The role of management development for equal opportunities in the career advancement of men and women

The case of the EGGER Group

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze management development initiatives aiming at the creation of equal opportunities in the career advancement of men and women. Historically, the role-expectations towards women contradict the role-expectations towards leaders, which influences organizational structures and patterns until today, leading to subtle discriminatory practices against women. The gender biases and stereotypes hence also affect the content and design of management development programs, which keeps a favoritism of masculine values and traits in place. Existing literature recommends trainings, mentoring relationships and networking opportunities as tools to support equal opportunities. The multiple-case study in this thesis provides examples for the practical realization of such measures. The main case of the EGGER group, which aims to support gender equality within the organization, was analyzed with qualitative expert interviews. The results show that there is still a lack of awareness about the reasons for gender inequality. The evolutionary process for equal opportunities starts with the sensitizing of the top management to understand how organizations can improve the situation. Having reached this goal, management development can be used to empower women in their leadership identity. Therefore, it is key to restructure existing offers by seeing the woman. This means, considering women in the selection process and addressing their developmental needs by adjusting the design and content of such programs. Possible ways are women-only programs to give female employees a safe space for exchange, mentoring relationships to work on individual developmental needs as well as networking opportunities to get social support along with instrumental resources for their career advancement.

Keywords: gender (in)equality, gender diversity, equal opportunities, management development
Preface

One of my interview partners said to me that it would be wonderful if some years from now the future generation would not understand the problem statement of this thesis because equality would already be the norm. Therefore, this master thesis should be one puzzle piece of this goal, hoping that one day my children can ask me why I spent six months of my life working on something so unbelievably obvious.


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1 Introduction

Nowadays, there is a nearly equal representation of women and men in the Austrian working population, with a proportion of 47.1% working females in 2017 (Statistik Austria, 2017b). When looking at the higher ranks of public and private organizations, however, the number drastically decreases, leading to 7.2% women on management- and even less on CEO-level with only 3.6% (Spitzer and Wieser, 2017). This development is known by the metaphor of a *leaky pipeline* as the number of women falls with a rising hierarchy level. The phenomenon cannot be explained by a lack of qualified women as more than half (55.6% in the study-year of 2015/16) of all graduates from Austrian public universities are female (Statistik Austria, 2017a). Despite the equal representation of men and women in the overall workforce, the distribution differs depending on the branch. There is a high degree of occupational sex-segregation, which means that jobs are distributed based on sex (Martin, 2012). This leads to various male-dominated industries, meaning that there are more men in powerful positions and there is a more masculine organizational culture in place. The greatest inequality can be found in the construction business (only 12.6% female employees) (Wirtschaftskammer Österreich, 2018). Naturally, here the probability of a woman reaching a top management position is even lower. It might seem like this is not an issue in female-dominated branches. But even though women are preferred over men in these domains (e.g. nursing and social work), men are still more likely to advance to senior positions and also ascend faster than their female colleagues (Eagly and Sczesny, 2009).

An interest in improving the situation of inequality in higher positions is currently observable in Austria, as the government decided to introduce a gender quota starting January 2018. According to the new law, all supervisory boards of stock-listed companies, as well as companies with more than 1,000 employees, must have a proportion of 30% female board members (Seebacher and Wieser, 2018). The law is criticized for being easy to get around, as currently only approximately 80 companies are affected due to several exception rules (Birkner and Leitner, 2017). Based on evidence from other European countries, where the gender quota has been in place for a longer period of time, such quotas are effective regarding the increase in overall numbers of women in supervisory boards. However, some argue that this positive development may only be short-lived and there are still disadvantages in place in the long run. It is criticized that the positive impact is restricted to the board level and there is little improvement on other management levels (Saab, 2014). Furthermore, as Cockburn (1989) stated, “quotas give disadvantaged groups a boost up the ladder while leaving the structure of
that ladder and the disadvantage it entails just as before” (p. 217). Even if there are positive changes, the underlying causes of inequality are kept in place, hindering a long-term improvement. Furthermore, as only some organizations are affected by the new law, even the named benefits do not go far enough. Hence, quotas can be a step towards equality but are not the solution. Other initiatives are necessary.

1.1 Problem statement
As seen in the statistics of Austrian companies, there is a clearly visible gender inequality in management positions. Research argues that there are certain obstacles hindering women from advancing. On the one hand, cultural socialization produces gender stereotypes (Ely et al., 2011; Ibarra and Petriglieri, 2016). An example is the dominant understanding of leadership as a masculine domain, which leads to the perception that masculine traits are needed to be a good leader. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), this can be explained by the predomination of men in leadership roles for such a long period of time. It has resulted in the common belief that leadership itself is a masculine domain and women do not match the profile. On the other hand, organizational structures are held responsible for keeping women away from top positions. This phenomenon is described in the literature with the metaphor of a glass ceiling. “The word ceiling implies that women encounter an upper limit on how high they can climb on the organizational ladder, whereas glass refers to the relative subtlety and transparency of this barrier, which is not necessarily apparent to the observer” (Barreto et al., 2009, p. 5). Being aware of this obstacle, an organization needs to engage in breaking those barriers for their employees and create career opportunities for everyone. Some years ago, Martin (2012) and Benschop and Verloo (2012) independently addressed an issue which persists until today: Organizational researchers put a clear focus on documenting inequality and the reason the discrimination remains, while approaches to enhance gender equality are left out of the scope, inhibiting a development towards a more equal future.

1.2 Relevance and contribution
According to an article by Abouzahr et al. (2018) from Boston Consulting Group, advancement is one of five key metrics that organizations need to address in order to enhance gender diversity next to pay, recruitment, retention, and representation. Management development is a popular tool to support employees in their advancement and is therefore discussed as a possible approach to equal opportunities in leadership by several authors (Ely et al., 2011; Hopkins et al., 2008; O’Neil et al., 2015; Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002a). A particular issue in the existing
research is the lack of information as to which specific approaches can be implemented to create change (Benschop and Verloo, 2012). Therefore, organizations need to be analyzed regarding preconditions and possibilities of realizing necessary measures. This research gap shows a need for further investigation, which this master thesis aims to provide by exploring the following research questions:

*How can management development impact equal opportunities for the career advancement of men and women?*

### 1.3 Working terms

Some of the terminologies are used and defined in diverse ways in the literature. This section will briefly clarify such terms and define in which understanding they will be used in this thesis.

#### 1.3.1 Management Development

Management and leadership are often used interchangeably in the literature. Gold *et al.* (2010) provide a definition to distinguish the two terms. While management is more connected to administrative tasks, organization, and planning, a leader provides visions and motivates people. This does not mean that these terms need to be seen separately from each other and are necessarily exerted by two different people in an organization. Rather, they are different aspects of the role of one person. Therefore, leadership development and management development are connected as well. In this thesis, the term management development is used to address both the organizational and the motivational aspect of a manager’s role. Gold *et al.* distinguish between two kinds of management development: a formal one with a planned process that is mostly offered by the organization like trainings or mentoring, and a rather informal one that includes active engagement and reflection of managers by recognizing opportunities in their daily activities to learn and grow on their own. This includes engagement in networking opportunities as well as working on challenging tasks. Both kinds will be considered in this thesis.

#### 1.3.2 Equal opportunities

The thesis defines equal opportunities as the goal of initiatives that address existing gender inequalities in the workplace. Taking distance from the idea of gender quotas, the aim is not an equality in total numbers of women and men in leadership positions, but an equality in the ability to reach such positions. The final decision if somebody takes on a new role depends on several factors. Not all of them are influenceable by an organization. As this thesis looks at
ways organizations can foster equality, the aim of the discussed approaches will be to enable
women just as men to advance their careers inside the organization. According to Kanter (1977),
a key factor of opportunity is the connection of the present position to a future position. It
includes the access to challenging tasks to develop new skills and improve existing ones in
preparation to further advancement. “A create equal opportunity strategy acknowledges the
existence of structural barriers, sees organization structures as the key problem and wants to
change the sloped playing-field into a level playing-field” (Benschop and Verloo, 2012).

1.4 Structure of the thesis
To gain a deeper understanding of the underlying causes of inequality, the thesis paper starts
with a literature review regarding cultural and organizational obstacles for women’s career
advancement. Following that, I will put management development into focus. Here, specific
tools will be analyzed regarding their possible effects towards equal opportunities in leadership.
After the theoretical insight, a case study will create a better understanding of the real situation
in organizations. Three best practice cases will be highlighted to examine what approaches are
realized in the business world. Afterwards, I will conduct a qualitative research with interviews
at the family-owned company Fritz Egger GmbH & Co. OG, an organization that wants to start
supporting equal opportunities for men and women in leadership. In order to support this, their
needs and preconditions will be analyzed, and possible tools evaluated.
2 Causes of gender inequality in organizations

There are several explanations for the unequal representation of women and men on senior management levels. In the following chapter, I will first give an insight into the issues on a cultural level which further influences the organizational level. Cultural beliefs about gender are carried into organizations, affecting the structure, practices, and culture, resulting in an uneven playing field (Kolb et al., 2003) for men and women in all areas of an organization. At the end of this chapter, the problems in management development as a mean for supporting career advancement will be addressed.

2.1 The influence of culture and socialization

Every culture holds beliefs about gender. A mutual understanding of the characteristics of men and women exists, leading to clear expectations towards their behavior. These assumptions are a deeply integrated part of a culture and are passed on over generations. This phenomenon and the gender differentiation between men and women is explained by West and Zimmermann (1987) with the theory of social constructionism of gender. The theory highlights the distinction between sex and gender. Sex is defined through biological criteria for classifying a person as male or female at birth. The assignment to one sex is therefore based on sex criteria like genitalia or chromosomal typing. Despite biological characteristics, the categorization of a person in society depends on socially expected displays (looks and behavior) that show someone’s belonging to one of the two categories. This leads to gender, as ”the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities [that are] appropriate for one’s sex category” (ibid., p. 127). This distinction is based on a variety of factors that proclaim the belonging to one gender, including “language, attitudes, patterns of behavior, symbolism, dress, patterns of belief, value systems, stories, rites, rituals, ceremonies, and physical artefacts” (Helms Mills and Mills, 2000, p. 56). The social construction of gender is the effect of cultural representations of this distinction, e.g. in films, literature, arts as well as the socialization in family and social institutions. The regular confrontation with these gender images produces subjectivities, which Bruni and Gherardi (2002) describe with the neologism

1 Historically the sex classification in most countries is bound to the binary classification of male and female. The classification is currently in a process of change as Austria enacted a law to introduce the third sex “inter/diverse” in June 2018 for persons who cannot be assigned to the male or female sex by their sex criteria (Der Standard, 2018).
“en-gendering”. The ongoing judgment whether behaviors are gender-appropriate or not is defined by West and Zimmermann (1987) as “doing gender”, which is a process of reinforcing gender stereotypes by judging people based on them. According to the theory of social constructionism, gender is a cultural artifact that is enacted by social practices over generations, creating an effect on reality by shaping the image how women and men should be (Bruni and Gherardi, 2002). Due to this reason, the understanding of male and female is not universal but bound to the individual historical culture (Gherardi, 1995). For an illustration: as sex and gender can be differentiated and are not the same category, a detachment of the biological sex from the constructed gender is possible. For example, a biological man can be – or rather can see himself or can be seen by others – as child-oriented and nurturing, while a biological woman may like hunting and have a competitive character (Alvesson and Billing, 2002). These are quite pithy examples, but they should show that the expected gender characteristics are not bound to the biological sex and therefore are not naturally given. The dividing line between the true sex characteristics and constructed gender images is unclear as centuries of socialization have hardened gender images in our cultures. Learned beliefs about gender influence life within a culture, patterns of interaction and structures within a society. This process results in a so-called second-generation gender bias (Ibarra and Petriglieri, 2016). In contrast to the first-generation gender bias, which is defined as the explicit discrimination of women – this is nowadays illegal in most countries – second-generation bias is rather subtle. It is mostly unintentional and not as explicit as gender discrimination was in the past (Rifkin, 2015). Therefore, the phenomenon is often addressed as unconscious bias as people themselves are not aware of their personal distortion due to their socialization. It “is the result of cognitive reasoning that was embedded in our brain long before we even realized it. It is based on our own background, culture, and personal experiences and often originates at a very early age” (Cuellar, 2017, p. 333). Produced over years, through societal norms as well as policies, practices, and structures, the bias results in the disadvantage of women (O’Neil et al., 2015). Although no official or explicit barriers are in place, these subtle and learned behaviors can have an equally powerful and detrimental effect on the career progress of women (Clarke, 2011), hindering them from creating a leadership identity, i.e. seeing themselves and being seen as leaders (Ibarra et al., 2013).

A powerful result of the second-generation gender bias are stereotypes about men and women, their characteristics, and abilities. When it comes to leadership, traditional stereotypes are predominantly masculine, as they stress masculine traits as necessary for being a good leader. This belief is rooted in the historical development, where leadership roles have mostly been
occupied by men, resulting in the cultural association of leaders with men (Eagly and Sczesny, 2009). These stereotypes lead to a prescriptive belief, meaning they create expectations about how leaders should be in their character and behavior. As the stereotypes are usually inconsistent with perceived female characteristics, these beliefs are problematic for women (ibid.). Hence, not only do social stereotypes shape social perceptions, but also the women's concept of career choice. This already happens when girls see what occupations are taken by men and women. This distinction shapes the way they see what they can or cannot do and what they can or cannot become. Furthermore, even if women themselves do not believe in stereotypes their knowledge of the possible stereotyped judgment by others – the so-called stereotype threat – holds them back (Zhang et al., 2009).

This situation puts women in a difficult position, as society does not naturally see them in a leadership role. The premise is that they need to adopt masculine skills and styles if they want to succeed in the business world (Ibarra et al., 2013). However, this leads to a further challenge when women need to balance their gender-expectated behaviors with the role-expectated behaviors of a leader, as these two are conflicting. If they act according to the expected behavior of their societal gender role, women are perceived as too soft for a leadership position. On the other hand, if they act according to the needs of the organizational leadership role they are criticized for being too hard and aggressive for a woman (O’Neil et al., 2015). This puts women in a double bind position (Eagly and Carli, 2007), which makes it impossible for them to live up to the expected norms of their gender and leadership role at the same time. This contradiction is verified by studies that found that women who are evaluated as competent managers often are rated low on likeability, while these two characteristics go hand-in-hand for men in similar positions (Ibarra et al., 2013).

Rincón et al. (2017) sum it up by stating that “[...] gender stereotypes can halt or hinder to a great extent the career development of women in senior management, given that when any ambiguity exists about their competence, they are likely to be judged as incompetent and when their competence is beyond reproach, they run the risk of being penalized socially” (p. 337).

The described aspects lead to the fact that leadership itself is defined as a masculine domain, resulting in a disadvantage for women independent of objective qualifications (Eagly and Carli, 2007). This assumption does not only affect the opinion of the society but also of the individual woman. Worries about a possible failure to fulfill the role-expectations exist on both sides: on the one hand, superiors, colleagues, and clients struggle with the woman’s credibility, on the
other hand, the woman herself questions her potential to excel in a higher position (Ibarra and Petriglieri, 2016). Hence, gender stereotypes and the resulting double bind have an impact on women’s self-efficacy. Confronted with the described cultural obstacles, women tend to anticipate a more difficult path to the top compared to their male colleagues and therefore are less likely to think that they can reach it (Yee et al., 2016). As self-confidence is a key characteristic of a leader and crucial for career advancement the lack of it has a lasting impact on a woman’s leadership potential. A widely shared perception is that women per se are less self-confident and therefore do not fit the profile of a leader. This ignores the contextual factor that culture and socialization created this image (O’Neil et al., 2015).

In sum, the perception of men and women and their natural characteristics are the result of one’s culture and socialization. Therefore, the judgment on men and women is often distorted by these gender stereotypes that form one’s expectations towards the behavior of people. This influences the view of society and has a lasting impact on the career advancement of the individual woman, as gender stereotypes and the double bind problem put her in a disadvantaged position.

2.2 Gendered organizations

Employees and employers carry their internalized gender images and stereotypes into their workplace. Gender classification is part of our society and organizations. On the one hand, it is a precondition for human thinking and acting. On the other hand, discourses and actions (re)produce gender images (Krell et al., 2004). This means they are formed through contribution at work and other contexts (Alvesson and Billing, 2002). Every organization contains an individual social structure – practices and patterns of behavior – and culture – shared beliefs, norms, artifacts, values – making it kind of a miniature society (Eagly and Carli, 2007). According to Gherardi (1995) “organizational cultures – as holistic phenomena – are strongly ‘gendered’. Organizations themselves, therefore, are gendered, and organizational processes are ways of organizing gender relations” (p. 12). Therefore, it is inevitable to investigate organizational practices for understanding gender discrimination.

Historically, organizations have been created largely for men as women were hardly represented in the workforce. Therefore, work practices, structures, culture, and norms are more likely to reflect masculine values and needs. “As a result, everything we come to regard as normal and commonplace at work tends to privilege traits that are socially and culturally ascribed to men while devaluing or ignoring those ascribed to women” (Kolb et al., 2003, p. 3).
Although the percentage of women has increased and amounts to almost half of the national workforce in Austria, usually men are still the dominant group and organizations are created by and for them. Leadership is also stereotypically associated with men (Meyerson and Fletcher, 2003). Facing this second-generation gender bias and stereotype threat creates a perception of impossible selves for women. This term was introduced by Ibarra and Petriglieri (2016) to describe “cultural prescriptions for leadership identity and behavior that many junior women found unattainable” (p. 1) as they are confronted with an inevitable double bind.

As mentioned in the introduction, the subtle discriminating practices in organizations that hinder women from advancing are widely described with the metaphor of a glass ceiling. The term refers to an informal and intangible hindrance that inhibits women’s progress to more senior positions (Stamm, 2010). Eagly and Carli (2007) distance themselves from this metaphor, as the authors do not consider it appropriate. They argue that the expression is misleading in several aspects. The metaphor implies that all barriers are invisible and fixed at a specific height assuming that there is one homogeneous barrier, ignoring the complexity of the issue. Further, it indicates that equality exists in entry-level positions. Although there are still barriers in place, they argue that those are permeable as nowadays more women reach leadership positions. Therefore, they use the metaphor of a labyrinth, stating that paths to the top exist and some women find them, but the right routes are still hard to discover and include obstacles.

One difficulty is the mindset of male supervisors and colleagues in organizations, due to their cultural socialization. Women see a problem in the attitudes, biases, and behaviors of their male colleagues through stereotyping and exclusion from relevant networks (O’Neil et al., 2015). There is a general tendency to favor those similar to oneself in gender and race when it comes to job opportunities or networking. As men are still the dominant group in organizations and are more likely to fill the top positions in organizations, this dynamic of a so-called homosocial reproduction subsequently leads to more men getting hired and promoted to fill such positions (Eagly and Carli, 2007).

The described problems in organizations create a lasting impact on the individual woman. Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) explain that due to homosocial practices, women are put into powerless positions. This carries the risk of eroding their self-confidence and career ambitions and puts them into a cycle of powerlessness if they begin to feel and see themselves as
powerless. Another problem is the lack of female role models if top positions are mostly filled with men, which further reduces the hope of reaching a powerful position for women.

There are several difficulties within organizations as they are strongly gendered in their structure and culture. These also influence individual areas of the organization. Since this paper aims at analyzing management development as a possible tool for equal opportunities in the career advancement of men and women, I will continue by giving an insight in existing challenges in current management development practices.

2.3 Issues in Management Development

Organizations are predominantly masculine, as already examined in the previous part. Consequently, management development programs are based on the experiences of men, which is reflected in their content and therefore primarily takes the needs of this gender into account (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002a). These male-based practices sustain a masculine culture and reinforce the domination of men in an organization (North-Samardzic and Taksa, 2011). Although more and more women joined the workforce in the past decades, approaches to management development stayed the same and did not adapt to the changed target group. Hence, the language and terms of the male-based developmental theories are also used to look at women’s careers (Gallos, 1989). As researchers argue, this ignores that women tend to define career success differently from men. They have different needs regarding their developmental opportunities. Sullivan and Arthur (2006) reported that women are oriented towards a more psychological, non-traditional career success, taking into account fairly subjective factors. Men, on the opposite, are rather directed towards a physical and traditional career success, which can be measured objectively through payment and hierarchy. In detail, men tend to value status, payment, and material possessions and see their achievements primarily determined by the workplace, while women define success based on the ability to combine the diverse – and often conflicting – demands of work and home (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002b). In a study by Clarke (2011), women explained that balancing their families and jobs was the most critical aspect of their careers and limited the choices they had. Hence, women have a fundamentally different view on career success than men. This can also be explained by the distinct roles they have both in their professional and private life. For women, it is not about the traditional “climbing the ladder”, but a question of fulfilling different demands as well as personal development (Struthmann, 2012). Regardless of the theories and knowledge about these differences, they are not reflected in the design of management development programs (Vinnicombe and Singh,
If organizations fail to understand how women pursue their career success and what their developmental needs are, they will not be able to get the required commitment and motivation from their female employees. Consequently, they lose potential for organizational success (Sturges, 1999).

In addition to the different interests and needs, also the structure and design of the management development programs may be an issue. Some researchers argue that women and men differ in their learning styles due to their distinct psychological development (ibid.). Heffler (2001) conducted a study to analyze the differences using a self-description questionnaire concerning four different approaches to learning on two dimensions: on the one hand, concrete-experience (1) with reflective observation (2) to understand how an individual perceives information. On the other hand, abstract conceptualization (3) with active experimentation (4) to see what individuals do with the information they are acquiring. The four different learning types are defined as doers (1), watchers (2), thinkers (3) and feelers (4). He revealed that women and men both prefer reflective observation over active experimentation, but women learn better with concrete experiences while men prefer abstract conceptualizations. Hence, men prefer instructors who take an expert role and e.g. give information in a teacher-centered style while women can identify better with a trainer that facilitates learning and gives them the possibility to act with the acquired knowledge (Barrett, 2006). Many development trainings encourage competition, but women tend to value collaboration. In order to better integrate women in trainings and address their needs, a more collaborative learning environment could be useful (Kulturel-Konak et al., 2011).

In addition to the issues in the style and content of management development approaches, another critical obstacle is the accessibility of such trainings for women. Researchers in the field agree that women get offered fewer development opportunities (Ohlott et al., 1994; Ebner, 2004; Auer and Welte, 2011; Scholten and Witmer, 2017; Rincón et al., 2017). This includes networking with people in powerful positions, having role models in the organization and access to trainings and mentoring programs to advance one’s career. Further, it is argued that men are actively offered such opportunities while women have to take the initiative and ask for them (Lyness and Thompson, 2000).

This chapter shows that there is still a variety of issues inhibiting the career advancement of women. Culture and socialization cause second-generation gender biases and stereotypes. Due to their deep internalization, it is difficult for a person to differentiate between real issues and
socially constructed images. This problem gets carried into organizations, creating gendered spaces and resulting in a *glass ceiling* or *labyrinth* that holds women back in their careers. The underestimation of women due to an association of leadership with men influences all areas of an organization. As a result, also management development programs are created by and for men. After giving an insight into the causes of workplace discrimination against women, now possibilities to face and overcome these obstacles will be addressed. Therefore, management development as a means of career advancement will be put into focus.
3 The potential of management development for equal opportunities

Management development is a popular tool to support employees’ career advancement. However, one not without problems regarding its usefulness for women as shown in the previous part. This chapter will investigate the possibilities of its optimization to address women. Beyond looking at the developmental needs that must be fulfilled, some specific tools and their advantages will be introduced. The initiative’s goal – again – is to foster equal opportunities for men and women in organizations.

3.1 What needs to be considered

For an effective implementation of management development for equal opportunities, some factors need to be considered beforehand. This section will give a brief insight into developmental needs, the significance of role models as well as the importance of top management support.

3.1.1 Women’s developmental needs

To understand the developmental needs of women and be able to adapt management development according to them, O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) conducted a study and created a model, dividing the working life cycle of women into three stages. According to them, women have different developmental needs in their careers, depending on the stage. They found that women’s responsibilities and priorities change with their age-related phases. The first phase is driven by idealistic achievement. Women in this phase strive for career success and are proactive to ensure their progress and reach their goal. Challenging assignments and opportunities to develop their skills and strengths are needed during this period. In the second phase, the pragmatic endurance phase, women are in their mid-careers. They often get confronted with obstacles in their career progress and are likely to be dissatisfied. Their focus shifts from primarily work to a balancing act of professional and personal demands and they are searching for an overall meaning in their lives. Organizations can support them with means for a better work-life-integration and flexibility, while still trusting them with challenging tasks. Reinventive contribution is the driving force of the third face. On this level, women look for positions where they can contribute meaningfully. Fairness and justice gain more importance and success is mainly defined through recognition, respect and living an integrated life.
Organizations need to recognize the experience of the women in this phase and use it e.g. to let them coach others while continuing to learn and develop their own skills. This model can help organizations to understand the needs of their female employees and create offers and opportunities to empower them and retain committed and motivated workers.

As mentioned in chapter 2.1, women need to deal with the conflicting expectations towards their behavior as a woman versus as a leader. Hence, there is a need to include identity work in management development initiatives. According to Snow and Anderson (1987), identity work is needed to uphold one’s own pride and dignity in the relationship with others. They define it as “the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept” (p. 1348). Regarding management development, identity work may be needed to take on the expected leadership-behavior without losing the socially validated expected gender-behavior and hence avoiding double bind situations (Debebe et al., 2016).

3.1.2 The significance of same-gender role models

Gibson (2004) defines role models based on role identification and social learning theories. The first states that people are more attracted to people they feel similar to (e.g. in behavior, goals), which enhances the motivation to take these people as role models. The latter emphasizes that models are useful for learning new tasks and skills. Therefore, a role model is “a cognitive construction based on the attributes of people in social roles an individual perceives to be similar to him or herself to some extent and desires to increase perceived similarity by emulating those attributes” (ibid., p. 136). The process of identification is more likely to happen in same-gender relationships, as it is usually easier to identify oneself with same-gender individuals, with whom more obvious similarities are shared (Ragins, 1997). According to Lockwood (2006), women may have a greater need for such role models, as they are in a minority position in many professions. The presence of female role models can especially be advantageous in male-dominated fields as this undermines traditional stereotypes and shows that women can succeed in such a profession, which includes the potential of reducing stereotype threats. Having a role model in one’s own field offers information about future prospect and potential for oneself. Clarke (2011) shares a concrete experience of how female role models can help:
“By sharing insights into their own career journey, including problems faced along the way, they were able to dispel some of the myths about what is required to achieve career success. In particular, they shared stories about the barriers they had faced, the challenge of finding work-life balance, and tips for gaining support from mentors and coaches. As role models, they provided practical examples to illustrate the more theoretical aspects of the program, thus reinforcing learning and encouraging participants to set more challenging career goals” (p. 505).

3.1.3 The role of top management support

Top managers critically influence the direction of an organization. A study by KPMG International (2014) revealed how a manager’s behavior can drive gender equality. Their accountability, commitment, and ownership are relevant to ensure the authenticity and significance of the equality initiatives. Support from the top hence shapes the possibilities for women and their progress in an organization (Wentling, 2003). Thus, the sensitization of top managers and supervisors regarding gender issues is a central factor as they play a relevant role when it comes to the distribution of development programs (Auer and Welte, 2011). A successful implementation of approaches for gender equality requires top-down as well as bottom-up support. Powerful, reliable and authentic engagement from the top, together with willingness and participation from the employees are a precondition for effective changes. Organizational research shows that participation enhances acceptance - hence diminishes resistance - for changes (Jüngling, 2004).

3.2 Using trainings to foster equal opportunities

The probably most common tools in management development are training programs. A meta-analysis by Collins and Holton (2004) revealed that such trainings focus primarily on knowledge/learning and are highly effective at this level. Further, they reported a moderate effectiveness in objective and subjective behavioral outcomes. According to Debebe et al. (2016), development programs are useful to create awareness about behavioral patterns and difficulties at work and provide alternative ways to increase effectiveness in managerial tasks. Advanced trainings can especially benefit women. They make the access to leadership positions easier, as participants receive some space to prepare for new tasks, develop new competencies and get the possibility of meeting and networking with other people in similar positions. By giving women the chance to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in training situations, they gain more visibility and are included in the promotion channel (Rincón et al., 2017). Such
trainings can also include gender equality as a topic and increase the gender awareness within an organization.

### 3.2.1 The idea of women-only development trainings and its benefits

As discussed in chapter 2.3, there are several issues regarding gender equality in the current design of management development programs. Primarily, they are mainly addressing the needs and learning preferences of men. One idea to overcome this problem is to offer women-only trainings. Research findings support this initiative as evidence exists that education and training are key for women’s career success. Participating in such activities enhances commitment, job satisfaction and opens new career opportunities (Wentling, 2003). According to Willis and Daisley (1997), such trainings distinguish themselves through the fact that they usually address women’s entire life and not only work. Furthermore, women take on responsibility for their professional and personal development by deciding what issues they want to work on and how they want to proceed. A suitable learning environment for female groups requires a holistic approach where various aspects align with the expectations and needs of the participants. This includes topics, teaching methods, rules, values and interpersonal relationships (Debebe, 2011).

In the following, I will give an overview of the most important advantages that are discussed in the existing research, which is mostly based on qualitative interviews with participants of women-only trainings. Debebe (2011) conducted a study in a strategic alliance of scientific organizations who strive for food security in developing countries. The so-called Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) implemented women-only leadership trainings for their female employees in 1995 to help them overcome challenges in leadership and management. Participants from the first ten years of this program were interviewed for the study. Results show that women value the environment and atmosphere of the trainings. It was reported that the women felt alone with their problems in the past but participating in the training and meeting other women with similar issues helped them as they could exchange and hear how others deal with the same challenges. Having the possibility of getting to know other people who share their experiences gave them a sense of belonging and acceptance. This leads to another advantage as the women felt they could just be themselves and do not need to fear stereotyping or gender biases. Gender topics could be addressed freely, which they usually perceived as risky to bring up in groups with men. Another opportunity such an all-women training setting holds is the use of gender-sensitive teaching practices. The masculine teaching methods were already discussed as an issue in management development. An all-women setting...
can be the solution to this problem. According to Ibarra et al. (2013) and Brue and Brue (2018), the safe setting and the feeling of a group identity sensitizes participants for their role as potential leaders, as they belong to a group which particularly exists for emerging female leaders. Such an environment is important for women to develop a leadership identity. As women are often in the minority, they feel forced to adapt to their male colleagues and neglect their own values and preferences. Being in a group with same-gender peers gives the opportunity to reflect and reinterpret one’s managerial experiences and freely express their femininity. Authenticity about one’s own needs can be expressed, which is a crucial aspect to create a leadership identity (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002b).

Clarke (2011) looked at another initiative from the Leadership Institute of South Australia, which offers trainings to women from private and public organizations. The results of the telephone interviews revealed a high importance of the social capital of women-only trainings. The opportunity to observe and connect with other women (especially those who have already reached top positions) from diverse backgrounds was named as beneficial for professional and personal development. Working in diverse settings like plena, small groups or project teams was perceived as helpful to develop a more strategic and critical thinking. As concrete outcomes of the program participants named learning how other women succeeded in their careers and hearing how they manage in their positions. Also establishing a supportive network and overcoming obstacles to career advancement were mentioned. Although several interviewees had experiences in mixed and single-sex settings, they argued for the advantages of the openness and intimacy that could only be established in women-only trainings. Lämsä and Savela (2014), who studied an all-female MBA program, found out that the opportunity to build relationships and get in contact with role models was key to promoting leadership skills. Although theoretical learning was also perceived as an important aspect, the interaction with female peers and sharing of experiences were seen as even more significant. Furthermore, having successful women to exchange with, the theoretical input got more emphasis through practical experiences shared by the participants. The openness and trust in discussions were used to also address critical questions and receive honest and authentic answers. The training events can also be used to build long-lasting relationships that offer ongoing support in one’s career. The central benefit of those relationships is that topics can be addressed openly without the need for explanations, as the other participants understand the context (Adler et al., 2001). The encounter with other women, who share the same experiences and struggles and the ability to learn from them and work together on solutions gives the participants a sense of identification.
and belonging. Different studies report that women feel an increase in self-confidence (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002b; Clarke, 2011; Brue and Brue, 2018). The training is seen as an opportunity for reflection, as well as the development of new skills and competencies. After the trainings, women feel more confident to face the challenges at their workplace. On the one hand, they feel more effective in their current position, as they got more self-awareness of their skills and needs. On the other hand, they feel prepared to take on more senior positions. In all this, there is the aspect that the training strengthens women in their authenticity and they do not feel forced to adapt to the masculine style of their colleagues after they exchanged with female role models and got more confidence in advancing while staying true to one’s own values.

All of these aspects include dealing with gender topics like stereotypes or the double bind. By sharing experiences and observing more senior women in their behavior, participants can learn how to deal with the gendered pressure in organizations. The safe setting offers room for talking openly about such issues. This can encourage women to get more proactive about problems in their own working environment (Clarke, 2011; Debebe et al., 2016). Furthermore, many women are not aware of the social and cultural roots of gender inequality. Trainings can be used to increase awareness. When women understand the causes and know about stereotype threats and double binds, this may give them an explanation for past insecurity or anxiety in their workplace and free them from this issue (Zhang et al., 2009).

Another interesting benefit is reported by Adler et al. (2001) as he mentions that already the selection process in itself can help women’s advancement. When different divisions of an organization were asked to nominate women for a training, the superiors got aware of all the promising female employees they had. Examples in his research reveal instant promotions as well as surprised reactions when supervisors became aware how many high potential women were working for them. Consequently, even the organization of such trainings can increase the visibility of high potential women and put them on the map for promotions.

3.2.2 Opportunities in mixed-gender development trainings

Although mixed-gender trainings cannot offer the intimacy and safe environment as women-only groups do, there are still possibilities and even advantages over the single-sex setting regarding its usefulness for enhancing equal opportunities. Including both women and men provides a more holistic view, as topics can be discussed from different points of view. The inclusion of male colleagues gives the opportunity to address gender issues and create
awareness of gender biases and double bind situations also for men. The most promising constellation would be a balanced group, as women are usually in the minority in mixed-gender trainings. If the gender distribution is equal, intergroup dialogues are possible where the female view is tolerated (Debebe, 2011). A possibility to include the advantages of both settings is presented by the example of Adler et al. (2001), where different sessions were held in different compositions. Hence, women got the chance to share their experiences and views in the intimacy of an all-women group and could afterwards approach male colleagues with their issues and discuss solutions. The mixed setting carries the chance of increasing awareness about gender topics on a broader level than when only talking to women. The mindset and behavior of men is a relevant obstacle for the career advancement of women. Therefore, there is a need to sensitize men to this topic and not only focus on women. Other authors argue for a combination of mixed- and single-gender sessions as well (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002b; Debebe, 2011; Ely et al., 2011). They say that both settings have their advantages and can be useful for different objectives. While issues about gender and being the minority in an organization can be better dealt with in an all-women environment, a mixed-group can provide relevant theoretical inputs and information on leadership skills and competencies.

An often-criticized aspect of all-women trainings is the focus on women, which holds the prejudice that women need to be changed to succeed – the so-called fixing the woman approach (Meyerson and Fletcher, 2003) – and this does not address the problem in the society or organization (Benschop and van den Brink, 2014). As gender bias is a cultural issue, there is the need to address it in the whole society and not only with women. Mixed-trainings can be a useful setting for this. However, Brew and Garavan (1995) argue that raising awareness of one group can lead to a system change in the organization through the changed behavior and mindset of the participants on the one hand and through their feedback and sharing of their experience in the training on the other.

3.3 The potential and difficulties of mentoring

Other widely used approaches to foster career advancement are coaching or mentoring relationships. The former does not have one single definition, the term is used in numerous ways. I will use the working term of Hawkins and Smith (2006) which says that the focus of coaching lies on performance improvement, personal development and the unlocking of one's potential in relation to one’s current work. These goals are reached through a formal collaborative relationship with regular meetings between the coachee and the coach. The short-
termed relationship is formally built with the purpose of reaching a specific objective. There are several settings of coaching as it can be one-on-one, group or peer coaching. Mentoring relationships can be informal when individuals get in contact through their work and feel connected by their background and interests. It is also possible to organize formal mentoring programs to help employees find more experienced people from whom they can get support in their development (Fine, 2003). While coaching focuses on rather specific changes of behavior, mentoring takes a broader view of the person and his or her development, not solely focusing on their current workplace. The relationship is ongoing, with meetings taking place on demand when the mentee needs guidance or support. Instead of focusing on specific goals, the mentoring relationship has an overall goal of professional and personal development of the mentee with room for feedback and reflection to help him or her to clarify career choices in the future (Hawkins and Smith, 2006). Although some authors examine the opportunities of coaching for women’s career advancement, mentoring relationships are analyzed more often in association with this topic. In general, difficulties and advantages of coaching and formal mentoring mentioned in the literature intersect. Since mentoring appears to be of higher relevance in the existing literature, this instrument will be put into focus.

As this thesis is looking at possibilities for how organizations can design management development to support women, formal mentoring is more relevant as this is a format that can be actively influenced. Having a mentor is seen to enhance visibility, enable access to social networks and resources as well as an improvement of status due to the association with a more powerful colleague. Mentees report higher career motivation, self-efficacy and subjective career success as outcomes (Clarke, 2011). In a study by Ragins et al. (1998), 81% of the interviewed female executives and CEOs stated that having a mentor was critical or important for their career success. Another study by Wentling (2003) revealed mentoring as one out of six most pertinent factors for women’s career success. Given the developmental needs which were already pointed out in the previous chapter, having a mentor or coach with the possibility of discussing individual problems and desires can be beneficial and provide a more holistic view. Bower (2012) explains the advantages of a mentoring relationship for women based on the division in psychosocial and career functions developed by Kram (1988). One very important psychosocial function is to act as a role model and give the mentee the possibility to observe and learn from the behavior and attitudes of the mentor. The relationship to a role model, who supports and encourages through the confirmation of one’s abilities and competencies, increases the confidence of the mentee. Such relationships have the possibility
of developing into friendships. This offers the opportunity to also discuss personal difficulties that might detract from professional obligations. Regarding the career function, a more experienced manager can provide sponsorship, through which the female protégé can build a reputation and increase her visibility for promotions (Bower, 2012). Further, the coach or mentor can provide productive feedback. This is especially relevant as women report to receive feedback less frequently than their male peers (Yee et al., 2016).

Despite the evidence on the multiple benefits of mentoring relationships, there are some difficulties regarding this offer specifically for women. Firstly, several researchers argue that women are less likely to receive mentoring (the same is said about coaching) (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989; Davey, 2008; O’Neil et al., 2015; Thomas et al., 2017). One reason could be that women report insecurity about how to find a mentor and to develop a mentoring relationship (Clarke, 2011). As there are far more men in senior positions, there are also more men available as mentors. The term homosocial practice was already introduced, which is also an issue at this point, as the potentially available mentors are more likely to connect with a protégé of the same sex. Hence, more men get access to mentoring. Secondly, even if relationships with male mentors and female mentees come into being, further issues arise. Ragins and McFarlin (1990) report that cross-gender mentoring relationships carry the risk of being targeted by workplace gossip and sexual innuendos. Although supportive and trusting relationships are still able to grow, they are limited to formal patterns of interaction to avoid the appearance of intimacy through informal, after-work activities. Such formal mentorship may inhibit the development of a social relation and friendship and therefore lacks some benefits a same-gender mentor can provide. Ehrich (2008) mentions that this risk could be a reason for male managers to avoid mentoring female employees. Further, the author examines the risk of strengthening stereotypical behaviors in men and women, by putting men in the mentor role, as the experienced and powerful part, while women take on the obedient and submissive role. This is enforced by the example of a “father-daughter” relationship, where the mentee is dependent of the paternalistic mentor. Such stereotypical roles bring gender inequality into the mentorship and can undermine advantageous aspects. To avoid this situation, Ragins and McFarlin (1990) suggest organizations to support cross-gender mentoring relationships by enabling casual meetings and exchange by hosting social events, where “mentors and protégés can interact socially in a sanctioned environment” (ibid., p. 334).
As already mentioned, the likeliness to find female mentors is lower due to their scarcity in senior positions. Formal programs which increase the visibility of potential mentors and mentees might be helpful in this case, as same-gender mentoring relations have advantages (Fine, 2003). Due to homosocial practices and a smaller risk of sexual innuendos, the relationships are likely to develop easier than in cross-gender settings. The role modeling function is strengthened, as the identification with a mentor of the same gender happens more naturally because experiences of a female in the working life can be shared (Block and Tietjen-Smith, 2016). By observing the female mentor, a woman can learn strategies how to overcome gender-related barriers and deal with issues like work-family conflicts. Hence, organizations should support the development of same-gender mentoring relationships by providing opportunities to meet and exchange in formal and informal settings (Ragins and McFarlin, 1990). Yet, female mentors tend to be in less powerful positions than their male-peers and therefore the relationship might lack some of the instrumental benefits that promote the career advancement of the protégé (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989).

3.4 Networking as a holistic solution approach

The value of social capital has been discussed since the introduction of the term by Bourdieu (1983). It is the totality of actual and potential resources that are held by a group of people. The possession of social capital, therefore, depends on the belonging to this group and the number of resources depends on the size of the group as well as the social capital of each of the members (ibid.). As it is necessary to enter such a group to be able to gain access to its information and resources, social capital depends on the engagement in networking activities. Studies have shown that networking is a relevant factor for career advancement, as successful managers dedicate more time to networking than their less successful colleagues (Luthans et al., 1988; Seibert et al., 2001). Social networking has four main career enhancing factors according to Lin (2001): Firstly, it facilitates the flow of information about opportunities and choices the individual would not get otherwise. This includes job openings, but also information about how to perform in one’s job. Secondly, contacts from networking may be in positions of power or have ties to people in such positions and can, therefore, influence the access to resources or decisions on promotions. Third, powerful social contacts can serve as an individual’s social credentials. Fourth, the relations can reinforce an individual’s identity and visibility inside the organization. Besides these career-enhancing factors, a network can also provide psychosocial support by establishing friendships, receiving support and confirmation (Clarke, 2011).
As women often lack access to other women in business, networking events can be a good opportunity to meet other women whom they can relate to and identify with. Such events give the chance to observe successful women and learn from them how to overcome gender-based difficulties at work (ibid.). The possibility of getting to know successful role models can ease stereotypical concerns and increase the self-esteem of less experienced female members (Zhang et al., 2009). This can further help to overcome organizational obstacles. Coleman (2010) distinguishes between two kinds of networks for supporting women. According to him, many of them are “emergent”, i.e. an individual or group decided on the need for such a network and started it from within. Another possibility is “prescribed” networks, which are set up top-down in an organization.

Networking and increasing one’s social capital is useful for everybodys’ career progress. Yet, this management development approach is also mostly used by men for several reasons. In studies, women name the exclusion from male networks as one of the primary reasons that hinder them from advancing (Hopkins et al., 2008; Catalyst, 2004). Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) argue that this exclusion could be of intentional but also unintentional nature. On the one hand, men can perceive women as intruders in their all-male group and therefore distance themselves from them. On the other hand, men might feel uncomfortable to engage with female colleagues in informal settings. These causes would lead to intentional exclusion. Furthermore, there are cases where exclusion happens unintentionally, e.g. in locker rooms or restrooms, where informal spontaneous networking takes place in settings women do not have access to. Some of the events men choose for networking might address more stereotypical male interests – e.g. watching a football game or playing golf – and women, therefore, do not seem to fit in. Most networking events happen outside of working hours, which is problematic for women – and men – with family responsibilities. As the majority of studies show that women are still more likely to be responsible for domestic and family tasks, networking activities, particularly evening events, exclude mothers (Sharafizad, 2011; Cahusac and Kanji, 2014). At the same time, such activities might make networking unappealing for women, as they lack interest in such events or simply decide not to get involved, as it intersects with their responsibilities at home (Ely et al., 2011). Ibarra et al. (2013) found out that many women see networking as inauthentic and do not like the instrumental character of the relationship building, where it is all about the benefit you can take out of the social tie. Furthermore, women are said to engage less in organizational politics at work as they feel they should be seen for their hard work and do not understand the point of networking for career advancement (Vinnicombe and Singh,
Yet, several authors argue that the reluctance decreases when the larger purpose of it is clarified (Ely et al., 2011; Ibarra et al., 2013). Clarke (2011) found out that some women who do see the need for networking and would like to engage in such activities feel uncertain about their networking skills. They would like to get trained in techniques on how to find a suitable network, get in contact with others or even how to make time for networking.

### 3.4.1 Creating all-women networks

To make it easier for women to enter groups and exchange with colleagues, women-only networks are a possibility to create a safe setting. This is especially popular in male-dominated businesses (Coleman, 2010). Sharing experiences and the ability to identify with others encourages women to talk openly as they do not need to fear misunderstanding or judgment. Being in a room with only women gives the opportunity to share sensitive topics, e.g. difficulties due to gender biases, which is usually difficult to share with male colleagues (Ibarra et al., 2013). Especially the presence of a critical mass of women (Chesterman and Ross-Smith, 2006) at such events makes a difference. As already mentioned, if female managers lack the opportunity to meet and exchange with other women, they can feel left alone with challenges linked to gender stereotypes and biases at their workplace. The members of all-women networks realize that they are not alone with their problems and get the opportunity to discuss them and establish a supporting culture (ibid.). McCarthy (2007) gives specific examples of possible outcomes:

> “By extending and developing these peer-to-peer relationships between women, networks become directories of possibility. Anything and everything could happen to a woman who connects with another woman in this space. She might get a new job, a business tip-off or the promise of an introduction to a useful contact; or she might hear an inspiring story of female success, or access advice on how to negotiate reduced hours; maybe she’ll come away with the name of a reliable babysitter or a good plumber. And, more likely than not, she’ll have shared her own experiences, strategies and knowledge with other women too” (p. 90).

This shows that this approach, too, can provide a solution to the usual lack of female role models. Even if the primary benefit of all-women networking is the opportunity to connect and exchange experiences, it provides a much-needed setting for such encounters. This helps women in their personal development in organizations, where they are often confronted with
the opinions and needs of their male colleagues, which are very different from their own (Barnes and Beaulieu, 2017).

3.4.2 Combining all-women and cross-gender networking

Nevertheless, Thomas et al. (2017) argue that if women rely on mostly female networks, it can hinder their career advancement. As typically men hold top positions in organizations, women might miss important contacts who can sponsor them and enhance their career prospects. This idea makes some women hesitant to join such networks as they may have an image of being less powerful and only a “meeting point for mothers” without actual benefit for professional development (Coleman, 2010). Based on networking research, according to Krell (2011) women need two factors to be successful in their careers. On the one hand, there is a need for strong ties that provide emotional and social support. These aspects are more likely to be provided by female peers due to homosocial practices. However, all-women networks are likely to lack so-called instrumental resources that support the career advancement of women. These resources are easier to receive from male colleagues and superiors. For this reason, women may need to engage in double networking – in all-women networks and in cross-gender networks – to obtain both benefits (ibid; Hopkins et al., 2008; Coleman, 2010). This may have a further advantage, as studies have shown that men and women need different networking strategies to be successful (O'Neil et al., 2011). Therefore, the combination of networking only with women and the opportunity to exchange with men provides different strategies and possibilities for connections and may lead to the largest outcome for both parties.

Coleman (2010) writes about another advantage of networking opportunities. He emphasizes the possibility of offering trainings and formal courses inside the network. Mentoring relationships can also be established through the network. Hence, the two previously highlighted approaches could be integrated into networking and make it a holistic approach to foster equal opportunities in the career advancement of men and women.

It is important to mention that it depends on the organization what kind of design and setting they use. It does not always make sense to establish an own internal network. For example, if there is only a small number of women at the workplace, it could be an option to cooperate with other companies to support an exchange with more women with diverse backgrounds (Wolf, 2004). According to Bilimoria et al. (2008), external partners can serve as facilitators and take on an active role in the pursuit of equal opportunities in the organization. They can share
experiences, give ideas, best practices and solutions. This aspect applies also to the previously mentioned approaches of trainings and mentoring.

This chapter has brought up three possible ways how gender equality can be promoted through management development. Women-only training sessions can address gender-specific topics and communicate content that is relevant for women to overcome organizational obstacles. Mixed-gender trainings should raise awareness on gender issues, also sensitize male colleagues and create a change of mindset within the organization. Mentoring relationships have the unique benefit of addressing individual challenges of a mentee. Having a mentor can increase visibility for an employee and help them get into the promotion channel. In some respects, a same-sex mentor can be advantageous for women, as it can provide them with a role model and gender-specific issues can be discussed without the fear of stereotyping or misunderstandings. To avoid gossip in cross-gender mentoring relationships, organizations should offer events where exchange can take place in a sanctioned environment. Networking events may offer a holistic solution in management development for equal opportunities by including training sessions and organizing formal mentoring relationships as well as providing the room for the development of informal mentoring relationships. All-women networks have the benefit of a safe environment, where women can share their insecurities and challenges in the workplace without stereotype threat. Being surrounded by other women, they can learn from each other’s experiences and meet role models who can help them overcome obstacles. On the other hand, mixed-gender networks provide instrumental resources for career advancement. Therefore, a combination of both settings provides the greatest benefit. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, all the approaches can only work when backed by the top management of an organization. The powerful support makes the changes effective and authentic. Surely, there is also the need for the participation of employees. A combination of top-down and bottom-up engagement ensures motivation and commitment. Each one of the approaches must take into account the developmental needs of women in its design. As the current issues base mostly on the masculine culture of organizations and therefore a masculine design of management development, it is important to include the female perspective. The aim is to strengthen the leadership identity of women, to empower them in their careers and open the doors to more senior positions.
4 Empowering women and creating equal opportunities: Practical examples

After an insight into the theoretical background of gender inequality in organizations and the potential of management development to create a positive impact, I will explore certain practical examples. Using three cases, I will give an insight into implemented management development approaches for equal opportunities in the career advancement of men and women.

4.1 Methodology

To gain an understanding of management development for equal opportunities in practice, I used a multiple-case study approach, aiming to analyze across settings and explore differences and similarities between the cases (Baxter and Jack, 2008). To ensure a comparability with the main case of the EGGER Group, which will be investigated in the following chapter, the companies were selected by the criteria of their geographical location in the German-speaking areas and operating within a predominantly male-dominated industry. Three companies were selected. I conducted one semi-structured expert interview per company with the responsible person for gender diversity initiatives. Two of the interviews were held on the phone and one in person. All interviews were recorded and lasted 65 minutes on average, ranging from 53 minutes to 1-hour 20 minutes. Afterwards, I transcribed the audio files with the web-based software oTranscribe. Using an inductive method, I developed categories of content based on the transcripts and categorized the results.

4.2 Description of cases

Out of three companies chosen, two are located in Tyrol just as the EGGER Group and one in Bavaria with a 115 kilometers distance from EGGER’s headquarter. Consequently, a comparability in the environment of the companies could be achieved. Due to the issue of occupational sex-segregation, the branches were also a relevant factor to ensure comparability. Therefore, rather male-dominated industries were chosen. In the following I briefly introduce the cases:
GE Jenbacher, Jenbach, Tyrol, Austria (Electrical industry)

GE Jenbacher located in Jenbach, Tyrol, with 1,600 employees is part of the Distributed Power division in the property of the US firm General Electric. Their focus lies on the production of gas engines and block-type thermal power stations (General Electric, 2018). For the interview, I met the responsible person for the Women’s Network in Jenbach.

Gore GmbH, Putzbrunn, Bavaria, Germany (Production industry)

Operating with 1,600 staff, Gore GmbH is the German subsidiary of the American company W.L Gore & Associates, Inc. and is based in Putzbrunn, a village close to Munich. Gore GmbH has been awarded as one of the best employers in Germany and Bavaria in recent years by Great Place to Work (Great Place to Work Initiative, 2018). Gore GmbH is a manufacturing company specializing in the manufacture of products derived from a material group called fluoropolymers. Products based on these raw materials are used in protective outerwear gear branded as GORE-TEX® fabrics as well as in other medical devices and equipment (W. L. Gore & Associates, 2016) I conducted an interview with the responsible person for Diversity and Inclusion in the European region.

Sandoz GmbH, Kundl, Tyrol, Austria (Pharmaceutical industry)

Being part of the Swiss Novartis Group, Sandoz Austria is the biggest producer of medicine in the country. Over 5,100 employees, distributed across four locations, are working for the company which is specialized in the production of antibiotics and biosimilars. One of their development and production sites is located in Kundl, Tyrol (Sandoz AG, 2018). Here, my interview partner was the employee responsible for Diversity and Inclusion across Sandoz GmbH’s Austrian sites.

4.3 Results

Internal coordination of gender diversity

In all three cases, diversity management has emerged at the American sites first. Especially ethnical diversity which is highly relevant due to historical factors. They have global initiatives

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2 When this thesis was written, the line of business which GE Jenbacher is part of, was just sold to the finance investment company Advent International, which is expected to run the hub from the fourth quarter in 2018 on (Die Presse, 2018).
that are coordinated in diverse manners throughout multiple regions and countries. GE Jenbacher has a global diversity leader for their Women’s Network who is supported by so-called hub-champions in each location, responsible for the network in their local hub. Collaboratively, these hub-champions have been working on the topic of gender diversity for over twenty years. The idea is to have two volunteer champions per hub, responsible for coordinating their local Women’s Network on top of their usual working tasks and hours. The volunteers function as an independent unit, not attached to any department, but working very closely with the other businesses and especially the Human Resources department. To ensure that the programs match the needs of the employees, the hub-champions conduct a quarterly brainstorming session with a group of employees to identify further Women’s Network activities and to collect feedback on past sessions. Additionally, questionnaires are sent out to all employees to gain an understanding of their developmental needs. In the case of Gore, gender diversity gained importance about twelve years ago. They have regional champions for America and Europe and are currently setting up Asia. The champions’ employment contracts assign part of their working time and tasks for diversity and inclusion initiatives. Other Associates (Gore calls his employees this way) support the work voluntarily by forming diversity & inclusion councils. Sandoz, as the only one of the selected cases, created one full-time position for diversity and inclusion in Austria three years ago, which is currently filled by two part-time employees through job-sharing. In meetings like a parents’ breakfast-group, they collect the feedback and wishes of the employees providing them with a voice in the selection of measures and tools.

**Objective**

The first priority of the gender diversity programs is raising awareness, as stated by all three companies. They emphasized the importance of sensitizing the top management and all employees to gender inequality, it’s background and the needs and benefits of gender diversity in a company. Other common objectives were skill building and education amongst women. The companies stress that the aim of these programs is to support women in their career achievements and personal development.

**Top-management involvement**

All interview partners emphasized the relevance of top-management support. At GE Jenbacher, senior leaders are committed to the Women’s Network and support them in their
communication, e.g. by appearing in videos to encourage and bolster employee participation. The ability to arrange meetings during working hours shows that the issue is taken seriously. When the Women’s Network proposed a Diversity-Week workshop at the beginning of the year, upper management recommended extending the workshop to occur over an entire month spending time on a different diversity dimension each week. This would allow the topics to be addressed more deeply while at the same time not overwhelming the employees.

Sandoz’ CEO was an active supporter from the moment Sandoz joined the Women’s Network, undertaking a lot of communication and marketing for the program. In general, my interview partner emphasized that the conviction and support of the senior leadership are indispensable for any successful program. Even with Sandoz’ combination of top-down and bottom-up orientation, it was made clear that backing from the top needs to be guaranteed first.

The responsible person from Gore pointed out that leaders need to be aware of their influence and use it to develop the culture and structure of an organization. There is still potential to increase the understanding at the leadership level on the fact that their actions shape the behavior and mindset of employees. Leaders are seen as role models and their decisions e.g. in hiring, compensation and development processes, shape the organizational environment and perceived fairness and equity by employees. Finally, the Gore interviewee stressed the importance of continually reinforcing the understanding of this responsibility across all management development programs.

**Women-only vs. cross-gender**

The question of whether the programs should be for women only or open to all genders is approached differently by the three subject companies. At Sandoz, this question was investigated and discussed prior to establishing the internal network of the program. Sandoz looked deeper into the issue and identified that the dynamic in a group of women changes when men join. While the conversations are very open and intimate in all-women settings, the presence of male colleagues leads to the women stepping into their work role, changing their behavior and talking less about their worries. Furthermore, they felt that women needed more support and encouragement than men. Ultimately, Sandoz decided to set up a network for women only while still inviting men to participate from time to time. Still, they have got other programs on gender diversity which more directly address men, this will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections of this chapter. GE Jenbacher prefers operating with mixed
groups stating that it is important to include men to raise awareness on the topic of gender inequality. In the hub-champion’s point of view, an inclusive approach is necessary to close the gap between genders. She argued that the gap would only increase if men and women worked separately and operated without the perspective, knowledge, and understanding of the other. Therefore, GE Jenbacher opens their programs for both men and women whenever the topic it is suitable. Only some topics, such as one focused on working moms are exclusively for women. When it comes to the selection of female participants, extra effort is placed on finding women, who wish to gain promotions in their career but also face personal obstacles. These women are assisted in managing and overcoming their particular obstacles. This is important as the company needs to be aware that there are also female (and male) employees who are satisfied with their position and do not strive for further career advancement. In the case of Gore, working in an all-women group received very positive feedback. The participants could share their experiences and challenges openly and felt understood by their same-gender colleagues. They felt able to address topics they would not feel comfortable talking about as openly with male co-workers. A pilot project with a cross-gender group also received positive feedback, but participants said that the discussion was not equally as open, and the dynamic was different. In the future, Gore strives to engage more men in the dialogue, as there is a need to discuss gender equality in mixed-groups and continue to raise awareness of the issue. However, my interview partner believed that they will need a different conversation structure than the all-women trainings.

**Networks**

Networks for women are a crucial tool at Sandoz and GE Jenbacher. The former started its engagement in the topic of gender diversity with membership in a Women’s Network, while the latter is using its Global Women’s Network as a central feature around which all other activities are organized. The focus of GE Jenbacher becomes obvious with the statement of their hub-champion: “At the end of the day a network is all you need. Whether you want to just share your concerns about certain situations or you want to learn something: It's all about knowing who to call. That's how I define network. That's what makes my life easier.” The hub-champion further emphasized that their focus lies on professional development as, in her opinion, social networks form naturally (perhaps through the Women’s Network) and do not need any organizational support. To be able to address unique challenges and topics there are multiple sections like Women in Technology, Women in Operations etc. One important aspect
she mentioned, is the transparency of the work in the Women’s Network. It is necessary to show to male colleagues, too, why it is needed and increase awareness on gender inequality and prevent prejudices and wrong images (for example seeing the Network as a meeting point for “girls’ stuff”). The network organizes small workshops and events for male and female employees during working hours, e.g. internal knowledge sharing sessions or excursions to other hubs. Sometimes they also undertake leisure time activities such as visiting the Christmas market or having a picnic. Depending on the demand events take place between twice a month or at least twice a quarter. One day per year is dedicated to the Women’s Network with various workshops and seminars that employees can attend. As mentioned earlier, in 2018 they had a whole month dedicated to diversity.

Due to the interest and wish of one female manager, Sandoz became a member of an external cross-organizational Women’s Network. Selected through nomination multiple women were able to attend the meetings and interact with other women from various companies in the region. Two years ago, they decided to establish an internal network to set the agenda based on their own particular needs. The network targets female managers interested in further development and in interacting with other women. It was important for them to invite all women in the company as the selection process by nominations had not been successful in the past. They had to acknowledge that some of the women nominated, were not necessarily interested. Furthermore, they decided to have their networking activities outside of working hours so that anyone could attend. The members are highly motivated and stating that they had been waiting for an opportunity like this and were happy that they could attend if the wished and did not need anyone’s permission. In their meetings, they focus on the personal and professional development of women with workshops or discuss topics such as self-marketing, strength-based approaches, being a workplace ally etc. Women from other companies in the region are invited to join the meetings. Some events are open for male colleagues, too, for instance, they had an open talk about power, but also casual, fun meetings such as informal wine tastings.

While both GE Jenbacher and Sandoz are operating within rather formal settings, Gore, on the other hand, has an informal network established and coordinated by a group of female employees. This informal network emerged out of a personal need for exchange and support amongst female employees and was dedicated to peer coaching. It is predominantly inactive at the moment due to a lack of committed Associates who dedicate time to its organization and operation.
Trainings

Gore’s primary management development tool are trainings. They have developed a successful training for female leaders and females who exhibit leadership potential. Participants are nominated by the Human Resources team or their company managers and supervisors. In some cases, women request to take part out of their own initiative. The idea of the training is to target the needs of women and support them in their leadership development. This includes topics like work-family integration, profiling a successful leader, creating a personal leadership identity, positioning oneself in a male-dominated environment, and dealing with biases. The training, which is conducted by an external coach, has a strong focus on communication patterns and understanding the ways in which males and females communicate and impact collaboration in mixed teams. Another training project targets intact leadership teams, which are usually cross-gender, and focuses on leveraging diversity in one’s own team in the best possible way. In this case, gender is only one of several diversity dimensions that are discussed in this setting. The training is voluntarily and is offered to the teams upon request. A relevant aspect in this setting is the awareness about unconscious biases. To address these biases, there is a larger program offered to all employees, which deals with so-called micro-inequities, i.e. creating an awareness for and reflecting on daily issues which are not readily recognized as discrimination but may have an impact on an individual’s engagement level. This program’s rollout was widespread and set a baseline for Gore’s Diversity & Inclusion effort. The participant groups represent a mix of gender and other diversity factors to bring different perspectives together. The program is offered to all employees upon request.

Awareness trainings on unconscious biases are popular, as also GE Jenbacher and Sandoz offer them to their leadership. At these, the leaders become aware and sensitized to their own unconscious preferences and homosocial practices. Tactics of overcoming such biases in the search for new talents or the leadership of one’s team are trained. For this matter, all companies have internally educated and certified trainers. This has been the most successful training program for Sandoz and is highly recommended and experiences high participation rates.

All training programs around the topic of gender diversity at GE Jenbacher are offered as part of the Women’s Network. The programs have regular events with different topics such as soft skills, negotiation, presenting, and conflict management among others are addressed. Additionally, they offer a women career advancement program for female mid- to senior-level
managers, providing the opportunity to work on different projects and to establish a certain network.

At Sandoz, they also conduct small training sessions as part of the network. For some years, the company had run a “female acceleration” program. In a reunion meeting of the participants, the responsible managers found out that no network had been developed between the female talents although they had attended the program together for a year. Additionally, the participants provided feedback that they preferred to undertake the training in a cross-gender setting. Since then, the company offers a mixed leadership program but tries to have gender-balanced groups with at least 40% female participants. Furthermore, they are starting to work with the MARC workshops by Catalyst which target emerging and senior male leaders. The premise is to work in mixed groups, with a majority of male participants. This program aims to sharpen the awareness of inequalities and develop skill sets to create change and build a more diverse environment (Catalyst, 2018).

Mentoring

Based on the three interviewed companies, mentoring does appear as a popular tool when it comes to gender diversity. None of the interviewees mentioned this instrument as part of their offers for female career advancement. Only the peer coaching network of Gore had a similar idea however this was also informal and addressed the exchange in groups and not in a fixed relationship. After a concrete inquiry, the responsible person for the Women’s Network at GE Jenbacher stated that they had had a formal mentoring matching program in the past but canceled it when they saw poor results. She emphasized that mentoring relationships need to develop informally to be successful. If a woman approaches them today with a need for mentoring, they set up a casual lunch date in a small group with people who fit the needs of the woman to give them the best opportunity to connect. For these matchings, gender is not a factor, rather similar and relevant experiences and skills. Generally, GE Jenbacher focuses on “advisory boards” than on having one mentor, i.e. to have a group of people which one can contact for distinct reasons. This leads to a preference for offering networking opportunities in bigger groups.

Beyond management development

Gore and Sandoz mentioned several other initiatives beyond management development. Both companies started with awareness building programs and it was emphasized that this is the first
step to establish diversity and inclusion within an organization. It was argued that formal programs are one part, but it is important to anchor the diversity mindset in the organizational culture and the daily working processes. Sandoz mentioned flexible working hours and childcare. Furthermore, they analyze personnel data regarding gender distribution to make the topic measurable and manageable. In talent review sessions, they always have one responsible person who observes if the discussions are influenced by unconscious biases and voices issues accordingly. Another concrete example is that the names of female employees are written in a different color than male names in talent review sessions to make it easily visible if women are taken into account. At Gore, the hiring process, as well as the working environment, are the main two aspects of diversity and inclusion. The recruiting team is made up of people of diverse backgrounds to represent different perspectives and increase the likelihood of considering more diverse candidates. By using small questionnaires, the company has a diversity scan for several processes. The set of questions should help to reflect on one’s decisions and minimize the risk of falling back into biased behavioral patterns.

4.4 Summary

In the explored practical examples, especially networks and trainings play a vital role in the companies’ engagement with the issue of gender diversity. Mentoring programs, however, did not get much attention and appear less successful. All interview partners mentioned the significance of receiving top-management support and awareness in building programs at the leadership level. These programs need to raise the issue of inequalities and convince senior management of the relevance of gender diversity. In the selection of target groups, the companies value a mixture of offers. On the one hand, they give opportunities for women to interact with same-gender colleagues, while on the other hand, activities in mixed groups are offered to raise awareness on the topic throughout the entire workforce. When it comes to the internal coordination of gender diversity activities, all cases had well defined responsible persons. They differ in the design of the task, as at GE Jenbacher the coordination is completely based on volunteer work, while at Gore and Sandoz, the company has allocated resources to this issue. As all interview partners emphasized the need for employee involvement, it can be argued that there is a necessity to convince the workforce of the importance of the topic and to find people to push the cause forward. A combination of top-down and bottom-up movement appears to be the most successful and sustainable outcome.
5 The case of the EGGER Group

The family-owned company Fritz EGGER GmbH & Co. OG, with over 9,000 employees worldwide, started with the opening of the first chipboard factory in 1961 in St. Johann in Tyrol by the founder Fritz Egger senior. Today, the group includes 18 factories spread over eight countries and 26 national distribution centers. While the company is still owned by Michael and Fritz Egger, the sons of the founder, they are not in the operational business, which lies in the responsibility of Walter Schiegl, Thomas Leissing, and Ulrich Bühler. With its corporate slogan “more from wood” the company offers products ranging from furniture and interior decoration over construction products to floors (Fritz EGGER GmbH & Co OG, 2017).

The group is organized into six functional units. Out of the 9,229 employees (in April 2018) 73,0% work in the technical/production unit with a percentage of 7,1% females. Other clearly male-dominated units are logistics with 15,0% women and IT with 17,0% women. In sales/marketing 37,8% of the positions are filled by women. The last two units have a majority of female employees with 66,0% in finance/administration and 76,0% in customer service. The occupational sex-segregation is obvious. Overall 18,7% of EGGER’s employees are female. On the leadership level, they occupy 13,1% of the positions. At this level, it is noticeable that men predominate in all functional units but customer service, where slightly more women than men occupy a leadership position with 51,8% (Fritz EGGER GmbH & Co OG, 2018b).

Development opportunities play a vital role at EGGER. The company created the EGGER CAMPUS platform, which comprises all developmental opportunities that are offered by the firm. This includes subject-specific trainings, cross-functional measures as well as strategic development programs for employees and leaders. In annual employee appraisals, individual development roadmaps can be created. For people with team-leading responsibilities, there are specific workshops to improve leadership competencies. Furthermore, coaching sessions can be offered on demand. A new two-day training on “Leading at EGGER” aims to reconcile leadership principles and skills. The main long-term initiative for career advancement into management level is the program Startklar, which is offered to emerging leaders and lasts 18 months. For existing leaders, there are two offers: On the one hand, Impuls covers the topics of active leadership, living values, and collaboration. On the other hand, the regular leadership conference Spirit addresses different topics depending on the current requirements. (Fritz EGGER GmbH & Co OG, 2018a)
5.1 Methodology

To analyze the case of the EGGER group, I chose the research approach of a case study. This approach is especially helpful in answering explanatory “how” and “why” research questions. A case study “investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-life context” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). The research is part of the constructivist paradigm, i.e. “that the truth is relative and that it is dependent on one’s perspective” (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 545) as subjective statements are analyzed. The case study describes and explores the situation of EGGER with regard to gender inequality and the impact of management development on equal opportunities in the career advancement of men and women.

5.1.1 Data collection

The central source for my case study were focused expert interviews, held as guided conversations using a semi-structured interview guideline. On the one hand, the conversation followed the prepared line of inquiry based on findings from the literature review. On the other hand, spontaneous questions could be added to dig deeper into a statement of the interviewee (Gläser and Laudel, 2010). Data triangulation could be ensured by the additional analysis of documentary data.

The interview partners were chosen in collaboration with the human resources department at EGGER. Six employees on leadership level were selected, three men and three women with each man being the direct supervisor of one of the women. To be able to get a holistic impression of the company, three different units – technical/production, finance/administration, and sales/marketing – were selected. This way, I could capture the diverse realities regarding gender distribution due to occupational sex segregation. The interviews were held in German as it is the mother tongue of all interview partners and the quality of the conversation was expected to be higher when speaking in the native language. Further, the anonymity of the persons was guaranteed in the beginning to ensure an open conversation. For the anonymized data analysis numbers were randomly allocated to the individual persons (P1-6). One-half of the interviews were conducted in person and the other half via the company’s internal conference call tool. All interview partners agreed to a recording of the conversation. The interviews took 45 minutes on average, ranging from 35 minutes to 63 minutes.

The questionnaire was divided into four parts with the aim to investigate the current situation and the target situation: Perception of gender diversity at EGGER.
1. Reflection on management development programs the interviewees had participated in (in this part the interview had an episodic character as past events were analyzed)
2. Equal and unequal opportunities at EGGER
3. Equal opportunities in EGGER’s management development

All interviews were transcribed, using the software oTranscribe.

The documentary data consisted of copies of the annual report, the EGGER CAMPUS catalog, the official outline of the defined leadership competencies and the organizational chart.

5.1.2 Data analysis

The information provided by the documentary data was used for the organization of the interview. The employee statistics of the annual report and the organizational chart were used for the selection of the interview partners and to discuss current gender ratios in the interviews. The EGGER CAMPUS catalog was used to develop the interview guideline. They got special attention in the second part as specific offers could be analyzed regarding gender diversity. In general, the knowledge of the documents gave me a better understanding of leadership and management development at EGGER. This proved to be helpful during the interviews, as I had company-specific information and could ask more detailed questions.

For the analysis of the interviews, the transcripts were encoded. In this method, relevant parts of the text are assigned to a code. The coding is part of the content analysis method by Mayring (2015), which aims at summarizing and interpreting the material. The codes can derive from initial considerations (deductive) or develop while reading the transcripts (inductive) (Gläser and Laudel, 2010). For the coding process, the content analysis software MAXQDA 12 was used. Initially, categories for the coding were defined deductively, using topics derived from the literature review and the interview guideline. More sub-categories were built inductively based on the content of the interviews. The relevant extracts from the text were generalized and reduced to key statements to improve the comparability of the content of the different interviews (Mayring, 2015). The analysis was conducted iteratively (Yin, 2009), with a revision and adjustment of the coding structure after the first round of coding, leading to summarized codes as well as new codes.
5.2 Results

The presentation of the interview results will be separated in the same four topic sets that I used to structure the questionnaire. This enables a distinction between the current situation (subchapter 1 and 2) with the target situation (subchapter 3 and 4).

5.2.1 Perception of gender diversity at EGGER

At first, all the interview partners were asked to give their perception of the gender distribution in their team or area. It was noticeable that only one person knew the distribution by numbers, although it was mentioned that this information had been looked up especially for the interview. All the others could give a personal impression. It became apparent, that due to occupational sex segregation at the company, the persons faced very different realities regarding the gender distribution in their working environment. In sales/marketing a majority of women of around 80% was reckoned, with 40% women on team-leading level and almost only men on the higher management level. In finance/administration an equal distribution of men and women in the factories was named with only occasional women at the top management level. The technical unit was described as male-dominated with 2% women overall and one woman in top management\(^3\). Without being asked to explain the reasons for a certain distribution, several interview partners justified the high number of male employees. On the one hand, a lack of female applicants was named due to the fact that the company is in the production business (P2, P3, P6). The nature of some occupations was named as a determining factor as they require hard physical work in shifts (P3). In addition to this, geographical and historical factors were mentioned. Job choices were explained to be highly influenced by a historical separation between typically male and female jobs (P2), this traditional image being even stronger in rural areas, where EGGER is mostly situated (P3, P6).

While all male interview partners emphasized that there were no differences or inequalities in the treatment of men and women in the workplace, the women saw this more critically. It was mostly agreed that there is no general discrimination against women in the workplace, but there is a need to differentiate between women with children and those without. Therefore, family responsibilities were named as a factor that impacts the treatment of women negatively regarding career advancement (P1, P4). It was also mentioned, that some men perceive women

\(^3\) To prevent conclusions from the working area to the identity of the interview partners, no sources are included in this part.
as unusual in leading positions and do not take them seriously (P6). Having a male supervisor that supports women’s career advancement was perceived as being lucky by female managers (P4, P6). On the other hand, supporting women’s career advancement was particularly emphasized by male managers (P3, P5).

Besides the social and behavioral aspects, the infrastructure was named as a discriminating factor as the factories in the past had only changing rooms, bathrooms, and showers for men. This issue was already recognized some years ago and the company is now in the process of building these rooms for both sexes, to enable women to work in factories (P2, P3).

After collecting first personal impressions, the interview partners were confronted with the term *unconscious bias*, which none of them had heard before. After giving a short definition, they were asked to reflect on the role of *unconscious biases* at EGGER. This insight led all persons to realize differences in the treatment of men and women and revealed information which was not named before. On the one hand, female employees mentioned that women need to put more effort into their advancement because they are usually not considered for promotions (P6). “There are certain biases and if you really seek the dialogue as women and communicate that you are looking for further development and that your private life is not your priority, then you do get the opportunity, but you need to be quite active and communicate that you want to advance*4*” (P1). Also, in the hiring process, a bias is noticeable because pregnancy and childcare are a factor in job interviews with women (P4). A male manager said, that biases only play a role in break talks, but not in professional meetings (P5). Furthermore, *unconscious biases* in the society were seen as the reasons why the company is lacking female employees as already children are confronted with traditional role images, making the role-expectations towards girls incompatible with the role-expectations of possible occupations at EGGER (P2, P3). Hence, few female applicants contact the company. In general, EGGER was perceived being at a higher risk of dealing with *unconscious biases* due to the rather rural areas their sites are located in, which are said to be populated with more conservative people (P3, P6).

In some interviews, a general awareness on the topic of gender inequality was noticeable as certain statements show: “It is still a long way for women to assert themselves in more areas” (P6). “I notice, that my male colleagues who have working wives are happy to work for me as I [as a woman] have more understanding for their situation” (P4). “We at EGGER should really

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*4 Direct quotations are translated from German into English by the author.*
start dealing intensively with this topic and set goals and think about how we can handle the situation” (P6). “Unfortunately, traditional gender images are still in place [emphasis added]” (P2). A clear demand for raising awareness on the topic was expressed. The company’s commitment to support women in their career advancement needs to be communicated more openly, as not even all interview partners knew about this strategic goal. Furthermore, EGGER’s leadership should set an example and support gender equality top-down (P1, P3). However, some managers see the issue in connection to historical developments and expect it to improve in a natural manner through generation change (P2, P6).

5.2.2 Reflection on past management development opportunities

After a first overall impression on the topic of gender diversity, the focus moved to management development opportunities. The interview partners were asked to recall their own experiences in management development in the course of their careers and reflect on the gender distribution among the participants as well as the occurrence of gender as a subject.

Half of the interviewees did not attend any formal management development training. This was explained by the lack of offers at the time they advanced in their career or lack of time (P1, P3, P4). In the other cases, the internal programs Spirit and Startklar were mostly mentioned (P2, P5, P6). Some managers emphasized that they support development opportunities for their team members (P2, P5). Training offers on higher management level were perceived as clearly male-dominated (P1, P3, P5, P6). For offers targeting emerging leaders, like Startklar, the aim is an equal gender distribution among the participants. However, the last selection round was just closed, and the next program will start with a majority of men (P2). One manager knew several cases where colleagues participated in management development programs but did not get an opportunity for career advancement afterwards. This affected mostly women (P1). Regarding the selection process, the majority said that one’s own initiative was central (P2, P4, P5, P6), while some also stated that they were actively offered opportunities (P2, P4). In the case of Startklar, the process was recently changed. Before, it was only possible to participate if nominated by a supervisor, whereas now, it is also possible to apply oneself. This was perceived as a step toward equal opportunities (P2). Still, selection processes were criticized as managers tend to consider employees, who push themselves forward and therefore easily get the attention. This carries the risk of overlooking high potential candidates who act less offensively (P1, P2).
All interview partners agreed that gender was never a topic in any development offer. Management development at EGGER was defined as gender-neutral by one manager (P5). One female manager emphasized that she did not miss any gender-specific content (P6). A discussion on gender was only recalled once as in a team meeting mixed groups were expected to improve the quality of the trainings by bringing together different perspectives (P3).

The interview partners were asked if they had had the possibility to talk with other experienced colleagues about their personal and professional development. Five of six claimed that they had always had someone to exchange with and get advice from in the course of their career until today. These conversations were mostly with superiors and all of them were male (P1, P2, P3, P6). When stating that there are mostly men available for advice as they occupy the top positions, one woman added “even if they do not understand one as well” (P1). Men also mentioned getting advice from colleagues that became friends (P3, P5). Regarding formal exchange opportunities, mentoring sessions were brought up twice, but these are only offered for the top management (P1, P4). A typical mentoring relationship for career development with superiors is seen as difficult, because, from a certain level upwards, the managers do not have time for such activities (P4). In some units mentoring is offered to new employees, but rather focuses on the onboarding process than on future development and usually ends when the person feels confident in his or her new position (P2, P5). Despite the mentoring for top managers and for new employees, exchange opportunities happen upon request and require personal engagement (P1).

Mentoring happens informally in some teams. Three managers talked about their individual experiences where they had offered advice for career advancement over a longer period of time to a less experienced colleague (P1, P3, P5). This included offering development opportunities, giving suggestions for applications and consulting on future career steps.

The role of gender for a successful mentoring relationship had opposing opinions. A shared perspective due to similar circumstances and a more natural identification was named as a benefit for same-gender mentoring (P1). Another person added that it does not necessarily depend on the gender, but similar private situation and responsibilities would improve the quality of exchange as one can relate to the challenges of the other. Without this aspect, the exchange would probably lack topics that are relevant for the personal and professional development (P4). On the other hand, professional understanding and qualifications were named as the primary aspect for effective mentoring regardless of gender (P2, P5).
The situation that usually men are in the advice-giving position was criticized. A cross-gender exchange was considered to be useful if the roles are mixed and men also receive advice from women as both genders have different skills the other one can benefit from (P1).

5.2.3 Equal and unequal opportunities at EGGER

After summarizing how the interview partners perceived gender diversity at EGGER and especially in management development so far, the focus will shift to the target situation. Therefore, the understanding of equal opportunities and the needs and goals of EGGER in this regard will be elaborated.

Equal opportunities were defined with an identical consideration of men and women for promotions (P1, P6). Therefore, women should not be pigeonholed as mothers and housewives. Everyone should be actively offered developmental opportunities (P1). Selection processes should only happen based on the character and competences and not on gender (P5). One person stated that not opportunities or the lack thereof were the issue, but that women— for biological reasons - have different preconditions in the business world than men (P3).

All men and one woman agreed, that EGGER offers equal opportunities for men and women (P2, P3, P4, P5). This was emphasized with the new infrastructure which offers the same conditions in factories for both genders (P2). The gender imbalance in the company was explained with a lack of female applicants (P2). Further, some positions in the factories are harder to fill with women as they include the work with chemicals which are dangerous in the case of a pregnancy (P3). The other two women stated that female employees are hardly ever considered for promotions (P1, P6). Especially in the selection process for management development programs, one manager named the challenge that usually rather “alpha-people” are considered for promotions and from his point of view this is a rather masculine phenomenon (P2).

Two topics received special attention regarding challenges for equal opportunities: children and working arrangements, which are closely interconnected. “These are topics that bring disadvantages for women regarding equal opportunities” (P3). Two other managers agreed on that, stating that even if equal opportunities existed for men and women in general, they did not exist for mothers (P1, P4). Some named the balance of work and family the only limiting factor (P1, P3, P4). On the one hand, it was criticized that the company does not support the return of women into their past position after maternity leave but usually downgrades them (P1). This
again leads to the often-mentioned fact that women reduce hours after having a child. According to P1, the downgrading just reinforces this decision as the woman is less motivated for the position and therefore cares less about working fewer hours. Contrary to this, others stated that all mothers get the possibility to return to their jobs after maternity leave (P4, P5). However, the majority agreed that women needed to make a decision between family and work and that family formation is the main obstacle for career advancement (P1, P3, P4, P5). The need to make time for childcare and the often-resulting reduction of work hours is named as the main reason for prioritizing men in promotions. Especially leadership positions do usually not offer the possibilities to work fewer hours (P3).

Therefore, according to the interview partners, there are mainly issues regarding childcare and working hours that need to be resolved to enhance equal opportunities for men and women at EGGER regardless of their family responsibilities.

5.2.4 Equal opportunities in EGGER’s management development

Narrowing it down to equal opportunities in management development, there were mostly organizational aspects that need to be changed rather than the content of existing offers. Especially target groups and selection processes were mentioned. On the one hand, two women agreed that it is key to address the higher management level first, e.g. by making gender a topic in Spirit events (P1, P6). Several managers emphasized the importance of actively approaching and encouraging employees to take part by communicating trust in the potential and abilities of the person (P1, P2, P5, P6). This should improve the current status where mainly “alpha-people” are considered for development opportunities. Therefore, a mix of nominations and applications, as it already exists for the Startklar program, was suggested to give everyone a fair chance (P2). The company should communicate openly, that all employees have the opportunity to develop, but that it also requires the commitment and communication from the employee-side (P1, P5). Furthermore, transparent information regarding benefits and career perspectives of management development programs should be given, as some participants in the past did not advance in their career. As the known cases were mostly women, a stronger support for women in management development programs is needed (P1).

Only one person addressed the content of development programs. It was suggested to have small trainings on topics like “Woman are different” or “How do men think?” for both male and female employees to improve the communication between the genders (P6). In contrast to
this, another manager stated that the gender-neutral approach in EGGER’s management development is positive as this expresses equal opportunities (P5).

Regarding specific development offers, especially exchange opportunities were named. Formal mentoring was seen as disadvantageous as it lacks the required trust level which is more likely to develop in an informal manner (P3, P4). In general, possibilities to get professional advice from a mentor or coach should be already offered in earlier career stages and not only for top management (P1, P4). As cross-gender interaction can be beneficial for all employees, managers should actively offer their advice and experience. Awareness of the opportunity to receive advice needs to be raised and the company should support an open culture of exchange (P1, P5).

The idea of a women-only network was seen rather skeptical. On the one hand, it was argued that such networks already exist informally. For example, joint management development trainings were perceived as supporting such network-building (P2, P3). On the other hand, geographical distances between the factories and offices were named as a challenging factor (P3, P6). Two women emphasized, that such networking opportunities depended a lot on the character of the individual and are not suitable for everyone (P1, P6). Still, all female interview partners said that they would give it a try. Independently of a long-term Women’s Network, the idea to bring women together to work on the topic of gender diversity at EGGER arose (P3, P6). However, the participation in such networking was perceived as difficult as it requires acceptance from the company to invest time in activities that do not create a measurable outcome and serve only a small percentage of the company’s staff (women) (P4). Another manager stated, that the already existing offers should be used with an increased focus on women’s advancement (P3). The suggestion to offer networking possibilities outside of working hours received opposing opinions. While some said they would participate (P1, P4), another person claimed that activities outside of working hours are not possible anymore nowadays due to the high importance of a good work-life balance (P5).

There were also opinions that gender inequality is not related to management development. Instead, working arrangements like flexible hours as well as the lack of females in the technical area were seen to be the main challenges (P3, P4).

Besides management development, several other aspects were named to support equal opportunities for men and women at EGGER in the future. This included the role of top
management support. Higher level managers need to be convinced of the importance of gender diversity to enable a top-down process in the company, in which they lead with good example and take responsibility (P1, P3). In general, the company should openly communicate its commitment to improving equal opportunities (P1, P3, P4, P6). This is needed to be a good employer for women and attract female candidates. Furthermore, to raise awareness of inequalities, obstacles in the career advancement should be analyzed and understood to find solutions. Even if women actively reject career advancement opportunities, the company should analyze the reasons and look if there is something that can be done from its side (P6). According to several interviews, this affects especially mothers where flexible working arrangements are required (P4, P6). Furthermore, one female manager noted that being a parent and a leader requires sacrifices from one’s own family. Therefore, the company should create benefits for the families, for example, support in childcare, to help their employees with the challenge of managing both their work and family (P6). Two managers talked about past ideas to offer internal childcare opportunities. They still think this would be helpful but it was not implemented so far for financial and structural reasons (P3, P5).
6 Discussion

This case study aims to give an empirical insight into the use of management development to enhance equal opportunities. Therefore, a combination of a multiple-case study of organizations with running management development programs for gender equality and the case of the EGGER group as a company that wants to start such a program was chosen. The former gives an insight into existing offers and shows which aspects of the literature are relevant in the business world. The latter puts a focus on organizational preconditions and needs to enhance equal opportunities. As existing research on management development for equal opportunities lacks information about preconditions and specific measures (Benschop and Verloo, 2012), the results from the case study aim to fill this gap. On the one hand, the discussion will focus on the awareness of EGGER’s employees about gender inequalities as a precondition for further engagement. On the other hand, the three management development tools from the literature review – training, mentoring, networking – will be discussed regarding their realization in the exemplary cases and the necessity and potential of these tools at EGGER.

6.1 Awareness and top management support as preconditions for enhancing equal opportunities

All interview partners at EGGER were aware that men form the majority of the staff and even more so on the management level. The explanation of this phenomenon differed. Some of the interviewed women mentioned rather subtle and invisible reasons – in the literature usually described as *glass ceiling* (Stamm, 2010) – like the preference of male superiors to promote male colleagues (P1, P6). This matches the finding of the literature review that women see one explanation for unequal opportunities in the mindset of their male colleagues and supervisors, which is expressed in their attitudes and behaviors (O’Neil et al., 2015). It also refers to the problem of *homosocial reproduction* (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Another argument for unequal numbers was the lacking visibility of talented women in selection processes. Men were perceived as expressing their wishes and abilities regarding a career more openly while women tend to rather stay in the background (P2). This is a widely shared opinion, which is often used to argue that women do not fit the profile of a leader due to their less self-confident character. This argument ignores the contextual factors that socialization and culture shape this image of women (O’Neil et al., 2015). On the other hand, women argued that they are often overlooked and must try hard to be considered for development opportunities or promotions (P1, P6).
According to the literature, this is a general problem. Lyness and Thompson (2000) state that women have to take more initiative to advance in their careers compared to their male colleagues. Furthermore, several researchers agree that women are offered less developmental opportunities (Ohlott et al., 1994; Auer and Welte, 2011; Scholten and Witmer, 2017; Rincón et al., 2017). At this point, the argument of Adler et al. (2001) gains relevance. According to him, the selection process in itself can create change when supervisors are told to look for female candidates and discover promising women in their teams. Therefore, encouraging managers to seek for female high potential can be an eye-opener.

Several interview partners saw pregnancy and childcare as the only factors inhibiting women’s career advancement (P2, P3, P4, P5). It was emphasized that no inequalities in the treatment of female employees exist, but only the biological precondition of women – possible childbearing – was the reason for the unequal distribution of male and female managers (P3).

Two men saw the problem rather in the small numbers of female applicants due to the work in the production industry than in internal obstacles for the career advancement of women. An understanding for the glass ceiling phenomenon could not be recognized. Gender ratios were justified with a lack of female applicants (P2, P3).

An awareness of the role of culture and socialization on the perception of gender could be detected as societal expectations towards the job choice were mentioned as an issue. It was criticized that parents and schools influence the decisions of children by raising them with a clear image of male and female occupations (P2, P3, P6). EGGER was seen to be strongly affected by these traditional images which are even more present in rural areas, where the company’s sites are mostly situated. Still, the understanding was limited as the problem was only seen outside the organization. There was no perception of the phenomenon of the gendered organization, with its subtle discriminating practices and a reproduction of societal biases and stereotypes (Acker, 1990).

Based on the reference to sociological reasons for gender differences, it was notable that some interview partners had an idea of the phenomenon of the unconscious bias. Still, none of the managers had heard the term before. An existence of unconscious bias inside the organization could be confirmed. Firstly, the interviewed persons themselves recalled situations where the phenomenon played a role in the workplace (P1, P4, P5, P6). Secondly, some answers uncovered individual unconscious biases, which – as the term indicates – the persons were not
aware of. This affected especially statements on the career decisions of women, which were always connected with the possibility of a pregnancy. Here, women were expected to stay at home after giving birth or only be willing to return for a small number of working hours (P3, P5, P6). Therefore, women with children were seen as unlikely to strive for a career. Some women clearly stated that such assumptions were made without asking the mothers about their actual plans (P1, P6).

The statement of two female managers that they were lucky to have had male superiors, who supported their careers (P4, P6) makes their personal awareness of gender inequalities visible. They do not perceive it as customary to be supported equally well as men in their advancement and felt the need to highlight this fact. Then again, two male managers continuously emphasized supporting their female employees (P3, P5), which seems like they perceived it as something that needs special mention and therefore decreases the credibility of their previous statement about women having the same opportunities as men. Such ambivalent expressions appeared regularly during the interviews, especially with male managers. Although they stated that EGGER provided equal opportunities, some answers raised the impression that inequalities exist, but the persons do not seem to recognize them as such.

The results show that even if some understanding of gender inequalities exist, many factors are still left out of scope and especially male managers do not see the role of the organization regarding this issue. The examples of GE Jenbacher, Gore and Sandoz have shown that the awareness of biases is a critical aspect and baseline to improve the situation. In all three cases, unconscious bias trainings are offered to raise awareness within the company. It is reported that these trainings are a central measure and are evaluated very positively by the staff. Furthermore, such trainings are named as a good first initiative to begin with a diversity and inclusion program. The need for awareness raising at EGGER became obvious in the interviews. Therefore, as a first precondition to work on equal opportunities a focus should be put on offers to understand gender inequalities in organizations and the reasons behind them. This is needed not only to deal with the symptoms (like introducing gender quotas) but offer solutions to deal with the roots of inequalities themselves (Meyerson and Fletcher, 2003).

In all practical examples, the importance of top management support was emphasized. A study by KPMG International (2014) revealed that CEO’s and senior leaders can stimulate change in the issue of gender inequality by “creating accountability, taking ownership, communication, leading by example, initiating and culture change” (p. 14). At EGGER, several managers agreed
that the leadership must take responsibility for enhancing equal opportunities (P1, P3, P4, P6). This was explained with the need for a top-down movement with senior managers leading by example (P1, P3). As mentioned at the beginning of this subchapter, some persons justified inequalities at the company with the difficulties of the production business as well as challenges due to pregnancy and childcare (P3, P5). These factors were mostly used as an excuse and inhibited the managers to reflect on internal obstacles in their organization. This shows that there is a need for sensitization and awareness raising on the senior level as they leverage the structure and culture of an organization and play a relevant role when it comes to the advancement offers for employees (Auer and Welte, 2011). Hence, top management support is another precondition to deal with the issue of gender inequality. This is the first level that management development can influence by raising awareness on the issue and enhancing top management support. Two interview partners shared the idea of including the topic in Spirit events first to increase the understanding of gender inequalities at the senior level and enable a top-down process (P1, P6). Such offers can shift the perspective from external factors – like lacking female applicants, pregnancy, childcare – on an organizational level and make managers see internal needs and potential for improvement.

As seen in the examples, to push the cause forward and work on equal opportunities, in the long run, it is necessary to clearly define the responsibility for the topic. Although two interview partners argued that gender equality will improve with generation change (P2, P3), this assumption does not reach far enough. Based on the theory, role expectations and stereotypes are deeply rooted in our culture and socialization (Bruni and Gherardi, 2002) and will not change by themselves. It needs active engagement to raise awareness and create a mindset change to enable long-term improvement. Therefore, it needs responsible actors in the organization to drive the initiative. This does not need to be someone from top management, but it is crucial that the person has its’ support and backing. On the other hand, it is also necessary to motivate the employees and get them on board as a combination of top-down and bottom-up support is the most promising way (Jüngling, 2004). The employee engagement in the activities could be seen in the practical examples as all companies include the staff in the organization regarding content and structure. For the case of EGGER, two managers suggested that female managers could meet and use this group of people to further develop the strategy on equal opportunities and decide on future measures (P1, P6).
6.2 Using management development to enhance equal opportunities

EGGER communicates to work with the 70:20:10 model of learning and development, which breaks down effective learning possibilities for people in 70% challenging assignments, 20% developmental relationships and 10% trainings (Fritz EGGER GmbH & Co OG, 2018a). Therefore, it was even more surprising that all interview partners equated management development offers with trainings when asked to reflect on past experiences. This should be taken into account in the design of a management development program by including the topic of gender diversity in all three areas. In contrast to the findings from the literature review on management development as a tool to enhance equal opportunities (Ely et al., 2011; Hopkins et al., 2008; O’Neil et al., 2015; Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002a), EGGER’s managers struggled to see a connection between the two. The problem of gender inequality was rather associated with childbearing and societal expectations as already mentioned earlier. Since the issue was not seen in connection to organizational structures, management development was not perceived as a promising tool to create change. Still, development opportunities play a vital role at the company as the EGGER CAMPUS initiative with its broad offer shows. Until now, none of the existing programs includes gender as a topic. One interview partner evaluated this as positive, seeing such a gender-neutral approach as a sign of equal opportunities (P5). This is a common assumption, but due to historical and cultural developments, everything one experiences as normal or neutral in an organizational context tends to favor socially ascribed masculine traits and values (Kolb et al., 2003). This leads to the assumption, that despite having 18,7% females working at EGGER, the design and approaches of management development is still historically adjusted to masculine traits (Gallos, 1989).

Trainings play a relevant role in supporting equal opportunities in the cases of GE Jenbacher, Gore, and Sandoz. They name benefits which are also documented in the literature like raising awareness about behavioral patterns, exploring possibilities for improvement (Debebe et al., 2016) or increasing the visibility of women (Rincón et al., 2017). Especially Gore worked primarily with this tool in diverse manners with different target groups and content. Women-only, as well as cross-gender settings, are provided. This enables an exchange of different perspectives and creates awareness for all employees (Debebe, 2011) as well as addressing individual needs of female managers in a safe setting (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002b; Ely et al., 2011; Brue and Brue, 2018). Especially cross-gender trainings on unconscious bias play a central role in all organizations. The relevance of this topic is notable as all three companies
educated and certified some employees to have internal trainers available and be able to offer these trainings on a regular basis and to a broad target group. As EGGER faces the need to raise awareness on gender inequality and its reasons, such unconscious bias trainings may be a good possibility to sensitize the managers. They can increase the awareness of men and lead to a reflection of one’s individual behavior. Women can benefit from understanding the causes and exploring solutions to deal with stereotype threats and double binds (Zhang et al., 2009). As the introduction of the term unconscious bias during the interviews already led to a reflection of the individual behavior and working environment, a complete training on the topic is expected to enhance the awareness of the participants and create change.

The interviewed managers at EGGER had little awareness of the role the content and design of a training can play in the enhancement of equal opportunities. There was only one idea about how the existing offer could be broadened to include gender as a topic. To improve the collaboration between men and women and reduce misunderstandings, a training about male and female communication patterns was suggested (P6). Such trainings can improve the understanding for women’s developmental needs and how they define career success, which may on the long-run create change in the design of management development (Sturges, 1999; Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002a). In the example of Gore, the all-women leadership trainings also have a strong focus on communication to empower women in an authentic leadership style.

Possibilities for the improvement of trainings were rather seen on the organizational side, especially in participant selection. As discussed in the previous chapter, several managers agree that there is a need for optimizing the nomination and application process to provide equal opportunities (P1, P2, P5, P6).

Networking appeared to be the holistic approach to support gender equality in organizations from the literature. Consistently, GE and Sandoz work intensely with this measure. Both use prescribed women’s networks (Coleman, 2010), as they were officially established and are coordinated by the organizations. The access to the networks is a central topic. Both companies have no nomination or selection process, but the networks are open to join by everyone interested. This voluntary approach can counter the possible challenges mentioned in the literature. This includes intentional as well as unintentional exclusion scenarios due to the choice of activities or time scheduling (Sharafizad, 2011; Ely et al., 2011; Ibarra et al., 2013; Cahusac and Kanji, 2014). As the participation is not mandatory, the employees are free to only join the events they are interested in. Still, networking activities are not suitable for everyone.
Some authors argue that women feel reluctant to engage in such activities as it feels inauthentic to them or they do not see the purpose behind it (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002b; Ely et al., 2011). These reasons also play a role at EGGER as two female managers argued that networking depends on the individual character and perhaps does not fit all women (P1, P6). The reactions to the idea of establishing a women’s network were rather reserved. Even if all women declared their willingness to participate in activities it was rather hesitant. They said they would give it a try but did not seem to see a need or benefit in it (P1, P4, P6). Large distances due to the geographical distribution of EGGER’s sites were named as a further challenge to successfully establish a network (P3, P6). Cross-organizational networks with other companies nearby the individual sites could be a possible solution to this difficulty. Furthermore, one woman expressed her doubts on a network without measurable outcomes as this would need a justification towards the top management (P4). This addresses the critical aspect of the image of women’s networks as they run the risk of being only seen as social meeting points for women without professional outcome (Coleman, 2010). Such image problems were also mentioned in the case of GE Jenbacher. Therefore, their hub-champion emphasized the importance of transparency in such activities to communicate openly what is done in the network and invite all employees – male and female – to join sometime and get an impression its work. She also stressed that the main goal of the network is professional development while friendships and social benefits come along naturally. This confirms the theory by Clarke (2011) that a network can provide both functional and psychosocial support.

As mentioned in the literature, more popular than prescribed networks are emergent forms (Coleman, 2010). This is also the case at Gore, where a network was established by some employees who experienced the need for such an initiative at the company. Two managers at EGGER argue for this kind of networking, as they believe that it already happens informally and that existing programs can be used to further strengthen the exchange and support among employees (P2, P3). For example, training offers are named as a possible space where new people meet and get the chance to establish lasting relationships to support each other (Lämsä and Savela, 2014). For this idea, the experience of Sandoz should be kept in mind, where it was discovered that the participants of the same management development training did hardly know each other and had no communication beyond the program. Therefore, the communication between employees should not be taken for granted and seen as something which evolves naturally. The exchange among participants and the development of a network may need some guidance from the side of the trainers.
Instead of starting a network for all (female) employees at EGGER, two managers expressed the idea of using the format of a network firstly to plan and coordinate gender diversity initiatives for the company (P3, P6). As already mentioned earlier, clear responsibilities for the topic are a precondition for the success of the initiatives, therefore these responsibilities should be defined right from the beginning and such a first form of a women’s network could be an option for the company.

Although mentoring is evaluated as especially valuable for the career advancement of women due to the possibility of addressing individual developmental needs (Bower, 2012) and the potential to include both psychosocial and career functions (Kram, 1988), it was not named as a measure to foster equal opportunities in the exemplary cases. Especially the formal kind of mentoring was perceived as critical, as the required level of trust is hard to establish when intentionally matching two persons (Interview GE Jenbacher). However, managers at EGGER named mentoring or coaching as a welcome opportunity to work on one’s own professional and personal development. As this measure is limited to the higher management level until now, opening it up to more employees was named as an effective approach to support career advancement (P1, P4). Still, trust was also mentioned as a problem in formal offers (P3, P4), whereas opportunities for informal exchange were seen as beneficial. The interviews have shown that some informal mentoring is already happening at EGGER (P1, P3, P5). These cases seem rather unique and restricted, although no definite statement can be made as such arrangements are not openly communicated but seem to happen in the background. In general, some managers showed a willingness and availability to function as a mentor. This finding is helpful to establish a more open exchange culture at the company, where mentoring opportunities develop more naturally. Therefore, existing examples should be made visible and the availability of managers to give others advice on their career advancement should be transparent. The need for more transparency on such opportunities was also named in some interviews, where managers stated that it is necessary to approach employees more actively to make them aware of the possibilities and transmit the trust in their potential and abilities (P1, P2, P5, P6). Benefits of working with a mentor of the same sex were only perceived by one manager (P1). Another person stated that this was not absolutely necessary, but that similar private circumstances – like having children or being responsible for the care of a family member – would increase the advantages of the relationship (P4). Other managers saw functional factors as more relevant for a successful mentorship (P2, P5). As it can be challenging to find a mentor who fits all requirements, the approach of GE Jenbacher could be
a promising alternative. Their focus lies on advisory boards with several people one can contact for different questions and needs rather than on the exchange with one particular person. As the restricted time of senior managers was named as one challenge (P4), such an approach could also be a way to reduce the workload for one person and divide responsibilities among several people.

The arguments regarding the work with same- or cross-gender mentors are equally valid for the decision between all-women or mixed-gender trainings or networks. As described in the literature review, both settings have their strengths and weaknesses. Although there was little response considering the request for women-only offers, it still holds benefits which are not easily transmittable in cross-gender settings: the safe environment of being among women who identify with each other and receiving understanding for one’s situation and advice on how cope with organizational obstacles (Ibarra et al., 2013; Brue and Brue, 2018). The case of Sandoz described their decision-making process on the question of women-only or cross-gender networks. They reported the group dynamic changing negatively when men joined a group of women with regard to openness in the discussion – a factor that needs to be considered. To enable open and trustful exchange, EGGER could test the dynamics in a pilot phase by offering women-only and cross-gender events to decide how the company should proceed. As seen in all three exemplary cases, the use of one setting does not exclude the other. A combination of both settings enables social support with discussions in a safe space as well as instrumental resources and an exchange of different perspectives (Krell, 2011). An exclusive use of women-only programs may be critical. The hub-champion of GE Jenbacher argued that working completely separately does only widen the gap between the male and female employees. Furthermore, as the mindset and behavior of men is a critical obstacle for the career advancement of women, the inclusion of male colleagues in the initiatives can be beneficial and accelerate the change process. Additionally, mixed settings in trainings and networks may enable exchanges which are not typically bound to the scenario that men are in the advice-giving position. It should be recognized that both genders have skills and competencies the other one can benefit from (P1).

The need to start with awareness raising programs is confirmed by all cases. At GE Jenbacher, Gore and Sandoz, unconscious bias trainings were used as a basis for further gender diversity initiatives. At EGGER, managers stated that it is crucial to begin the process by raising awareness at the top management level. After the top management has recognized the issue,
awareness raising among all employees can follow. The literature and the examples have shown that besides creating awareness, management development can be used to address the developmental needs of women and empower them in their career advancement. These factors build on each other and form a sequence of how management development can foster equal opportunities. In the literature this is defined as small wins (Weick, 1984) meaning “small, targeted, and achievable change initiatives that result in concrete and visible results that build momentum to create a cascading change effect” (Bilimoria et al., 2008). Management development can create such small wins through the mentioned three steps. Looking at the examples of Gore and Sandoz, an evolutionary process of creating equal opportunities (as demonstrated in figure 1) can be shown. After the first steps of raising awareness and empowering women in formal programs, the companies moved into the fourth phase by making gender equality part of their working environment. Such actions must affect power structures, behavioral patterns and organizational practices (Struthmann, 2012). Hence, management development can be the starting point for a bigger organizational change if it is embedded in additional positive actions (Brew and Garavan, 1995).

Figure 1: Evolutionary process for equal opportunities

When a critical mass of women in senior positions is reached, the topic of gender equality should start to evolve naturally, as the organization will become more attractive for female applicants seeing that they do have the chance to reach the top. Female top managers will be visible testimonials for an encouraging and supportive culture for both genders (Chesterman and Ross-Smith, 2006).

EGGER should make use of the knowledge and experience of other organizations in the region that are engaged in gender diversity and inclusion. GE Jenbacher and Sandoz are already
collaborating and expressed their willingness to exchange with EGGER to push the cause forward and drive change in the region together. As the companies are working under similar circumstances as EGGER, their experiences can support the introduction and implementation of programs to enhance equal opportunities. They can provide some guidance through the process and accompany EGGER through a long-term change process. Both Gore and Sandoz can offer references for further initiatives once the company is ready to go beyond management development.

In sum, all findings show that management development can positively influence equal opportunities. The existing literature and the cases of GE Jenbacher, Gore and Sandoz have given an insight which tools can be useful to address the topic. Although the correlation between management development and equal opportunities is not yet recognized by the managers at EGGER, a need for programs to raise awareness can be stated. Therefore, based on the finding of the evolutionary process, a first offer should target senior managers to create understanding. Afterwards – when the role of management development is recognized in the organization – the initiative can be broadened with their backing. Management development programs can transmit information and understanding on the topic of gender inequality, its reasons and different ways to improve the situation. In a second step, it can provide customized offers that suit the individual needs of men and women by adjusting the content and design onto the target group. Hereby, it is crucial to consider the risk of unconsciously sticking to male values and needs and reproducing stereotypes and biases. Gender-specific management development is often criticized for using a fix the woman approach, where women are told to behave in a more masculine way to succeed and inequalities stay in place (Kolb et al., 2003). Bruni and Gherardi (2002) speak of the risk of only adding the woman to the organization without adjusting to their needs. To avoid such misguided approaches, I argue to see the woman. Firstly, organizations must learn to take women into account for developmental opportunities and promotions without biased judgments and stereotypes on the career process of women. Secondly, they should be aware of the differences between men and women in their definition of career success and their individual developmental needs. They should distance themselves from wanting to be gender-neutral and not making any differences but embrace the differences and the diversity and use it for their own benefit. This is part of the final phase which goes beyond management development. There, the organizational structure and culture are adjusted to provide equal opportunities.
At EGGER, a first step could be to make the gender distribution more visible and confront all managers and employees with the low proportion of women. This may already start a first reflection in the company. Furthermore, the commitment of EGGER to support women, as it is written in the business strategy, must be communicated more openly to raise awareness among the employees and encourage them to contribute with their actions and ideas.

6.3 Limitations

Reflecting on my methodology, there are three factors which limited the research. Firstly, the strong differences in numbers regarding gender distribution between the working areas at EGGER indicate that gender diversity cannot be generalized. Hence, the responses in the interviews were not easily comparable. Reflecting on the methodology, I would increase the number of interviews to be able to collect answers from several persons per functional unit. There is a need to distinguish between the individual areas as the interview partners face very distinct situations and suggestions are not applicable to the whole organization in general.

Secondly, investigating such a sensitive topic like gender equality, which is very present in the media nowadays, makes it difficult to receive unbiased and undistorted answers. The interview partners knew the topic of my thesis, which carries the risk of influencing their statements by giving socially desirable answers, thus leading to distorted data.

Thirdly, seeing that there is little awareness of the background of gender equality, which inhibited the understanding of the role of management development, I would discuss the particular approaches more directly. I deliberately put the questions in a subtle way without mentioning specific tools as I wanted to collect the individual needs without imposing predefined formats. This did not work out as I hoped as the interview partners tended to discuss challenges like pregnancy, childcare, and occupational sex segregation and were not open to see the potential of management development for equal opportunities.
7 Conclusion

This research shows possible ways for how management development can impact equal opportunities in the career advancement of men and women. The sociological and cultural reasons for gender inequality were highlighted at the beginning of this thesis to transmit an understanding of the problem. Gender biases and stereotypes are the sources of subtle discriminatory practices against women. The expectations towards one’s gender role affect organizational structures and patterns. Hence, they also influence the content and design of management development programs, which historically address masculine traits and values.

The conducted literature review reveals training offers, mentoring relationships and networking opportunities as recommended tools to foster gender diversity. The investigation of practical examples, as well as the case of the EGGER group, have revealed several steps in the process of establishing equal opportunities. As the support of the top management is critical to the success of any gender equality initiatives, this level needs to be addressed first. Hereby, management development can be used to raise awareness both on the issue of gender inequality and the reasons behind it as well as on the potential of organizations to improve the situation.

The role of the latter is made apparent by the case of EGGER, where some managers justified inequalities with external circumstances and did not recognize the responsibility of the company. When the top management understands the issue and supports the work on gender equality, management development can be further used to empower women and create an even playing field. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge differences between the genders and see their benefit for the organization instead of insisting on gender-neutral structures. Embracing differences and seeing them as an advantage is the key to successful (gender) diversity. To make this possible, existing management development programs need to be revised regarding their content and design to get away from the favoritism of masculine traits and also address women’s developmental needs. This approach was described as seeing the woman (with an allusion to the criticized management development methods of fixing the woman and adding the women) in this thesis. Hence, management development does not need to be invented anew, but existing tools and structures can be kept in place with some further development towards equally addressing male and female needs for career advancement.

Based on the results of the literature review and the case study, the following recommendations for further research can be made: As the need for a distinction between the developmental needs of male and female employees exists to ensure a fair treatment that addresses these differences,
equity theory should be researched in combination with management development. This can help to get a deeper understanding of how the intentional differentiation is a means to reach equality. Furthermore, an accompanying research on the gender diversity initiative at EGGER can help the company to evaluate actions and adjust offers to the needs of the employees. As already mentioned in the outlook, management development is only the first step of a bigger organizational change. Therefore, it can be useful to investigate the next step to understand the right timing and actions to enable a modification of organizational structures and processes for equal opportunities.
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