization and with attention to gender balance in order to reduce selection bias. Each interview was scheduled as a 45-minute slot at a mutually convenient time.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via the organization’s Teams platform according to which was more convenient. With each participant’s informed consent, interviews were audio recorded to ensure accurate capture of responses (with the exception on one interview, which was not recorded). Recordings were transcribed pseudonymized at the transcription stage; identifying details were removed. “Field notes” were taken during and immediately after each interview to capture contextual observations and initial analytic impressions. These notes serve as the main data source for analyzing the first part (semi-structed interviews) of the research.

3.2 Quantitative research

A quantitative approach allows for collecting data from a larger number of respondents and typically involves less time-consuming methods, such as online surveys. A larger sample size generally increases the likelihood that the sample will be representative of the population. Another advantage of quantitative research is the ability to analyze data using statistical software packages, which provide various additional tools for data analysis (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

Quantitative methods involve the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data to understand patterns, relationships, and trends within a given topic (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). These methods are often used to test hypotheses or measure variables across large populations, providing statistically significant results that can be generalized. Common quantitative techniques include surveys, experiments, and structured observations, which allow researchers to gather measurable data efficiently (Little, 2013; Martin, 2012). The strength of quantitative research lies in its ability to produce objective, replicable findings through statistical analysis, often using software tools to identify correlations, differences or causal relationships (Martin, 2012).

While quantitative methods can provide wide-ranging opportunities for breadth and generalizability, the method may lack the depth of understanding that qualitative approaches provide.

3.2.1.1 Surveys

The second part of the thesis data collection is conducted through a survey. Surveys are a quick and easy way to gather information from a large number of people and to produce, for example visual representations of different categories of data, proportions or averages and distributions of numerical responses (Farquhar, 2012). A structured questionnaire can be used as a data collection method when the phenomenon under study is well understood. If there were little knowledge of the phenomenon, it would be difficult to formulate appropriate questions. Thus the semi-structured interviews with experts were conducted prior to finalizing survey questions.

According to Anttila (2014) the basic principles of survey research include using a systematic approach to ensure thorough coverage of the studied phenomenon, selecting a representative sample that reflects the entire population or all variations of the phenomenon, collecting data objectively to maintain accuracy and reliability and producing data that can be quantified and analyzed numerically. The success of a scientific survey depends on several factors, one of the most important being the researcher’s ability to consider the characteristics and conditions of respondents. In addition, the length of the questionnaire should be reasonable, and its layout clear, so that both respondents and data recorders have a good experience (Borg et al., n.d.).

Survey questions can be either open-ended or structured with predefined answer options. Open-ended questions allow for broader responses but can be more complex to analyze than structured questions. Structured questions may include multiple-choice or scale-based options. It is important that questions are clear, concise, and precise, and do not mislead respondents.

According to Trochim (n.d.), research projects can distinguish three basic types of questions:

- Descriptive: Aim to describe events or existing situations, such as opinion polls measuring the proportion of people supporting different views.
- Relational: Aim to investigate relationships between two or more variables, for example, a survey comparing gender and voting preferences.
- Causal: Aim to determine whether one or more variables cause an effect on another, such as a study examining if a political campaign influenced voter preferences.

Sample selection for the survey will combine a population-level invitation. Employees within the study’s European scope will be invited to participate to maximize coverage and reduce sampling bias. However, to reach possible participants, I will use internal network, which may increase bias (I will not have control over who is invited to take the survey), as the colleagues I reach out to, may decide to share the invitation to the survey with certain kind of employees (eg. their closest colleagues, people who think might be favorable to answer etc.)

The survey will include background questions regarding geographical location, gender and position (whether the respondent is a people manager or not) as well info about caring duties (is the respondent primary carer or not). The survey will be conducted via Microsoft Forms and link to survey will be distributed internally, utilizing networks and email groups and/or intranet through colleagues. It is reasonable to expect a final respondent pool to be between 50-150 respondents.

Permissions to conduct the survey will be sought through formal internal approvals. The survey will at start state informed-consent statement, clarifying purpose, voluntary participation, data use, storage and anonymization procedures. All data collection and handling will comply with GDPR and company data-protection policies. All the data gathered will be deleted once thesis is approved.

3.3 Interview and survey questions

Initial interview questions for the expert interviews are written on the basis of the findings of the literature review consists of 8 main questions. Survey for employees and leaders consisted of 7 questions and were revisited and validated based on the expert interviews. In addition, for both data gatherings background information is collected from respondents. Details of the interview and survey questions are in the appendices 1 and 2.

3.4 Limitations and potential biases

The mixed-methods design adopted offers strengths but also introduces several methodological limitations which has already been discussed previously. The single-company frame restricts external validity. It is notable that findings are context-bound and limits any sector-level conclusions. Also sampling limitations and self-selection may bias results: interviewees and survey respondents who are keen to join this type of research may potentially differ from non-participants in attitudes or experiences, and the relatively small qualitative sample constrains representativeness. In addition, the survey invitation will reach respondents through my internal networks, and I have no control over the final sample (the link to answer the survey is open to all company employees, and I have no control over sharing the link once it’s out). Finally, researcher positionality – I am an insider within the commissioning company—creates both opportunity and risk: prior knowledge can shape question design and interpretation, and participants may moderate responses knowing an internal researcher conducts the study and it increases the risk for myself to be biased when analyzing and outlining the results.

These limitations are managed where possible using straightforward methods. Participants in interview are chosen purposively to include relevant subgroups. Question wording is carefully tested to avoid leading or confusing items. Data is collected anonymously to reduce social-desirability. In addition, conclusions are presented cautiously, focusing on observed patterns and mechanisms rather than strong causal claims.

3.5 Ethical considerations

This research acknowledges ethical standards for human-subjects research which includes voluntary informed consent, a favorable risk–benefit assessment and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty (Rice, 2008). Thus participation is voluntary and based on informed consent: all interviewees and survey respondents will receive an information detailing the study’s purpose, procedures, expected duration, data use, and contact details for questions. Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

Confidentiality and anonymity are secured through anonymized collection in surveys, and interview data will be pseudonymized by removing identifying details in transcripts. Data storage complies with data-protection norms and organizational rules (including GDPR requirements): data and any supporting documents will be stored on secure, access-restricted locations and retained only until the thesis is approved.

Additionally, relevant organizational approvals and ethics clearance was gathered and participants provided with a debrief that summarizing how their contributions will be used. Potential conflicts of interest arising from the researcher’s organizational role are disclosed in the thesis.

4 Analysis

4.1 Analytic approach for semi-structured interviews

The interview data were analyzed using an inductive thematic approach, informed by the literature review. The inductive thematic approach is a qualitative research method where themes are derived directly from the data without relying on pre-existing theories or frameworks. Researcher identifies patterns and insights by immersing themselves in the data and systematically coding it to uncover meaningful themes grounded in participants’ experiences (Hecker & Kalpokas, nd).

In the process, field notes were read several times to achieve familiarization. Initial codes were generated from the data and iteratively grouped into higher-order themes that capture recurring patterns across respondents. Coding combined data-driven (inductive) codes with deductive sensitizing concepts from the literature review (e.g. occupational segregation, role modelling, work–life balance, data use). Cross-case comparison, which enables examination of similarities and differences across multiple cases was used to support identifying patterns, contextual influences and explanatory mechanisms across the five experts.

4.2 Interviewee characteristics

The interview sample comprised of six HR professionals whose gender, length of HR experience and tenure in the company provide a diverse set of perspectives. The sample included both female and male professionals and ranged from mid-career to late career, as well as rather recent joiners (less than 2 years in the company) to long-serving employees to the company (20 years +). This heterogeneity supplies a useful mix of both institutional memory and more recent external viewpoints: longer-tenured participants brought historical insight from within organization, whereas more recently appointed interviewees contributed to comparative external experience.

Participants were drawn purposively to cover multiple organizational levels and contexts: they represent three different business Groups, four different business Divisions, Sales function and a Central Corporate Function. The respondents were located in three different European countries, but their area of responsibility covered a much broader geographical area, as all of the respondents lead multiple locations/teams in multiple countries. This mix of respondents gave access to daily management in both shop-floor and office, division-level dynamics and corporate perspectives, allowing comparison of how D,E&I issues and solutions work in different parts of the organization. As a result, the data reflects both practical, local constraints and broader strategic considerations. The titles of the interviewees will not be disclosed for anonymity.

The interviews were done on Microsoft Teams or face-to-face. The interviewees received pre-information about the interview and the interview questions were shared with the interviewees prior to the meeting. All meetings were scheduled for 45 minutes and the interviews lasted precisely the given time.

While the purposive design supports depth and relevance for the study’s aims, it is limited. Sample is qualitative and not statistically representative of the whole workforce or leadership. However, these experts are the ones driving the diversity, equity and inclusion agenda within the business, so their in-depth understanding is like no other within the organization. In addition, the combination of varied tenure, role perspectives and organizational coverage strengthens the credibility of emergent themes and increases the likelihood that identified mechanisms have practical salience across comparable organizational contexts.

4.3 Thematic analysis

The semi-structured interviews with the six HR experts produced a coherent set of themes that illuminate both structural constraints and managerial practices affecting the attraction and retention of women in technical and shop-floor roles. All the interviewees approached the topic and these constraints with a rather positive and solution-orientated mindset. The findings revealed barriers that are rooted in the labor-market composition and industry more widely, recruitment processes, working-time models, leadership and organizational culture. The interviewees also broadly agreed on a set of concrete, actionable measures the organization could pursue. The following presents the principal themes and where the respondents agreed with each other and where their views differed. It also outlines implications for subsequent quantitative measurement and organizational action.

A dominant theme was the structural and cultural limitations in the talent pipeline for roles open within the company. All respondents described a narrow, gender-skewed candidate pool for engineering and shop-floor positions but also overall ion the industry. One expert emphasized acute shortages in highly specialized fields such as hydraulics, where the applicant pool remains predominantly male. Several interviewees observed that job advertisements and employer branding foreground technical and conventionally masculine aspects of work, thereby reducing appeal to potential female applicants.

“*The industry is so male-dominant. I think our organization is reflective of the industry in that sense. But this means have a smaller pool to attract from when we have an open position.”* (Interviewee a)

“*This question needs to be looked at two different angels from my perspective. The first one is related shopfloor. It’s still very hard to find women for these roles, although the working conditions have significantly improved. Looking back 10-15 years ago, the work was a lot harder from a physical point of view, and this idea is still in the back of many heads. For the office roles, even for the engineering roles, we can see that things are changing, and they already have. Perhaps we have a momentum here.”* (Interviewee b)

Low external visibility among female talent pools was frequently cited as a compounding problem, suggesting that passive recruitment strategies are insufficient where the target population is limited. Several participants therefore recommended proactive outreach to schools and universities and the promotion of visible female role models as essential long-term remedies to broaden the pipeline. Discussions also included the need to affect this phenomenon in the long run: companies in the industry should be proactive already in schools to showcase the industry as a viable and interesting option to diverse population. This approach is strongly linked to the notions of CSR and Corporate Citizenship discussed in theory; such actions can be viewed to enhance also company's financial performance in the long run (due to enhanced decision making and other positive traits linked to diversity, also discussed in literature review), but the effect is diminishing and indirect. Schools and educational institutions with minors often ban direct marketing of the company or its open positions per se (and the pupils are usually long way from making real career decisions), so such activities are more about making wider social impact rather than promoting a specific company.

One interviewee noted difficulties in filling in very specific roles and the employer's low visibility in B2C-oriented channels and at educational institutions was reiterated as a key obstacle. In addition, it was noted that the current uncertain labor market, some women may be more cautious about changing jobs, which has implications for outreach and the timing of recruitment activities.

"*Companies that have a strong brand have it easier to attract talents to begin with. Our company is not that known. We have an issue with that. But then also with regards to the things that we produce more precisely. There are not that many women who study hydraulics… The pool of women we can recruit from is small still. I think we need to be much more focused on finding the talents out there rather than sit and wait that they apply for our vacancies. And that goes beyond gender too, in order to get a diverse workforce.*" (Interviewee c)

"*There is still a certain perception about manufacturing roles: male dominated and physically intense… Our job ads and employer branding is more targeted to a technical audience and show only a few visible female role models. I think this is changing, we are trying to be more inclusive"* (Interviewee d)

Linked to pipeline constraints, respondents identified recruitment design and partner management as meaningful strategies to attract wider pool of candidates and as an area of improvement. Several participants highlighted that recruitment partners should be explicitly briefed on diversity objectives and held accountable for delivering balanced shortlists. They also recommended reviewing role requirements to permit appointment of promising, less-experienced candidates, and two interviewees noted positive organizational experiences where slightly junior hires with potential had subsequently proven successful.

Targeted sourcing, rather than passive vacancy posting, was put forward as a pragmatic approach to increase the diversity of applicant pools and to overcome relying solely on voluntary applications. One interviewee raised that trained recruitment partners and revised recruitment ads are effective in practice; the organization's use of external partners and specific recruitment trainings was described as a tangible enabler of more inclusive shortlists.

"In our business, our managers are keen to see applications from diverse candidates, and we have built our recruitment partnerships with this focus. Our recruitment partners share our view of diverse recruitment, and they are the advocates for it. It is key in getting diverse applications in. But still we struggle with especially certain technical and engineering roles." (Interviewee f)

Work–life interface and flexibility emerged as a recurrent barrier to both attraction and retention. This view is supported by findings in the literature review, where work-life balance and the 'gender care gap' and its effects on women was discussed. Interviewees reported that the company's rather rigid hybrid policy and the scarcity or perceived scarcity of part-time work, job-share or shared-leadership arrangements may deter especially women and hinder career progression. The interviewees recognized that often still today childcare and domestic responsibilities remain unevenly distributed, affecting women. One respondent gave concrete examples on how this could potentially be addressed for example via childcare support services, return-to-work support when returning from parental leave and more flexible leadership arrangements, such as shared leadership positions. Business Resource Groups, that are internal organizations within the company designed to support the attraction, development and retention of specific target groups (such as women) were highlighted as a positive and vital mean to provide support. By contrast, one interviewee did not identify retention as being systematically linked to gender at the organizational level, suggesting heterogeneity across units: while flexibility remains a barrier in some operational contexts, other parts of the organization report robust hiring and promotion of women and do not view retention as gender-specific. This may suggest local variation in the salience of flexibility constraints and the need to tailor interventions by more specific organizational context.

"*We do have challenges retaining women, and the number of women in supervisory positions is falling in my area of responsibility. Those women who have left have received better positions elsewhere. This raises the question have we trusted our potential? Do our long careers affect this? Do we challenge people enough? ... But in general, external* *factors and family situations can also affect this, because, for example, our remote work policy is strict*." (Interviewee a)

"*There are perceived barriers regarding for example working hours, and I say perceived deliberately. Women may experience more family pressure, and our hybrid working arrangements don't always work for them. There is some lack of availability of part time work. Our company has a really strong focus on headcount and productivity and efficiency, which doesn't make it always easy to find solutions or arrangements. But sometimes the working arrangements still can be done, and there is also flexibility on the working hours.*" (Interviewee b)

"In our part of the business, retention is not linked to gender. We don't have a macho culture anymore, and it's a result of deliberate work. Another example of it is our succession pipeline, which has nearly 50/50 split in gender-terms." (Interviewee f)

Apart from one interviewee, retention was consistently characterized as an inclusion and opportunity problem. Apart from this one interviewee, experts described a drop-off in female representation at supervisory and senior levels and attributed some departures to better external opportunities and to perceived deficiencies in development pathways. Unconscious bias in hiring and promotion were cited as still persistent dynamics that inhibit the formation of a critical mass of women in leadership. Several respondents recommended embedding female talent identification and progression within core talent management and succession processes, rather than treating diversity as a separate initiative. Respondents noted Business Resource Groups as vital and effective means to foster inclusion. As presented above, one part of the organization had already achieved this, and this interviewee did not experience a link between gender and retention. Others saw beforementioned integration as a way to normalize consideration of gender in routine talent decisions and reduce the risk that D,E&I becomes an add-on activity without sustainable impact. However, not all candidates brought up quotas a solution, or responded positively to it. The interviewee who reported near parity in succession pipeline splits (approaching a 50/50 distribution) also reported active promotion of women at entry level and mid-career, which may indicate that where HR processes and organizational leadership commitment align, retention and progression outcomes can be much stronger. Two interviewees reported joint leadership as a possible mean to gain more women in leadership positions. The company is currently implementing joint leadership in parts of the organization.

"We are trying to implement something... joint leadership, where women could share a leadership position. I think this initiative could be very effective, and there are cases outside of our business, in other large companies, where this has been successful… But the support from management is missing and we are struggling to implement the first part-time role." (Interviewee e)

Interviewees converged on several interventions viewed as effective. Mentoring opportunities in both senior-to-junior and at peer-level emerged as a consistently endorsed mechanism for building confidence, visibility and sponsorship. These mentoring circles often (but not exclusively) operate within or in close cooperation with the company's Business Resource Groups. In the theoretical part, Washington (2022) categorized mentorship as one of means to develop D,E&I maturity within a company. Structured career dialogues and the deliberate use of "living role models" in outreach activities were described as powerful means to translate abstract commitments into tangible career pathways. Several experts emphasized that manager training and the integration of D,E&I into core leadership development programs are necessary to create durable behavioral change, advocating for development approaches that position inclusion as a central leadership competency.

"… the career dialogue process. I would say that if women are not asked, they are less, based on my own assumption, less willing to bring up such goals and ambitious plans on their own. But then if you are really asked what you want to be and do in the future, and asked how can I support you with that. Then through the discussion supervisor may get a lot out of it, and even the person themselves may start thinking about career opportunities unlike before." (Interviewee a)

Leadership attitudes and behaviors were identified as a key moderating factor. The theoretical finding from literature review supports this, as leadership frameworks and styles were identified affecting D,E&I also in theory. While some parts of the organization demonstrated active sponsorship of women and clear managerial commitment, others remained strongly KPI and productivity driven, which can deprioritize people development. Respondents suggested that visible role modelling from senior leaders and attention to daily management practices. For example avoiding scheduling meetings at late hours adopting inclusive language were identified as ways to align everyday behavior with formal policy. This provides evidence that leadership attitudes vary depending on the part/business within the organization, and that local managerial practice can be a decisive factor in translating strategy into outcomes. Such actions and leadership example are also affecting the organizational culture, from which barriers then may stem from.

Organizational culture vis-à-vis formal policies was indeed identified as a development area in the interviews. As discussed in the literature review, culture is intangible but has a great impact on individuals. Participants acknowledged the presence of institutional supports such as a code of conduct, diversity, equity and inclusion trainings and hybrid policies. However, they noted that an operations-efficiency orientation can limit the practical application of these measures. Opinions differed on the value of quota-type interventions: some experts viewed such measures as effective catalysts for achieving critical mass, while some preferred merit-based process-integrated approaches that guard against perceptions of preferential treatment. One interviewee noted that the respective organization there already is a widespread cultural tendency to treat team members as colleagues rather than focusing on gender distinctions. The dissonance between inclusion initiatives and strategy and the organizational culture which emphasizes the ability to deliver financial performance is interesting from the theoretical foundation of this thesis: what is the role of an organization? Can and should profit-making institutions be made accountable for other performance than financial? Shareholders expect lawful operations and anything else is a business risk. What is the level of focus that should be paid to wellbeing of employees and the wider impact organizations have?

Finally, the interviews highlighted the presence but underutilization of D,E&I data. All respondents reported gender dashboards or basic gender metrics to be well gathered and available. However, several emphasized that these data are often confined to HR and not systematically used by business leaders in operational decision-making. One respondent raised the concern over exit-data and ability to draw conclusions on it with regards to female leavers and also viewed problematical the local HR’s ability to receive qualitative information outside of own security access, as wider access could help identify patterns. Experts advised collecting more detailed and specific data (rather than only high-level aggregates) so the organization could better understand patterns and root causes. Ways to achieve this was gathering more information about promotion rates by gender and understanding candidate pools behind promotion and hire decision to enable diagnostic and corrective action. For example, it might be beneficial to understand how many women the organization reject in the hire or promotion process.

“*When ambitious female leaders leave our company, it would be beneficial to understand more deeply why that is, but I think they don’t always share all their thoughts. I’m not saying* *that we did something necessarily wrong, but at least we would know where we could do better. Understanding the individual level better could give insights. In addition, we don't have data on our candidate pools or understanding of how often women apply for leadership positions. It would be interesting to understand how many times we have decided on non-diverse leader, for example, or how many times we had the opportunity to hire or promote a woman, but we didn't take that decision"* (Interviewee e)

This thematic summary has direct implications for the planned survey instrument and for organizational practice. Survey items should operationalize constructs identified in the interviews—perceived gendering of roles, attractiveness of employer branding to women, accessibility and satisfaction with flexible work arrangements, clarity of career paths and experience of inclusion. Practically, interventions prioritized by interviewees—mentoring, targeted recruitment, manager development and improved data practices—should be evaluated in subsequent phases of the project for feasibility and impact.

4.3.1 Analytical table

The below table shows main emergent themes with supporting respondent evidence. Respondents are identified as a, b, c, d, e and f. The table shows how many interviewees raised each theme. This table was used to draw implications for the survey following the interviewees and to determine preliminary items for organizational action based on the interviews.

Theme	**Short description**	**Supporting evidence (respondent) — paraphrased**	**Frequency (of 6)**	**Ideas for implications for survey items / organisational action**
Structural/cultural candidate pool constraints	Small, gender-skewed talent pool for engineering/shop-floor roles and low external visibility among women	a: hydraulics roles male-skewed; c: weak employer recognition among women; b,d,e: STEM	6/6	Survey: Ask whether employer is visible/attractive to women. Action: targeted outreach to universities, STEM promotion to girls.

		seen as masculine		
Recruitment design & partner management	Role requirements, vacancy wording and agency briefs affect female applicant numbers	a: partner briefing important; c: proactive sourcing needed; b: request female applicants from agencies	6/6	Survey: Measure perceived fairness of job ads. Action: standardize gender-inclusive job descriptions and always brief agencies on diversity targets. Ensure effectiveness of recruitment partners
Work–life & flexibility constraints	Rigid working time models and limited part-time/job-share options deter women	b,d,e: hybrid policy too strict; e: part-time/shared leadership pilots failed due to lack of support f: the issue is perceived not to be as gender-related	5/6	Survey: Capture employee view on work-life balance and support. Action: pilot job-share/part-time leadership
Retention — inclusion, career visibility & development	Women leave due to perceived lack of development, unclear career paths and external opportunities	a,c,e: women leaving to better roles; e: promotions and return-to-work support inconsistent	5/6	Survey: Ask about clarity of career path, access to development. Action: make career pathways visible; review possibilities to increase female focus, promote Business Resource Groups

Unconscious bias	Hiring and promotion favour similarity; low female representation reduces pipeline effect	c: leaders hire people like themselves; fewer role models reduces inspiration; recruits perpetuate same profile	4/6	Survey: Measure exposure to diverse role models. Action: Review possibility of additional bias training, mandate diverse candidate shortlists.
Effective interventions: mentoring, career dialogues, role models	Mentoring circles, senior-women mentoring and active career dialogues viewed as high impact	a,b,c,e: mentoring, PeerW, career dialogue repeatedly endorsed; d: living role models at fairs effective	6/6	Survey: Evaluate interest in mentoring and whether employees are aware of opportunities. Review whether career dialogues are experienced to be effective. Action: scale mentoring programmes, ensure quality of career dialogue conversations
Leadership attitudes & role modelling	Leadership commitment variable; walk-the-talk and small managerial behaviours matter	b,d,e: some GMs actively sponsor women; c: “talk but not walk” — KPI focus undermines people development	6/6	Survey: - Action: include DEI indicators in leadership KPIs and review meeting practices (e.g., late meetings).

Policy vs culture tension	Formal policies exist (Code of Conduct, training) but operational culture (efficiency focus) may counteract inclusion	a,b,c,d: Code of Conduct and training positive, but operations-driven culture can impede application	5/6	Survey: - Action: Possibility to align operational metrics with inclusion goals; embed D,E&I more strongly in business processes.
Data availability and under-use	Gender dashboards exist but managers do not consistently use DEI data for decisions; data quality/access issues	a,b,c,d,e: dashboards present but not driving decisions; e: promotions/exits not always recorded, limited HR access	5/6	Survey:- Action: improve data quality, broaden access, and integrate DEI metrics into operational dashboards.
Alignment gaps between employee expectations and leadership	Mixed picture; some alignment but evidence of unmet expectations around career visibility and flexibility	c,e: women have higher expectations; d: some units aligned but decentralization creates variance	4/6	Survey: - Action: -

Table 1. Analytical table of emergent themes, made by the thesis author.

4.4 Analytic approach for survey

The survey questions were finalized after the expert interviews. The survey data is presented and analyzed in this chapter. The overall aim is to describe response patterns, create reliable composite measures for key constructs (e.g. perceived employer attractiveness, flexibility satisfaction, role-model visibility) based on the interviews, and examine relationships between these constructs and outcome indicators relevant to attraction. Not everything that was captured in the interviews was reasonable to cover in the survey, and the depth of knowledge required to answer and the target audience (any employee in the company) was considered when making final decisions.

The quantitative analysis complements the inductive thematic work by enabling assessment of how widespread identified perceptions are, whether they vary across subgroups, and how the measures and themes identified by the experts are perceived more widely in the organizations. The results from interviews and survey will be also analyzed in comparison.

The data is first prepared and checked. The responses were reviewed for completeness, obvious errors and outliers. Total 78 respondents answered the survey, and all respondents answered all the 7 survey questions with the one exception of one respondent, although this was not required. The exception was that the final question regarding parent/primary carer status was left blank by one respondent. No obvious errors or outliers was detected. Answer distributions and response patterns (for example many neutral or extreme answers) are analyzed and discussed below. The survey also included a possibility to leave an open comment. 7 respondents utilized the opportunity, and the answers are reviewed in the analysis, and these answers are not included in the main numeric analysis.

The answers of the survey are analyzed in Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly agree). The analysis includes mean values for which numeric coding was used: “Agree” combines responses 4 (Agree) + 5 (Strongly agree), and “Disagree” combines responses 1 (Strongly disagree) and 2 (Disagree). As mentioned, the sample size for each item was N = 78.

Descriptive statistics will give snapshots of survey results. Counts and percentages for key demographics (gender, managerial status and carer status) is shared, and means are utilized as part of the analysis. Visual charts are created to illustrate the overall results. Results are reported in aggregated and de-identified form to respect respondent anonymity and the ethical safeguards described in the methodology chapter.

4.5 Gathering responses and respondent characteristics

The survey was administered via Microsoft Forms and was open for responses for one week, from 10 to 17 October 2025. The invitation link, including general information about the research, was distributed through internal networks and with help from the HR professionals who participated in the interview stage. Because the link was openly available to anyone in the company, participation was self-selected; once distributed, there was no direct control over who ultimately accessed and completed the survey.

This distribution approach facilitated quick reach across the organization but also creates sampling challenges that must be acknowledged. My internal network is HR concentrated, and some further shares was also done with HR colleagues, which risks over-representation of HR perspectives. There is also a possibility of bias if recipients of the invite shared the link with colleagues who are positively disposed toward D,E&I, producing favorable response patterns. In addition, the survey was available in a single language, which very likely limited participation from shopfloor resulting in that groups underrepresentation in the sample relative to their share of the workforce.

The survey form contained detailed information on the survey purpose and intended data use. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and it was disclosed respondents were free to withdraw at any time. The survey also detailed that submission constituted consent to use the responses for research. The respondents were also informed about data security and data aggregation, as well as information about the researcher with contact detail included.

Despite the limitations, the survey yielded 78 responses. Respondent status is roughly balanced, with 41 respondents (53%) identifying as non-managers and 37 (47%) as line managers, allowing comparison between managerial and non-managerial perspectives. The sample is geographically diverse but uneven: Finland is the largest national subsample (31 respondents, 40%), followed by the United Kingdom (14; 18%), Sweden (11; 14%), Germany (8; 10%) and Czechia (6; 8%); the remaining responses are distributed across Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, France and those preferring not to state their country. Because some country cells are small, possibilities for country-level analysis are limited.

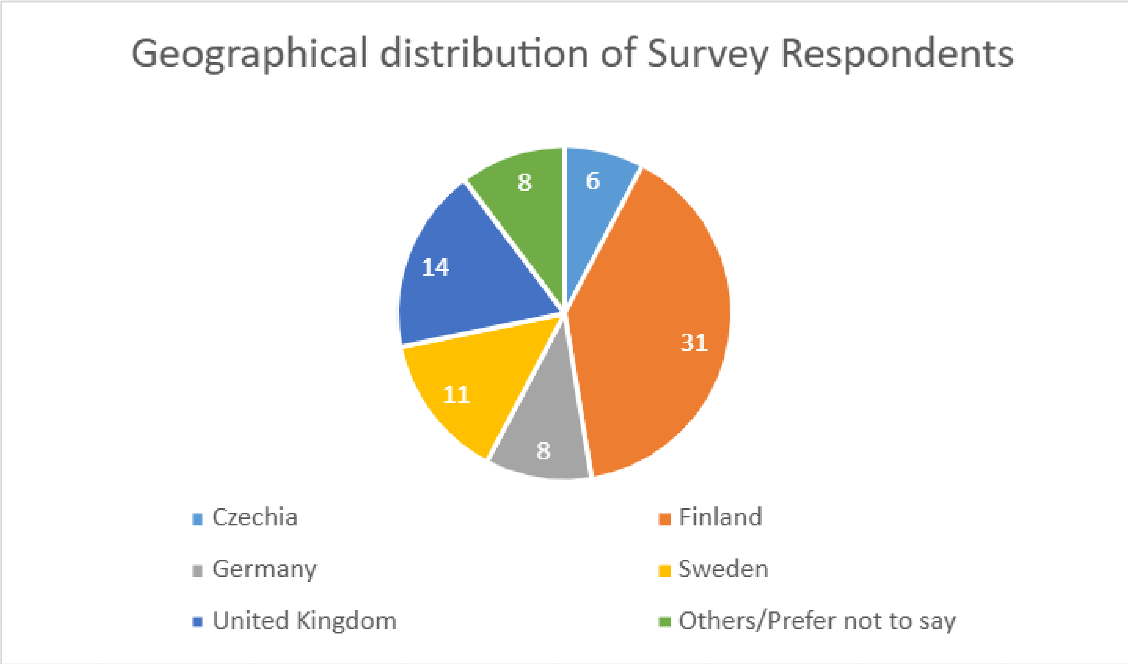

Table 2. Geographical distribution of Survey Respondents, made by the thesis author.

Gender balance of respondents is also approximately equal: 39 respondents (50%) identified as female, 37 (47%) as male, and 2 (3%) preferred not to disclose. A majority of respondents (46; 59%) indicated they are a parent or primary carer, 20 (26%) indicated they are not, and 11 (14%) preferred not to say. For this question, one respondent did not answer. The relatively high proportion of carers is relevant when interpreting responses to items on work–life balance and flexible working.

In sum, the sample offers useful variation across managerial status, gender and caregiving responsibilities to support subgroup comparisons and to test themes identified in the interviews. At the same time, the recruitment and language limitations described earlier mean results should be interpreted with care: geographic comparisons are exploratory with small groups and shop-floor perspective is under captured.

4.6 Analysis of survey results

In general, the survey demonstrates that the respondents experience internal support positively but perceive external visibility weaker. Most questions had majority of favorable (Strongly Agree/Agree) responses, with the weakest favorable respondents being to questions regarding employer visibility and attractiveness and diverse role models. Figure 12 visualizes the results overall.

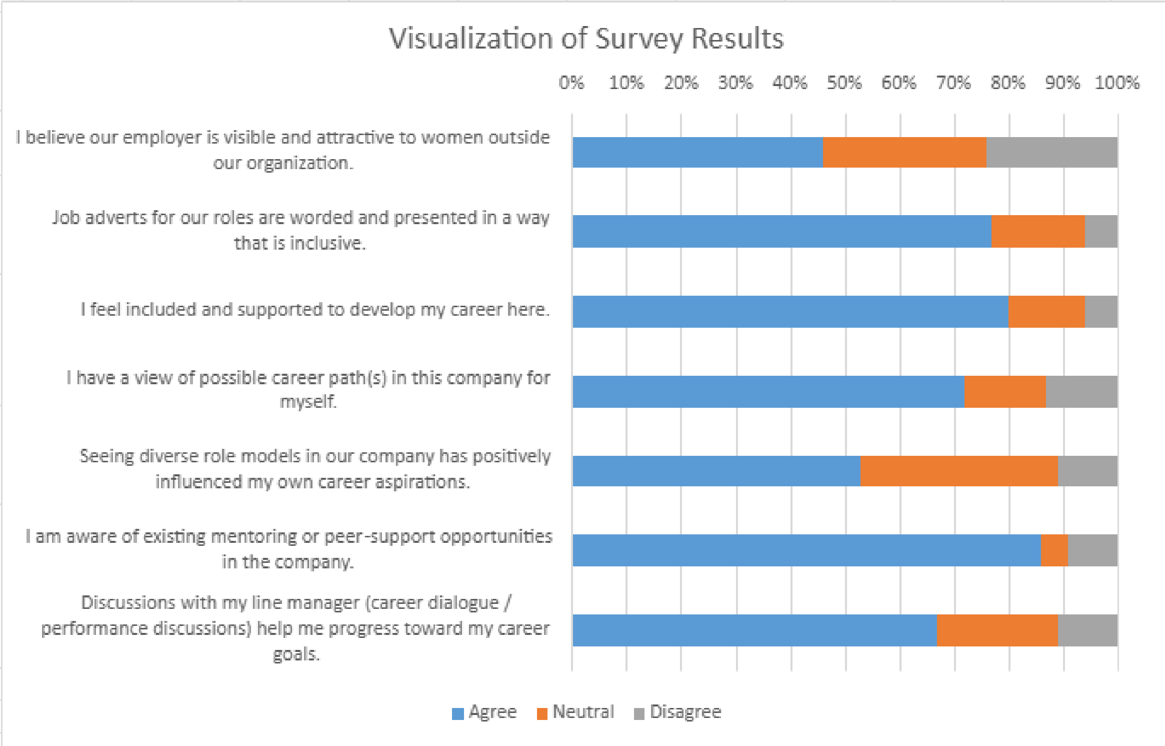

Table 3. Visualization of Survey Results, made by the thesis author.

The respondents agree they are aware of mentoring (86%), feel included and supported (80%), and find job adverts inclusive (77%). Perceptions of career path clarity (72%) and helpfulness of career discussions (67%) are positive but less agreed. In contrast, employer visibility to women outside the organization is low (46% agree), and only about half report role models influencing their aspirations (53%), with also a high neutral response (36%) on the survey question. The clearest strengths emerging from the survey are awareness of mentoring/peer support and a general sense of inclusion and development support. The statement “I am aware of existing mentoring or peer-support opportunities in the company” obtained the highest endorsement, indicating these programs are well visible within the company.

Responses on career clarity and manager dialogues were positive overall but less uniformly strong. The item “I have a view of possible career path(s) in this company for myself” showed substantial agreement (72%) but also a non-trivial share of disagreement (13%). Similarly, “Discussions with my line manager (career dialogue / performance discussions) help me progress toward my career goals” was endorsed by 67% as mentioned, but also attracted a larger neutral share (22%), indicating variation in perceived effectiveness of development conversations across respondents, which may indicate variance in the competence of line managers, as the performance discussions and career dialogues are defined and instructed processes within the company – but of course, the ultimate success of such conversations rely heavily on how the direct manager carries out the conversations.

Two items stand out as relative weaknesses. First, employer external visibility and attractiveness to women scored lowest: only 46% agreed that the employer is visible and attractive to women outside the organization, while nearly 30% were neutral and almost 25% disagreed. This pattern suggests a need to strengthen external employer branding and outreach to female talent pools. Second, the influence of visible role models produced only modest agreement (53%) with a high neutral response rate (36%). The high neutrality on this item suggests inconsistent visibility or impact of role models across the organization.

Question means summarize the central tendencies of questions, ie. a higher mean indicates stronger average agreement with a statement. The survey means in general are displayed in the graph below and will be used to further break down responses by respondent sub categories.

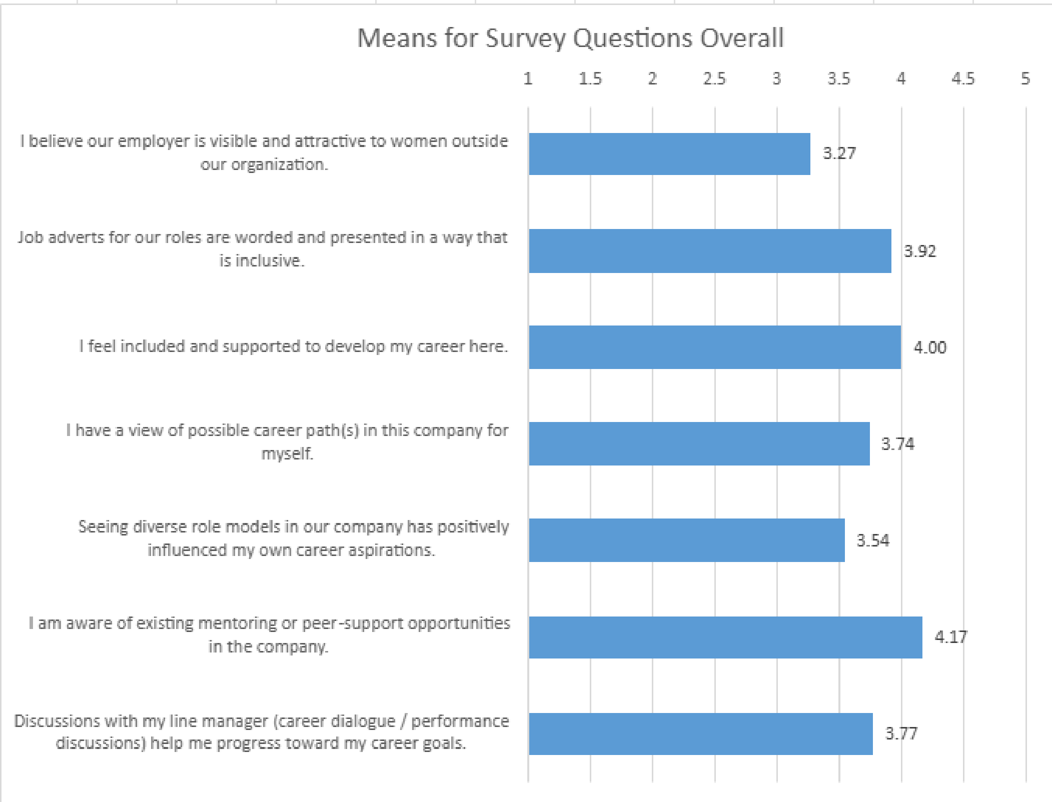

Table 4. Means for Survey Questions, made by the thesis author.

Taken together, the quantitative data indicate that internal programs (mentoring, inclusion initiatives, and inclusive job adverts) are visible and perceived positively by many respondents, supporting internal development capacity. However, gaps remain in external attractiveness to women and in the consistent visibility and influence of female role models—both of which are likely critical to expanding and diversifying the external talent pipeline for technical roles. The mixed signals on career dialogue and career path clarity imply that managerial practice is uneven: some teams appear to benefit from constructive development conversations, while others do not.

4.6.1 Subgroup analysis

The subgroups analyzed are done with gender, managerial status and carer status split with the means summarizing the central tendencies of questions.

4.6.1.1 Gender analysis

The gender-split means indicate a modest but pattern: male respondents rated all items slightly higher than female respondents, with mean differences generally in the 0,2–0,3 point range. Notably, the largest relative gaps appear for perceived visibility of diverse role models (3,6 male vs 3,3 female) and clarity of career paths (3,7 male vs 3,5 female), suggesting that women experience weaker role-model presence and less certainty about progression opportunities. Those who preferred not to disclose gender reported marginally lower scores overall, indicating a small additional group whose perceptions may be less positive or more uncertain.

These differences are numerically modest but if the results represent a broader point of view it may be substantively important, as the results would then indicate women’s experience lags behind men’s and targeted actions may be required. Practically, the results suggest priority attention to increasing visible female professional and leadership role models and to clarifying and communicating career pathways.

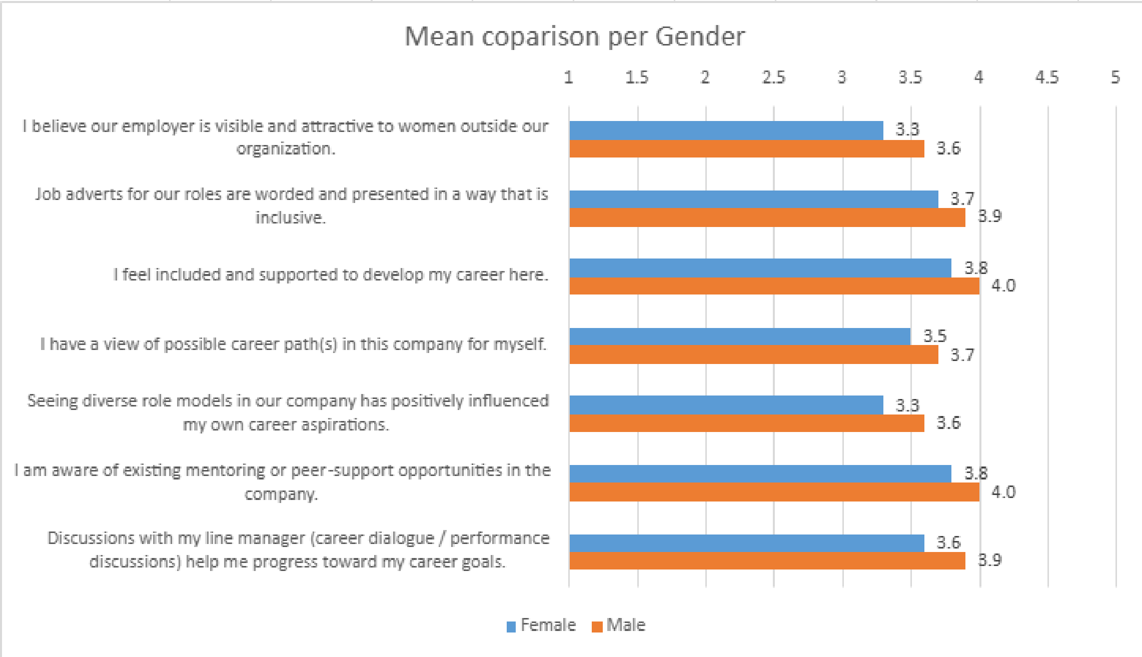

Table 5. Means comparison per gender, made by the thesis author.

4.6.1.2 Manger status analysis

Managerial respondents consistently rate the surveyed items more positively than non-managers, with mean differences of approximately 0,3–0,4 points across items (e.g., employer visibility 3,7 vs 3,4; inclusive job adverts 4,0 vs 3,7). The largest gaps appear for career path visibility (3,9 managers vs 3,5 non-managers) and awareness of mentoring/peer support (4,1 vs 3,7), indicating that managers perceive career structures and support programs as clearer and more accessible than non-managers might. Managers also report greater perceived line-manager support for career goals (4,0 vs 3,6) and somewhat stronger sense of inclusion and support (4,1 vs 3,8).

Managers appear more aware of available programs and pathways than their teams. This could point out that firstly, improving downward communication and transparency about career pathways, mentoring availability and how to access support may be required. Secondly, ensuring that manager-level awareness translates into observable actions at team level (e.g., regular career dialogues, active sponsorship, visible role models).

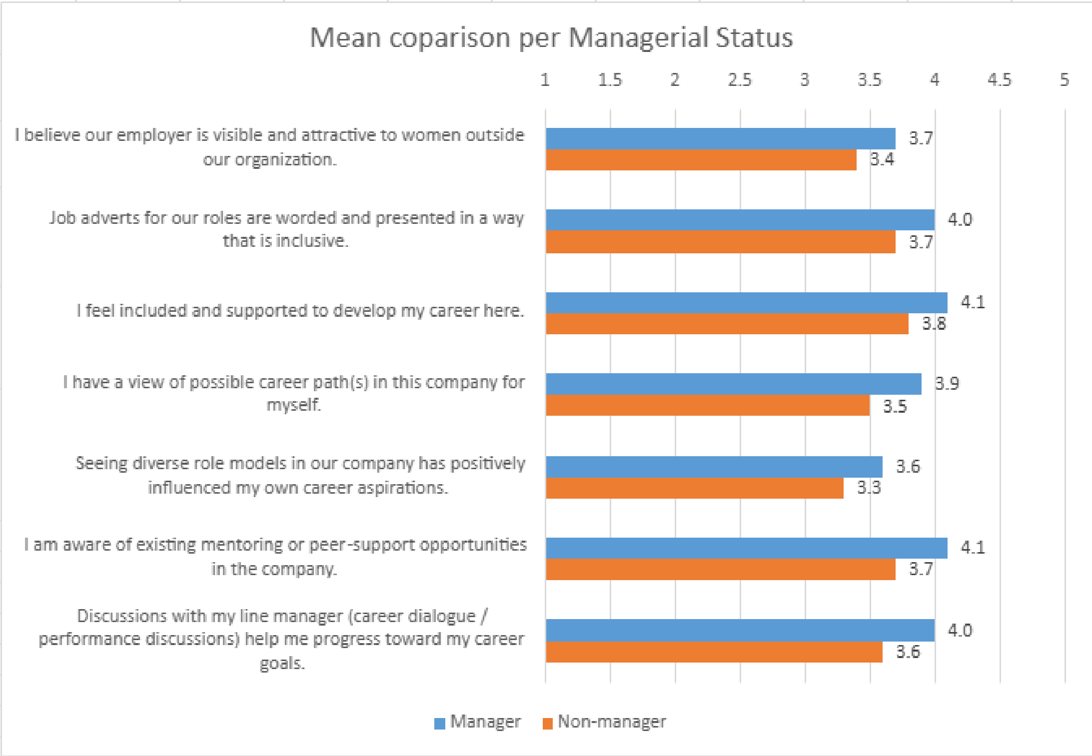

Table 6. Means comparison per managerial status, made by the thesis author.

4.6.1.3 Carer status analysis

The carer and non-carer groups show very similar response patterns, with only marginal mean differences across items (all differences are ≈ 0,1 on the 1–5 scale). Respondents who are parents/primary carers report actually slightly higher average perceptions of inclusion, mentoring awareness, career-path clarity and line-manager support (e.g., Feeling included: carers 4,0 vs non-carers 3,9; Mentoring awareness: 4,0 vs 3,9). Non-carers score very slightly higher also on the influence of role models (Role-model influence: 3,5 vs 3,4).

The near-parity of means suggests that carers do not report substantially worse experiences on the surveyed dimensions; if anything, carers are marginally more positive about internal support and development visibility. As discussed regarding the interpretation already, these patterns should be treated as indicative rather than conclusive.

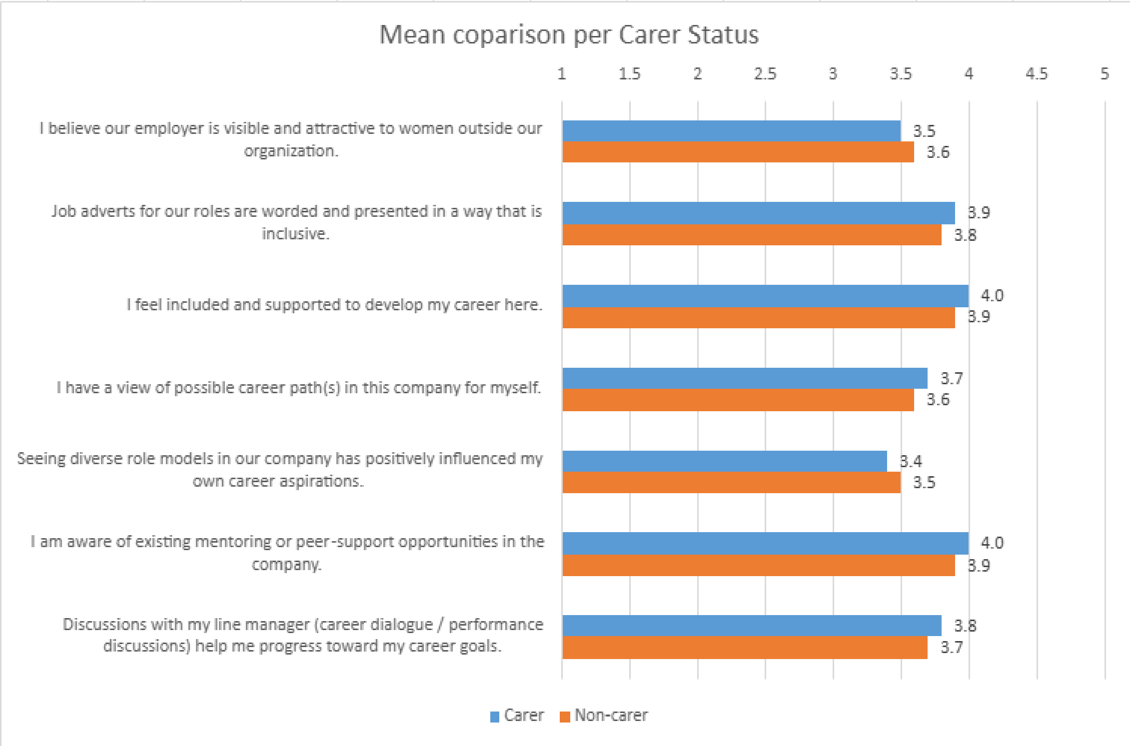

Table 7. Means comparison per carer status, made by the thesis author.

4.7 Integration: Comparing interviews and survey results

The interview and survey data show convergence on several core points. Both methods indicate that internal support structures, most notably mentoring and inclusion initiatives, are visible and perceived positively. Interviewees described mentoring networks and Business Resource Groups as important enablers of confidence and sponsorship, and the survey finding is aligned: awareness of mentoring scored highest of all items (mean ≈ 4,17, and 86% agreeing on the question statement). This alignment strengthens confidence that mentoring represents an organizational asset that can be leveraged for retention and development.

Both methods also show moderately positive perceptions of formal communications and development processes. Interviewees reported that career dialogues and talent processes exist but are applied unevenly across units; the survey likewise shows generally favorable means for career-dialogue effectiveness and career-path clarity (means ≈ 3,7–3,8) but with notable neutral and disagree shares. Together these findings may suggest that while structures are in place, the enactment of day-to-day process vary and therefore produces mixed employee experiences.

Both interviews and the survey point to a weak external branding and limited visibility of role models. Interviewees noted low presence in relevant talent pools, especially for specialized technical fields, and urged more proactive outreach. The survey supports this: 46% agreed the employer is visible and attractive to women (mean ≈ 3,27, which is the lowest mean in the survey), and about 53% agreed that visible role models have influenced their career aspirations (mean ≈ 3,54, which is the second lowest mean in the survey). Together, these findings may indicate a gap in external employer branding and uneven internal role-model visibility.

There are gendered differences in both interview and survey results. Interviews described structural pipeline limits and persistent bias dynamics, and the survey finds men rate items slightly higher than women, with the largest gaps for role-model visibility and career-path clarity. However, there are areas of divergence that warrant attention. An interviewee also reported near parity in succession pipelines and no evident gender-linked retention problems; the survey, however, suggest aggregate gaps in external attractiveness and role-model influence that suggest the company-wide picture is more mixed. This divergence appears to be contextual: interviewees from units with strong local practice report better outcomes, while the survey captures both well-performing and underperforming units. Such divergence emphasizes that successful practices are possible and locally achievable, but inconsistent across the organization.

In sum, the interviews explain mechanisms and variability (how and why) while the survey quantifies prevalence and group differences (how widespread). Together they indicate a coherent agenda: consolidate visible internal strengths (mentoring, inclusion programs), close the manager–employee information and practice gap and increase external visibility and role-model exposure to attract women. These integrated insights form the basis for the practical recommendations developed in the concluding chapter.

4.8 Limitations

The analysis presented in this chapter should be interpreted considering limitations. The interviews used a convenience, self-selected sample reached through internal networks and the sampling of survey respondents represented the same limitations; although the survey was open to all employees, the invite to participate stemmed often from HR professionals. In addition, the single-language form of survey may underrepresent shopfloor employees. In addition, geographic sample size is uneven, and some comparative results are exploratory. Measurement also entails limitations as one-off self-reported Likert questions may be influenced by people wanting to give socially acceptable responses or by a tendency to agree with statements (Grimm, 2010; Hill & Roberts, 2023). Also, Likert responses are ranked categories, so treating them as exact numeric intervals has limitations. The interview sample was purposive and designed for in-depth representativeness. While this method may provide rich insight, its findings cannot be generalized. Finally, the cross-sectional design prevents causal claims. However, the research method helps to mitigate these limits, as findings are compared between the different sources and the evidence combined, which means conclusions are not based on one single source. In addition, the results are presented in a way which avoids overstating what the data proves. Throughout the research, the sample and measurement limits are noted.

4.9 Conclusion

This analysis chapter presented the methods and findings from both qualitative and quantitative research, linking the research findings to theory where applicable. For the interviews, an inductive thematic approach was used: field notes and transcripts were coded, codes were grouped into higher-order themes, and identification of recurring patterns and contextual variations was conducted. Thematic findings included structural pipeline constraints for technical roles, emphasized the importance of recruitment methods and recruitment partner management, work–life and flexibility, role of mentoring and role models and utilization of D,E&I data.

Survey analysis supplemented and quantified these themes. Data preparation and quality checks preceded descriptive statistics, mean comparisons and subgroup analyses. Item means and frequency distributions showed awareness of mentoring and general feelings of inclusion, moderately positive views of job advert inclusivity and career dialogues, and weaker scores on external employer visibility and role-model influence. Subgroup comparisons by gender, managerial status and carer status revealed modest but consistent differences: men and managers tended to report more positive perceptions than women and non-managers, while carers and non-carers exhibited similar mean patterns.

The analytic integration compared interview themes with survey patterns. This mixed-methods comparison established where qualitative mechanisms align with quantitative data. Collectively, the analysis documents both the presence of organizational strengths (visible mentoring and inclusion programs) and similarity on gaps (external visibility, lack of role models, and possible manager–team implementation gaps). These results are situated within the study's sampling and measurement constraints.

5 Discussion, Contributions to theory and practice, Practical recommendations, Limitations and future research directions and Final Conclusions

This final chapter discusses the findings from the qualitative interviews and quantitative survey, further situates them within relevant theoretical frameworks, and outlines implications for organizational practice. It also discusses the study's limitations and proposes directions for future research and presents the final conclusions.

5.1 Discussion

The context and aim of this study is to explore attraction and retention of women within a multinational technology company. This research situates in an industry and company, which presents gender-segregation: in the latest sustainability report the commissioning company reported 31% of it's global workforce women, whereas the Technology Industry in Finland reported the industry to have 23% of females in the industry workforce in 2022 (Teknologiateollisuus, 2022). One of the central findings indeed was the persistence of gender-skewed recruitment, particularly in specific technical and manufacturing roles. Interviewees described a narrow pool of female candidates, shaped by industry norms and which may be reinforced by the employer brand that still may emphasize technical and conventionally masculine aspects of work, despite this being a development topic and focus area within the company. This was compounded by perceived low external visibility of the company among females, suggesting that passive recruitment strategies are insufficient in contexts where the target population is limited. Several experts recommended proactive outreach to schools and universities and the promotion of visible female role models as essential long-term remedies, which would not result in immediate results in recruitment but would be an impact on the whole industry in the longer term. This kind of influencing is already part of the CSR initiatives of the company, however it perceived as an area of development by the experts.

Recruitment practices and recruitment partner management emerged as a development area. Participants highlighted the importance of briefing recruitment partners on diversity objectives and holding them accountable for delivering balanced shortlists. They also advocated for reviewing role requirements to permit the appointment of promising, less-experienced candidates with the hiring managers. Targeted sourcing, rather than passive vacancy posting, was viewed as a pragmatic approach to increase the diversity of applicant pools.

Work–life balance was identified as possible barrier in the academic research, and the results also identified this as a possible barrier to both attraction and retention. The company's hybrid policy and the limited or perceived limited availability of part-time, job-share, or shared-leadership arrangements were perceived to disproportionately affect women, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities. While some parts of the organization reported robust hiring and promotion of women and did not view retention as gender-specific, others described a drop-off in female representation at supervisory and senior levels. This variation suggests that flexibility constraints and inclusion challenges are not uniformly distributed across the organization and that interventions may need to be tailored to local contexts.

Retention was characterized as an inclusion and opportunity problem. Experts attributed some female departures to better external opportunities and to perceived deficiencies in development pathways. Unconscious bias in hiring and promotion was cited as a dynamic that may still inhibit the formation of a critical mass of women in leadership. Several respondents recommended embedding female talent identification and progression within core talent management and succession processes, rather than treating diversity as a separate initiative. However, there were some mixed views on this, and also one part of the organization had already achieved near parity in succession pipeline splits and they also reported high leadership buy-in of the topic, which may indicate that where HR processes and leadership commitment align, retention and progression outcomes improve.

Mentoring opportunities (through Business Resource Groups or other means), structured career dialogues, and the deliberate use of living role models in outreach activities were described as effective mechanisms for building confidence, visibility, and sponsorship. These are management and leadership practices as well as drivers of organizational culture, which was also identified as contributors of diversity, equity and inclusion in the academic research. Experts emphasized that manager training and the integration of D,E&I into core leadership development programs are necessary to create durable behavioral change. Leadership attitudes and behaviors were identified as key moderating factors. While some parts of the organization demonstrated active sponsorship of women and clear managerial commitment, others remained strongly KPI and productivity driven, which was sometimes seen contradictory to people development. Respondents suggested that visible role modelling from senior leaders and attention to daily management practices, such as avoiding late-hour meetings and adopting inclusive language, are essential for aligning everyday behavior with formal policy.

Organizational culture, in relation to formal policies, was identified as a development area. Although institutional supports such as a code of conduct, diversity trainings, and hybrid policies were acknowledged, participants noted that an operations-efficiency orientation can limit their practical application. This discussion is particularly interesting from the starting point of this thesis; what is the role of an organization in society? Some experts viewed such measures as effective catalysts for achieving critical mass, while others preferred merit-based, process-integrated approaches that guard against perceptions of preferential treatment.

The interviews also highlighted the presence but underutilization of D,E&I data. While gender dashboards and basic metrics were well gathered and available, several participants emphasized that these data are often confined to HR and not systematically used by business leaders in operational decision-making. Experts also advised on possibility of collecting more detailed and specific data, such as promotion rates by gender and candidate pool composition, to enable diagnostic and corrective action.

The survey results broadly confirmed the interview themes. Respondents reported high awareness of mentoring and peer-support opportunities and a general sense of inclusion and development support. Perceptions of career path clarity and the helpfulness of career dialogues were positive but less uniformly strong. In contrast, employer visibility to women outside the organization and the influence of visible role models were perceived as weaker. The high neutrality on the role-model item suggests inconsistent visibility or impact across the organization.

5.2 Contributions to theory and practice

These findings contribute to existing literature on occupational segregation and gendered career trajectories by linking qualitative and quantitative insights to organizational mechanisms. The findings support theoretical claims about the role of leadership in shaping inclusion outcomes and underscore the importance of integrating D,E&I into core business processes. The study also adds empirical depth to discussions on corporate social responsibility, particularly regarding outreach to educational institutions as a means of long-term talent development.

Based on the findings, possible practical implications may be:

- Sustain and increase focus on school and University cooperation to promote STEM to more diverse groups.
- Revising employer branding to be even more inclusive. As an HR myself, I am aware that for example the job advertisement pictures represent diverse colleagues, and the language from title and corporation point of view is inclusive. However, as this was clearly identified as development area, it may suggest that the broader employer brand is still less functional and there may be inconsistencies.
- Strengthening recruitment practices and partnerships to be more inclusive. Recruitment practices could guide hiring managers more in detail about diverse recruitment, and a centralized diversity management expectation to recruitment partners could ensure more consistent operations.
- Clarifying flexible work options. The company has a Corporate hybrid working model, but the findings suggest other options (such as part-time work opportunities, flexible working hours) could be utilized better.
- Embedding inclusion more deeply in leadership development and utilizing the existing processes better in diversity management. Building leaders’ skills, priorities and accountability for inclusive behavior and making inclusion part of everyday decision-making are ways to put diversity, equity and inclusion in action. Using the established processes (performance discussions, career dialogues, talent reviews) can enable measurement and continuous improvement. Actively showcasing live role models from minority groups when possible.
- Foster and further develop mentoring opportunities and Business Resource Groups.
- Development of available D,E&I data. The findings from expert interviews suggest that there is already a lot of data available regarding diversity, equity and inclusion. However, in some cases a deeper understanding of individual experiences could be beneficial. In addition, there is also data that is not yet available and could shed light on for example hiring and promoting practices. For example, what is the number of women in applicants in recruitments? Or how often women are considered as part of a promotion process?

These suggestions for implications are well aligned with the commissioning company's Inclusion and Engagement Strategy presented in the Organizational Context. In addition, they respond to the original objectives set for this thesis.

5.3 Limitations

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations which have already been discussed in respective chapters in detail. The main limitations relate to the qualitative sample being not statistically representative and reflecting the perspectives of HR professionals. The survey sample may be biased due to sampling method. Language limitation has likely reduced participation from shop-floor employees, underrepresenting their views.

5.4 Future research

Future research should address the limitations of this study by conducting targeted surveys or focus groups with shop-floor employees to capture missing perspectives. Longitudinal data on promotion and retention should be explored to assess the impact of interventions over time. Additionally, intersectional analyses considering for example ethnicity, age, and disability would be valuable in order to deepen understanding of diversity dynamics within the organization.

5.5 Final conclusion

As a final conclusion, this study provides a mixed-method exploration of gendered dynamics in attraction and retention of women within a multinational technology company. By integrating qualitative insights from HR experts with survey data from a broader employee base, it identifies both constraints and actionable levers for change. The findings underscore the importance of inclusive recruitment, work arrangements and leadership commitment. While challenges remain, the organization is well-positioned to advance its D,E&I agenda through targeted, evidence-based interventions that reflect both strategic priorities and lived realities.

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Appendix 1. Questions for the expert interviews (semi-structured interviews)

Demographic / profiling items gathered with the responses (background questions): Years in HR, Years at the Commissioning Company, Gender.

1. What challenges, if any, do you observe in attracting women to our organization? Could you elaborate on the key factors contributing to these challenges?

2. Based on your experience, what are the primary barriers to retaining women within our organization?

3. Which strategies or initiatives have you found to be most effective in promoting gender diversity and inclusion in our organization?

4. How do you perceive leadership attitudes and behaviors as influencing women's career progression in our organization?

5. Are there specific organizational policies or cultural elements that you believe either support or hinder the inclusion of women in our organization?

6. How do you perceive the current Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (D,E&I) data available within our organization? How effective do you think our current methods of utilizing this data is?

7. How would you describe the alignment between female employees' expectations around inclusion and the perceptions or actions of leadership? Are there areas where you see differences or similarities?

8. What additional data, policies, or insights would you find valuable to better understand women's experiences and engagement with our organization's work environment?

Appendix 2. Refined survey questions after expert interviews

Demographic / profiling items gathered with the responses (background questions): People Manager (Yes/No - Required), Country (Optional), Gender (Female / Male / Non-binary / Prefer not to say - Required), Tenure (Years with company - Optional), Parent / primary carer status (Yes / No / Prefer not to say - Optional)

1. Employer visibility and attractiveness to women.
   "*I believe our employer is visible and attractive to women*."
2. Employer visibility and attractiveness to women.
   "Job adverts for our roles are worded and presented in a way that is inclusive."
3. Work–life balance and organizational support.
   "*I feel included and supported to develop my career here*."
4. Clarity of career path and access to development.
   "*I have a view of possible career path(s) in this company for myself*."
5. Exposure to diverse role models.
   "*Seeing diverse role models in our company has positively influenced my own career aspirations*."
6. Mentoring: interest and awareness.
   "*I am aware of existing mentoring or peer-support opportunities in the company*."
7. Career dialogues effectiveness.
   "Discussions with my line manager (such as career dialogue, PA discussions) help me progress toward my career goals."
8. Open comment