Chapter 2

The relevance of paradoxes in diversity and talent management:

The exclusion-inclusion paradox
The strategic management of work inevitably involves balancing ambiguous tensions, or paradoxes (M. W. Lewis, 2000). This has been recognized and addressed in the human resource management (HRM) research domain (Aust, Brandl, & Keegan, 2015). Existing studies that applied the paradox lens as analytical tool highlight that doing so serves as a means to consider other perspectives, to analyze existing assumptions and to explore tensions in different ways (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Yet, the paradox perspective has not been adopted to the same extent in sub-domains of HRM, such as diversity management and talent management.

Within the diversity management literature, and in particular within gender studies, applying the paradox perspective has been advocated since nearly two decades (Hearn, 1998), and has resulted in multiple publications that articulate complex, interrelated principles that persist over time and which contribute to the prevailing inequalities within organizations (e.g. Faulkner, 2009b; Pesonen, Tienari, & Vanhala, 2009; Sools, Engen, & Baerveldt, 2007; Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014).

Within the talent management literature, the paradox perspective has not yet been applied. This is relevant and problematic because talent management is a relatively young research field that has emerged in the last decade and which is currently establishing legitimacy within the HRM literature. Talent scholars raised calls to develop a broader approach to talent management (Thunnissen, Boselie, & Fruytier, 2013b), and expressed inconsistencies with regards to the operationalization of talent (Dries, 2013a). While these publications provided comparative and critical reviews of the existing talent management literature, they remained silent about the application of paradox theory for talent management. This is somewhat surprising, given Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier’s (2013a) recommendation to advance the talent management literature by borrowing relevant concepts from the HRM research domain.

The present chapter addresses this issue through combining this gap in talent management with the relevance of paradox theory for diversity management. I advocate the paradox lens of theorizing for dovetailing the areas of talent management and diversity management, understood as two sub-domains of HRM. To do so, I first apply a paradox lens to critically review the diversity management and the talent management literature respectively. Second, I connect the two fields and formulate a paradox that becomes apparent when considering talent management and diversity management simultaneously. Later in this chapter I coin this tension as the ‘exclusion-inclusion paradox’, highlighting that talent management and diversity management reflect contradictory principles that persist over time: organizations establish exclusion through a talent management architecture that focuses on the identification and development of a few selected employees, while simultaneously,
organizations strive for inclusion, in the attempt to minimize existing inequalities for traditionally marginalized groups.

Thus, the exclusion-inclusion paradox is an expression of opposing managerial demands that co-exist in organizations derived from different organizational aims, and is in line with the duality lens which assumes that organizations consist of opposing forces (Evans, 1999). Furthermore, the exclusion-inclusion paradox has practical relevance. Once uncovered, it enables organizational actors to make choices on how to respond to the paradox. The options vary between defensive and active responses (Jarzabkowski, Lê, & Van de Ven, 2013; Smith & Lewis, 2011) which might lead to various outcomes. Rather than reconciling the paradox, I argue that there is benefit in actively working through the exclusion-inclusion paradox.

The remainder of this chapter is structured in three sections. Following this introduction, I first review the diversity literature and point out the relevance of paradox theory in gender studies. Second, I review the talent management literature and present four tensions, which I then connect to the paradox lens. Here, the review shows that these tensions in the talent management literature do not necessarily mark paradoxes as defined in the paradox literature, but rather, as bipolar dualities.

Third, I connect the fields of talent management and diversity management through the concept of paradox, and conceptually develop a phenomenon which I frame the exclusion-inclusion paradox. I proceed with a discussion and conclusion on the relevant levels of analysis to further the insights on the exclusions-inclusion paradox.

**Relevance of paradoxes**

Paradoxes appear to be ubiquitous in organizations, both in practice and theory. In practice, organizations increasingly face conditions of plurality, change and scarcity. Additionally, economic globalization, increased speed of information exchange and the demographic shifts towards new habits of spontaneous collaboration result in increased demands on the workforce, especially for employees of internationally operating organizations. In Smith and Lewis’ (2011) words: “As organizational environments become more global, dynamic and competitive, contradictory elements intensify” (p. 381). In order to understand and explain such tensions, the relevance of paradoxes in practice is contested for organizational change processes and managerial sensemaking (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Applying a paradox lens in practice supports managers to consider a both/and perspective, rather than an either/or dilemma - which requires a decision for one alternative at the cost of the other and breaks through paralysis and frustration (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008).
In theory, understanding and exploring paradoxes in organizational studies addresses the complexity of organizational life and acknowledges the existence of various dimensions that simultaneously co-exist (Westenholz, 1993). According to Poole and Van de Ven (1989), analyzing paradoxes stretches the bounds of current thinking and enables scholars to uncover new directions in generating theory. Following Poole and van de Ven’s (1989) definition, I consider a paradox to be loosely defined as an apparent contradiction. Addressing a paradox is neither a compromise nor a split between competing tensions; instead, it is an awareness of both (Eisenhardt, 2000; Lewis, 2000). Aust et al. (2015) acknowledge the relevance of paradox for HRM studies and advocate its importance for two reasons. First, applying a paradox perspective to HRM enables a more systematic analysis of different types of tensions and moves towards acknowledging the potentially positive effects of dealing with paradoxes. Second, in doing so, the HR actors take on an active role to recognize and manage these tensions, and promote that “focusing on tensions can help in finding creative, novel solutions to organizational problems in the pursuit of organizational sustainability” (Aust et al., 2015, p. 198).

Defining paradox and related terms

Related to the term and definition of ‘paradox’ are the terms tension, contradiction, duality and dilemma. In her dissertation, Ehnert (2009) provides definitions and outlines their relevance for HRM. On that basis, I summarize relevant meanings of the key terms and outline their application in this chapter in order to provide construct clarity (Suddaby, 2010) (see Table 2.1). I consider tensions to be the basic elements that form dualities, contradictions, paradoxes or dilemmas. Tensions that involve logical incongruity form a contradiction, of which inconsistency is a key characteristic. Tensions that form a duality compose a couple (i.e. two) contradictions, which are characterized by a reflexive relationship. That is, each pole of a duality requires the other pole also to be present (Ehnert, 2009). In this chapter, I apply the concept of duality to outline and analyze inconsistent couples that create tensions in diversity and talent management. Broader than a duality, a paradox is characterized by multiple opposing tensions which operate simultaneously and which persist over time. According to Ybema (1996), a paradox points at an “unthought-of possibility, a blind spot in oppositional thinking” (p. 40) as it stands in contrast to what is expected and thus reveals an element of surprise (Ybema & Kamsteeg, 2009). In addition, paradox is also used as an analytical tool, i.e. as a mental construct, which enables new insights and which allows one to analyze tensions and to identify key oppositions (Cameron & Quinn, 1988; Ehnert, 2009). In this dissertation, I apply both meanings of paradox.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition (Oxford English Dictionary)</th>
<th>Existing application in HRM</th>
<th>Application in this dissertation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>A straining, or strained condition, of the mind, feelings, or nerves; Straining of the mental powers or faculties; severe or strenuous intellectual effort; intense application</td>
<td>Similar elements that lead to dilemma, duality, or paradox</td>
<td>Basic elements that form dualities, contradiction, paradoxes, dilemmas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contradiction</td>
<td>A statement that contradicts or denies the truth or correctness of another; Logical inconsistency or incongruity</td>
<td>Inconsistency is key characteristic</td>
<td>Links to existing research: key dualities are identified and analyzed for diversity management and talent management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duality</td>
<td>The condition or fact of being dual, or consisting of two parts, natures, etc.; twofold condition</td>
<td>A contradictory couple creates the tension; Complementary oppositions; Each pole of a duality requires that the other is also present (reflexive relationship); One pole of duality produces the other and vice versa; Two opposing poles, characterized by their co-existence</td>
<td>Links to existing research: key dualities are identified and analyzed for diversity management and talent management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradox</td>
<td>An apparently absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition, or a strongly counter-intuitive one, which investigation, analysis, or explanation may nevertheless prove to be well-founded or true; A proposition or statement that is (taken to be) actually self-contradictory, absurd, or intrinsically unreasonable</td>
<td>Paradox is used as an analytical tool, i.e. mental construct, enabling creative insights, to analyze tensions and to identify key oppositions; Interesting and thought provoking contradictions of all sorts; Describes tensions or oppositions that have been detected in HRM theory; Broader than duality, allowing more than one contradictory couple creating the tensions; several different aspects of a problem are opposing each other; multiple opposing forces operate simultaneously; Different than dilemma, no choice needs to be made between two or more contradictions; both contradictions in a paradox are accepted and present, they operate simultaneously; Different than contradiction, paradoxes can be contradictory, but they do not necessarily have to be</td>
<td>Lens of theorizing as well as label for simultaneous, contradictory and interrelated principles that persist over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dilemma</td>
<td>A choice between two (or, loosely, several) alternatives, which are or appear equally unfavorable; a position of doubt or perplexity, a ‘fix’</td>
<td>A choice needs to be made between two or more contradictions; A situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between two alternatives, especially when a decision either way will bring undesirable consequences; An either-or situation</td>
<td>Comes to play when individual/managerial choices need to be made</td>
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</table>

*Source*: compiled by the author on basis of Oxford English Dictionary (2015); Ehnert (2009)
I use paradox as a lens of theorizing and I use paradox as a denotation for the simultaneously opposing forces in an outlined context. Dualities as well as paradoxes can turn into a dilemma if a choice needs to be made between the opposing forces. This becomes relevant when individual or managerial decisions are required in organizational life.

**Observer related nature of constructs.** The presented differentiation between the terms tension, contradiction, duality, paradox and dilemma allows me to distinguish between the meanings and characteristics of opposing conceptual or material elements. At this stage, it is relevant to mention the observer-related nature of these constructs (Ehnert, 2009). That means that the assessment - as to what extent elements are contradicting or consistent - depends on the observer. What may be contradicting for one observer may be consistent for another. These observer-related differences have been highlighted in cultural studies, such as perceived differences between Japanese and Western cultures (Johnston & Selsky, 2006). In line with the observer-related nature of constructs, Davis (1971) points out that various audiences hold different assumptions as to what is relevant and thus interesting to them. Given my intention to apply the paradox perspective to the two HRM sub-domains of talent management and diversity management, observer-related differences might occur due to the different backgrounds and research traditions in each domain. Yet, I believe that applying the paradox lens as analytical tool will enable me to dovetail the two domains and to present pertaining coexisting tensions that result from juxtaposing different elements.

**Addressing paradoxes**

According to Smith and Lewis (2011), a paradox theory presumes at its core that “tensions are integral to complex systems and that sustainability depends on attending to contradictory yet interwoven demands simultaneously” (p. 397). Poole and van de Ven (1989) confirm that working with paradoxes is challenging, and that there is no single best way to address a paradox. Bartunek (1988) contests that a paradox perspective creates awareness of blind spots, and ways in which they can be reframed. For organizational actors and scholars, the simultaneous co-existence of contradicting elements offers various options for addressing paradoxes. In recent paradox literature, the distinction between defensive and active responses has been proposed (Aust et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

**Defensive responses.** Once paradoxes are manifested, they spur responses. Defensive reactions categorize a rather passive form of addressing paradoxes, and do not provide long-term relief. Instead, they may offer temporal solutions to overcome the paradoxical tensions, without providing new ways of dealing with paradoxes (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). As these defensive responses address the passive examination of the paradoxical tensions, this
category of responses may spur vicious cycles that provoke managerial paralysis and organizational inertia, because organizational actors are not willing to compromise (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Examples of defensive responses include ignoring, denying, repressing or separating (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). Separating a paradox can take two different forms, considering spatial or temporal aspects (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989). Spatial separation implies assigning a different physical or social locus to each of the aspects, such as micro or macro levels. Temporal separation takes the role of time into account, assuming that the various aspects hold during different periods of time. However, separating paradoxes does not take transitions into account and therefore creates a dichotomy of perspectives rather than allowing for new insights (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989). Thus, defensive responses imply an either/or choice between the opposing poles, rather than acknowledging the persistent co-existence of contradicting elements.

**Active responses.** Addressing paradoxes in an active manner implies to consider contradicting tensions to a more equal extent. Acknowledging the dynamic and persistent nature of tensions may lead to virtuous cycles, fostering new perspectives and creative reactions to paradoxes which enable the opposing tensions to co-exist (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Examples of active responses include transcendence or acceptance. *Transcendence* of a paradox refers to synthesizing the opposing elements to a higher level, and implies finding a new perspective that eliminates the contradiction, for example on the basis of newly introduced constructs or through a new perspective (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989).

*Accepting* a paradox implies to embrace it and to use it constructively, without ignoring or suppressing it (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989). This can be achieved by juxtaposing contradicting perspectives and includes the understanding that these different viewpoints can inform each other. Thus, according to Poole and Van de Ven (1989), accepting paradoxes can produce new insights and theory. Beech, Burns, de Caestecker, MacIntosh, and MacLean (2004) analyzed the experience and consequences of holding a paradox open and ‘working through it’. The authors conclude that actively resisting coming to intellectual closure enables actors to transform existing tensions into new forms (Beech et al., 2004). On an individual level, concepts such as ‘doublethink’ (El-Sawad, Arnold, & Cohen, 2004), ‘Janusian thinking’ (Rothenberg, 1971), or the ‘dialogical self’ (Hermans, 1996, 2003) highlight that actors can produce and benefit from holding contradictory propositions simultaneously. Ybema (1996) conceptually unfroze the boundary between the integration and differentiation perspective and concluded that consensus and dissensus occur simultaneously in interpersonal and intergroup relations in the interface of harmony and conflict. Lüscher and Lewis (2008) highlighted that supporting managers to work through paradoxes which arise
during organizational change processes enabled new forms of sensemaking which in turn affected the perception and acceptance of dealing with persistent tensions on an individual, group and organizational level.

Taken together, there is benefit in holding contradicting tensions simultaneously with the acknowledgement that these tensions do not necessarily require resolution. Or, in line with the dialogical self theory, letting multiple internal voices speak allows for the creation of new information (Hermans, 1996). Active responses to paradoxes thus apply a long-term orientation as they acknowledge paradox as inherent contradictions, which can be powerful in providing new insights and creating new boundaries (Aust et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). Promoting a paradox lens of theorizing thus means that instead of applying an ‘either/or’ dichotomy for resolving paradoxes, a more interdependent ‘both/and’ perspective is suggested (Aust et al., 2015; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Ybema, 1996).

Recently, the paradox perspective has increasingly been applied in the HRM literature (e.g. Aust et al., 2015; Boselie, Brewster, & Paauwe, 2009; Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Ehnert, 2009; Francis & Keegan, 2006). However, in sub-domains of HRM, such as diversity management and talent management, the paradox perspective has not been adopted to the same extent, as the next two sections will highlight.

**Applying the paradox lens to diversity management**

One HRM sub-domain where the paradox lens has been applied in previous research is diversity management, especially in the area of gender studies. In this section I define diversity and diversity management, before I move on to review existing literature that has adopted a paradox perspective as an analytical lens to provide insights into the reasons of the prevailing gender inequality in organizations.

**Defining diversity**

Research in the diversity management field dates back to the late 1980s, and originally emerged in the United States as an evolution of equal employment opportunity (Kossek & Pichler, 2007). In order to define the concept of diversity, two trains of thoughts can be distinguished.

**Compositional approach.** Most diversity scholars consider the *compositional approach* of diversity, which focuses on individual differences such as demographic (e.g. age, gender, tenure) or psychological attributes (e.g. personality or behavioral style) in a work group or organization unit (Jonsen, Maznevski, & Schneider, 2011; Kossek & Pichler, 2007; Prasad, Pringle, & Konrad, 2006; Thomas & Ely, 1996). In this vein, Harrison and Sin (2006, p. 196) define diversity as “collective amount of differences among members within a social
unit”, and Kossek and Pichler (2007, p. 255) consider a diverse organization to “have numerical representation of individuals from different backgrounds”. Thus, according to the compositional approach, diversity is conceptualized as one overall variable applicable to all units. Considering diversity as the totality of individual attributes implies that diversity affects unit-level outcomes, such as creativity or decision making of the entire work group or organization (Guillaume, Brodbeck, & Riketta, 2012). Furthermore, the compositional approach implies that diversity affects all individuals of a unit in the same way, and thus distracts from systematic inequalities between certain social groups within a unit (Guillaume et al., 2012; Linnehan & Konrad, 1999; Ossenkop, 2015).

**Relational approach.** In contrast to the compositional approach to diversity stands the relational approach. The focus of the relational approach is described as “the relationship between the individual’s characteristics (e.g., in respect to a demographic or personality attribute) and the distribution of these characteristics in the individual’s unit” (Guillaume et al., 2012, p. 81). This approach acknowledges existing power differences of social groups within a unit, which may lead to systematic inequalities between members of different social groups (Prasad et al., 2006). Guillaume and his colleagues highlight that this relational approach takes an “individual-within-the-group-perspective” and represents a “function of people’s relative level of dissimilarity in a unit” (Guillaume et al., 2012, p. 81). Konrad (2003) links the notion of group identity to the relational approach of diversity when she argues: “sets of individuals find themselves sharing a common fate as organizations systematically treat them to various routines and standard operating procedures” (p. 8).

In this dissertation, I define diversity in line with the relational approach of diversity and thus agree with Ossenkop’s (2015) argument that “the definition of diversity according to the relational approach provides room for individual perceptions of relative (dis)similarity in terms of specific attributes in relation to the others in the same unit (pp. 18, original emphasis). That means that according to the relational approach, diversity differs per unit. As I will explore later on in this chapter, the talent pool is such a unit that receives heightened attention in an organization, and within that unit, there are different degrees of similarity. Considering the relational approach of diversity will enable me to link diversity with talent management and to critically identify and analyze tensions in the talent management field.

**Diversity management**

In line with the relational approach of diversity, Linnehan and Konrad (1999) consider diversity management as organizational efforts to reduce intergroup inequalities. Diversity management initiatives have been established in many organizations, as well as in the public and non-profit sector, and the relevance has been established well beyond the USA
- such as in Europe, Asia and the Middle East (Prasad et al., 2006). Özbilgin, Tatli, and Jones (2015) highlight the differences between local and global diversity management practices in large organizations. While local diversity management is focused on formulating and implementing relevant diversity policies in the specific national context, global diversity management is focused on the development and coordination of diversity initiatives that reach across subsidiaries and national borders with the aim to promote organizational cultures and structures which leverage the overall diversity within the entire organization (Özbilgin et al., 2015).

Özbilgin et al. (2015) define global diversity management as:

| Planning, coordination and implementation of a set of management strategies, policies, initiatives and training and development activities that seek to accommodate diverse sets of social and individual backgrounds, interests, beliefs, values and ways of work in organizations with international, multinational, global and transnational workforces and operations. (p.10) |

In line with the conceptual split between local and global diversity management, many international organizations have established positions or even departments that focus on local and global diversity initiatives (Özbilgin et al., 2015). Given the continued overrepresentation of men in managerial positions across the world, global as well as local diversity management practices include diversity initiatives with the aim to move towards gender parity. In the next section, I will review findings that shed light on the persistent inequalities in terms of access to opportunities and outcomes between men and women in organizations.

**Prevailing gender inequality in organizations**

A continued overrepresentation of white men characterizes the workforce at an increased rate at higher hierarchical levels, in private organizations and in the public sector. This signifies that the upward mobility of women or non-whites does not equal that of men. Existing gender studies have addressed this phenomenon, aiming to explain underlying factors and to propose avenues to move towards gender parity. Ellemers (2014) summarizes previously researched mechanisms which prevent women from making the same career choices as men, and concludes that individuals and organizations mutually influence each other. This is in line with Martell, Emrich and Robison-Cox’s (2012) multilevel emergent theory of gender segregation in organizations, highlighting that gender inequality arises from a system of micro-level and macro-level forces. In Faulkner’s (2009a) words, prevailing gender exclusive dynamics create initially small differences between men and women that cumulatively “amount to a dripping tap effect” (p.15), leading to structurally embedded
inequalities. Thus, while “there is no silver bullet to secure equal career opportunities for men and women” (Ellemers, 2014, p. 52), gaining more insights in the prevailing mechanisms may enable individuals as well as organizations to create change. Acker (2006) refers to the organizational structures as ‘inequality regimes’, defined as “interlinked organizing processes that produce patterns of complex inequalities” (p. 459). West and Zimmerman (1987) coined the term ‘doing gender in organizations’, which refers to “a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’” (p.126). Thus, the prevailing gender inequality in organizations is a consequence of individual as well as organizational factors that mutually affect and reinforce each other.

**Paradoxes in gender studies**

Applying a paradox lens to gender studies facilitates the identification of simultaneously existing contradictions in gendered organizational systems, and thus facilitates the sensemaking process of social phenomena (Hearn, 1998). Furthermore, manifesting paradoxes enables social actors to “reflect on current practices, question certain tacit rules and act otherwise” (Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009, p. 466) and thus creates the possibility for change. In recent years, the paradox perspective has been applied as a means of theorizing in a number of gender studies, contributing to the understanding of prevalent practices in the private sector as well as in academic institutions. Examples highlight simultaneous, contradicting, yet interrelated principles that persist over time and as a consequence, offer insights in the prevailing gender inequality in organizations. As illustrated in the visualization below, four examples are: (1) the visibility paradox (Faulkner, 2009a, 2009b; Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009), (2) the support paradox (Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014), (3) the ambition paradox (Sools et al., 2007), and (4) the boardroom paradox (Pesonen et al., 2009). Figure 2.1 presents the four examples in a matrix reflecting the context of academia and practice in which the respective studies have been conducted as well as the upward mobility continuum, indicating that the paradoxes might occur at different career stages. The empirical evidence for four out of five described paradoxes stems from studies that have been conducted in northern Europe, and thus heightens the relevance of shifting existing barriers for the advancement of female managers in this geographical area. This is in line with the call from Nishii and Özbilgin (2007) to embed diversity management approaches in the national context.
Figure 2.1. Examples of paradoxes in gender studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Support paradox (Van den Brink &amp; Stobbe, 2014): Imbalance between the support that men and women receive during their careers: Men’s support during their academic career tends to be taken for granted; women are expected to advance on their own in order to prove that they are sufficiently qualified. Hence, women are caught in the double bind as gender equality programs are considered as simultaneously necessary and harmful for their careers.</th>
<th>Ambition paradox (Sools et al., 2007): Both men and women are expected to show ambition without being overly overt about it. Yet, women are simultaneously caught in a double bind position as they have to counter both, the assumption that they lack ambition, and at the same time they have to counter being perceived to ‘do ambition’ in the ‘wrong’ hierarchical way.</th>
<th>Boardroom paradox (Pesonen et al., 2009): Contradicting elements in the discourses of female boardroom members about accessing and succeeding in corporate boards: The discourse of competence considers boardroom access and success as gender-neutral, while the discourse of gender builds on essential differences. Thus, gender is considered to simultaneously matter and being irrelevant.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>Visibility Paradox (Van den Brink &amp; Stobbe, 2009; Faulkner 2009a; 2009b): Women engineers and women science students are simultaneously visible as women yet invisible as engineers/students; perceptions of functional expertise are accompanied with a showpiece status and require excellence, i.e. the need to outperform other students or colleagues.</td>
<td>Meritocracy Paradox (Castilla &amp; Benard, 2010): Meritocratic systems are widely accepted and applied as fair organizational practice, yet, simultaneously managers are more likely to promote and reward men in comparison to women. Thus, in the attempt to create fair and transparent treatment for all employees, unfair treatment is reproduced.</td>
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Source: Compiled by the author
The relevance of paradoxes in diversity and talent management: The exclusion-inclusion paradox

The visibility paradox has been described in the context of academia (Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009) as well as in practice, for the occupational group of female engineers (Faulkner, 2009a). The described paradox highlights that female science students as well as female engineers face the double bind of being simultaneously visible (as women) and invisible (as subject matter experts).

The support paradox describes the imbalance between the support that women and men receive throughout their academic career (Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014). While the support that men receive to advance their careers tends to be taken for granted, women are expected to advance on their own. Thus, formalized gender equality programs with the goal to support women to achieve upward mobility are considered simultaneously as necessary and harmful.

The ambition paradox highlights that both men and women are expected to show ambition in an organization without being overly overt about it in order to advance their careers (Sools et al., 2007). Women however face a heightened dilemma of showing ambition in the ‘right’ way, especially in combination with the general expectation that young women are bound to have children and as a consequence will lose all interest, and thus ambition for advancing their career.

The boardroom paradox describes contradicting elements in the discourses of female boardroom members about accessing and succeeding in corporate boards (Pesonen et al., 2009). While the discourse of competence considers boardroom access and success as gender-neutral practice, the discourse of gender builds on essential differences. Thus, gender is simultaneously considered to be important and irrelevant.

In addition to these four examples, the paradox of meritocracy exemplifies the role of organizational culture in maintaining prevailing inequalities. This paradox may occur in both contexts, academia as well as practice throughout all hierarchical levels. Castilla and Benard (2010) highlight in a series of three experimental studies conducted in the United States that when an organizational culture advocates meritocracy, managers are more likely to promote and reward men in comparison to women. These results stand in contrast to the general acceptance of meritocratic systems as a fair organizational practice, where “everyone has an equal chance to advance and obtain rewards based on their individual merits and efforts” (Castilla & Benard, 2010, p. 543). Thus, in the attempt to create fair and transparent treatment for all employees, unfair treatment is reproduced. Similar to the findings from Castilla and Benard’s (2010) study, Kumra’s (2014) review of meritocracy points out that the seemingly objective character of the construct can be supplemented with a rather subjective notion, when she states: “Thus meritocracy, far from being the guardian of objectivity, fairness, and the reward for hard work it is purported to be often entails elements of subjectivity,
unfairness, and rewards ascriptive characteristics rather than achievement” (Kumra, 2014, p. 285). Castilla and Benard (2010) propose two underlying mechanisms for the paradoxical effects found in their studies: moral credentials and a sense of personal objectivity. On the basis of the moral credential argument (Monin & Miller, 2001), meritocratic moral credentialing suggests that because of the organizational culture that fosters meritocracy, managers are more likely to perceive the organization and themselves as unbiased, and therefore do not assess their own behaviors for signs of favoritism (Castilla & Benard, 2010). Applying the personal objectivity argument (Uhlmann & Cohen, 2007) to the meritocracy paradox refers to the fact that if the organizational advocates meritocracy as relevant value, managers may feel that they are acting fair and objective, and as a consequence feel legitimized to act on their beliefs, even if these include negative stereotypes about women (Castilla & Benard, 2010).

To summarize, applying a paradox perspective to identify and analyze underlying mechanisms that affect the continued overrepresentation of white men in organizations is a suitable approach to distill persistent contradicting factors on the individual as well as organizational level in diversity management studies. Linking the paradox perspective with related fields within the HRM domain would provide additional avenues to create further insights in diversity management. Talent management is such a possible field, as the next section will highlight.

Applying the paradox lens to talent management

Another HRM sub-domain where the paradox lens has not yet been explicitly applied is talent management. In this section I define talent management and differentiate it from related concepts such as management development. I then move on to present four conceptual tensions that are currently debated in talent management literature and review them from a paradox perspective.

Defining and differentiating talent management

Talent management is a relatively young research field, which has grown in the last decade (Collings, Scullion, & Vaiman, 2015; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, & González-Cruz, 2013). The interest in talent management was catalyzed by an article on the “war of talent” in 1998, in which a McKinsey & Co study highlighted the need to elevate talent management to a “burning corporate priority” (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin, & Michaels, 1998, p. 46). Since then, a steadily growing number of publications attest that talent management has grown as a sub-domain of HRM - and that talent management represents more than a relabeled version of an existing HRM sub-domain (e.g. Collings et al., 2015;
Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Thunnissen et al., 2013a). Metaphorically speaking, talent management is more than ‘old wine in new bottles’ (Chuai, Preece, & Iles, 2008).

In order to describe talent management, Collings and Mellahi (2009) integrate three core elements in their proposed talent management definition: the emphasis on key positions, the development of a talent pool of high performing and high potential employees and the importance of a differentiated human resource architecture. On this basis, talent management is defined as:

Activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organization’s sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization. (Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p. 305)

Prior to the emergence of talent management as a HRM sub-domain, other HRM sub-domains of have focused on the identification and retention of a selected group of employees who hold key positions. For example, Jansen, Paffen, Thunnissen and Thijssen (2012) compared talent management to management development and career development – two concepts, which received heightened attention in the years prior to the rise of talent management. Jansen, Van der Velde and Mul (2001) define management development as “the system of personnel practices by which an organization tries to guarantee the timely availability of qualified and motivated employees for its key positions” (p. 106). Based on a survey conducted in 1997 of 92 Dutch large and medium sized organizations, the authors identified four types of management development according to the dimension ‘organization development’ (emphasis on the importance of filling key positions) and the dimension ‘personal development’ (emphasis on the importance of the individual) (Jansen et al., 2001). The first type, administrative management development, is characterized by being low on both dimensions, and reflects management development as an internally oriented, administrative process. The second type, derived management development, is high on the organization development dimension and low on the personal development dimension and represents a focus on the company strategy. Management development is seen as a support system to enable the achievement of company objectives. The third type, partner management development, is characterized by being high on both dimensions, and serves the goal to combine external business opportunities with internal human potential. Lastly, the fourth type, leading management development, is low on the organization development dimension, and high on the personal development dimension. In this category, the unique knowledge and
skills of talented employees determine the company’s strategy and its realization. Although Jansen et al. (2001) found a representation of all four types of management development in their study sample, management development is seen to emphasize the organizational goals as a central element (Jansen et al., 2012) and thus is to a lesser extent concerned with the identification and personal development of the employees who are supposed to fulfill the organizational objectives, which are referred to as talents. In contrast to the focus on the organization in management development, the concept of career management addresses the individual to a higher extent. At its core, career management can be described as an instrument to ensure the qualitative and quantitative demands of personnel in an organization now and in the future, which is accomplished through investing in the development of employees on all levels (Jansen et al., 2012). In this vein, some examples of development initiatives include coaching, mentoring, training or development conversations (Jansen et al., 2012).

The authors introduce talent management as the most recent concept, which has gained international attention and a vast growing body of literature across the world (e.g. Stahl et al., 2012; Tarique & Schuler, 2010). While the target audience of talent management activities initially focused on more junior, high potential employees, the scope has shifted to the entire workforce and thus overlaps with management development and career management (Jansen et al., 2012).

Nowadays, when keying the three terms ‘management development’, ‘career development’ and ‘talent management’ into a generic search engine, such as Google scholar, the publication dates of the presented hits show that the search term ‘talent management’ yields the most recent publications and literature reviews. This confirms the increased relevance of talent management in the last decade. Furthermore, talent management is studied in geographic areas across the world, whereas management development and career development have mainly been studied in Europe, and especially in the Netherlands. Given the increased relevance of talent management as a sub-domain of HRM in the recent years, I therefore focus on talent management for the remainder of this dissertation.

Current debates in the talent management literature highlight the lack of consistent definitions and frameworks, arguing that the field would benefit from a plurality of perspectives (Dries, 2013b). In a similar vein, Thunnissen, Boselie and Fruytier (2013a, 2013b) critically review the talent management literature and propose a pluralistic perspective in order to establish legitimacy within the HRM research domain. Yet, unlike in the HRM and diversity management fields, the paradox perspective has received little consideration in talent management. One seemingly single exception is Nicky Dries’ dissertation with the title “Different ladder, different story? Dissecting the talent management
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In the overall introduction, the author refers to a paradox when comparing the management literature with the careers literature. In the management literature, talent management is defined as “strategic imperative”. In contrast, the postmodern career context threatens the underlying principle of talent management programs, which implies that identified talents will be rewarded with accelerated career opportunities (Dries, 2009). However, while Dries contributes significantly to the advancement of talent management research through her dissertation and subsequent publications, she does not utilize paradox as an analytical tool for her theoretical arguments. I propose to adopt the paradox perspective in talent management in order to analyze existing conceptual tensions that have been previously described and argue that doing so will contribute to establishing legitimacy of the field.

Four conceptual tensions in talent management

In this section I depict four conceptual tensions in talent management, and apply a paradox lens - as I discuss the extent to which these tensions comprise an opposing, simultaneous and persistent coexistence of interrelated principles (Aust et al., 2015). I illustrate the scholarly debate between the (1) inclusive and exclusive scope of talent management, tensions with regards to the (2) goal and (3) outcome of talent management, and (4) methodological considerations to advance the field of talent management. In line with the definitions of paradox, duality and dilemma provided in Table 2.1, I conclude that the tensions in the talent management literature do not necessarily mark paradoxes, but rather, bipolar dualities.

Inclusive and exclusive scope of talent management. The debate between the inclusive and exclusive scope of talent management addresses various perspectives around the focus of talent management, and has been described as the “hottest topic within the already hot topic that is talent management” (Dries, 2013b, p. 269). To date, there is no agreement in the talent management literature whether talent management should focus on all employees (inclusive) or only on a few selected employees (exclusive).

The ‘inclusive’ or ‘diversity’ approach advocates that everyone in an organization should be considered as talent, and that it is a role of talent management to create conditions in which individual talents can be leveraged in order to add value to the organization (Ingham, 2006; O'Reilly III & Pfeffer, 2000). An inclusive definition of talent is based on the resource-based approach, which aims at “recognizing where each employee’s area of natural talents lie, and figuring out how to help each employee develop the job-specific skills and knowledge to turn those talents into real performance” (Buckingham & Vosburgh, 2001, p. 22). Critics of the inclusive approach argue that talent management would be equal to
conventional HRM (Collings & Mellahi, 2009) and that it would be both not strategic and inconsistent with current demands (R. E. Lewis & Heckman, 2006).

In contrast to the inclusive approach to talent management stands the ‘exclusive’ or ‘elitist’ definition of talent management. This approach advocates investing selectively in talent. Swailes (2013) describes the exclusive perspective of talent management as “an approach in which a small proportion of a workforce is singled-out for special treatment on the basis of perceived high potential” (p. 355). Other authors advocate the importance of high performance and the contribution to company performance in key positions as relevant factors for the identification as talent (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; R. E. Lewis & Heckman, 2006). In their review of the talent concept, Gallardo-Gallardo and her colleagues summarize the critics to the exclusive talent management perspective, highlighting the inherent subjectivity of potential and performance assessments - as well as the risk that the focus on a few identified talents might have negative consequences for the morale and performance of the “non-talents” (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). With regards to the practical application, Stahl et al. (2012) found out that the two approaches on talent management are not mutually exclusive, as many of the studied companies apply both perspectives simultaneously and thus create a hybrid approach.

Linking the debate between the inclusive and exclusive focus of talent management to the paradox lens highlights the characteristics of a duality. That is, the inclusive and exclusive focus of talent management form two opposing poles that seem to co-exist. Focusing on one pole, e.g. on the inclusive nature of talent management means to neglect the differentiated role of some employees, which is advocated by the exclusive view of talent management. The findings presented by Stahl et al. (2012) indicate that in organizational practice, this duality exists without necessarily requiring a choice between the inclusive or exclusive focus on talent management. Yet, the ongoing debate in the talent management literature presents this duality as a dilemma, requiring a choice to be made for one of the two poles. On this basis, the exclusive talent management approach is prevailing for the purpose of theorizing and researching talent management (Swailes, 2013).

**Goal of talent management.** The second conceptual tension that has been discussed in recent talent management literature addresses the goal of talent management. Central to this tension is the question around the intended organizational effects and outcomes of talent management. Based on their literature review, Thunnissen et al. (2013a) highlight that there is no agreement whether talent management should focus on profit maximization, or on broader, societal goals. Based on the shareholder value paradigm, many authors follow Cappelli’s (2008) claim that “Talent management is not an end in itself. […] It exists to support the organization’s overall objectives, which in business essentially amount to making
money” (p. 3). Thunnissen et al. (2013a) critically argue that this unitarist approach to talent management neglects the wider role of talent management in society. Ramstad and Boudreau (2005) claim that the objective of talent management should be to seek sustainability, and should therefore not be limited to the aim of financial return of the organization. Recent publications emphasize the importance of the macro view in global talent management, focusing on country effects that influence the broader society (Khilji, Tarique, & Schuler, 2015), and address the link to diversity management (Al Ariss, Cascio, & Paauwe, 2014). Thus, the tensions around the goal of talent management address differences concerning the time perspective: from short term, financial company success towards a longer term orientation, in order to enable future generations to fulfill their needs.

Applying a paradox lens to this conceptual tension around the goal of talent management highlights that following organizational goals versus societal goals represents two simultaneous, contradictory and yet interrelated principles that persist over time – and is thus in line with the definition of duality. In the HRM literature, Evans (1999) describes the temporal trade off between short- and long-term orientations as one of the most important dualities in the HRM field. Applying a paradox lens to this contradiction in talent management thus implies to consider a both/and perspective. That is, rather than adhering to one of the goals of talent management (i.e. short term financial success or long term sustainability) at the expense of the other goal, a more simultaneous response to both goals is advocated. For this purpose, Evans (1999) proposes to encourage decision-making processes that maintain the tension between the contradicting poles. For example, with regards to talent development, the balancing act between short- and long-term goals would mean to implement development programs that outlast financial drawbacks in the annual company performance.

**Outcome of talent management.** The third conceptual tension in talent management focuses on the outcome of talent management, and addresses the individual, micro perspective. Current talent management literature suggests that being identified as talent leads to more favorable outcomes than not being identified as a talent in an organization (Gelens, Dries, Hofmans, & Pepermans, 2013). Positive outcomes include higher organizational commitment (Marescaux, De Winne, & Sels, 2013) as well as higher commitment to increased performance demands, building skills and supporting strategic priorities (Björkman, Ehrnrooth, Mäkelä, Smale, & Sumelius, 2013). While talents perceive increased engagement, motivation and exhibit extra-role behavior (Cheese, Farley, & Gibbons, 2009; Collings & Mellahi, 2009), organizations benefit from this effect and increase their overall performance. Within the talent management literature, provided explanations for these positive effects rest on the concepts of the Pygmalion and Golem effect. The Pygmalion effect describes that other’s expectations (e.g. from the manager) of high performance...
determine the actual performance of identified talents in a positive way (Dries, 2013a; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Swailes, 2013). The adverse effect concerns the motivation and performance of those employees in an organization who are not labeled as talents. It is referred to as Golem effect, describing that those employees who perceive low expectations from their managers - because they are not considered as talents - may decrease their motivation and actual performance (Swailes, 2013). Thus, the Pygmalion and Golem effects describe a dichotomy: identified talents benefit from the talent management architecture, while those who are not identified as talents suffer. However, literature from related HRM fields such as the careers literature offers different suggestions. For example, in their conceptual article about top management selection, Vinkenburg, Jansen, Dries, and Pepermans (2014) present the metaphor of an arena as a critical framework for top management selection in which they distinguish between arena entry (i.e. being shortlisted for a top management position) versus arena success (i.e. being selected for promotion). The authors highlight that due to this two-step model, those who are not chosen for promotion still remain motivated and committed (Vinkenburg et al., 2014). Linking this concept to talent management indicates that ‘non-talents’ might actually work harder in order to get to the inner circle, i.e. to become a member of the talent pool.

Applying a paradox lens to the tensions around the outcome of talent management for talents and non-talents thus suggest that being identified as a talent might bear positive outcomes, as well as challenges or negative outcomes. More research is needed on the individual and group level in order to explore the positive and negative outcomes of talents, as well as non-talents, to explore the factors that contribute to the outcomes of talent management. Chapter 4 addresses this quest through studying the benefits and drawbacks of being identified as talent in a multinational organization.

**Methodological considerations in talent management research.** Lastly, the fourth conceptual tension that I consider to be relevant for the advancement of the talent management research concerns methodological considerations.

On the one hand, there is the appeal to “design, conduct, and publish top-tier academic work” (Dries, 2013b, p. 268) in order to advance talent management as a serious research field. Collings, Scullion and Vaiman (2015) endorse this direction and conclude that the “conceptual understanding of the area of talent management continues to evolve at a high pace” (p. 234). However, producing top-tier academic work implies focus on methods that are widely accepted for publication, such as quantitative research or qualitative studies that follow a positivistic research approach (Symon & Cassell, 2006). Yanow and Schwarz-Shea (2014) describe traditional qualitative methods as constructivist-interpretative methods and
distinguish them from quantitative and qualitative methods that fit in a more positivist approach.

On the other hand, there is an understanding that the talent management domain requires the inclusion of various perspectives, and as Dries (2013b) puts it, “a critical mindset that leaves ample space for alternative understandings of the meanings and effects of talent management in organizations” (P. 270). In a similar vein, McDonnell (2011) suggests considering qualitative methodologies including narrative, or ethno-methodological approaches that allow for grounded theory building in talent management. Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe (2014) propose a research agenda to advance talent management that includes diversified research methods and data sources. The authors place particular emphasis on the need to gain deeper understanding of individual experiences, which can be obtained through applying qualitative research methods that go beyond traditional interviews (Al Ariss et al., 2014). One example of an innovative research approach is autoethnography, an approach that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experiences in order to extend sociological understanding (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

The opposing forces of applying positivistic versus constructionist-interpretive research methods in talent management thus pose a dilemma for talent management researchers: Pursuing positivistic research methods has the advantage of “established credibility, familiarity, and well-known and understood assessment criteria” (Symon & Cassell, 2006, p. 310) that encompasses publications and funding, whereas following innovative research methods might be more difficult to publish and to gain academic recognition. Sparkes (2000) provides insights into the criteria applied by reviewers to judge an autoethnographic paper for submission in a leading journal, and highlights that autoethnography is located on the “boundaries of disciplinary practices (…) [which] raises questions as to what constitutes proper research” (Sparkes, 2000, p. 21). In his paper, he provides a selection of reviewer comments and illuminates the value of submitting and publishing autoethnographic work (Sparkes, 2000). In the acknowledgement of this methodological tension, Symon and Cassell (2006) propose to integrate different methodological perspectives into the research, writing and teaching of organizational psychology. Following this argument, and in line with paradox theory, I propose that a combination of various methods in talent management research would contribute to establishing legitimacy of the field - as it would enable the exploration of phenomena from various perspectives.
Paradoxes in talent management

I have outlined four conceptual tensions in the area of talent management. First, the duality between the inclusive or exclusive approach of talent management; second, the tensions around the goal of talent management to benefit the organization versus society in a broader sense, that might lead to a dilemma in case a decision for either pole is required; third, tensions around the outcome of talent management that call for more research to explore the consequences of the Pygmalion and Golem effects in talent management; and fourth, the dilemma around methodological considerations with regards to conducting and publishing positivistic versus constructivist-interpretative research - such as autoethnography - in order to provide a set of different perspectives to the talent management literature. This list of prevailing conceptual tensions is not exhaustive; I consider it rather a review of the most relevant discussions that are ongoing in the talent management field.

In applying paradox as an analytical tool to these conceptual tensions I advocate a plurality of perspectives to consider both/and options, rather than calling for either/or decisions with regards to the outlined tensions. Yet, reviewing the outlined tensions critically, I do not consider them to reveal surprise elements or thought-provoking contradictions, nor do they seem to uncover blind spots – characteristics which have been considered relevant for uncovering paradoxes (Ybema, 1996). Instead, the described tensions highlight debates that are currently discussed in the talent management field, with the intention to demarcate its boundaries in comparison to the HRM field (Thunnissen et al., 2013a). Doing so contributes to the maturation of talent management as research domain, as it caters to the quest for an increased plurality (Thunnissen et al., 2013b).

In summary, the preceding talent management literature review highlights that the presented conceptual contradictions do not mark paradoxes, but clear tensions instead. However, when combining talent management with diversity management, a paradox arises. In the next section I will elaborate on this argument.

Dovetailing diversity and talent management

After describing prevalent tensions within the respective diversity management and talent management fields, I now turn towards dovetailing, that is integrating and aligning the fields. Considering simultaneously prevalent tensions within the respective diversity management and talent management research fields enables me to bring to the fore a contradiction between the fields, which I term the exclusion-inclusion paradox. This paradox is based on the dominance of the exclusive approach of talent management in contemporary talent management literature (Swailes, 2013) and builds on the key focus of diversity management, that is to decrease systematic inequalities between social groups within an
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organization (Guillaume et al., 2012). In order to formulate the paradox, I follow Lüscher and Lewis’ (2008) proposed process of working through paradox, and formulate consecutively a problem, a dilemma, and ultimately a paradox that embraces the simultaneous, contradictory and interrelated principles of talent and diversity management. By doing so, I contest the currently ongoing activity of ignoring the link between talent management and diversity management - and advocate that the fields should be dovetailed.

The exclusion-inclusion paradox

Problem. Lüscher and Lewis (2008) present a collaborative process of working through paradox. While the authors applied this process in an action learning research project, I utilize the outlined steps to conceptually develop the exclusion-inclusion paradox. In essence, the exclusion-inclusion paradox describes the need for organizational actors to simultaneously engage in exclusive talent management practices while embracing diversity and inclusion principles.

According to Lüscher and Lewis (2008), formulating a problem facilitates setting boundaries for exploring an issue. Here, I formulate the exclusion-inclusion issue as an open question: If talent management is purposefully exclusive in terms of talent identification and development, how can organizations achieve diversity and inclusion at all organizational levels? Talent management is purposefully exclusive as it focuses on the identification and development of a selected group of employees who are considered to hold relevant characteristics for future organizational success, and are perceived to display a fit with the organizational culture and values (Stahl et al., 2012). At the same time, diversity management aims to achieve diversity and inclusion at all levels. So, while diversity management actively aims to break down existing barriers for career advancement of all groups within an organization, talent management simultaneously establishes criteria and barriers through developing a talent management architecture that fosters differentiated treatment for some employees, so-called for talents. Hence, exclusion and inclusion co-exist in an organization. In order to highlight the relevance of this problem, I will outline a brief case, representing a typical situation that I encountered during the course of my dissertation trajectory in various organizations:

Assume that Company A is an international operating organization where the management cadre emphasizes the relevance of diversity management - as well as talent management as relevant pillars to drive and implement strategic priorities. The vision of representing a diverse and inclusive work environment is translated to recruiting initiatives. In specific, the goal is to attract and hire more women into Company A, and recent initiatives have increased the percentage of recruited women at all levels.
At the same time, the talent management process is defined and implemented across Company A. Similar to other large organizations, the talent process in Company A includes “global performance standards, supported by global leadership competency profiles and standardized performance appraisal tools and processes” (Stahl et al., 2012, p. 30). Talents are identified according to an agreed upon set of talent identification criteria and developed through specifically tailored training programs. Despite these rigorous and well-intended initiatives, Company A does not hone a diverse leadership pipeline, meaning that women do not seem to make it in and/or through the talent program. So, while Company A seemingly adheres to diversity as well as talent management practices, the success of both initiatives is not satisfying.

In terms of diversity objectives, no significant changes are observable with regards to increasing the percentage of women leaders throughout the hierarchy; in terms of talent management, those talents ‘who make it’, are male, and rather similar to the existing top management squad. Transformational change is rather difficult to realize as the existing power structure is reproduced.

This situation has an effect on the employees: they feel confirmed in their assumptions that women are not competent enough to succeed (because if so, they would be represented in the talent pipeline), and women feel that there is no place for them in top management, and they are not willing to invest what seems to be required from them in order to ‘make it’.

In sum, despite the attempts to recruit diverse set of employees, the talent pipeline is filled with a homogeneous group, i.e. the diversity is not automatically transferred to this employee population.

While the scenario described in Company A might remain unrecognized for a period of time, the exclusion-inclusion problems becomes salient in times when legal regulations are changed towards a quota that represents an increased number of women in the leadership pipeline or in times when financial success stagnates. The next step in working through this problem is therefore to formulate a dilemma.

Dilemma. According to Lüscher and Lewis (2008), formulating a dilemma is to unpack the poles which stand in contradiction to each other, by formulating either/or choices. Here, I phrase the exclusion-inclusion dilemma as follows: Should organizations primarily either focus on establishing an exclusive talent management architecture, or on embedding inclusive diversity management practices? The scant evidence of aligning the two fields suggests that this dilemma is currently addressed through a passive response, in form of repression, i.e. by not addressing it at all, or in the form of reacting to one pole while ignoring the other (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). In a recent publication, Sheehan and Anderson (2015) describe the disconnect between talent management and diversity as one possible form of the ‘shadow side’ of talent management and argue for more research in this area.

Yet, the surprise element comes in when the context is taken into account: demographic changes, legal regulations that prevent discrimination and foster equal opportunities, as well as corporate values which highlight respect and fair treatment of all employees – these all stand in contrast to practices that reproduce existing power patterns, as highlighted through the outlined paradoxes that the diversity research review illustrated.
While repressing the exclusion-inclusion dilemma does not bring these tensions to the fore, they become apparent when a paradox lens is applied.

**Paradox.** According to Lüscher and Lewis (2008, p. 229), oscillating between the conflicting poles of a dilemma spurs paradoxical thinking, defined as a situation in which “no choice can resolve the tension because opposing solutions are needed and interwoven.” Here, I formulate the paradox as a statement that uncovers the link between the opposing poles and that fosters both/and thinking. Thus, the exclusion-inclusion paradox articulates: Establish an exclusive talent management architecture for developing those deemed as high potential employees - while simultaneously embracing inclusive diversity management principles that allow each and every employee to uncover and evolve their particular talents.

Linking the exclusion-inclusion paradox back to the example of Company A would mean that once brought to the forefront, organizational actors in Company A recognize that the underlying principles of exclusive talent management and inclusive diversity management create tensions which can only be addressed by enabling a plurality of perspectives and by engaging both talent management and diversity management principles simultaneously. Recognizing the persistence of these contradictory yet interrelated principles facilitates sensemaking - and thus creates new boundaries for organizational actors to respond to this paradox (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Weick, 1995). In the next section, I outline responses and provide practical examples on how organizational actors may address the paradox.

**Responses to the exclusion-inclusion paradox**

The exclusion-inclusion paradox is of relevance for management scholars who engage with real-life issues in organizations towards the promotion of intellectual pluralism and flexibility (Morrell & Learmonth, 2015). At the same time, the exclusion-inclusion paradox has practical relevance. Once rendered salient, it enables organizational actors to make choices how to react in order to address the paradox. The options vary between defensive and active responses, which might lead to various outcomes. Linking the paradox perspective back to the example of Company A offers different options to respond to the exclusion-inclusion paradox in practice.

**Defensive responses.** Organizational actors in Company A could decide to continue to respond to the paradox in a defensive manner, such as separating the talent and diversity functions or repressing the fact that there is a tension at all. The empirical chapter 4 of this dissertation provides an example of such a defensive response, as the case organization decided to opt for separating talent management from diversity management by eliminating the diversity management position. However, according to Jarzabkowski et al. (2013), defensive responses to paradoxes inhibit the formation of new ways to work with or
understand paradox, and thus provide only a temporal solution to overcome paradoxical tensions. Thus, the absence of reacting as well as other defensive forms of response are avoidance tactics, and inhibit the reconceptualization of actors’ experience of paradox (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013).

**Active responses.** Alternatively, organizational actors in Company A could decide to respond actively to the exclusion-inclusion paradox, in the effort to address the paradox on a longer-term basis, and actively work through it. This implies to consider the relevance of both, the exclusion and inclusion principles to a more equal extent and to purposefully oscillate between alternatives in order to ensure simultaneous attention to both principles over time (Aust et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Building on the preceding literature reviews on diversity management and talent management respectively, I propose that the talent management practice and literature would benefit from embracing the paradox lens, as applied in diversity management. In concrete, that implies to acknowledge the relevance of paradoxes that offer explanations on the continued overrepresentation of men in leadership positions when designing, implementing or analyzing talent management architectures. For example, talent practitioners and senior managers in Company A who design, implement and sponsor the talent management processes could embrace the existence of double bind situations for women in organizations, demonstrated through the visibility paradox (Faulkner, 2009b; Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009), the ambition paradox (Sools et al., 2007), the support paradox (Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014) or the boardroom paradox (Pesonen et al., 2009). Furthermore, awareness of the meritocracy paradox (Castilla & Benard, 2010) would emphasize that in the attempt to produce fair and transparent treatment, unfair treatment is possibly reproduced.

Once organizational actors decide to respond actively to the exclusion-inclusion paradox, concrete measurements may be implemented on individual and organizational levels, that together affect the overall organizational system (Martell et al., 2012). Examples on the individual level include gender-neutral talent definitions or the possibility for (female and male) talents to adjust their participation in talent programs according to their life stage without negative consequences for their careers. Examples on the organizational level include the establishment of systems in which intended behavior is rewarded and unintended behavior is recognized and addressed. This may be in form of talent development targets for women or other historically marginalized groups. Further examples on the organizational level include the integration of diversity and talent management functions in organizations so that the effective collaboration between the gatekeepers of diversity and talent management policies is organizationally legitimized. Chapter 3 of this dissertation zooms in on this aspect.
Together, working actively through the exclusion-inclusion paradox reflects the interconnectedness of talent management and diversity management which would be mirrored in the talent management architecture and which ultimately might lead to a more diverse talent pipeline.

Working actively through the exclusion-inclusion paradox has also theoretical implications. I argue that the talent management literature would benefit from applying a paradox lens that acknowledges the relevance of working through contradicting yet interrelated principles that persist over time. Talent management scholars could dovetail relevant diversity literature that applied paradox as analytic tool in their work, for example by integrating the findings from diversity management studies in the design, analysis and discussion of studies in the talent management field. Thus, applying paradox theory is another way of generating a broader understanding of talent management which is required to move the field towards maturity (Thunnissen et al., 2013a).

Discussion

Linking diversity to talent management does not have a long history. Within the diversity management literature, Linnehan and Konrad (1999) recommend analyzing HR practices and identifying structural barriers in order to reduce intergroup inequality. While the authors refer to HR practices in general, they do not specify talent management explicitly. This may stem from the fact that in 1999, when Linnehan and Konrad’s article was published, talent management played no significant role in the HRM research domain (Gallardo-Gallardo, Nijs, Dries, & Gallo, 2015). Nishii and Özbilgin (2007) mention global talent development as an integrative part of global diversity management, however the authors do not provide more details around the relationship between talent management and diversity management. More recent publications have acknowledged this gap between talent management and diversity management, and authors have proposed avenues for future research. Al Ariss et al. (2014) argue for broader inclusion of less-privileged employees, and emphasize the link to diversity in terms of gender or intercultural competencies. Festing, Kornau and Schäfer (2015) have presented a comparative case study analysis of gender inclusion in the talent management practices in the German media industry. The authors conclude that inclusive talent management can be assessed by the level of gender bias and the discriminatory risk in specified talent management elements (Festing et al., 2015). Sheehan and Anderson (2015) propose that scholars engage in an examination of the consequences of talent management for workplace diversity.

Applying a paradox perspective to this conceptual tension between exclusive talent management and inclusive diversity management, I coin the exclusion-inclusion paradox.
Chapter 2

This paradox states the quest for organizations to establish an exclusive talent management architecture for developing those deemed as high potential employees - while simultaneously embracing inclusive diversity management principles that allow each and every employee to uncover and evolve their particular talents.

To respond to this paradox, I propose to actively work through this exclusive-inclusive paradox on three levels: the organizational, the group, as well as the individual level, which bears implications for theory as well as for practice in both fields - diversity management as well as talent management.

Exploring the exclusion-inclusion paradox on an organizational level implies to consider institutional aspects of experiences with regards to diversity and talent management. This is similar to what was presented in the fictitious example of Company A. Further research needs to highlight the relation between diversity and talent functions in organizations.

Exploring the exclusion-inclusion paradox on a group level implies to consider interactive aspects of experiences with regards to talent management and diversity management. For this purpose, it is relevant to interlink talent management and diversity management from the (diverse) talent’s perspective. Currently, very little is known about how talents themselves perceive the consequences of talent management for their careers, and to what extent the interactions with other members of the organization contributes to or hinders their success. For example, in light of the tension around the outcomes of talent management, gaining more insights on the Pygmalion effect would enable us to understand whether the positive perception of being identified as talent in an organization might be accompanied with risks and uncertainties, especially if the talent belongs to a historically marginalized group.

Exploring the exclusion-inclusion paradox from an individual level implies to consider personal aspects of experiences with regards to talent management and diversity management. For this purpose I propose to apply the concept of identity, as it links the two fields of diversity and talent management. With regards to diversity, the relational approach builds on social identity theory (Konrad, 2003) and is thus corresponds with Nkomo and Cox’s (1996, p. 339) claim that “the concept of identity appears to be at the core of understanding diversity in organizations”. The relevance of identity for diversity is crucial, as individuals create and recreate their identities through the process of interaction (Prasad et al., 2006). With regards to talent management, Tansley and Tietze (2013) claim that the understanding of identity formation as part of talent management is central for advancing the field. To understand how individuals perceive and manage the uncertain state of in-betweenness in the process of identity reconstruction, the concept of liminality has provided
valuable insights (Ybema, Beech, & Ellis, 2011). Understanding how individuals perceive and deal with ongoing ambiguity and in-betweenness would enable us to provide more insights on the individual level of working through the exclusion-inclusion paradox.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined the relevance of paradoxes for organizational practice as well as for theory building in the field of human resources management, especially for diversity management and talent management. I have defined diversity, in line with the relational approach, and diversity management as the set of organizational efforts to minimize intergroup inequalities. I have summarized existing research findings that applied the paradox lens for theorizing in order to illustrate existing inequalities for women along the career pipeline that contribute to the prevailing overrepresentation of white men in leadership positions.

Next, I have focused my attention on talent management, an emerging HRM sub-domain in which the paradox perspective has not yet been applied. On the basis of contemporary talent management literature I have identified four conceptual tensions in the talent management field: First, the debate between the inclusive and exclusive approach of talent management; second, the consideration whether the goal of talent management ultimately lies in creating a financial benefit for the organization or in creating more sustainable benefits for the society; third, the assumptions around the outcome of talent management and the need for more research to review the Pygmalion effect; and fourth, the methodological dilemma which arises from the call to publish talent management literature in top tier journals versus the understanding that alternative research approaches such as autoethnography would contribute to formulate diverse perspectives in the talent management literature.

Following the distinct reviews of diversity management and talent management, I have then conceptually linked the two fields. I coined the exclusion-inclusion paradox, formulated in the quest for organizations to establish an exclusive talent management architecture for high potential employees, while simultaneously embracing inclusive diversity management principles that allow all employees to unfold their talents. As suggested by the paradox literature, I proposed to actively work through the exclusion-inclusion paradox, in order to extend the conceptual boundaries of both research domains, talent management as well as diversity management.
References


