BREAKING THE CONCRETE CEILING

Unveiling Perspectives and Pathways to Gender Diversity and Equity in the Construction Industry

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Acknowledgments

Three years ago, after one year of full-time work, the urge to go back to school started. With quite a clear idea in my head what direction I wanted to go in (technology or engineering based, but more focused on management and business) I started searching for the right master program. The Management of Technology master seemed to be a perfect fit from the beginning and full of enthusiasm, I started. The plan was to quit working at Strukton Rail and to get a job in hospitality again. However, my wonderful manager **Mark** had other plans and gave me the opportunity to stay on at Strukton Rail for 16 hours a week. I would say that this opportunity has shaped my educational experience. Of course it was hard work, sometimes difficult to combine work deadlines and exams or project deadlines. However, it gave me a layer of depth that I could not have dreamed of, in advance. I was given a lot of freedom, under one condition: if you can, bring back the knowledge that you learn during your masters to Strukton Rail. When I was given a lecture on equity, diversity, and inclusion, I thought 'I can bring this back to Strukton Rail'. I am not sure that was what you meant, but here we are. So, first and foremost, I want to thank you **Mark** for the opportunities that have led me here, including the support to pursue such a controversial topic as gender diversity. I know we have not been on the exact same page about this topic, but that has made it amazing to have all those heated conversations about it.

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My main conviction is this:
We have so much to learn from each other and we can indeed change this world for the better. Just open your mind and listen to each other.

Jet van Eeghen
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Executive Summary

This research is initiated to investigate the underrepresentation of women in technical occupations, particularly in the male-dominated field of the construction industry. The Netherlands is a country where this gender gap has been observed, with a significant disparity in the representation of women in the industry. Despite the recognized importance of gender diversity and equity in promoting gender equality and empowerment, there is a lack of comprehensive frameworks that address these issues within organizations.

Purpose and methodology

The goal of this study is to contribute to the existing knowledge on gender diversity and equity within the workplace, specifically focusing on the challenges faced by women in the construction industry in the Netherlands. The study aims to provide insights and recommendations for promoting gender diversity and equity within organizations by examining the perspectives and experiences of different roles within an organization. The research also aims to contribute to existing literature, inform the company's diversity initiatives, and provide insights applicable to similar industries and contexts. The research objective of this thesis is to examine the perceptions, challenges, and opportunities related to gender diversity and equity within Strukton Rail from the perspectives of different roles of actors, namely employees, top management, and recruitment and human resource (HR) business partners.

To do this, this research uses a combined approach of a single case study approach and ethnographic research approach. The methodology of the thesis involves a combination of research methods, including in-depth interviews, online questionnaires, and observations, to gather qualitative data. Additionally, quantitative data is analyzed to gain some insights in things such as the gender pay gap. The unique advantage of the researcher's position as an employee of Strukton Rail provides access to interviewees, data, and a contextual advantage, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the organization's culture, practices, and policies.

Findings and Recommendations

The findings of this research suggest that there are many perspectives on gender diversity and equity within Strukton Rail. This difference between perspectives is present between the different roles of actors, i.e. employees, top management, and recruitment and HR business partners. However, within these roles of actors, perspectives differ considerably, due to each person's positionality.

All roles of actors recognize a **male-dominated culture** within the organization and the construction industry in general. However, there exists some difference in the acknowledgment of the influence of this culture on the experiences of female employees. There is limited recognition of top management on the challenges that female employees face due to the male-dominated culture. While some top management members express to have gender-blind mindset, and express the wish for meritocracy and performance-based hiring, indication of underlying **gender biases and stereotypes** was found throughout this study. This professed gender-blindness and preference for performance-based hiring

results in a resistance of some top management members towards quota and setting specific goals. Female employees, recruitment/human resource professionals, and some members of top management recognize the **influence of biases and stereotypes** that may restrict women's interest in technical occupations. They acknowledge that these biases can negatively impact women's experiences in the organization.

The interviews show that **work-life balance and flexibility** are valued by employees, especially expressed by female interviewees. On the contrary, management prioritizes operational demands, expressing reservations about the feasibility of working part-time, especially in operational departments which are characterized by continuous working hours. This highlights a potential conflict between operational needs and the aspiration for work-life balance. Both male employees and management tend to perceive men as more adaptable, capable of balancing work and personal life effectively, hinting towards the expectation of a care taking role of women and biases that come with this.

To address gender diversity and equity challenges, **management commitment** is identified as a crucial driving force. This involves alignment on a gender diversity vision, challenging biases, and setting clear objectives for women's representation across departments. This approach communicates the value the organization assigns to gender diversity and equity and can assist in complying to regulatory requirements as defined by the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), coming into force in 2025.

Strukton Rail has already made steps towards **transparent and fair evaluation and advancement procedures**, with their the introduction of the 'vlootschouw'. In challenging gendered biases during promotion processes, this is a significant step. Ensuring and monitoring integrity and impartiality of assessment within this process is crucial, and shows the important role that HR business partners have in challenging biases.

This research emphasizes the importance of **open dialogue** to understand the wide array of perspectives on gender diversity and equity. Encouraging conversations that challenge norms and power dynamics can drive change.

Practical Implications

The description of the framework for organizational change provides organizations in the construction industry with a way to assess the gender diversity and equity status within their organization. This can aid in challenging and assessing challenges that hinder the inclusion and retention of women within the industry.

Value

This research describes an approach to understand organizational factors influencing gender diversity and equity in the construction industry. In present a novel framework that can shed light on the gender diversity and equity within an organization and can be the blueprint for organizational change. The value of this research is rooted in the ethnographic methodology, combined with the case study design. Combined with the dual position of the researcher as both employee and researcher, highly in-depth, contextual data forms the basis of this research.

Contents

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
BCAO	Buiten (outside) Collective Employment Agreement
CAO	Collective Employment Agreement
CBS	Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek
CSRD	Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive
EU	European Union
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human resource management
IT	Information Technology
NUP	Niet-uitvoerend personeel (non-operational staff)
PMC	Product Market Combination
SR	Strukton Rail
SR NL	Strukton Rail Nederland (Netherlands)
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
SHE	Safety, Health, and Environment
UK	United Kingdom
UP	Uitvoerend personeel (operational staff)
US	United States

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"You got to keep your company car even though you only work 16 hours a week due to your masters? Is your manager in love with you or something?"
This is something that has been jokingly said to me personally, twice, by two different male colleagues and it might not be an uncommon type of thing to hear when you work in a technical field, as a woman.

In many countries, women are significantly underrepresented in technical occupations. In 2011, figures from the United States (US), for instance, say that the share of women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) jobs is around 24% (Beede et al., 2011). In the United Kingdom (UK), female engineers make up around 14% of the work pool and 26% of the Information Technology (IT) work pool consists of women (Pynn, 2023). Another example of the gender gap comes from the Netherlands, where the share of women in technical professions is around 14%, similar to the UK (Olsthoorn, 2022). The need for more women in STEM fields is widely recognized, with the United Nations acknowledging the importance of ensuring unrestricted and equal entry to, as well as active involvement in, science, technology, and innovation for women and girls across all age groups. They state that participation of women in these fields plays a big role in advancing gender equality and fostering the empowerment of women and girls (United Nations, 2023).

Much research is done on the challenges and barriers that women face in male-dominated environments, especially the work place. One of these environments that have a poor representation of women is the construction industry. Research of women in the construction industry in the UK reveals that women often occupy roles in facilitating departments, rather than technical positions (Wright et al., 2016). A generic report by Techniekpact (2021) claims that only 2% of the technical occupations in the construction industry in the Netherlands is occupied by women. This last statistic emphasizes a significant gender gap within the Dutch context, prompting a need for a detailed investigation into the factors contributing to this notable gender imbalance. A comprehensive and actionable framework for effectively addressing factors of gender diversity and equity within organizations seems to be lacking. The absence of a suitable framework could leave organizations grappling with how to identify, approach and navigate issues effectively.

This thesis aims to bridge that gap by examining the perspectives and experiences of different roles within an organizations regarding gender diversity and equity in relation to a newly defined framework for organizational change. The study aims to identify the existing challenges, differences in

viewpoints, and potential areas for improvement in promoting gender diversity within an organization. By doing this, this research aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on gender and inclusion in the workplace, specifically in male-dominated industries. To gather in-depth data on the topic, the combined case study and ethnographic research design is chosen to thoroughly investigate the gender diversity and equity challenges within one company, Strukton Rail. The selection of this organization is based on the researcher's role as an employee, which grants access to interviewees, data, and a distinct contextual advantage. This methodology provides insights into the organization's culture, practices, and policies while considering the broader construction industry landscape. This approach facilitates an in-depth exploration of the research objective while acknowledging the researcher's unique position within the organization.

This thesis will start with the theoretical framework in chapter 2, drawing from existing literature to define key terminology and discuss topics such as the influence of gender diversity in STEM fields, strategies for fostering gender diversity, the concept of meritocracy, ideological approaches to gender-related challenges, and existing frameworks for organizational change. This results in the proposal of an applied framework for addressing gender diversity and equity in organizations. The research approach and research methodology is discussed in chapter 3, where the research questions are defined and the research approach is elaborated on.

Based on the framework for organizational change as defined in the theoretical framework, the formative context of the case study object is described in chapter 4. This includes an analysis of Strukton Rail based on quantitative data, and a description of its organizational culture as experienced by three roles of actors. Drawing from this, the organizational discourse concerning gender in assessed and strategies for promoting awareness are discussed. The role of society as experienced by the roles of actors is described in chapter 5, and a description on how to challenge assumptions is given. This leads to the assumptions and preconceptions that are present within the organization in chapter 6, discussing the gender diversity discourse at Strukton Rail and the role management has in challenging assumptions and preconceptions.

From these chapters, which highlight gender diversity and equity challenges and opportunities at Strukton Rail from various perspectives, a strategic approach is formulated to address these issues in chapter 7. This chapter outlines steps to enhance gender diversity, considering employee, management, human resources, and policy perspectives.

In the discussion in chapter 8, the broader discussion of intersectionality of gender with other aspects is presented. Besides this, results from the previous framework are consolidated. The final chapter, chapter 9, of this research concludes the thesis and provides recommendations based on the research findings.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

This chapter will form the theoretical framework for the remaining of the research, providing the knowledge-base, drawing from existing literature. Literature was selected via Scopus, one of the databases that can be used to search for keywords related to topics of interest. The keywords can be searched for in specific combinations. The original search terms and topics can be found in Appendix B. This literature list is not the only literature used in this thesis research. Relevant literature was already found through reading about the topic and referrals of colleagues. Concepts introduced by interviewees were input for additional literature searches. However, this body of literature did provide the starting point of the research design.

First, section 2.1 is devoted to defining terminology, to gain a common understanding of the terminology that is being used in the remaining of the research.

After this, several topics are discussed. section 2.2 discusses the background of gender diversity in STEM and IT. After this, section 2.3 elaborates on how the lack of gender diversity in STEM and other male-dominated fields influences the experiences of women, according to literature. Strategies for building gender diversity outlines strategies discussed in literature to attract and retain women in male-dominated industries is discussed in section 2.4. In the context of gender diversity efforts, the concept of meritocracy is explored in section 2.5. This leads to the assessment of two ideological approaches to addressing gender-related challenges in the workplace, gender-blindness and gender-awareness, described in section 2.6.

To conclude the theoretical framework, existing frameworks for organizational change are explored in section 2.7. These frameworks are explored in the context of gender diversity and equity in organizations, leading to the proposition of an applied framework that combines existing frameworks from previous research.

2.1 Defining terminology

Let's start by establishing definitions for the relevant terminology used throughout the research. This step is crucial to ensure a shared understanding among readers, providing clarity and avoiding potential misinterpretations. By laying the foundation with clear terminology, the subsequent sections can build upon this common understanding, fostering a coherent and well-informed exploration of

the subject matter.

One of the most important terms that will recur often is gender. The distinction between sex and gender is an important concept in understanding human identity and social roles and has been the topic of converstaion and research for many years. MacKinnon (1983), for instance, explored the distinction between sex and gender where they describe that sex refers to the biological characteristics of an individual, typically categorized as male or female, based on reproductive organs and chromosomal composition. It is a biological and physiological classification. On the other hand, gender is a social construct that encompasses the roles, behaviors, expectations, and identities that society attributes to individuals based on their sex. Gender goes beyond biology and is shaped by cultural, societal, and historical factors. This description is supported by Deaux (1985) and Torgrimson and Minson (2005)

In this thesis research, both terms that refer to sex and terms that refer to gender are used. The terms female and male are used as feature (e.g. 'female colleague'), while the terms woman and man are used to indicate a individual or a group of individuals (e.g. 'women who'). The choice is made to only focus on two genders in this thesis, men and women (male and female). In this regard, sex and gender are considered the same. This is done because all interviewees and survey respondents expressed to identify as the sex they were assigned at birth. Additionally, the personnel database of the organization under investigation only allows for two genders and is actually denoted as sex ('geslacht' in Dutch).

Diversity is a key concept in this thesis research. In their book on human resource management in construction, Sang and Powell (2013) dedicate a chapter on diversity, equality and inclusion. They describe equality as a state or condition of being the same and movements striving for equality often center around minority groups, like women, advocating for equal treatment compared to men. In response to the limitations of the concept of equality, theorists have introduced the term 'diversity,' which, according to Sang and Powell (2013) encompasses a broader range of characteristics and experiences that define individuals, including race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, disability, and sexual orientation. Embracing diversity involves acknowledging the uniqueness of individuals and valuing the diverse perspectives they bring (Sang and Powell, 2013). In fostering an equitable and diverse environment, Sang and Powell (2013) argue that inclusion is important. An inclusive workplace is one that values individual differences and recognizes that treating everyone the same may not lead to genuine equality. Inclusion involves actively embracing the uniqueness of individuals, their backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, and ensuring that they are fully integrated and involved in the workplace. It goes beyond numerical diversity and focuses on creating a work environment that encompasses the differences between people to promote productivity, adaptability, and creativity. Sang and Powell (2013) describes that inclusion means that to ensure real freedom and fair opportunities, people might need different resources and support based on their specific needs, situations, and goals. Thereby, inclusion acknowledges that equality does mean sameness or uniform treatment for all individuals. This idea is closer to equity than equality.

Holley (2022) describes the difference between the definition of equality and equity. Equality is defined as the state of being equal. It can be illustrated with examples where everyone receives the same treatment or resources. On the other hand, equity is defined as the quality of being fair or im-

partial, or something that is fair and just. Achieving equity can be more complex, as it involves addressing subjective concepts of fairness and justice. To clarify the difference, Holley (2022) provides an analogy of three boys trying to watch a baseball game. Under equality, each boy receives one box to stand on, but the shortest boy still cannot see over the fence. With equity, the shortest boy would receive additional boxes until he can watch the game. Introducing the difference between equality and equity, instantly raises the issue around justice. Where equity seeks to compensate for social differences, justice would be that there are no social differences. Equity therefore also recognizes that people do not have the same starting point.

Different definitions may lead to distinct perspectives on the current situation, diverse goals in diversity policies, and consequently, varying recommendations for improvement. Adopting an equity-based approach in diversity policy could ensure a fairer outcome, as it focuses on providing individuals with the necessary tools for their individual success. Therefore, the term 'equity' will be employed. Another reason to prioritize equity over equality is that using the term 'equality' may overlook or undermine the existing differences between men and women, including biological, emotional, or intellectual differences. Benschop and Verloo (2011) argues that these differences should be acknowledged regardless of their origin, whether biological or culturally influenced. This is also further explained in section 2.6, where the difference between gender-blindness and gender-awareness is explained. To consider each individual's starting point, 'gender equity' is a more suitable term to use.

Lastly, when exploring the multifaceted subject of gender diversity, another concept that needs some considerations is 'intersectionality'. Individuals possess various intersecting identities, including gender, age, education, race, ethnicity, social class, (dis)ability, and more. These personal characteristics collectively shape one's unique identity (Crenshaw, 1991). It is important to recognize that people belong to multiple social groups, and no single group identity is homogeneous (Crenshaw, 1991). Taking an intersectional perspective in the study of social constructs, such as gender, allows for examination on how identity is influenced by interconnected contextual factors such as culture, power dynamics, and oppression within both public and private spheres. This approach acknowledges that individuals' experiences and challenges are shaped by the intricate interplay of various social categories and identities. By considering these intersecting factors, a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances surrounding gender diversity and the ways in which it intersects with other aspects of individuals' lives can be gained.

A glossary with a short summary of these definitions is included in Appendix A.

2.2 Gender Diversity in STEM and IT: The Dutch and International Context

The Dutch Expertise Center for Gender Diversity in STEM and IT is the VHTO. This is an organization that focuses on promoting gender equity and increasing the participation of girls and women in STEM and IT. VHTO raises awareness about the importance of gender diversity in STEM and IT through campaigns, events, and publications. In this light, they have also investigated how to retain women as an organization (VHTO, 2022). They argue that negative experiences frequently lead to women

leaving the STEM sector, even though they had consciously chosen that sector in previous years. Additionally, there are many points in a girl's/woman's school and career path at which point she can choose against pursuing a STEM career. In high school, young women have to make a specialization choice. After high school, they must choose which bachelor to do. After their education, a career choice is made. At each point, women choose against bèta. Therefore, much potential talent is lost (VHTO, 2022). According to VHTO (2022), approximately 20% of women with a technical education end up working in an occupation in a relevant direction, in the Dutch context. For men, this is a little over 50%. With these numbers, they suggest that the inflow of technical women in the industry is a point for improvement.

The reasons behind the low participation numbers of women in STEM and IT are widely researched, throughout the world. Countries in which such research is often conducted include the UK and the US. When looking at the broader context of gender diversity in the construction industry, statistics show that most Western countries deal with low representation of women (Taieb, 2023). The construction industry in the Netherlands comprises of approximately 10% . In the USA, about 11% of construction workers is female, and the same numbers are found in Europe (Taieb, 2023). The percentage of women in construction in Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Portugal is around 9%. The UK representation of women in construction is slightly higher, at 14%. Techniekpact (2021) reported that in the Netherlands, an estimated 2% of the technical occupations within construction is occupied by women. Similarly, this pattern appears to hold true in other nations as well. Statistics from the US, for instance, reveal that only 1% of workers in the 'natural resources, construction, and maintenance' occupation within the construction industry are women (Gallagher, 2022).

To investigate the impact that a low representation has on an organization, literature is consulted. Makarem and Wang (2020) made a systematic review of 28 empirical studies around the experiences of women in STEM fields. These studies were done in the context of Western countries, with one study that was done in the context of China. The US emerged as the most frequently examined location (in 16 studies), followed by the UK. In the European context, France, the Netherlands, Italy, and Ireland were the subject of empirical studies. Makarem and Wang (2020) found many similarities between the experiences of women in the studies countries. Termed as 'roadblocks', they pinpointed a range of obstacles encountered by women in their pursuit for a career in STEM fields. These challenges encompass gender-biased organizational culture, stereotypes related to gender roles, difficulties in achieving work-life balance, and a lack of mentorship opportunities. By means of analyzing existing literature these challenges are explored to see the impact of these on women's experiences. After this, literature on strategies for change to address these challenges is explored.

2.3 Obstacles for Women in Construction: Navigating the Concrete Ceiling

Wright et al. (2016) examined the gender imbalance in traditionally male sectors, particularly construction and transport, in the UK. They describe a **hostile working environment** for women as a prevalent obstacle. However, unlike Makarem and Wang (2020), they note that the working environment is influenced by factors such as the pay gap, demanding working hours that disrupt work-life balance, and sexualization and harassment, rather than stating it as an individual obstacle. Organ-

izational culture is recognized as an obstacle and as an influence on women's experiences in male-dominated organizations by other researchers as well. Fielden et al. (2000), who investigated women in the construction industry in the UK, note that the hostile work environment that is often found in the industry affects both men and women. Women, however, experience isolation and a feeling of being unwelcome to a greater extent than men, because of their minority position. A study by Morello et al. (2018) investigated recruitment and retention in the construction industry in the US by identifying barriers specific to women. According to them, the minority status of women can expose them to exclusionary practices, such as boundary raising, where male colleagues engage in discussions about masculine subjects or make inappropriate jokes about women, alienating their female counterparts. Women often navigate issues related to body visibility and adhere to specific dress codes to minimize exposure, aiming to maximize acceptance and assimilation (Morello et al., 2018). They describe that typical male behavior is often viewed as agentic and forceful while female behavior associated with communal and connection. Women can therefore be deemed to be lacking the traits associated with successful leadership in the masculine environment. Achieving excellence in tasks traditionally associated with male traits could lead to resistance against women (Morello et al., 2018).

This is related to the aspect of **power dynamics**, often considered a challenge for women in male-dominated environments (Wright et al., 2016). Wright et al. (2016) describe that power dynamics and masculine interactions shape organizational culture as they highlight the use of different power resources by men, including positional, personal, and sexual power. Instances of sexualized interactions and verbal and physical harassment contribute to the overall hostile work environment. Building on sexualized interactions, the study by Wright et al. (2016) explored the intersectionality between gender and sexuality and its impact on women's experiences in male-dominated environments. In these environments, sexuality can influence how women are perceived and treated. According to Wright et al. (2016), openly lesbian women may avoid certain forms of sexual attention and may potentially fit into the masculine culture. However, they can still face sexualizing behavior and receive comments, such as suggestions to change their sexual orientation to heterosexuality. Makarem and Wang (2020) describe that many studies note that women often find themselves responsible for managing men's behavior, setting strict boundaries, and avoiding any sexual involvement, showing high levels of resilience. Failure to uphold these boundaries may lead to gossip, judgment, and double standards. According to Wright et al. (2016), women working in the construction industry often tolerate behaviors like comments, jokes, and stares, under the belief that it is just a part of 'men being men'. Wright et al. (2016) states that this acceptance reflects the dominance of male perspectives and the notion that certain behaviors are inherent to how men interact with women, even though these behaviors would likely be considered unacceptable in other industries.

Multiple other studies in multiple fields have described how **work-life balance** is an obstacle for women in male-dominated industries (Fraszczyk and Piip, 2019; Makarem and Wang, 2020; Wright et al., 2016). Research by Fraszczyk and Piip (2019), which reviewed female professionals in transport organizations in the UK, indicated that women perceive achieving work-life balance as a bigger challenge than men. According to them, this is largely due to care responsibilities, which predominately fall on women's shoulders. Fraszczyk and Piip (2019) attributed this to **stereotypes and societal expectations** that place the burden of family duties on women rather than men. This was

also widely found in the review by Makarem and Wang (2020) as a commonality throughout Western countries. They state that long working hours in the construction industry create assumptions that women cannot effectively fulfill their roles as mothers or wives (Makarem and Wang, 2020). Gender norms and expectations continue to hinder progress in the workplace, as noted by Makarem and Wang (2020); Fraszczyk and Piip (2019). Traditional ideals perceive men as breadwinners and women as caretakers, with these gender stereotypes becoming particularly visible after childbirth. Bringing this to the Dutch context, almost half of women reduce their working hours or quit their jobs entirely after becoming mothers, while men rarely alter their working patterns (CBS, 2022b). Additionally, a discrepancy seems to exist in the societal expectation of reducing working hours between women upon becoming mothers and men upon becoming fathers (CBS, 2022b).

Besides societal expectations, Wright et al. (2016) also describe that **demanding work hours** are a challenge for women who require flexibility to fulfill their family responsibility. The construction industry, which is an industry that continues 24/7, might not be suitable to combine with care giving responsibility, according to Wright et al. (2016). In their research, Wright et al. (2016) note that their interviewees consisted primarily of women working full-time jobs, who did not necessarily require flexible working hours due to them not having (young) children having a partner who shared care giving duties. They note that this observation implies that the women active in this industry do not need flexibility in working hours, confirming the notion that this is a barrier for women that do require this flexibility.

2.4 Strategies for Building Gender Diversity and Inclusion: The Construction Zone

Intervention methods to attract and retain women in male-dominated organizations and industries require a comprehensive and multifaceted approach, according to literature. Morello et al. (2018) argue that a key aspect is promoting a cultural shift within these industries to make them more appealing to women. There have been improvements in this field, with interviewees of Wright et al. (2016) noting that employers in the construction and transport industry increasingly become more intolerant to such behavior towards women. However, Wright et al. (2016) highlight in their research that it remains important to challenge the existing male-dominated discourse and the belief that certain behaviors towards women are inevitable.

Fielden et al. (2000) state that women can find support from male colleagues who help, guide, and coach them in their roles, touching upon the topic of **mentorschip**, introduced by Makarem and Wang (2020). In male-dominated industries, such as the construction industry, this can lead to a feeling of support. This makes support from men, male allyship, an important factor for recognition and validation. Besides male allyship, mentoring programs are deemed to be an effective support mechanisms for women in these environments (Fraszczyk and Piip, 2019; Amaratunga et al., 2006). Such programs provide valuable connections, opportunities for skill development, and the establishment of social networks that aid in career advancement. In a review of boundaries for women to enter and work in the construction industry in the UK, Amaratunga et al. (2006) point out that active support, coaching, and encouragement are essential to ensure the successful retention of women in male-dominated industries. They state that positive discrimination, when implemented cor-

rectly, can be a useful tool to increase diversity within organizations. However, the focus should be on equal opportunities rather than solely hiring women based on gender (Amaratunga et al., 2006). Wright et al. (2016) state that companies should strive to create an inclusive environment that allows women to be taken seriously without having to adopt oppositional or counter-gender identities. Support for women in male-dominated industries can come from various sources, as described by Wright et al. (2016): 1) informal support from female colleagues; 2) industry and professional networks; 3) employer-established staff networks; and 4) trade unions. Participating in women's networks can provide support, a sense of inclusion, and identification. Resilience, which can be build through mentor programs, is described by Van Veelen et al. (2019), who explored the impact of masculine work contexts on gender identity threat, specifically examining numerical male dominance and normative male dominance in the STEM sector. The findings reveal that women in STEM face a unique challenge, as they experience a combination of being outnumbered by male colleagues and working in a sector where women are negatively stereotyped. This 'double trouble' of gender identity threat has implications for women's work engagement and career confidence. The study highlights that even highly competent and resilient women in STEM fields continue to be affected by social identity threats in their professional careers. Supporting women resilience should be part of the way towards gender diversity, equity, and inclusion, but is should be accompanied by what is described as 'fixing the system', focusing more on working towards and inclusive environment.

Research conducted by Powell et al. (2010) on achieving gender equality in the construction professions in the UK suggests that understanding the factors that attract women to work in male-dominated industries, as well as addressing the barriers and discouragements they face, can significantly contribute to increasing their representation. Strategies such as advertising diversity messages, expanding selection criteria to include emotional intelligence, implementing non-monetary rewards, and challenging gendered biases in job advertisements have shown potential for improving retention (Myers and Dreachslin, 2007; Gaucher et al., 2011). Even when job advertisements don't explicitly mention gender preferences (anymore), Gaucher et al. (2011) describes that the way they are worded can still convey subtle messages about which gender is more suitable for the role. This happens through the use of certain words associated with masculinity or femininity. These wording differences can have a significant impact on how people perceive and evaluate the job. The study by Gaucher et al. (2011) emphasizes the importance of recognizing these subtle cues in job advertisements and understanding their potential effects which is endorsed by Hentschel et al. (2021).

Campbell and Bohdanowicz (2018) note that there seem to be concerns with setting quotas to improve gender composition in the context of company boards. They state that some believe that positions should be filled based solely on merit, according to the meritocracy belief system (further explained in section 2.5). Campbell and Bohdanowicz (2018) identified several concerns, firstly, according to critics, quota and affirmative action can lead to less-qualified individuals being chosen over more qualified ones. The second concern builds on this, as some individuals claim that quota and affirmative actions discriminate against men and that more qualified men may not be considered in favor of a woman. Third, opponents suggest that such measures can create a negative reputation for individuals that are hired through such programs. They describe that emphasizing gender in hiring or promotions can create the perception that the women are only chosen based on their gender rather than their abilities and qualifications.

2.5 The Concept of Meritocracy in Gender Diversity Efforts: Breaking Barriers or Maintaining the Status Quo?

As mentioned in section 2.4, quotas and affirmative action to increase gender diversity is often countered with the fear that it may get in the way of objective assessment (Campbell and Bohdanowicz, 2018). Critics argue that hiring and promotions should be based on merit, believing in the concept of meritocracy. The idea of meritocracy was first introduced in a book called 'The Rise of Meritocracy' by Michael Young in 1958 (Son Hing et al., 2011). The book described a future society where things like money, jobs, and power were given to people based on their abilities and hard work. But over time, the meaning of 'merit' has changed to include things like skills, training, and experience (Son Hing et al., 2011). Many individuals perceive meritocracy as a just and fair method for distributing rewards, where only objective factors are taken into account and characteristics such as race or gender hold no significance (Son Hing et al., 2011). However, Son Hing et al. (2011) describe that in reality, merit-based systems can sometimes make existing social differences even stronger and benefit the people who are already powerful. Things like inheritance, social advantages, and discrimination can get in the way of true meritocracy, creating an uneven start and thereby an unfair playing field. Some people, according to Son Hing et al. (2011), say that meritocracy can actually make social inequality worse by keeping things the way they are and making them seem fair.

In the article by Son Hing et al. (2011), a distinction is made between three main ways of distribution: treating everyone the same (equality), giving things based on what people need (need), and giving things based on how much people contribute (equity). Meritocracy is most similar to the idea of equity. Be aware that this is a slightly different definition of equity than previously described in section 2.1. In the definition given by Son Hing et al. (2011), 'equity' means that if someone works harder or does more for a group, they should get more rewards than others. In Western countries, people often think that equity is the best way to distribute things fairly because it helps people work harder and be more motivated (Son Hing et al., 2011). Therefore, merit-based evaluation and rewarding, meritocracy, is a belief system that comes naturally to many (Son Hing et al., 2011).

But there is another way to think about meritocracy. According to Son Hing et al. (2011), it can be a belief system that helps keep social differences in place. This way of thinking has three main ideas. People want to see the world as fair and predictable, so they believe in ideas that make the current system seem fair. Believing in meritocracy makes people more likely to support the way things are. They might also think that people in higher positions deserve to be there because they are better (Son Hing et al., 2011). This can help explain why people might believe negative things about groups that don't have as much power and positive things about groups that do. Because of this believe in the fairness of the status quo, Son Hing et al. (2011) claim that meritocracy can make social differences stronger.

Son Hing et al. (2011) highlights that there is a gap between people's beliefs about meritocracy should work and how it actually functions. To explain this gap, they make a distinction between prescriptive and descriptive meritocracy. Prescriptive meritocracy relates to the current situation, stating that the status quo is that performance evaluation is based on merit. Descriptive meritocracy, on the other hand, states that performance evaluation should be based on merit, but does not make a claim that this is currently the case (Son Hing et al., 2011). They suggest that people may have an ideal-

ized view of meritocracy that may not align with the reality of existing biases and discrimination in performance evaluations.

Son Hing et al. (2011) state that the belief in prescriptive belief can drive support for policies changing the status quo. However, the belief of descriptive meritocracy may be used to justify existing inequalities. With this notion, they suggest that individual's beliefs about meritocracy influence their support for policies promoting gender diversity and equity.

2.6 Gender-Blindness and Gender-Awareness

Adding to meritocracy and strategies to battle gender inequality, there are two main, distinct ideological approaches of addressing gender-related challenges and promoting equity in the workplace are gender-blindness and gender-awareness.

As the name suggests, gender-blindness is blind to gender-differences and ignores or disregards distinctions based on gender and treats all individuals as part of a shared humanity, without taking into account the specific differences between genders (Woodhead, 2001). It treats everyone equally without acknowledging the unique experiences or challenges that individuals of different genders may face Gender-blindness advocates for the notion that gender should not be a factor in decision-making processes, policies, or social interactions within the workplace. It emphasizes equal treatment for all individuals, irrespective of their gender, and to focus on the similarities between individuals instead of the differences (Veen, 2022). Proponents argue that by disregarding gender, a level playing field can be created where merit and qualifications take precedence over other considerations. Gender-blindness defined in this way is very similar to meritocracy. However, critics say that this approach often overlooks the unique challenges faced by individuals due to their gender (Townsend et al., 2021). It may fail to address the historical and structural inequities that have perpetuated gender disparities in the workplace. Consequently, gender-blindness can inadvertently perpetuate existing biases and maintain the status quo, impeding genuine progress towards gender equity. This is the same argument that was made against meritocracy by Son Hing et al. (2011).

In contrast, gender-awareness recognizes and embraces gender differences as a fundamental aspect of social dynamics. It acknowledges that gender may shape experiences, expectations, and opportunities within the workplace. By actively addressing these disparities, gender-awareness seeks to dismantle gender-based inequities and biases. This ideology challenges traditional gender norms and stereotypes, claiming to pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable work environment (Woodhead, 2001).

The differing approaches of gender-blindness and gender-awareness can have implications for achieving gender equity in the workplace. While gender-blindness aims to treat everyone equally, thereby focusing on gender equality, critics mentions that it often fails to address systemic biases and perpetuates existing inequities (Woodhead, 2001). On the other hand, Woodhead (2001) argues that gender-awareness recognizes the importance of addressing gender disparities, challenging societal norms, and fostering inclusivity. By adopting a gender-aware perspective, organizations can take proactive measures to eliminate gender-based biases in hiring, promotion, and compensation practices. In this regard, it seems that gender-blindness aims for gender equality, and may by doing

so overlook the differences in starting point, gender-awareness aims for gender equity (Woodhead, 2001).

Martin and Phillips (2019) mentions the ideology of gender-blindness for its potential to reduce stereotyping of women in STEM fields. They describe that both the gender-blindness and the gender-awareness ideologies have been proposed as interventions for gender equity. Through six studies, the authors claim that gender-blindness, compared to gender-awareness, leads to less gender stereotyping. The authors do acknowledge that the results primarily focus on explicit stereotyping and female evaluations, and more research is needed to examine the effects of diversity ideologies in different contexts. They also note that gender-blindness is not proposed as a strategy for *diminishing* gender stereotyping that is already embedded.

The statement by Martin and Phillips (2019) that gender-blindness could mean blindness to biases is not agreed upon by everyone. Townsend et al. (2021) for instance, while recognizing that gender-awareness can have negative influences on women's experiences and thereby result in lower empowerment, claim that there are benefits of educating, in their case, students on social class differences. The authors suggest that the way social group differences are presented and made a priority can have different effects depending on the specific social groups (such as race, social class, or gender) and how those differences are explained. They propose that a difference-education approach, where students learn about the contextual origins of social class differences, could be a new way to acknowledge gender differences without perpetuating inequity. Additionally, Townsend et al. (2021) found that educating students on differences reduced the achievement gap between different social classes and made students more comfortable with the differences between social groups. Therefore, they state that gender-awareness might be a better strategy for addressing gender equity, not only in the context of education, but also in the workplace.

2.7 Frameworks for Achieving Gender Diversity and Equity: Constructing Change

This section will go into existing frameworks for organizational change in subsection 2.7.1, to see the applicability of them for this case. Based on the existing frameworks, a gender applied framework is proposed that takes into account the complexities of the topic of gender within organizations in subsection 2.7.2. The results of this research will be framed in relation of the gender specific framework.

2.7.1 Existing Frameworks for Organizational Change

Organizational change is a complex process that involves different stages, theories, and frameworks. One of the most famous frameworks used for organizational and social change is Lewin's 'Unfreeze, Change, Refreeze' (Kent, 2011). It consists of three stages: unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. The first stage involves making the organization receptive for change. This is often done by identifying where something is not working out and showing people where the hurt should be felt, identifying the core issue. The second stage is changing, where the solution to the problem identified in the first stage is proposed and implemented. The third and final stage is refreezing, where the change made in the second stage is cemented into the organization's culture to ensure that it is permanent.

Lewin's framewok is very simplistic, which makes it easy to understand. However, it does not offer a lot of support for the specific subject of gender in an organization. Gender-related issues are deeply embedded in an organization's culture and the underlying gender biases and cannot be changed by simply learning and implementing new skills. Jacobs et al. (2013) provided a more comprehensive framework that considers the internal and external factors that affect organizational change. They recognize that organizational change is a risky endeavor that can violate an organization's core cultural values and identity. Jacobs et al. (2013) describe that to ensure the success of specific organizational change programs, it is essential to identify the internal and external conditions that affect the organization in its specific context. The influence of cross-country cultural and institutional differences is also crucial to consider, as what works in one organization, culture, or country may not produce the same results in another.

Jacobs et al. (2013) uses input, throughout, and output as the three stages of their framework. The input stage refers to the period before the change, the throughout stage refers to the period during the change, and the output stage refers to period after the change. The framework is held together by the organization's identity and how it is affected by the change. The internal and external factors that affect the organization are also considered.

A third framework for organizational change comes from Unger's social theory, as described by Crawford and Mills (2011). Change, according to Unger, is initiated by critically reflecting and understanding society, social structures and roles through awareness of the formative context. If this understanding is gained, preconceptions and assumptions about these societal constructs can be challenged and changed, which in turn can change the formative context. Unger describes that incremental change could accumulate to change in total social structures. Crawford and Mills (2011) applied the concept of Unger's social theory to the issue of gender and gender relation where the process of change that is described by Unger is elaborated on by organizational discourse and language. They state that discourse is a way of placing people in the structure of the organization and is in no way neutral. Crawford and Mills (2011) describe how institutional bias is present in most professional discourse. They state that discourse is at the core of the change process. The organizational discourse is predominantly controlled by men, as organizational structures reflect the patriarchal nature of society (Crawford and Mills, 2011). This is illustrated by the high ratio of men in executive positions, and for the construction industry, in general positions. Because of the high representation of men, the organizational discourse in this industry is by default determined by men (Crawford and Mills, 2011). Therefore, Crawford and Mills (2011) describe that, due to this deeply entrenched male-dominated organizational context, it may be preferable to pursue incremental change as the primary strategy for organizational change. Crawford and Mills (2011) describe how by changing language, discourse is changed and overall change can be initiated. They stress the importance of management to act as a role model and correct language that does not fit the desired change.

That organizational language is male-dominated, is also recognized by Acker (1990). In English, warfare terms are very common, and going to war is, historically, a male affair. English does offer the relatively easy option to go for the singular they, which is gender-neutral, while this is much more difficult in Dutch (Kooijman, 2021).

2.7.2 A Gendered Track Plan for Organizational Transformation

The Unfreeze, Change, Refreeze model of Lewin is a simplistic and high over model which is not completely applicable for the topic of gender diversity and equity. However, the principle of organizational change going through these three phases is noteworthy and will provide a basis for how to address these issues. The elaboration by Jacobs et al. (2013) provides insight in the necessity of knowing the organizational, internal, and contextual behavior and the external factors influencing a change process. However, it is still difficult to relate this directly to the topic of gender. The description of Crawford and Mills (2011) does provide more support for framing this topic, inspired by Unger's social theory:

"[Unger's theory] encourages criticism and reflection by developing an understanding of society, social structures, roles and ranks through awareness of the formative context and our ability to challenge and change preconceptions and assumptions that shape social roles and institutional structures" (Crawford and Mills, 2011, p. 92).

As Crawford and Mills (2011) describe, discourse is at the center of this process by stating that discourse and language play a crucial role in shaping the formative context of an organization in relation to gender. They argue that the way gender is discussed and represented within an organizational discourse can reinforce or challenge existing gender norms and power dynamics. Crawford and Mills (2011) argue that discourse and language have a profound impact on society and its social structures with regards to gender. The way gender is portrayed, discussed, and reinforced in public discourse can perpetuate or challenge gender stereotypes, roles, and expectations. Language choices can shape societal norms, values, and behaviors related to gender. Discourse and language contribute to the formation and maintenance of conceptions and assumptions about gender. The way gender is represented and talked about influences how individuals perceive and understand gender roles, identities, and relations. Language choices can reinforce or challenge existing stereotypes and biases. By using language that recognizes and respects diverse gender identities, expressions, and experiences, discourse can help challenge and reshape societal conceptions and assumptions about gender (Crawford and Mills, 2011).

This is why Crawford and Mills (2011) state that discourse and the language that is the basis of this discourse should be the target point of organizational change. Discourse holds the power to in itself incrementally change the formative context, according to them. Accumulative change could eventually result in a change of total social structures, as described by Unger (1987).

Visualizing this process described by Crawford and Mills (2011) results in Figure 2.1.
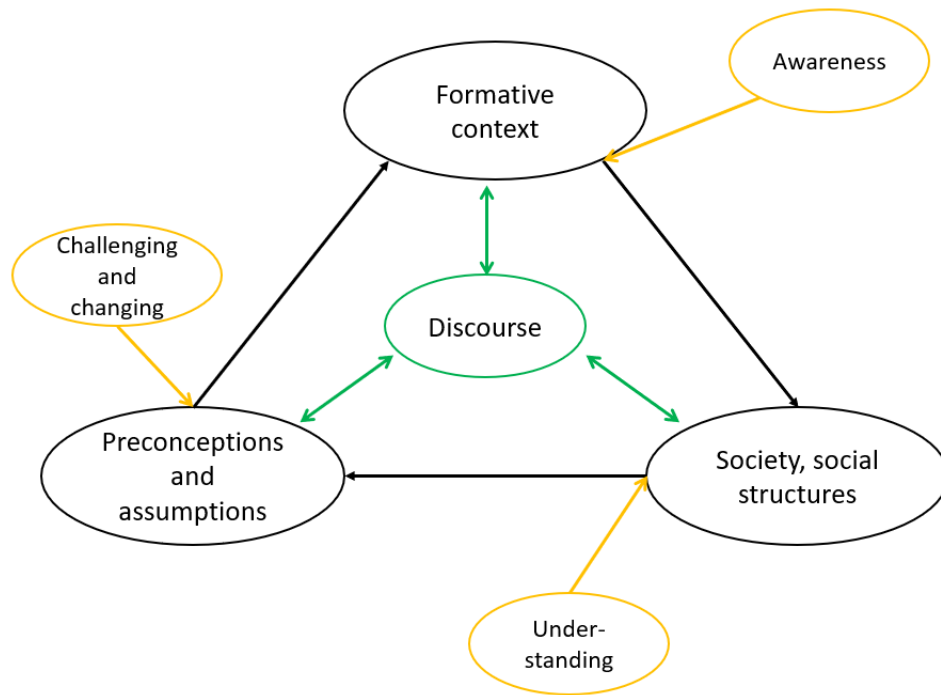
Figure 2.1: Framework for organizational change, inspired by Crawford and Mills (2011)

Looking at Figure 2.1, the formative context of an organization could be the starting point for organizational change. As this research looks at gender from an organizational lens, this is a logical starting point. By creating awareness about the formative context, society, social structures, roles and ranks can be exposed. When these social structures and how these impact the formative context are understood, preconceptions and assumptions arise which can be challenged. By challenging these preconceptions and assumptions, the formative context can be challenged and ultimately changed, closing the circle. As shown in Figure 2.1, discourse is in the middle of this cycle.

Awareness, understanding, challenging and changing can be seen as forces that come in and influence the cycle of organizational change. By viewing these aspects as external forces, this can be where intervention can occur. This does not mean that the interventions necessarily come from outside the organization. The formative context is something that is organization specific, therefore making it a logic starting point for organizational change. Society and its overarching social frameworks exert a significant influence, as this is ingrained within the operational context of an organization. Understanding this society and the social structures that come with is, is crucial to expose the preconceptions and assumptions. However it is not a direct subject of change, as the organization as limited influence on society as a whole.

The framework shown in Figure 2.1 builds on the framework of Lewin where awareness and understanding can be seen as the Unfreeze phases. Challenging and changing corresponds with Lewin's Changing phase. This leaves Lewin's Refreeze phase. The model shown in Figure 2.1 does not explicitly show how and where this refreezing should occur and is therefore not complete. Crawford and Mills (2011) discusses the role model that management can play in changing the discourse, which is a driving factor in this model of change.

Through the addition of discourse to Lewin's model, the model can be extended, as shown in Figure 2.2.
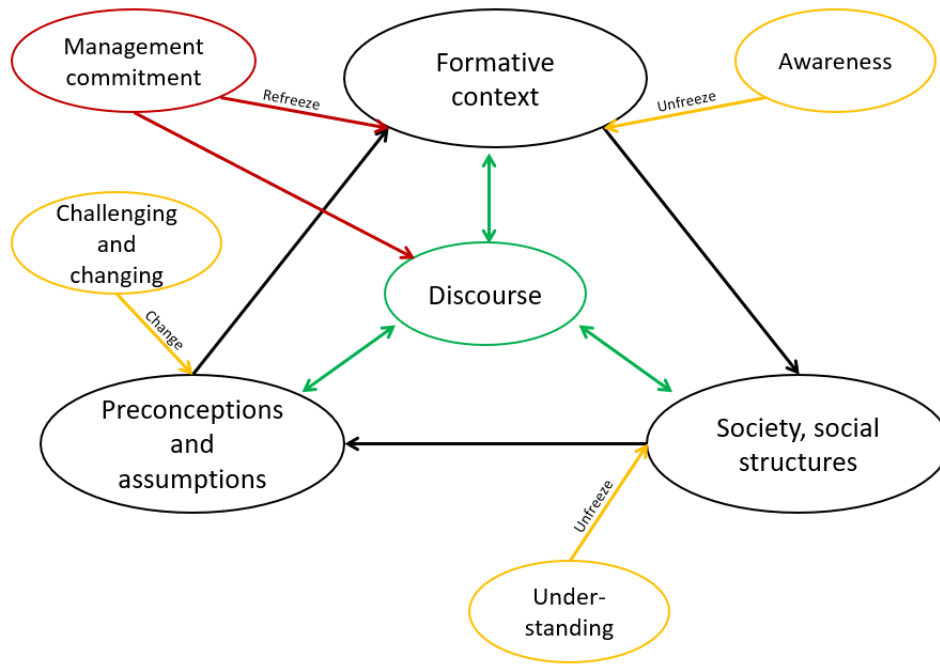
Figure 2.2: Extended framework for organizational change

Looking at this framework, there are three factors that make up the status quo, i.e., the formative context, society, and existing preconceptions and assumptions. Then there are four external forces, i.e. awareness, understanding, challenging and changing, and management commitment.

Each factor may be described individually to determine the status quo and the starting point of change. If the starting point is determined, specific approaches for the forces can be determined. As this research is focused on the organizational lens, the formative context is a logical starting point and the primary focus. The formative context of an organization determines the points that require awareness and the required amount of awareness. The same goes for the level of understanding that is required. First, the role that society plays in the perception of gender equity needs to be determined, after which the level of required understanding can be determined and an approach for this can be formulated. The preconceptions and assumptions need to be exposed before they can be challenged and changed. The level of management commitment can be assessed by examining the formative context within an organization. This involves evaluating the existing commitment and identifying areas for potential improvement

This applied framework combines existing frameworks as described by Lewin, Jacobs et al. (2013), and Crawford and Mills (2011). As described earlier, none of these frameworks gives a clear guideline on how to address a topic such as gender diversity and equity in organizations. This is why the definition of a novel framework is proposed. With this framework, a description of the current status of gender diversity and equity in an organization can be described and factors that could require attention to change the organization can be identified. In the next chapter, the methodology for applying this framework in a single case study design is defined.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this thesis, the following main research question is answered:

What are the perceptions, challenges, and opportunities surrounding gender diversity and equity within Strukton Rail, as understood by different roles of actors in the organization?

These different roles of actors can be divided into three main roles, i.e. employees, top management, and recruitment and human resource (HR) business partners. The employee role refers to the individuals who work within the organization representing different departments and functions. The role of top management is the role that makes the strategic decisions, sets goals, provides the vision and overall direction for the organization. The recruitment and HR business partner role is the role that serves as the gatekeeper between employees and top management. On the one hand, recruitment is involved in recruiting new personnel, serving as a gatekeeper for potentially improving diversity in the recruitment phase. The HR business partner, on the other hand, is the gatekeeper for retaining and advancing personnel.

The definition of these three roles translates into three sub-research questions:

1. What are the gender diversity and equity perceptions, challenges, and opportunities according to Strukton Rail's *employees*?

2. What are the gender diversity and equity perceptions, challenges, and opportunities according to Strukton Rail's *top management*?

3. What are the gender diversity and equity perceptions, challenges, and opportunities according to Strukton Rail's *recruitment and human resource business partners*?

The intersection between these roles is further discussed in subsection 3.2.4.

This chapter discusses the research approach in section 3.1, the methods that were used to collect data in section 3.2 and the way that these data were analyzed in section 3.3. After this, a critical reflection on the positionality of the researcher is included in section 3.4.

3.1 Research Approach

This section describes the research approach that was chosen for this thesis research. It outlines the research design, incorporating a case study approach with ethnographic research approach. Additionally, the research objective, significance and scope and limitations are discussed.

3.1.1 Case Study Approach

The construction industry is a very large industry that has many sub-categories of specialized organizations. This research will adopt a single case study research design. The company that is chosen as the subject for the case study is a rail contractor. A rail contractor is a construction company that specializes in construction- and/or maintenance work in the rail infrastructure. This specific company was chosen because of two main reasons. The company is fairly large, over 1,000 employees with a relatively poor representation of women in its labor pool, around 10%. Besides this, the main researcher has been working in this company for over 3 years, providing valuable contacts and a good basic knowledge of the company's structure and operations. Section 3.4Critical reflexivity - positionalitysection.3.4 goes into the implications that this position has on the execution and outcomes of this research.

The nature of this research is exploratory, as it is set up to generate knowledge by doing inductive research. A suitable design for such an exploratory, inductive research is a case study design (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). The case study approach will enable an in-depth analysis of a single organization and provide insights into the company's culture, practices, and policies related to gender equity, diversity, and inclusion. The case study will be conducted in a railway maintenance company with over 1,000 employees in the Netherlands, Strukton Rail (SR). The gender diversity in the company is significantly skewed towards men (90%) and is a good representation of the construction industry as a whole when it comes to female labor participation.

3.1.2 Ethnographic Research Approach

Ethnography is a research method focused on studying social interactions, behaviors, and perceptions within various groups, organizations, and communities (Reeves et al., 2008). Ethnography's primary goal is to provide in-depth insights into people's perspectives and actions within their cultural context. It involves immersive observations and interviews to capture the complexities of their viewpoints. Ethnographers strive to understand and empathize with how individuals perceive the world, aiming to 'get inside' their perspectives (Reeves et al., 2008). Adopting an ethnographic research approach and incorporating participant observation as a research method may allow for a deeper insight in social dynamics and nuance. As described in the research objective, this research will investigate the perspectives of several roles of actors, making ethnographic research an appropriate research approach. Additionally, as the researcher of this thesis study holds a dual position as researcher and employee within the company that is the topic of this case study, an ethnographic research approach is highly suitable. This dual position is discussed further in subsection 3.4.5, and the research method of observation is elaborated on further in section 3.2.

3.1.3 Research Objective

The objective of this study is to examine the perspectives and experiences of different roles of the organizations regarding gender diversity and equity within Strukton Rail. The study aims to identify the existing challenges, differences in viewpoints, and potential areas for improvement in promoting gender diversity within the organization. The unit of analysis for the research is therefore the individuals within the entirety of Strukton Rail as a company.

3.1.4 Research Significance

First, this research contributes to existing research and existing bodies of literature on gender and inclusion in the workplace. By conducting research on the experiences of women in male-dominated industries, it contributes to the understanding of the relation between organizational culture and gender.

Second, the research can help the company in question to identify issues related to gender equity and diversity. By providing a comprehensive analysis of the current state of gender equity and diversity in the company, the research may help to inform and guide the company's diversity and inclusion initiatives in the future. Besides this, the creation of a framework for organizational change that can be applied to the gender perspective, is helpful for seeing the aspects that need to be considered to address gender diversity.

Third, the thesis research has broader implications for other companies in similar industries. The research provides insights and recommendations that could be applied in other contexts, leading to more inclusive and diverse workplaces across industries. The drafted framework can be generalized and applied to other organizations.

Finally, the research has had personal and societal significance for women in the industry. By shedding light on the experiences of women in a male-dominated industry and identifying areas for improvement in the field of equity and inclusion, the research can help to create a more equitable and supportive environment for all employees, particularly women. During the interviews, this research gave employees, mostly women the opportunity to share their experiences around this topic, which they mostly had never done before.

3.1.5 Scope and limitations

This research limited itself to Strukton Rail, which is a part of the Strukton Group, one of the largest construction companies in the Netherlands. Strukton Rail specializes in maintaining, renovating, and building rail infrastructure.

The role of the researcher was both an advantage and a limitation in this research. At the time of writing, the researcher had been working at Strukton Rail in two different positions for over 3.5 years prior to the research, which provided opportunities in selecting suitable candidates for interviews and getting support from management in the research. This led to more response in the in-depth interview pool and the quantitative data collection since the internal data collection methods of Strukton could be used.

However, this position was also a limitation as participants might not have viewed the researcher as independent and may not have fully trusted them to keep their answers and information confidential. It may have also changed their answers to what they thought the researcher would like to hear and introduced a type of confirmation bias.

Another possible effect of the researcher working within the organization was a potential negative backlash on their career. The subject is a controversial one in a conservative environment, and not everyone might be pleased with the subject being brought up or possibly some outcomes and conclusions of the research. Since the researcher was known to many in the organization and planned on continuing their career there, this might have had or can still has a negative impact.

Another limitation that the researcher's position might have resulted in was their biases. The researcher has personal experience in this field, which could have influenced their judgment about research results. These biases were addressed by extensively talking about the research with peers, supervisors, gender experts, and colleagues who were not directly involved in the topic. This helped to gain different points of view and address blind spots.

3.2 Data Collection

Multiple methods were used to collect data, such as in-depth interviews, a questionnaire, and observations.

3.2.1 In-depth semi-structured interviews

In this method, the individual employee was the unit of analysis. The interviews had the objective to bring issues to the surface, which is why an unstructured interview technique was suitable. However, there was a clearer goal and subject of interest, which is why some structure and some guiding questions were drafted. These can be found in Appendix E.

Interviews were conducted with the three subgroups described in subsection 3.2.4. In subgroup 1, employees, eight interviews were done. Of these eight interviews, six interviewees identified as women, with 2 identifying as men. In the overarching Human Resource Management (HRM) subgroup, eight interviews were conducted. Of these eight, five were with top management and three were with several human-resource departments (recruitment, training, human-resource business partner). One interview consisted of two participants, while the others were all one-on-one interviews.

All interviews took about one hour and started out with the interviewees being asked to share a little bit about their history at the organization. This proved to be a very good tactic to get into experiences with the organization and a sense of belonging that the interviewees experienced. Especially with the female and male employees, this was the focus point of the interviews. Another focus point of the interviews with male and female employees was organizational culture and how that affected the experiences the employee has had. Parts of the interviews were similar to some of the questions posed in the questionnaire. The data generated in the interview and questionnaire are therefore complementary to each other.

The focus point for HRM was directed towards the vision and goals of the organization in term of

gender diversity. Organizational culture was also a focus point, as the description given by management was very interesting to compare to their employees.

The list with guiding questions that was used during the different interviews is included in Appendix E. As these interviews were semi-structured, these questions provided guidelines, and many other questions arose during the interviews themselves. The sampling method and participant list for the in-depth interviews is included in subsection 3.2.4.

3.2.2   Online questionnaires

In this method, the individual employee was the unit of analysis. With an online questionnaire, the opinion of gender diversity and inequities was tested with a large part of the organization. No sampling method was used; the questionnaire was administered to the entire population of Strukton Rail. The questionnaire consisted of eighteen questions, of which two were open and sixteen were closed questions. Each closed had the option of explanation. The questionnaire yielded 91 completed responses. However, 181 Strukton Rail employees started the questionnaire, which means that 90 employees did not finish the entire questionnaire. Appendix D consists of a complete breakdown of the questions and the progression of number of answers. Of the 181 people that opened the link to the questionnaire, 164 people answered the first question, which was made to give some background and establish consent for participation. The first background questions, to determine gender, age, length of employment, and type of employment of the participant, were answered by 164 employees. After this, the substantive questions about the topic started. The first substantive question was answered by 151 employees, the second by 117. This is where the highest drop-out took place. The first question around inequities between men and women also resulted in some drop-outs.

What does this say about the questionnaire itself? The questionnaire was published in consultation with the communication department of Strukton Rail. In the announcement text, the title 'Help us attract more technical personnel' was used. A feedback point that was given by some employees was that this was a misleading title. The announcement text did include a mention to gender diversity, but this was not clear enough for some people. This can explain the drop-out rate in the first few questions, as some participants might have noticed the topic of the questionnaire later on, by, for instance, skipping the introduction text in the questionnaire itself. Another reason for drop-out could have been the way the questions were posed. Some questions might have suggested that inequity between men and women was there. See subsection 8.8.2 for a reflection on how the questionnaire could have been improved for future research.

The administered questionnaire provided both qualitative and quantitative data. The responses that were given is not enough to hold significance, as it accounts for approximately 8% of the entire population (91 out of 1,187). However, respondents were a good representation of the entire population. How the questionnaire respondents relate to the total population of Strukton Rail can be seen in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Questionnaire response in comparison to the population of Strukton Rail

	Questionnaire respondents	Total population
Number	91	1,187
Relative number	7.7%	100%
Men	85%	91%
Women	15%	9%
<40 years old	38%	27%
>40 years old	62%	73%
<10 years of employment	37%	34%
>10 years of employment	63%	66%
UP'ers	25%	45%
NUP'ers	75%	55%

The gender that respondents identified as, as well as length of employment, is very similar to the total population of Strukton Rail. In terms of age groups, the respondents were a bit younger than the average age of Strukton Rail. The operational staff (UP'ers) were heavily underrepresented in the group of questionnaire respondents, while the non-operational staff (NUP'ers), office personnel, were overrepresented. As this group is relatively old, this can partly explain the difference in age between the questionnaire respondents and the total population.

3.2.3 Observations

A last method that yielded a lot of (informal) data, was through informal discussions. This consisted of update and feedback meetings with the company supervisor on progress and findings, but also of conversations with the researcher's manager during weekly catch-up meetings. Because the researcher held a dual position as researcher and employee within the organization, work meetings and conversations during lunch and informal events were a source of information too, which were taken into account in the form of observations. Context of the organization and the results that were gathered in other methods can be gained through these observations. However, they are also a data source in itself. Additionally, this method was used to triangulate the data and overcome biases that the researcher may have had on the topic. The triangulation took the form of asking informal question about diversity policies and interventions, at work events. Overcoming biases was done by reflecting research findings with colleagues from diverse backgrounds in informal settings.

3.2.4 Sampling

The perspective of three roles of actors was of interest in this research, i.e., 1) employees; 2) top management; and 3) recruitment and HR business partners.

Employees of SR provided insight into the experiences within the organization. As this research was specifically interested in the reasons behind the gender imbalance, a relatively high number of women were interviewed. Their experiences and opinions were helpful to shed light on their experiences in the organization and to Interviewing male employees aimed to provide insights into the

differences in perceived culture and overall experiences between men and women, to identify gender specific challenges.

For the HRM subgroup, both top management and the dedicated HR department was interviewed. Typically, the initiation of HRM strategies does not solely rely on the HR department. Instead, it is often initiated by the executive board. Individuals from the HR department serve as internal advisors, and their primary responsibility lies in supporting and implementing the HRM policy. Similarly, the implementation of HRM practices is carried out by line managers, with the support and guidance of the HR department. HRM is therefore used as an overarching term to point to employees from the HR department and to top management (business line managers in the case of Strukton Rail). The dedicated HR department at Strukton Rail is responsible for, among other things, recruiting, hiring together with managers, internal training, and providing guidance and advice to management on personnel management matters. The guidance and advise to management on personnel management matters is done by HR business partners. Each department within the organization has an HR business partner who serves as an advisor to the business line managers of that department. The HR department is responsible for various aspects of personnel management, including recruitment and training. They oversee the hiring process, ensuring that suitable candidates are identified and selected for open positions within the organization. Additionally, they play a role in developing and implementing training programs to enhance the skills and capabilities of employees. Interviewing this subgroup of HR personnel, such as recruitment and HR business partners, provided valuable insights into the organization's hiring practices and the procedures followed during the recruitment process. It also shed light on the approaches taken for employee advancement, including the training programs implemented by the HR department.

Furthermore, interviews with business line managers within the organization offered an opportunity to understand their goals and priorities concerning gender diversity. As business line managers are crucial in implementing HRM practices and prior research has demonstrated that management commitment plays a significant role in influencing the adoption of HRM diversity practices (Zou and Fan, 2022). Exploring the perspectives of top management regarding gender diversity provided insights into their level of commitment and the extent to which they perceive the gender imbalance as an issue within the organization, in comparison to the experiences and perceptions of the employees.

By conducting interviews with both HR personnel and top management, the research aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the organization's HR practices, management's perspective on gender diversity, and the alignment between management's goals and the experiences of employees.

The sampling method that was used was quota sampling, a type of purposive sampling (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). It is used to select participants based on pre-defined characteristics (quota). Unlike random sampling methods where participants are selected randomly from the population, quota sampling involves non-random selection. The researcher identified the relevant criteria (such as age, gender, occupation, or other relevant variables) and actively seeks individuals who fit those criteria until the desired quotas are met. Random sampling methods were not appropriate in this research because of the specific goal to investigate gender related experiences. Seeing the limited number of women in the total population of Strukton Rail's employee file, quota sampling was appropriate. To avoid bias in the sampling, participants from different departments were approached. Seeing the

dual position of the researcher, participants that were unknown to the researcher had the preference. From a list of employees, the participants were randomly selected.

Data of the participants of the research are shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Summary of interviewees

	Employees	Top management	Human resources
Age group			
20-30	1	0	0
30-40	4	0	2
40-50	2	0	1
50-60	1	5	1
Length of Employment			
0-2 years	3	1	2
2-5 years	1	1	0
5-10 years	1	2	0
10-20 years	2	1	1
>20 years	2	3	0
Gender			
Man	2	4	0
Woman	6	1	4
Other	0	0	0
Total	**8**	**5**	**4**

The participants of this research will be quoted throughout. The female employees are denoted by FE1 through FE6, the male employees are denoted as ME1 and ME2. The participants that are classified as top management are denoted as M1 up to M5. Human resource participants are H1 up to H4.

The actors that operate within these levels, have intertwining roles. For instance, all interviewees are employees. Even though the interviews are designed to gain insight from the specific role the interviewee was chosen for, overlap occurred. Each interviewee speaks from their personal experience, as a manager, as an employee, as a person.
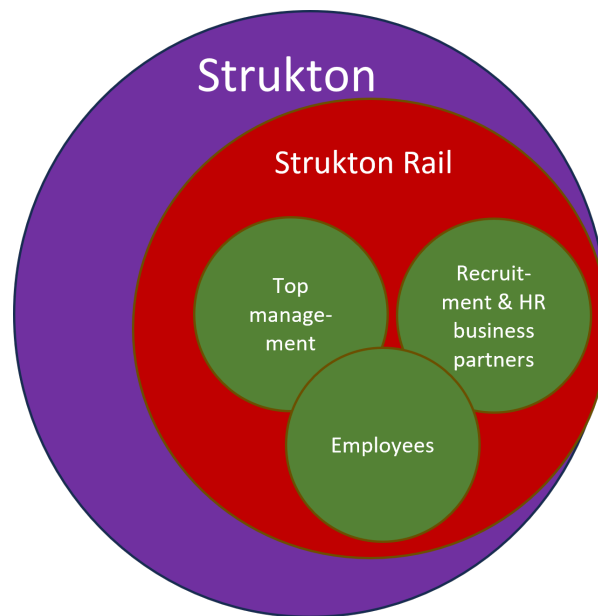
Figure 3.1: Roles of interviewees

Figure 3.1 shows the position of the interviewees in the context of Strukton Rail and Strukton. It shows that the top management and recruitment & HR business partners have an overlap with employees, as the interviewees within these groups also have a role as an employee themselves. The sample that was counted as 'employee' did not overlap with the other roles. None of the interviewees that are fall under the employee group also fall under the top management or human resource group.

3.3 Data Analysis

The research utilized two complementary methods of analysis, namely content analysis and thematic analysis, to examine the data collected from interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses. The first step was anonymizing the interview transcripts. The content analysis process involved summarizing interviews and forming clusters based on initial impressions. Subsequently, the full dataset underwent content analysis, refining and systematically examining the data to identify patterns, relationships, and trends. This approach facilitated the comparison of identified themes and categories, leading to the creation of a new framework addressing the research question.

After the first content analysis, the thematic analysis was conducted by carefully reading and re-reading the themes and categories. Direct quotations from the main themes were then employed to illustrate individual results and support arguments based on the existing literature.

3.3.1 Validity and reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, several measures were taken, including triangulation of data sources, member checking, and peer debriefing. Triangulation of data sources involved the use of multiple methods and sources of data to verify findings. The research was set up with several methods (personal interviews, questionnaires, and literature research) to gather data from different perspectives. Member checking involved presenting the findings to participants to ensure their accuracy and completeness. Peer debriefing involved seeking feedback from colleagues, other students, and supervisors to ensure the rigor and quality of the study.

A method that was used to triangulate the findings was by reflect the findings with VHTO, which is the Expertise Center for Gender Diversity in STEM and IT.

VHTO, the Expertise Center for Gender Diversity in STEM and IT, is an organization that focuses on promoting gender equity and increasing the participation of girls and women in the fields of STEM and IT. VHTO raises awareness about the importance of gender diversity in STEM and IT through campaigns, events, and publications. They advocate for equal opportunities and work towards dismantling gender stereotypes and biases in these fields. They have multiple ways of doing this. They have educational program, in which they develop and implement programs and initiatives to inspire and encourage girls and women to pursue careers in STEM and IT. VHTO conducts research on gender diversity in STEM and IT and shares their findings through reports, publications, and conferences. They contribute to the knowledge base on effective strategies for promoting gender equity in these fields. VHTO also collaborates with various organizations, including educational institutions, industry associations, and government bodies, to create a network of stakeholders committed to promoting gender diversity in STEM and IT. Because of their many activities, they have wide range of knowledge of this topic. Several conversations with VHTO were conducted to validate the research results.

3.4 Critical reflexivity - positionality

My social context was a determinant in my positionality in research and affected my view on the topic, the way of collecting research results, and the interpretation of results. As described by (Coburn and Gormally, 2017), positionality is one's self-identity in relation to interactions and in relation to others. This positionality had an impact on this research. Parts of my self-identity that were most relevant here were my race, my gender, my upbringing, my educational background, and my cultural background. I will discuss these parts here in more detail.

3.4.1 Race and gender

I am a white woman. From this position, I am both privileged and have a disadvantage. On the one hand, I've experienced sexism in both my education and my job. This has made me more receptive to sexism in both settings, but it also made me short-sighted and might have influenced my conclusions in a negative way, interpreting behavior as sexist instead of evaluating how the person in that specific situation perceived the behavior. My race could have also been a reason for short-sightedness, as I have not experienced racism and the intersectionality between sexism and racism, which might have provided an additional point of view on this research topic. By asking about the values, feelings, and thoughts behind experiences of people that were being interviewed about their experiences, I attempted to counter this short-sightedness and critically reflect on my research results.

3.4.2 Upbringing and cultural background

I grew up in Amsterdam, in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is a rich country and is relatively emancipated. There are no legal restrictions for women to work, and in the context of profession, women do not have fewer rights than men. The Netherlands could be considered a right-wing country, with

a right-wing party as the largest party for the century. However, Amsterdam is predominantly left-wing oriented, which was part of my upbringing. The result of this was that there was a lot of focus on providing additional opportunities for people that did not have the same opportunities as others (e.g. people with less money, immigration background, etc.). This focus led to me having a mindset of natural equity. I am aware that this mindset is not one that comes naturally to most people. This impacted my research as it made me oblivious to reasons why not to care for equity. A focus on the individual perspective meritocracy is somewhat strange to me. In the Netherlands, it is still considered relatively normal for the woman to stop working or start working less when a heterosexual couple has children, while the man keeps his normal job and hours. However, in my upbringing, this was not the case. My family was, in that sense, a non-traditional family. My father and mother both assumed a caring and working role within the family. While my mother worked during the day, my father took care of the children and the household. He would bring us to school, pick us up, and cook almost every day. My father worked during the evening, during which my mother took care of cleaning up and getting the children to bed. The traditional role division had an impact on gender typical roles within a family, which I did not experience. This had an impact on my assumptions regarding gender within the family and working context.

3.4.3 Educational background

Lastly, my educational background was a determining factor in my role as a researcher. My parents are both highly-educated, as am I. Having a critical view on the status quo was something that I have been taught both by my parents and by previous education. Besides this, I have a bachelor's degree in a male-dominated area (aviation engineering) and have worked in a male-dominated organization for over 3 years. The situations that I have encountered there had formed my opinion and led to biases about this topic. However, me still working in this environment also showed that I do feel comfortable (enough) working here.

3.4.4 How did this impact my research and biases

My race, gender, and cultural, educational, and upbringing background all impacted my personal opinion on the topic that I have been researching. The combination of these contexts have formed my personal experiences and given me a sense of urgency on this specific topic. If I would not have been white, my priority might not have been gender equity. If I were a man, my priority might not have been equity in general. If I had not studied and worked in male-dominated environments, gender equity might not have been a pressing issue. Me feeling comfortable in a male-dominated field I might have left the industry instead of spending time on (in my opinion) improving the status quo. If I was raised in a more traditional environment, I would not have perceived gender traditional roles as an issue. My upbringing has given me a critical attitude towards the status quo and an intolerance to what I perceive as injustice.

The things that I perceive as injustice also led to some biases. I did have an expectation about the results that I would find in this study, as I expected them to be similar to my personal experience. This was especially true because I conducted this research in the organization that I have had most of my experiences.

3.4.5 Dual position as employee and researcher

As mentioned before, I held a dual position during this research. At the time that I was writing this thesis, I also worked part-time at the organization that I was studying. The job that I held had nothing to do with this thesis topic, as I worked primarily as an internal project leader. This entailed me leading projects that were meant for business improvements, such as the development of new tools in support of the operation or improving business processes. This role provided me with contacts within the organization which made it much easier to get interviews. My years of experience within the company provided me with a lot of context of organizational processes and workings. I was, in a sense, part of the context of the organization, and I did not first have to get to know the organization before starting my research. This was a major advantage but could also be a disadvantage. In section 8.8, I will reflect on what my experiences were during this research.

Chapter 4

Formative context
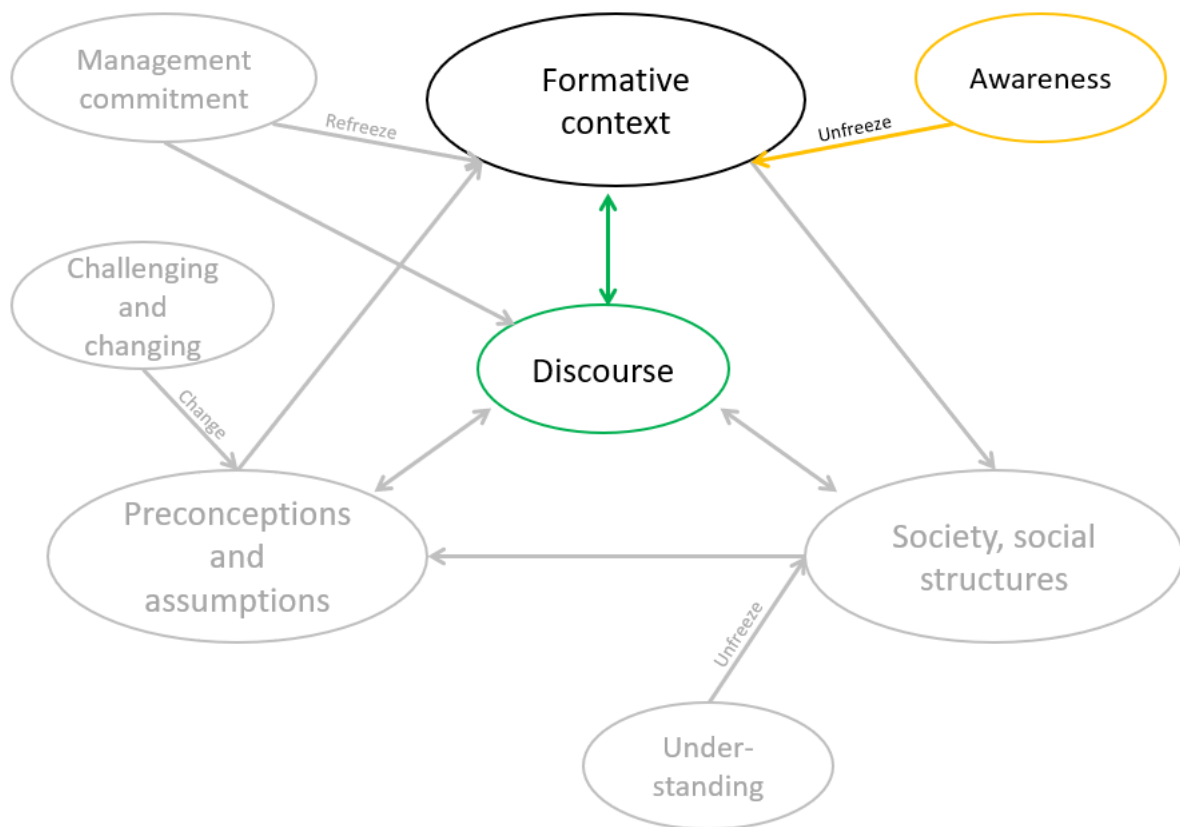
Looking at Figure 2.1 back in the theoretical framework, the formative context of an organization was defined as a logical starting point to assess gender in an organization. This is depicted above.

Unger defines that formative context may *"consist in imaginative assumptions about the possible and desirable forms of human association as well as in institutional arrangements or non-institutionalized social practices"* (Unger, 1987, p. 89).
This definition is expanded by Crawford and Mills (2011):
"These are taken-for-granted arrangements and shared beliefs that give coherence and continuity to the roles people enact and that guide how interests are defined and problems are approached" (Crawford and Mills, 2011, p. 91).

So, formative context refers to the shared assumptions, beliefs, and institutional arrangements that shape the actions and behaviors of individuals within an organization or society (Crawford and Mills, 2011). It is the foundation of social theory, according to Roberto Unger, who argues that understanding the formative context is critical for understanding the social world (Unger, 1987).

The formative context can be divided into two, the formal and the informal side of the context. The formal part of the formative context would be the institutionalized arrangements while the informal part can be seen as the non-institutionalized social practices, the taken-for-granted arrangements and the shared beliefs. The formal context is therefore looked for in the identity of the organization, in this case analyzed in terms of its quantitative data by describing its employees, managers, and some HR aspects. This is discussed in section 4.1. The informal context can be best described by looking at the organizational culture. A description of the organizational culture shows the organization's values and beliefs, this is done in section 4.2.

4.1 Strukton Rail

The company that is the subject of this case study is Strukton Rail. Strukton Rail specializes in maintenance and construction of the rail infrastructure. They are a major participant in the European rail sector. By concentrating on sustainability, passenger demands, and competitiveness, they aim to make rail service appealing, safe, and dependable. They encourage partnerships for building and maintaining rail networks believing that rail transportation is the way of the future. Strukton Rail states that it is proud of its committed staff members that put professionalism, health, and safety first. Despite having its roots in the Netherlands, Strukton Rail operates globally, with locations in Belgium, Denmark and Sweden (Strukton Rail, 2022).

On the date of analysis, Strukton Rail has 1,182 employees, excluding interns and externals. Within Strukton Rail, a distinction is made of three types of employment conditions. First off, a distinction is made between employees that fall within the collective employment agreement (CAO) and employees falling outside the CAO.

Within the employees for who the CAO is applicable, there is the distinction between UP and NUP personnel. UP, which stands for 'Uitvoerend Personeel' in Dutch, applies to the operational staff. These are the technicians doing the operational renewals, construction, or maintenance work. Non-operational staff, NUP or 'Niet uitvoerend personeel' in Dutch, is the office personnel. The personnel that falls outside the CAO has the label of BCAO, 'buiten CAO'.

Strukton Rail is divided into twelve main departments. Appendix C gives a short description of the departments and the number of employees per department.

Looking at quantitative data, the degree to which a gender imbalance is present can be defined. This done by looking at three different layers of diversity. In subsection 4.1.1, the ratio of men and women within the organization and its departments will provide insight in the employee layer of Strukton Rail. The (top) management layer is discussed in subsection 4.1.2, by examining the distribution of managerial positions. This is complemented by looking at some human resource aspects of the overall employees, i.e. the pay gap within the organization in subsubsection 4.1.3.1, and the distribution of full-time and part-time work in subsubsection 4.1.3.2.

4.1.1 Strukton Rail's employees

Overall, the ratio men/women at Strukton Rail is 91/9. About 45% of the employees of Strukton Rail works under the UP conditions, the technical operational staff. Within this group, there is one woman out of 530 men (0.19%). When this group is excluded from the analysis, the ratio men/women of Strukton Rail in general increases to 84/16.

Within departments, there is much difference in the participation of women. The operational departments have the lowest gender diversity ratios with PMC Beveiliging & Installaties having the lowest participation rate with one female employee (<1%) and PMC Kabel having the highest rate with five female employees (7.6%).
The majority of women at Strukton Rail are working in the supporting departments. Business support and finance and control have the highest participation rates of women, 26% and 39% respectively.

Excluding the UP personnel, the department of capacity management also has a more equal men/-women ratio of 64/36. For the other departments, the percentage of women increases too, but less drastically. This is due to the fact that the capacity management department has a relatively high number of operational staff employees.

The overall participation rate of women in the organization per department is shown in Figure 4.1.
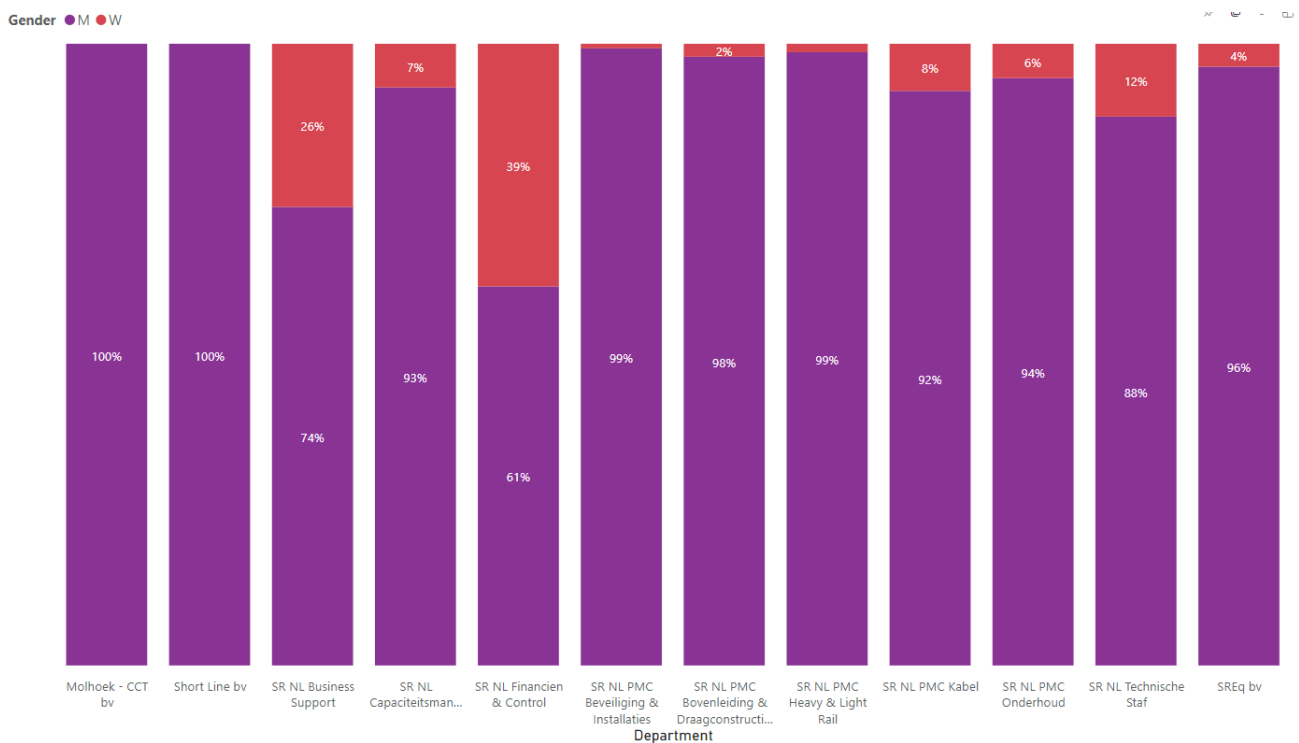
Figure 4.1: Gender diversity numbers per department

Strukton Rail is also a very old organization, with an average age of 48 and only about 27% of employees that is younger than 40 years old. Especially the operational staff (UP'ers) is relatively old, with 53% being older than 50.

When looking at the length of employment, what stands out is that the majority of the employees have been working at the company for over ten years. Female employees, however, have a much lower average employment length than male employees. A little more than one third of the female

employees have been with the company for less than 3 years, while this is less than 20% when looking at the entire staff. Almost 47% of the female employees have been at the company for less than 6 years, while this holds true for 27% for the entire labor pool. Some of this difference is explained by the large part of operational staff that have been working at Strukton Rail for a very long time and are (almost) all male. However, when excluding this group, the percentage of male employees working at the company for less than 6 years increases to 29%, which is still a very big difference from the 47% of female employees.

4.1.2 Strukton Rail's managers

With the data that was available during this research, determining who has a managerial position at Strukton Rail was cumbersome. In the dataset that was used for this analysis, only by interpreting the job title, an estimation could be made if an employee had a managerial position. In UP positions, managerial positions are the 'uitvoerder' position, which entails managing and overseeing the operational work. Managerial NUP positions are businessline managers, contract managers, project managers, team leaders, and tender managers. Not all tender managers hold a managerial position, but some do. This analysis is therefore not completely accurate, but it will give some insight in who holds the managerial positions.

Looking only at NUP and BCAO, much difference between the departments is seen, again. Some departments have similar percentages of female managers in comparison to their overall gender ratio. However, some other departments have significant lower number of female managers in comparison to their general population. The Finance and Control department had the most equal gender ratio of the organization, but in terms of female managers, they are on the low end, with 14%. Contrasting is PMC Kabel, who relatively speaking has more female managers than female employees (13% female managers against 7% female employees overall).

Overall, the ratio of female/male managers is comparable to the overall ratio of female/male employees at the organization. Drawing conclusion from these data is difficult, but this could be an indication that the decision-making power at Strukton Rail also lies with men.

4.1.3 Strukton Rail's human resource aspects

The human resource aspects that are looked to investigate the position of women at Strukton Rail are two fold. First, salary information is assessed. After this, an analysis is made on the division of full-time and part-time work in relation to gender.

4.1.3.1 Strukton Rail's pay gap

In section 2.2 the pay gap is considered as a factor contributing to an unwelcoming environment for women (Morello et al., 2018). It can be an interesting topic as background information for Strukton Rail. Data on salary can say something about the decision-making power within an organization, but it may also be an indication on fairness of the system and objective assessment.

The decision-making power relates to the division of higher paying jobs. Logically, higher paying jobs are probably the jobs that hold more responsibility, even though they are not necessarily a ma-

nagerial position. Comparing average pay between men and women can therefore give information about the position women hold within the organization. In the previous section, horizontal segregation, the ratio of men and women in an organization as a whole, was discussed. The division of pay is related more the notion of equal access to opportunity, often referred to as the 'glass ceiling' (Coron, 2020), and can be described as vertical segregation (Mejia-Dorantes, 2019). The presence and degree of vertical segregation can also be made clearer by looking at the number of women in (senior) management positions, which was done to some degree in the previous section.

Two different approaches are taken in this preliminary analysis of the pay gap. Statistics Netherlands (het Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek) periodically reports on the pay gap in the Netherlands CBS (2022a). In their reports, two different pay gaps are discussed. First of all, the unadjusted pay gap, which is described as the difference in average gross hourly earnings of men and women. A second analysis is by adjusting for differences in for example education level, job level, and years of experience (CBS, 2022a).

As explained in section 4.1, there are three types of employment conditions. A clear distinction is made between operational staff (UP) and non-operational staff (NUP and BCAO). Considering the information that operational personnel receive irregularity allowances, it would be more appropriate to focus on the non-operational staff for this analysis because of two reasons. First, analyzing only the NUP and BCAO personnel provides consistency in base salary. The base salary of non-operational staff likely reflects their regular monthly earnings more accurately, as their compensation structure may not be subject to irregularity allowances or other additional payments. This consistency allows for a more straightforward comparison of salaries. Second, focusing only on the NUP and BCAO personnel is more aligned with roles and responsibilities and is a better representation of the hierarchies of the organization. Non-operational staff typically hold positions that directly contribute to decision-making processes, such as managers, supervisors, or financial roles. Their salaries are often tied to their level of responsibility and decision-making authority within the organization. Non-operational staff members often occupy positions higher in the organizational hierarchy, where decision-making power is typically concentrated. Focusing on this group can shed light on the disparities in decision-making authority at the managerial and administrative levels.

This unadjusted pay gap is calculated by subtracting the average income of women from the average income of men, dividing it by the average income of men, and multiplying it by 100. The difference is the difference in terms of percentage, and uses the salary of employees based on a 40 hours work week. As all salaries are adjusted to a 40 hours work week, there was no need for calculating the gross hourly income of employees. This analysis takes the gross monthly income of employees based on a full-time employment into account. Based on this analysis, much difference in the average pay of men and women is observed. No relationship with the nature of department can be found at first glance. The percentage of women working in a department does not seem to be an indication for the difference in pay. The pay gap is not controlled for length of employment, education, and experience. As the last two parameters are not present in the data, they cannot be controlled for. In a more detailed look, the pay-, length of employment- and age gap per department are examined. This examination indicates that these factors cannot easily explain differences that come up. This analysis could not give a reason and explanation on the differences. To do this, an in-depth analysis is required.

Based on the reporting of CBS (2022a), another way of looking at a potential gender pay gap is comparing the salary of men and women in specific jobs, controlling for length of employment, education, experience, and age and life stage. This is known as the adjusted pay gap. Length of employment and age are parameters that are kept track of within the HR database. Life stage can partly be induced from age, but is not a known parameter and when looking purely at quantitative data, therefore always an assumption solely based on age. An employee of 30 might already have children, want to have children in the short term, not be ready for children yet, or not want children altogether. Education and experience are not parameters that are available in the data source provided for this thesis research. Therefore, a complete comparison of the gender pay gap in terms of comparing specific jobs, is not possible. It requires much more nuanced information, moving away from a quantitative approach towards a qualitative approach. However, working with the data that is available may provide some insight, which might be input for future research, as described in section 8.9.

For this analysis, a comparison is made between men and women doing the same job. Therefore, only people that have a colleague in the same department with the same job title will be taken into account. This is done because the organization has a standard job function structure ('functiehuis') which makes comparing functions between departments difficult and illogical. A function can have an entirely different set of requirements in one department compared to another. This leaves 424 employees with 29 unique department-job title combinations that have both female and male employees in eleven different job titles. Much difference is found in this gap. Some functions show a small pay gap, four out of eleven functions have a gap of less than 2%. For three functions, the pay gap is in favor of women, with the function of 'calculator' having the highest pay gap of 17.9% in favor of women. The other four functions show a pay gap in favor of men higher than 2%, with the function of 'projectleider' (project leader) showing the highest difference, with 29.1% in favor of women.

However, it must be noted that it is illegal to pay employees differently based on, among other things, gender (Netherlands Enterprise Agency, 2022). The assumption is that Strukton Rail adheres to this. Differences shown here should therefore be explained by other factors. As mentioned earlier, length of employment, education, experience, and age, to name a few, can all play a role in salary and be an explanation for difference. This could be a point for future research.

Other interesting analyses around salary would be to compare salaries of men and women in terms the length of employment, seniority, and function type. As this type of analysis is out of the scope of this thesis, it is not done in depth, but looked at shallowly. What stands out is that women who work at the organization for less than six years earn, on average, more than men, while men earn on average more than women when looking at employment length of six years and more. Another noteworthy detail is that in terms of seniority, men earn more than women with A, B, C seniority or functions without a seniority option, while the average salary of a woman with seniority D (the highest seniority denotation) is higher than that of her male colleague with the same seniority.

One conclusion that can be drawn is that when looking at salary data and the pay gap, there are many different ways of analyzing and interpreting this data. Additionally, the data that was provided by Strukton Rail had some gaps. Data on advancement, for instance how many positions an employee has had since start of employment and the time an employee had spent in each position, were not available. Data on start salary and how the salary grew during years of employment were also not

readily available. To perform an in-depth analysis on the pay gap and potential discrepancies in pay to unveil the system of advancement and reward, the first step is to define the objective of such an analysis and clearly outline the purpose. Second, different data sources would have to be combined to gather all relevant and accurate data on employee salary, promotions, salary increases, and any other factors. Data on education and experience could be gathered through a qualitative investigation.

The notion that focusing on NUP and BCAO personnel for this analysis to be more aligned with roles, responsibilities and hierarchies, is a simplification of reality. It is important to note that this approach does not recognize the significance of decision-making power held by operational staff. While their irregularity allowances may impact their base salary, it is still valuable to consider their roles within the organization separately, acknowledging the unique responsibilities and decision-making power they possess within their respective operational functions. However, taking into account this group of employees makes for a more complex analysis. As this is not the sole focus of this thesis, this analysis could not be done to its full extent and could be a point for future research.

4.1.3.2 Putting in the hours

Another factor that is of interest when looking at where the power lies within the organization, is full-time versus part-time employment. Analyzing the division of part-time and full-time labor between men and women is intriguing and valuable for several reasons. The division of part-time and full-time labor is often influenced by societal gender norms and stereotypes, as elaborated on further in section 2.2. Historically, women have been more likely to take on part-time work to accommodate care giving responsibilities, while men have been encouraged to pursue full-time careers. Analyzing the status quo at Strukton Rail when it comes to the division of full-time and part-time works and the differences between men and women, can provide a basis for unveiling potential genders norms and stereotypes. Besides this, part-time work is often seen as a barrier for career advancement (Wright et al., 2016).

At Strukton Rail, women work, on average, less than men. On average, women work less hours than men, 35.2 hours compared to 39.6 hours. More than 50% of female employees work less than 40 hours, while this is only true for 4% of male employees. Most women that work part-time work more than 32%, with only 12% of female employees working less than 32 hours a week. For male employees however, this is less than half a percent.

This shows that there is a gap between the hours that men put in and the hours that women put in.

4.2 Organizational Culture Perspectives: The Heartbeat of the Company

The heartbeat of a company lies in its organizational culture, which encompasses the shared values, beliefs, and behaviors that shape the working environment and employee experiences. Understanding the perspectives of employees, managers, and human resources professionals provides valuable insights into the dynamics and challenges of organizational culture in relation to gender diversity and equity. In examining the employees' viewpoint, five key themes emerge, including gender dynamics, power dynamics, learning and growth, and age. These themes shed light on the experiences and perceptions of employees, particularly women, within the organizational culture at Strukton Rail. Managers' perspectives also offer valuable insights into the recognition of gender dynamics and power dynamics, as well as the impact of the male-dominated environment. Furthermore, human resources professionals acknowledge the influence of gender dynamics and the appeal of the industry on women's comfort in the organizational culture. By exploring these perspectives, a comprehensive understanding of the organizational culture at Strukton Rail can be gained, as well as its impact on employees.

4.2.1 Employees' Perspective on Organizational Culture

When discussing the organizational culture as experienced by interviewed employees and questionnaire respondents, five themes emerge.

First of all, **Gender Dynamics**, dynamics between men and women are frequently mentioned. As seen in subsection 4.1.1, many women working at Strukton Rail are surrounded by male coworkers, most of the time being the only woman in their team, sometimes even in the entire department. This lack of representation and lack of recognition can be demotivating in itself for a minority. If women actively identify as a woman, they may struggle to relate to their colleagues (Van Veelen et al., 2019). If their gender is an inherent part of their identity, this automatically sets them apart from their teammates. This feeling of being different can be alienating, and they have to find ways to compensate in order to fit in. For women who don't strongly identify with being a woman, this situation might look to be easier. According to critical mass theory, many studies, specifically aimed at looking at performance benefits due to board diversity, note that a minimum representation of 30% is required for diversity to truly result in added benefits (Nuber and Velte, 2021; Yarram and Adapa, 2021; Joecks et al., 2013). If this representation is not reached, it could be argued that there is a token representation (Yarram and Adapa, 2021). Joecks et al. (2013) states that "Tokens are not treated as individuals, but as representatives for their category" (Joecks et al., 2013, p.62). So, even if a woman doesn't strongly identify as a woman, her colleagues will perceive her as one, creating a disconnect between her self-perception and the perception of her teammates. This, too, can be alienating.

Looking at the case of Strukton Rail, interviews with female employees showed that being a minority also comes with additional challenges. The exclusion of women from the group can be very subtle in the organization, but, can be found in some cases. It ranges from (subconscious) exercise of power over women by making sexual innuendos or using exclusionary language. These tactics are described by Acker (1990) who claim that using male sexuality is a way of dominating women in the workplace. Some described that language changes, when a woman joins a team or a meeting and that male col-

leagues become more conscious of their language use. For example, the phrase "okay boys" may turn into "okay boys, uhm... and girl." Although this adaptation is intended to be inclusive, it still emphasizes the woman's difference from the group, perpetuating the feeling of alienation.

Literature suggests that all eyes may be on the woman, regardless of how they feel, personally. They are either supposed to be the woman who proves the assumptions wrong, or they are expected to act in a certain way because of these assumptions. Consequently, women seem to adapt. They seem to either embrace their femininity or accept that when they need to make their point, they will either be seen as 'the bitch' or not be taken as seriously as their male colleagues. This is recognized by female employees at Strukton Rail, as illustrated by the following quote:

> FE3: *"They just don't completely take you seriously as colleague, they think they can walk all over you. So you have to be loud and show a bit of bitchy behavior. It's not something I want to do, and it takes energy, but I do use that."*

Gender dynamics also intersect with age, as shown in the following quote. One woman described their experience with colleagues marking them as their daughter, either explicitly or implicitly. This comparison might seem harmless, but it puts the woman in a position of inferiority as the man holds a power position over his daughter and by implication, thereby also over his female colleague.

> FE1: *"Sometimes, older men say 'you're just like my daughter', and they start comparing. They mean really well, but it's messes with your own perspective of your position."*

Some female interviewees note that they have been the subject of sexual comments (participants FE1, FE2, and FE5), while others explicitly note that it has not been sexual, but more towards their capabilities (participant FE3).

> FE1: *"I have never had a bad experience. A comment now and then, but I think that you have that everywhere, especially in a male-dominated company."*

The previous quote suggests two things. The presence of (sexual) comments is shown, but it is also an accepted part of the working environment. The status quo is accepted by female interviewees. Not everyone agrees on the presence of gender dynamics and differences between men and women within Strukton Rail.

> FE6: *"I come here to do my job, and men do the same. So I don't see any differences in that. We are all human."*

From the questionnaire respondents, one male respondents noted that a construction company like Strukton is still dominated by men who sometimes still find it normal to put up pictures of women in the hut and/or break room or talk ambiguously about women or female colleagues. They note that this co-contributes to a women un-friendly company culture. This male-dominated culture is recognized by female respondents. However, some disagreement exists on the effects of this culture. One female respondent notes that women are taken seriously at Strukton, while another shares that they have had personal experience with men earning more than women, men being taken more seriously than women, and women having to deal with harassment. Another female respondent mentions that they has had the feeling that they had to fight harder than men to get where they are.

Being taken seriously leads to the next theme, **Power Dynamics**. Participant FE1, for instance, men-

tioned that people in power have the ability to set the tone, which determines the position that they has within a meeting. The power dynamics could be related to gender dynamics. Undermining positional power by exerting sexual power is a phenomenon described in literature by for instance Wright et al. (2016). Female interviewees seem to be proud to work for Strukton Rail despite the male-dominated environment and the sometimes challenging culture for women. In interviews, female employees express that they feel the responsibility to set clear boundaries (participants FE2 and FE4) or be able to not take everything personally (participant FE5).

Many interviewed women (FE1, FE2, FE4, and FE5) acknowledged facing challenges due to high expectations. Despite these expectations being self-imposed, they still experienced difficulties in meeting them. Participant FE3 expressed that these high expectations were something that they used to struggle with but that due to work experience, they had developed the capability to set suitable goals for themselves. This introduces the fourth theme, **Learning and Growth**. Another view on this theme was offered by participant FE6:

> FE6: *"Young people need to gain a lot of experience in life and work, and sometimes they have to trip and fall miserably to know that next time, they might need to keep their mouth shut a bit more, or say it in a different way, without pretending to know it better than the experienced people."*

Both male interviewees (participant ME1 and ME2) expressed that they never had the feeling of having to prove themselves:

> ME1: *"I have never had the feeling I had to prove myself, not even in the beginning. I got all the time and space to learn the ropes."*

A last theme that overlaps many other themes is **Age**. Many of the previous quotes show this intersectionality, whether it is about being categorized as someones daughter, having enough work experience to set realistic expectations, or gaining experience in general. However, according to the following questionnaire respondent, age might also be a determining factor of inequality:

> QR1: *"I don't experience inequality between men and women. If there is inequality, it could be that this has to do with the company culture. Seeing the average age of employees, inequality could be something that's rooted in the culture. Just look at the key figures in top management, all men that are a bit older."*

This respondent attributes a potential gender inequality to the old age of the organization and its management. This might also be seen by some female interviewees. Participant FE1, for instance, explicitly mentioned a feeling of inadequacy due to the large age difference between them and their male colleagues.

4.2.2 Managers' Perspective on Organizational Culture

When looking at the perspective of managers on the organizational culture in relation to the five themes, not all are specifically mentioned.

The themes **Gender Dynamics** and **Power Dynamics** are recognized, but to a lesser extent compared to the experiences of employees. The differences between men and women in the organizational cul-

ture are recognized by some managers but are generally not considered to have a negative influence on women within the context of the organization:

M5: *"I think that men and women experience different obstacles, not necessarily within this organization, but perhaps from a client. This is still a male-dominated world, and men can be like 'we men know how it works, and women, they have no understanding of it'."*

Some managers note that there are benefits of being a woman in the organization, which was also recognized by some female interviewees (participants FE1 and FE4). By recognizing benefits of being a woman, a difference between men and women is also recognized:

M4: *"I have the conviction that you have a different tool set as a woman, and you can use that."*

The environment that Strukton Rail operates in is described as male-dominated and sometimes a bit crude (participants M2, M3, and M4):

M4: *"In the traditional construction situation, you have posters of naked women on the walls. Some find that offensive, some don't, it depends on your own attitude. I'm not saying it's right, but it is the dynamic that we're all in, and you have to deal with that."*

However, even though this could be classified as a quote falling in the theme of Gender Dynamics, the impact this environment could have on the experience of women was not recognized easily. Instead, the interviewee related it to the individual's experience, not classifying it as being more detrimental for women rather than men. This relates to the theme of **Power Dynamics**, as this interviewee suggests that the organizational culture can also have a negative impact on men. Participant M4 mentions that there is a culture of not listening to each other, which bothered them. They stress that men *and* women contribute to this culture and that it is the environment everyone is in, and that everyone has to find their way in. The organizational culture is also describes as follows:

M4: *"We have a 'doers culture', where the person who shouts the loudest gets stuff done. We also have a fire brigade culture, we love putting out fires. It's very task driven, goal driven, not process driven and everybody has something to say about everything."*

Just as with the experience of employees, this interviewee recognizes the status quo and accepts it to some extent, even though not being satisfied with it. However, not everyone agrees with participant M4. Shown by the following quote, the organizational culture is also experienced as professional:

M1: *"[I would describe the company culture at Strukton as] professional, to the point."*

A commonality between management interviewees was that even though difference between men and women was recognized, the impact of the male-dominated culture on the experience of women was not.

4.2.3 Human Resource's Perspective on Organizational Culture

Recruitment and HR business partners recognize the theme of **Gender Dynamics** within the organizational culture. This is often related to the appeal of the industry:

H3: *"I believe the entire construction culture, not just within Strukton, is not particularly appealing to women. There is also a bit of a stigma, I think, of a male-dominated culture, and as*

a woman, you may not feel comfortable in that environment. Or perhaps you do, but I think it can be off-putting sometimes. It can be perceived as rough, a bit blunt, based on what I observe around me."

Building on women's comfort in the environment as stated by participant H3, participant H2 mainly recognizes that the current culture cannot be considered gender neutral. This is largely due to the use of language:

H2: *"Well, when we talk about culture, I think that [making crude jokes] is a bit of a culture here. And as a man, you have to go along with it. It's not easy to say, 'Hey guys, calm down a bit'."*

Participant H2 notes that the men making crude jokes and pranks might come across differently for women. They mention that this is something that is ingrained in the culture, due to the large population of men, and the few women. Working on an inclusive environment is seen by recruitment (participant H1) as one of the opportunities for Strukton Rail to increase gender diversity.

4.3 The Organizational Discourse

The organizational culture at Strukton Rail is described differently by different individuals. Some perceive the culture as professional and to the point, while others describe it as macho and characterized by a 'shout the loudest' attitude, where the person who is most assertive gets things done. It is generally acknowledged that the culture is male-dominated, and some believe that having more women in the organization could potentially change the culture. Speaking up and assertiveness are valued in the organization, and this is also expected of women in professing their boundaries. While not all women express to have negative experiences, and most say they do not have negative experiences at all, they do express challenges. While some women have had positive experiences and see the current situation as something to be accepted, others recognize that there are challenges and aspects of the culture that need improvement. The organization is described as having a professional and goal-driven culture, where task accomplishment is valued over process-oriented approaches. Especially some HRM interviewees (participants M1, M3, and M5) describe the culture is seen as welcoming to everyone, regardless of gender or ethnicity. It is important to note that there is no consensus on the exact nature of the culture, indicating the presence of diverse subcultures within the organization and there are many different perspectives.

Someone's perspective shapes their language choices, interpretation and argumentation. Perspectives provide the lens through which individuals communicate and understand the world, influencing the way they express their thoughts and interact with others in various contexts. The language used to describe the culture reflects the importance of independence, individualism, and a 'doers' mentality that has been present in the organization for a long time. The acceptance of the status quo and the acknowledgment that certain behaviors, such as having to deal with gender-related comments, are part of the dynamic within the organization seem to further contribute to the discourse and the culture. The discourse surrounding gender diversity is notable as well. Some employees express the belief that increasing the number of women in the organization could potentially change the culture and address the gender imbalance:

M3: We as management think it's good to have more women because it sometimes helps with tempering the man's culture

One manager specifically recognized that diversity and language are related:

M1: *"Dealing with diversity brings about it's challenges. I think people are used to saying things a certain way with specific type of language, and all of a sudden they have to think about what you're saying and doing."*

Every interviewee expressed that they saw the benefit of more women and more diversity, including all managers. However, Strukton Rail does not have any specific policy or goals that focuses on gender diversity or equity. The absence of such policies or goals could indicate a gap between the discourse and the actions taken by the organization.

4.4 Raising Awareness: Understanding Each Other

Creating awareness is the first force in the framework described in subsection 2.7.2. Awareness can have multiple instigators, both internally and externally. These are both described in this section.

4.4.1 Internal

As mentioned in subsection 2.7.2, people must be aware of the formative context of their organization in order to ultimately change the organization. When in comes to challenging gender diversity, this awareness takes the form of becoming familiar with the workings of the organization in relation to gender. One of these workings is the way organizational culture impacts the experiences of people of different genders. The perspective that the majority has, which in this case is the male perspective, is not the only perspective out there. The male perspective may be formed through privilege that the majority may enjoy through the formative context being the way it is. Becoming aware of ones privilege is described by Todd et al. (2023) who state:

"Research on male privilege demonstrates similar types of effects where an increase in awareness of male privilege and gender inequality was linked to a reduction in sexism and greater support for collective action" (Todd et al., 2023, p. 226).

Todd et al. (2023) also gives some insight in how becoming aware of privilege works. By investigating the cross-sectionality of minority groups and privilege, they show that if one is a member of a minority themselves, they are better able to recognize the privilege they hold. Taking the example of male privilege, they state that cis-males of color show higher awareness levels of their male privilege than white cis-males (Todd et al., 2023). With this study, Todd et al. (2023) provide a good theoretic framework for understanding privilege awareness. However, they do not offer much guidance in how to dismantle these systems. They suggest that individuals from different intersected groups require a different approaches. Todd et al. (2023) therefore plead for qualitative research that investigates the group specific elements as well as the overlapping elements for improving privilege awareness.

In relation to discourse and language, creating awareness could take the form of discussing what language is commonly used and how it creates or hinders an inclusive working environment. The results in subsection 4.2.1 illustrate that most female employees express that they face comments that are

directly related to their gender. However, this is not the only way of how masculine wording forms the formative context. The effect of inclusive wording in creating an inclusive work environment is described by, among others, Cusson et al. (2023) who suggest that incorporating inclusive language in the workplace itself has a positive effect staff happiness. The statement adds on the concept and focus on the use of gender neutral wording in job advertisements to attract a more diverse group of applicants (Gaucher et al., 2011; Wille and Derous, 2017; Hentschel et al., 2021). Besides people feeling included, Miller et al. (2021) describe that the benefits of inclusive language include permitting more precise wording, maintaining neutrality, and conveying respect to those listening. Their guide on using inclusive language in documentary standards offers insight in how important language is. They note that there is much ignorance on the importance of gender in documentary standards, which could also be true for the use of language in everyday life. The (lack of) gender-neutrality in the language we use on a daily basis is described by Kooijman (2021) for the Dutch language specifically but can be found in all languages. This was also faintly described in subsection 2.7.1. Acker (1990) describes the construction of symbols and images in gender related division of labor, behavior, and power. This goes beyond the use of language, but also includes imaging and takes the form of sexual power over women. This is reflected in what is also described by some interviewees and survey respondents of the sexual imagery still present in the construction industry.

Becoming aware of the differences in perspectives that different employees hold is crucial for understanding the discourse of the organization. To address the use of language and how this language is including or excluding for different employees, awareness training can be employed. Understanding the discourse and perspectives of all employees is also crucial to create awareness. This might be done by having informal and formal discussions about the perspectives of minorities and seeing how this differs from the perspective from the majority.

4.4.2 External

Several external factors can trigger or drive an organization's awareness of gender diversity, equity, and inclusion within their formative context.

First, changes social and cultural shifts towards gender equity can influence an organization's awareness and priorities. Public awareness and activisms around gender-related issues, such as the #MeToo movement, or in the Netherlands, the stories around the Voice of Holland (BNNVARA, 2022), have highlighted the importance of creating a safe environment. This has also had its impact on Strukton Rail, as some interviewees noted that, as a result of the episode about the Voice of Holland, conversations about a safe work environment have been had. Additionally, Strukton Rail has assessed and updated its procedures about harassment.

Legislative changes and regulatory requirements related to gender equity can shape an organization's awareness and actions. Laws promoting gender pay equity, anti-discrimination measures, and affirmative action policies can compel organizations to examine their gender-related practices and take proactive steps towards fostering diversity and inclusion. An example of regulatory requirements that could benefit gender diversity in corporate boards, based on the advice by the Social Economic Counsel (SER) in the Netherlands on the need for more diversity in the boardroom (SER, 2019). The European Parliament has also called upon the European Commission to *"introduce and*

support awareness-raising campaigns and other programmes and initiatives to reduce these barriers [such as socio-economic disadvantage and hostile working environments and working conditions for women] in the academic world" European Parliament (2021, p. 67).

Another external influence could be expectations and demands from customers and the market. One of the interviewees mentioned that an organization should want to be a reflection of the world they work in. When the discourse of an organization is similar to the discourse of its client, the collaboration is easier, as you speak the same language. In the case of Strukton Rail, this refers primarily to ProRail. ProRail have, in all layers of the organization, more women than Strukton Rail, around 30% (ProRail, 2022). Strukton Rail also reports that in recent years, they have witnessed the fundamental role of diversity in shaping strategic decision-making within organizations. ProRail, too, is increasingly placing value on inclusivity and diversity when selecting suppliers and partners. The communication department recognizes that this not only strengthens Strukton Rail's collaborative relationship but also opens up new possibilities for joint projects and future collaborations.

A last external influence is national or international policy regarding gender diversity and equity. This is discussed in some more detail in section 7.1.

Chapter 5

Society and Social Roles
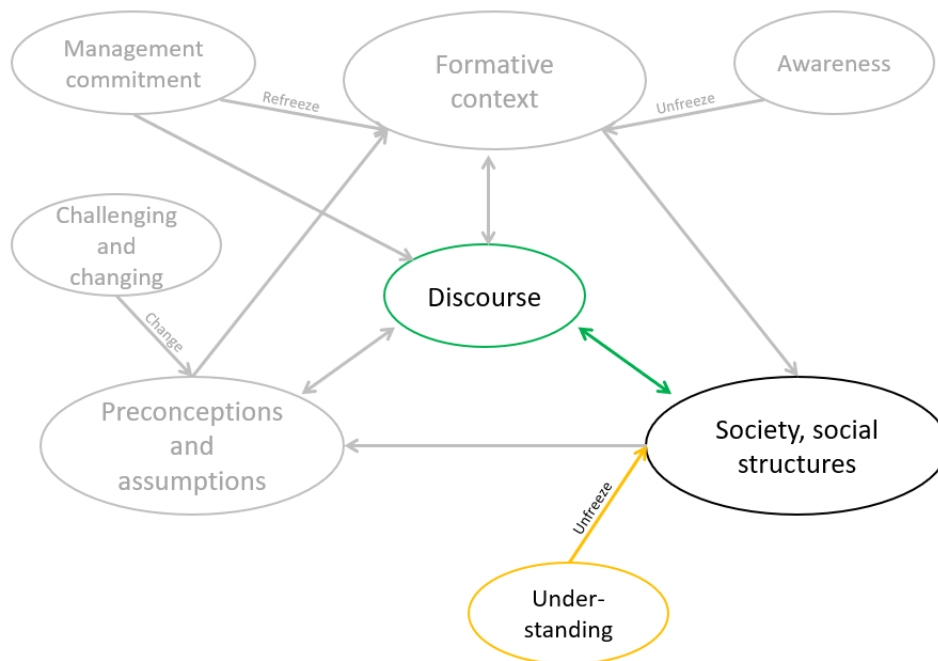
The formative context of Strukton Rail Rail is linked to Dutch society and her social structures and roles.

Nosek et al. (2009) investigated the relationship between national sex differences in science performance of 8th-graders and the national implicit stereotyping of science as male. Besides finding a strong relation between the two, their data suggests that the Netherlands has a fairly strong association between male and science. This association is stronger in the Netherlands than it is in neighboring countries such as Belgium, the UK, Sweden and Norway. The only countries that scored (slightly) higher were Hungary, Romania, and Tunisia. The difference between the presence of the explicit stereotype in the Netherlands, however, was much greater with neighboring countries. Tunisia was the only country that scored higher on the explicit association test. This illustrates that the association between STEM and men is a lot stronger in the Netherlands than in other (Western) countries (Baar, 2021). This can play a role in the preconceptions and assumptions that society has on women in technical occupations.

This association is also described by Miller et al. (2015), who investigated how representation of women in science related to the association stereotypes. They note that the Netherlands score relatively high on equity indices, but that the association between women and science is very low. Especially the explicit association between men and science is much higher than the 66 other nations under investigation, which is a confirmation of research by Nosek et al. (2009). The implicit gender-science stereotypes was found to be very strong (Miller et al., 2015). Miller et al. (2015) found a strong relationship between representation of women (in science) and the gender-science stereotypes. The lack of representation of women in science in the Netherlands was therefore offered as one of the explanations of the high gender bias.

5.1 Society's influence on Gender in the Workplace: Shaping Perspectives

During interviews, three main themes emerged when discussing the role of society on gender in the workplace. The first theme was centered around **Work-Life Balance and Flexibility**. This theme is explicitly mentioned, while the second and third theme, **Gender Biases and Stereotypes** and **Gender Roles and Expectations** emerged more implicit and required interpretation. These themes are, again, explored through the perspectives of employees, management, and HR.

5.1.1 Employees' Perspective on Society's Role

During interviews, many female employees expressed that the main appeal of Strukton Rail was the possibility for part-time and flexible working hours. This is also shown in subsubsection 4.1.3.2, where is seen that women work part-time more often than men. The theme of **Work-Life Balance and Flexibility** is explicitly mentioned by the following interviewee:

> FE4: *"I've interviewed with many competitors of Strukton, but the option to work 32 hours and the flexibility within those hours, have led me to choose for Strukton."*

But also some freedom as to what to do at work and how to do one's job is mentioned as appealing of working at Strukton Rail:

> FE1: *"The reason I stayed at Strukton was primarily because of my manager, who gave me a lot of space to do what I wanted to do."*

The expression of some female interviewees of the benefits of Strukton Rail to work part-time might only be present in some departments. As some questionnaire respondents, mention that the Strukton Rail is not an attractive working environment for women due to it's irregular working hours:

> QR3: *"[Rail construction] is not an attractive working environment for women. Strukton is not equipped to combine work and private life as the work is too last minute which means that making arrangements about for instance picking up or dropping off kids are difficult."*

This quote shows the theme of **Gender Roles and Expectations** as this respondent suggests that women are the one's to pick up the kids.

5.1.2 Top Management's Perspective on Society's role

This theme of **Gender Roles and Expectations** is recognized by managers as well:

> M5: *"In this business, it's a 24-7 operation, sometimes even seven days a week. So, working part-time can be challenging depending on the role. I understand that young people today enjoy doing fun things on weekends, and I empathize with that, but it doesn't entirely align with the demands of this industry. However, there have been significant changes and new possibilities that have emerged in the past year."*

Not a direct link is made with gender, but the intersectionality with age does emerge here as well, as this interviewee specifically mentions the younger generation. The link to gender is made by some other managers:

> M2: *"If I ask women within the organization to join an operational department, they have these limiting beliefs, and they hold on to their Friday's off. In these operational departments you do have to make some sacrifices, and that's part of the deal."*

Women tend to not want to make those sacrifices and on the topic of **Work-Life Balance and Flexibility** one manager notes:

> M3: *"But I think that men are usually more flexible than women because of their home situation, so they can balance work and private life more easily."*

The statement that men more easily manage their work and private life is widely recognized in literature (Fraszczyk and Piip, 2019; Makarem and Wang, 2020; Ramos et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2016). As was mentioned briefly in section 2.2, a discrepancy seems to exist in the anticipated reduction of working hours between women upon becoming mothers and men upon becoming fathers. As stated by CBS (2022b), a majority of the Dutch population believes that women should work part-time, regardless of whether they have young children or not. For mothers with a child aged 0 to 4, a majority finds working two or three days per week sufficient, while a workweek of three or four days is seen as ideal for mothers with children in primary school. Most individuals think that fathers should work four or five days per week, with the four-day workweek being considered more ideal than the five-day workweek for fathers with children up to 4 years old. When there are no (more) young children to care for, 78 percent consider four or five days per week as the ideal work duration for women.

Within the organization, there is a divergence in viewpoints regarding flexible working arrangements. The perspectives on this matter highlight the challenges faced by departments with the lowest representation of women. According to the interviewees, departments that have fewer women employees often necessitate flexible working hours, particularly in the context of maintenance and renewal projects conducted during nights and weekends. These departments require employees to be adaptable and available outside of standard working hours to meet the operational demands of the work. This need for flexibility may pose a barrier for women who have commitments or preferences for fixed working hours. A manager in one of these departments pointed out that women from other departments, who could potentially join the operational teams, tend to prefer part-time work arrangements, such as working 32 hours per week. A possible misalignment between the high workload of operational departments is recognized by several managers (participants M1 and M2):

> M1: *"Most people who drop out, drop out due to the high workload combined with their personal situation. For example, young project coordinators or something similar, who are becoming parents. It becomes evident that the high workload is no longer compatible with their personal life."*

Part-time schedules that may assist in this workload may not align with the operational requirements of the business, where full-time engagement is deemed as necessary to ensure smooth project execution and meet client expectations. This contrast in perspectives highlights a potential mismatch between the desire for flexible work and the operational needs of certain departments. It underscores the challenge of balancing individual preferences and organizational requirements, particularly when it comes to gender representation and the creation of inclusive work environments. In the in-depth interviews, managers did not show much willingness to accommodate women in these challenges.

The expectation of gender roles influences **Gender Biases and Stereotypes**. One way in which this becomes evident from the interviews is by the following statement:

> M3: *"Men prove themselves with working harder, I think. Not always, but often. This might be a result of traditional division of roles."*

This managers also adds:

> M3: *"However, you cannot catch [female colleague] on cutting corners. Sometimes I get emails of her on Saturday morning."*

This quote suggests a potential gender bias or stereotype regarding the work ethics and commitment of their female colleague. By stating that the female colleague cannot be caught "cutting corners" and referring to receiving emails from them on a Saturday morning, the manager seems to imply that the colleague is exceptionally diligent and dedicated to their work. The statement implies that the manager finds it surprising or noteworthy that the female colleague is actively working on a weekend. Linking this statement to their previous quote suggests that this assumption could stem from the societal expectation that women prioritize personal or family commitments over their careers, leading to stereotypes that women are less committed to their jobs or more likely to seek work-life balance.

5.1.3 Human resources' Perspective on Society's role

Human resources recognizes the role of society and the impact this has on biases against women (participants H1, H2, and H3).

Recruitment states the following:

> H1: *"I believe that as a society, as a government, and as the business community, we have a role to play in sowing those seeds in young girls. And that starts right from elementary school and high school."*

This suggests that there is a collective responsibility of society, government, but also the organization itself to engage in creating opportunities and empowering young girls from an early age. By focusing on 'sowing seeds' at a young age, HR recognizes society as having a crucial role in shaping the mindset, aspirations, and opportunities available to young girls.

## 5.2 Challenging Assumptions: Beyond Stereotypes

Societal norms play a role in the way organizations and gender roles are shaped. It forms the positionality of all people involved in the organization. Each individual has its own positionality based on a unique combination of factors, and society is not one clear thing that can be marked and understood. However, a general description of the societal umbrella the organization operates in, could provide insight in how the formative context was formed and how it is maintained. An organization alone will not change society, but acknowledging its effects on the organizations context is important. Otherwise, a big determinant is ignored as irrelevant because it cannot easily be changed. It is therefore not about changing society, but about understanding the effects that society and its social norms has on the topic of gender within the context of an organization and the gendered discourse that is the result of that. Additionally, HR recognized the share organizations themselves have in the responsibility of encouraging young girls to choose for STEM. This is in line with Unger (1987), who stated that incremental changes made over time may have the potential to accumulate and ultimately lead to significant transformations in overall social structures.

In their paper about the gendered narrative in organizations, Ely and Meyerson (2000) advocate for incremental change. This is in line with what Unger points out, that with small incremental changes, the larger formative context and even social structures can be changed. Gendered discourse is one that is interwoven with the power structures of an organization. Challenging power relations is tricky and must be done carefully.

Ely and Meyerson (2000) proposes an intervention strategy in relation to understanding gender in organizations. This intervention strategy is described as an ongoing process of recognizing and challenging the existing social order within organizations. The goal is to make changes in the way organizations are structured and how people interact and interpret things in order to promote gender equity This approach doesn't have a specific endpoint in mind but sees the process of change itself as important. They describe that to address gender inequalities, organizations need to identify and disrupt the social norms, policies, and practices that contribute to gender disparities. This requires continuous reflection, learning, and adaptation to ensure that the way organizations are set up and run supports gender equality. Besides noting that continuous reflection and challenging is required, no specific tools are provided for organizations to do this. The role that HR business partners hold within the organization and the awareness of recruitment in these biases could be a good starting point in challenging the biases in hiring and evaluation processes. However, future research would need to determine what the best strategies for Strukton Rail to do this are.

Chapter 6

Preconceptions and Assumptions
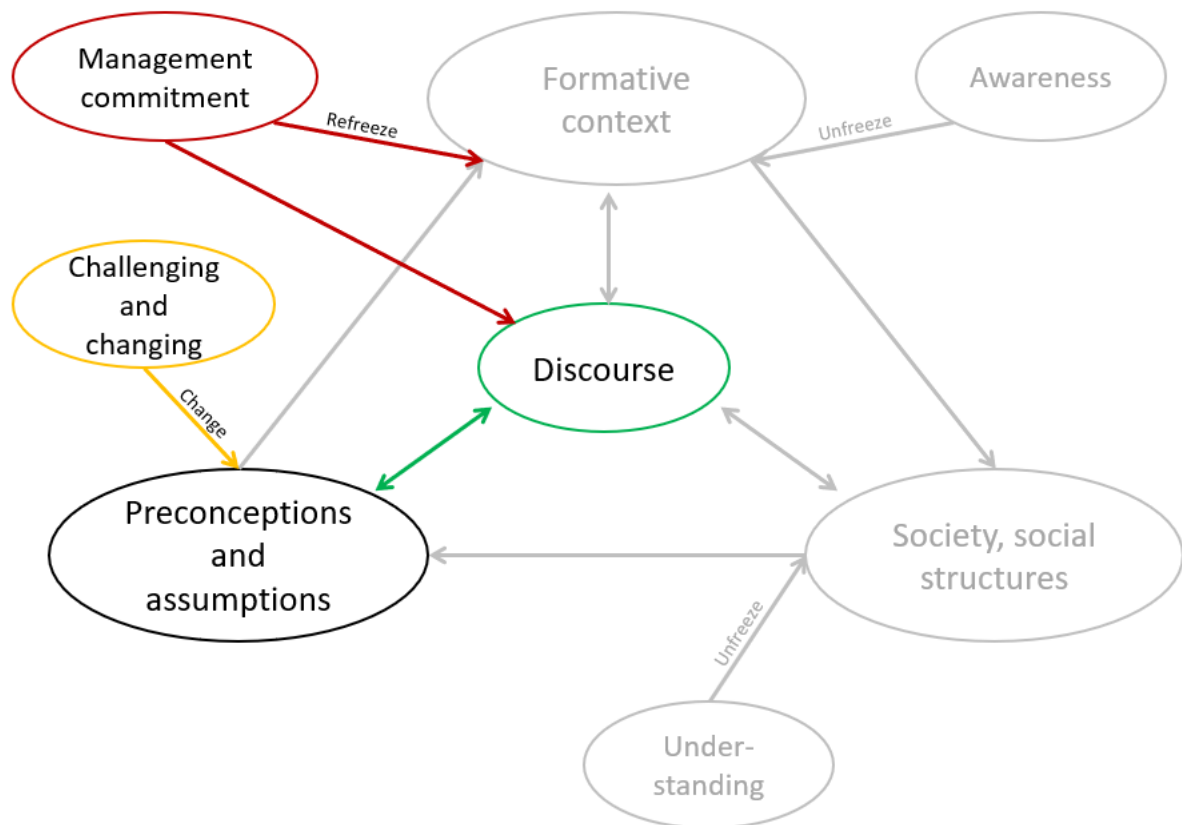
This chapter delves into the gender preconceptions and assumptions prevalent at Strukton Rail, as described by or found during the interviews with the three roles of actors. These biases may shape employees' experiences and impact the organization's culture. Through the interviews, gendered discourses and expectations are explored in section 6.1, which may affect women's advancement and recognition. Afterwards, the impact and importance of management commitment in challenging assumptions and changing gendered discourse is described in section 6.2.

6.1 The Gender Diversity Discourse of Strukton Rail: Language Matters

Through the theme identified in section 5.1, **Gender Biases and Stereotypes**, the gendered discourse at Strukton Rail can be explored. Besides this theme, some other themes were identified as well. This includes the theme of **Knowledge and Expertise** and **Self-Awareness and Responsibility**. The first two were mainly identified in interviews with employees, while the last two resulted from interviews with management and HR.

6.1.1 Employees' Experience of Gendered Preconceptions and Assumptions

The assumptions that people have of women in the workplace is something that most female interviewees recognized (participants FE1, FE2, FE3, FE5, and FE6). These assumptions were recognized as being specific to women, as illustrated by participant FE6:

> FE3: *"We have a certain image of girls, women, that don't present themselves as the strong woman that says "here I am, and I'm going to be a bitch". Because it's my experience that that is what you need to get ahead, so we assume them not be a good fit. But there are enough men that show that exact same behavior but in a male guise and they were hired too."*

This remark shows the difference of what is expected of women in how to behave in the industry. It ties together with the remarks about having to stand your ground, as discussed in section 4.2. The dutch phrase for this is 'je mannetje staan', which literally translates to 'standing your man'. This phrase was used by almost all interviewees (FE1, FE2, FE3, FE4, FE5) and shows the masculinity of the Dutch language. This shows that male-dominated discourse also has a place in the organizational culture of Strukton Rail. This particular interviewee believed that 'using their femininity', as some people, including their manager, had suggested to them, would not get them very far. However, this belief is not shared by everyone as some women point out that it can be useful to be a woman in a man's world and that it has certain advantages in getting stuff done. However, the expectation of women to behave in a certain way is recognized by some other interviewees as well, as illustrated by the following quote:

> FE2: *"Everyone is instantly confused when we women start to shout, and the logical conclusion is that we're on our period."*

These are examples of biases and stereotypes put on behavior shown by women. Another interviewee explicitly talked about biases:

> FE6: *"People have certain biases when it comes to women in technique, but you can easily convince them when you show them you know what you're talking about."*

This introduces the theme of **Knowledge and Expertise** as this interviewee believed that by working hard, people's biases can be taken away. Women expressed that they gained confidence and a network through gaining knowledge, expertise, and experience (participants FE1, FE4, FE5, and FE6):

> FE1: *"My male colleagues got a greater network earlier on because they were more assertive, but I did catch up to them in the long run by keeping more to the background and building that confidence."*

6.1.2 Managers' Gendered Preconceptions and Assumptions

In interviews with managers, some gendered preconceptions and assumptions came up. The difference of expected behavior of women in the industry is also seen in the language use by managers. As described by Wright et al. (2016), female managers can adopt either a 'bitchy-but-fair' leadership style, or a 'feminine' style. This is illustrated by the way different women in power are described by their colleagues:

M3: *"She has something which is a bit bitchy."*

Versus:

M3: *"I especially enjoy [female colleague]'s approach because she's also so patient. Sometimes I see her thinking 'ah here they go again, these men', that we go in, in a crude way. And then she comes in and puts things into perspective. She does that in a very fun way, you know."*

Another assumption that came up in the interviews was about the confidence of women. This partly relates to the theme of **Knowledge and Expertise**. Where women want to feel confident about their expertise, one managers describes the following:

M4: *"Inequality between people stems from the persons themselves, in personality. [...] If we would both go for the same role, with the same background, I would get it because I will sell myself as an 8 while thinking I'm a 7 while you would sell yourself as a 6.5 thinking you're a 7 while you are a 7.5."*

With this statement, assumptions that women made about themselves and other women are recognized. However, differences between men and women are also recognized by, in the same sentence, assigning inequalities to individual personality traits. This seems to be contradictory.

This last quote introduces the theme of **Self Awareness and Responsibility**, as the interviewee mentioned that they would encourage women to take more imitative and be more assertive. This interviewee assigns the responsibility partly to the individual themselves. However, participant M4 later on also mentioned that they believed in a more equitable approach, controlling for the needs of the individual in distributing chances. This suggests that the interviewee believes in a joined responsibility of the individual and their manager to overcome 'self-imposed' inequalities.

6.1.3 Human resources' Experience of Gendered Preconceptions and Assumptions

As the gatekeeper of advancement, the HR business partner has a perspective on how gendered preconceptions and assumptions influence this process:

H2: *"I think that within Strukton, but also within the entire society, we have to be more aware of what influences our decisions, because a lot is done on a subconscious level."*

This quote also fits the theme **Self Awareness and Responsibility**, but from a different angle. Where previously, the self awareness was applicable to the employee, this self awareness is more applicable to the managers and their biases. The responsibility for is therefore also put on the managers. But this responsibility is also put on the HR business partner, as the interviewee recognized the role the HR business partner has in challenging these assumptions in a manager's assessment of their

employees. They recognize that 'like attracts like', which in the case of Strukton Rail often results in white men hiring or promoting white men. There are management instruments that have been implemented recently that assist in a fair judgment, which will be further discussed in section 7.2.

6.2 Management Commitment in Challenging Assumptions: Leadership in Action

Lansu et al. (2020) acknowledges the significance that is frequently accorded to senior executives, especially CEOs, in attempts to advance gender equity. Literature often states that in order to achieve gender equity inside firms, top managers must be involved (Zou and Fan, 2022). Lansu et al. (2020) describe that top executives are viewed as gatekeepers who can let gender equity initiatives into their firms and because of that. Top manager's participation and commitment is thought to be crucial since they hold authority to give legitimacy to gender equity change within the organization. They have the authority to set strategic goals, challenge gender-based norms and behaviors, allocate resources, alter business culture, and motivate people. Managers are thought to have the power and influence required to launch and promote diversity programs within the organization (Lansu et al., 2020). This is also recognized by at least one management interviewee:

> M4: *"I think that exemplary behavior helps. If you, as a manager, tries to consciously adopt a certain style during meetings, others will follow. That means that top management has to work on that."*

In their paper, Lansu et al. (2020) discuss the topic of resistance of middle management to gender equity interventions and its impact on organizational change. They note that various studies have highlighted resistance as a major challenge to achieving gender equity. While resistance is often seen as a hindrance to change, some may argue that it can also foster organizational change by allowing for open discussions about implicit gender norms and values.

Instead of focusing on top management, Lansu et al. (2020) focus on the role of middle managers as change agents for gender equity, as they have to support the goals set by top management. They suggests that middle managers need to take ownership of the problem and lead by example in order to drive change. However, resistance to this problem ownership by managers is reported in literature. In their theoretical framework, they portray resistance as a productive force that can influence and improve management decisions. They emphasize the importance of understanding when and how resistance can be productive in the context of gender equity interventions. The definition Lansu et al. (2020) adopt for resistance is that it 'challenges and rewrites organizational discourse' (Thomas and Davies, 2005, p. 698).

The perspectives of the importance of gender diversity, the way to diversify the work pool and the potential resistance against diversifying for Strukton Rail specifically, are discussed in chapter 7.

Chapter 7

From Vision to Reality

The previous sections have offered insight in the gender diversity and equity status of Strukton Rail, as viewed through the perspectives of different actors. By examining these viewpoints in light of the proposed gender diversity framework, notable disparities in how employees and top management perceive the organizational culture have emerged. Furthermore, the role that society and social roles play became more apparent, leading to the emerging of some gendered preconceptions and assumptions.

Addressing these challenges requires thoughtful consideration and strategic action. In this regard, the chapter "From Vision to Reality" seeks to provide a comprehensive approach to advancing gender diversity and equity at Strukton Rail. It begins by addressing the fundamental question of the organization's desire for diversification and the perceived appropriate measures to achieve it, as outlined in section 7.1. This section not only explores the viewpoints of employees, top management, and HR at Strukton Rail but also examines the policy requirements for diversification mandated by the CSRD.

By combining these perspectives and policy guidelines, the chapter aims to offer a guided pathway towards realizing gender diversity and equity at Strukton Rail. This includes discussions on the significance of objective assessment in section 7.2 and the importance of addressing gender biases within the organization. Through this holistic approach, Strukton Rail can work towards translating its vision of gender diversity into tangible and sustainable results within its work pool and culture.

7.1   Goals for Gender Diversity

This section delves into gender diversity at Strukton Rail, exploring its significance to employees, management, and the challenges faced by human resources in promoting inclusivity.

To do this, first the viewpoint on more diversity in the organization of employees is explored. The attitude of Strukton Rail's management towards diversifying is described next. This is complemented by their perspective on setting goals or quota to achieve gender diversity. Following that, the struggle of human resources to attract more women in examined. Lastly, the external requirement for diversification, driven by the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) are discussed.

7.1.1 Employees' Perspective on Diversifying

Most female employees that were interviewed agreed on an added benefit of having more women in a team (participants FE1, FE2, FE3, and FE6). Some say that the culture and atmosphere is improved by more women (participants FE1 and FE6). One female interviewee (participant FE3) explicitly mentioned that more diversity would be positive but that attention should be given to hiring the best person for the job, maintaining the practice of meritocracy. Not everyone agrees with this, which becomes evident from the following quote:

> FE5: *"I'm not sure if I would necessarily say we need more women. It has its advantages being the only woman between men."*

The importance of setting up programs to increase the number of women in UP and NUP functions was also included in the questionnaire (see Appendix D). The responses men gave differed significantly from the responses given by women. When asked about the importance of setting up programs to increase the number of women in UP functions, approximately 77% of female respondents answered with 'somewhat important' or 'extremely important in comparison to 42% of the male respondents. For the male respondents, the most common answer was 'neutral' with 45%, while the most common answer for female respondents was 'very important' with 46%. When asked the question about increasing the number of women in NUP functions, 92% of female respondents found this 'somewhat important or 'very important'. Within the male respondent group, this was true for 47%. Based on the questionnaire results, most men do not consider improving the men/women ratio as a priority of Strukton Rail's management, with 32% either 'somewhat agreeing' or 'totally agreeing' with this statement. Women seem to find this much more important, with 46% agreeing totally, and 31% agreeing somewhat. The other 23% is neutral about the topic, compared to 46% of men adopting a neutral stance. This shows a big difference in perceived importance of increasing gender diversity within the organization.

7.1.2 Management Wish to Diversify

In interviews with management, three main themes emerge. When it comes to gender diversity, many people feel hesitant and uncertain about what their stance *should* be. While people generally agree that diversity is desirable, the question that is often raised is 'why focus (only) on gender?'. Strukton Rail has been a male-dominated organization for as long as anyone can remember. A mindset that is common at Strukton Rail, and which is not only used when discussing gender diversity is 'it has always been this way'. This phrase is used as reason not to challenge the status quo. 'It has always been this way, and it has always works' is implied. This mindset is deeply ingrained in the organization's culture and results in resistance to change, which is mainly recognized by participant M2. Working on increasing gender diversity is seen as a solution to this mindset:

> M2: *"We need to take the step to look outward, otherwise we will not survive this crucial phase that we're in. We need to honestly want to work differently, instead of hold on to the old."*

This introduces the theme of **Importance of Diversity**. Just as the interviewed women, interviewed managers recognize the added value of diversity within the organization. All of the interviewed managers expressed their wish for more women in their department or the organization. A given reason

for this is illustrated by the following quote:

> M1: *"I think that an organization should want to be a reflection of society, or at least the world that you work in. We see that NS and ProRail have a more equal ratio, and we are falling behind in that regard."*

Some managers were very vocal about the need for more diversity (participants M1 and M2) seeing it as the answer to create more balance in teams, achieving more openness and curiosity by looking at subjects from different angles:

> M2: *"If we put energy in this topic, it will help the organization to grow into a direction that we need to survive. I think this is more than a believe of me, it's a conviction."*

When discussing specific goals for gender diversity or setting quota, interviewees respond hesitantly, which results in the emergence of the theme **Willingness to Setting Goals**. Additionally, no clear vision or goal when it comes to increasing the number of women emerged during the interviews and managers express that they do not understand why there is a lack of women in the organization to begin with. While they recognize the organization's lack of vision or strategy on the topic, they express to be uneasy when asked about the need for a vision. Most managers strongly disagree with the idea of implementing quotas to increase the number of women in their departments. Managers generally believe that individuals should be hired based on their performance and fit within the organization.

> M4: *"There's a difference between setting quota and actively recruiting women. If I have a female and male candidate, I want to have the freedom to be able to hire the candidate who I deem to be the best."*

If quota and goals were to be introduced, the focus on merit for hiring personnel would, in their eyes, blur. This view is shared by all interviewed managers, and also repeatedly came forward in the questionnaire results. This is in line with the concerns about quota and affirmative actions as described by Campbell and Bohdanowicz (2018) in section 2.4. Some managers (participants M1 and M2), however, do acknowledge that increasing gender diversity is a gradual process that requires goals and a clear vision to yield results. One manager described the realization that many of their colleagues can express a desire for diversity, but if that sentiment is not genuinely felt, it won't translate into action.

> M2: *"We profess with words that we prioritize gender diversity, but it has to come from the heart, we need to really want it."*

Again, no consensus is reached on this topic. This is illustrated by the following quote, which is an answer to the question if goals to increase the ratio of men/women would be appropriate:

> M5: *"It [the ratio of men/women] doesn't matter to me at all. No. If someone is performing well and they're happy with it, and it's good for the company."*

Additionally, all managers agreed that performance and quality should be the most important selection criteria. The interviews established that top management talks about the need for diversity in the organization. However, a willingness of management to put effort into improving diversity numbers was not found to much extent. This statement is based on the fact that there is no clear policy to increase diversity, and the frequent endorsement of hiring on quality instead of gender. Many HRM members showed resistance to the topic of gender quota. However, what Lansu et al. (2020)

describes to be true for middle-management, could also be applied to top management. This resistance could be beneficial for instigating change, as it could open up the conversation about implicit biases. However, it does show the state of readiness of Strukton Rail to deal with this topic. If top management is not willing to commit to clear goals, which in literature is often mentioned as one of the most important steps to be taken to improve gender diversity (VHTO, 2022), there is still a long way to go.

7.1.3 Human resources' Struggle to Diversify

Recruitment teams state that there is a low level of interest from women in the industry and that the amount of women applying for jobs is very low. In a context where personnel shortage is a significant issue, they state that the organization cannot afford to spend additional time searching for women if qualified men are more readily available.

> H4: *"There is a very limited availability of staff, so focusing solely on women would also be limiting. It's a matter of priorities. If there is a lot of internal pressure, then you should question whether it's a wise decision. If we have more time to fill a position, then perhaps it's possible to be more critical or have more time to consider it."*

When it comes to recruitment, Strukton Rail describes that they are mindful of the language they use in job advertisements to ensure inclusivity and attract a more diverse pool of applicants. They understand the significance of this approach, as highlighted by Gaucher et al. (2011). It's not just about using less masculine language to appeal to female applicants; consideration is also given to educational backgrounds. For example, applicants with higher professional education tend to respond positively to process-oriented wording, while those with secondary vocational education are attracted to job listings with a focus on technical content.

Recruitment also recognizes the role of society in stimulating young girls to pursue a career in technical occupations. Recruitment notes that the expectation of girls to play with dolls and boys to play with building kits does not help the association that girls can go into a technical occupation too. They thereby recognize the role that gender bias and society play in the lack of diversity in the industry, just as previously described by Makarem and Wang (2020); Fraszczyk and Piip (2019); Chung and Van der Lippe (2020). Even though Strukton Rail has some role in breaking these stereotypes, according to recruitment, they also recognize that internally, there is still much to gain. Opportunities for Strukton Rail lie in hiring based on competencies instead of experience, and when it comes to attracting more women, making the environment more women-friendly. The interviewees highlight the importance of addressing basic needs and considerations for women, such as providing appropriate work clothing, access to facilities like changing rooms and toilets, and even small amenities like sweeteners for coffee. They emphasize the significance of creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in order to attract and retain female talent.

7.1.4 The requirement for diversifying

As of January 5, 2023, the CSRD has become effective, compelling large and listed companies like Strukton Rail to report on various social and environmental aspects, aiming to enhance sustainability reporting, transparency, and comparability of non-financial information (European Commission,

2023). Among the social factors to be reported are working conditions, equality, non-discrimination, diversity, inclusion, and human rights. This new directive requires organizations to disclose information about their diversity policy and the gender pay gap starting from the financial year of 2024.

The specific details and benchmarks for diversity practices are yet to be fully defined. To get a sense of what might be expected, the guidelines for benchmarking diversity practices under the similar EU directive 2019/2034 can be looked at (European Banking Authority, 2023). This directive is specifically applicable to financial institutions. These guidelines highlight the importance of both quantitative and qualitative elements in defining a comprehensive diversity policy. Organizations must address questions like setting quantitative targets as a percentage or headcount and defining qualitative targets, such as aiming for an appropriate gender balance.

Additionally, monitoring and reporting on policy performance annually are mandated, and aspects of diversity beyond gender, including age, educational background, professional background, and geographic origin, must be assessed as well. The guidelines also touch upon the significance of a diversity policy concerning non-binary individuals.

If these guidelines may serve as an example of what is expected of Strukton Rail and other organizations under the CSRD, it is evident that a unified vision on gender diversity and equity needs to be established to be able to define a clear diversity policy. As demonstrated in earlier sections, there is a lack of consensus among top management regarding gender diversity and goal setting. Therefore, achieving vision alignment on gender diversity and equity becomes essential to develop a robust diversity policy that meets the requirements of the CSRD.

The CSRD addresses the gender pay gap in two aspects. Firstly, it emphasizes the need to progress towards a more gender-balanced participation in decision-making, which can be related to the unadjusted gender pay gap, explained in subsubsection 4.1.3.1. The unadjusted gender pay gap reflects the average gross hourly earnings of men and women and may serve as an indicator of decision-making power within an organization. Secondly, the CSRD requires organizations to report on equal pay for work of equal value, which requires a more comprehensive analysis. This is shortly discussed in subsubsection 4.1.3.1 and the subsequent appendix.

However, simply analyzing pay data won't be sufficient; it is essential to closely monitor the assessment processes to ensure fair advancement opportunities, free from any gender biases that may influence outcomes. By focusing on these aspects, organizations like Strukton Rail can make meaningful progress towards addressing and closing the gender pay gap effectively in line with the CSRD's requirements. Objective assessment for gender equity is therefore crucial.

7.2   Objective Assessment for Gender Equity

The concept of prescriptive and descriptive meritocracy, discussed in section 2.5, is reflected in the insights gathered from interviews and questionnaire. Most managers stated that meritocracy was the status quo. As was established in subsection 7.1.2, most managers also oppose quota and 'too much' affirmative action to address gender diversity and equity. This combination aligns with the notion of Son Hing et al. (2011), described in section 2.5. They stated that the belief in prescriptive meritocracy may hinder the support for affirmative action and policies to promote gender diversity and equity. Most female interviewees express their belief that their performance is the primary criterion for evaluation and advancement within their current department. However, some of them also acknowledge witnessing promotions that they found illogical or inconsistent with merit-based principles.

> FE1: *"In my current job and department, I think advancement is based on performance. [...] Sometimes I do wonder why a certain person gets a promotion, and in my opinion, it's often nepotism and playing the political game in the right way."*

These observations shed light on potential discrepancies between the idealized notion of meritocracy and the actual promotion practices within the organization. During the interviews, one participant specifically mentioned the presence of nepotism in the organization, as also shown in the previous quote, implying that personal connections or favoritism may influence promotion decisions. Another female interviewee shared their personal experience of being denied a raise based on intangible factors. Their manager continuously set new goals for them to achieve in order to get a raise, leading to a frustrating and seemingly arbitrary process. Meanwhile, some of their colleagues, particularly those of the other gender, were promoted within a year of joining the company while their female colleagues all seem to fall behind too. This pattern led them, at that point, to believe that their gender was the primary reason for being denied the raise. The interviewee did note a positive change after the introduction of the new job classification system, known as the 'functiehuis'. This system explicitly outlines growth paths and provides clear, tangible, and objective requirements for career advancement. This highlights the importance of transparent and well-defined criteria for promoting fairness and equality within the organization.

However, it is important to note that even with the implementation of such systems, achieving a truly fair and equitable promotion process may not be guaranteed. Through observations during this research, instances were found of individuals successfully advancing by directly demanding promotions from their managers, indicating that subjective factors and personal assertiveness can still play a role in career progression. This highlights the significance of the role played by human resource management and business partners in critically assessing and overseeing the promotion and raise processes. The need for objective assessment criteria and the recent introduction of the 'vlootschouw' system demonstrate the organization's efforts to establish a more objective evaluation and advancement framework:

> H2: *"I think the role of the HR business partner is to critically assess a manager's assessment of their employees. By doing this, we can become more aware about what plays a role in our decision making."*

The promotion practices at Strukton Rail have brought to light potential discrepancies between the

idealized notion of meritocracy and the reality of the situation. Instances of nepotism, arbitrary decision-making, and gender disparities in promotions have raised concerns about the fairness and inclusivity of the promotion process.

To move towards a more equitable promotion system, the introduction of a clear and transparent job classification system has already shown promising improvements in career advancement. This step marks a positive direction in promoting fairness and diversity.

However, Strukton Rail faces the ongoing challenge of effectively monitoring and evaluating these practices. It's essential to continually assess promotion decisions, ensuring that they are based on objective criteria and free from any gender biases or other discriminatory factors. By actively tackling gender biases and creating a more inclusive and transparent promotion process, Strukton Rail can foster a diverse and empowered work pool, aligning with the principles outlined in the CSRD and promoting gender equality within the organization.

Chapter 8

Discussion

After examining the specific research findings within the context of the proposed framework, it becomes apparent that there are numerous aspects of gender that have not been addressed in this study. Additionally, the aspects that are discussed should be consolidated and discussed. As described in the terminology, intersectionality is a crucial concept when exploring such a multifaceted subject like gender diversity. Many other aspects intersect with gender, but this has not been taken into account during this research, due to complexity restraints.

In section 8.1, the intersectionality of gender with other aspects, such as age, race, and sexuality is discussed. After this, an overall analysis of the many different perspectives that were gathered throughout the research is made. First, the importance of setting a goal when it comes to gender diversity if discussed in section 8.2. The impact that the presence of all these different perspective has on how an organization could address a topic such as gender diversity is explored in section 8.3. Afterwards, a topic that was often discussed in the interviews, the need for women to stand their ground, is discussed in section 8.4. Here, some tactics for supporting women resilience in a male-dominated organization are discussed. The framework that was proposed in section 2.7 can be applied in other organizations. A short explanation on the way to do this is included in section 8.5.

When all of this is discussed, the research questions are answered in section 8.6, after which limitations of the research are discussed in section 8.7. The discussion will conclude with a reflection on the executed research in section 8.8 and recommendations for future research section 8.9.

8.1 Intersectionality in Focus: Navigating Gender, Age, Race, and Sexuality at Strukton Rail

As already described, intersectionality, which emerged in the 20th century, provides method for looking at social inequities by acknowledging their interconnectedness and exploring possibilities for societal transformation (Collins and Bilge, 2020). Intersectionality examines how different forms of discrimination and inequities, such as race/ethnicity, gender, and class, intersect and affect individuals. Collins and Bilge (2020) claims that intersectionality plays a critical role in understanding and addressing social issues.

As described earlier, the question that is often raised when talking about gender diversity is 'why only

gender?'. This question is often raised because diversity ís much broader than just gender. Looking at gender offers a first look into understanding inequities in the workplace. However, as the concept of intersectionality suggests, inequities may be formed by many intersecting factors. Exploring intersectionality and thereby widening the view of diversity beyond gender can have its benefits for gender diversity too. This is described by Ely and Meyerson (2000) who suggest that increased diversity in a company in this broader sense can result in greater complexity and nuance in its gender relations. A lack of diversity in general can be a significant obstacle in recognizing gendered discourse as they can remain hidden.

In this section, the intersectionality of gender with age, race, and sexuality is explored. These are just a few of the many possible factors that intersect with gender, and the list is longer than this. But starting with these will start to highlight the complexity of the discourse around equity in the workplace.

8.1.1 Age

The intersectionality between age and gender is a topic that recurred consistently throughout this research. Many of the challenges that were brought up for the attraction and retention of women were also identified as challenges for the attraction and retention of a younger generation. The option for flexible working hours or working from home is an example of this.

On the other hand, some challenges faced by employees in their work also showed the intersectionality between age and gender. Some interviewees described their difficulty with being taken seriously by their colleagues and attributed that to their age, rather than their gender. One interviewee described that young people will be challenged and tested by their (older) colleagues. Being a young woman might be additionally challenging in an environment like Strukton Rail, which is male-dominated and relatively old. This challenge was nicely described by one interviewee who mentioned being compared to her colleagues daughters on multiple occasions.

During the interviews, it was evident that age is a subject where interviewees indicated a greater acceptance of striving for diversity. This sentiment was particularly notable in discussions with HR managers, who emphasized the importance of rejuvenating the workforce. When asked about the company's vision and strategy regarding gender diversity, the emphasis on age diversity frequently surfaced.

8.1.2 Race

The similarities between racial- and gender inequity was first introduced in the discussion around gender-blindness and gender-awareness in section 2.6. In interviews and through informal conversations, it became apparent that racism is a reality at Strukton Rail. These experiences were shared by multiple male employees. In the same way that women face comments about their gender, people that have another race than the majority, which is white, deal with comments about the color of their skin. Besides this, in the same way that women face implicit biases against them based on gender, implicit biases around race are part of the experience of some within the organization.

The intersectionality between gender and race is described by Hamad (2020) who describes the white

woman as the prototype of womanhood: *"White woman can oscillate between their gender and their race, between being oppressed and being the oppressor. Women of color are never permitted to exist outside of these constraints: we are both women and people of color and we are always seen and treated as such."* Hamad (2020, p. 14)

Where white women might face sexism, and men of color might face racism, women of color may face both. The unique challenges that women of color face is a very good example on how complex the problem of gender is. This intersectionality between gender and race was not investigated throughout this research, as all interviewed women were white.

8.1.3 Sexuality

Sexuality is recognized as an influencing factor in workplace experiences by, among others, Wright et al. (2016). As mentioned in section 2.2, openly lesbian women may avoid some sexual attention and potentially fit into the masculine culture, but they can still face sexualizing behavior. Wright et al. (2016) intended to have bisexual participants in their research, but none came forward. However, it could be argued that bisexual women have the worst of both worlds. They may lack to fit into a masculine culture in the same way straight women do, and they do not get to avoid the sexual attention.

Even though sexuality is widely discussed in literature, it did not dominantly appear in interviews or in the survey. It was, after all, not a topic of interest in the scope of this research, but the other aspects of intersectionality discussed here did appear repeatedly. One of the interviewees did mention the 'rainbow situation', and raised the question if there might come a time where they couldn't just be straight anymore. This comment and the absence of the topic in other conversations while others did emerge clearly shows the hetero- oriented and normative discourse at Strukton Rail. It also begs the question if people feel free to express their sexuality within the organization.

8.2 Goal Setting in Achieving Gender Diversity: Cracking the Concrete Ceiling

The reluctance to set specific goals to enhance gender diversity can be linked to the theory of critical mass. The critical mass theory suggests that achieving a minimum representation of 30% is necessary to counter tokenism and its associated burdens. As stated by Joecks et al. (2013), token representation can place an additional burden on women by expecting them to act as representatives for their entire gender. However, without clear goals in place, organizations may struggle to reach this critical mass, perpetuating the lack of diversity. By recognizing the importance of setting goals and striving for adequate representation, organizations can actively work towards achieving the critical mass necessary to truly benefit from diversity. Currently, a lot of resistance against goal setting and quota was found within the managers of Strukton Rail. The reluctance to adopt quotas or establish specific goals to promote gender diversity can be attributed to concerns surrounding potential compromises to merit-based hiring practices. The argument against quotas often stems from the belief that merit should be the sole determinant in the hiring process, ensuring that individuals are selected based on their qualifications and abilities rather than any other factor.

However, managers did not show great recognition and awareness of potential biases against women, which might be in direct contradiction to merit-based hiring. Women, but also men, recognized that incidentally, arbitrary decisions were made, where one woman even expressed her concern that she thought she was, at one point in her career, being denied a raise solely based on her gender. The presence of implicit biases about women that some managers showed may be in direct contradiction with their professed gender-blindness and might affect the objective assessment qualities of managers. This in combination with the resistance to setting goals to diversify the work pool, might provide a challenge for Strukon Rail to actually The role that HR business partners play will be significant, as they are tasked with challenging biases. However, battling gender-blindness might require more attention than this, in a targeted campaign to reach awareness. Introducing goals for gender diversity, by for example stating that all job applications must have at least one female and one male applicant, could be a first step in this direction. This will put additional workload with the recruitment department, as some applicants will most likely be actively approached to apply.

8.3 Fixing the System for Gender Diversity and Inclusion: Raising the Structure

Within Strukton Rail, there exist distinct perspectives on gender dynamics, reflecting the varying experiences and beliefs of employees, management, and HR. But also within these groups, there are many diverse discourses due to the unique positionality held by the many individuals within the organization. The presence of multiple positionalities generates a multitude of experiences within the workplace, leading to the absence of a singular perspective.

From the employee perspective, most women agree that a male-dominated culture prevails, but the extent to which they feel its impact differs significantly. They often feel a lack of representation, struggle to relate to colleagues, and experience alienation in the form of not being taken seriously. Female employees may encounter subtle forms of exclusion, such as sexual innuendos and exclusionary language, reinforcing their sense of being different. **Gender Dynamics** and **Power Dynamics** are recognized by many employees as part of the organizational culture.

The perspectives offered by employees was diverse, but had some common themes. The perspective of management is even more diverse, as there is no common understanding or consensus on the presence of gender diversity issues. Parts of management recognizes the presence of **Power Dynamics** as a part of the organizational culture, but these are linked less to **Gender Dynamics** compared to women's experience. This shows the gender-blind mindset that some interviewees from management hold. Many may not recognize the barriers faced specifically by female employees or the need for change. Challenges faced by employees are often not attributed to gender but to personality. Simultaneously, differences in being assertive are attributed to gender. Language use and assumptions about for instance part-time work and ambitions might indicate presence of implicit biases about women. This may be in direct contradiction with their professed gender-blindness and might affect the objective assessment qualities of managers. Many interviewees proclaimed their resistance to quota and goals, influenced by a belief in meritocracy. This does align with what many women also express. Most women agree that the best person should be hired or promoted, agreeing with management in this regard.

Meanwhile, HR, as an intermediary, is positioned to bridge the gap between employees and management. Their perspective encompasses a broader awareness of gender diversity issues, acknowledging the challenges faced by female employees. They recognize the need to address power dynamics, promote inclusivity, and create a more equitable work environment. HR interviewees emphasized that raising awareness in order to gain knowledge, expertise, and experience about gender dynamics is vital for challenging **Gender Biases and Stereotypes** and fostering gender equity.

Work-Life Balance and Flexibility is another theme on which the perspectives of employees and management diver. From the employees' perspective, there is a strong desire for work-life balance and flexibility. Female employees specifically value the possibility of part-time and flexible working hours, as it allows them to balance their personal and professional lives. They appreciate the freedom to manage their time and tasks at work. In contrast, the management perspective is more focused on the operational demands of the business. Some managers express skepticism about the feasibility of part-time work and flexible arrangements in certain departments, especially those that require round-the-clock operations. This highlights the potential mismatch between operational requirements and the desire for work-life balance. There is a belief from both the perspective of (male) employees and management that men are more flexible and better able to balance operational work and private life.

As shown throughout this research, a multitude of experiences and perspectives exist on the topic of gender diversity, equity, and inclusion. In discussing such a topic, it is crucial to recognize the validity of every perspective. It is not for anyone to judge. Accepting that every perspective is valid, could be a key to challenging and changing the aspects that make the system broken for some individuals. However, this may present a significant challenge, as some individuals may struggle to acknowledge that their perspective is not the only one. Especially those in a position of power or belonging to a majority group, may find it difficult to acknowledge their privilege and accept the legitimacy of other perspectives. This may lead to resistance to the notion that the system may be broken from someone else's perspective. Storytelling and sharing experiences hold great power in initiating conversations and promoting understanding among individuals. It is therefore important for the organization to facilitate open dialogue and create a space where these perspectives can be shared and understood. By fostering communication and collaboration among employees, management, and HR, the organization can work towards a more comprehensive understanding of the gender dynamics at play and implement effective strategies to promote gender diversity, equity, and inclusion. Addressing the broken aspects of the system requires a neutralization of power dynamics between management and marginalized groups, with individuals in positions of privilege consciously relinquishing their power. This process necessitates a willingness and openness on the part of those in power to actively engage in this transformation. Management commitment plays a crucial role in empowering and uplifting marginalized voices, as those in positions of power have the ability to either undermine or uplift alternative discourses. By recognizing and validating diverse perspectives, the organization can work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for all employees.

One effective way to overcome this resistance is by initiating and sustaining conversations that provide individuals who do not align with the dominant perspective an opportunity to share their experiences. Sharing personal stories and experiences can foster understanding and empathy, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by individuals who do not conform to

the norm. This research serves as a starting point for initiating these conversations and amplifying the voices of individuals who are often marginalized in the dominant discourse. The presence of implicit biases in combination with a proclaimed gender-blindness, working towards gender-awareness would be a more realistic approach in fostering gender diversity and equity. By initiating and sustaining conversation, a gender-awareness mindset can be created.

It is important to note that the perspective presented here, highlighting the challenges faced by women within a system that may not be designed to accommodate them, is not the only valid perspective. This perspective is influenced by the multitude of perspectives and discourses gathered through the research process. Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that a broken system is not exclusive to women; it can affect anyone who does not conform to the dominant discourse. Age, race, and sexuality can also contribute to feelings of alienation and exclusion within the workplace.

8.4 Women Resilience: Strategies for Building Strength

A recurring theme that emerged in interviews with women in the construction industry is the importance of women being able to stand their ground ('je mannetje staan') and to assert boundaries with colleagues. This aspect of workplace dynamics is essential in addressing gender diversity, equity, and inclusion. While fostering open conversations and diverse perspectives is crucial, as discussed in the previous section, it is equally important to provide support systems and opportunities for women to succeed in this challenging environment. By doing this, the themes that have occurred in the interviews that are related to women resilience can be supported. One effective approach to achieving this is through mentoring and sponsorship programs specifically tailored for women in construction. This approach was mentioned in literature as an effective intervention method.

Mentoring can help women in becoming more assertive, addressing the **Self Awareness and Responsibility** theme. The responsibility women feel to assert their boundaries is related to this responsibility theme. It is also related to the **Learning and Growth** and the **Expertise and Knowledge** theme, which can also be supported by mentoring and sponsoring practices by giving women more tools to deal with specific challenges, giving them a private platform to discuss these challenges, and giving them tools to enhance their network. Mentoring and sponsorship have proven to be powerful tools in empowering women, enabling them to navigate the complexities of the industry, overcome barriers, and unleash their full potential. This phenomenon is well-documented in the literature, as demonstrated by the findings in the study by Wright et al. (2016). Although the specific topic of supervision and guidance was not extensively discussed in the interviews and the questionnaire, several women expressed a desire for more support, particularly at the early stages of their careers.

As described by Van Veelen et al. (2019) in the theoretical framework, even highly competent and resilient women in STEM fields continue to be affected by social identity threats in their professional careers. This shows that only focusing on building women resilience will not be the answer either. Supporting women resilience should be part of the way towards gender diversity, equity, and inclusion, but is should be accompanied by what is described in the previous section, 'fixing the system'.

To provide a comprehensive support system, it is valuable to draw from the four sources of support identified by Wright et al. (2016). These sources include informal support from female colleagues,

industry and professional networks, employer-established staff networks, and trade unions. In the case of Strukton Rail, the organization could play a role in facilitating the establishment of industry networks and staff networks, providing women in the company with valuable connections, resources, and support.

8.5 Generalizability of the Proposed Framework: A Blueprint for Change

The framework that is described in subsection 2.7.2 can be applied to other organizations.

In this research, a start was made by assessing the formative context. However, I do believe that the most important thing in improving gender diversity and achieving gender equity within an organization is management commitment. The first thing to do is to ensure that top management is committed to driving the change process. Management plays a crucial role in changing the discourse and setting the tone for gender equity initiatives. Therefore, the first step is to secure their support and involvement in implementing gender-inclusive policies, practices, and cultural changes. Working on a common understanding of gender diversity is key. This means reaching consensus on the extent to which gender diversity is a problem.

When this is done, the current organizational context, including practices, policies, and cultural norms related to gender diversity and equity can be examined by interviewing HRM employees and male and female employees. Here, the areas where the gender imbalance and biases exist can lead to a determination on the level of awareness that is required for change.

The societal analysis in which the organization operates is the next step. In this research, this is done by looking at the society of the country the organization operates in and seeing how the employees of the organization are influenced by societal biases.

By doing this, the preconceptions and assumptions can be uncovered. Through critical reflection, open discussion, and awareness-building activities, this be achieved.

Throughout this process, a focus on discourse and language is required. Management, and the rest of the organization, should start to recognize the power of discourse and language in shaping the organizational culture and perceptions of gender. Foster inclusive and gender-neutral communication practices, by openly discussing what language is acceptable and how the language that is currently used is inclusive or exclusive for different groups within the organization. A possibly effective way of doing this is by encouraging discussions and initiatives that challenge gender norms and promote equity.

When this analysis is done, the external and internal forces can be mobilized. Use awareness campaigns, training programs, and workshops to increase the understanding of gender-related issues and the different perspectives that are present in the organization. Challenge existing practices and biases through open discussions and critical reflection. Critically asses current policies and practices and change where necessary to promote gender equity.

By applying this framework, organizations can create a more structured approach to address gender diversity and equity issues. It allows for a comprehensive assessment of the current situation, identification of areas for improvement, and the implementation of targeted interventions. Continuous

monitoring and evaluation of progress will help ensure that change efforts are effective and sustainable.

8.6 Answering the Research Questions

This section revisits the research questions that were defined at the start of this thesis research. First, the sub-questions are answered, after which the main research question is discussed.

8.6.1 Sub-question 1: Employees

What are the gender diversity and equity perceptions, challenges, and opportunities according to Strukton Rail's employees

Based on interviews conducted with employees at Strukton Rail, the following insights are gained regarding their experiences:

The majority of women agree that there is a male-dominated culture, but the extent to which they experience its negative effects varies greatly. Most women indicated to be the subject of gender-related comments and/or sexual innuendos. This relates to acknowledged power dynamics, which can be influential factors in employees' positions and experiences within the organization. Women, in particular, find it necessary to establish clear boundaries and assert themselves in order to be taken seriously. They seem to also develop strategies to navigate through these dynamics by for instance not taking everything personally. Learning and growth are significant aspects for female employees, who face high expectations, mostly put on themselves, which they can experience as challenging. This challenge was not found in the experiences of male employees and seems to be specific to women. Some women expressed that goal setting for ambitions and managing their own performance expectations is something that comes with gaining experience, showing the intersection with age. This is also shown in other aspects of women's experience. For instance, women note that they experienced being compared to others' daughters and feeling a sense of inadequacy due to age differences with their male colleagues.

Gender roles and expectations also come into play, as women expressed to face assumptions and biases regarding their behavior and abilities in the workplace. Some women feel the need to constantly prove themselves and may experience different judgments compared to their male counterparts. Gaining knowledge, expertise, and experience is recognized by female employees as a means to overcome biases and gain confidence. They understand the importance of demonstrating their competence to challenge existing stereotypes and biases.

It is important to note that these experiences may vary among employees, and the insights provided here reflect the overall experiences of individuals interviewed at Strukton Rail.

8.6.2 Sub-question 2: Management

What are the gender diversity and equity perceptions, challenges, and opportunities according to Strukton Rail's top management?

The perspective of top management at Strukton Rail reveals a recognition of the value of diversity and a desire for increased gender diversity within their departments and the organization as a whole. Some understand the need to shift the organization's mindset and embrace new ways of working to ensure its survival and growth.

However, there is a tendency among managers to exhibit gender blindness when it comes to gender diversity. They hesitate to set specific goals or implement quotas, instead emphasizing the importance of hiring based solely on performance and fit within the organization. This approach may overlook the gender specific challenges that women expressed. The hesitancy in setting goals or implementing quotas can pose challenges to achieving gender diversity and equity within the organization. It may lead to resistance to change and hinder efforts to create a more inclusive work environment. Additionally, potential biases in the promotion processes could perpetuate existing gender disparities.

To promote gender diversity and equity, there are opportunities for Strukton Rail to address biases, both implicit and explicit, that may hinder the advancement of women within the organization. Creating an inclusive work environment where diverse voices are valued and heard is crucial. Furthermore, establishing transparent and objective evaluation and advancement frameworks can ensure fair opportunities for all employees, regardless of gender.

Overall, while top management at Strukton Rail recognizes the importance of diversity, there is a need to address the gender blindness that exists in their approach to gender diversity and equity. By embracing more proactive measures and fostering an inclusive culture, the organization can work towards a more equitable representation of women and tap into the valuable contributions they can bring to the company. This starts with creating awareness about the specific challenges women face, explicit and implicit gender-biases, and by this, recognizing the diverse perspectives when it comes to gender in the workplace.

8.6.3 Sub-question 3: Recruitment and human resource business partners

What are the gender diversity and equity perceptions, challenges, and opportunities according to Strukton Rail's recruitment and human resource business partners?

Recruitment teams at Strukton Rail acknowledge that there is a low level of interest from women in the industry, which leads to a smaller pool of female applicants. The organization's primary focus on quickly hiring qualified candidates, driven by personnel shortages, limits the prioritization of gender diversity in the hiring process.

Human resources professionals within the company recognize the influence of societal expectations and gender bias in restricting women's interest in technical occupations. They understand that certain stereotypes and biases may discourage women from pursuing careers in these fields and that the biases could negatively impact their experience in a male-dominated organization. Therefore, they

recognize that to increase gender diversity within Strukton Rail, there are opportunities to create a more women-friendly environment. This can involve addressing the basic needs and considerations that may attract and retain female employees. Additionally, breaking down gender stereotypes and biases can help to create a more inclusive and supportive workplace.

HR business partners within the organization play a crucial role in assessing managers' decisions and ensuring fairness in promotion and raise processes. They can actively work towards promoting gender equity by challenging any biases and advocating for objective evaluation criteria.

8.6.4 Main research question

What are the perceptions, challenges, and opportunities surrounding gender diversity and equity within Strukton Rail, as understood by different layers in the organization?

The similarities among employees, top management, and recruitment/human resource business partners at Strukton Rail lie in their recognition of the value of gender diversity and the need for an inclusive work environment. They all, on some level, acknowledge the existence of a male-dominated culture.

However, there is a different perspective on the role that gender plays in the male-dominated culture and the effect this has on women's experience in the organization. The influence that biases and stereotypes has is recognized by female employees, HR business partners and recruitment, but in lesser extent by top management. The same goes for the importance of overcoming biases and challenging stereotypes.

Top management exhibits a tendency towards gender blindness, hesitating to set specific goals or quotas and emphasizing hiring based on performance and fit. Even though the sentiment for wanting to select based on competence is shared by all, the belief that this is the reality is not unanimously agreed upon.

Different layers of the organization have a different perspective on the topic of gender in the workplace, without there being a common understanding of the extent of the issue. But also the difference in perspective within these layers is immense. This shows the complexity of the topic introduced by the intersectionality of gender with other aspects.

8.7 Limitations

This research was not without limitations, these are discussed in this section. By acknowledging these limitations, future researchers may come to a more all-encompassing result on gender diversity and equity.

8.7.1 Time

This research was conducted between February 2023 and July 2023. First of all, this is a limited time for a gender related research.

Additionally, during this time, the organization that was the topic of this case study has been undergoing changes when it comes to internal improvement procedures and reorganizations. These internal changes may influence the research, but it may also influence the applicability of the results. Gender diversity and equity is a topic that evolves over time, and the results found in interviews in the beginning of the research may not be applicable at the end of the research. By opening the conversation about the topic of gender diversity, the research results may also be influenced, as it may have become more on the top of mind. Longitudinal research may give a better understanding of the changing nature of gender diversity and equity.

8.7.2 Position of the researcher

A limitation of this research concerns the position of the researcher. As discussed in the methodology, the research held a dual position of employee within the organization and as a researcher.

The positionality of the researcher has a major influence on the results of this study. A change in researcher in the gathering of the data, analysis of the data, and interpreting of the data, could have enormous influence on the results and conclusions. This can be seen as a limitation for the replicability of the results.

8.7.3 Limited Generalizability

This research was conducted in the context of one organization in the form of a single case study. Because of this research method design, the generalizability of the results are limited. The results that were obtained through interviews, questionnaire, and informal conversations were validated through peer conversations, conversations with expert center VHTO, and during an event on gender diversity in management. These validations indicate that the results are generalizable, as they are recognized. However, replicating this research in other organizations may result in other perspective on the topic of gender diversity.

Additionally, the proposed framework is based on the results found in the context of this study. The generalizability of the framework should therefore be tested in other organizations.

8.8 Reflection

In this section, a reflection on the research approach is given. This includes an reflection on the two main data collection method, the in-depth interviews and questionnaire, and on the position the researcher held.

8.8.1 In-depth interviews

The in-depth interviews were the primary part of this research and provided the most results. The interviews were very time consuming, as they all lasted around 60 minutes. The subsequent transcribing, summarizing, and analysis of themes was even more time-consuming. However, the interviews resulted in in-depth insight in the perspectives and experiences of the different layers of the organization. The semi-structured interview method added to this even more. The set-up of the interviews, semi-structured and personal, make it hard to replicate these. However, the depth of data that it provided was invaluable for the research results.

For future research, it would interesting to let someone with another background conduct the in-depth interviews. With many interviewees, my impression was that especially my gender influenced their position and anwers. Especially with the employee interviewees, I felt that my gender and age influenced their willingness to talk which led to candid answers. On the other hand, the answers from management or HR might have been influenced by my gender, leading to more favorable answers towards gender diversity. Changing the positionality of the main researcher and interviewer would, so I expect, result in different answers.

8.8.2 Questionnaire

The way that the questionnaire was designed in the current research was to provide background and additional information, it was not supposed to be a primary source of information. The goal was to investigate, on a very basic level, the perspectives that people held on the topic of diversity. However, a lot of very interesting information surfaced in the questionnaire results. With the knowledge that I have now, I would focus the questionnaire more on organizational culture. As this became the primary subject of the research, and was a thing that surfaced in in-depth interviews quite often, the questionnaire could have provided more information on this in a broader organizational sense. Some perspectives on the organizational culture were shared through the questionnaire, but it had the potential to be much richer.

8.8.3 Dual position of the researcher

As described in section 3.4, I have held a dual position as employee and researcher during this research period. This dual position had many advantages but also disadvantages. On the one hand, people where happy to talk to me about this topic. Some already knew me, and were happy to help out a colleague. Other didn't know me but were open to participating in interviews. It gave me the opportunity to get to know more colleagues, which will definitely be helpful in my future projects within the organization.

However, this topic within this organization is quite controversial. Many colleagues that I've spoken

to about this topic outside of the interviews, have an opinion. I have noticed that some have changed their perception of me because I am conducting research. Comments like 'O, I did not know you were one of those feminists' are quite common. I have also heard comments about playing the victim by raising issues around this topic or by insisting there might be inequalities between men and women in the organization. Comments about being happy with the progress we as a society have made already and question about when it would even be enough were also made. These comments all paint a picture of the common opinion on the topic, and it helped me frame my research much more, but they were also, at times, detrimental to my motivation about the topic within this specific context.

After publishing the questionnaire, I have felt uncomfortable at work for a few days. I started reading comments in the questionnaire that deemed the topic to be nonsense, irrelevant, or misplaced. My name was connected to the questionnaire and I noticed that my LinkedIn profile was visited by some of the colleagues that I did not know. This gave me quite an unsafe feeling at the office after the questionnaire got published.

The results in this thesis and the conclusions that I draw are not the opinion of many in the organization. It connects the experiences of different women in the organization and makes conclusions out of the combined experiences. It gave a lot of women, and some men, the opportunity to share their experiences around this topic, which many had never done before. I have received feedback from some interviewees that they were happy to be able to tell their story, which delighted me. Another thing that I enjoyed was a manager telling me that they enjoyed the interview and that it inspired them to discuss this topic more with their colleagues. I feel like having this conversation is very good for an organization in which so much is taken for granted, and I'm happy that I got the opportunity to be the conversation starter.

8.8.4 Validity and Reliability

The validity of this research was ensured by the many different research methods that were combined. The in-depth interviews, complimented by the questionnaire, provided the most research results. These results were validated through literature research, conversations with experts and researchers, and conversations with peers, increasing the reliability of the research results. The results of the research could be validated even more by replicating the research in other organizations, and including more intersectionality between gender and race, age, sexuality, and social class.

8.9 Future Research

In terms of future research, there are several recommendations that can be made. Firstly, conducting a comprehensive analysis of salary differences between men and women in the construction industry would provide valuable insights. This analysis should include factors such as positions held, duration in each position, start salary, salary progression, and other relevant data. Combining quantitative and qualitative investigations, including education and experience, can provide a more complete understanding of the pay gap. Additionally, exploring the intersectionality of gender, race, ethnicity, and other dimensions of diversity in the pay gap analysis would be interesting.

To further advance understanding of gender diversity in the construction industry, it is recommended

to investigate the specific factors contributing to the significant difference between the Netherlands and the rest of Europe. Understanding how company performance affects attention given to social issues like gender diversity is also crucial. Replicating this research in different organizations and comparing it with financial performance can yield valuable insights.

Another area for future research is establishing privilege awareness, taking into account the unique experiences and perspectives of different groups. Intersectionality should be considered, as individuals may experience multiple forms of privilege or marginalization simultaneously. Exploring the role of institutional practices and policies in promoting privilege awareness and accountability is important. Investigating the impact of policies on facilitating awareness and accountability around privilege can provide useful recommendations for promoting better understanding among different groups.

By addressing these research areas, scholars can contribute to a deeper understanding of gender diversity, pay gaps, intersectionality, and privilege awareness in the construction industry, leading to more informed strategies and policies for promoting equity and inclusion.

Chapter 9

Conclusion and Recommendations

The conclusion of this research is the end result of this master thesis, bringing together all perspectives on the topic of gender diversity and equity at Strukton Rail. Based on these conclusions, recommendations for Strukton Rail and the construction industry are made.

9.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, this master thesis has explored the organizational factors influencing the gender imbalance in the construction industry. The findings have shed light on various aspects of gender diversity and equity within Strukton Rail, providing valuable insights into the perspectives of employees, top management, and recruitment and human resource business partners. However, it is important to note that this study has limitations, particularly in terms of not fully addressing the intersectionality of gender with other aspects such as age, race, and sexuality due to complexity restraints.

Within Strukton Rail, diverse perspectives exist among employees, management, and HR, reflecting varying experiences and beliefs. Employees, particularly women, perceive a male-dominated culture with a lack of representation, struggles to relate to colleagues, and experiences of not being taken seriously. Gender and power dynamics are recognized by many employees. Management perspectives are also diverse, but generally do not recognize the experiences of female employees. There is no common consensus on gender diversity issues. Some managers may hold a gender-blind mindset, not fully recognizing barriers faced by female employees. This seems to be a professed gender-blindness, where they express they do not care about gender of employees. At the same time differences between men and women in career ambition, willingness to work full-time, and assertiveness are emphasized and assigned to gender differences. The proclaimed gender-blind mindset among management individuals may not align with their language use, suggesting a potential inconsistency between their professed gender-blindness and their underlying biases. These implicit gender biases underscore the significance of raising awareness and fostering understanding to create a workplace that is more inclusive and equitable. Perspectives diverge on work-life balance and flexibility, with employees valuing it for personal-professional balance, while management prioritizes operational demands. A belief persists that men are more flexible, affecting perceptions of work-life balance. Overall, understanding and addressing these diverse perspectives is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and

equitable workplace. HR does recognize the need to address power dynamics, promote inclusivity, and create an equitable work environment.

This research highlights the existence of diverse experiences and perspectives regarding gender diversity, equity, and inclusion. Recognizing the validity of every perspective is crucial for challenging and changing broken aspects of the system. However, it can be challenging for individuals, especially those in positions of power or belonging to majority groups, to acknowledge their privilege and accept other perspectives. Storytelling and sharing experiences are powerful tools for initiating conversations and fostering understanding. Challenging preconceptions and assumptions entails recognizing these and addressing gendered discourse. Open dialogue and collaboration among employees, management, and HR are important for promoting a comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics and implementing effective strategies. Addressing the broken aspects requires neutralizing power dynamics and requires willingness from those in power to actively engage in the transformation. Management commitment is vital for empowering marginalized voices and creating an inclusive environment. By recognizing and validating diverse perspectives, organizations can work towards a more equitable and inclusive workplace.

9.1.1 Scientific contribution

This research offers a distinctive and extensive scientific contribution through its combined methodology. The data gathered throughout this thesis, both qualitative and quantitative, have provided incredibly in-depth data on the different perspectives on gender diversity and equity. By focusing on one organization, the research delivers profound and meticulous insights into these perspectives. Due to the ethnographic nature in combination with the dual position of the researcher, the context that could be added to the in-depth nature of the data provided a lot of nuance and even more depth to the research results.

Additionally, the proposed framework is novel and provides organizations with more hands-on tools to assess and address the gender diversity and equity topic. The detailed information that was gathered in the combined research methodology makes for a robust framework that can be generalized and gives way for future research.

9.1.2 Societal contribution

The societal contribution of this thesis is mainly the exploration of gender diversity and equity within the context of Strukton Rail. By examining the perspectives of various stakeholders, including employees, management, and human resources, the thesis sheds light on the challenges and disparities that exist in achieving gender diversity and equity within the organization.

The thesis highlights the broader societal implications of gender diversity and equity efforts within the construction industry. It acknowledges the influence of social roles, cultural norms, and historical biases on the perception of gender diversity.

Furthermore, the societal contribution lies in combining these personal views with requirements from regulatory measures, such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), on promoting gender diversity and equity. It emphasizes the importance of organizations aligning their

vision and policies with these regulatory requirements to create a more inclusive and transparent work environment. This reflects a broader trend in society towards recognizing the importance of gender equality and diversity in workplaces. Combining the personal perspectives of different roles within a company such as Strukton Rail with the requirements set from regulation that will be implemented shortly, provides insight in the importance of gender diversity and equity in workplaces. To translate the vision of gender diversity and equity into reality, this thesis emphasizes the importance of a unified organizational vision, including the recognition of the value of diversity and the need for clear goals.

9.2 Recommendations

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made to address the gender imbalance and promote gender diversity and equity within the construction industry:

Top management should demonstrate a unified commitment to driving the change process and embrace gender diversity initiatives. **Management commitment** is a crucial part of achieving a more diverse work pool. To establish management commitment, an alignment of wishes and perspective on diversity goals is a first step. Management has the tools to actively challenge gender biases, stereotypes, and gendered language to change the organizational discourse, foster an inclusive culture, and set clear goals for gender diversity representation. **Establishing clear objectives** is another suggestion arising from this research. As a precursor to setting specific quota for hiring women, which will likely result in resistance from management, it is advisable to establish goals regarding the representation of women in various departments of the organization and monitor these goals periodically. Implementing this approach will elevate the significance attributed to gender diversity within the organization and effectively communicate the value that management places on the subject. Additionally, it will assist in complying with regulatory requirements, such as the CSRD.

As established, there might be a professed gender-blindness which is in contradiction with the presence of implicit gender-biases. To work towards an gender-awareness mindset, **awareness-building and training** can be conducted to increase understanding of gender-related issues. These initiatives should address unconscious biases, gender dynamics, intersectionality, and gendered language, fostering empathy and a comprehensive understanding of diverse perspectives. Foster **open dialogue and communication** and by creating a safe space for employees, management, and human resource professionals to share their experiences, perspectives, and concerns to gender diversity. Encourage discussions that challenge gender norms, promote equity, and address power dynamics within the organization.

Implement **mentoring and sponsorship programs** specifically tailored for women in the construction industry. These programs can provide guidance, support, and networking opportunities, empowering women to navigate challenges, assert boundaries, and enhance their resilience.

Establish **transparent and objective evaluation and advancement frameworks** that ensure fair opportunities for all employees, regardless of gender. This includes addressing biases in promotion processes and providing equal access to career advancement opportunities. Strukton Rail has already taken steps towards this through the implementation of the 'vlootschouw'. It remains important to

monitor and share these practices, leveraging them to identify and learn from any implicit biases within the organization.

Organizations should acknowledge that achieving gender diversity and equity necessitates a comprehensive approach and the collaboration of all stakeholders. By implementing the suggested strategies and cultivating an inclusive culture, the construction industry has the potential to, slowly and steadily, crack and ultimately break the concrete ceiling, paving the way for a more equitable and diverse workforce. This transformation can yield significant benefits for individuals and organizations alike.

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Appendix A

Glossary

Term	Definition
Diversity	Encompassing a range of characteristics like race, gender, age, religion, etc., acknowledging uniqueness and diverse perspectives.
Equality	Treating all individuals the same, providing equal treatment and resources.
Equity	Providing resources and support based on specific needs to ensure fair opportunities, compensating for social differences.
Gender	Social and cultural norms, behaviors, and identities attributed to individuals based on their sex.
Inclusion	Actively embracing individual uniqueness and backgrounds to create an integrated and productive environment.
Intersectionality	Recognizing multiple intersecting identities and how they shape experiences and challenges.
Sex	Biological characteristics of an individual, categorized as male or female.

Appendix B

Literature Search Terms

Table B.1: Search terms

Nr	Subject	Search phrase
1	Organizational culture and gender	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("organizational culture" OR "organisational culture") AND "gender" AND ("equality" OR "equity") AND ("career" OR "work") AND ("male-dominated industry" OR "male-dominated occupation" OR "male dominated industry" OR "male dominated industries" OR "male dominated occupation" OR "male dominated occupations" OR "male-dominated occupations" OR "tech industry" OR "technology industry" OR "construction industry" OR "STEM"))

2	Meritocracy	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("meritocracy" OR "based on merit" OR "affirmative action") AND "gender" AND ("equality" OR "equity") AND ("career" OR "work") AND ("male-dominated industry" OR "male-dominated occupation" OR "male dominated industry" OR "male dominated industries" OR "male dominated occupation" OR "male dominated occupations" OR "male-dominated occupations" OR "tech industry" OR "technology industry" OR "construction industry" OR "STEM"))
3	Meritocracy	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("meritocracy" AND ("gender equality" OR "gender inequality" OR "gender gap") AND ("career" OR "work") AND ("industry" OR "organization" OR "organisation"))

		TITLE-ABS-KEY (
		("recruitment" OR "recruiting" OR "retainment" OR "retaining") AND
		"gender" AND
		("equality" OR "equity") AND
4	Recruitment and retainment	("career" OR "work") AND
		("male-dominated industry" OR "male-dominated occupation" OR
		"male dominated industry" OR "male dominated industries" OR
		"male dominated occupation" OR "male dominated occupations" OR
		"male-dominated occupations" OR "construction industry"))

Table B.2: Search results

Search phrase	Title	Authors	Industry	Topic	Applicability (from abstract)
1	Work–family balance in the construction industry: why gender analysis matters to develop sustainable interventions	Lefrançois, M., Trottier, M.	Construction	Work-family balance	Yes
1	Meeting to transgress: The role of faculty learning communities in shaping more inclusive organizational cultures	O'Meara, K., Nyunt, G., Templeton, L., Kuvaeva, A.	Education	Retention and advancement	Maybe
1	Institutional transformation: Toward a diversity positive campus culture	Anicha, C.L., Bilen-Green, C., Burnett, A., Froelich, K., Holbrook, S.	Education	Transformation	Yes
1	Barriers to women in the UK construction industry	Worrall, L., Harris, K., Stewart, R., Thomas, A., McDermott, P.	Construction	Barriers and challenges	Yes
2	A Review of Irish National Strategy for Gender Equality in Higher Education 2010–2021	Dunne, J., O'Reilly, A., O'Donoghue, A., Kinahan, M.	Education	Gender EDI	Maybe
2	Challenges Still Facing Women in Microwaves and How You Can Help	Nguyen, J., Bernay, E.	STEM	Barriers and challenges	Yes

2	Affirmative action for attracting women to STEM in Chile	Bastarrica, M.C., Hitschfeld, N., Samary, M.M., Simmonds, J.	STEM	HR challenges	No
2	The role of organizational learning in soft regulation of workplace gender equality	Macneil, J., Liu, Z.	Industry	Organizational learning	Yes
2	Gender equality interventions in the STEM fields: Perceptions, successes and dilemmas	Van Den Brink, M., Stobbe, L.	STEM	Gender EDI	Yes
2	Building strategies: equal opportunity in the construction industry	Pringle, R., Winning, A.	Construction	Strategies	Yes
3	Meritocracy at Work?: Merit-Based Reward Systems and Gender Wage Inequality	Mun, E., Kodama, N.	Industry	Meritocracy	Yes
3	Women, work, and opportunities: From neoliberal to feminist mentoring	Harris, D.A.	Industry	Mentoring	Yes
3	Critical race theory and black feminist insights into "race" and gender equality	Rankin-Wright, A.J., Hylton, K., Norman, L.	Sports	Race EDI	Discussion on intersectionality
3	#UsToo: Implicit bias, meritocracy and the plight of black minority leaders in healthcare	Busari, J.O.	Healthcare	Race EDI	Discussion on intersectionality

3	Lucky to reach the top? : Gendered perspectives on leadership acquisition across Qatar and Denmark	Ottsen, C.L.	Industry	Leadership	Maybe
3	Employee wellbeing and human sustainability: Perspectives of managers in large Japanese corporations	Kobayashi, K., Eweje, G., Tappin, D.	Industry	Leadership	Yes
3	Gender inequality in screenwriting work	Wreyford, N	Media/film	Gender EDI	Maybe
3	Denied inequality: An engendered media system in Slovenia and increased meritocracy	Pajnik, M., Petkovi, B.	Media/film	Meritocracy	No
3	Unmanageable inequalities: Sexism in the film industry	Jones, D., Pringle, J.K.	Media/film	Gender EDI	Maybe
3	Unspeakable inequalities: Post feminism, entrepreneurial subjectivity, and the repudiation of sexism among cultural workers	Gill, R.	Media/film	Gender EDI	Maybe
3	The support paradox: Overcoming dilemmas in gender equality programs	Van den Brink, M., Stobbe, L.	Industry	Gender EDI	Yes
4	Improving Gender Equity in Sports Coaching	Norman, L.	Sports	Gender EDI	Maybe
4	Identifying Pertinent Indicators for Assessing and Fostering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion of the Construction Workforce	Karakhan, A.A., Gambatese, J.A., Simmons, D.R., Al-Bayati, A.J.	Construction	EDI	Yes

4	The gendered dimensions of informal institutions in the Australian construction industry	Galea, N., Powell, A., Loosemore, M., Chappell, L.	Construction	Gender EDI	Yes
4	Human resource management challenges in the indian construction industry: A likert-type survey based study	Samuel, C., Tejaswi, D.	Construction	HR challenges	Yes
4	Gender and ethnic minority exclusion from skilled occupations in construction: A Western European comparison	Byrne, J., Clarke, L., Van Der Meer, M.	Construction	EDI	Yes
4	Women in construction: The untapped resource	Fielden, S.L., Davidson, M.J., Gale, A.W., Davey, C.L.	Construction	HR challenges	Yes

Appendix C

Departments of Strukton Rail

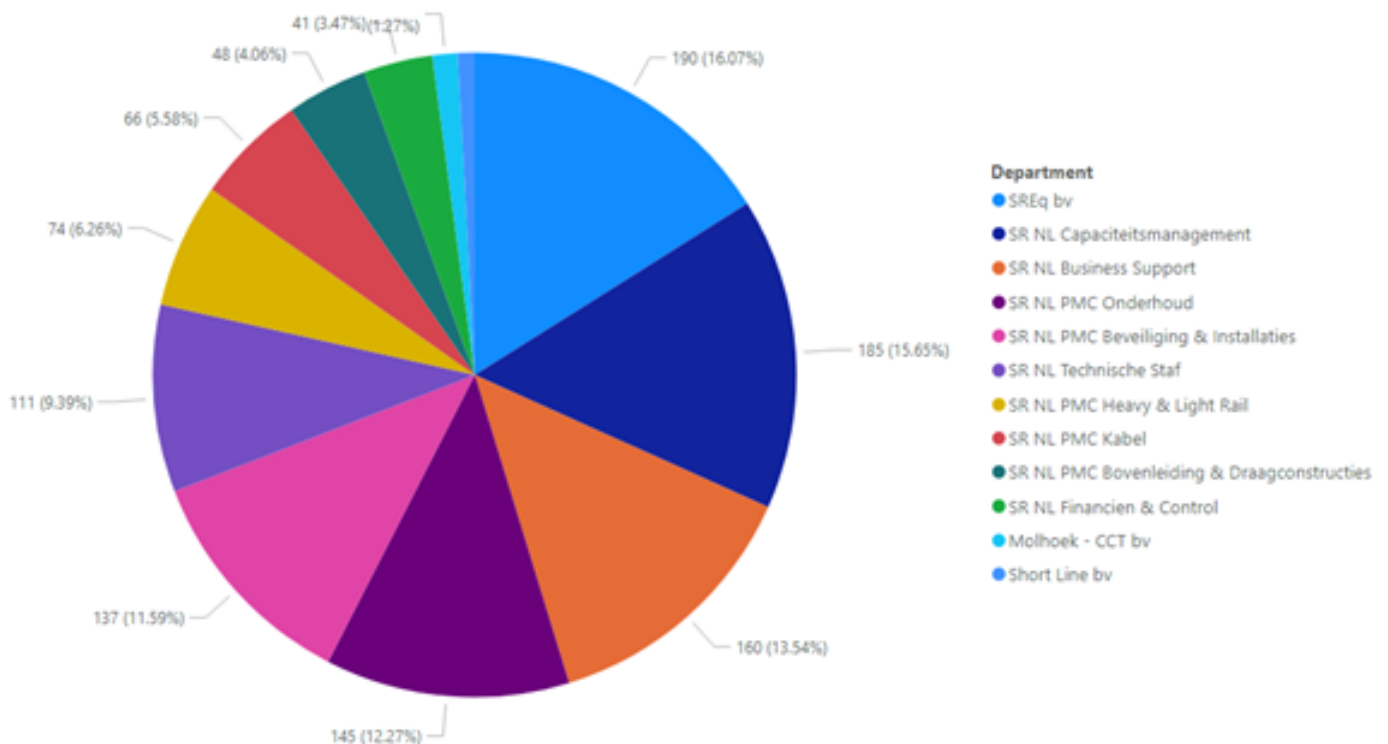Appendix C shows the departments and their employee count in relation to each other.

Figure C.1: Departments of Strukton Rail and their employee count

There are two limited liability partners which are daughter organizations of Strukton Rail Netherlands, Molhoek - CCT bv and Short Line bv. These are both small departments, each accounting for about 1% of the total Strukton Rail employee count.

There are five operational departments, that are concerned with the renewal, construction, or maintenance of the railway infrastructure. There is a significant difference between the activities that the 'project-side' of Strukton Rail performs with that of the 'maintenance-side'. SR NL PMC Onderhoud is the PMC (product-market combination) that is concerned with maintenance. Currently, Strukton Rail maintains seven areas in the Netherlands, where they have contracts that run over five years. The project-side of the organization is concerned with the renewal and construction of smaller parts of the infrastructure, on project basis. There are several PMC's that have their own discipline. These

PMC's have their own expertise but usually perform their work together, as most projects are integral and require multiple disciplines for at least some parts of the work. PMC Beveiliging & Installatie works on the electrical safety systems and installations. Examples of these are the electrical side of switches, signaling, and relays. PMC Bovenleiding & Draagconstructies specializes in catenary services and its supporting structures. PMC Heavy & Light Rail is the department that works on the mechanical parts of infrastructure. Their main business is renewal of upper tracks, renewal of the rail and the ballast. The last PMC is PMC Kabel. This department is concerned with replacing rail cables.

SR NL Capaciteitsmanagement and SREq bv can be seen as supporting departments highly connected to the operational departments. The Capaciteitsmanagement (capacity management) departments accommodates PMC Maintenance with executive personnel. Most mechanics that work within the maintenance department are part of this department. Besides this, the department holds the scheduling office, training and certification office, and disturbance coordination. The department is focused on people management, making sure the mechanics can do their job.

SREq bv is another limited liability partner and is the equipment department. In this department, larger equipment that is used in projects and maintenance activities are managed and maintained. This includes smaller equipment like lorry-mounted cranes and larger equipment like tamping machines. Personnel that operates this machinery is also situated in this department, besides engineers and planning employees.

Lastly, there are three departments that can be seen as fully supporting departments. SR NL Business support is the department that entails departments such as HR, communications, IT and, safety, health, and environment (SHE). This department is a mixture of technical support and non-technical support. The SHE department and IT are more technical sub-departments, while HR, communication, buying, and legal are less technical. BI&I is a department that is concerned with internal improvement projects, which can be seen as a non-technical, project management department that requires technical knowledge and understanding in the way the business works.

SR NL Financien & Control is the finance department. It includes sub-departments that deal with business control, invoicing, facility management, project administration, and vehicle fleet administration and management.

SR NL Technische Staf is the technical support staff department. Many different sub-departments are part of this department, such as data management and monitoring, tender management, and sales.

Appendix D

Questionnaire questions

Table D.1: *The progression of survey responses per question*

Question	Nr of responses	Question Dutch	Question English
	181	*Link geopend*	*Opened link to questionnaire*
Q0	164	*Introductie en goedkeuring voor deelname*	*Question to inform and establish consent*
Q1	164	Hoe identificeer je jezelf?	How do you identify yourself?
Q2	164	Wat is je leeftijd?	What is your age?
Q3	164	Ben je UP'er of NUP'er?	Are you an UP'er or NUP'er?
Q4	164	Hoe lang werk al je bij Strukton?	How long have you been working at Strukton?
Q5	151	Wat is, volgens jou, het belangrijkst als werknemer om promotie te maken of een loonsverhoging te krijgen bij Strukton Rail?	What do you think is most important as an employee to get promoted or receive a salary increase at Strukton Rail?
Q6	117	Wat denk jij dat de verhouding mannen/vrouwen is in uitvoerende functies (UP'ers)? - % mannen	What do you think is the ratio of men/women in executive positions (UP'ers)? - % men
Q7	117	Wat denk jij dat de verhouding mannen/vrouwen is in uitvoerende functies (UP'ers)? - % vrouwen	What do you think is the ratio of men/women in executive positions (UP'ers)? - % women
Q8	117	Waarom denk je dat de man/vrouw verhouding zo is in uitvoerende functies?	Why do you think the gender ratio is the way it is in executive positions?

Q9	117	Wat denk jij dat de verhouding mannen/vrouwen is in technische staf functies (technische NUP'ers)? - % mannen	What do you think is the ratio of men/women in technical staff positions (technical NUP'ers)? - % men
Q10	117	Wat denk jij dat de verhouding mannen/vrouwen is in technische staf functies (technische NUP'ers)? - % vrouwen	What do you think is the ratio of men/women in technical staff positions (technical NUP'ers)? - % women
Q11	117	Waarom denk je dat de man/vrouw verhouding zo is in technische staf functies?	Why do you think the gender ratio is the way it is in technical staff positions?
Q12	111	In welke mate is er, volgens u, ongelijkheid gebaseerd op gender bij Strukton Rail?	To what extent, in your opinion, is there gender inequality at Strukton Rail?
Q13	111	Wat zijn de belangrijkste redenen voor ongelijkheden tussen mannen en vrouwen bij Strukton Rail?	"What are the main reasons for inequalities between men and women at Strukton Rail?
Q14	107	In jouw beleving, heeft Strukton momenteel beleid en procedures om ongelijkheid tussen mannen en vrouwen aan te pakken?	In your perception, does Strukton currently have policies and procedures in place to address gender inequality between men and women?
Q15	91	Hoe belangrijk vind je het dat Strukton programma's opzet om meer vrouwen in uitvoerende functies (UP'ers) te krijgen?	How important do you think it is for Strukton to establish programs to increase the number of women in executive positions (UP'ers)?
Q16	91	Hoe belangrijk vind je het dat Strukton programma's opzet om meer vrouwen in technische functies (technische NUP'ers) te krijgen?	How important do you think it is for Strukton to establish programs to increase the number of women in technical positions (technical NUP'ers)?
Q17	91	In hoeverre vind je dat het werken aan een gelijkere man/vrouw verhouding één van de prioriteiten van Strukton's management en HR zou moeten zijn?	To what extent do you believe that working towards a more equal gender ratio should be one of the priorities of Strukton's management and HR?
Q18	91	Wil je nog iets kwijt over het onderwerp wat niet aan bod is gekomen?	Would you like to mention anything else that has not been discussed?

Appendix E

In-depth interview questions

E.1   Interview question HRM - business line managers

This list of questions will give an indication of the questions that served as a guideline during the interviews with the business line managers, within the HRM population. These questions were posed in Dutch:

1. Kunt u de visie van het bedrijf op genderdiversiteit beschrijven en hoe deze past in de algehele bedrijfsstrategie?

2. Zouden er doelen moeten zijn met betrekking tot genderdiversiteit?

3. Kun je eventuele uitdagingen of obstakels beschrijven waarmee het bedrijf te maken heeft gehad bij het bereiken van zijn doelen op het gebied van genderdiversiteit, en hoe zijn deze uitdagingen aangepakt?

4. In jouw beleving als manager, hoe ervaar je de uitdagingen die vrouwen en mannen tegenkomen in hun bij Strukton?

5. Hoe zou je de bedrijfscultuur van Strukon Rail omschrijven?

6. Hoe beïnvloedt de cultuur van het bedrijf de ervaringen van vrouwelijke werknemers, en welke stappen heeft het bedrijf gezet om een meer inclusieve en ondersteunende cultuur voor alle werknemers te bevorderen?

7. Hoe bepaalt u of een werknemer recht heeft op een salarisverhoging of promotie en welke factoren worden in aanmerking genomen tijdens dit besluitvormingsproces?

8. Wat zijn volgens jou de belangrijkste stappen die het bedrijf kan nemen om meer genderdiversiteit en -gelijkheid op de werkvloer te bevorderen, en hoe kunnen deze stappen effectief worden geïmplementeerd?

9. Zijn er onbewuste vooroordelen of maatschappelijke normen die volgens jou van invloed kunnen zijn op de carrièrekansen van vrouwelijke werknemers, en zo ja, welke stappen worden er genomen om deze aan te pakken?

An English translation of these questions:

1. Can you describe the company's vision on gender diversity and how it aligns with the overall business strategy?

2. Should there be goals regarding gender diversity?

3. Can you discuss any challenges or obstacles the company has faced in achieving its gender diversity goals and how these challenges were addressed?

4. As a manager, how do you perceive the challenges faced by women and men in their roles at Strukton?

5. How would you describe the company culture at Strukton Rail?

6. How does the company culture impact the experiences of female employees, and what steps has the company taken to promote a more inclusive and supportive culture for all employees?

7. How do you determine if an employee is eligible for a salary raise or promotion, and what factors are considered during this decision-making process?

8. In your opinion, what are the key steps the company can take to promote more gender diversity and equality in the workplace, and how can these steps be effectively implemented?

9. Are there any unconscious biases or societal norms that you believe may influence the career opportunities of female employees, and if so, what measures are being taken to address them?

E.2 Interview question HRM - HR department

This list of questions will give an indication of the questions that served as a guideline during the interviews with the the different HR employees, within the HRM population. Not all questions were posed to all participants, as some were more relevant for certain types of jobs participants filled. These questions were posed in Dutch:

1. Kunt u de visie van het bedrijf op genderdiversiteit beschrijven en hoe deze past in de algehele bedrijfsstrategie?

2. Zouden er doelen moeten zijn met betrekking tot genderdiversiteit?

3. Kun je eventuele uitdagingen of obstakels beschrijven waarmee het bedrijf te maken heeft gehad bij het bereiken van zijn doelen op het gebied van genderdiversiteit, en hoe zijn deze uitdagingen aangepakt?

4. In jouw beleving als manager, hoe ervaar je de uitdagingen die vrouwen en mannen tegenkomen in hun bij Strukton?

5. Hoe zou je de bedrijfscultuur van Strukon Rail omschrijven?

6. Hoe beïnvloedt de cultuur van het bedrijf de ervaringen van vrouwelijke werknemers, en welke stappen heeft het bedrijf gezet om een meer inclusieve en ondersteunende cultuur voor alle werknemers te bevorderen?

7. Hoe wordt er bepaalt of een werknemer recht heeft op een salarisverhoging of promotie en welke factoren worden in aanmerking genomen tijdens dit besluitvormingsproces?

8. Hoe zorgt het bedrijf ervoor dat op verdiensten gebaseerde factoren, zoals vaardigheden en prestaties, de belangrijkste factoren zijn bij beslissingen over loopbaanontwikkeling?

9. Hoe ondersteunt het bedrijf de ontwikkeling van vaardigheden en competenties die essentieel zijn voor loopbaanontwikkeling, zoals leiderschaps- en communicatievaardigheden?

10. Wat zijn enkele specifieke trainings- of ontwikkelingsprogramma's die beschikbaar zijn voor werknemers om hun vaardigheden te verbeteren?

11. Hoe wordt de toegang tot trainings- of ontwikkelingsprogramma's bepaald en zijn er specifieke richtlijnen of criteria die worden gevolgd bij de toewijzing van programma's aan werknemers?

12. Hoe worden trainings- of ontwikkelingsprogramma's aangepast aan de specifieke behoeften en doelen van individuele werknemers en/of teams binnen de organisatie?

13. Wat zijn volgens jou de belangrijkste stappen die het bedrijf kan nemen om meer genderdiversiteit en -gelijkheid op de werkvloer te bevorderen, en hoe kunnen deze stappen effectief worden geïmplementeerd?

14. Zijn er onbewuste vooroordelen of maatschappelijke normen die volgens jou van invloed kunnen zijn op de carrièrekansen van vrouwelijke werknemers, en zo ja, welke stappen worden er genomen om deze aan te pakken?

An English translation of these questions:

1. Can you describe the company's vision on gender diversity and how it aligns with the overall business strategy?

2. Should there be goals regarding gender diversity?

3. Can you discuss any challenges or obstacles the company has faced in achieving its gender diversity goals and how these challenges were addressed?

4. As a manager, how do you perceive the challenges faced by women and men in their roles at Strukton?

5. How would you describe the company culture at Strukton Rail?

6. How does the company culture impact the experiences of female employees, and what steps has the company taken to promote a more inclusive and supportive culture for all employees?

7. How does the organization determine if an employee is eligible for a salary raise or promotion, and what factors are taken into account during this decision-making process?

8. How does the company ensure that merit-based factors such as skills and performance are the primary considerations in career development decisions?

9. How does the company support the development of skills and competencies that are essential for career advancement, such as leadership and communication skills?

10. What are some specific training or development programs available to employees to enhance their skills?

11. How is access to training or development programs determined, and are there specific guidelines or criteria followed in assigning programs to employees?

12. How are training or development programs tailored to the specific needs and goals of individual employees and/or teams within the organization?

13. In your opinion, what are the key steps the company can take to promote more gender diversity and equality in the workplace, and how can these steps be effectively implemented?

14. Are there any unconscious biases or societal norms that you believe may influence the career opportunities of female employees, and if so, what measures are being taken to address them?

E.3 Interview question female and male employees

This list of questions will give an indication of the questions that served as a guideline during the interviews with the the employees, both female and male. These questions were posed in Dutch:

1. Hoe lang werk je al bij Strukton? Kun je je loopbaan tot dus ver toelichten?

2. Waarom ben je bij Strukton komen werken?

3. Heb je wel eens getwijfeld om weg te gaan (of doe je dat nu nog steeds)?

4. Waarom blijf je bij Strukton werken?

5. Hoe ondersteunt Strukton of jouw manager binnen Strukton jouw persoonlijke ontwikkeling en doorgroeimogelijkheden?

6. Waar zijn loonsverhogingen en promoties op gebaseerd in jouw huidige positie?

7. Hoe zou je de bedrijfscultuur van het bedrijf beschrijven?

8. Kun je beschrijven wat er voor nodig is om succesvol te worden bij Strukton, en wat betekent succes voor jou?

9. Waarom denk je dat er zo weinig vrouwen werken bij Strukton?

10. Is er beleid op diversiteit binnen Strukton?

11. Vind je dat er beleid zou moeten zijn op diversiteit?

An English translation of these questions:

1. How long have you been working at Strukton? Could you explain your career path so far?

2. Why did you choose to work at Strukton?

3. Have you ever had doubts about leaving (or do you still have them)?

4. Why do you choose to continue working at Strukton?

5. How does Strukton or your manager support your personal development and growth opportunities within the company?

6. What are salary increases and promotions based on in your current position?

7. How would you describe the company culture at Strukton?

8. Can you describe what it takes to be successful at Strukton, and what does success mean to you?

9. Why do you think there are so few women working at Strukton?

10. Is there a diversity policy in place at Strukton?

11. Do you believe there should be a diversity policy?