

A FRESH LOOK AT WOMEN NETWORKS

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For simplicity, we use the term 'network', however the survey was inclusive of organizations that go by several names, including "affinity networks", "employee networks", "diversity employee groups", "Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)", "Business Resource Groups (BRGs)", "professional networks", and other names.

CONTENT

3	Why a Survey on Women Networks?	17	Authors' Reflections on Survey Findings
4	Overview of the Survey Design and Demographics of Participants	19	Taking the Learnings Forward
6	Research Findings in Detail	21	Foundational Rules for Networks
7	3.1 Organizational Expectations, Resources, and Metrics are Misaligned	22	Acknowledgements
10	3.2 Women Networks Can Be a Barrier to Female Advancement	23	About Us
12	3.3 Many Members Would Hesitate to Recommend their Network		
14	3.4 Members of Networks that Are Insufficiently Supported Have Lower Engagement Scores		
15	3.5 There Is a Huge Gap between the Theory and Intentions for Networks and their Reality		

1 WHY A SURVEY ON WOMEN NETWORKS?

Employee networks are a core element of most organizations' diversity & inclusion (D&I) activities and are often seen as a logical starting point of those efforts. Still, most of the research available today is focused on "how to set up a network" and looks at network benefits from a company perspective. There is virtually no cross-company data regarding their actual impact, the quality of the membership experience and whether they live up to employees' expectations.

This groundbreaking global survey sheds light on women networks' impact, members' experience, and meeting expectations

Based on our own experiences as global heads of diversity & inclusion functions in multinationals for many years and also based upon numerous discussions with D&I practitioners from around the world, we saw a clear need to dig deeper on employee networks. Across our professional D&I networks and at D&I events, we heard frequent questioning on the effectiveness of employee networks, wondering about alternative models moving forward, seeking a global "fit" for this U.S.-origin concept, and also wanting more insight to what other companies were experiencing with their employee networks.

This is why we set up a research project to look beyond the theory and advice-giving that has dominated the dialogue, and to instead explore how networks actually operate, how likely they are to deliver on their intended goals, and how these are aligned with members' expectations.

As women networks are by far the most frequent form of employee networks internationally, we have focused our research on these specifically, although many of the findings can be translated to networks addressing other employee populations.

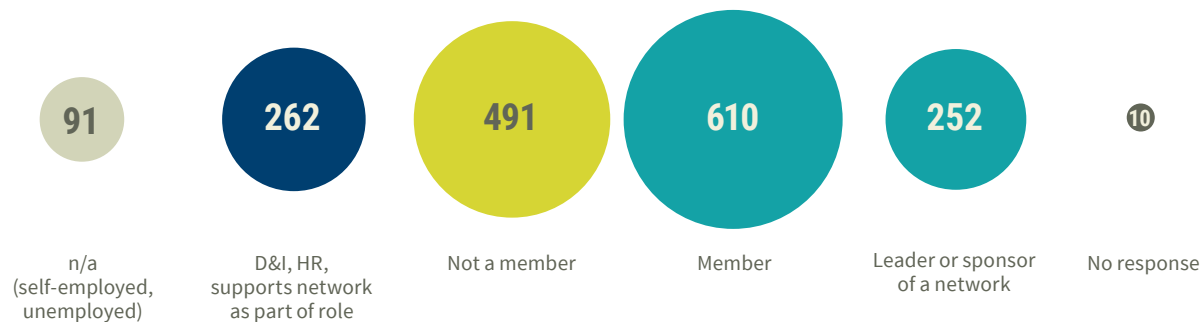
2 OVERVIEW OF THE SURVEY DESIGN AND DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS

Survey responses from over 1700 people, 92% female, from over 55 countries

This global research project on women networks is based on a comprehensive online questionnaire which was offered in four languages (English, German, French, & Spanish). Between August to November 2015, we surveyed network leads, sponsors, D&I and HR professionals, as well as employee members and non-members of women networks. In total, 1716 participants from 58 countries completed the survey, 92% of them women.

Our aim was to get a broad view of the current state of women networks in general – rather than evaluating networks of individual companies. This informed both the design of the questionnaire, as well as the strategy for distribution of the survey link.

To gain access to participants from around the world, across companies, industries, and generations, we relied on both our personal networks and the support of multipliers in the D&I and gender fields, such as external networks, key conferences, and educational institutions. We also made broad use of social media.



**CHART 1:
ROLE IN WOMEN NETWORK
(NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS)**

The survey – which included both quantitative and qualitative questions – is centered around three main questions:

ORGANIZATIONAL PRIORITIES AND SUPPORT: What are the priorities of women networks, how are they structured and supported by an organization, and how is success being measured.

NETWORK LEADERSHIP: How are network sponsors and leaders selected, why do they engage, how much time do they invest, and how is that time being recognized

NETWORK MEMBERS: Why do people decide for or against joining a company network, and how do they rate their membership experience.

As “increasing employee engagement” is often mentioned as a key priority, we have included questions focused on it and used these insights – together with Net Promoter Score (NPS), i. e. the likeliness someone would recommend their network to others – as a measure of network success.

The survey also included questions on the role of men in women networks, as well as the impact of external women networks. These findings will be part of future deeper research that we will conduct and share later this year.

3 RESEARCH FINDINGS IN DETAIL

While networks are generally believed to deliver positive outcomes, the global survey “A Fresh Look at Women Networks” provides a much more differentiated view. As quite a few of the findings strongly deviate from what is considered “common knowledge” today, we actually decided to extend the survey period to allow more employees to share their experience and to make sure that we have sufficient data to validate the research outcomes and support the findings introduced in this report.

The perspectives shared by participants can help spark new dialogue on networks

What we found is that, while there are great networks out there, a high share of respondents don’t feel their network delivers on their needs and especially don’t believe that it is fully embraced by the organization. Only 1 in 3 respondents says that their network is seen as “actively used to support the business” or “part of our culture”, 1 in 4 say their network is “not well known” and about 40% believe that their network is seen as a “coffee club” or “not delivering value” by their organization, which – not surprisingly – has strong impact on their network experience and the willingness to recommend it to others.

We hope that the compelling perspective shared by survey participants from around the world can help spark new dialogue on better ways to balance what organizations and members hope to gain from their networks and the importance of recognizing the work delivered by networks and especially their leaders.

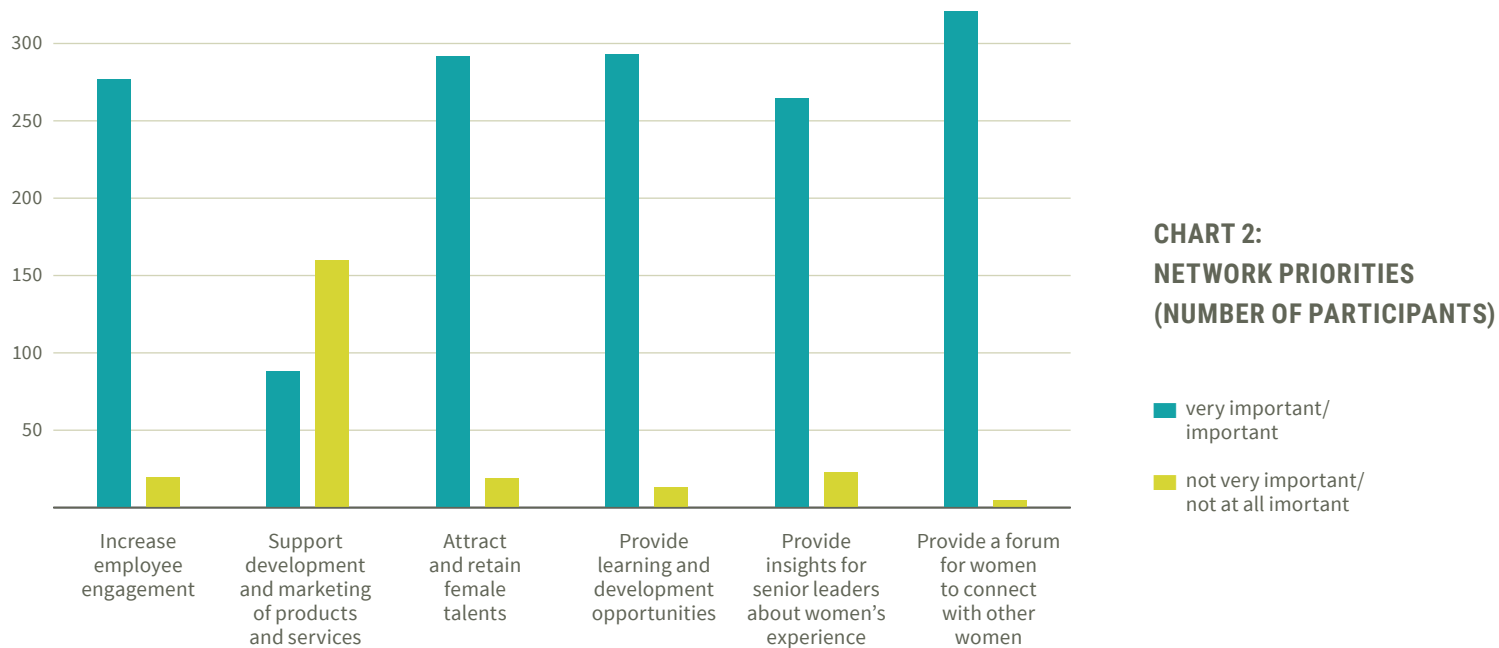
A point of attention: in several places of the research, we highlight differences in findings based on employee experience. It is important to note, though, that these correlations do not imply a causal relationship, as the research does not control for the influence of other factors.

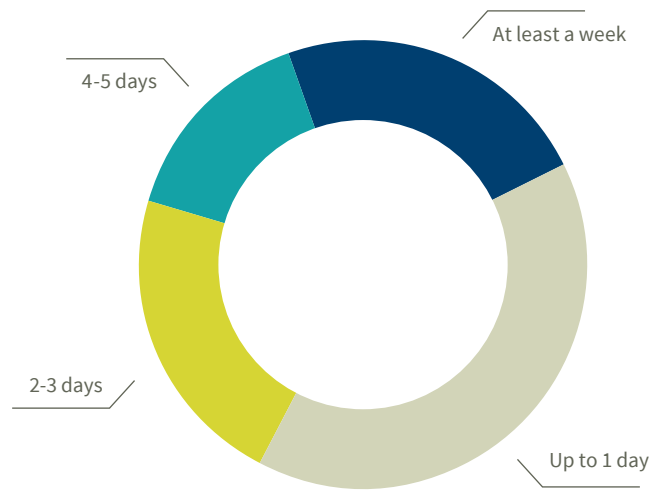
3.1 ORGANIZATIONAL EXPECTATIONS, RESOURCES, AND METRICS ARE MISALIGNED

While there is a high level of expectations on what a network is able to achieve, just 28% consider “support product marketing and development” a priority, despite the increasing discussion around “Business Resource Groups”

There is a high-level of expectation on what a network is able to achieve. More than 8 out of 10 network leaders and sponsors, as well as HR and D&I professionals, commenting on network priorities say that “increasing employee engagement”, “talent attraction and retention”, “learning and development”, “provide insights to senior leaders”, and “providing a forum to connect” are “important” or “very important”. This creates an extremely ambitious agenda.

Interestingly, less than 3 out of 10 consider “support product marketing and development” a priority of their network, despite the increasing discussion around “Business Resource Groups” that are meant to have a direct impact on business success and purportedly are the next evolution of employee networks according to popular assumption in D&I circles.

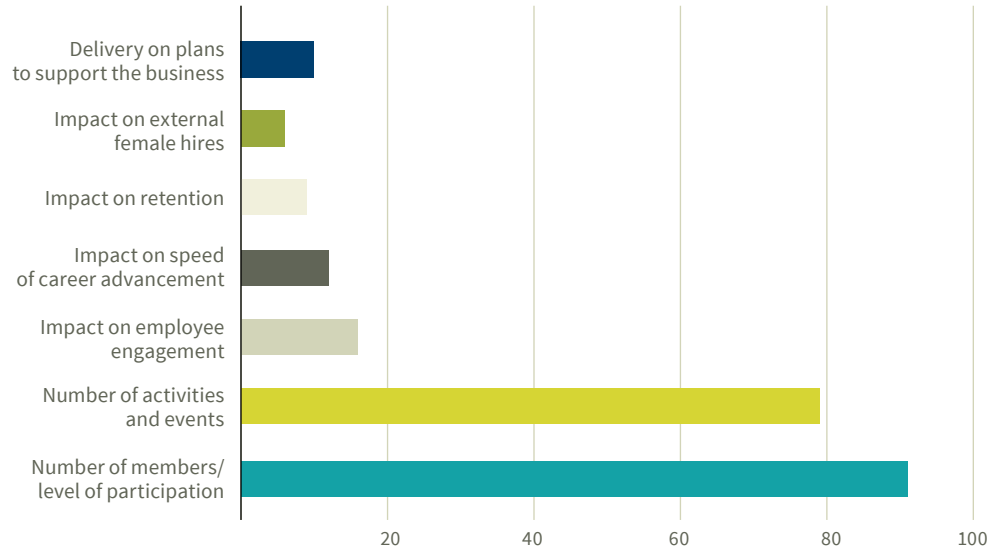




**CHART 3:
TIME INVESTED PER MONTH
BY THE ORGANISATION (IN %)**

40% of organizations dedicate less than a day per month, 12% of respondents say their company has a full-time role focused on their women network

There is a huge variation in the time invested by organizations to guide network activities and to provide oversights. While 40% of organizations dedicate less than a day per month, probably making it “yet another activity” on an already busy agenda of their D&I manager, almost a quarter invests more than a week per month and 12% even have a full-time dedicated role focused on their women network.



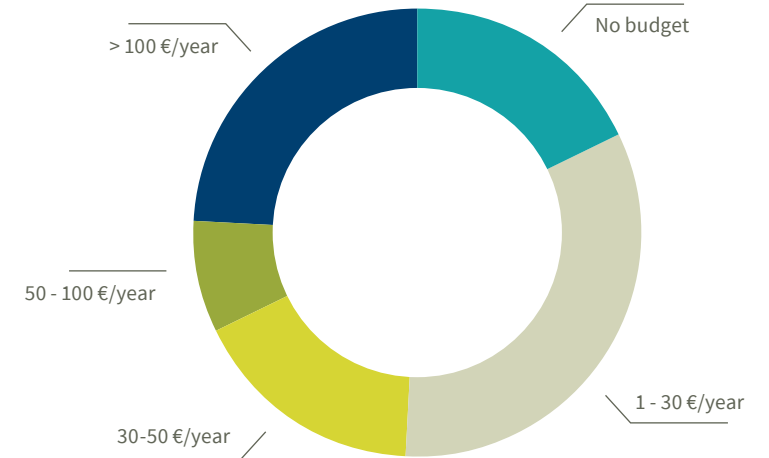
**CHART 4:
RESULTS MEASURED (IN %)**

Despite the amount of time invested by quite a few companies, only very few measure the actual contribution to what networks have set out or are expected to deliver. While the number of members and the number of activities are tracked by the vast majority of organizations – about 90 and 80% respectively – just 1 in about 8 has metrics in place to measure how well a network delivers on its intended outcomes.

There is no connection apparent between the deliverables of a network and the funds provided to help them achieve that goal

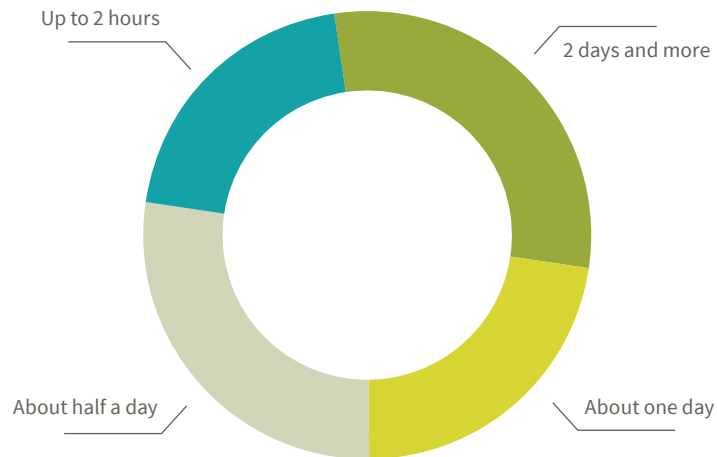
While budgets generally tend to be scarce, differences between networks are huge. Almost 1 in 5 respondents (18%) reported that their network has no budget at all. On the other hand, nearly a quarter have more than 100€ annually per member – some mentioned this is because they are tasked with delivering events that target beyond just network members. Disappointingly, there is no connection apparent between the deliverables of a network and the funds provided to help them achieve that goal.

For instance, about half of networks that say “provide learning and development opportunities” is an “important” or “very important” part of their agenda have a monthly budget of less than 2€ per participant and 17% of them don’t have any budget at all, which raises questions on the quality and effectiveness of such learning solutions, and even if this is a plausible expectation.

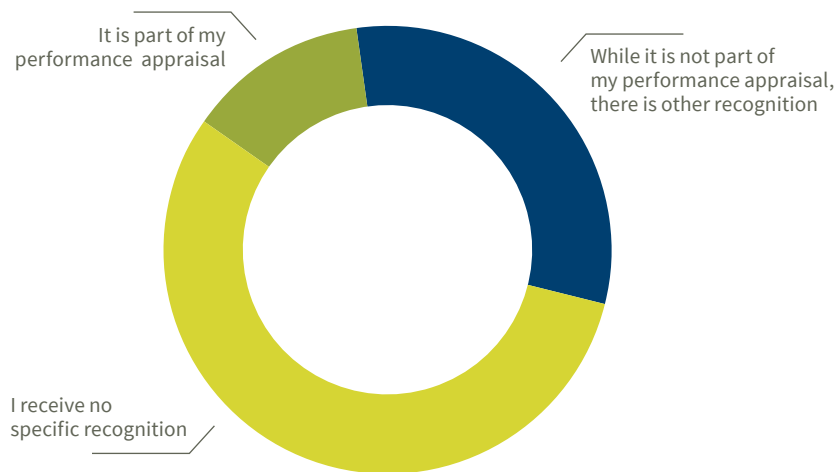


**CHART 5:
ANNUAL BUDGET
PER MEMBER (IN %)**

**CHART 6:
TIME INVESTED PER MONTH
BY NETWORK LEADS (IN %)**



**CHART 7:
HOW IS TIME
RECOGNIZED (IN %)**



3.2 WOMEN NETWORKS CAN BE A BARRIER TO FEMALE ADVANCEMENT

In driving their women network, many organizations heavily rely on the time and energy of very dedicated volunteers. More than 50% of the women network leaders responding to our survey invest at least a day per month in this role. Over 30% even invest 2 days and more, i.e. over 10% of their regular working time, usually because they want to create a better workplace for women, which is a main driver for 80% of respondents taking on a network leadership role.

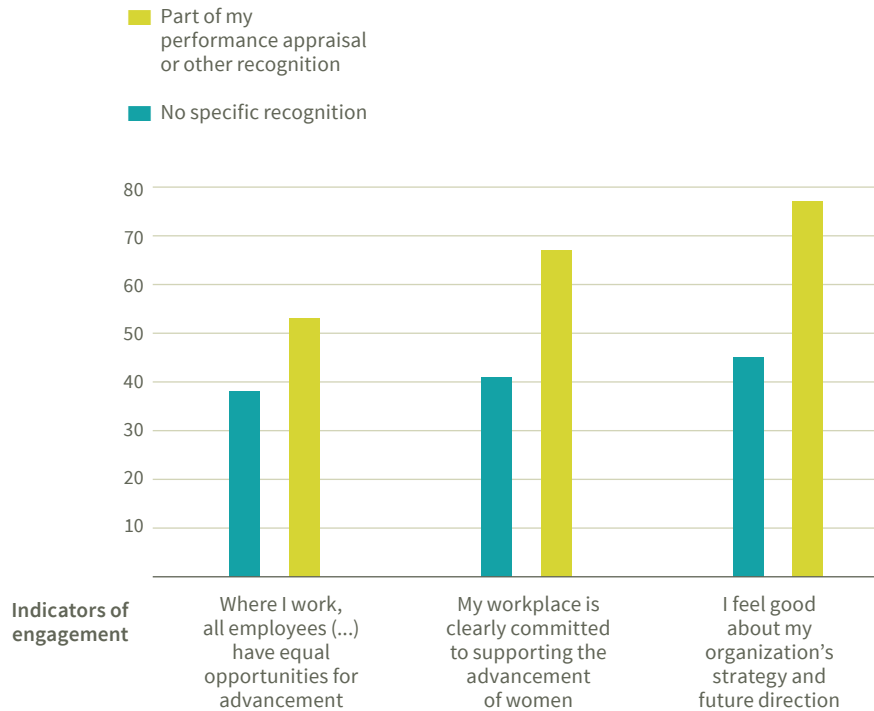
In most organizations, this large investment of time goes unrewarded – 87% of network leaders say that their network contributions are not part of their performance appraisal. However, 31% at least experience some other benefits, e.g. access to training programs, and a troubling 56% of respondents receive absolutely “no specific recognition”.

This is not only true for networks that select their leaders among themselves. Results look very similar for organizations that nominate female talents for network leadership roles via their leadership teams, HR, D&I or talent management activities.

High time investment and lower engagement, if the role is not recognized, can have a negative impact on women's careers

Network leaders, who say their work is not being recognized, have considerably lower employee engagement scores. They are less likely to believe their organization is serious about diversity and inclusion efforts and are less positive about their employers' "strategy and future direction".

It seems likely that the considerable time investment in activities that are not recognized by the organization, as well as lower engagement, can have a negative impact on the advancement of female talent. It probably also affects the ability to rally network members behind a common cause in support of their employer.



**CHART 8:
RECOGNITION AND
ENGAGEMENT SCORES OF
NETWORK LEADS (IN %)**

3.3 MANY MEMBERS WOULD HESITATE TO RECOMMEND THEIR NETWORK

While network leaders and sponsors, as well as D&I and HR, have high ambitions setting the agenda for the network, members have much more limited expectations. The majority of them join a network to connect with people across the organization (56%), help create a better workplace (54%) and leverage learning and development opportunities to advance their career (48%).

With an NPS of minus 3, many members are unlikely to recommend their network to others

Still, based on a net promoter score (NPS) of minus 3, many members are unlikely to recommend to friends and colleagues that they join their network.

**CHART 9:
NET PROMOTER SCORE (NPS)**



NPS EXPLAINED

As one of the priorities of our survey was to gain insights on membership experience, we leveraged a commonly used marketing instrument – the “Net Promoter Score” (NPS), which looks at how likely a product or service would be recommended to a friend or colleague.

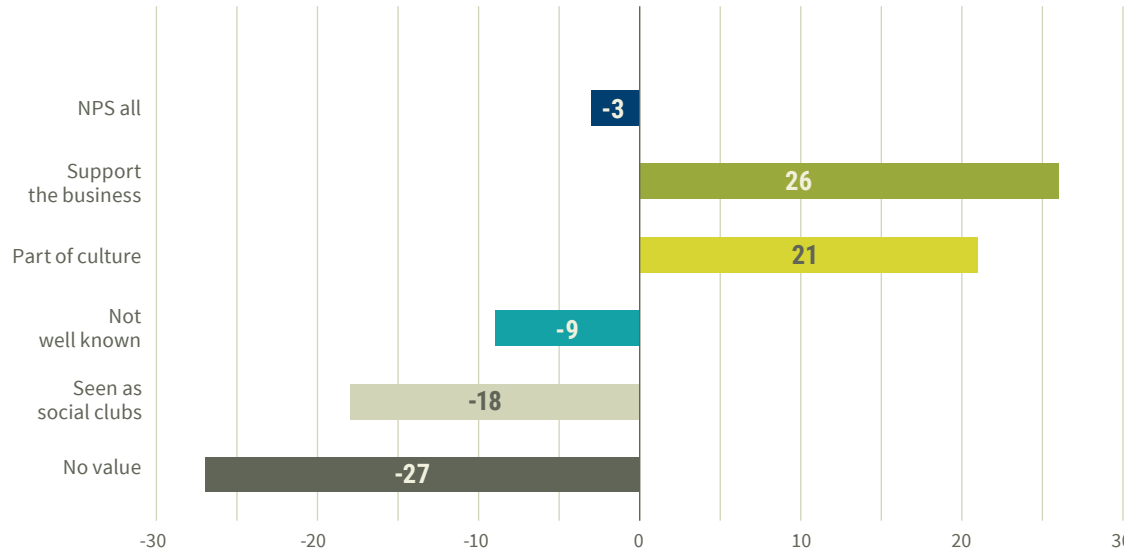
Relying on one simple question “How likely are you to recommend (...) to a friend or colleague?”, NPS is considered an indicator of the quality of the customer experience. The NPS is most commonly based on a 0 – 10 scale. Respondents that score a 9 or 10 are identified as “Promoters”, responses of 7 and 8 “Passives” and participants scoring a 6 or below “Detractors”. The NPS is calculated by deducting the share of Detractors from the share of Promoters. In our example: 29 percent Promoters minus 32 percent Detractors equals an NPS of minus 3.

Support from the company and embedding into culture positively impact perception of the network

There are two key factors impacting NPS. Obviously, there is a link between the ability of a network to deliver on expectations and the likeliness a member would recommend their network to others.

But even more important than the personal experience is what respondents say about the way their network is being seen by the organization at large. Networks, which members believe are perceived as “supporting the business” or “part of our culture” have NPS scores of plus 26 and 21 respectively, while, networks that are believed to be seen as “coffee clubs” score at very low minus 18 percent. With only about 1 in 5 being promoters, but almost every second member not recommending for others to join, the “not delivering value” networks even scores at minus 27.

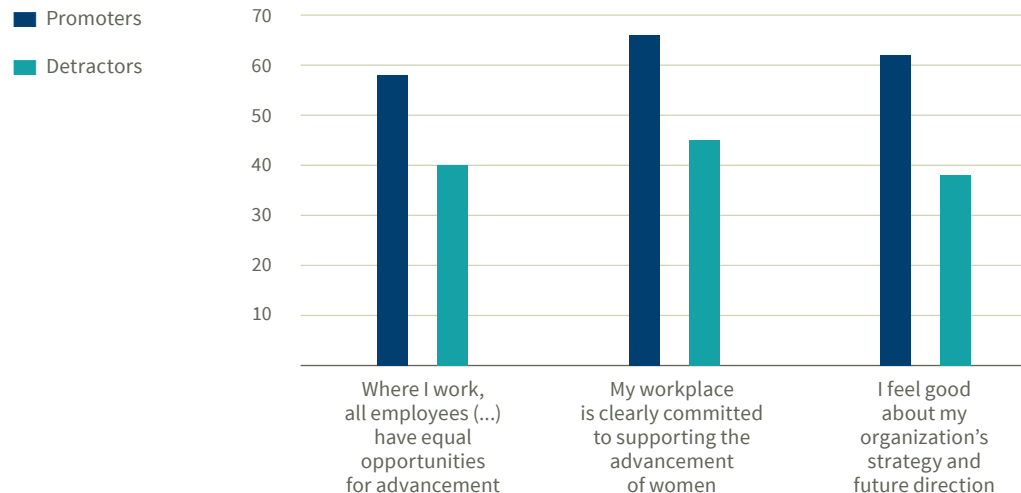
This clearly demonstrates the importance of a coherent D&I strategy focused at creating an inclusive culture for networks to be successful.



**CHART 10:
PERCEPTION IMPACTS
LIKELINESS TO RECOMMEND
NETWORK**

3.4 MEMBERS OF NETWORKS THAT ARE INSUFFICIENTLY SUPPORTED HAVE LOWER ENGAGEMENT SCORES

The research shows a strong link between NPS and employee engagement. Members that have a neutral or especially negative network experience expressed by a low NPS, score much lower on questions related to employee engagement, like their employer’s strategy and future, as well as commitment to diversity and inclusion.



Considering that about a third of respondents are actually detractors of their network and about 40% of all respondents are passives, this makes a very sizable part of the population. It also obviously raises the questions why people decide to stick to a network that is neither believed to have a positive image nor delivers on their needs.

Apparently, being unhappy about culture, lack of support, and opportunities to advance can increase the need to unite with others around common-shared experiences and help explain why the possibility to connect – which is the one aspect that scores at a similar level regardless of network perception – is sufficient to remain in the network despite an otherwise unsatisfactory networking experience. This raises questions on a network’s ability to be a nucleus of change.

**CHART 11:
PROMOTERS VS.
DETRACTORS THAT AGREE
WITH KEY QUESTIONS
STRONGLY LINKED TO
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
(IN %)**

While employee networks are an overwhelmingly popular element of companies' D&I activities, their reality often does not live up to the intentions

3.5 THERE IS A HUGE GAP BETWEEN THE THEORY AND INTENTIONS FOR NETWORKS AND THEIR REALITY

While employee networks are an overwhelmingly popular element of companies' D&I activities, and despite the amount of advice offered on how to set them up, their implementation often leads to a very different network reality than intended, with networks not contributing to either engagement or advancement of women in the organization.

One of the key reasons is that networks tend to lean towards supporting a corporate agenda vs. focusing on meeting their members' expectations. A prominent example is the increasing push to evolve networks into "business resource groups", providing insights into product development and marketing for their constituency. Again, the survey shows network members demonstrate little interest in what is often positioned as the "natural evolution" of employee networks.

Another issue is that many companies apparently hope that networks can be a "quick win" and that having a network might be sufficient to drive diversity and inclusion within their organization – vs. implementing a broad D&I strategy.

This belief is supported by some of the currently available employee network advice-giving materials and presentations which suggest focusing network efforts where formal processes and activities are insufficient to drive change.

Such networks, that are not supported by, nor integrated into a broader organizational culture change, are holding women responsible for driving – what is considered – “the women’s agenda”. This behavior does not go unnoticed, as can be seen from the many comments provided (a few of which are below).

“[The network] makes it look like the organization is taking things seriously.”

“[...] Lots of training events talking about how to do things better as women. However, I do not think the women are the problem. It is the environment around the women, and I do not see these networks at all addressing those issues.”

“Viewed as great, on paper, so we can say we are an equal gender company, but reality is they have little impact.”

“For women networks to work, they need to become incorporated into the culture of the workplace.”

“[Our women network is] considered as informal by personnel, hence lack of budget. But personnel has advertised the network as a diversity initiative on our external website.”

Finally, we find the advice-giving guides not sufficiently clear on the fact that employee networks are not a “cheap” element of a D&I strategy, but actually a major investment. This is also the case with organizations that run their networks with limited budgets and rely on network leadership and members to invest their own time, as they have a high price to pay in lower employee engagement.

4 AUTHORS' REFLECTIONS ON SURVEY FINDINGS

As we reflect on the survey results, we note several dynamics that are seen in other pieces of research on gender and diversity & inclusion. There are:

WORK-TYPE GENDER STEREOTYPING: Women network leadership falls into the “care taking” dimension which has been identified as the predominate nature of the types of work that many women do in organizations, and also, as one of the barriers to women’s career advancement. With proper positioning and support of women networks, we hope to see a reframing of network leadership roles as “take charge” work which is higher valued and the route for career advancement.

DOUBLE BIND: Women network leaders who are asked to take on a women network leadership role are placed in a “double bind” (no win) choice: Take on an unrecognized, unrewarded, time-consuming role on top of their “day job” which is not useful for their own career advancement or refuse and carry negative labels of “selfish” and the burden of being seen as not helping women.

THE “WOMEN’S WORK” EFFECT: Traditionally, what is described as “women’s work” has these common dimensions:

- Unseen or limited visibility
- Under- or unpaid
- Under-resourced
- Under-valued

This could be said for the majority of women networks represented in this survey based on their disconnection from business strategy and business leaders; reliance on a ‘volunteer’ model for leadership; the very small, and in some cases no, resources dedicated to networks to accomplish their goals; and the lack of rewards or recognitions for network leaders. The women network becomes an example of what it is supposedly trying to rectify in the organization, which limits the network’s ability to drive change. Our belief is that by raising awareness of this paradox that then healthy discussions can arise resulting in support for greater innovation with women networks.

GRATITUDE: There are numerous positive benefits to practicing gratitude which improves the quality of lives—including at work. Gratitude, which can begin as a simple sincere “thank you”, isn’t hard to do nor even needs to cost money. One priority for organizations wanting to leverage a women network must be on providing adequate recognition for women taking on network roles. This is even more crucial based on the survey findings on the strong impact on the engagement of key female talent when gratitude is not expressed to women network leaders.

ROLE MODELS: Many gender strategies seek to identify senior women to be role models of achieving career success in the organization and inspiring other women. Considering that women network leaders are often seen as career role models for more junior-level women in the network, the ramifications of lower engagement in these leader talents is not part of a healthy gender strategy. We believe that stronger integration of contributions as a network leader in the performance management process is needed to send a strong message of support and valuing of the contributions of network leaders and of the women network.

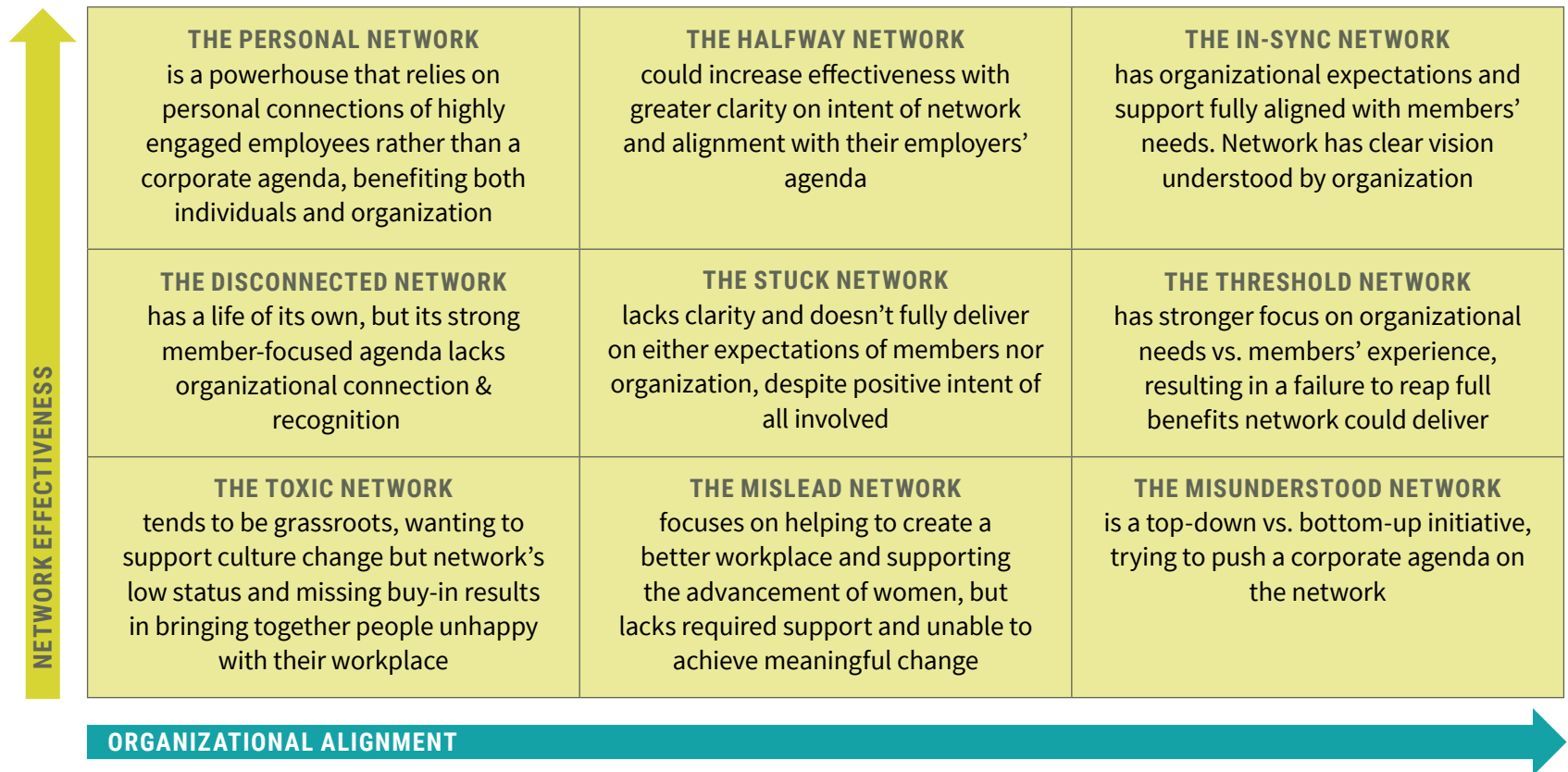
PSEUDO-NETWORKING: Networking is described as one of the keys to career advancement, however this needs to be networking with those with influence, power, and position. Based on the survey findings, it seems that members’ focus is to network with other women, perhaps for support, to reduce isolation, to inspire for career growth, or other reasons. However personally fulfilling that type of networking may be, and we don’t discount this, we also want to raise the point that the needed networking for career advancement (close to organizational power) is mostly likely not occurring within most women networks.

5 TAKING THE LEARNINGS FORWARD

We are optimistic that women networks can be effective parts of a D&I strategy with the proper mechanisms in place. Based on research and our years of experiences, we have developed a diagnostic tool which identifies typical network personas

centered on membership experience, network effectiveness, and how strongly the network is embedded in an organizational context. This diagnostic tool helps to guide targeted steps to strengthen the network and its organization.

**CHART 12:
EMPLOYEE NETWORK
DIAGNOSTICS GRID**



EMPLOYEE NETWORK DIAGNOSTIC GRID: CASE STUDIES

THE IN-SYNC NETWORK:

In this high-tech R&D company, there is less than 15% women. The firm wants to increase women in STEM for long-term pipeline growth, to hire more women in the company, and to help create a more gender inclusive culture. The women in the organization want to connect with other women in engineering, helping to reduce the feelings of isolation and to help make the company more welcoming of new female hires. Their women network is focused on all of these goals, seeing value in each, and the company provides needed resources, frequently interacts with the network, and recognizes the contributions made. The network is seen as part of work at the company and vital to culture change.

THE MISLEAD NETWORK:

There has been a lot of attention on this company's equality practices, and its been feeling the pressure on increasing women in senior leadership roles, which currently are less than 10% at CEO-2 levels. The CEO has made some public statements about his commitment to promoting more women, but little has changed in the company's talent practices since these statements were made. Hoping to show the company's actions on gender balance, it launches a women

network which is prominently showcased on the company's website and in recruiting materials. However, members are left confused as the level of organizational support for the network does not match at all the PR spin that the company uses to highlight the network.

THE STUCK NETWORK:

A senior leader in this company was seeking how to show support for greater gender equity. This leader spoke with several senior women and suggested that there should be a women network in the company. The idea was tested with some employees, and soon there was a women network established with great hope by all that this was a "best practice" in gender work and change would soon follow. A couple of years on, the network is in a place of questioning continuing, the organization is questioning the network's value add, and generally little is known about the network outside of its members and HR / D&I. How did it get to this place? No clear agenda or support to deliver on the agreed-upon original expectations.

To illustrate the Employee Network Diagnostic Grid, these are some of the case studies we have developed based upon real experiences

FOUNDATIONAL RULES FOR NETWORKS

In order to lay a sound foundation for a successful network, a few ground must be considered. While these may not be surprising, the research findings clearly shows that they are lacking in many networks.

1. Expectations of a network and its agenda need to be aligned with a network's resources.
2. As with any other business activity, relevant metrics are needed and provide the basis to measure impact and develop over time.
3. Members' needs and expectations are a key insight to inform network priorities and strategy.
4. Network leaders must be recognized for the work they do.
5. No network can succeed if its members and leaders don't feel it is embraced by their organization.

Contact us if you'd like to explore about using the Employee Network Diagnostic Model and next steps for your network's strategic development.

6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Veronika is a seasoned leader with deep expertise in inclusion and diversity (D&I), change management and communications. After a career of almost 25 years holding leadership roles in D&I and communications in global high tech companies – Hewlett-Packard, Xerox, Alcatel, and Philips – she founded D&I Strategy and Solutions, a consultancy firm that combines deep subject matter expertise with extensive experience in driving change in large scale organizations.

Veronika is a frequent speaker at conferences globally. She is part to the faculty of the The Conference Board’s ‘D&I New Leaders Academy’ and has acted as a member of the Executive Committee of their ‘Diversity in Business Council’. Her work was recognized with a number of prestigious awards for ‘Best Internal Communications’, ‘Best Integrated Communications’ and ‘Best Sustainability Campaign’. She was also shortlisted two consecutive years for the ‘European Diversity Award’ and has just been honored with the Global HR Excellence Award in recognition of extraordinary work in her field.



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Lisa brings over 20 years’ experience working in diverse, global environments. Lisa was a senior Global Diversity & Inclusion executive with AXA, Microsoft, & Hewlett-Packard setting strategic direction internationally. In 2013, she founded the Inclusion Institute focused on consultancy, training, coaching, & research. Her special expertise in organizational development integrated with inclusive culture make her a unique resource for change at all levels. She partners with organizations on how to successfully achieve their goals for creating a more inclusive culture for sustainable business growth. Lisa is a D&I thought leader, frequently speaking at conferences, training & coaching new D&I practitioners, and advising organizations on their culture change strategy. Lisa was an advisory board member of Catalyst Europe and is on the board of the Global WIN (Women International Networking) organization, she was a founder of a European-based Global D&I Network, & has been a faculty member for The Conference Board’s D&I Academy. Lisa has co-authored (with Tinna Nielsen) the Inclusion Nudges Guidebook. For this work, Lisa and Tinna were named in November 2015 to The Economist’s Global Diversity List of Top 10 Diversity Consultants.

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