

MSc in Business Administration

Inclusive Play: Advancing Gender Diversity Through HR Policies and Organizational Culture Within Game Developer Teams

Student: Michelle Sausmikat

Student number: 2328283

Supervisors:

Dr. Guido Bruinsma

Dr. Maarten Renkema

University of Twente

BMS Faculty

Date: 03-02-25

Abstract

This research explored strategies to increase gender diversity and foster inclusion in the game industry, which has been characterized by underrepresentation of women and other marginalized groups. Grounded in a step-by-step framework for organizational transformation, the study investigates effective recruitment practices, inclusive job descriptions, tailored training and development programs, and equitable working conditions. Data collection involved interviews with 12 industry professionals, analysed to identify successful measures and challenges in creating inclusive workplaces. Key findings highlight the importance of flexible working arrangements, unbiased recruitment processes, and leadership development programs for underrepresented groups. Practical implications include a detailed plan that organizations can implement to attract and retain female talent, supported by real-world examples of initiatives that have proven effective in practice. The study emphasizes the need for cultural transformation, underscoring that sustainable changes require aligning organizational structures, policies, and behaviours with the values of diversity and inclusion. By addressing both immediate measures and long-term strategies, this study provides a comprehensive guide for organizations aiming to embed inclusivity into their core culture and practices, contributing to a more diverse and equitable future for the game industry.

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
<i>Background</i>	5
<i>Research Goal and Central Research Question</i>	7
<i>Academic and Practical Relevance</i>	7
<i>Outline of Thesis</i>	8
Theoretical Framework	9
<i>Resource-Based View Theory</i>	9
<i>Signalling Theory</i>	9
<i>Diversity and Inclusion in the Game Industry</i>	9
<i>Diversity & Inclusion</i>	10
<i>Different Game Developer Studios</i>	11
<i>Organizational Culture</i>	13
<i>Bro Culture</i>	14
<i>Inclusive Culture</i>	15
<i>Transformational Stages for Building a Diverse Culture of Inclusion</i>	16
<i>The Role of Human Resource Management</i>	19
<i>Gender-Focused HR Policies and Practices</i>	20
<i>Key Functions of HRM</i>	20
<i>The Culture Cycle</i>	23
<i>Individual Dimension</i>	24
<i>Interactions Dimension</i>	24
<i>Institutional Policies Dimension</i>	25
<i>Idea Dimension</i>	25
<i>Conceptual Model</i>	26
Methodology	28
<i>Research Design</i>	28
<i>Measures and Instruments</i>	28
<i>Sample and Data Collection</i>	29
<i>Data Analysis</i>	31
<i>Data Structure</i>	32
Findings	36
<i>Current Situation</i>	36
<i>Characteristics of the Game Industry</i>	36
<i>Comparison of Game Developer Studios</i>	37
<i>Lay offs</i>	37
<i>Stage 1: Mindsets & attitudes</i>	38

Self-reflection	38
Valuing individuality	38
Dedication	39
Commitment	39
Stage 2: Inclusive culture	40
Autonomy and Equality	40
Supportive environments	41
Company Events	41
Inclusion within Gameplay	41
Stage 3: Diversity & Inclusion Initiatives	42
Company Image and Website	42
Networking Events	42
Internal Educational Initiatives	43
Consultation and Collaboration	43
Stage 4: Gender-focused HR Policies & Practices	44
Recruitment in different companies	44
Job Descriptions	45
Training and Development	45
Working Conditions	46
Stage 5: Female Future	46
Career Events and Programs	46
Role Models and Representation	47
Education	47
Non-negotiable conditions	48
Discussion	49
Main findings	49
Stage 1: Mindsets and Attitudes	49
Stage 2: Inclusive Culture	49
Stage 3: Gender Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives	50
Stage 4: Gender-Focused HR Policies and Practices	50
Stage 5: Female Future	51
Practical Implications	52
Step 1: Creating a Sense of Urgency	52
Step 2: Building Guiding Coalitions/Cross-Sectional Teams	53
Step 3: Creating a Vision of Inclusion	54
Step 4: Communicating the Vision	54
Step 5: Empowering Actions	54
Step 6: Short-Term Wins	56

<i>Step 7: Consolidating improvements</i>	57
<i>Step 8: Institutionalizing new Approaches</i>	60
<i>Theoretical Implications</i>	69
<i>Limitations and Future Research</i>	69
Conclusion	71
References	72
Appendices	78

Introduction

Background

The game industry has been rapidly growing since its development from arcade games in the 1970s, exceeding a global market value of \$100 billion in 2017 (Clement, 2021). Originally designed to attract and unite players of all kinds, video games, as Kirkpatrick (2017) claims, have been labelled exclusively masculine since 1987 due to the political economy of the gaming industry. Around that time, large corporations entered the industry with the intention to profit from the rising market, hence outplayed smaller companies that could not keep up with the raising costs of developing new games (Kirkpatrick, 2017). On the customer side, a community has arisen that emphasizes with the stereotypical definition of masculinity, declaring a strong demand on an autonomous gaming discourse (Kirkpatrick, 2017). This combined with the emerged competitiveness on the gaming market has created a risky environment for organizations at the expense of exploring the possibilities of different gaming experiences that may be more appealing to other audiences, such as women and girls (Styhre, & Remneland-Wikhamm, 2021). Instead, the focus was placed on targeting men and boys by producing triple-A games, such as sports, first-person shooter, or action role-playing games, which supported the reinforcement of the stereotypical definition of masculinity in the industry (Kirkpatrick, 2017). As a result, fewer girls developed an early passion for video games, which significantly reduced the number of women pursuing careers in the industry. The placed focus on a male audience may still influence the industry's gender imbalance today, as fewer women have historically been encouraged to engage with games or consider careers in game development (Ahmadi, et al., 2020).

To elaborate, the industry is known for individuals that have turned their passion of playing video games into the profession of developing them themselves (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). This passion cannot be developed if there are no games that girls and women can be passionate about. Without this 'gamer identity', individuals are less likely to consider a career in the game industry, while organizations are less likely to consider hiring these individuals (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). This lack of early interest could be one reason why so few women have entered the industry. Another contributing factor could be the industry's bad reputation for fostering bro-cultures, involving stereotypes, biases, and socially constructed gender roles that are hindering women to either enter or excel in the game industry (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). Furthermore, evidence suggests that an organization's structures, processes, and practices might be disadvantaging more women than men, which may lead to discriminations embedded within HR policies and practices against female applicants and members (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). These unfavourable HR policies and practices are asserting influences on essential HR functions that determine the success of employees in an organization, such as their compensation, and performance evaluations (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). These discrimination can be defined as either institutional discrimination, such as in form of the gender pay gap (Subhash, et al., 2019), or personal discrimination, in which decision-makers are denying female employees promotion opportunities despite their skills and experiences (Styhre, et al., 2016). Additional examples of personal discriminations are women are being talked over, approached inappropriately, or excluded from company events (Bailey, et al., 2021).

This is supported by the allegations against larger corporations of the industry concerning abuse, harassment, and discriminations against female employees (Bailey, et al., 2021). One of the larger cases was against the video game company Activision Blizzard, of which the CEO is said to have interfered an investigation concerning sexual harassment, while being accused of the involvement and toleration of toxic behaviour against women at the company for many years (Grind, et al., 2021). Due to the dominating 'bro culture' and the mentioned allegations, several employees and investors have turned their back on the

company, resulting in a 40% decrease in stock (Sherr, 2022). However, the greatest consequence is the recent cash buy-out of the company by Microsoft for almost \$69 billion, as it is claimed that the allegations have forced Activision Blizzard to accept the offer (Sherr, & Solsman, 2022). In this context, the game industry can be labelled male-dominated, and the process of increasing gender diversity has been leisurely (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). This is aligned with the results of the developer satisfaction survey (DSS) 2021 of the International Game Developer Association (IGDA), which investigates game developers' satisfaction with their occupation and the overall game industry. The results showed that 33% of the respondents indicated that the organizations they work for have not implemented programs to foster equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), while 27% are not sure whether these programs exist at their organizations (Weststar, et al., 2021).

Further findings of the survey revealed that approximately 30% of the respondents were women, of which 10% were holding a programming role in the organization (Weststar, et al., 2021). In this context, Ahmadi, et al. (2020) explain that the few women working in the game industry commonly occupy non-technical positions, such as management or human resources rather than programming. At the same time, girls and women account for almost half of all players nowadays (Bailey, et al., 2021), while in some genres they even display the majority of players (Ye, et al., 2020). In accordance with the resource-based view, the unequal distribution of gender within game development teams in particular has been identified as a mayor challenge that organizations in the game industry need to overcome if they want to keep a competitive advantage on the market. To explain, a sustainable competitive advantage can be gained through the effective use of rare, unique, and non-substitutable resources (Ali, 2015). With girls and women emerging as a new profitable target group, women may be considered a rare, unique, and non-substitutable source of information concerning female gamers' wants and needs (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). This highlights the urgency to increase gender diversity within game developer teams, as the developing process "benefits from diverse perspective, reducing stereotypes embedded into game mechanics and character design as a result" (Ahmadi, et al., 2020, p. 165). Other benefits of mixed-gender groups are that tasks are finalized faster and with better decisions compared to homogeneous groups (Ly-Le, 2022). Additionally, a higher percentage of women may lead to decreases in conflicts and in over-competitiveness of men (Ly-Le, 2021).

Research on the given issues in other male-dominated industries has led to two relevant concepts, namely gender-focused HR policies and practices and inclusive organizational cultures. Gender-focused, or supportive HR policies and practices are developed to ensure procedural justice, which can be defined as the absence of biases and discrimination in organizational processes, ensuring that decisions are based on merit (Subhash, et al., 2019). Additionally, these policies and practices are used to aid in the reorientation of negative gender attitudes of decision-makers, which can be seen as a common bias of employees within male-dominated industries (Taparia, & Lenka, 2022). An inclusive culture can be explained as an environment in which people with different backgrounds, experiences, and behaviours are equally respected and encouraged to share their opinions and ideas (Pless, & Maak, 2004). In theory, the fostering of both, gender diversity and inclusive cultures may diminish the given issues that women face in the game industry. In practice, the fostering of gender diversity in the game industry in particular is a scarcely researched area and there is limited evidence on whether these strategies yield the same benefits in this unique sector, which is shaped by its own cultural and structural dynamics (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). This research aims to bridge that gap by examining how gender diversity and inclusion can be effectively fostered in the game industry. To address this gap, the following chapters will outline the research goal and central research question guiding this study, followed by revealing academic and practical relevancies.

Research Goal and Central Research Question

The research goal of this study is to explore existing gender-focused HR practices and other initiatives that have been and will be implemented by game developer studios in the game industry to foster gender diversity. By examining both current practices and future-oriented strategies, this study aims to provide actionable insights and recommendations that contribute to creating a more equitable and inclusive work environment for women within the game industry. Accordingly, the central research question is: *“What actions, plans, and aspirations do HR manager of game developer studios and women working in game development identify as key to fostering gender diversity and inclusion within game developer teams in the game industry?”*

Academic and Practical Relevance

Based on the fact that working in the game industry is merely possible if a gamer identity has been developed (Ahmadi, et al., 2020), it is of greatest importance for game developer studios to increase the number of women working in game development. Prior research of the game industry relevant for this study explained recent events of the industry (D’Anastasio, C., 2018), as well as expected issues when working in game development (Cote, & Harris, 2021). Concerning gender diversity, the findings on gender compositions of triple-A game developer teams (Bailey, et al., 2021) and associated reasons for the low number of women working in game development (Ochsner, 2017) have been studied. Furthermore, research on improving recruitment processes to increase the number of women working in the game industry have been explored (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). However, there are several knowledge gaps regarding the fostering of gender diversity or the implementation of supportive initiatives in the game industry, as well as their influences on the organizational culture of game developer studios (Ochsner, 2017). To our knowledge, no study has explored the impact of HR policies and practices on solving the associated problems that women and minorities in the game industry face, even though they can directly be linked to key functions of HRM, such as recruitment and selection (Ahmadi, et al., 2020).

The importance of HRM in fostering gender diversity and consequently, inclusive cultures has been pointed out by researchers that studied other male-dominated industries (Biswas, et al., 2020; Cheryan, & Markus, 2020; Ly-Le, 2022; Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022), while their findings will serve as framework to be applied to the game industry. Since past researchers have placed their focus on triple-A organizations, or indie game developers, there is a lack of knowledge regarding game developer studios in between these extremes, such as small and medium sized organizations. These organizations may have established practices to foster gender diversity or inclusive cultures in a suitable way for the game industry, similar to the company case of Ahmadi, et al. (2020), which would enhance the current state of knowledge. In this sense, this research aims at contributing to the academic fields of gender studies by investigating gender diversity initiatives in form of gender-focused initiatives and HR policies and practices implemented by game developer studios of different sizes within the game industry and their impact on organizational culture in terms of effectiveness and inclusiveness perceived by women. Knowledge about these policies and their suitability for the game industry may aid members of organizations in creating greater understanding about the associated issues in increasing gender diversity, as well as in finding suitable solutions for their current situation.

In this sense, the practical contribution of this study lies within evaluating industry-tailored recommendations of initiatives and actions, including gender-focused HR policies and practices to be used by game developer studios to increase gender diversity, as well as to establish an inclusive culture. With the knowledge gained through this research, a step-by-step framework can be developed for the game industry that may serve as guidance in the reorientation of formal policies, key management concepts and organizational culture. The

novelty within this study is the combination of two important perspectives, namely the organizational perspective of gender diversity initiatives and the individual perspective as an organizational member. The resulting recommendations are written on behalf of what HR manager and women consider to be essential and suitable in increasing gender diversity and fostering inclusiveness within game developer teams. Additionally, light will be shed on challenges and other issues that may occur during the implementation processes of gender-focused initiatives and HR policies and practices, followed by advice on solving these upcoming obstacles. Therefore, organizations in the game industry that are interested in increasing gender diversity within game developer teams may use this study as a first approach to understand their own position on gender diversity, as well as which steps can be taken from there on to increase gender diversity sustainably and in the long-term.

Outline of Thesis

The first chapter of this paper is the introduction, which includes the explanation of the problem, the research goal and research question as well as relevant theories. The second chapter is the literature review that aims at summarizing the current state of knowledge concerning gender diversity in the game industry. Additionally, it presents practices of other male-dominated industries in form of gender-focused HR policies and practices that are claimed to aid organizations in increasing gender diversity and inclusiveness. Chapter three concentrates on the methodology of this study, including the research design, methods, sample, and selection criteria. The fourth chapter will deal with the analysis of data and concludes with research findings. These findings will be evaluated within the discussion chapter, while the last chapter entails the conclusion of this research study.

Theoretical Framework

Resource-Based View Theory

The resource-based view of organizations implies that a sustainable competitive advantage can be gained through the effective use of rare, unique, and non-substitutable resources (Ali, 2015). With regards to game development, the resource-based view posits that gender diversity may increase the competitiveness of an organization, because women may be considered a rare, unique, and non-substitutable source of knowledge concerning female gamers' preferences, which may support the penetration of the increased interest of women and girls in playing video games (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). Moreover, evidence suggests that intangible and socially compounded resources, for instance, employee competences, experiences, and knowledge, are more valuable in gaining an advantage compared to intangible resources, such as an organization's financial assets (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). Based on the resource-based view, gender-focused policies and practices may support the improvement of performance, which is greatly linked to the degree of gender diversity and the number of supportive HR policies within organizations (Ali, 2015). Accordingly, organizations may gain a competitive advantage through gender-focused HR policies, as they may save costs associated within their key functions of HRM, because they effectively recruit and develop human resources (Ali, 2015).

Signalling Theory

Signalling theory is used to evaluate the behaviour of two parties that are exposed to different kinds of information, whereas one party's observable actions are noticed by the other party and interpret in their own way (Ali, 2015). Through the use of gender-focused HR policies and practices, organizations are able to create signals that attract female personnel, which may increase the likelihood that the job-offer will be accepted, while women and men equally perceive the organization as socially responsible (Ali, 2015). To elaborate, the signalling process starts with one party, *the signaller*, who creates a *signal*, which may be for instance a piece of information. This signal will be encountered by the second party, *the receiver*, who will interpret it and answer to it by sending their perception of the signal as *feedback* (Ali, & Konrad, 2017). In relation to gender diversity, an organization (signaller) that is seeking to hire more female personnel may show its dedication to gender diversity through open vacancies on their career website (signal) which may be seen by women (receiver) and may be answered with an incoming job application (feedback). However, it might be that the receiver is interpreting the signal differently as the signaller has intended, which is due to information asymmetry (Ali, & Konrad, 2017). Information asymmetry occurs when one party has more information than the other party, which is applicable to candidates that have less information about the organization than their members (Ali, & Konrad, 2017).

Diversity and Inclusion in the Game Industry

The video game industry is known for individuals that have turned their passion of playing video games into the profession of developing games themselves (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). In general, working in the game industry has been associated with a high degree of networking within informal and relaxed environments occupied by employees that seek to express their creativity (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). In contrast, low salaries, long working hours, and crunch may be part of the job of a game developer as well (IGDA, 2021). To explain, video games are commonly developed within projects and depending on the needs, companies hire and fire accordingly. This results in a high turnover rate of game developers, as they are often forced to switch between companies to continuously earning money (Politowski, et al., 2021). Crunch time can be explained with working unpaid overtime, sometimes up to 60 hours a week, to meet deadlines and finish projects (IGDA, 2021). Voluntarily overworking has been reasoned with being passionate about the game and its success and seemed to be part of the work culture, whereas especially women with care responsibilities may find it harder to

adopt to this work culture (Prescott, & Bogg, 2010). Against this background, researchers agree that there has been an increased interest in fostering diversity within organizations (Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022), especially in male-dominated industries, such as the tech industry (Ly-Le, 2021) and the IT sector (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020).

This interest in fostering diversity can be linked to the increased rate of globalization and the associated development of technology, as it enables a greater number of individuals with different cultures and backgrounds from all over the world to work together (Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022). At the same time, girls and women have emerged as a new profitable segment in the game industry, as they account for almost half of all players nowadays (Bailey, et al., 2021), while in some genres they even display the majority of players (Ye, et al., 2020). Regarding video game development, female game developers may represent an important source of knowledge about their preferences, which is key in creating satisfying gaming experiences for women and girls (Ye, et al., 2020). Additionally, a diverse workforce may support the reduction of stereotypes within game mechanics and character design (Ahmadi, et al., 2020), which may result in more appealing games for target groups other than men and boys. In this sense, the increase of games that are not labelled exclusively masculine is essential for increasing the number of women working in the game industry in the long term, as it enables that girls and women can create a passion for video games, which may be considered an important motivator for seeking a career as a video game developer (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). Despite the increased interest in gender diversity, there is great debate about the conceptualization of the term (Beischel, et al., 2022), which will be done in the following.

Diversity & Inclusion

Diversity can be defined as a composition of different characteristics or attributes of people which are asserting influence on the way they think and behave at the workplace (Jerónimo, et al., 2021). Researchers explain that differences in attributes can be found on several dimensions, such as social class, marital status, race, education, and political beliefs. (Jerónimo, et al., 2021). In this context, Nweiser, & Dajnoki (2022) highlight that age, gender, ethnicity, and religion are the dimensions that have been researched most, as they are claimed to be the most influential attributes when dealing with discrimination at the workplace. However, the great number of dimensions that diversity offers needs to be limited for the scope of this study. Due to the inequalities among men and women in the game industry, the focus was placed on increasing gender diversity. In general, gender is commonly defined as the sex an individuum was born with, namely female and male (Ho, & Mussap, 2019). However, individuals' that do not perceive their gender as binary are omitted, which stands in contrast to an inclusive approach to gender diversity (Ly-Le, 2021). Regarding the game industry, the International Game Developers Association (IDGA) has published a survey about gender diversity among game developers in 2017, in which 5% of the population has declared that they do not perceive themselves as either male or female (Bailey, et al., 2021).

In this context, Ho & Mussap (2019) introduce the term gender identity, which can be explained as an individuum's perception of being a woman, man, or nonbinary gender, regardless of the sex they have been born with. Nonbinary gender include transgender, androgynous, intersex, and genderqueer individuals (Beischel, et al., 2022). Within this paper, the term gender diversity will be defined as having a number of people with different gender identities beside the binary construct. In this sense, the aim of this research is to find approaches that increase the number of people working in the game industry that do not identify as male, whereby the focus is placed on women, as evidence suggests that especially in male-dominated industries, a higher percentage of women may lead to decreases in conflicts and in the over-competitiveness of men, while there has been in

increase in sensitivity when dealing with these issues (Ly-Le, 2021). Furthermore, a gender diverse workforce is argued to improve the motivation and performances of employees, while turnover rates decrease (Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022). Similar results have been found with diversity of board members, as “board members with different genders will raise different types of questions, which introduce a more critical understanding of the market conditions, higher quality decision-making, and more efficient problem-solving” (Ly-Le, 2022, p.395).

In this sense, the concept of inclusion is worth introducing, as Byrd (2022) explains that an inclusive culture builds a great foundation to effectively foster diversity and minimize conflicts. This is supported by researchers who agree that diversity and inclusion are greatly related to another (Kuknor, & Bhattacharya, 2020; Jerónimo, et al., 2021; Pless, & Maak, 2004). In general, inclusion can be understood as the act of providing equal opportunities for each individual of a diverse workforce (Byrd, 2022). Equal opportunities are granted in terms of permitting everyone access to the same information, resources, and networks while entitling them to take part in the decision-making processes of the organization (Jerónimo, et al., 2021). To define, diversity focuses on acknowledging and exploring different characteristics of individuals that shape how they identify themselves and behave at work, while inclusion is about examining these characteristics to develop policies and practices that ensure every employee feels secure and has the needed resources to reach their highest potential (Jerónimo, et al. 2021). In this context, Ly-Le (2021) highlights that fostering gender diversity needs to become an overall objective rather than a side project to deliver satisfying results. Furthermore, the support and dedication of top management in fostering gender diversity is essential (Ly-Le, 2021).

Regarding top management, evidence highlights that especially the attitude of decision-makers of an organization towards gender diversity is deciding upon success or failure of gender diversity initiatives (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). To elaborate, attitude can be explained as a combination of opinions, thoughts, and beliefs that an individual holds to make sense of his or her surroundings while used to reflect upon objects, events, or other individuals (Biswas, et al., 2020). An individual's attitude can be seen as one of the major motivators that leads to actual behaviour (Biswas, et al., 2020). Therefore, the attitude of supervisors and managers that decide upon hiring and promoting employees needs to be unbiased and without stereotyping (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). In fact, Stamarski, & Hing (2015) believe that gender stereotyping is a common discrimination against women in male-dominated industries, which can be defined as expecting men and women to act suitably to their traditional gender roles. If a woman deviates from these expectations by acting masculine, she will not be considered to be as good as a man due to the opinion that women are more emotional and best at caring activities (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). In this sense, there is evidence that female employees have difficulties to adapt to the cultural norms of the game industry (Ochsner, 2017), which will be explored in the next chapter.

Different Game Developer Studios

Most research of the game industry has been made about triple-A games and studios, which are the largest organizations with the highest profits (Bailey, et al., 2021). To reflect, the accusations of the dominating ‘bro culture’ within the industry can primarily be traced back to triple-A organizations, such as Activision Blizzard (Bailey, et al., 2021). In contrast, there are video game developer studios that explicitly aim at creating other gaming experiences. One example are indie games, of which the developers claim to develop different games compared to mainstream game producers, in which passion and creativity are their drivers to reach gamers other than core gamers. Furthermore, mobile games have reached a greater audience than any other game platform, enabling everyone with a smartphone to experience video games as casual gamers (Mäyrä, & Alha, 2020). To define, a core gamer can be explained as a user that commonly invests great amounts of time in playing video games that

are “structured around competition, the taming of chance, or other conventional gaming narrative” (Styhre, & Remneland-Wikhamn, 2021, p. 12), while a casual gamer enjoys “simple, ritualistic and non-immersive games” which consume less time to be learned and played (Mäyrä, & Alha, 2020, p. 6). To gain a better picture of the broader game industry, the given types of games and associated characteristics of organizations will be explained in the following.

Triple-A Games and Studios. Triple-A games are claimed to be the ideological foundation of the game industry and “the driver behind many industrial practices due to its reach and power” (Cote, & Harris, 2021, p. 163). In general, triple-A games can be described as top-selling video games produced by large corporations that focus on traditional genres, such as sports, first-person shooter, or action role-playing games (Bailey, et al., 2021). Furthermore, production processes of triple-A games include a great number of people and steps, such as to create a new concept, seek funding from publisher for production, as well as to develop, promote, and release the game (Cote, & Harris, 2021). This supports the assumption that developer studios have kept their focus on the large and profitable segment of triple-A games, while they do not want to risk financial losses by exploring game experiences that would serve to attract other gamers (Kirkpatrick, 2017). In this context, Bailey, et al. (2021) analysed gender compositions of the seven most represented video game publisher and identified the lowest women to men ratio in development roles was for Microsoft’s Halo 5 with solely 6% of female developers, whereas the highest ratio of 23% was found in the development of Nintendo’s Super Mario Galaxy (Bailey, et al., 2021). Similar numbers can be observed within the results of a survey about game genre preferences between men and women as it has shown that within the genre of first-person shooter, such as Halo 5, female gamers display 7% of the proportion, while the game genre of platformer, to which Super Mario Galaxy belongs, showed a proportion of 25% female gamers (Yee, 2017). One may assume that women have chosen a game developer studio according to their game preferences. In contrast, Styhre, et al. (2016) claim that female developers are merely seen valuable for information about female gamers’ preferences, rather than their skills or experiences, which may explain the similarities between the numbers. In either case, the number of female game developer is low within triple-A game developer studios.

Indie Games and Independent Developers. The first Indie games were developed by amateurs in the beginning of the 1980s (Styhre, & Remneland-Wikhamn, 2021). What started as a hobby is nowadays a flourishing market with independent developers and small teams designing creative games without external influences, while some are even competing with large, established companies in the gaming industry (Styhre, & Remneland-Wikhamn, 2021). Freeman, et al. (2020) argue that indie game developers have intended to create a counterculture compared to mainstream game producers, in which passion and creativity are their drivers to reach gamers other than core gamers. The revenues achieved with the games are, from an indie developer perspective considered honourable but should never be the primary intention of creating games (Styhre, & Remneland-Wikhamn, 2021). In other words, indie developers identify themselves as creators of art, while the games serve as a form of cultural expressions rather than to make profits (Styhre, & Remneland-Wikhamn, 2021). Moreover, indie game developers and studios have established different labour setups, production models and product expectations compared to triple-A studios (Freeman, et al., 2020). One of these differences lies within their dependency on free, and immaterial labour within their communities (Freeman, et al., 2020). To elaborate, indie game developers have built up supportive environments using various social-media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter, to network, collaborate, and support each other (Freeman, et al., 2020). Especially newcomers and individuals of underrepresented groups of the game industry are receiving assistance from other indie game developers, while they perceive the environment as being open and supportive (Freeman, et al., 2020). This stands in contrast to

the requirements that triple-A organizations request from game developers, such as advanced technical skills and deep understanding for development processes (Freeman, et al., 2020). Lastly, female indie game developer within the study of Freeman et al. (2020) expressed to feel secure and appreciated for their contributions.

Mobile Games and Studios. The development of mobile phones as of today has been the reason for transformational changes of gaming content and practice in the industry (Mäyrä, & Alha, 2020). There has been a rapid increase of gamers that genuinely enjoy mobile games and their services (Ye, et al., 2020), while the mobile game genre is expected to reach \$315.90bn in revenue in 2023 (Statista Market Insights, 2023). As a result, mobile games have reached a greater audience than any other game platform such as PC, or game consoles, enabling casual game experiences to everyone that possesses a smartphone (Mäyrä, & Alha, 2020). In general, mobile games can be defined as any sort of game that is playable on portable smart devices, such as smartphones or tablets, which usually deliver a less complex playing experience compared to triple-A games on consoles or PCs (Styhre, & Remneland-Wikhamm, 2021). Nonetheless, the profitability of the mobile game market has been noticed by triple-A organizations, which have started to create mobile games for high-end smartphones of which the quality is claimed to be competing with PCs and consoles (Schmithäuser, 2021). One example is the triple-A PC game Diablo that was announced be continued with a mobile version instead of publishing it for PCs. Despite the critique of core gamers, the game has reached \$100 million in revenue after two months (Beverungen, 2022). This may imply that the mobile game market may not greatly influenced by the preferences and opinions of core gamers. In fact, 68% of all mobile games can be traced back to indie game developers that use app stores and social media channels as publishing platform (Freeman, et al., 2020). On the customer side, most gamers are female, while they account for 31% more in app-purchases, spend 35% more time playing and show a 42% higher 7-day retention on average compared to their male counterparts (Ye, et al., 2020).

There are great examples of mobile developer studios that have successfully fostered diversity and inclusion in the past, including Zynga, with 50% female board members (Bailey et al., 2021), and women-led studios like Nordcurrent and Glass Bottom Games (Hardcastle, 2023). Even though there is no evidence that more women work in mobile game development, it is argued that “this hyper-growth sector demonstrates the most radical gender rebalancing of any global industry” (Hardcastle, 2023, p.1). In this sense, the importance placed on increasing gender diversity within game developer teams seems to vary with the type of game a studio creates and the value that is placed on female gamers’ preferences. Classical triple-A games cover the genres of sports, first-person shooter, or action role-playing games, which are the ones with the smallest proportion of female gamers (Yee, 2017). Accordingly, these genres indicate the lowest women to men ratio in development functions (Bailey, et al., 2021). In contrast, mobile games cover genres, such as Match3, or Family/Farm Sim, which both show a proportion of 69% female gamers (Yee, 2017). Similar findings have been associated with indie game development, whereas indie games range from genres that are merely enjoyed by male users, such as turn-based strategy games, to genres that are greatly played by female users, such as casual puzzles (Yee, 2017). Lastly, indie game developer studios claim to have created supportive environments for women and other minorities of the game industry (Freeman, et al., 2020). This leads to the next chapter, namely organizational culture and its impact on increasing diversity and inclusion.

Organizational Culture

An organization’s culture can be explained as a set of shared values, assumptions, and beliefs hold by the organization and the workforce (Johnson, 2013). It serves as guidance for employees to understand what is expected from them and how to behave accordingly

(Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Culture can be seen as a framework that yields information on organizations' norms, procedures, routines, languages, and symbols, thereby disclosing which behaviour is expected, even ideal to achieve organizational goals (Tama, 2019). Within this paper, culture is defined as a system that shapes and guides people's behaviour, while their actions either reinforce or challenge the patterns of the culture (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Through challenging the patterns of the existing culture, it is possible to accelerate changes, similar to the example of Activision Blizzard and the boycott of employees and investors. In this context, culture can be defined as the most influential factor within organizations, as it may impact the performance, satisfaction, and loyalty of its members, whereas a sense of belonging is created if members agree with the norms and values of the organization (Tama, 2019). After introducing the given types of games, triple-A developer companies have been associated with fostering bro cultures (Bailey, et al., 2021), while indie game developer studios have been linked to inclusive cultures (Freeman, et al., 2020). Both concepts will be discussed in the following.

Bro Culture

Within bro cultures, the shared set of values, assumptions, and beliefs circle around the stereotypical definition of masculinity, while members exclude everyone that deviates from these standards (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). These standards are derived from socially constructed gender roles, while individuals are expected to act accordingly to their biological gender by having either masculine or feminine traits (Taparia, & Lenka, 2022). In this context, the stereotypical definition of masculinity can be found within a physically strong, and unemotional man (Miller, et al., 2021) that is driven by competition and acts assertive and independent (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Femininity, on the other hand, may be associated with a modest, agreeable, and interdependent woman that seeks collaborations (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). In this sense, bro cultures can be explained as environments in which the traits of a stereotypical man are valued and key to gain promotions and leadership positions (Bailey, et al., 2021). Miller, et al. (2021) add that it includes to bond with other men over "hypermasculinity and assumed heterosexuality" (p. 6). Additionally, it is argued that male members consider masculine interactions as superior, such as the act of self-promoting (Styhre, et al., 2016), or intrusively interrupting others (Lombard, et al., 2021). This is supported by Ochsner (2017) who states that women are denied equal access to networks, because they may be excluded from social events, such as beer Fridays or playing triple-A games with colleagues. In this context, researchers argue that discriminations against women and other minorities seemed to be invisibly embedded within organizational processes in the game industry (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020).

These discriminations may be linked to a cultural bias labelled as "masculine defaults" (Lombard, et al., 2021). To explain, a cultural bias can be seen as the tendency to prefer one's own culture and accepted behaviour of the group of belonging over other cultures and behaviours (Yingst, 2011). With masculine defaults, the behaviour and characteristics of the classical male gender role are favoured without directly discriminating by gender but disadvantaging more women than men (Lombard, et al., 2021). Women are adversely affected because they usually show fewer of these expected masculine traits, while women that do show masculine traits may not be recognized and treated as such, or they might face social sanctions for deviating from their female gender role (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Accordingly, evidence indicates that women working in bro cultures are confronted with stereotypes and social categorization (Ahmadi, et al. 2020), while especially the attitude on gender diversity of the "male-dominated senior leader" influences how women are treated and whether they are able to earn promotions (Biswas, et al., 2020, p. 10). This is aligned with the findings of Ochsner (2017) who examined responses on Twitter related to the hashtag #1ReasonWhy, in which members of the game industry were asked to give one reason for the low number of female game developer. The researcher found that women

perceive to be evaluated differently from men, often based on unrelated criteria, and are less recognized for their achievements. They also experience exclusion, with their voices being silenced, dismissed and made invisible" (Ochsner, 2017, p. 7). To conclude, the prevalence of bro cultures in the game industry and the associated issues that women face within may constitute the low number of female game developers. In contrast, the fostering of an inclusive organizational culture may create a favourable work environment for women and other minorities, which will be discussed next.

Inclusive Culture

As defined previously, inclusion means to offer equal opportunities to all employees in terms of access to the same information, resources, and networks, thereby entitling them to take part in the decision-making processes of the organization (Jerónimo, et al., 2021). Within an inclusive culture, people with different demographics, backgrounds, experiences, and behaviours are equally respected and encouraged to share their opinions and ideas (Pless, & Maak, 2004). An inclusive culture creates the perception that everyone in the organization belongs to the same group and can freely express themselves (Jerónimo, et al., 2021). Similarly, Shore, et al. (2011) define inclusion as the balance between an employee's need for belonging to a group of similar people and its desire to be a unique individual with distinct features and thoughts. Another important characteristic of inclusive work environments is the presence of procedural justice, which can be defined as the lack of biases and discrimination in organizational processes (Subhash, et al., 2019). The fact that women feel to be evaluated on different scales than their male counterparts within the game industry (Ochsner, 2017) highlights the urgency of implementing organizational processes that ensure decisions are based on non-prejudicial factors (Subhash, et al., 2019). Regarding game development, within inclusive cultures, women and other minorities would have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes, thereby freely sharing their opinions and ideas, which may result in a better work environment for their representative groups, as well as in more appealing games for them.

In general, the benefits of an inclusive culture are similar to those of a diverse workforce, as researchers agree that the best results can be achieved if both, diversity, and inclusion are integrated as core values of the organization (Byrd, 2022; Jerónimo, et al., 2021; Kuknor, & Bhattacharya, 2020). To rehearse, diversity deals with different observable and non-observable demographics of individuals, while inclusion examines these differences to create environments in which every member of an organization may feel a sense of belonging and recognition for their distinctive inputs (Mor Barak, 2015). If managed properly, an inclusive culture may increase performance, productivity, and satisfaction of employees (Kuknor, & Bhattacharya, 2020), while they feel a higher level of commitment and loyalty towards the organization (Byrd, 2022). Concerning the game industry, evidence suggests that indie game developers have created work environments for female game developer to feel secure, supported and appreciated, which stands in contrast to women's experiences in the overall industry (Freeman, et al., 2020). This could be linked to the number of employees working in a company, as it is easier to create an inclusive environment for the needs and wants of 10 different people compared to 500 people. Still, the wish to create an inclusive culture may be challenging for organizations of all sizes, which will be elaborated in the following. With the entrance of female professionals into the game industry, organizations have the opportunity and are partly forced by anti-discrimination laws to diversify their workforces and enjoy the given benefits of having different perspectives and ideas floating into the game development process (Kuknor, & Bhattacharya, 2020).

However, the associated obstacles that women may face when entering the game industry, such as discriminations, stereotyping, and exclusions, are consequences of trying to increase the diversity within an organisation but without creating an environment that allows

individuals to feel valued and appreciated for their differences (Shore et al., 2011). Instead, conflicts may arise, and corporate messages might be misunderstood if workforce diversity is not managed properly due to the different ways individuals think, behave, and communicate (Jerónimo, et al., 2021). In general, the facilitation of an inclusive culture must be understood as a time-consuming long-term commitment associated with organizational changes and additional costs, which may be challenging for organizations to cover (Pless, & Maak, 2004). To highlight the scope of changes to undertake and challenges to expect, the transformation stages for building a diverse culture of inclusion, proposed by Pless, & Maak (2004) will be introduced, accompanied by Kotter's 8-step framework on change management (1995).

Transformational Stages for Building a Diverse Culture of Inclusion

The transformation stages can be used as a framework to guide organizations through the process of building an inclusive culture, as it covers the most essential areas for cultural change and gives advice on which aspects to focus on during the stages (Pless, & Maak, 2004). There are four different stages to undergo, of which the order needs to be followed because they built upon each other (Pless, & Maak, 2004). However, the process is rather iterative, allowing to explore the current stage lavishly, as well as to go back to earlier stages for adaptations before entering the next one (Pless, & Maak, 2004). Similarly, the 8-step framework on change management developed by Kotter (1995) represents a clear and structured approach for organizational transformations with a focus on leadership and communication, while covering common obstacles associated with expected changes (Carreno, 2024). The steps need to be taken in subsequential order, which leads to a rather rigid approach and lacks the flexibility of today's dynamic and everchanging environments (Carreno, 2024). To enable a more adaptable transformation process, the steps of Kotter's framework (1995) have been built into the transformation stages' framework of Pless, & Maak (2004), whereas both frameworks were adjusted accordingly to the findings of the literature review on dynamics and settings associated with the game industry. The stages will be explained in the following.

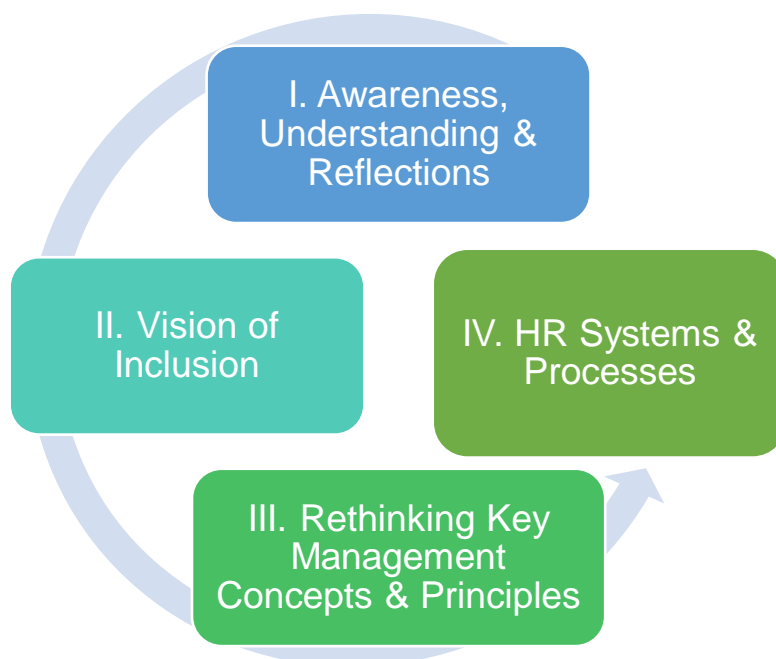
Stage 1: Awareness, Understanding, and Reflections. The first stage is characterized by a "discursive learning process" to raise awareness that there is no true, objective reality and each individual perceives it differently due to their diverse attributes (Pless, & Maak, 2004, p. 137). This aligns with the *first step* of Kotter's framework and will mark the starting point of the step-by-step framework this study aims to establish. The steps emphasize on creating a sense of urgency about the issue at hand, raising awareness about forthcoming changes, and motivating individuals to act with enthusiasm and purpose (Kotter, 1995). This is supported by Jerónimo, et al. (2021) who state that every individual in the organization needs to understand the meaning of inclusion and diversity, as well as the purpose and importance of enhancing them. This can be done by openly communicating upcoming changes, as well as evaluating the reasons behind them to employees, including the benefits and obstacles of diversity and inclusion (Carreno, 2024). Regarding the game industry, organizations need to address stereotyping, sexism (Ahmadi, et al., 2020), masculine defaults (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020), and other biases, such as the gender pay gap and glass ceilings (Bailey, et al., 2021). This leads to the *second step*, which is *building a guiding coalition* (Kotter, 1995). Traditionally, Kotter's framework recommends allocating strong and engaged leaders for a centralized leadership coalition that ensures guidance through the changing process, which is especially suitable for hierarchical organizations that favour a top-down leadership style (Carreno, 2024).

Regarding the game industry, developer organizations with video game production processes characterized by involving a great number of people and steps, such as triple-A studios (Cote, & Harris, 2021), should be opting for the centralized approach. However, Carreno (2024) highlights that especially in creative industries, as well as in tech industries,

there are organizations that commonly emphasize on decentralized decision-making and collaborative leadership, which can be seen within indie game developer studios (Shore, et al., 2011). In this sense, the researcher recommends forming cross-sectional teams consisting of executives, managers, and other influential individuals of an organization to firstly enable different perspectives to be considered and secondly, to encourage others to participate in the change processes (Carreno, 2024). Both guiding methods support the reduction of internal resistance of employees towards changes, while improving the credibility and consistence of change initiatives (Carreno, 2024). Within this stage, the steps proposed by Kotter (1995) can be taken without following the right order, as the guiding coalition, as well as the cross-sectional teams may support the creation of urgency for diversity and inclusion from the beginning. The aim of this stage is to arrive at “a common basis of understanding” among all members of the organization (Pless, & Maak, 2004, p. 137). This can be accomplished by investigating which moral aspects everyone agrees on, while reflecting on the diverse set of influences that may explain an individual’s thoughts and behaviour (Pless, & Maak, 2004). This phase is essential to be completed before going into the next one, because the insights are needed in creating a vision statement of inclusion (Pless, & Maak, 2004).

Figure 1

Transformational Stages of Building a Diverse Culture of Inclusion.



Note. This model has been adapted from Pless, & Maak (2004).

Stage 2: Vision of Inclusion. The second phase “*Vision of Inclusion*”, which is also the *third step* of Kotter’s framework (1995), deals with the *development of a vision statement* that serves as enlightenment for the upcoming changes and aids the facilitation of an inclusive culture and a diverse workforce (Pless, & Maak, 2004). It is commonly formulated in one sentence and can be seen as a long-term goal that an organization wants to pursue in the upcoming years, which is used to differentiate itself from its competitors (Bowen, 2018). Carreno (2024) explains that a vision can be inspiring, as employees are motivated to engage in the processes when they understand their contribution, which highlights the need for clear and simple formulations. When creating a vision statement, researchers agree that a great number of stakeholders should take part in formulating a “consensual vision that addresses all relevant concerns” (Pless, & Maak, 2004, p. 138), including employees of all levels of the organization (Bowen, 2018; Carreno, 2024). In this context, Martins (2020)

explains that the way an organization defines the terms diversity and inclusion greatly impacts how the vision statement will be formulated, and which measures and processes will be implemented to achieve the goal. Additionally, evidence suggests that the vision navigates organizational culture, which indicates that caution is needed for wording it (Bowen, 2018).

The personal involvement of senior leaders in the implementation processes seems to be of great importance for the overall success of visions aimed at supporting diversity and inclusion (Martins, 2020). This is in accordance with Carreno (2024) who claims that the commitment of leaders is one of the most important factors when accelerating organizational changes. Additionally, Pless, & Maak (2004) highlight the importance of displaying commitment to the vision statement and associated changes done by the CEO and other leaders of the organization. This leads to the *fourth step* of Kotter's framework, which is to *communicate the vision* (Kotter, 1995). This step is more considered as a starting point for frequently communicating the vision rather than a task to be completed before going over to the next step (Bowen, 2018). In this sense, Carreno (2024) advises that communicating the vision should be done constantly, regularly, and in ways that reach all employees. This could be done, for example, by embedding the vision into onboarding processes of new employees, into the common topics of discussions during team meetings, as well as into decision-making processes (Bowen, 2018). To enhance the engagement of employees, it is advised to give them the opportunity to ask questions about the vision and upcoming changes, thereby listening to their remarks and explaining the answer (Carreno, 2024). The insights collected up to this point will be used to adjust key management concepts and principles, which will be explained next.

Stage 3: Rethinking Key Management Concepts and Principles. The third phase "*Rethinking Key Management Concepts and Principles*" concerns implementing changes to key management concepts and principles, beginning with the creation of business principles that are derived from the vision statement (Pless, & Maak, 2004). These principles should be "based on mutual recognition", while they serve to guide employees through the changing process, as they yield information on adapted "shared assumptions, values, and beliefs" (Pless, & Maak, 2004, p.138). In this context, Stamarski, & Son Hing (2015) state that policies are a great guidance, but success depends on the decision-makers and their enactment on these policies. With this in mind, Ly-Le (2022) explains that especially the support and dedication of the CEO is needed to build an inclusive culture. This leads to the *fifth step* of Kotter's framework, namely, to *empower actions* (Kotter, 1995), which is about eliminating all sorts of obstacles that may affect the transformation process, including structural or cultural barriers (Carreno, 2024). The empowering of actions means that employees are granted autonomy, as well as access to important tools and other resources that increase their willingness to participate in upcoming changes (Carreno, 2024). This should be supported by cross-sectional teams or the guiding coalition, as it may result in collectivistically gathering ideas with the intention of encouraging employees to accept change initiatives and embrace the vision (Carreno, 2024).

In general, organizations should retreat from the belief of hiring and promoting the most brilliant employees is best, thereby valuing traits of stereotypical men, such as independence and self-reliance (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Another common key concept of male-dominated industries is the act of self-promotion to achieve higher positions in the organization (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). To avoid the reinforcement of masculine defaults or other biases that discriminate against women, key concepts and principles need to be evaluated, preferably done by a third-party company to assure an objective view and a complete picture of the problems (Ly-Le, 2020). In relation to Kotter's framework, the cross-sectional teams and the guiding coalition should be part of the evaluation processes, as well as of the *next step* of the framework, namely, to *create short-term wins* (Carreno, 2024).

Communicating the first accomplishments serves as evidence that the transformation has resulted in successful moments already (Carreno, 2024). However, Kotter (1995) indicates that successful transformations involve seeking opportunities to achieve clear performance improvements. This includes setting measurable goals within the annual planning system, meeting established objectives, and rewarding those involved through recognition, promotions, and financial incentives (Kotter, 1995). A focus should be placed on showing improvements that are aligned with the vision within key areas, which may convince sceptical employees of the value associated with the changes and increase their engagement (Carreno, 2024). In this sense, Carreno (2024) explains that this step offers the opportunity to take a broader look and to refine strategies. The redefining of key management concepts and principles serves as basis for the evaluation of HR policies and practices, which will be elaborated in the following.

Stage 4: HR Systems and Processes. The last stage “*HR Systems and Processes*” is about adapting the organization’s HRM system and its processes accordingly to the vision statement and the findings of unfavourable key concepts and principles (Pless, & Maak, 2004). Accordingly, the *seventh step* of Kotter’s framework will be introduced, namely *consolidating improvement*. It deals with the alignment of organizational structures and policies to address deeper complexities uncovered during the transformation process, while integrating new behaviours and processes into the organizational culture (Carreno, 2024). Additionally, the transformation process greatly benefits from the empowerment of actions and the presentation of first successes within this area, as it reduces the resistance of employees towards change (Carreno, 2024). The final step of Kotter’s framework (1995) involves embedding change into the culture, where leaders model desired behaviours and align rewards to reinforce them. Success is achieved when new processes become integral to the organization and employees adopt new mindsets and behaviours (Carreno, 2024). Given the reported benefits of HR policies and practices in the alignment of organizational structures and policies (Pless, & Maak, 2004), as well as in embedding new behaviours and processes into culture (Biswas, et al, 2020), the next chapter will explore these matters in greater detail. Special attention will be drawn to implementing supportive policies and practices associated with key HR functions, namely recruitment, performance appraisal, training and development, and compensation (Pless, & Maak, 2004). In this context, the role of HRM in fostering gender diversity, as well as the concept of gender-focused HR policies and practices will be explained next.

The Role of Human Resource Management

Human resources are defined as an organization’s main information source, which highlights the benefits of having a diverse workforce (Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022). In general, human resource management (HRM) deals with managing and supporting people that are working together in an organization to accomplish overall organizational goals (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). The management of human resources includes to investigate differences among individuals of the workforce, to decide upon development opportunities accordingly, while ensuring the safety and well-being of all employees (Subhash, et al., 2019). Additionally, it is the responsibility of the HRM department to provide working conditions of high standards to ensure the satisfaction and retention of employees (Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022). In this sense, developments of technology, increased globalization, and other changes have caused the number of HRM functions to increase, while they became essential for corporate strategies (Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022). The importance of HRM for organizations lies in its ability to alter attitudes and behavioural patterns of individuals, which may result in an improved performance (Biswas, et al, 2020). Additionally, HR policies and practices may be used to guide employees in favourable directions (Hamedani, & Markus, 2019). Against this background, there is evidence that supportive, or gender-focused HR policies and practices may support the fostering of gender diversity (Subhash, et al., 2019), as well as the

facilitation of an inclusive culture (Biswas, et al., 2020), which will be evaluated in the following section.

Gender-Focused HR Policies and Practices

The term 'gender-focused HR policies and practices' has been introduced by Ali (2015) and can be defined as a set of principles aimed to foster gender diversity by monitoring the well-being of minorities and promoting a supportive work environment. They aim at offering a healthy work environment in which everyone feels supported and treated equally with the same opportunities, despite of social backgrounds or gender identities (Ali, 2015). Similarly, Subhash, et al. (2019) use the term 'diversity-focused HR practices' which can be described as diversity management principles that are incorporated into the most important HR functions, thereby aiming at ensuring procedural justice within an organisation's processes. Another term has been used by Biswas, et al. (2020) who argue that 'supportive HR practices and policies' constitute that the work environment is perceived as welcoming and inclusive, while members of the organization are equally encouraged to participate in development opportunities and the decision-making processes. Regarding the issues shared by female respondents of the IGDA survey, gender-focused, or supportive HR policies and principles may support the elimination of decision-making biases, the homogeneity in workforces, as well as toxic workplace cultures. In this sense, the management of a diverse workforce is closely linked to an organization's HRM key functions and includes the planning and implementation of certain procedures (Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022), which will be explained in the following. The key functions prioritized for this study are recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, and compensation.

Key Functions of HRM

Recruitment and selection. Recruitment can be defined as the act of attracting potential employees, which includes the formulation and distribution of job advertisements, the choice upon channels to reach target candidates, and recruiting events that organizations hold to gain greater attention (Ly-Le, 2021). Gender-focused recruitment and selection are claimed to aid in gaining the attention of target candidates while increasing the chances that the job-offer will be accepted (Ali, 2015). Furthermore, it includes to ensure equal opportunities during recruitment and selection procedures, which diminishes the perception of discriminations and unfairness against women and other minorities (Subhash, et al., 2019). Starting with job advertisements, Ahmadi, et al. (2020) argue that caution is needed when formulating job descriptions targeted at women, because they need to be addressed differently. It is recommended to use gender-sensitive wording and visuals in job applications, which can be understood as acknowledging differences between male and female traits and choosing words and pictures applicable for both (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). Within male-dominated industries, job advertisements commonly state a great variety of skills of which not all are relevant for the job. Especially requiring extra technical skills may lead to a reduced number in female applicants, because women hesitate to apply for a job if they do not meet all requirements (Ly-Le, 2021). This is supported by Ahmadi, et al. (2020) who suggest that to attract more women, the stated skills should represent a realistic list of requirements necessary for the job.

Another important part of the recruitment process is to find channels that deliver the desired message of the organization to target candidates. In this sense, Ly-Le (2021) argues that the importance an organization places on gender diversity should be the centre of their career pages, while uploading talks and articles discussing the subject may help in sending the right signals to the right target group. Furthermore, the visibility of female role models positively influences the perception that women can excel and pursue career opportunities in male-dominated industries (Ochsner, 2017). This is aligned with the findings of Ahmadi, et al. (2020), whereby a focus should be placed on the competences of these role models instead

of the gender. In this way, women and other minorities perceive the organization as being supportive and inclusive, which may increase the number of these applicants (Ly-Le, 2021). Despite their own website, organizations should build up an online presence on social media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter, as there is evidence that these channels are increasing in importance to attract female professionals (Freeman, et al., 2020). However, Ahmadi, et al. (2020) argue that physical contact to potential candidates has a greater impact in attracting female personnel than using online channels. In this context, it is advised to engage in active sourcing rather than relying on existing social circles, by for example partnering with educational institutions to host recruiting events targeted at women to enhance both, physical and online presence (Ly-Le, 2021).

Selection can be explained as the process of identifying the most suitable candidates and deciding which to hire based on criteria set by the decision-makers of an organization (Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022). To avoid discrimination against minorities, it is advised to carefully decide upon criteria that supports the fostering of diversity and inclusiveness while being aligned with other key strategies of the organization (Ali, & Konrad, 2017). In this sense, the selection process needs to represent what the organization is searching for rather than focusing on traditional “hot shots”, which are candidates that perform swiftly and assertive (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). An issue associated with interviews can be found in asking candidates about their interests and hobbies, as it may lead HR managers to favouring candidates with the greatest similarities to themselves (Ly-Le, 2021). With supportive or gender-focused HR policies and practices, the names and other personal information is removed during the screening process of applications to increase the number of female applicants (Ly-Le, 2021), while interview questions are standardized to elude the chance that candidates are being treated unfairly by HR managers (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). In this way, it can be assured that candidates are selected based on unbiased criteria related to the job instead of personal preferences or other biases (Ly-Le, 2021). In general, the quality of the recruitment and selection processes could be improved with unconscious bias training, which will be explained in the following.

Training and development. The majority of employees is placing great emphasis on the availability of training and development opportunities in the workplace (Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022). Women in particular prioritize organizations that claim to offer training and development initiatives when applying for a job (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). However, past events have shown that women in male-dominated industries are confronted with glass ceilings that hinder their upward career advancements (Cheryan & Markus, 2020). Glass ceilings can be described as invisible barriers that prevent women and other minorities from being promoted to higher positions, despite of accomplishments, suitability, and experiences (Taparia, & Lenka, 2022). To diminish these effects, it is important to find initiatives that support the reorientation of negative gender attitudes of employees, especially of organization’s decision-makers (Taparia, & Lenka, 2022). Researchers agree on the effectiveness of unconscious bias training for employees in overcoming gender-related issues, such as stereotyping (Taparia, & Lenka, 2022), the unequal treatment of women (Ly-Le, 2022), or the negative effects of masculine defaults (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). These kinds of trainings are about educating employees about differences between people, as well as biases associated with these differences (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Examples of these biases are stereotyping (Ahmadi, et al., 2020), and social categorization (Lauring, & Villesèche, 2017).

By increasing awareness and educating people about common biases, a tolerance for dissimilarities may be developed, as it is claimed that interactions and communication may decrease discriminations (Lauring & Villesèche, 2017). Therefore, unconscious bias training leads to an increased appreciation of differences in individual’s attitudes, values, and behaviours (Subhash, et al., 2019), thereby supporting the creation of positive diversity

attitudes (Taparia, & Lenka, 2020), and reducing potential problems of diverse workforces (Subhash, et al., 2019). Due to the difficulty of detecting own biases successfully, unconscious bias training should be done by a third party outside of the organization (Ly-Le, 2021). In this context, evidence suggests that organizations that voluntarily participate in diversity training show an increased likelihood of acknowledging their biases, while a great number of female participants decide to become part of mentorship programmes for women (Cheryan & Markus, 2020). The offering of mentorships for female employees has been considered an important factor in diversity training and development (Taparia, & Lenka, 2022). With regards to the game industry, mentorships may help women to manage the culture of the industry, while it increases their access to informal networks (Ochsner, 2017). Additionally, employee development programs should be created that are considering the needs of diverse employees, which signals women that they have career opportunities at this company (Subhash, et al., 2019).

Performance appraisal. This function includes the development of a system used to evaluate the effectiveness of employees in achieving their goals, as well as to identify factors that impact their performance (Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022). Furthermore, it is the responsibility of HRM to understand these factors and to find ways of controlling them to enable the most effective performance of employees (Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022). One important condition for performance appraisals of diverse workforces can be seen in ensuring equality within the assessment criteria (Nweiser, Dajnoki, 2022). Within male-dominated industries, women and minorities perceive that they receive lower ratings compared to their male colleagues (Subhash, et al., 2019). With regards to the findings of Ochsner (2017), women are denied the status and expertise that their male colleagues would gain for the same achievements (Ochsner, 2017). In this context, it is essential to establish assessment criteria and appraisal practices that are unbiased, transparent, job related and based on merit (Subhash, et al., 2019). Furthermore, performance appraisal techniques need to verify the fair distribution of rewards based on gender-neutral indicators, such as the performance of the team rather than individual efforts. In this way, employees may favour to work cooperatively rather than competitively (Subhash, et al., 2019). Lastly, the performance appraisal criteria of supervisors and decision-makers should be linked to diversity measures. This can be done by offering meaningful rewards for identifying and preparing female applicants for higher positions (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015).

Compensation. Compensation packages can be defined as everything that the organization offers in exchange for an employee's work, including non-monetary benefits such as health and dental insurances (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). It can be used to attract female personnel, if the compensation is based on the understanding of women's social roles and their needs (Ly-Le, 2021). Compensation packages within male-dominated industries are often compiled without this understanding, while organizations do not acknowledge that they could offer more attractive benefits for women to increase the number of female applicants (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). In fact, family-friendly benefits are claimed to be positively perceived by men and women equally, thereby increasing their job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Therefore, an essential part of fostering diversity is the promise of equal compensation for everyone (Subhash, et al., 2019). In this context, issues that women and minorities face within the game industry are the gender pay gap (Subhash, et al., 2019), and reward systems that lack to demonstrate a link to gender diversity (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). The gender pay gap can be explained as the existence of inequalities in salaries between women and men, whereas women earn less by working the same number of hours and possessing the same qualifications (Subhash, et al., 2019). This may be improved by making salaries transparent (Bailey, et al., 2021) and based on skills and experiences (Ly-Le, 2021).

To prevent discrimination against women and minorities, an organization should adopt a gender pay equity policy, which can be explained as the promise that employees receive equal payments for the same kind of work (Ly-Le, 2021) due to the fact that inequalities in pay may lead to employee dissatisfaction and demotivation (Subhash, et al., 2019). Similarly, the distribution of rewards needs to be balanced and linked to gender diversity goals to avoid the valuing of individual orientation, which would lead to an increase in competitiveness among employees rather than motivating them to work co-operatively (Subhash, et al., 2019). Additionally, it is advised that organizations may offer more family friendly programmes and promote them to be used by everyone, regardless of gender or other diversity dimensions (Taparia, & Lenka, 2020). These programmes could support an employee's wish to start a family by for example offering paid maternity leave, or by covering fertility treatments, as well as adoption fees (Ly-Le, 2021). Moreover, an organization may offer flexible schedules, compressed work weeks, and part-time work opportunities to signal applicants and employees the organization's emphasis on work-life balance initiatives (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). To avoid discrimination against women and other minorities, formal HR policies need to clarify who may adopt flexible work arrangements and under which circumstances. To conclude, the implementation of gender-focused HR policies and practices may have a positive influence on the issues reported by women and other minorities working in the game industry.

The Culture Cycle

To understand the impact that gender-focused HR policies and practices may have in solving the given problems that women and other minorities face in the game industry, the culture cycle framework was developed (Hamedani & Markus, 2019). The culture cycle is a tool that defines culture as a dynamic, multi-layered system, in which people's actions either challenge or reinforce the existing sociocultural patterns (Hamedani, & Markus, 2019). It consists of four levels, which influence each other while none are theoretically prior (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). The culture cycle was favoured because it "visually and conceptually represent the dynamic processes through which the cultural and the psychological interact and mutually constitute one another" (Hamedani, & Markus, 2019, p. 2). This supports the assumption that the replacement of formal HR policies and practices may have the impact to alternate cultural patterns and individuals' attitudes (Hamedani, & Markus, 2019). Moreover, the culture cycle framework may be considered as a valuable tool in completing the last step of Kotter's framework (1995) namely, *anchoring change in culture* and can be considered completed, if new processes are embedded into an organization's culture, and employees have changed their behaviour and thinking patterns (Carreno, 2024). In this sense, the framework provides a lens through which organizations can navigate these complexities, helping leaders and employees to sustain their commitment to the transformation (Hamedani & Markus, 2019). To explain the dynamics of organizational cultures in more detail, a comparison between bro cultures and inclusive cultures will be made based on the findings of previous chapters, of which an overview of the characteristics can be found in Table 1.

Table 1.

Comparison of cultural dimensions between bro cultures and inclusive cultures.

Dimension	Bro Culture	Inclusive Culture
Individuals	Gamer identity Negative gender attitudes	Individual identity Positive gender attitudes

Interactions	Glass ceiling Crunch time Exclusion of minorities Rewards competitiveness	Equal opportunities Work-life balance Inclusion of minorities Rewards cooperativeness
Institutional policies	Masculine defaults	Gender-focused HR policies and practices
Ideas	Stereotypes Social categorization Women merely seen knowledgeable about female gender	No true, objective reality Common basis of understanding Mutual recognition

Note. Table has been made by the author based on the findings of the theoretical framework.

Individual Dimension

The individual dimension deals with “identities, self-concepts, thoughts, feelings, mindsets, biases, and behaviours” (Hamedani, & Markus, 2019, p. 2). Individuals are expressing their feelings and thoughts through their behaviour which may result in either accepting or challenging the patterns of the culture (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Within bro cultures, individuals are expected to have created a gamer identity that motivated them to pursue a career in the game industry (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). If interested in working for triple-A companies, individuals need to develop a core gamer identity which implies that they commonly invest great amounts of time in playing video games (Styhre & Remneland-Wikhamn, 2021). Within inclusive cultures, individuals are appreciated for having their own, unique identity and are valued for sharing diverse viewpoints and opinions (Pless, & Maak, 2004). Moreover, it creates the perception that every member of the organization belongs to the same group, and no one feels excluded (Jerónimo, et al., 2021). In this relation, the decision-makers in the organization decide upon the acceptance of other gamer identities, as well as how women are treated in general (Biswas, et al., 2020). This is due to the gender attitudes of decision-makers and their openness to diversity and inclusion (Lauring & Villesèche, 2017). Within bro cultures, there seems to be a tendency that individuals have negative gender attitudes (Biswas, et al., 2020), while in inclusive cultures, a focus is placed on fostering positive gender attitudes (Lauring, & Villesèche, 2017). The gender attitudes on the individual dimension are reinforced through the interactions dimension and greatly influenced by the institutional policies and ideas of an organization (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). To understand the origins of negative and positive gender attitudes, it is important to evaluate all dimensions, as research indicates that members commonly adapt to the cultural patterns over time and rearrange their beliefs and behaviours (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Accordingly, the interactions dimensions will be introduced next.

Interactions Dimension

Interactions describe the ways individuals engage with the norms and values of organizations and how they interact with each other in- and outside of the firm (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Interactions can be understood as events in which people get involved with other people, thereby affecting each other (Hamedani, & Markus, 2019). Examples of those events are meetings, phone-calls, e-Mails, or the small-talk at the coffee machine. Additionally, HR related decision making can be labelled as an event as well, as it describes an interaction between HR managers and employees (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Accordingly, Cheryan, & Markus (2020) highlight “what is happening on the interactions level may prevent otherwise fair policies from being followed or enacted” (p. 1030). Within bro cultures, the shared set of values are circling around the stereotypical definition of masculinity (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020), leading to employees that play shooting games in

the office, stay late into the night to socialize, and hold events, such as beer Fridays (Ochsner, 2017). These practices are perceived exclusionary to everyone that deviates from these standards (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Within inclusive cultures on the other hand, different characteristics of individuals are explored and examined to develop policies and practices that ensure every employee feels secure and has the needed resources to reach their highest potential (Jerónimo, et al. 2021).

Another important characteristic of inclusive cultures is to ensure that every employee enjoys equal opportunities (Byrd, 2022), in form of participative decision-making, as well as granting equal access to same information, resources, and networks (Jerónimo, et al., 2021). Additionally, organizations that foster inclusive cultures aim to verify the fair distribution of rewards and career opportunities based on performances, which may lead to employees that favour to work cooperatively rather than competitively (Subhash, et al., 2019). On the contrary, norms and values of bro cultures are reinforced by individuals in the organization that hold negative gender attitudes (Taparia, & Lenka, 2022), and by policies that reward stereotypical masculine traits, such as being independence, which may increase the competitiveness among employees (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Accordingly, evidence suggests that within bro cultures, women may be confronted with glass ceilings that hinder their upward career advancements, despite of suitability, accomplishments, and experiences (Taparia, & Lenka, 2022). Another attribute of bro cultures is crunch and the assumption that developers that do not engage voluntarily in crunch are considered less passionate about the development and success of the games (Prescott, & Bogg, 2010). This stands in contrast to the importance of work-life balance initiatives, such as family-friendly programs that organizations with inclusive cultures promote to be used by everyone regardless of gender to avoid that women may be disregarded to avail them (Taparia, & Lenka, 2022).

Institutional Policies Dimension

The next layer is called institutional policies and evaluates the written and non-written rules and regulations of institutions (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Members of an organization are directly and indirectly affected by these policies, for instance through the rewards they receive for obeying to the rules (Hamedani, & Markus 2019). Therefore, policies are used by organizations to guide an employee's behaviour in the right way to achieve overall organizational goals (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). Within bro cultures, there is an enhanced likelihood that HR policies and practices are influenced by masculine defaults, whereas the behaviour and characteristics of the classical male gender role are favoured without directly discriminating by gender but disadvantaging more women than men (Lombard, et al., 2021). Examples of masculine defaults in institutional policies can be found in the expectation of employees to nominate themselves for promotions as well as in environments of intrusive interruptions, because it signals that the independent self is prioritized over the feelings and thoughts of the group (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Within inclusive cultures, a focus has been placed on developing policies that are diminishing the effects of biases, such as gender-focused, or supportive HR practices and policies which constitute that the entire workforce perceive the environment as inclusive and welcoming (Biswas, et al, 2020). One example to motivate people in charge to follow these supportive policies can be found in linking their salary rises or bonuses to gender diversity statistics (Ali, 2015).

Idea Dimension

The idea dimension yields information on what an organization defines as good, moral, and indispensable, which asserts influence on its policies, as well as on the individuals and their interactions with another (Hamedani, & Markus, 2019). On this layer of culture, the purpose of the organization is defined while characteristics of ideal and inefficient members are enclosed (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Evidence suggests that stereotypes, biases, and

socially constructed gender roles are issues that hinder women to excel at organizations that foster bro cultures (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). These issues are embedded in the idea dimension and greatly aligned with the attributes of the given dimensions of bro cultures, such as individuals' negative gender attitudes, glass ceilings, the exclusion of minorities and the presence of masculine defaults. Another consequence of the alignment between the dimensions within bro cultures is the idea that women are merely considered knowledgeable about female gamers' preferences, instead of being recognized for their expertise and skills (Styhre, et al., 2016). By introducing supportive, or gender-focused HR policies and practices to the institutional policies dimension, changes on other dimensions may occur as well. For example, the offering of mandatory unconscious bias training for the entire workforce has shown that it educates about stereotypes and social categorization, thereby diminishing the negative effects for women and other minorities (Taparia, & Lenka, 2022).

With regards to the transformational stages to build a diverse culture of inclusion, the first step is about creating an understanding that there is no true, objective reality and thereby enclosing that each individuum perceives it differently (Pless, & Maak, 2004). Within inclusive cultures, organizations explore the differences of their members and develop policies and practices based on the "common basis of understanding" that resulted from the evaluation of these differences (Pless, & Maak, 2004, p. 137). In this context, diversity and inclusion need to be overall goals and perceived as something good, moral, and indispensable to organizational success (Ly-Le, 2021). Researchers highlight the importance of mutual recognition (Pless, & Maak, 2004), as well as procedural justice (Subhash, et al., 2019) in fostering an inclusive culture. Both concepts may signal employees that fairness and equality are essential parts of the organizational culture. The given ideas of inclusive cultures show a great alignment with the characteristics of the other dimensions, including individuals with positive gender attitudes, gender-focused HR policies and practices and the offering of equal opportunities to everyone in the organization. The comparison of both cultures has shown how they may have manifested themselves on the given dimensions. It supports the assumption that each dimension asserts its influences equally on other dimensions, whereas individuals are either reinforcing or challenging the cultural patterns (Hamedani, & Markus, 2019). Lastly, it underlines the importance to implement changes on all dimensions to accelerate cultural changes in the long run (Hamedani, & Markus, 2019).

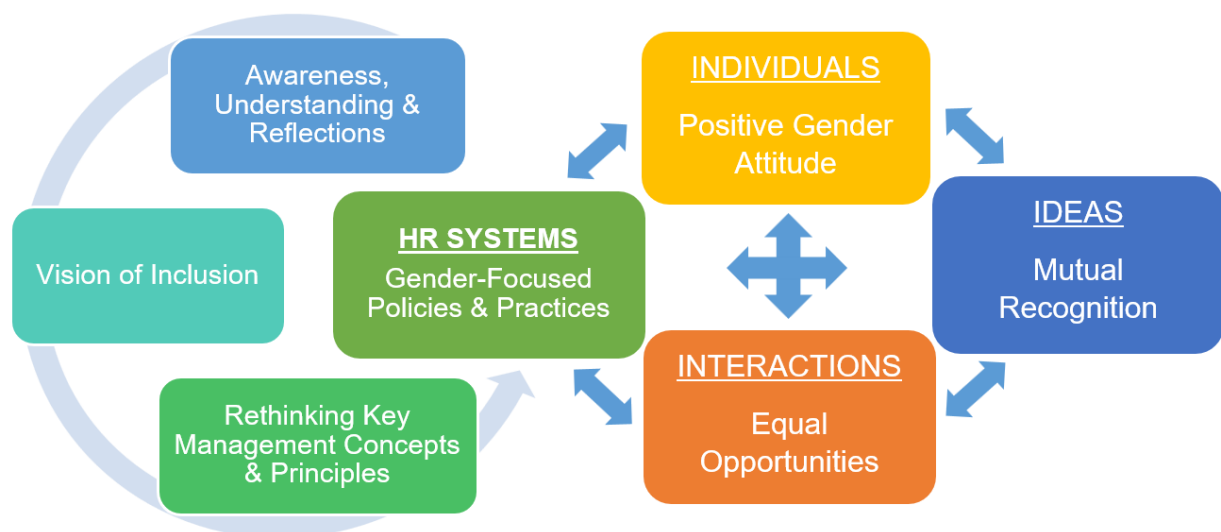
Conceptual Model

With the knowledge collected up to this point, the conceptual model presented in Fig. 2 will be proposed for this study. It serves as guiding framework that aligns the transformational stages of building a diverse culture of inclusion (Pless, & Maak, 2004), including the 8-step framework on change management (Kotter, 1995), with the dynamic interactions of cultural dimensions expressed in the culture cycle (Hamedani, & Markus, 2019). The first framework defines the sequential stages necessary to drive organisational change (Pless, & Maak, 2004), while the second framework outlines the steps an organization needs to take (Carreno, 2024). The third framework introduces four cultural dimensions that collectively shape and influence the dynamics of organizational culture (Hamedani, & Markus, 2019). For this study, the last dimension has been renamed to gender-focused HR policies and practices and serves as binding element between the given frameworks. The impact of gender-focused HR policies and practices on fostering gender diversity and inclusion has been pointed out by researchers that studied other male-dominated industries (Biswas, et al., 2020; Cheryan, & Markus, 2020; Ly-Le, 2022; Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022), which led to defining them as the unit of analysis in this study. The combination of the frameworks enables a deeper exploration of the processes and dynamics associated with fostering gender diversity and inclusion within game developer organizations in the game industry.

The model is designed to provide a holistic lens for understanding the impact of cultural transformation (Pless, & Maak, 2004), while outlining necessary steps to drive change across all cultural dimensions (Hamedani, & Markus, 2019; Kotter, 1995). In this sense, functions of this model are to illustrate which steps organizations need to take and how organizational changes may drive broader cultural shifts within an organization (Hamedani, & Markus, 2019; Kotter, 1995; Pless, & Maak, 2004). Furthermore, it aims at generating a greater understanding of effective actions and strategies for fostering gender diversity and inclusion within game developer teams in the game industry. Since there is limited research on gender diversity and inclusion in the game industry, an exploratory approach was adopted to gather detailed, qualitative insights into the actions, plans, and aspirations of organizations and individuals (Priya, 2021). The purpose of exploratory research is to delve into underexplored areas, uncover new perspectives, and gain a deeper understanding of phenomena by examining them through different perspectives (Makri, & Neely, 2021). It seeks to identify what is happening and generate insights that can lay the foundation for further investigation or practical application (Priya, 2021). In this sense, this approach aligns with the model's iterative nature, because fostering diversity and inclusivity can be seen as a dynamic and ongoing process (Subhash, et al., 2019), while exploratory research allows for capturing respondents' diverse experiences, opinions, and aspirations, enabling organizations to use the findings as a foundation for refining and adapting their gender-focused initiatives and practices to better meet evolving needs (Makri, & Neely, 2021).

Figure 2

Conceptual Model of Fostering Gender Diversity Through HR Policies and Practices.



Note. Adapted from Pless, & Maak (2004), and Hamedani, & Markus (2019).

Methodology

Research Design

Due to the explorative nature of this study, a qualitative approach to research has been favoured. The investigation of increasing gender diversity within game developer organizations involved gaining a greater understanding of the dynamics of social relations, including the relationships, experiences, and interactions of organizational members, which is best explored with qualitative research methods (Turner, et al., 2021). Therefore, qualitative research has been chosen as it suits the evaluation of phenomenon that deal with multi-layered realities of attitudes, meanings, aspirations, or values that can neither be quantified, nor turned into operationalized variables (Turner, et al., 2021). Furthermore, a case study design has been adopted to support the enhancement of the current state of knowledge concerning gender diversity initiatives implemented in game developer studios within the game industry. In general, a case study can be defined as a research strategy in which a particular phenomenon, or unit of analysis, is investigated in great detail (Priya, 2021). Commonly, it is applied to explain, describe, and explore phenomena within their real-life context (Crowe, et al., 2011), while being especially fitting for scarcely researched phenomena (Ryan, 2012). Although this study does not involve direct collaboration with an organization, it examines the broader phenomenon of gender diversity across multiple studios, identifying common actions, plans, and aspirations shared by industry stakeholders (Priya, 2021). Furthermore, it allows for an exploration of various methods and initiatives employed within the industry to address gender-related challenges, while also providing insights into the suitability for organizational transformation and cultural change.

For this study, the units of analyses to be explored in great depth were gender-focused initiatives, or more favourably, gender-focused HR policies and practices that may support the increase of gender diversity and inclusion within game developer teams. The units of observation were experts in form of HR manager of game developer organizations, as well as female individuals working in game development positions. Furthermore, the method of semi-structured interviews has been opted for, which can be explained as leading a conversation with prepared open-ended and follow-up questions that are related to relevant topics but not chained to an order (Newcomer, et al., 2015). The semi-structured script serves as guidance during an interview and ensures flexibility to adapt to interviewees responses, which may lead to receiving more-detailed information on the topics discussed (Ruslin, et al., 2022). Additionally, its flexibility allows that the conversation can take any direction and “may delve into totally unforeseen issues” (Newcomer, et al., 2015, p. 493). This has been especially useful for exploring the rather unresearched area of gender diversity in the game industry, as new insights have occurred after conducting the pre-tests, as well as after the first two interviews, leading to changing the semi-structured interview scripts. The development of questions and execution of the research will be explained in the following chapters.

Measures and Instruments

It is argued that the quality of information received through interviews is based on the quality of the interview guide, as well as on skills and preparation of the interviewer (Naz, et al., 2022). An interview guide can be identified as a document that supports the researcher's interviewing processes by establishing an overview of important issues and topics that needs to be addressed during the interviews (Newcomer, et al., 2015). The creation of the interview guide included the development of questions for the semi-structured interview scripts, as well as grouping these questions around research topics (Newcomer, et al., 2015), but without a clear structure to grant flexibility to move from topic to topic (Ruslin, et al., 2022). The interview guide of this study can be found in the appendices (see **Appendix D**). To increase the quality of the semi-structured interview scripts of this study, the questions were

participant-oriented, worded clearly and developed based on the conceptual model and the findings of the theoretical framework (Naz, et al., 2022). An overview of theoretical concepts used in supporting the formulation of questions can be found in the appendices (see **Appendix A**). The themes discussed with both groups were (1) *attitudes and beliefs on gender diversity*, (2) *gender diversity initiatives*, (3) *inclusive organizational cultures*, as well as (4) *HR policies and practices* employed by their current workplace. The assembling of questions around themes has the advantage that answers of participants can be compared, as well as grouped around these themes (Lochmiller, 2021), which has been of great value in keeping an overview during the coding process.

The semi-structured interview scripts contained a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions, as well as follow-up questions (see **Appendix D**). Open-ended questions have been opted for due to its suitability for unexplored research areas, as it allows participants to freely choose their answers of which the information may contain insights that have not been considered before by the researcher (Ruslin, et al., 2022). As an example, an open-ended question has been chosen to be the “icebreaker” question of the interviews, which says, *“What do you think is the most important thing for organizations in the game industry to understand or change to enable the fostering of gender diversity?”*. It has granted great insights into the participants perception of the currently largest problems in the game industry, as well as the smooth transition into one of the given topics. Closed-ended questions have been included to explicitly ask for opinions on given issues, such as *“Do you think a female quota would support the fostering of gender diversity?”*, followed by *“Why do you think that?”*. In this way, “some firm quantitative points of reference” could have been made (Newcomer, et al., 2015, p. 497) which were used to formulate statements, such as *“3 out of 6 asked experts are not convinced of the effectiveness of female quotas”*, including an explanation of their perspective.

Before conducting the interviews, the execution of the interview guide was tested to guarantee that relevant topics were covered and well communicated (Naz, et al., 2022). Two pre-tests were made that caused the altering of questions of the semi-structured interview script due to given feedback and evaluation of findings. Both pre-tests’ participants fulfil the requirements to be included in the sample, except for the minimum experience of 3 years for game developer and 5 years for CEO/founder or HR manager. Additional changes have been made to the semi-structured interview scripts after conducting the second and fifth interview (see **Appendix C** for an overview of changes made to the semi-structured interviews). The interviews were conducted either via webcam or as a personal visit at the participant’s office. Both ways have been identified as suitable approaches to capture meaningful information from participants (Lobe, et al., 2022). The first approach enabled to comfortably interview participants that would not have been accessible due to the distance to the researcher (Lobe, et al., 2022). Still, the possibility to visit was preferred, as the researcher was able to gain a larger picture of the participants and their office environments (Lobe, et al., 2022). Additionally, by interacting face-to-face with professionals, the researcher had the great opportunity to increase her network and self-esteem. More details on the interviewing processes will be given in the following.

Sample and Data Collection

The expert group of HR managers that work in different game developer studios within the game industry and the second group of women working in game development have been identified as great sources to gather a deeper understanding of gender-focused HR policies and practices employed in game developer organizations. HR managers have been chosen as experts, as they are knowledgeable individuals with privileged access to information about gender diversity initiatives within an organization (Robinson, 2021). They are commonly consulted to assist in solving problems, which implies that they have experiences with the

implementation processes of solution-oriented initiatives (Robinson, 2021). Additionally, there is evidence that a great number of the problems women may face in the game industry are related to the key functions of HRM (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). Therefore, they might be able to share first-hand insights of successful and failed gender diversity initiatives, as well as to provide recommendations for the implementation and execution of these initiatives. Organizations that did not have a HRM department or HR manager were still included, if an equivalent source, such as the CEO, the owner, or the one in charge of the given HR functions, could be interviewed. The second group consisted of women working in game development, whereas the purpose was to learn about their perception of gender diversity initiatives in the game industry, as well as to hear about their experiences with them.

Besides belonging to one of the given groups, other requirements for being included in the sample were to have at least 5 years of experiences for HR managers and 2 years of experience for women working in game development. A focus was placed on finding participants from different game developer organizations, such as triple-A, mobile, or indie game developer studios to ensure a representation of the context of the wider game industry. This distinguishment is important, as the findings of the literature review suggested that there might be great differences among game developer studios in relation to gender diversity and inclusive organizational cultures depending on the type of game they create. As highlighted by Turner, et al. (2021), the analysis of qualitative data is an iterative process and allows to be updated with every piece of information, creating multiple levels of interpretations built up on each other during the entire process. Therefore, the information gained through the expert interviews was constantly compared with the second interviewee group, which resulted in adapting the semi-structured interview scripts to enhance the flow and the arise of new insights (Ruslin, et al., 2022). Additionally, the combination of both sample groups enabled a comparison of initiatives that experts and those affected by these initiatives assume to result in increasing gender diversity within game developer teams.

However, the act of getting in contact with both groups of interviewees had been difficult, as experts are commonly actively occupied and shielded (Robinson, 2021), and women working in game development are minorities and were less likely to be found (Bailey, et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the quality of collected data can be considered more important than its quantity when applying qualitative research, arguing that detailed information coming from a limited number of expert interviews may reveal useful insights (Turner, et al., 2021). To increase the likelihood of finding expert interviews, it is advised to use own personal and professional networks (Robinson, 2021). In this sense, purposeful and convenience sampling have been the most suitable approaches to get in contact with the given expert groups. Purposively sampling was used to gain access to subjects with target characteristics described in the selection criteria, whereas convenience sampling, or more specific, snowball sampling was used by asking participants to reach out to their networks and introduce further interviewees with similar features to the study (Naderifar, et al., 2017). LinkedIn has been the most useful tool to create first contact with experts due to its reach and the ability to apply search filters (Robinson, 2021). Other tools used in this study to successfully enable first contacts with target interviewees have been Discord, Facebook, and Instagram.

To assure scientific rigour, this study drew upon existing literature, ensured respondents' validation, as well as assured transparency throughout the research process (Crowe, et al., 2011). In this sense, the companies purposely contacted were award-winning organizations that have been praised for their great work environment and those participating in supportive initiatives, such as "Girls' Day". Meanwhile, the women contacted were those with the greatest visibility to the researcher, including voluntaries engaging in supportive institutions or founder of related associations. Because of these circumstances, it was urgent to assure participants anonymity and security of their data. The document "informed consent"

was created to explain the purpose of the study and the handling of participants information (see **Appendix B**). Moreover, participants needed to sign the document and send it back to the researcher before an interview could be conducted. In this way, participants were aware of the topics discussed during the interview and assured that their data will be handled confidential.

The first contact with companies was usually a written e-Mail or direct message on social media platforms, in which the researcher asked for having an interview, accompanied by explaining the researcher's admiration for the individual or organization, the purpose of the study and the impact of their participation. One successful way of contacting women working in game development was to directly message them on different Discord channels or Facebook groups that are related to increasing gender diversity in the game industry. In total 12 participants have been acquired this way, of which an overview can be found in appendices (see **Appendix E**). The interviews were conducted either online or in person and within the period of 29th May 2024 to 27th August 2024. Six participants were identified as HR experts (HR_1), while five participants were game developer (DEV_1) and one was a speaker of the game industry (SPKR). The average length of an interview was 38 minutes, whereas the shortest was 21 minutes and the longest 49 minutes. The audios of the interviews were recorded after receiving permission of the participations, which were then turned into anonymised transcripts using Microsoft Word. These transcripts have been checked for their correctness multiple times by hearing the audio and reading the transcript simultaneously. After assuring the correctness, the audios were deleted and the researcher started the analysis, which will be explained in the following part.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis, which can be explained as a qualitative method to identify reoccurring patterns within collected data that are used to address and interpret the research (Maguire, & Delahunt, 2017). It can be used for explorative research and yields the benefit of developing interpretations of the observed patterns in accordance with a chosen theoretical framework or conceptual model (Lochmiller, 2021). In this context, the conceptual model presented in chapter two served as theoretical lens for analysing and interpreting the patterns of the data of this study. Additionally, the six-phase framework of thematic analysis proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006) was adopted to guide this analysis, of which a detailed overview of the steps taken within this research can be found in the appendices (see **Appendix F**). The process started with re-reading transcripts and personal notes to get a first impression of the data (Maguire, & Delahunt, 2017). After getting familiar with the data set, the data was organized by generating codes about initial ideas (Maguire, & Delahunt, 2017). These initial codes aimed at creating a sense of the data by assigning value to different perspectives or experiences (Lochmiller, 2021). The method of open coding was chosen to be most suitable for this approach.

Open coding can be defined as the process of finding underlying key ideas within the collected data set that are associated with the unit of analysis (Alhassan, et al., 2019). Microsoft Word and Excel were used to support the open coding process of the transcripts. Microsoft Word was used to break down the transcripts into smaller sections and to craft codes, while Excel was used to organize these codes with frequencies. The process of reading the sections, coding them, and evaluating these codes based on frequencies and personal judgement had been repeated until no new codes were possible to be crafted. In total 315 sections of transcripts have been coded, which resulted in the identification of 71 codes. The resulted codes were proceeded into themes that aimed to "capture something significant or interesting about the data and/or research question" (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3356). In this sense, Lochmiller (2021) advises on categorizing themes, as it supports the identification of related and unrelated patterns of different and similar nature.

Additionally, it increases transparency of the coding processes of this study (Lochmiller, 2021). Accordingly, axial coding was used to reassemble the 71 codes produced through the open coding and define categories that are connected with another (Alhassan, et al., 2019).

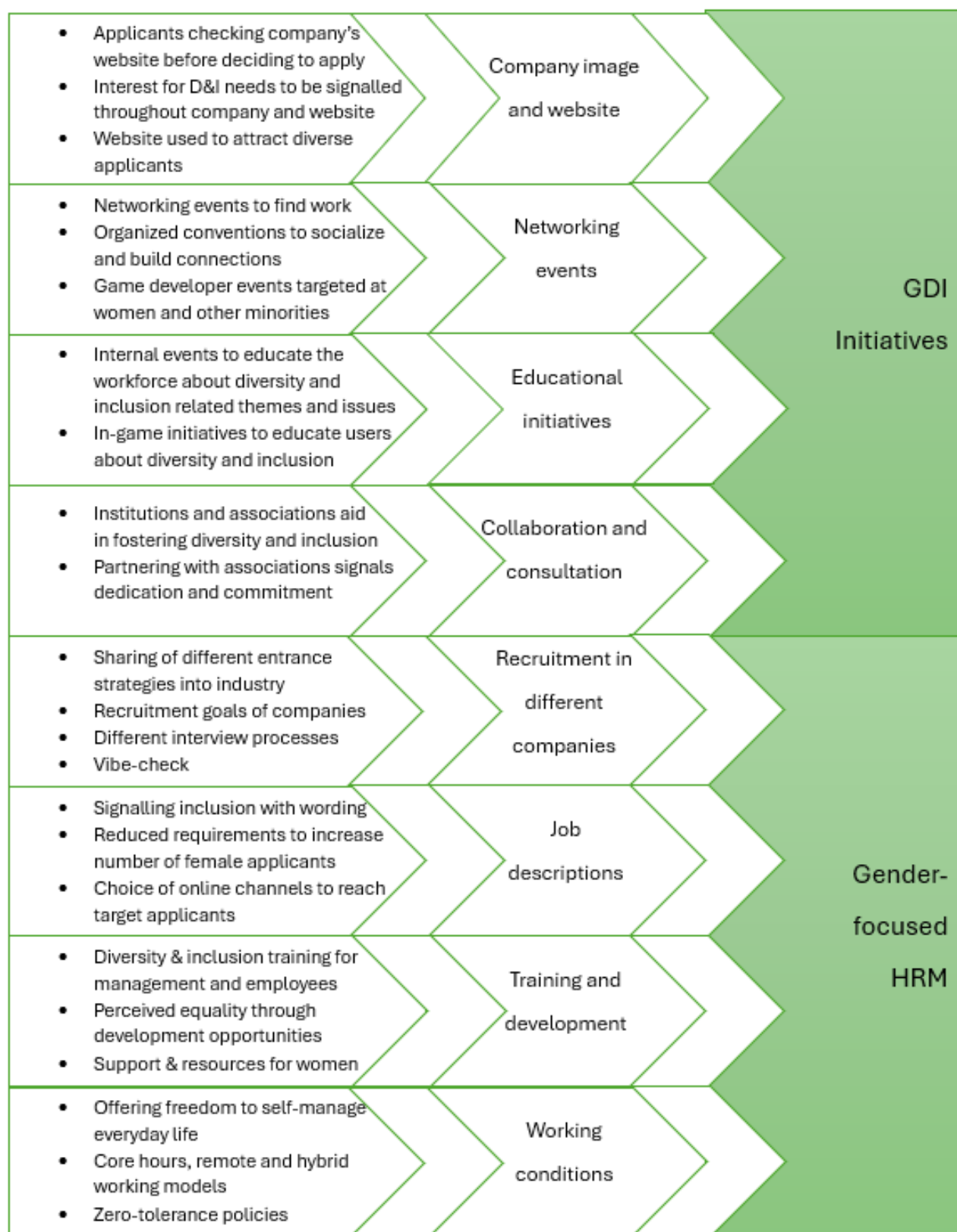
The topics of the semi-structured interview guides helped to have a first impression of possible categories. After reviewing the themes, including the modification and development of them (Maguire, & Delahunt, 2017), six categories were identified, namely (1) *Mindsets & Attitudes*, (2) *Inclusive Culture*, (3) *Diversity & Inclusion Initiatives*, (4) *Gender-focused HR Policies & Practices*, (5) *Female Future*, and (6) *Current Situation*. The fifth phase dealt with defining the categories and their relations to each other (Maguire, & Delahunt, 2017). In this context, Lochmiller (2021) labels these steps as the interpretive phase and explains that it deals with the creation of “broad overarching statements that describe the underlying data” (p. 6). The last phase of the analysis included selective coding, which can be explained as the process of identifying a core category and systematically connecting it to other categories that have emerged during the axial coding process, which may result in the refinement and expansion of the theoretical framework (Alhassan, et al., 2019). The core category of this study is (4) *gender-focused HR Policies & Practices* because it has shown to have the most influential relation to the other categories. To elaborate, the first three categories can be interpreted as needed elements for successfully developing and implementing gender-focused HR policies and practices within game developer organizations that may have an influence on the current and future situation in the game industry. Further explanations of the developed categories, themes and codes can be found in the appendices (**Appendix G**).

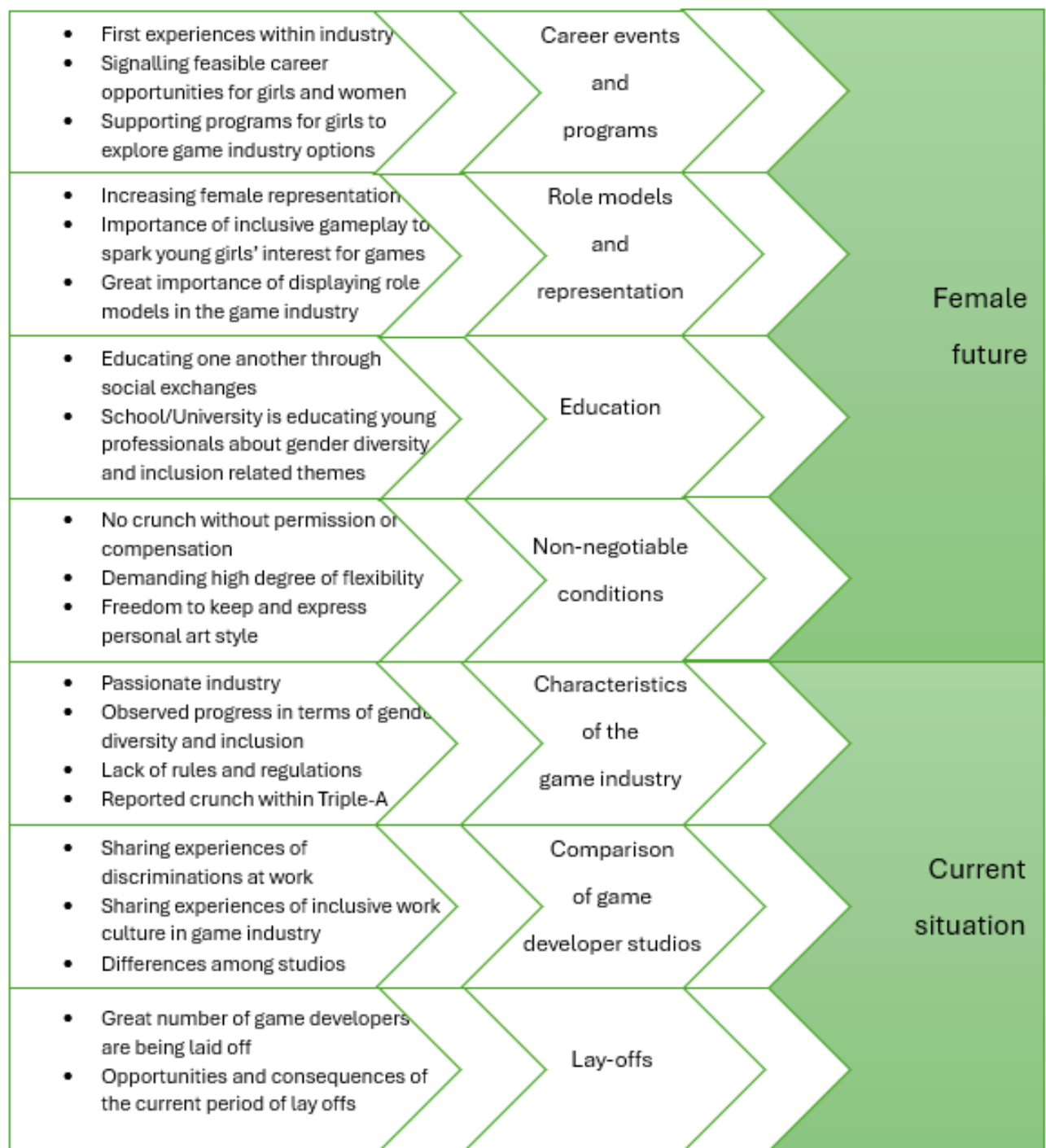
Data Structure

While the data coding process was conducted using thematic analysis, involving open, axial, and selective coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the resulting insights were organized and presented using the Gioia method, which is a systematic and inductive approach with the aim to enhance specific knowledge of events or organizations (Gioia, et al., 2012). This approach was chosen to provide a clear and systematic structure for displaying the relationships between first-order concepts that have been discovered during the open coding process, second-order themes that have been created during the axial coding process and associated overarching dimensions that were produced during the selective coding process (Gioia, et al., 2012). Aim of employing this framework was to enhance the interpretability of the findings while maintaining their grounding in the thematic analysis. The data structure is illustrated in **Table 2** on page 33.

Table 2
Data structure.

First order concepts	Second order themes	Aggregate dimensions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing awareness for problems related to diversity Knowing and learning about biases Exchanging different opinions Will for self-development 	Self-reflection	Mindsets and attitudes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring the uniqueness of individuals to learn about them Individuals with diverse attributes benefit the company Cherishment of differences 	Valuing individuality	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showing great interest in their employees Showing great interest in D&I related themes Leading by example 	Dedication	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Displaying the commitment throughout the company Being devoted to take actions that support the fostering of diversity and inclusion 	Commitment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Granting freedom of self-governance benefits company and employees Ensuring equality means to assure that everyone feels included 	Equality and autonomy	Inclusive Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being empathic and caring Treating each other respectfully Offering support in private and professional manners 	Supportive environment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get-togethers to improve the bonding between members of the organization Building relationships with colleagues creates inclusion 	Company events	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive culture helps in developing inclusive game features Inclusion within games starts with accurate female representation 	Inclusion within video games	





Findings

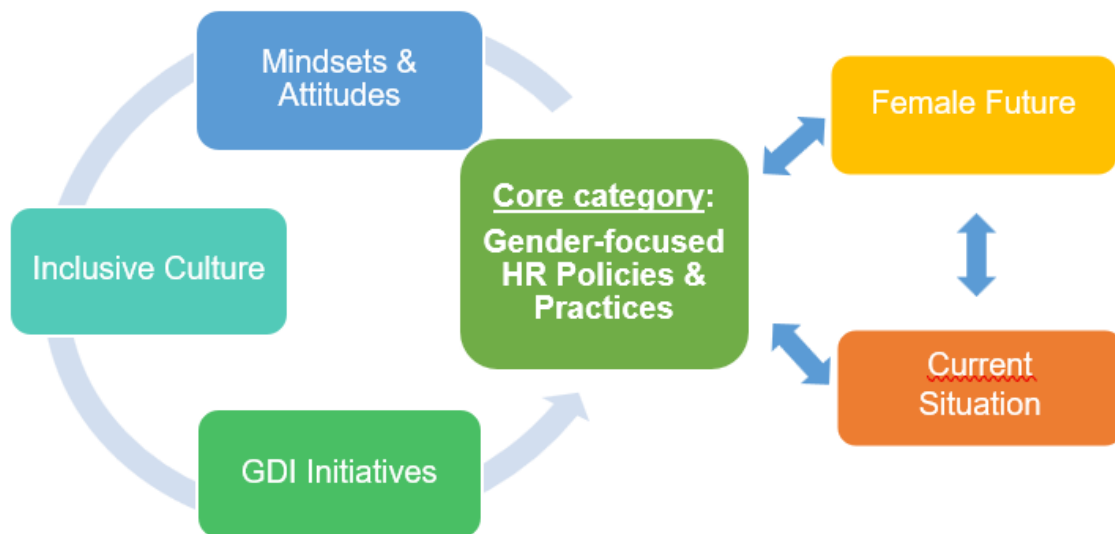
This chapter presents the results of the data analysis. The data has been collected through semi-structured interviews with HR managers and game developer working in the game industry, aiming to explore actions and initiatives that may result in an increase in women working in game development. Based on that, five stages have been identified that were associated with increasing gender diversity and inclusion within game developer teams in the game industry, of which their relations to each other are illustrated in Figure 3. The chapter begins with general findings related to the participants' perceptions of the current situation of the game industry and continues with the identified stages that explain favourable behaviour, actions, initiatives, and policies to foster gender diversity and inclusion.

Identified stages:

- Stage 1: Mindsets and Attitudes
- Stage 2: Inclusive Culture
- Stage 3: Gender Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives
- Stage 4: Gender-Focused HR Policies and Practices
- Stage 5: Female Future

Figure 3

Relation between developed categories and the selected core category.



Note. The development of categories and their relations to each other.

Current Situation

Participants shared their general opinion on the current situation of the game industry. This can be seen as a collection of impressions and yields information on characteristics of the game industry, as well as participants' experiences with different game developer studios, discriminations, and lay-offs.

Characteristics of the Game Industry

The game industry has been described by the participants as a passionate one with devoted and creative people that pursue their dream of making video games themselves. In relation to gender diversity and inclusion, participants agreed that there is a positive progress happening of organizations that want to be more diverse and inclusive, while more women are entering the industry. Accordingly, one participant shared, "Females are also passionate

about games, which is not something that is necessarily generally advertised, but it's nice to see that lately I could also notice that more and more women are into like coming to this wonderful industry" (HR3). However, the majority of participants of the game developer group, as well as the speaker, have indicated to believe that not enough is done in terms of fostering diversity and inclusion in the game industry. A comparison has been made between triple-A companies and smaller companies, whereas respondents indicated to have the perception that more participation on this movement has been shown by small and medium-sized enterprises, such as indie and mobile game developer studios. The majority asserted critic on triple-A companies for having the necessary resources to implement changes that enable the fostering of gender diversity and inclusion but not the ambitions to do so. In this sense, participants shared a need for more independent associations in the industry, as well as internal initiatives within organizations that support the aim of securing equality and the absence of discriminations through the implementation of rules and regulations.

Comparison of Game Developer Studios

The participants have shared their experiences of working within game developer studios that differ in size and type of game, including SMEs, as well as indie, mobile, and triple-A game developer studios. When asked about gender discrimination at the workplace, participants indicated that none has felt discriminated against. However, they explained to have heard negative experiences shared by others in the industry, and the majority of the participants agreed that discrimination against women in the game industry is still a problem that needs to be addressed and solved. In this sense, one participant, who is also a founding member of an association, briefly shared her impressions of the results of an online survey they conducted industry-wide among game developers and stated *"above all, we asked, for example, how many people have ever felt discriminated against in their work environment. And so, yes, it's not particularly surprising, it came out that many women felt discriminated against"* (DEV1). This can be supported by another respondent who noted, *"you hear really bad things from the industry here and there and I've talked to a lot of women about it and yes, it still really happens that women somehow have to deal with stupid jokes or maybe aren't taken seriously at all. I didn't get that feeling at my current workplace"* (DEV5).

In general, participants shared that larger organizations are greatly hierarchical and characterized by a high level of granularity, which made them feel that complaints, feedback or other input was handled *"like a file in the filing cabinet is opened and treated in some way and then you close it again and put it away, even if that wasn't the end for the person who brought it up"* (DEV3). This stands in contrast with the impressions that participants of smaller companies shared, as one explained, *"In our league, by league I mean indie games, smaller companies, I don't know that many, if any, that would be in any way negative about gender or other forms of diversity"* (HR1). Moreover, respondents indicated that problems and complaints are directly discussed in a one-to-one, while ideas are welcome to be shared during meetings and throughout the development processes. Furthermore, respondents of both groups were convinced that a great work-life balance leads to healthier and more productive employees, thereby ensuring that employees solely work within working hours. More details on the differences within game developer studios in terms of HR policies and practices will be given later in this chapter.

Lay offs

Most of the participants reported that a great number of people employed in the game industry were laid off by their companies and that many game developers were looking for a new job. One participant indicated to be affected by these lay-offs and shared, *"I'm still employed at CompanyX now, but I don't know if you've noticed, but there have been big lay-offs in the entire industry and I'm also affected by it, which means I already know that my contract isn't extended. It will now run until January and after that it stops, it will not be*

extended, and I already know that" (DEV3). Other participants have not been affected but noticed it too, as one respondent explained, *"there is an oversupply of employees in the games industry. At least currently. There's just, my links and timeline are full of people who have been laid off right now. This means that as an employer you can actually pick the people you want"* (HR2). Against this background, the current situation has been identified as a great opportunity for organizations in the game industry to increase the number of women within their game developer teams, as well as to facilitate elements of an inclusive work culture to support their entrance and retention. Further findings associated with this will be evaluated in more detail at a later point in this chapter.

Stage 1: Mindsets & attitudes

The inclusion of mindsets and attitudes within this study is rooted in respondents' perspectives, as participants of both groups have indicated that without ensuring that employees and those in decision-making positions promote appropriate mindsets and attitudes towards gender diversity and inclusion, initiatives aimed at increasing gender diversity and inclusion are unlikely to achieve sustainable success. This is aligned with the response of one participant that shared, *"any programmes or initiatives or anything that's for later, because if you don't have that foundation of people understanding why this initiative is coming in, why you have to change how you're doing this process, they'll just fight it and they won't embrace it and they won't do it as it should be"* (HR4). This stage is essential for creating an environment where diversity and inclusion initiatives can be effectively implemented and supported. Therefore, fostering positive mindsets and attitudes towards gender diversity and inclusion serves as a necessary foundation to the actions and strategies explored in this study, reinforcing the importance of cultural readiness as a critical step. In this sense, four themes have been identified that have been associated with participants' perception of favourable characteristics that should be valued in an organization to enable the fostering of gender diversity and inclusion. These are self-reflection, valuing individuality, as well as dedication, and commitment.

Self-reflection

The majority of participants indicated that the act of self-reflection is essential for the fostering of gender diversity and inclusion in the game industry and should be applied by all members of an organization, including employees, top management, and CEO. Furthermore, they agreed that more awareness for the topics need to be created, as well as to educate about biases, of which different ways of doing so will be explained later in this chapter. In general, participants expressed the importance of being self-reflective and seeking the exchange of different perspectives with diverse individuals, thereby showing the will for self-development. Accordingly, one participant shared, *"first of all, this openness and awareness of the topic, because as I said, I had a lot of conversations with male colleagues who then asked me, 'Is this even a problem in the industry?' and it should just be, be a little more in people's consciousness, I think"* (DEV1), while another stated, *"I just think as long as you're trying and you're learning and you're open to the feedback and people will tell you nicely if you're wrong because that's how we all learn and grow and then it becomes a habit"* (HR4).

Valuing individuality

The importance of valuing an individual for their unique attributes has been mentioned by most interviewees, as one shared, *"it is super interesting to bring in and incorporate the perspectives of all kinds of people from all kinds of levels and also perspectives of people who come from different directions than you do"* (HR1), while another claimed, *"we want, like we give everybody a chance, we want to be as diverse as possible"* (HR3). In this sense, participants agreed that the appreciation of differences among individuals is an essential part of a favourable mindset to increase the number of women working in game development. Furthermore, respondents highlighted that this mindset needs to be displayed by all

members of an organization and should be reinforced through interactions and formal policies. In this sense, one respondent shared, *“diversity is, it has to be part of the company DNA, you know. There is no such thing as a checklist box or something for it, it is a matter of heart”* (HR5), whereas another highlighted, *“I’m sure that other companies have also got other plans and approaches. But yeah, for me it’s always the people, right, whether it’s the people doing the hiring or the people that you’re hiring in. It’s that unity, the cohesion and that’s what makes it a strong company unit”* (HR4).

Dedication

Another theme that emerged through the analysis is the dedication of CEO and top management in terms of fostering gender diversity and inclusion. Despite being self-reflective and valuing individuality, participants indicated that the perception of having devoted and caring leaders creates contentment within their working environment, as one respondent indicated, *“for my supervisor it [increasing gender diversity] is very important, she has an eye on it, and I feel very comfortable there”* (DEV5), whereas another shared, *“the management of my current employer is partly queer and personally affected by problems regarding inclusion and diversity in society. Therefore, topics related to this are always taken seriously and are discussed”* (DEV4). The majority of the game developer participants have asserted the wish for devoted and emphatic superiors, while all respondents of the expert group indicated to strive to become this kind of supervisor to their employees. Accordingly, one participant explained, *“diversity concerns me as a topic in general. For me personally, it’s not just about gender equality, but also about equality in age structures or where someone comes from or what education someone has”* (HR2). In this sense, respondents associated dedication with showing an interest in diversity and inclusion topics, as well as in the employees working at the organization.

Furthermore, participants have indicated that dedication can be expressed through leading by example, which can be explained as providing guidance to others by being a role model, shown through actions and behaviour, rather than solely words. This has been declared by both interviewee groups, as one respondent explained, *“for fostering inclusivity and diversity you need to lead by example, and all managers in this company will be, and are trained by internal and external experts about for example conscious and unconscious biases that may influence their perception of, yea, of everything”* (HR5), whereas another respondent stated, *“I think it must be coming from the top and must be supported by displaying role models. If it is not coming from the top, it will not be taken seriously and cannot be implemented throughout the entire company structure”* (DEV2). Against this background, participants shared different ways of enhancing the perception of working at a company with dedicated superiors, such as internal events to educate about diversity and inclusion themes. As an example, one participant shared, *““whenever he [the CEO] comes visiting, he organizes like a meeting, like breakfast with the new joiners but even with the old ones. So, you could actually just catch up with the old ones, but also get to know the new ones”* (HR6). Other approaches will be evaluated thoroughly later in this chapter.

Commitment

Commitment can be understood as the state of top management and CEO being devoted to take actions to foster gender diversity and inclusion. Dedication and commitment can be closely linked to each other, but are treated as separate themes, because respondents of the game developer group indicated that they have experienced cases, where CEO and management have announced their dedication to diversity and inclusion but treated it more as an obligation, as explained by one respondent, *“there are many companies, especially in the social media marketing and entertainment area, that are trying to be part of the inclusion movement by for example, displaying one or more LGBTQI+ flags on their profile picture or in a post during Pride Month, usually in connection with their own company logo, but they do*

not truly live this out in the workplace itself" (DEV4). In this sense, participants of the game developer group indicated that fostering gender diversity and inclusion should be happening in an authentic way, including the continuous surveillance of changes regarding policies and initiatives. Reflecting the opinions of the expert group, participants shared the same urgency for treating the fostering of gender diversity and inclusion as a long-time investment. This can be seen by the response of a participant who indicated, *"I really hope we don't ever feel like we're done, and we can sit back and stop because I think it will always be something you have to do"* (HR4), while another shared, *"if it is, for example, a requirement from the country or state, only the bare minimum will be done. Companies will do just the basics to comply with the regulations and laws, but fostering diversity and inclusion is beyond that"* (HR5).

Stage 2: Inclusive culture

Participants highlighted that fostering an inclusive culture is a foundational requirement for achieving gender diversity. This stage emphasizes respondents' answers on creating an environment in which everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered. In this context, five themes have emerged to describe the findings associated with establishing an inclusive culture within game developer organizations in the game industry, namely autonomy and equality, supportive environments, internal company events and inclusion within gameplay.

Autonomy and Equality

Autonomy can be understood as the freedom of self-governance and means that individuals enjoy the freedom to decide for themselves when and where to work. Participants of both groups agreed on the importance of granting autonomy and shared their conviction that it improves the well-being and productivity of employees. One participant of the expert group shared, *"we are convinced that employees with the right expertise and the right skills will make the right decisions in our company and that is why everyone is involved in decision-making processes here at the company. And we let them do that. They can propose and implement new ideas and discuss them within their teams and we trust them that it is all done in a good way for the company"* (HR5), while one respondent of the game developer group stated, *"working remotely is super important to me, I'm doing that right now because my company is in another city and I just don't want to, or can't live there at the moment and I'm very grateful that they approached me and offered it to me"* (DEV5). In general, autonomy has been indicated by participants, because it creates the perception of being trusted, as explained by another participant, *"so, people can stay home with their kids and just, of course they are expected to work. Yeah, people expect them to work, and it's not, It's kind of like any way you manage your own time, right? No one checks that you're working every minute, right? I mean even here like nobody checks on you if you deliver and as long as you bring your results, then everything is fine. That's how it should be"* (HR6).

Equality can be explained as treating all employees in the same way and offering everyone the same opportunities. Participants of the expert group have indicated that equality is an important factor in fostering an inclusive culture. Most agreed that the definition of it greatly depends on the employees working together at an organisation because different viewpoints need to be explored and incorporated to assure that everyone feels valued, as one participant shared, *"there is a lot of exchange with each other and people are very happy to discuss things and listen to everything. I think it's an inclusive working culture, regardless of the aspects, whether it's the seniority in the team or the gender or the identity. It's really important to listen to everything and try to incorporate everything equally"* (HR1). Furthermore, participants explained that in some cases, equality means offering diverse people special treatment to ensure that these individuals feel as included and comfortable at the workplace as everyone else. As an example, one participant shared, *"we have somebody that is extremely tall, extremely tall. Yeah. And we realized that maybe, I mean, we have all the tools in the company. He's diverse like he's in a way different but in order to feel, to make*

him feel more included we actually offered him like a special kind of desk, like standing desk as we were like maybe the normal desk that we have make him feel uncomfortable. So why not just, like, ensure that everybody's feeling as comfortable as they want and like" (HR3). In this sense, participants shared ways on assuring that autonomy and equality are granted to employees, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Supportive environments

Participants of both groups indicated that a supportive environment is part of fostering inclusion and means to create a comfortable atmosphere in which people treat each other respectfully and care about each other, as one participant of the game developer group explained, *"personally, I believe that, first and foremost, you have to ensure that all employees generally treat each other with respect, regardless of gender, ethnicity, etc. And that you clearly signal that any disrespect or even bullying will not be tolerated"* (DEV4). Similar to defining equality, the definition of a supportive environment depends on the employees that work in an organization and their understanding and needs of support. As an example, one participant of the expert group shared, *"I try to create a pleasant working environment for everyone. As much flexibility as possible and we have certain family regulations, something like family care, also because we have a lot of fathers in the company. I have two children myself and we just have a lot of understanding, and we definitely wanted to accommodate families and show a lot of consideration"* (HR2). Other respondents of the expert group highlighted the importance of showing empathy and creating a safe space for employees to talk about their problems and concerns. Accordingly, one respondent explained, *"for us, of course, if the person tells us I'm going through a tough time we try to help them like, you know, as a friend first, but then also like what we can do in terms like company wise"* (HR3).

Company Events

Participants of both groups agreed on the benefits of internal company events, which can be understood as parties, or get-togethers with colleagues outside of working hours. They explained that it is a great opportunity to get to know their colleagues and supervisors better in a personal matter. Moreover, some expressed that it constitutes a comfortable working environment, while some described their colleagues as friends they work with. Especially the expert group highlighted the positive effect of team bonding through organized events on the interactions between employees. Another point made was that it is a great approach to gather all employees together at the office for these events, as all participants of the expert group were working at organizations that grant their employees flexible working conditions, such as hybrid and remote working models. In this sense, some explained that company events can be linked to fostering diversity and inclusion, as the arrangement of them should create the perception that every individual's needs and wishes were covered, such as the choices of food, and activities. Additionally, one participant shared that even the title of the event can signal inclusion to employees, by, for example, changing the Christmas party into the Winter party. Lastly, participants of the developer group shared their delight for company events and explained that it creates the perception of being valued and thanked for their contributions, as for example explained by one respondent, *"what I always think is really nice, is when a company creates balance like that, for example by having a summer party or a Christmas party or something like that. So just the usual things, a little bit, to give people the feeling that they somehow value the commonality within the company"* (DEV3).

Inclusion within Gameplay

A recurring theme in the data was the signalling of inclusion through the games that an organization develops, particularly evident among the respondents of the expert group. They highlighted that an inclusive culture may influence the game development processes in a way that choices are done with a more critical view on diversity and inclusion, especially if

minorities are allowed to share their ideas and participate in the development processes. In this context, one respondent shared, *“a lot of them should take a look on their culture to see like how inclusive they are and I think this is like not just inclusivity in terms of like just having women or having, I don't know, people from the LGPTQ+ community but also the way that they're doing games is, you know, like in games like the female characters sometimes are, like, maybe not the best portrayed. And so, they should also take a look into that”* (HR3). Most participants of the game developer group mentioned that inclusion begins with an accurate representation of female characters, while they emphasize on the consideration of diverse opinions within development processes to create novel game experiences. As an example, one respondent shared, *there are also development studios ‘by women for women’, which I think is really great. This results in completely different types of games, which of course are not just for women. But here at least care is taken to ensure that women are not only involved in the decision of their own representation, but also develop it themselves and in this context rarely send a female, half-naked character to war”* (DEV4). Further elaboration on the importance of female representation will be provided further along in this chapter.

Stage 3: Diversity & Inclusion Initiatives

Respondents of both groups stressed that targeted initiatives may be beneficial for addressing existing imbalances and promoting gender diversity. This stage summarizes respondents' answers on different diversity and inclusion initiatives that have been implemented at their organizations. It focuses on signalling an organization's efforts of fostering diversity and inclusion internally and externally through their image, website, the participation in networking events, as well as through internal educational initiatives and partnerships with associations and institutions.

Company Image and Website

Within this study, image can be understood as a collection of impressions that people associate with an organisation in relation to fostering diversity and inclusion. A reoccurring trend in the data showed that participants of both groups agree that an organization needs to signal their interest and efforts in fostering diversity and inclusion internally and externally, which are essential factors that influence the image of an organisation. Respondents of the game developer group highlighted that they usually inform themselves about employers through employer rating platforms, such as Kununu, or through their own networks by asking current or former employees about the conditions. Particular attention has been drawn from participants of both groups to the arrangement of an organization's website. Respondents of the game developer group indicated that they review an organization's website to assess its alignment with their values and to evaluate its commitment to fostering diversity and inclusion, as shown with this example, *“I would research how important the topics are for development studios. I would definitely look at the website and the studios that would be considered would have to have at least formulated a statement on diversity and inclusion somehow, yes. And I think you get a really good impression based on the internet presence, for example, how the website is designed, but also how they behave on other social media and what content is posted and shared”* (DEV5). Comparably, participants of the expert group emphasized that they utilize an organization's website to convey their efforts and commitment to diversity and inclusion, aiming to attract the most suitable candidates that align with these values.

Networking Events

Networking events have been regarded by participants as organized conventions that serve as platform for organizations to increase their visibility, as well as for people to socialize and build connections and relationships. In general, networking has been mentioned by the majority of participants to be an essential part of working in the game industry. Thereby,

participants of both groups highlighted that the intention of visiting networking events was to firstly get to know people or possible employer on a personal level before considering working with each other. Still, most respondents of the game developer group have noted that they found their current or former occupation by visiting networking events and making first contact there with people from different game developer studios. As an example, one respondent shared, *“I think I got into a conversation with an employee from CompanyX at Devcom and somehow it clicked straight away and I think we actually talked for almost an hour, with no real intention of getting a job here but then it came up what I was doing and yes, he suggested that I should just apply and I just did that and he then put in a good word for me and yes, after I think a week I also received a message from them confirming an interview. I received the yes for the position a day later”* (DEV5). In addition, respondents mentioned that there are game developer events that target women and other minorities, which could be used by organization to diversify their talent pools and to signal their interest in fostering diversity and inclusion. From the game developer groups’ side, these events serve to increase the representation of female game developer, while enabling them a platform to present themselves and their projects.

Internal Educational Initiatives

Respondents were asked for their opinion on successful ways of improving the circumstances that women currently face in the game industry and the majority indicated that solving these issues greatly depends on educating about them. In this context, participants of the expert group explained that they commonly arrange internal events and employ other educational measures to enlighten the workforce about various aspects of fostering diversity and inclusive environments, as shared by one respondent, *“we want to communicate common issues with the entire workforce, and we hold events for important topics, such as the Pride Month right now. Just a small example, every day, we post a piece of information that educates about the LTBGQ+ community”* (HR5). Another recommended approach mentioned by participants of both groups is to invite speakers and experts to the organization for the workforce to listen to their talks. While digital workshops on educating about diversity and inclusion were also mentioned by participants of the game developer group, participants of the expert group highlighted the positive effect of making the effort to arrange an initiative that involves human interactions. As an example, one respondent shared, *“there were diversity and inclusion speaker and expert and just chatting with them after the event or even just during asking the really important questions. Just that little personal element and the one-on-one type thing and it just makes it more real”* (HR4). Lastly, respondents of the expert group expressed the urge to implement initiatives that serve to educate the users of the games within their online communities, too. This can be done by sharing interesting information in-game about diversity and inclusion related themes, for example the meaning behind the abbreviation LTBGQ+.

Consultation and Collaboration

Participants have mentioned a great number of institutions and associations in the game industry that can be contacted to get information and support for different concerns, such as increasing diversity and inclusion within game developer companies. The majority indicated the possibility of partnering with institutions and associations to show a higher degree of dedication, as a partnership usually involves the payment of member fees that associations use to sustain themselves. As an example, one respondent explained, *“I think it's always a good sign when studios somehow voluntarily join forces with clubs or associations that, for example, are committed to more diversity and provide education, so that they can also support them as a studio in what they do and publicly stand behind it. I think that's really a green flag”* (DEV5). In this context, participants of the expert group agreed on the great expertise of institutions and advised to seek their consultation and guidance when planning to implement changes that aim at the facilitation of an inclusive work environment, as shared

by one respondent, *“at least from what I’ve always found the most interesting, is doing it with externals often helps, but not like outsourcing the whole thing, but doing it in connection with kind of relevant trained people”* (HR3). Similarly, participants of the game developer group acknowledged the expertise but with a focus on providing support and guidance to women and other minorities that have experienced discriminations or abuse in the game industry.

Stage 4: Gender-focused HR Policies & Practices

The research revealed that participants identify formalizing gender-focused HR policies and practices as essential for embedding gender equality into organizational frameworks. Therefore, the fourth stage emerged from the data as a significant area influencing diversity and inclusion efforts. Participants highlighted several key aspects within this stage, including recruitment practices across different companies, the formulation of job descriptions, training and development programs, and policies regarding working conditions.

Recruitment in different companies

Participants of both groups shared their impressions and recommendations regarding recruitment policies and strategies, including successful actions, plans and aspirations to foster gender diversity and inclusion within recruitment processes. A common perspective was that recruitment efforts should focus on identifying the most suitable candidates but ensuring equitable opportunities for all individuals. As an example, one respondent shared, *“a great mistake is looking for the ideal candidate that has the whole package instead of creating them yourself, in a sense that you invest time and training in individuals that have not yet achieved all relevant skills or do not have the right knowledge but have the right mindsets and are eager to learn. We will give these individuals a chance to show their value even if not all requirements are met”* (HR5). To achieve this, participants of the expert group emphasized the importance of defining recruitment strategies that promote diversity and inclusion, particularly targeting underrepresented groups such as women. Specific recommendations included adopting active sourcing techniques on social media platforms, using employee’s networks to get in contact with target candidates, as well as engaging in networking events that show a high representation of women. Additionally, they recommended that recruiters and hiring managers receive training to ensure consistency and fairness in their actions, particularly during interview process. This is in accordance with the other group, while participants of the game developer group asserted the wish for female representation within interviewing processes, because they value the involvement of a woman’s opinion on the suitability for a job. Similarly, the involvement of women in interviewing processes has been mentioned by respondents of the expert group as a measure to minimize biases. Another example to assure an equitable assessment of all candidates involves anonymizing CVs and cover letters by removing information such as name, gender, age, and heritage.

Moreover, participants of the expert group addressed the importance of conducting team distribution analyses and internal diversity audits to assess organizational needs concerning gender diversity and inclusion. Based on these evaluations, recruitment strategies should be adapted or revised accordingly. Additionally, respondents of both groups agreed on the value of incorporating a ‘vibe-check’ into the recruitment process. This involved facilitating interactions between candidates and current employees during an interview to evaluate mutual compatibility, ensuring a good fit for both, the organization and the candidates. Regarding respondents’ experiences with their entrances, participants of the game developer group shared that their pathway into the game industry began with studying the relevant subjects and completing internships at companies that often transitioned into long-term employment. Others described that they started their career in different industries but eventually discovered their passion for game development and changed career paths through retraining and workshops. Similarly, respondents of the expert group shared that

they were working in different industries before settling for the game industry, as one shared, *"that's why I fell in love with the industry. Before that, we made apps and websites, and it was a bit different then, and here most people are just lefties and are super open-minded"* (HR2). In this sense, participants of both groups emphasized that the industry should remain welcoming to individuals from diverse backgrounds and career stages.

Job Descriptions

Job descriptions emerged as a recurring theme in discussions on recruitment strategies. Participants, particularly from the game developer group, emphasized that job descriptions serve as a critical signal of an organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion. They noted that if a job description does not resonate with them or address their identity, they are less likely to apply. Similarly, the expert group agreed on the importance of treating job descriptions as a tool to attract potential candidates, highlighting the need for careful consideration in their formulation. Key recommendations included ensuring gender-neutral language and crafting descriptions that are inclusive and appealing to a broad audience. To give an example, one respondent shared an excerpt of a job description, *"If you find that you don't meet all the criteria outlined in this job description or if you feel your experience might fall short, research indicates that individuals, particularly women and people of colour, tend to hesitate in applying unless they meet every requirement. At CompanyX, our commitment lies in creating a workplace that is diverse, inclusive, and equitable. If you're intrigued by this role but feel your previous experience doesn't perfectly align with all the qualifications listed, we encourage you to submit your application. The ideal position for you could be closer than you think!"* (DEV3). Within this example, another recommendation could be found that is aligned with respondents' answers, namely, to keep the list of requirements limited to essential skills needed for the job, because women and other minorities tend to avoid applying, if they feel that they do not meet all requirements. Lastly, respondents of both groups agreed that the distribution of the job listing need to be done within ways that reach the target candidates, thereby recommending online channels, such as Discord, Facebook and LinkedIn as great ways to make first contact.

Training and Development

Training and development were mentioned by both groups as equally important, though with differing focuses. Participants of the game developer group emphasized the desire to be considered in training opportunities, seeing this as a signal that all employees are treated equally in matters of professional development. Additionally, they expressed the need for training and development to support their sense of self-realization, as they seek fulfilment and growth in their positions. Participants of the expert group agreed on the value of granting training for self-realization, as shared by one respondent, *"we can always improve ourselves and I encourage, we are encouraged to learn new things that might or might not be useful at the workplace, but it will help to enrich the diversity of ideas and perspectives and opinions that lead to better decisions because everyone is involved"* (HR2). However, the expert group has placed greater emphasis on providing training for hiring managers and others involved in decision-making processes. In this sense, respondents indicated that these trainings aim to create more equitable recruitment practices, including unconscious and conscious bias training or diversity and inclusion workshops. Accordingly, one respondent explained, *"other companies should absolutely make sure their hiring managers are all trained properly, make sure everybody's got clarity on what they're actually looking for within the team, and make sure it aligns to the company. Checking biases for sure"* (HR4). Lastly, both groups underscored the importance of organizational development plans for women and minorities. These plans should focus on identifying high-potential individuals from underrepresented groups and offering tailored strategies, including mentorships and leadership workshops to support their future success in higher-level roles.

Working Conditions

The theme of working conditions focused on establishing policies and practices that ensure employees are satisfied with how they work, which accordingly to the majority of participants, contributes to a more inclusive organizational culture. In this sense, participants of the expert group emphasized on the importance of offering employees as much freedom as possible in terms of self-managing their everyday lives. Against this background, participants of both groups agreed that organizations in the game industry commonly provide flexible working conditions, such as hybrid or fully remote work arrangements. A great number of respondents highlighted the use of core working hours, requiring employees to be present at their desks during specific times. Both groups agreed on the benefits of flexible arrangements, such as the ability to work from home or even from another country, as these enable employees to achieve a healthier work-life balance. Some participants shared their experiences with a four-day workweek, noting its positive impact on work-life balance and expressing that they would struggle to return to a five-day schedule. Another critical aspect of working conditions mentioned by the participants was payment. Respondents of both groups emphasized that equal pay plays a fundamental role in fostering diversity and inclusion, while participants of the expert group recommended regular salary reviews to ensure fair and equal compensation among employees. In this context, one respondent shared, *“we do extensive salary reviews to ensure that employees receive fair compensation, by for example doing compensation audits”* (HR5). Participants further emphasized the need for zero-tolerance policies toward discrimination, harassment, and other inappropriate behaviour. Such policies, they argued, must be implemented and strictly enforced to create a safe and inclusive work environment where employees feel secure and supported. Knowing that any issues will be addressed promptly and appropriately was described as essential for fostering trust and comfort in the workplace.

Stage 5: Female Future

This chapter explored initiatives aimed at making the industry more welcoming for women and girls in the long-term, while positioning it as one that offers viable and rewarding career paths. It examines the role of career events and programs designed to increase the number of women, alongside the significance of role models and their representation in the field. The chapter also highlights the critical role of education in achieving this goal and delves into the non-negotiable working conditions women currently seek to feel supported and valued in their careers.

Career Events and Programs

Participants have shared existing events and programs aimed at educating young girls and women about viable career opportunities, which were considered as long-term investments because they do not yield immediate results. In this context, participants highlighted the importance of widespread organizational participation in such events and programs to make a meaningful impact for the future of the game industry. Various examples were shared, including weekend trips organized by companies to invite individuals from underrepresented groups to visit their offices, providing insights into the work environment and emphasizing that girls and women are equally welcome and capable of succeeding in the industry. Another notable program is the annual Girls' Day, an international event allowing girls to leave school for a day to explore traditionally male-dominated occupations. Organizations often dedicate an entire day to engaging with visiting groups, showcasing different roles, and fostering the perception that a sustainable career in the industry is achievable. In this context, one respondent shared about the Girls' Day, *“if the participants previously thought that it was only for boys and that coding was too difficult, they will definitely consider this career field after Girls' Day. We have already received a lot of positive feedback from the girls that were with us”* (HR2). Furthermore, participants recommended partnerships with universities and schools, such as offering internships and guest lectures, to familiarize students with their

studio and encourage them to consider the game industry as a viable career path. Additionally, the participation in career fairs was recognized by respondents of both groups as a valuable opportunity, provided organizations adopt targeted strategies to attract and convince girls and women of the industry's suitability and appeal. Finally, the implementation of mentoring programs was suggested as a means to support both new and existing female employees, helping them acclimate to the workplace culture and providing guidance.

Role Models and Representation

The theme of role models and representation emerged through participants' opinion on the importance of granting women greater visibility within organizations and the wider game industry. They explained that a greater appearance of women supports the perception that they belong in this industry and are equally capable of thriving within it. However, respondents argued that it is not solely about visibility but also about meaningful representation, while they explain that it involves providing platforms for them to demonstrate their skills and fit within the industry regardless of their gender. As mentioned, participants appreciated the inclusion of female personnel in interview processes, noting that it made them feel more comfortable and understood during the interviews. In general, respondents stressed the importance of having women in leadership roles, such as CEOs or other senior positions, as this ensures a deeper understanding and incorporation of women's needs and perspectives into organizational practices. As an example, one respondent shared, *"I think before this becomes somewhat normalized, it will remain very challenging for women who are on the path to advancing further up. That's why, in a way, it always depends on having men who show empathy or pay attention to these issues, and then it might happen. But I believe it's a bit easier if there are people in leadership positions who understand what one is going through or who have a bit more empathy"* (DEV5). Another key aspect of representation discussed was the portrayal of female characters in games. Participants from both groups agreed that game development studios need to reconsider how they design female characters, as past representations often left women feeling misrepresented. They recommended involving women or diversity experts in the design process to increase the likelihood that women and girls feel a sense of identification with these characters.

Education

Education was identified by respondents from both groups as a key factor in increasing the number of women working in the industry over the long term. They agreed that education helps address challenges women may encounter, such as discrimination and stereotyping, while they emphasized the importance of signalling young girls early in their educational journeys that a career in the industry is attainable and rewarding. This early exposure may have a significant role in shaping their perceptions and may encourage them to consider the industry as a viable career path. As an example, one respondent indicated, *"it's a problem that goes a bit further back, I suppose, because it's getting women, getting young girls into those directions at the right time. So that then they realise, oh, I am allowed to be, you know, a data engineer, I'm allowed to be a coder or whatever and that's getting better over the time, for sure"* (HR4). Furthermore, participants reflected on their own experiences, noting the positive impact of being sensitized to gender diversity and inclusion topics during their time at university. Respondents argued that this education has helped them preparing for the challenges and opportunities they now face in their professional lives, as one respondent explained, *"it was just very important for me to have received some fuel for thoughts in the course of my career and my studies, because I also had gender studies, and that has helped me in my everyday professional life so far already, helped a lot in my position as manager of the company"* (HR1). Furthermore, respondents highlighted the importance of continuous learning through social exchanges and participation in industry events, as they claim that these opportunities allow individuals to broaden their understanding of inclusivity,

share experiences, and learn from best practices that support a more equitable work environment.

Non-negotiable conditions

Respondents from the game developer group expressed a growing sense of confidence in articulating their demands, underlining the importance of these conditions as essential for fostering satisfaction, productivity, and inclusivity. The majority of respondents mentioned flexibility as essential requirement for them, thereby emphasizing the need for remote or hybrid working options. They claimed that this flexibility is critical for balancing personal responsibilities, such as caring for children or other family members, and ensuring a sustainable work-life balance. Another important condition raised was the avoidance of crunch. Respondents acknowledged that, in exceptional cases, overtime may be necessary, but only if the entire team agrees to it and if additional hours are properly compensated, either through financial means or time off. For artists, having the freedom to express their creativity and stay true to their own artistic style was identified as another critical requirement, as one respondent explained, *“it depends on different things, but first of all the project has to be right and in my case, as an artist, I naturally have a certain style that I feel comfortable with and that I enjoy working with”* (DEV5). In this sense, respondents of the game developer group stressed that this autonomy fosters both personal satisfaction and higher-quality output. Additionally, respondents from both groups highlighted the importance of providing support and resources for women and other underrepresented groups, such as through online seminars, workshops, and training programs that help employees acquire essential skills, including leadership capabilities. In this context, participants argued that the availability of these resources should be greatly signalled to all employees. Overall, respondents indicated that these non-negotiable working conditions reflect fundamental values that organizations need to address to attract and retain a diverse and satisfied workforce.

Discussion

This chapter discusses the key findings that emerged from the analysis of participants' responses, exploring their alignment with existing literature and broader industry trends. The findings reveal several interconnected themes related to fostering diversity and inclusion in the game industry, with a particular focus on gender diversity initiatives, inclusive work cultures, and gender-focused HR policies and practices. The insights of the participants reflect a growing emphasis on creating equitable opportunities, supporting underrepresented groups, and reshaping workplace structures to accommodate diverse needs and values. Accordingly, this chapter aims to interpret the participants' observations, compare them to existing research, and consider their implications for both organizations and the wider industry. Furthermore, an overview of key steps developed from Kotter's 8-step framework on change management (1995) can be found under practical implications. It outlines important actions and recommendations for organizations to follow to foster diversity and inclusion in the game industry. In total five stages and eight steps have been identified, of which an overview can be found in **Table 3** on page 61. Moreover, this chapter includes a discussion of the study's theoretical contributions, as well as its limitations. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research, offering pathways to explore emerging areas of interest within fostering gender diversity and inclusion in the game industry.

Main findings

Stage 1: Mindsets and Attitudes

To rehearse, the first stage is characterized by a “discursive learning process” to raise awareness that there is no true, objective reality and each individual perceives it differently due to their diverse attributes (Pless, & Maak, 2004, p. 137). In this context, it is essential that every individual in the organization understands the meaning of inclusion and diversity, as well as the purpose and importance of enhancing them (Jerónimo, et al., 2021). While prior studies emphasized structural or policy-based interventions as starting points (Kuknor and Bhattacharya, 2020; Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022), this study suggests promoting positive gender attitudes and mindsets as the foundational step to fostering gender diversity and inclusion. Respondents highlighted that without having this foundation, policies and initiatives risk to be seen as inauthentic, facing resistance from employees, or failing to achieve their intended impact. Furthermore, participants argued that the transformation especially depends on the mindsets of top management, such as the CEO or other key decision-makers, whose attitudes towards gender diversity and inclusion can be seen as more critical in driving a successful organizational shift. This is aligned with literature findings, as researchers agree that especially the attitude of decision-makers of an organization towards gender diversity is deciding upon success or failure of gender diversity initiatives (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). In this context, participants indicated that the transformation needs to be done by devoted and caring leaders to create the perception that diversity and inclusion are fostered in an authentic way. Moreover, they indicated that an ideal leader should be greatly self-reflective and encouraged to seek the exchange of different perspectives with diverse individuals, thereby showing the will for self-development.

Stage 2: Inclusive Culture

The findings from the data analysis align with those from the literature while also offering novel insights specific to the game industry. Both sources agree on key characteristics of an inclusive work environment, such as offering equal opportunities to all employees in terms of access to the same information, resources, and networks, entitling them to take part in the decision-making processes of the organization (Jerónimo, et al., 2021), as well as ensuring procedural justice (Subhash, et al., 2019). Furthermore, respondents indicated that they associate an inclusive culture with being granted autonomy in terms of working conditions and art style. They emphasized the need for a supportive environment in which they feel

comfortable sharing their ideas and feedback. Unlike existing frameworks, which often treat inclusivity as an outcome, participants in this study identified it as a continuous and evolving process that involves revisiting norms and fostering psychological safety within teams. This aligns with Pless and Maak's (2004) model, which highlights that an essential aspect of the process involves reevaluating deeply ingrained assumptions that hinder inclusiveness, including leadership, decision-making, and teamwork, which need to be redefined to promote greater employee integration. The findings extend this perspective by revealing that inclusivity must be experienced in interpersonal interactions to ensure its authenticity. Another unique insight from the respondents is the connection they drew between an organization's culture and the inclusiveness of its games. They explained that fostering an inclusive work culture benefits employees and also directly impacts the inclusiveness of the games the organization developed. Respondents further suggested that the most effective way to promote diversity and inclusion is by embedding these values into the organization's game development processes, making inclusiveness a core aspect of both the workplace and its outputs.

Stage 3: Gender Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives

The third stage concerns implementing changes to key management concepts and business principles that are ideally derived from the vision statement (Pless, & Maak, 2004). These principles yield information on adapted "shared assumptions, values, and beliefs" while they serve to guide employees through the transformation (Pless, & Maak, 2004, p.138). One common key concept of male-dominated industries found in the literature is the act of self-promotion to achieve higher positions in the organization (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). To avoid the reinforcement of masculine defaults or other biases that discriminate against women, key concepts and principles need to be evaluated, preferably done by a third-party company to assure an objective view and a complete picture of the problems (Ly-Le, 2020). This is aligned with the findings, as respondents stress the importance of collaborating with experts to evaluate organizational practices through a diversity and inclusion lens. They perceive the involvement of experts and the establishment of partnerships as critical for identifying challenges and ensuring more effective and informed approaches to fostering gender diversity. While a great number of organizations focus on high-visibility initiatives, the study revealed that smaller, less publicized efforts, such as creating safe spaces for discussions, are at least equally impactful. Respondents indicated that they value the little gestures and initiatives, such as providing hot water bottles for people with period pain, that increase the perception of being seen and included in the organisation. This insight aligns with the findings of Byrd (2022) who states that these kinds of initiatives increase the feeling of belongingness between members of an organization, which is especially important within companies that greatly engage in remote working.

Stage 4: Gender-Focused HR Policies and Practices

This stage corresponds with the 'Institutional Policies' dimension of Hamedani and Markus's (2019) culture Cycle, which highlights the role of formal systems in shaping behaviours and norms. It deals with adapting the organization's HRM system and its processes accordingly to the vision statement as well as to the findings of unfavourable key concepts within the organization (Pless, & Maak, 2004). The findings of the data analysis are closely aligned with those highlighted in the literature review, reinforcing the importance of adopting inclusive practices and policies to effectively address barriers to gender diversity and foster a more inclusive work environment (Byrd, 2022; Jerónimo, et al., 2021; Kuknor, & Bhattacharya, 2020:). Respondents emphasized several critical elements within this stage, such as recruitment strategies, the design of job descriptions, training and development programs, and the establishment of equitable workplace policies and conditions. These findings affirm existing research that underscores the importance of HR systems in fostering diversity and inclusion (Biswas, et al., 2020; Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022; Subhash, et al., 2019). While

respondents acknowledged the potential of such policies, they also highlighted challenges in ensuring these measures are consistently applied and regularly adapted to the specific needs of the industry. This aligns with literature findings, which highlights that it depends on the enactment of these policies, as well as leadership accountability and iterative review processes (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). Furthermore, the study highlights the necessity for organizations to tailor these policies to emerging industry trends, such as increasing flexibility in work arrangements and addressing aspects of diversity, ensuring they remain relevant and impactful over time. Lastly, respondents emphasized that gender-focused HR measures signal commitment, which helps attract and retain diverse talent, creating a positive feedback loop between policy and culture.

Stage 5: Female Future

This stage underscores the importance of fostering ongoing dedication among leaders and employees, while adapting systems to sustain and deepen the inclusivity efforts (Carreno, 2024). In this sense, respondents agreed that targeted career events for young girls, female role models, improved representation, and enhanced education can be seen as vital in enabling a future for women in the game industry. One particularly profound insight that emerged during the research analysis is the recognition that one of these deeper complexities underlying diversity and inclusion in the game industry lies at its very foundation, which is that young girls and women are often not exposed to the possibility of pursuing careers in this field during their formative years. Respondents emphasized that the long-term solutions to the challenges women currently face in the game industry must begin with sparking interest and fostering awareness at an early age. This includes the creation of a greater variety of diverse and inclusive gameplays, as it may enable that girls can create a passion for video games, which may be considered an important motivator for seeking a career as a video game developer (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). Furthermore, participants emphasized the value of organizing support programs, such as weekend office visits, where individuals from underrepresented groups can gain firsthand insight into the work environment. These initiatives may showcase the industry's inclusivity and highlight that girls and women are equally capable of succeeding in the industry (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). Similarly, active participation in established programs like the annual Girls' Day has been considered by respondents as an opportunity to shift perceptions and spark interest. By dedicating time and resources to such programs, companies can make meaningful improvements in increasing visibility and encouraging young talent to consider careers in the game sector (Ahmadi, et al., 2020).

Literature findings and data analysis argue that sustainable changes toward gender diversity and inclusion require organizations to establish working conditions that genuinely appeal to women and support their work-life balance (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). Respondents emphasized that flexibility is a non-negotiable factor, with remote or hybrid working options being crucial for employees balancing personal responsibilities, such as caring responsibilities. By prioritizing flexibility, organizations may demonstrate their commitment to fostering a supportive environment that accommodates diverse needs (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). Another critical recommendation is the elimination of excessive overtime, commonly known as crunch. While respondents acknowledged that overtime may occasionally be unavoidable, it should solely occur with team consensus and must be properly compensated, whether through additional pay or equivalent time off. Implementing such policies ensures fair treatment, thereby asserting a positive influence on performance and productivity (Subhash, et al., 2019). Autonomy was also highlighted as an essential condition, particularly among participants of the game developer group, who expressed the need for freedom to stay true to their artistic styles. Allowing employees to express their creativity enhances job satisfaction and leads to higher-quality outputs (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). As mentioned, both groups underscored the importance of organizational development plans

for women and minorities, including mentorships and leadership workshops to support their future success in higher-level roles. Creating an environment that prioritizes flexibility, creative freedom, and development opportunities will attract and retain diverse talent, while ensuring that inclusion becomes a deeply embedded organizational value (Ly-Le, 2022).

The findings highlight actions, plans, and aspirations that organizations can adopt to foster inclusivity and increase the number of women in the game industry. From rethinking recruitment processes and designing inclusive working conditions to emphasizing the visibility of role models and investing in education, each stage reflects the interconnected nature of addressing gender diversity challenges. While many of these measures may require time, effort, and cultural shifts, respondents have made it clear that the benefits, both for individuals and organizations are significant. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of addressing systemic barriers by starting at the root of the issue, namely, to encouraging young girls and minorities to consider careers in the game industry through targeted outreach efforts like Girls' Day events, partnerships with educational institutions, and role model visibility. Finally, accelerating change involves aligning HR systems, leadership behaviours, and organizational policies with diversity goals (Biswas, et al., 2020). This requires continuous leadership engagement, reward systems that recognize inclusive practices, and regular evaluations of progress to sustain these changes over time (Carreno, 2024). Ultimately, this chapter illustrates that the transformation into a more inclusive and diverse industry is necessary for long-term growth and success (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). By addressing systemic barriers, building support structures, and signalling inclusivity at every stage, organizations can create an environment in which women can thrive (Pless, & Maak, 2004).

Practical Implications

This study evaluated a comprehensive, step-by-step framework that organizations can follow to increase the number of women working as game developer. An overview of the steps, stages and recommended actions can be found in Table 3 on page 61. The findings provide organizations in the gaming industry with a practical roadmap for fostering greater gender diversity and inclusivity in the workplace. Drawing on insights from respondents' successful practices identified in the industry, these recommendations emphasize actionable strategies that organizations can adopt at various stages of their transformation processes.

Step 1: Creating a Sense of Urgency

The findings of the current situation in the game industry are aligned with those of the literature review, revealing that women and other minorities still face obstacles that hinder their entrance and decrease their overall career potential, including stereotyping, sexism (Ahmadi, et al., 2020), masculine defaults (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020), gender pay gaps and glass ceilings (Bailey, et al., 2021). Participants indicated that progress is happening, but slowly, which underlines the need of raising more awareness for the given circumstances. However, respondents indicated that these circumstances may present a unique opportunity for transformation, because the game industry is currently experiencing widespread layoffs, resulting in a surplus of highly skilled professionals seeking employment. This situation provides organizations with a critical chance to actively recruit from this diverse talent pool, including women and other underrepresented groups. In this context, part of the first step is to signal the importance of initiating changes within the organization, which can be done by openly communicating upcoming changes, as well as evaluating the reasons behind them to employees, including the benefits and obstacles of diversity and inclusion (Carreno, 2024). Accordingly, participants agreed that any form of transformation need to be initiated and carried out by a knowledgeable and dedicated CEO or management team that is showing great interest in diversity and inclusion topics, while leading by example. This is aligned with Kotter (1995), who claims that "transformation often begin, and begin well, when an

organization has a new head who is a good leader and who sees the need for a major change” (p. 4).

Building on insights from both the literature and participant responses, the following actions represent logical and research-informed strategies that organizations can implement to create a sense of urgency for diversity and inclusion. One strategy is ensuring visible leadership commitment, in terms of having CEOs and top management actively communicate their dedication to change, done through internal messaging as well as by taking part in diversity-focused initiatives or industry events. Furthermore, organizations can conduct internal diversity audits, in which they may analyse hiring and promotion trends, and compare their workforce demographics to industry benchmarks. Sharing these insights with employees and stakeholders helps highlight disparities, making the case for immediate action more compelling (Carreno, 2024). This could be done during networking events, hosted by the organization, in which leaders can directly engage with employees to foster open discussions on workplace culture, diversity-related challenges, and potential improvements. These internal awareness campaigns may support CEO and top management in understanding employee concerns while reinforcing the company’s commitment to inclusivity (Pless, & Maak, 2004). Beyond internal efforts, companies can also increase external visibility in their diversity commitments through public statements, collaborations with industry diversity organizations, or participation in recruitment events that specifically target underrepresented groups. In either case, publicly demonstrating commitment to diversity may build credibility and can attract talent that values inclusive workplaces. Finally, organizations should empower employees to take part in the change process by providing structured opportunities for them to engage in these conversations, which may ensure that the sense of urgency is embedded throughout the organization. These actions will be explained in more detail under step five and seven later in this chapter.

Step 2: Building Guiding Coalitions/Cross-Sectional Teams

The second step involves building guiding coalitions or cross-sectional teams that lead employees through the process of change (Kotter, 1995). These coalitions should consist of dedicated and knowledgeable individuals, commonly three to five in the beginning and reaching up to 50 people over time within larger organizations. As mentioned, larger developer organizations with extensive production processes should be opting for the centralized approach of building a guiding coalition, while organizations that commonly emphasize on decentralized decision-making and collaborative leadership are recommended to form cross-sectional teams (Carreno, 2024). Both guiding methods support the reduction of internal resistance of employees towards changes, while improving the credibility and consistence of change initiatives (Carreno, 2024). Furthermore, Kotter (1995) explained that in most successful cases, the coalition tends to hold significant influence, as the members of these coalitions bring value through their authority, specialized knowledge, credibility, and professional networks. Their role is to oversee and direct the change efforts, ensuring progress remains on track and aligned with the organization’s goals (Kotter, 1995). Additionally, their commitment must be consistently demonstrated and signalled to all employees throughout the organization to inspire confidence and foster trust in the transformation process (Carreno, 2024). By establishing coalitions and cross-sectional teams that embody dedication and accountability, organizations can ensure a strong foundation for managing change effectively (Carreno, 2024). In this context, participants have asserted the need for accessible points of contact for employees, providing support and addressing questions or concerns related to gender diversity and inclusion. This is aligned with the area of responsibility associated with these guiding coalitions and needs to be advertised and communicated to the workforce (Carreno, 2024).

Step 3: Creating a Vision of Inclusion

A vision statement, commonly formulated in one sentence, serves as enlightenment for upcoming changes and aids the facilitation of an inclusive culture and a diverse workforce (Pless, & Maak, 2004). When creating a vision statement, researchers agree that a great number of stakeholders should take part in formulating a “consensual vision that addresses all relevant concerns” (Pless, & Maak, 2004, p. 138), including employees of all levels of the organization (Bowen, 2018; Carreno, 2024). This is in accordance with the findings of the data analysis, as respondents stated that different viewpoints need to be explored and incorporated to assure that everyone feels valued and included in an organization. In addition, respondents shared their advice on assigning people and investing time to learn more about the diversity that the individuals of the workforce bring into an organization, which is equitable to building guiding coalitions and cross-sectional teams. Furthermore, findings of the literature indicate that a vision statement can be seen as a long-term goal that an organization wants to pursue in the upcoming years, which is used to differentiate itself from its competitors (Bowen, 2018). In this context, respondents claimed that fostering diversity and inclusion need to be considered a core goal and part of an organization’s DNA to result in meaningful change towards a more inclusive work culture. Making the vision actionable is crucial, as it must be translated into concrete goals, measurable objectives, and strategic initiatives (Pless, & Maak, 2004). This could be achieved by setting specific diversity hiring targets, establishing mentorship programs, or implementing initiatives that actively foster an inclusive workplace culture, which will be explained at a later stage within this chapter.

Step 4: Communicating the Vision

The fourth step focuses on effectively communicating the vision statement of inclusion to the workforce. Findings within literature emphasize the crucial role of CEOs and other organizational leaders in demonstrating their dedication and commitment to the vision (Pless, & Maak, 2004), which is a point that is strongly supported by the respondents’ perspectives. Additionally, findings of the literature review underscore the importance of consistently communicating the vision to all employees to ensure it becomes an integral part of the organizational culture (Carreno, 2024). In this context, respondents provided information that have emerged into practical recommendations for communication strategies, such as introducing the vision statement during the “vibe check” of the interview and onboarding processes to ensure that new employees understand the organization’s commitment. Another effective way to communicate the vision is by displaying it prominently on the company website because respondents reported to explicitly seeking such statements related to gender diversity and inclusion when researching potential employers. Furthermore, hosting dedicated company events aimed at raising awareness about diversity and inclusion can be identified as another impactful approach, as respondents shared to appreciate the effort of initiatives that involve human interactions. Lastly, findings of literature and data analysis highlighted the positive effect of openly discussing related issues within the workforce, as well as the value of creating opportunities for interaction and engagement on these topics (Carreno, 2024). These initiatives supported by the guiding coalition can reinforce the vision statement and encourage employees to embody the principles of inclusion in their everyday work.

Step 5: Empowering Actions.

The fifth step is about empowering employees and other members of an organization to initiate actions supporting the fostering of gender diversity and inclusion, thereby eliminating obstacles affecting the transformation process, such as structural and cultural barriers (Carreno, 2024). The empowering of actions means that employees are encouraged to take part in decision-making processes, while being granted autonomy, as well as access to important tools and other resources, which may increase their willingness to participate in

upcoming changes (Carreno, 2024). These empowerment measurements closely align with the insights shared by the respondents in this study when discussing their perception of important elements of an inclusive working culture. However, the guiding coalitions and cross-sectional teams play a vital role in empowering actions. As key drivers of change, they are responsible for overseeing the progress of diversity and inclusion initiatives, ensuring that these initiatives are supported and actively pursued at all levels of the organization (Carreno, 2024). In the following, actions that are based on findings from existing literature and insights gathered through this study's research will be presented and further explained.

Company Image and Website. Respondents of both groups highlighted the importance of the company's website as a gateway to understanding its values and culture, which implies that it should be intentionally designed to signal inclusivity. Especially participants of the game developer group appreciated websites that showcase diverse individuals in pictures, with employees expressing their individuality through attire, as this conveys a sense of authenticity and value for personal identity. This is aligned with findings of the literature review, as Ly-Le (2021) argues that the importance an organization places on gender diversity should be the centre of their career pages, while uploading talks and articles discussing the subject may help in sending the right signals to the right target group. In this sense, both groups underscored the importance of including a clear and visible statement on diversity and inclusion, because it has been mentioned as a way to demonstrate the organization's dedication to fostering an equitable environment and to influence potential applicants' decisions. For many participants of the game developer group, the presence of these elements was a deciding factor in whether they would consider applying to a company. Consequently, designing a website that communicates inclusivity and embraces diversity is crucial in attracting and engaging a more diverse workforce. Lastly, researchers and participants argue that organizations should build up an online presence on social media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter, as there is evidence that these channels are increasing in importance to attract female professionals (Freeman, et al., 2020).

Networking events. Respondents from both groups expressed their appreciation for networking events that serve as platforms for socialization and relationship-building. These events allow individuals to make new connections, exchange ideas, and simply enjoy casual conversations. Experts particularly emphasized the value of networking events as opportunities to increase organizational visibility in the market and attract new talent. Targeted networking events, in particular, were highlighted as effective spaces for showcasing the work and skills of individuals and companies. As a recommendation, organizations should actively participate in such events and proactively connect with women and other underrepresented groups. Being present at these events brings the immediate benefit of increasing visibility among diverse talent pools. Furthermore, these events provide a relaxed environment for unpressured conversations with potential candidates, fostering genuine connections. Since the industry is known for individuals maintaining strong interrelations within their professional networks, it becomes even more crucial for organizations to make a positive impression. Respondents indicated that they often consult their networks about companies they are considering applying to, specifically inquiring about diversity and inclusion practices, as well as how welcomed and comfortable others felt working there. In this sense, a consistent presence at networking events helps organizations establish a positive external image, ultimately attracting and retaining a more diverse workforce.

Internal educational events. The use of internal educational initiatives in fostering awareness and understanding of diversity and inclusion has been recommended by researchers and participants. In general, these efforts can be spearheaded by the guiding coalition or cross-sectional teams and should aim to educate employees on these critical

themes (Carreno, 2024). Respondents suggested hosting internal events featuring guest speakers and industry experts to address common misconceptions and industry-specific challenges. Such events should also incorporate networking opportunities, enabling employees to exchange their impressions and perspectives in an open and inclusive setting. Another approach highlighted by respondents involves spreading educational materials throughout the organization, including sharing information via internal communication channels, displaying posters in the office, or using digital screens and TVs to convey key messages. A particularly impactful suggestion from respondents emphasized the importance of top management and CEOs actively participating in these initiatives. For example, holding speeches or making public statements in front of the workforce would signal their dedication to fostering an inclusive workplace. One novel insight involves extending educational initiatives beyond the organization and into the gameplay. Respondents proposed integrating educational content into the gaming experience to promote appropriate behaviour and reflect the organization's core values. This means that organizations need to assign employees that take care about users that engage in negative behaviour or post negative comments by educating them about their wrongdoing and deleting inappropriate comments. This proactive approach aims at reinforcing diversity and inclusion internally and can set a strong precedent for creating a positive and inclusive user environment.

Collaboration & Consultation. Both literature findings and data analysis emphasize the importance of seeking collaboration and consultation with experts and other credible sources when addressing complex and less-explored areas, such as gender diversity and inclusion. A key aspect of this process involves evaluating organizational concepts and principles through the lens of diversity and inclusion. Participants agree that expert input during this evaluation stage can significantly enhance the effectiveness of these efforts. Furthermore, they explained that establishing partnerships with specialists may provide valuable insights into potential challenges and common pitfalls, ensuring that organizations can navigate these issues effectively. Accordingly, participants highlighted that partnerships with associations dedicated to diversity and inclusion demonstrate a company's commitment to the cause, as Ly-Le (2021) explains that partnering with educational institutions to host recruiting events targeted at women may enhance both, physical and online presence. Additionally, memberships with associations and institutions may involve the payment of membership fees, which they need to sustain themselves. In this sense, respondents explained that these collaborations enable them to continue their work and provide valuable resources. Therefore, collaborations signal an organization's seriousness about promoting inclusivity to both employees and the broader community. Moreover, respondents revealed that organizations benefit from the networks facilitated by such partnerships, as memberships often grants access to a wider array of contacts, resources, and opportunities, such as participation in industry-specific events and communication channels like Discord groups. By leveraging these collaborations, organizations can advance their diversity and inclusion strategies and solidify their presence.

Step 6: Short-Term Wins

A critical aspect of driving the transformation toward greater gender diversity and inclusion is to prepare for and demonstrate short-term wins that highlight the organization's progress (Carreno, 2024). Based on findings of literature and data analysis, one effective way for demonstrating short-term wins could be to publicly celebrate progress made toward diversity and inclusion goals. Respondents indicated that this could be done through highlighting these wins in internal newsletters, company-wide emails, or during meetings. The completion of diversity training of departments or an overall higher percentage of diverse hires are examples of short-term wins to be shared. The public recognition may motivate involved individuals and signals that diversity initiatives are actively being pursued. Another effective approach could be to offer incentives linked to diversity-related achievements (Ali, 2015). For

instance, departments or teams that meet diversity goals could be rewarded with bonuses, additional benefits, or public recognition at company events. These tangible incentives may help reinforce the idea that the organization is dedicated to fostering diversity and employees are encouraged to take part in the transformation. Similarly, hosting or sponsoring a networking event for women and minorities within the industry would demonstrate the company's proactive approach to connecting with diverse talents (Ly-Le, 2021). Positive feedback and new connections made at the event would further validate this effort and could be used to measure its success. Showcasing success stories of diverse employees can be an impactful way to highlight the positive effects of diversity initiatives. These stories can be shared via internal communication channels, at company events, or on social media to reinforce the message that diversity and inclusion are integral to the organization's success (Ly-Le, 2021). Achieving external diversity certifications is another actionable step that can create short-term wins for the organization and may demonstrate an organization's dedication to fostering an inclusive environment. These short-term wins build momentum, foster trust among stakeholders, and affirm the organization's dedication to creating a more inclusive environment (Carreno, 2024).

Step 7: Consolidating improvements

The seventh step deals with the alignment of organizational structures and policies to address deeper complexities uncovered during the transformation process, while integrating new behaviours and processes into the organizational culture (Carreno, 2024). Since gender-focused HR policies and practices have been identified as critical in fostering diversity and inclusion (Ali, 2015; Biswas, et al., 2020; Nweiser & Dajnoki, 2022; & Pless, & Maak, 2004), the focus within this study was placed on the alignment of organizational structures and policies related to HRM. One critical factor identified by literature and respondents was the incentive system of an organization, which should be linked to diversity measures, as Kotter (1995) emphasizes the importance of rewarding those engaged in the transformation through recognition, promotions, and financial incentives. Respondents argued that this can be done by offering rewards for identifying and preparing female applicants for higher positions, which is in accordance with literature findings (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). In general, performance appraisal techniques need to verify the fair distribution of rewards based on merit to offer equal opportunities to the entire workforce (Subhash, et al., 2019). In this context, other complexities have been identified by literature and respondents, which may hinder the transformation progress (Carreno, 2024), including recruitment strategies, training and development opportunities, working conditions (Subhash, et al., 2019) and job descriptions (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). The following section will elaborate on these complexities and offer recommendations for aligning HR policies and practices to effectively embed gender diversity and inclusion initiatives within an organization's structures and culture.

Recruitment in different companies. Gender-focused recruitment and selection are claimed to aid in gaining the attention of target candidates while increasing the chances that the job-offer will be accepted (Ali, 2015). It includes to ensure equal opportunities during recruitment and selection procedures, which diminishes the perception of discriminations and unfairness against women and other minorities (Subhash, et al., 2019). As a start, respondents highlighted the importance of conducting team distribution analyses, allowing organizations to identify areas where diversity is lacking and assess the types of individuals needed to strengthen their teams. This may enable companies to make informed decisions about recruitment strategies and ensure their hiring efforts align with organizational needs. This is aligned with the findings of the data analysis, as respondents emphasized the need for organizations to redefine their recruitment strategies to actively promote diversity and inclusion. A key recommendation involves training for recruiters and hiring managers on recognizing and mitigating both conscious and unconscious biases. For instance, asking

candidates about their hobbies could unintentionally lead to favouring candidates that the recruiter shares similar interests with (Ly-Le, 2021). To ensure fairness, respondents argued that recruitment should be handled by professionals who are trained in identifying and avoiding such biases. Additionally, respondents highlighted the importance of including women in the recruitment process. Having women present during interviews provides a female perspective on candidates and may create a more comfortable and relatable environment for female applicants. An industry-specific insight that emerged from the data is the concept of the "vibe check," which was emphasized by both respondent groups as a vital component of recruitment in the games industry. The vibe check allows candidates to meet the team and assess whether there is mutual compatibility. This approach especially benefits companies, as it increases the likelihood of hiring individuals with a strong fit, which minimizes recruitment costs and efforts, making the process more efficient and effective.

Another approach recommended by respondents is to actively source for women through social media and other online platforms. The current state of the industry, marked by a significant number of layoffs, presents employers with an excellent opportunity to access a diverse pool of candidates. The literature underscores the effectiveness of using online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram for connecting with female professionals (Robinson, 2021). This aligns with respondents' feedback, as they identified LinkedIn, Facebook, and Discord as key channels for outreach, noting their effectiveness in engaging with potential candidates. Discord, in particular, stands out as a unique resource, with various channels linked to associations and institutions dedicated to improving the representation of women in the game industry. These platforms offer valuable opportunities to connect with skilled female talent, making them a powerful tool for recruitment. Additionally, respondents suggested leveraging personal networks as well as employees' professional connections to enhance the organization's visibility and broaden its reach among female candidates. Both literature and respondents also agreed on the importance of anonymizing application materials, such as CVs and cover letters, by removing personal identifiers like name, age, gender, and heritage (Ly-Le, 2021). This ensures that recruiters focus solely on a candidate's skills and qualifications, enabling a merit-based evaluation free from conscious or unconscious biases (Subhash, et al., 2019). Furthermore, respondents emphasized the unique openness of the industry, which is particularly welcoming to career changers. Maintaining this welcoming attitude is crucial for fostering greater inclusion and diversity.

Training and Development. Both participants groups expressed enthusiasm for training opportunities and found the availability of development programs to be highly appealing in the workplace. As previously noted, unconscious and conscious bias training emerged as a key recommendation, particularly from the expert group, who emphasized its importance for at least all individuals involved in decision-making processes. Ideally, if financial resources permit, such training should be extended to as many employees as possible within the organization, as researchers agree on the effectiveness of unconscious bias training for employees in overcoming gender-related issues, such as stereotyping (Taparia, & Lenka, 2022), the unequal treatment of women (Ly-Le, 2022), or the negative effects of masculine defaults (Cheryan, & Markus, 2020). Another approach recommended by respondents was the hosting of diversity dedicated workshops to address common pitfalls and explore actionable strategies for creating a more inclusive work environment. A noteworthy insight from the expert group revealed that some organizations encourage employees to participate in any workshops or training sessions they find interesting, regardless of whether the subject aligns with their specific role or offers direct value to the company. This philosophy is rooted in the belief that supporting employees' personal growth and will for self-fulfilment ultimately benefits the organization by broadening their perspectives and enhancing their creativity and problem-solving skills. Lastly, the importance of structured development plans for women and

other underrepresented groups was strongly emphasized. This is aligned with literature findings, as offering mentorships for female employees has been considered an important factor in diversity training and development (Taparia, & Lenka, 2022). More information on mentoring programs will be provided at a later point in this chapter.

Job descriptions. Job descriptions emerged as a significant focus in discussions surrounding recruitment strategies. Respondents, particularly from the game developer group, stressed that job descriptions act as an essential indicator of an organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion. They explained that if the content of a job description fails to resonate with their identity or values, they are less likely to consider applying. Similarly, the expert group underscored the importance of treating job descriptions as a strategic tool for attracting a diverse range of candidates. Research highlights that caution is needed when formulating job descriptions targeted at women, because they need to be addressed differently (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). In this sense, key recommendations coming from the participants included using gender-neutral language and crafting descriptions that are inclusive and appealing to a wide audience. Additionally, respondents from the game developer group shared that they find it highly encouraging when job advertisements include a statement directed at minorities and women. For example, a note at the end of the description inviting candidates to apply even if they feel they may not meet all requirements, which can increase applicants' confidence and motivation to apply. Furthermore, both the literature and respondents emphasized the importance of keeping job requirements concise and to the point. They noted that women and other underrepresented groups are often hesitant to apply if they do not meet all listed qualifications or if the job description does not convey a welcoming tone (Ahmadi, et al., 2020).

Working Conditions. This section emphasizes the importance of implementing policies and practices that ensure employee satisfaction with their working environment. According to the majority of participants, such efforts significantly contribute to fostering a more inclusive organizational culture. Researchers argue that an organization may offer flexible schedules, compressed work weeks, and part-time work opportunities to signal applicants and employees the organization's emphasis on work-life balance initiatives (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). This is aligned with answers given by respondents from both groups, as they expressed their appreciation for granting employees as much flexibility as possible to manage their time and daily lives. This includes offering working arrangements that are tailored to individual preferences, ranging from fully remote work to hybrid setups. Some participants evaluated the positive impact of having a four-day work week on their work-life balance. Another alignment between literature and data analysis was the implementation of gender pay equity policies, which can be explained as the promise that employees receive equal payments for the same kind of work (Ly-Le, 2021). In this context, respondents strongly recommended implementing equal pay initiatives to close the gender pay gap. Many shared that conducting regular salary reviews is essential for identifying and addressing discrepancies in compensation related to gender, ethnicity, age, or other factors. These reviews provide valuable insights and enable organizations to make more informed and fair decisions. Moreover, when discrepancies are identified, respondents of the expert group indicated that they proactively adjust salaries to ensure equity, as well as that salaries are not based on negotiation skills, which helps to establish a fairer, more inclusive workplace where employees feel valued and supported (Subhash et al., 2019).

A common pitfall in transformation efforts is assuming that initial progress signifies lasting change (Kotter, 1995). While early successes are important milestones, they do not guarantee long-term impact. Until these new approaches become deeply embedded in an organization's culture there is always a risk of regression (Carreno, 2024). Therefore, rather than viewing short-term wins as the final achievement, they should be leveraged to build

momentum for further structural improvements (Carreno, 2024). As leaders of successful transformation efforts recognize, these early victories should be used to address deeper systemic challenges, ensuring that diversity and inclusion efforts result in lasting organizational change (Kotter, 1995). In the area of recruitment strategies, a short-term win could involve redesigning job descriptions to include gender-neutral language and a welcoming statement encouraging applications from underrepresented groups. Organizations can immediately monitor the results by tracking an increase in applications from women and other minorities, demonstrating the effectiveness of inclusive job advertisements. Offering employees access to diverse learning opportunities, even those outside their immediate job roles, can foster positive emotions within the workforce, showcasing the organization as an advocate of personal growth and inclusion (Subhash, et al., 2019). Regarding working conditions, introducing flexible work arrangements and conducting an initial salary review to address pay disparities could be impactful (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015). For example, raising the pay of under-compensated individuals based on findings from these reviews would promote equity, while demonstrating that the company is taking immediate and meaningful action to close gender gaps. By strategically planning and communicating these initial successes, organizations can effectively showcase their progress toward creating a more inclusive and equitable work environment, thereby inspiring continued support and engagement from employees at all levels (Carreno, 2024).

Step 8: Institutionalizing new Approaches

The last step of Kotter's framework (1995) is about anchoring change in culture, while the researcher highlights that "leaders must consistently model the desired behaviours and align rewards and recognition systems to reinforce them" (Carreno, 2024, p. 6). The transformation can be considered successful when new processes become ingrained in the organization's work culture, and employees have embraced new patterns of thinking and behaviour (Carreno, 2024). To ensure lasting progress in fostering gender diversity and inclusion, organizations must go beyond short-term initiatives and embed sustainable practices into their core operations, which is aligned with the findings of the data analysis. In general, respondents urged that organizations must actively provide resources and support for women and other underrepresented groups, while recommending to establish mentoring programs and structured development plans that actively support women's career growth. These programmes should be designed to offer guidance, help employees navigate workplace challenges, and fostering professional growth, ensuring a more inclusive employee experience (Jerónimo, et al., 2021). With regards to the game industry, mentorships may help women to manage the culture of the industry, while it increases their access to informal networks (Ochsner, 2017). In this context, respondents stressed the importance of clearly communicating the availability of these resources to all employees to encourage participation and professional growth. Another effective strategy involves forging strong partnerships with educational institutions (Taparia, & Lenka, 2022). By offering internships, guest lectures, and workshops in collaboration with schools and universities, organizations can familiarize students with career opportunities in the game industry and establish long-term talent pipelines.

Career fairs have been mentioned by respondents to present a valuable opportunity to connect with target candidates, provided that companies adopt targeted approaches to attract girls and women, such as showcasing female role models. This is aligned with findings of the literature review, as the visibility of female role models positively influences the perception that women can excel and pursue career opportunities in male-dominated industries (Ochsner, 2017). Researchers, as well as respondents highlighted that a focus should be placed on the competences of these role models instead of their gender (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). In this context, a key theme running through the recommendations was the importance of authenticity, which is in accordance with Carreno (2024) who explains that a

lack of trustworthiness or meaning behind changes may increase the resistance of employees. Therefore, institutionalizing these initiatives enables companies to create a long-term framework that attracts, retains and advances female talent (Pless, & Maak, 2004). To sustain changes, Kotter (1995) indicates two key factors, namely demonstrating how new behaviours have impacted performance, as well as ensuring that future leaders embody these changes. This could be done through clear “communication, recognition, and feedback”, reinforcing new behaviours until they become “second nature” and adaptable to future challenges (Carreno, 2024, p. 6). Additionally, respondents recommended that companies should implement, as well as routinely audit policies related to equal pay, parental leave, flexible working conditions, and anti-discrimination measures. Regular assessments and updates will help maintain their relevance and effectiveness, ensuring that these policies continue to support a more equitable workplace.

In conclusion, the eight steps presented, which are based on Kotter’s change management framework (1995) provide a structured and actionable approach to fostering gender diversity and inclusion within the game industry. The successful implementation of these actions requires a holistic approach, where the leadership is committed, the systems and policies are aligned with diversity goals, and all employees, particularly women and underrepresented groups, are supported and empowered to thrive (Carreno, 2024). The steps outlined provide a structured starting point for organizations committed to driving change. The first half of the steps are dedicated to creating a foundation for changes to be effective, which is done by promoting supportive mindsets and dedicated employees, including CEO and top management (Pless, & Maak, 2004). Key implications for the transformation process include the alignment of recruitment strategies, training and development, performance incentives, as well as the continuous reinforcement of new behaviours through feedback, recognition, and clear communication (Kotter, 1995). Flexible working conditions and clear overtime policies are essential for ensuring work-life balance and retaining diverse talent. Equally important is the focus on sustainable long-term initiatives, such as mentoring programs, organized development plans, and inclusive policies, which ensure that diversity efforts are integral to the company’s future. By embedding the given practices into an organization’s workplace culture, they can anchor the desired transformation in their systems and processes, while addressing the structural challenges that have historically limited diversity in the game industry (Carreno, 2024).

Table 3
Overview of stages, steps and associated actions within the transformation process.

Step	Action	Objective	Impact	Suitability	Costs
Stage 1: Mindsets & Attitudes					
1	Strategic recruitment of laid-off talents from diverse backgrounds	Take advantage of industry-wide layoffs to bring in underrepresented talent.	Increases diverse hiring, demonstrating an immediate commitment.	Suitable for companies with hiring capacity.	Moderate to high: requires dedicated HR resources for outreach and hiring processes.
	Leadership visibility & commitment	Demonstrate top management’s commitment to diversity by addressing the urgency directly.	Signals that diversity is a priority, reinforcing accountability at the highest levels.	Most effective in mid-sized to large organizations where leadership has	Low to moderate: requires executive time and communication materials.

			significant influence.	
Internal diversity audits	Assess the current state of diversity within the organization, including the identification of gaps in hiring, promotions, and workplace culture.	Provides data-driven insights, highlights areas for improvement, and serves as a foundation for informed diversity strategies.	Suitable for all companies, with scope varying based on the size of the organization.	Moderate: requires HR data analysis, employee surveys, and potentially external consultation for unbiased assessment.
Internal awareness campaigns	Provide employees and leadership with clear insights into diversity gaps and industry challenges to highlight the need for change	Raises awareness, encourages participation of employees and leadership, and fosters engagement.	Suitable for all company sizes, as it can be scaled based on available resources.	Low to moderate: requires internal data collection, & communication efforts.
Publicly demonstrating commitment	Commit publicly to fostering gender diversity, increasing external accountability.	Builds credibility and enhances positive image of organization.	Suitable for all size of companies.	Low: requires time
2 Build a guiding coalitions	Form a dedicated team responsible for driving diversity initiatives and ensuring long-term commitment.	Creates accountability, ensures representation from different departments, and drives structured action.	Suitable for all company sizes, depending on company structure and available resources.	Low to moderate: requires leadership involvement, time, and possibly a small budget for initiatives.
Include influential leaders and allies in the coalition	Ensure that leaders and well-respected employees actively support and champion diversity efforts.	Increases credibility, strengthens advocacy, and ensures coalition members have influence to drive change.	Most effective in mid-to-large organizations where leadership influence is critical.	Low: requires careful selection of coalition members and clear role definitions.
Build cross-sectional diversity working groups	Engage employees from different departments to collaboratively identify and address diversity challenges.	Encourages engagement across the organization and integrates diversity considerations into various functions (e.g.,	Works well for medium to large companies and can be adapted for startups with informal working groups.	Low: requires coordination but minimal financial investment.

		HR, product development).		
Mandatory diversity and inclusion training for coalition members	Training for the guiding coalition about biases, inclusive leadership, and cultural differences.	Ensures the coalition understands best practices and can drive meaningful change.	Suitable for all companies serious about fostering inclusive leadership.	Moderate to high: requires training resources, external consultants, or internal workshops.
Stage 2: Inclusive culture				
Develop the vision of inclusion	Craft a clear vision statement that outlines the company’s commitment to inclusion, accompanied by measurable DEI goals.	Establishes a shared understanding and long-term commitment, creating alignment across teams.	Suitable for all companies; scalable in scope depending on size.	Low to moderate: requires internal HR and leadership time, potentially external consultants.
Involve employees in vision creation	Ensure diverse voices contribute to defining inclusion goals through focus groups, surveys, and workshops.	Increases commitment, making employees feel valued and heard.	All companies can implement this at different levels.	Low: requires time of everyone at the company
Embed vision into corporate values	Integrate principles into mission statements, strategic documents and code of conduct.	Reinforces commitment and ensures diversity and inclusion are core parts of company culture.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low to moderate: requires time to align internal documents and processes
Displaying vision statement on website	Add vision statement to website	Provides representation and encourages engagement with diversity and inclusion efforts.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low: requires internal content creations and minimal marketing costs.
Use internal communication channels for continuous reinforcement	Regularly communicate diversity and inclusion progress via newsletters, intranet updates, and emails.	Ensures diversity and inclusion remain a priority and part of ongoing discussions.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low: primarily internal effort.
Host internal event for vision statement	Leaders openly discuss commitments, progress and challenges linked	Builds trust and transparency while reinforcing accountability.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low: requires time of leaders and employees

	to the vision statement			
Incorporate vision statement into onboarding & training	Ensure all new hires learn about the company's vision of inclusion from the start.	Helps institutionalize inclusion from day one.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low to moderate: requires HR resources and time for training
Granting employees autonomy to propose & lead initiatives	Allow employees to drive initiatives, such as organizing events, suggesting policy changes, or leading inclusion campaigns.	Fosters engagement and accountability, making DEI efforts employee driven.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low: requires management support and time.

Stage 3: Diversity & inclusion initiatives

5	Add diversity & inclusion statement to website	Publicly demonstrate the company's commitment to diversity and inclusion.	Attracts diverse talent and fosters trust.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low: website update.
	Showcase diversity & inclusion as a central focus on the website	Feature diversity and inclusion initiatives, employee testimonials, and progress updates prominently.	Increases transparency and enhances company reputation.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low: website redesign and content updates.
	Build and expand online presence for diversity and inclusion efforts	Use social media, blogs, and external platforms to highlight company progress, share resources, and engage within diversity and inclusion related conversations.	Enhances visibility, attracts diverse candidates, and strengthens external partnerships.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low: content creation, and social media engagement
	Host and participate in networking events	Engage with external communities to exchange knowledge, increase visibility, and attract diverse talent.	Strengthens industry relationships, expands hiring pools, and promotes inclusive culture.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low to moderate: fees for participating and costs for hosting may vary

	Create safe spaces within the company	Offer designated areas (physical or virtual) where employees can discuss diversity and inclusion topics openly.	Encourages dialogue, raises awareness, and fosters psychological safety.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low to moderate: internal moderation, online forums, or designated meeting spaces.
	Create clear and accessible reporting channels for discrimination & harassment	Ensure employees can report issues without fear of retaliation through confidential channels.	Builds trust and accountability while addressing systemic barriers to inclusion.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Moderate: requires internal HR oversight or external compliance services.
	Support inclusion and diversity within gameplay	Actively educate users & address discrimination and toxic behaviour within online gaming environments.	Creates a safer and more inclusive player experience, reinforcing company values.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Moderate: assign/hire and train a number of moderators, add tools for moderation
	Host educational events on diversity and inclusion topics	Organize talks, workshops, and panels to raise awareness and educate employees on inclusion.	Increases knowledge, sparks meaningful conversations, and normalizes diversity and inclusion efforts.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Moderate to high: requires speaker fees, training materials, and internal coordination.
	Seeking collaboration and partnerships	Connect with external advisors or associations specializing in fostering diversity and inclusion, incl. strategy and implementation.	Brings in external perspectives, best practices, and validates internal efforts.	Suitable for all size of companies; larger firms may hire consultants, while smaller firms can collaborate with industry associations, nonprofit groups, or invite expert speakers.	Moderate to high: may require consulting fees or membership costs.
6	Recognize & celebrate contributions to diversity and inclusion	Publicly acknowledge employees and departments efforts made to increase diversity and inclusion through awards, recognition, and incentives.	Reinforces inclusive behaviours, boosts engagement, and encourages broader participation.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low to moderate: requires internal recognition programs, certificates, and the costs associated

				with granted incentives.
Publish diversity and inclusion progress reports internally & externally	Share key wins, data insights, and success stories with employees and stakeholders.	Enhances transparency, strengthens employer brand, and maintains accountability.	Suitable for medium and large companies; smaller firms can share informal updates.	Moderate: requires data collection, report creation, and PR support.
Showcase first successes in recruitment & promotion	Linking incentives to diversity and inclusion goals and highlighting wins related to new hires, promotions, or leadership changes.	Demonstrates commitment, inspires employees, and attracts diverse talent.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low: requires HR tracking, and costs associated with communicating wins internally and externally.
Achieving external diversity certifications	Commit publicly to fostering gender diversity, and applying for receiving certifications, which increases external accountability.	Builds credibility and improves the image of the organization.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low to moderate: Requires partnership-building and communication efforts.
Measure and communicate impact of diversity and inclusion training programs	Track attendance, engagement, and behavioural changes after training sessions.	Validates training effectiveness, identifies areas for improvement, and reinforces learning.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low to moderate: requires survey tools, HR analytics, and feedback collection.

Stage 4: Gender-focused HR policies & practices

7	Revise and standardize gender-inclusive HR policies	Update policies on recruitment, promotion, parental leave, flexible work, and pay equity.	Ensures structural alignment with GDI goals and removes systemic barriers.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Moderate: requires HR policy reviews, legal consultation, and training for HR teams.
	Team-distribution analysis	Assess gender distribution across teams and departments.	Identifies representation gaps and informs recruitment and development strategies.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low to moderate: requires HR data analysis, and reporting tools.
	Link diversity and inclusion goals to performance appraisal	Integrate GDI targets into performance evaluations and promotions.	Ensures accountability, motivates leaders, and reinforces	Suitable for medium and large companies.	Moderate: requires performance review updates,

		commitment to DEI.		managerial training, and policy alignment.
Provide Bias Training for Managers & HR Professionals	Equip decision-makers with the skills to recognize and mitigate biases in hiring, promotions, and performance reviews.	Ensures fairer career advancement and creates a more inclusive workplace.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low to moderate: requires training costs (internal or external providers).
Implement Gender-Sensitive Recruitment & Hiring Practices	Anonymized screening of applications, vibe check, and structured interviews, involving the representation of women within the processes.	Reduces biases in hiring, increases diverse representation, and fosters fairness.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Moderate to high: requires HR training, software for anonymizing screening, and policy adjustments.
Use of social media to actively source for target applicants	Leverage LinkedIn, Twitter, and industry platforms to attract diverse candidates.	Expands talent pipeline, reaching underrepresented groups more effectively.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low to moderate: requires social media management tools, and recruiter training.
Job description	Adopt gender-neutral job descriptions, such as reducing requirements and including a statement addressing women and other minorities	Increases accessibility and encourages candidates from diverse backgrounds to apply.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low: requires HR training and policy adjustments.
Introduce targeted leadership development for women	Create leadership programs, sponsorships, and succession planning to advance women.	Increases female representation in leadership and creates long-term change.	Suitable for medium and large companies.	Moderate to high: requires mentorship programs, executive coaching, and development workshops.
Strengthen pay equity and transparency	Conduct pay audits, establish clear salary bands, and ensure equal pay for equal work.	Closes gender pay gaps, boosts employee trust, and enhances retention.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low to moderate: requires compensation analysis tools, and HR collaboration.

Integrate work-life balance and family-friendly policies	Offer flexible work arrangements, parental leave, and childcare support.	Increases retention of female employees and enhances workplace inclusivity.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Moderate: requires policy adjustments, financial planning for benefits.
Build a feedback culture, including continuous policy reviews	Regularly assess HR policies through employee feedback and external benchmarking.	Ensures policies remain relevant, effective, and responsive to employee needs.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Moderate: requires surveys, employee focus groups, and HR benchmarking studies.

Stage 5: Female Future

8	Ensure leadership continuity with inclusive leaders	Prioritize diversity-aware leaders in succession planning and promotions.	Ensures long-term commitment to gender inclusion at the highest levels.	Suitable for medium and large companies.	Moderate: requires leadership development programs, HR policy updates.
	Maintain and expand mentoring and sponsorship programs for women	Institutionalize mentorship programs that prepares women for higher positions and connects them with senior leaders and other contacts.	Strengthens career advancement opportunities and long-term retention of female talent.	Suitable for medium and large companies.	Moderate: requires mentorship framework and executive engagement.
	Embed inclusion and diversity training into leadership development	Ensure that every new leader receives training on unconscious bias, inclusive leadership, and equitable decision-making.	Cultivates an inclusive leadership pipeline and sustains cultural transformation.	Suitable for medium and large companies	Moderate: requires training programs, external consultants and internal trainers.
	Recognize and reward inclusive behaviours in performance reviews	Make diversity advocacy a key performance indicator for promotions and bonuses.	Ensures that leaders actively contribute to D&I efforts and cultural change.	Suitable for medium and large companies.	Low: requires Performance management updates, leadership training.
	Build partnerships with educational institutions	Engage with universities, colleges, and schools to encourage young women to pursue careers in gaming.	Expands the talent pipeline and fosters early interest in the industry.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low to moderate: requires partnerships with educational institutions.

Participate in career fairs and support programs (e.g., Girls' Days)	Actively recruit female talent by engaging in events focused on diversity in STEM and gaming careers.	Strengthens employer branding and attracts a more diverse applicant pool.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Low to moderate: requires Event participation, recruitment team engagement.
Encourage gender-inclusive game design	Support diverse narratives, characters, and development teams to reflect inclusion in company products.	Strengthens alignment between company culture and the gaming industry's representation standards.	Suitable for all sizes of companies.	Moderate: requires trained, creative development teams.

Note. Information has been summarized based on the findings of this study.

Theoretical Implications

This study provides significant theoretical contributions to the understanding of gender diversity and inclusion within male-dominated industries, particularly the video game industry. Existing literature has predominantly focused on general challenges faced by women and minorities in broader male-dominated fields (Biswas, et al., 2020; Cheryan, & Markus, 2020; Ly-Le, 2022; Nweiser, & Dajnoki, 2022). However, this research extends these findings by offering novel insights into the nuanced dynamics of the gaming industry. This study is further distinguished by its integration of two unique perspectives, namely HR experts and women working as game developer. By capturing and comparing the insights of both groups, this research offers a more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities surrounding gender diversity and inclusion. This dual-perspective approach enriches the depth of the findings but and enhances the credibility and practical relevance of the resulting recommendations, ensuring they are based on both strategic expertise and lived experiences. In this sense, the findings of the data analysis indicate a connection between inclusive workplace cultures and the implementation of inclusive characteristics within games, which has not been extensively explored in prior research. This novel perspective bridges organizational inclusivity with product outcomes, suggesting that fostering internal diversity has tangible impacts beyond internal operations. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of tailored strategies for recruitment and retention, such as hosting inclusive career events, enhancing visibility of role models, and addressing representation in both leadership and game content. To conclude, this research enriches the discourse on diversity and inclusion, paving the way for future studies to investigate the interplay between organizational culture, HR policies and practices, and industry-specific challenges.

Limitations and Future Research

This study provided valuable insights into gender diversity and inclusion research within the game industry. However, several limitations must be acknowledged. One primary limitation is the sampling approach. The use of purposively sampling combined with snowball sampling, can be considered effective for reaching participants in a niche field, but may lead to potential biases by drawing heavily from interconnected networks (Newcomer, et al., 2015). This, coupled with a small sample size, limits the generalizability of the findings and may not accurately represent the perspectives of the broader population within the gaming industry (Naderifar, et al., 2017). Additionally, the respondents were primarily focused on specific roles and organizations, which might have restricted the scope of perspectives, while leaving out potential variations between independent studios and larger corporate entities or across

different levels of seniority. Another limitation lies in the cultural and regional scope of the research. As the study was primarily conducted in Germany and the Netherlands, the findings may reflect localized experiences that do not fully capture the global diversity challenges faced by the industry. As with any study relying on self-reported data, the findings are inherently shaped by participants' perspectives, which can be influenced by personal biases, selective memory, and the tendency to present themselves or their organizations in a favourable light (Ruslin, et al., 2022). While the research offers actionable insights, it is leaving room for future studies to validate these findings across larger populations and diverse regions. Finally, while the study incorporates long-term recommendations for fostering gender diversity and inclusion, the scope of the research did not allow for experimental or longitudinal approaches to directly measure the sustainability and effectiveness of these strategies over time.

In this context, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term effectiveness of diversity initiatives, such as unconscious bias training, flexible work policies, and mentorship programs. Evaluating how these measures influence employee retention, job satisfaction, and organizational culture over time could provide organizations with actionable strategies for sustaining meaningful change. Despite the wealth of knowledge on fostering gender diversity and inclusion, the game industry continues to face significant challenges in implementing sustainable change (Ahmadi, et al., 2020). One critical factor may be the industry's deeply rooted cultural and structural norms, which often perpetuate masculine defaults and create resistance to inclusive practices (Bailey, et al., 2019). While frameworks and initiatives are well-documented, respondents indicated that their translation into actionable, long-term change remains inconsistent. They argue that the causes lie within a lack of accountability, insufficient resources allocated to diversity efforts, and resistance at both organizational and individual levels, which is aligned with literature findings (Pless, & Maak, 2004). Additionally, fast-paced industry dynamics, including high employee turnover and a focus on project-based work, may prioritize short-term goals rather than diversity and inclusion initiatives (Politowski, et al., 2021). Future research could explore how to overcome these systemic barriers and investigate strategies for embedding diversity and inclusion efforts into the core operational and cultural values of game companies. Additionally, understanding how different aspects of identity, such as gender, race, age, and cultural background, shape individual experiences can uncover unique barriers faced by diverse groups. This insight would help organizations create more targeted, inclusive initiatives, moving beyond an one-size-fits-all approach. By addressing these areas, future research can build on the foundation of this study to drive meaningful progress in fostering a more inclusive gaming industry.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore strategies for increasing gender diversity and fostering inclusion in the game industry, a field historically marked by underrepresentation of women and other marginalized groups. Drawing on both literature and insights from industry professionals, the research highlights a multifaceted approach to driving meaningful change, combining short-term actions with long-term commitments to create more equitable workplaces. The findings emphasize that achieving gender diversity requires more than isolated initiatives. It demands a holistic transformation in organizational culture, recruitment practices, working conditions, and leadership development. Key strategies include revising recruitment practices to mitigate biases, crafting inclusive job descriptions, and ensuring tailored development plans for underrepresented groups. Equally important are flexible working conditions, equal pay policies, and the proactive inclusion of women in leadership roles, all of which serve to make workplaces more appealing and equitable for diverse talent. One of the core contributions of this research is a step-by-step plan that organizations may follow to implement these strategies effectively. This plan provides actionable guidance at every stage of transformation, from identifying barriers and revising policies to consolidating gains and institutionalizing changes. By following these steps, organizations can foster a deeper cultural shift and ensure that progress achieved and sustained over time.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of addressing structural barriers from an early stage, such as increasing awareness among young girls and other underrepresented groups about career opportunities in the game industry. This involves fostering partnerships with schools and universities, as well as implementing mentorship programs and outreach initiatives designed to inspire and prepare the next generation of diverse talent. While this research provides actionable recommendations, it also highlights certain limitations, including the small sample size and reliance on qualitative data. More importantly, the limited novelty revealed through the data analysis in this study may indicate that there are still barriers or other elements undiscovered that hinder the progress of increasing diversity in the game industry. These limitations express the need for future research to expand the scope, explore long-term impacts, and consider how different identities shape workplace experiences. Addressing these challenges could be crucial in ensuring meaningful and lasting change. Nonetheless, the findings presented contribute to a growing body of knowledge and offer practical guidance for organizations striving to foster inclusive environments. In conclusion, the journey toward greater gender diversity and inclusion in the game industry is complex but achievable. By committing to sustained efforts, engaging all levels of the organization, and continuously refining policies and practices, companies can improve representation and create cultures where all employees thrive. The step-by-step plan and recommendations outlined in this study provide a pathway for meaningful progress and serve as a call to action for industry leaders to champion change and build a more inclusive future.

References

- Ahmadi, M., Eilert, R., Weibert, A., Wulf, V., & Marsden, N. (2020). „We want to push the industry via communication” ... Designing Communication Measures to Foster Gender Diversity in a Video Game Company. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interactions*, 4(16), 1-26. Doi: 10.1145/3375196
- Alhassan, I., Sammon, D., & Daly, M. (2019). Critical Success Factors for Data Governance: A Theory Building Approach. *Information Systems Management*, 36(2), 98-110. Doi: 10.1080/10580530.2019.1589670
- Ali, M. (2015). Impact of Gender-Focused Human Resource Management on Performance: The Mediating Effects of Gender Diversity. *Australian Journal of Management*, 41(2), 1-22. Doi: 10.1177/0312896214565119
- Ali, M., & Konrad, A. (2017). Antecedents and consequences of diversity and equality management systems: The importance of gender diversity in the TMT and lower to middle management. *European Management Journal*, 35(4), 440-453. Doi: 10.1016/j.emj.2017.02.002
- Bailey, E. N., Miyata, K., & Yoshida, T. (2021) Gender Composition of Teams and Studios in Video Game Development. *Games and Culture*, 16(1), 42–64. Doi: 10.1177/1555412019868381
- Beischel, W. J., Schudson, Z. C., Hoskin, R. A., & van Anders, S. M. (2022). The Gender/Sex 3×3: Measuring and Categorizing Gender/Sex Beyond Binaries. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*. Advance online publication. Doi:10.1037/sgd0000558
- Bernevega, A., & Gekker, A. (2021). The Industry of Lanbdlords: Exploring the Assetization of the Triple-A Game. *Games and Culture*, 17(1), 47-69. Doi: 10.1177/15554120211014151
- Beverungen, J. (2022). Diablo Immortal erreicht Rekord-Einnahmen von 100 Millionen Dollar in nur 2 Monaten. *GamePro*. Retrieved on 01-01-2022 from <https://www.gamepro.de/artikel/diablo-immortal-rekord-verkaeufe-100-mio-dollar,3383058.html>
- Biswas, K., Boyle, B., & Bhardwaj, S. (2020). Impacts of supportive HR practices and organisational climate on the attitudes of HR managers towards gender diversity – a mediated model approach. *Evidence-based HRM a Global Forum for Empirical Scholarship, Emerald Group Publishing*, 9(1), 18-33. Doi: 10.1108/EBHRM-06-2019-0051
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. Doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Brossart, T. (2021). 15 Indie Games That Became Major Success Stories. *Game Rant*. Retrieved on 01-01-22 from <https://gamerant.com/indie-games-major-success-stories/>.
- Bowen, S.A. (2018). Mission and Vision. *University of South Carolina*, 9(4), 1-9. Doi: 10.1002/9781119010722.iesc0111
- Byrd, D. (2022). How diversity fails: An empirical investigation of organizational status and policy implementation on three public campuses. *Education Sciences*, 12(3), 1–

32. Doi:10.3390/educsci12030211

- Carreno, A. M. (2024). An Analytical Review of John Kotter's Change Leadership Framework: A Modern Approach to Sustainable Organizational Transformation. Institute for Change Leadership and Business Transformation, 1-19. DOI:10.5281/zenodo.13836160
- Cheryan, S., & Markus H. R. (2020). Masculine defaults: Identifying and mitigating hidden cultural biases. *Psychological Review*, 127(6), 1022–1052. Doi: 10.1037/rev0000209
- Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, A., Hubby, G., Avery, A., & Sheikh, A. (2011). The Case Study Approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 11(100), 1-9. Retrieved on 15-01-2024 from <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2288/11/100>
- Clement, J. (2021). Game developer distribution worldwide 2014-2021, by gender. *Statista*. Retrieved on 20-01-22 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/453634/game-developer-gender-distribution-worldwide/#:~:text=A%20game%20developer%20survey%20in,as%20either%20men%20or%20women.>
- Cote, A. & Harris, B. (2021). 'Weekends became something other people did': Understanding and intervening in the habitus of video game crunch. *Convergence The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 27(2):135485652091386 DOI:10.1177/1354856520913865
- D'Anastasio, C. (2018). *Inside the Culture of Sexism at Riot Games*. *Kotaku*. Retrieved on 03-01-22 from <https://kotaku.com/inside-the-culture-of-sexism-at-riot-games-1828165483>
- Freeman, G., Bardzell, J., Bardzell, S., & McNeese, N. (2020). Mitigating Exploitation: Indie Game Developers' Reconfiguration of Labor in Technology, *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 4(CSCW1), Article No. 56, 1-23. Doi: 10.1145/3392864
- Gioia, D., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. (2012) Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15-31. Doi: 10.1177/1094428112452151
- Grind, K., Fritz, B., & Needleman, S. E. (2021, November 16). Activision CEO Bobby Kotick knew for years about sexual-misconduct allegations at videogame giant. *The wall street journal*. Retrieved on 29-01-22 from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/activision-videogames-bobby-kotick-sexual-misconduct-allegations-11637075680>
- Hamedani, M. G., & Markus, H. R. (2019). Understanding culture clashes and catalyzing change: A culture cycle approach. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10(700), 1-7. Doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00700
- Hardcastle, K. (2023). Unleashing the Power of Women in the Billion Dollar Mobile Gaming Sector. *Forbes*. Retrieved on 13-09-2022 from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/katehardcastle/2023/07/13/unleashing-the-power-of-women-in-the-billion-dollar-mobile-gaming-sector/>
- Ho, F., & Mussap, A. J. (2019). The Gender Identity Scale: Adapting the Gender Unicorn to measure gender identity. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 6(2), 217–231. Doi:10.1037/sgd0000322
- IGDA. (2022). Game Industry Standards. *International Game Developers Association*. Retrieved on 29-01-22 from <https://igda.org/resourcelibrary/game-industry-standards/>

- Jerónimo, H. M., Henriques, P. L. & Carvalho, S. I. (2021). Being inclusive boosts impact of diversity practices on employee engagement. *Journal of Iberoamerican Academy of Management*, 20(2), 129-147. Doi: 10.1108/MRJIAM-05-2021-1175
- Johnson, R. S., (2013). Toward greater production diversity: examining social boundaries at a video game studio. *Games and Culture*, 8(3), 136-160.
Doi: 10.1177/1555412013481848
- Kirkpatrick, G. (2017). How gaming became sexist: a study of UK gaming magazines 1981–1995. *Media, Culture & Society*, 39(4), 453–468. Doi: 10.1177/0163443716646177
- Kotter, J. P. (1995) Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail. *Harvard Business Review*, 73, 59-67.
- Kuknor, S. C., & Bhattacharya, S. (2020). Inclusive Leadership: New Age Leadership to Foster Organizational Inclusion. *European Journal of Training and Development*, 46(1), 771-797. Doi:10.1108/EJTD-07-2019-0132
- Lauring, J., & Villessèche, F. (2017) The Performance of Gender Diverse Teams: What is the Relation between Diversity Attitudes and Degree of Diversity? *European Management Review*, 16(2), 243-254. Doi: 10.1111/emre.12164
- Lobe, B., Morgan, D., & Hoffman, K. A. (2020). Qualitative Data Collection in an Era of Social Distancing. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19(2), 1-8.
Doi: 10.1177/1609406920937875
- Lombard, E. J., Azpeitia, J., & Cheryan, S. (2021). Built on uneven ground: How masculine defaults disadvantage women in political leadership. *Psychological Inquiry*, 32(2), 107–116. Doi:10.1080/1047840X.2021.1930776
- Lochmiller, C. R. (2021). Conducting Thematic Analysis with Qualitative Data. *The Qualitative Report*, 26(6), 2029-2044. Doi: 10.46743/2160-3715/2021.5008
- Ly-Le, T.-M. (2022). Hiring for Gender Diversity in Tech. *Journal of management Development*, 41(6), 393-403. Doi: 10.1108/JMD-11-2021-0322
- Maguire, M., & Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning Teaching Scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 8(3), 3351-3365. Retrieved on 19-02-24 from <http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/3354>
- Makri, C., & Neely, A. (2021). Grounded Theory: A Guide for Exploratory Studies in Management Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20(2), 1-4.
Doi: 10.1177/160940692110131654
- Martins, L. L. (2020). Strategic diversity leadership: The role of senior leaders in delivering the diversity dividend. *Journal of Management*, 46(7), 1191–1204.
Doi: 10.1177/0149206320939641
- Mäyrä, F., & Alha, K. (2020). *Mobile Gaming*. In: Kowert, Rachel, and Thorsten Quandt. 2020. The Video Game Debate 2: Revisiting the Physical, Social, and Psychological Effects of Video Games. New York & Milton Park: Routledge
- Miller, R. A., Vaccaro, A., Kimball, E. W., Forester, R. (2021). “It’s Dude Culture”: Students with Minoritized Identities of Sexuality and/or Gender Navigating STEM Majors. *American Psychological Association*, 14(3), 340-352. Doi: 10.1037/dhe0000171

- Mor Barak, M. E. (2015). Inclusion is the Key to Diversity Management, but What is Inclusion? *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*, 39(2), 83-88. Doi: 10.1080/23303131.2015.1035599
- Naderifar, M., Goli, H., & Ghaljaie, F. (2017). Snowball Sampling: A Puroseful Method of Sampling in qualitative Research. *Strides in Development of Medical Education*, 14(3), 1-7. Doi: 10.5812/sdme.67670.
- Naz, N., Gulab, F., & Aslam, M. (2022). Development of Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Case Study Research. *Competitive Social Sciences Research Journal*, 3(2), 42-52. Doi: 10.1111/jan.13031
- Newcomer (2015). *Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews*. Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation 4th Edition, Publisher Jossey-Bass
- Nweiser, M., & Dajnoki, K. (2022). The Importance of Diversity Management in Relation With Other Functions of Human Resource Management – A Systematic Review. *Cross-Cultural Management Journal*, 1(2022), 17-25. Doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.11344.38408.
- Ochsner, A. (2017). Reasons Why: Examining the Experience of Women in Games 140 Characters at a Time. *Games and Culture*, 14(5), 523-542
Doi:10.1177/1555412017709418
- Oliveira, G. (2022). Developing a codebook for qualitative data analysis: insights from a study on learning transfer between university and the workplace. *International Journal of Research & Methd in Education*, 46(3), 1-13.
Doi: 10.1080/1743727X.2022.2128745
- Pless, N., & Maak, T. (2004). Building an Inclusive Diversity Culture: Principles, Processes and Practice, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 54(2), 129-147. Doi: 10.1007/s10551-004-9465-8
- Prescott, J., & Bogg, J. (2010). Career attitudes of men and women working in the computer games industry. *Eludamos Journal of Computer Game Culture*, 5(11), 7-28.
Doi: 10.7557/23.6124
- Priya, A. (2021). Case Study Methodology of Qualitative Research: Key Attributes and Navigating the Conundrums in its Application. *Sociological Bulletin*, 70(1), 1-17.
Doi: 0.1177/0038022920970318
- Politowski, C., Petrillo, F., Ullmann, G. C., Guéhéneuc, Y. G. (2021). Game industry problems: An extensive analysis of the grey literature. *Information and software technology*, 134(2021), 1-14. Doi: 10.1016/j.infsof.2021.106538
- Roberts, K., Dowell, A., & Nie, J. (2019). Attempting rigour and replicability in thematic analysis of qualitative research data; A case study of codebook development. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 19(1), 1-8. Doi: 10.1186/s12874-019-0707-y
- Robinson, G. (2021). Capturing a moving target: interviewing fintech experts via LinkedIn. *Area*, 53(4), 671-678. Doi: 10.1111/area.12726
- Ruslin, R., Mashuri, S., Abdul Rasak, M. S., Alhabsyi, F., & Syam, H. (2022). Semi-Structured Interview: A Methodoligical Reflection on the Development of a Qualitative Research Instrument in Educational Studies. *Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 12(1), 22-29. Doi: 10.9790/7388-1201052229

- Ryan, C. (2012). Cross-Case Analysis. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 6(1), 543-558. Doi: 10.1108/S1871-3173(2012)0000006033
- Sherr, I. (2022, January 21). Microsoft promises culture change at Activision Blizzard. Here's how. *CNET*. Retrieved on 10-01-22 from <https://www.cnet.com/tech/gaming/microsoft-promises-culture-change-at-activision-blizzard-heres-how/>
- Sherr, I., & Solsman, J. E. (2022, January 22). Microsoft expands gaming and Xbox further, Buying Activision Blizzard for \$68.7 billion. *CNET*. Retrieved on 10-01-22 from <https://www.cnet.com/tech/gaming/microsoft-expands-gaming-and-xbox-further-buying-activision-blizzard-for-68-7-billion/>
- Stamarski, C. S., & Son Hing, L. S. (2015). Gender inequalities in the workplace: the effects of organizational structures, processes, practices and decision makers' sexism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6(1400), 1-20. Doi: [10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01400](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01400).
- Statista Market Insights. (2023). Retrieved on 24-10-23- from <https://www.statista.com/outlook/dmo/digital-media/video-games/mobile-games/worldwide>.
- Styhre, A., & Remneland-Wikhamn, B. (2021). The video game as agencement and the image of new gaming experiences: the work of indie video game developers, *Culture and Organization*, 27(6), DOI: 10.1080/14759551.2021.1919893
- Styhre, A., Remneland-Wikhamn, B., Szczepanska, A. M., & Ljungberg, J. (2016). Masculine domination and gender subtexts: The role of female professionals in the renewal of the Swedish video game industry. *Culture and Organization*, 1-19. Doi:10.1080/14759551.2015.1131689
- Subhash K. C., Archana, M., Jahanvi, B., & Sandeep, K. (2019). Diversity focused HR practices and perceived firm performance: mediating role of procedural justice. *Journal of Asia Business Studies*, 13(2), 214-239. Doi: 10.1108/JABS-02-2018-0032
- Tama, K. M. (2019). Organizational Culture Mapping Analysis Through Organizational Culture Assessment (OCA). *jurnal masyarakat kebudayaan dan politik*, 32(2), 186-195. Doi: 10.20473/mkp.V32I22019.186-195
- Taparia, M., & Lenka, U. (2022). An integrated Conceptual Framework of the Glass Ceiling Effect. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, 9(3), 372-400. Doi: 10.1108/JOEPP-06-2020-0098
- Turner, D., Ting, H., Wong, M. W., Lim, T., & Tan, K. (2021). Applying Qualitative Approach in Business Research. *Asian Journal of Business Research*, 11(3), 1-14. Doi: 10.147/Ajbr.210111
- Weststar, J., Kumar, S., Coppins, T., Kwan, E., & Inceefe, E. (2021). Developer Satisfaction Survey 2021 Summary Report. International Game Developer Association. Retrieved on 12.04.2022 from https://igda-website.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/18113901/IGDA-DSS-2021_SummaryReport_2021.pdf
- Ye, P., Liu, L., Gao, L., & Mei, Q. (2020). Factors Affecting Woman's Continuance Intention for Mobile Games. *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education*, 16(4), 48-67. Doi: 10.4018/IJICTE.2020100104
- Yee, N. (2017). Beyond 50/50: Breaking Down the Percentage of Female Gamers by Genre. Quantic Foundry. Retrieved on 26-06-2023 from <https://quanticfoundry.com/2017/01/19/female-gamers-by-genre/#:~:text=Sports%20Games%20>

(with%20an%20average,7.2%25)

Yingst, T.E. (2011). *Cultural Bias*. In: Goldstein, S., Naglieri, J.A. (eds) Encyclopedia of Child Behavior and Development. Springer, Boston, MA. Doi: 10.1007/978-0-387-79061-9_749

Appendices

Appendix A

The development of interview questions derived from findings of the theoretical framework.

Table A.1

Overview of topics, literature and developed questions of semi-structured interview guide.

Topic	Literature	Questions for HR Manager & Game Devs
<p>Attitudes & beliefs of people in charge</p> <p><i>Thoughts: Which attitudes or beliefs are supporting the fostering of gender diversity & inclusion?</i></p> <p><i>What are important characteristics for management and CEO to have?</i></p> <p><i>Which roles do CEO and management play in fostering gender diversity?</i></p>	<p>Ly-Le (2021): fostering gender diversity needs to become an overall objective of the CEO rather than a side project to deliver satisfying results.</p> <p>Biswas, et al. (2020): the attitude on gender diversity of the “male-dominated senior leader” influences how women are treated and whether they are able to earn promotions (p. 10)</p> <p>Martins (2020): the personal involvement of senior leaders in the implementation processes seems to be of great importance for the overall success of visions that aim to foster diversity and inclusion.</p> <p>Ochsner (2017): Women perceive to be evaluated differently compared to their male colleagues and by criteria that is rather unrelated to their accomplishments and contributions. They tend to feel less appreciated and recognized, while they are denied the status and expertise that their male colleagues would gain for the same achievements.</p> <p>Pless, & Maak (2004): there is no true, objective reality and each individuum perceives it differently due to their diverse attributes.</p> <p>Prescott, & Bogg (2010): Voluntarily overworking was reasoned with being passionate about the game and its success and seemed to be part of the work culture.</p> <p>Stamarski, & Son Hing (2015): the support and dedication of upper management is essential, as well as the attitude of decision-makers of an organization towards gender diversity is deciding upon success or failure of gender diversity initiatives. The attitude of supervisors and managers that decide upon hiring and promoting employees needs to be unbiased and without stereotyping. Policies are a great guidance, but success depends on the decision-makers and their enactment on these policies.</p>	<p>Please describe what importance is placed on gender diversity and inclusion at your current workplace? → <i>In which ways is this importance communicated or demonstrated?</i></p> <p>Please explain which qualities do you possess that support the fostering of gender diversity in your company?</p> <p>Please share with me which qualities would you want your boss to have that would make you feel comfortable?</p>

<p>Inclusive working culture</p> <p><i>Thoughts:</i> How does the facilitation of an inclusive culture work in the game industry?</p> <p>What are important factors to consider in fostering an inclusive culture as a game developer studio?</p> <p>What kind of different work cultures exist in the game industry?</p>	<p>Jerónimo, et al., (2021): inclusion means to offer equal opportunities to all employees in terms of access to the same information, resources, and networks, thereby entitling them to take part in the decision-making processes of the organization. An inclusive culture creates the perception that everyone in the organization belongs to the same group and can freely express themselves. Characteristics of individuals are explored and examined to develop policies and practices that ensure every employee feels secure and has the needed resources to reach their highest potential</p> <p>Byrd, 2022: every employee enjoys equal opportunities (Byrd, 2022)</p> <p>Lauring, & Villesèche, (2017): a focus is placed on fostering positive gender attitudes within inclusive cultures.</p> <p>Pless, & Maak (2004): within inclusive cultures, individuals are appreciated for having their own, unique identity and are valued for sharing diverse viewpoints and opinions.</p> <p>Shore, et al. (2011): inclusion is the balance between an employee's need for belonging to a group of similar people and its desire to be a unique individual with distinct features and thoughts.</p> <p>Subhash, et al., (2019): An important characteristic of inclusive work environments is the presence of procedural justice, which can be defined as the lack of biases and discrimination in organizational processes. The fair distribution of rewards and career opportunities based on performances, which may lead to employees that favour to work cooperatively rather than competitively</p>	<p>What do you think is important for fostering an inclusive culture in the game industry?</p> <p>In your opinion, what do you consider supportive in ensuring that women feel comfortable and included at the workplace?</p> <p>What do you consider important to ensure that you feel comfortable and included at the workplace?</p> <p>Please share your experiences with work cultures of different game developer studios.</p>
<p>Gender diversity initiatives</p> <p><i>Thoughts:</i> How do organizations signal their interest in gender diversity and inclusion to the outside?</p> <p>How effective is partnering with associations and</p>	<p>Ly-Le (2021) the importance an organization places on gender diversity should be the centre of their career pages, while uploading talks and articles discussing the subject may help in sending the right signals to the right target group. In this way, women and other minorities perceive the organization as being supportive and inclusive, which may increase the number of applicants.</p> <p>Byrd, 2022; Jerónimo, et al., 2021; Kuknor, & Bhattacharya, 2020: the best results can be achieved if both, diversity, and inclusion are integrated as core values of the organization.</p>	<p>In your opinion, which influence has fostering gender diversity and inclusion on the games an organization develops?</p> <p>In which ways do you signal the company's interest in fostering diversity to the outside.</p> <p>Please share your experiences of working together with institutions</p>

<p><i>institutions in increasing gender diversity?</i></p> <p><i>Which influence may have the interest in gender diversity and inclusion on the games an organization produces?</i></p>	<p>Pless, & Maak (2004): the development of a vision statement that serves as enlightenment for the upcoming changes and aids the facilitation of an inclusive culture and a diverse workforce.</p> <p>Ochsner (2017): the visibility of female role models positively influences the perception that women can excel and pursue career opportunities in male-dominated industries.</p> <p>Ahmadi, et al. (2020): a focus should be placed on the competences of role models instead of the gender. Working in the game industry has been associated with a high degree of networking within informal and relaxed environments occupied by employees that seek to express their creativity.</p> <p>Taparia, & Lenka (2022): to diminish the effects of glass ceilings, it is important to find initiatives that support the reorientation of negative gender attitudes of employees, especially of organization's decision-makers.</p> <p>Cheryan, & Markus (2020): Another common key concept is the act of self-promotion to achieve higher positions in the organization. Such key concepts and principles need to be evaluated, preferably done by a third-party company to assure an objective view and a complete picture of the problems.</p>	<p>and associations that aim at supporting the fostering of gender diversity in the game industry.</p> <p>Please share your experiences with supportive associations and institutions within the game industry.</p> <p>Please explain your motivation for becoming a game developer and working in the game industry.</p>
<p>HR policies & practices</p> <p><u>Thoughts:</u> <i>Which policies exist that aim at fostering gender diversity and which results have been observed after implementing these policies.</i></p> <p><i>What do women working in game development want and need to feel appreciated and equally treated?</i></p> <p><i>What can organizations offer or what do they need to</i></p>	<p>Cheryan, & Markus, (2020): organizations should retreat from the belief of hiring and promoting the most brilliant employees is best, thereby valuing traits of stereotypical men, such as independence and self-reliance. The selection process needs to represent what the organization is searching for rather than focusing on traditional "hot shots", which are candidates that perform swiftly and assertive. Interview questions are standardized to elude the chance that candidates are being treated unfairly by HR managers</p> <p>Jerónimo, et al., (2021): Characteristics of individuals are explored and examined to develop policies and practices that ensure every employee feels secure and has the needed resources to reach their highest potential</p> <p>Freeman, et al. (2020): organizations should build up an online presence on social media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter, as these channels are increasing in importance to attract female professionals.</p>	<p>Which recommendations would you share with other game developer organizations that aim to increase the number of women working in game development?</p> <p>Please explain which policies have been implemented to ensure the equal treatment of women.</p> <p>Please tell me about training and development opportunities at your organization that aim to support the fostering of gender diversity.</p> <p>In your opinion, when you are applying for a new job, what needs to be</p>

<p><i>change that would result in an increase of women working in the industry.</i></p>	<p>Ali (2015) principles foster gender diversity by monitoring the well-being of minorities and promoting a supportive work environment in which everyone feels supported and treated equally with the same opportunities, despite of social backgrounds or gender identities.</p> <p>Subhash, et al., (2019): supportive HR practices and policies may reduce discriminations against women and other minorities within key functions. Unconscious bias training leads to an increased appreciation of differences in individual's attitudes, values, and behaviours</p> <p>Biswas, et al. (2020): members of the organization are equally encouraged to participate in development opportunities and the decision-making processes.</p> <p>Ahmadi, et al. (2020) caution is needed when formulating job descriptions targeted at women, because they need to be addressed differently. It is recommended to use gender-sensitive wording and visuals. To attract more women, the stated skills in job descriptions should represent a realistic list of requirements necessary for the job. Physical contact to potential candidates has a greater impact in attracting female personnel than using online channels.</p> <p>Ly-Le, (2021): Especially requiring extra technical skills may lead to a reduced number in female applicants, because women hesitate to apply for a job if they do not meet all requirements. Partnering with educational institutions to host recruiting events targeted at women to enhance both, physical and online presence. Removing the names and other personal information during the screening process of applications may increase the number of female applicants. unconscious bias training should be done by a third party outside of the organization. Gender pay equity policy, which can be explained as the promise that employees receive equal payments for the same kind of work.</p> <p>Ali, & Konrad, (2017): Carefully deciding upon selection criteria that supports the fostering of diversity and inclusiveness while being aligned with other key strategies of the organization.</p> <p>Taparia, & Lenka (2022): unconscious bias training for employees in overcoming gender-related issues, such as stereotyping. The</p>	<p>given for you to accept an offer?</p> <p>Please share which are the best ways to get your attention when you are looking for a new job?</p> <p>In your opinion, what can an employer do to support you in keeping a good work-life balance?</p>
---	--	--

	<p>offering of mentorships for female employees has been considered an important factor in diversity training and development.</p> <p>Lauring & Villesèche (2017): By increasing awareness and educating people about common biases, a tolerance for dissimilarities may be developed, as it is claimed that interactions and communication may decrease discriminations.</p> <p>Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015: formal HR policies need to clarify who may adopt flexible work arrangements and under which circumstances, including flexible schedules, compressed work weeks, and part-time work opportunities, which may signal applicants and employees the organization's emphasis on work-life balance initiatives.</p>	
--	---	--

Note. Questions derived from main findings of literature review.

Appendix B

Informed consent for social and behavioural sciences.

Informed Consent for Social and Behavioural Sciences

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
University of Twente
BMS Faculty

MSc in Business Administration
**Inclusive Play: Advancing Gender Diversity Through HR Policies and
Organizational Culture Within Game Developer Teams**

Investigator: Michelle Sausmikat
Supervisor: Dr. Guido Bruinsma

Introduction

I am inviting you to participate in a research study about gender diversity and inclusion in the game industry, which is part of the requirements for obtaining a master's degree in social sciences. Taking part in this study is entirely voluntarily and can be determined at any time without further explanation and negative consequences. This form includes explanations about the purpose, procedures, risks and benefits of this research, as well as a statement of confidentiality. Please read the information carefully and do not hesitate to ask any questions in advance. If you have any question about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher, you may contact the Secretary of the Ethics Committee.

Contact	E-Mail Address
Michelle Sausmikat	Sausmikat2804@gmail.com
Ethics Committee/domain Humanities & Social Sciences of the Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences at the University of Twente	Ethicscommittee-hss@utwente.nl

Purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to explore existing gender-focused HR practices and policies or other initiatives that have been implemented by game developer studios in the game industry to foster gender diversity and inclusion. The resulting recommendations may be used as guidance for other organizations in the industry to facilitate an inclusive organizational culture, as well as to increase the number of women working in game development.

Procedures

You have been identified as an expert and asked to participate in a 30-minute-long interview. The interview will be about your opinion on what organizations can do to create a more inclusive environment for women and how to increase gender diversity in the game industry. The information received through these interviews will be used to evaluate industry-tailored recommendations for fostering diversity and inclusion. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be released or disclosed with other parties. The audios of the interviews will preferably be recorded and turned into transcripts

for coding purposes. The audios will be deleted immediately after receiving the anonymised transcripts of the interviews.

Risks

For this study, no potential risks have been identified. It is not anticipated to ask personal or sensitive questions during the interviews. Nonetheless, the topic of gender diversity and inclusion in the game industry can cause discomfort and stress when reflecting on certain memories or experiences that involve the negative treatment of women and other minorities.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits provided to participants other than the appreciation for their involvement in searching for solutions that aim to improve the overall situation for women and other minorities in the game industry.

Statement of Confidentiality

Any information about you and other participants will be coded and stored on the investigator's private notebook, which is well secured and kept at home. The recorded audios of the interviews will be deleted immediately after creating the anonymised transcripts, while collected information will be only accessible by the investigator.

Consent to Participate

I have read the information in this form and understand my role in participating in the research. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions in advance and all have been answered satisfactorily. I understand that I may determine my participation at any time without the need to give a reason. By signing this form, I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form for my own records

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Witness

Signature

Date

Appendix C

Changes made to the semi-structured interview scripts.

Table C.1

Overview of added and removed questions of semi-structured interview scripts.

Action	Question	Explanation
Added	Please explain which qualities you possess that support the fostering of gender diversity in your company?	Literature findings and pre-tests indicate that there might be a relation between degree of gender diversity within a firm and characteristics/qualities of CEO/founder/HR manager.
	Please share with me which qualities would you want your boss to have that would make you feel comfortable?	Literature findings and pre-tests indicate that there might be a relation between degree of gender diversity within a firm and characteristics/qualities of CEO/founder/HR manager.
	Do you know of any policies or initiatives to ensure that women feel comfortable and included at the workplace? → If so/if not, please share your ideas with me.	The word “policies” might indicate a formally written document, which is not necessarily given. Pre-tests have shown that participants hesitate to give an answer and rather say “I don’t know” when asked for policies. Adding the follow-up questions to share ideas might still result in fruitful insights of what could be considered a policy.
	Please share your experiences with work cultures of different game developer studios.	Adding the dimension of experiences with different work culture to enable a comparison among studios from the perspective of women working in game development.
	In your opinion, which influence does fostering gender diversity and inclusion might have on the design of your games?	After conducting the first two interviews, the influence of fostering gender diversity and inclusion within a game developer studio on their games was mentioned without explicitly asking about it, which may have signalled the importance of it.
	In which ways do you signal the company’s interest in fostering diversity to the outside.	During the fifth interview, the importance of signalling the dedication on fostering gender diversity and inclusion to the outside world was highlighted.
	Do you work together with institutions or associations? → Please share your experiences of working together with them.	The partnership with supportive institutions and associations has been a greatly mentioned topic without explicitly asking about experiences with them. To gain greater insights, this question has been added to the HR manager interview script.
	Do you have experiences with supportive institutions and associations? → Please share your experiences with them.	The partnership with supportive institutions and associations has been a greatly mentioned topic without explicitly asking about experiences with them. To gain greater insights, this question has been added to the game developer interview script.

	Please explain your motivation for becoming a game developer and working in the game industry.	This question was added after the fifth interview to gain insights in areas that may increase the likelihood of reaching more girls and women.
Removed	Have changes been made to key management concepts and principles to support the fostering of gender diversity and inclusion?	The use of too formally formulated questions about “principles” or “key management concepts” have resulted in short and unclear answers and was removed after the pre-tests.
	How have these strategies influenced the workplace	The word “strategy” might indicate a formally written document, which is not necessarily given, which is why this question has been removed after the pre-tests.
	How have these strategies influenced the performance of the organization?	The word “strategy” might indicate a formally written document, which is not necessarily given, which is why this question was removed after the pre-tests.
	What do you think can an organization do that would help in enhancing the interaction between colleagues?	This question was removed after the second interview because it did not lead to useful results.
	Which strategies or policies have you implemented to ensure that women feel secure and equally treated?	The words “strategies” and “policies” might indicate formally written documents, which are not necessarily given. Pre-tests have shown that participants hesitate to give an answer and was removed.

Note. Overview of added and removed questions of the semi-structured interview scripts.

Table C.2

Overview of initial and altered questions of the semi-structured interview script.

Initial question	Altered question	Explanation
Please explain which strategies or practices you follow within this organization to create an inclusive environment for all employees?	What do you think is important for fostering an inclusive culture in the game industry?	The words “strategies” and “practices” might indicate formally written documents, which are not necessarily given. To ask in a more general matter has resulted in information on strategies and practices that have not been defined as such by the participants.
What do you think needs to be done that women feel comfortable and included at the workplace?	What do you consider important to ensure that you feel comfortable and included at the workplace?	The initial question has been interpreted as asking for all the women, which has left participants overwhelmed. By directing the focus on what they consider important for their own well-being, the scope was

		limited, and answers were insightful.
Which actions or steps have been taken to increase gender diversity among game developers?	Which recommendations would you share with other game developer organizations that aim to increase the number of women working in game development?	Participants have been struggling with recalling single steps and actions done to increase gender diversity. By asking for recommendations, participants are not chained to explain in great detail what has been done but select what they still remember worked very well in increasing the number of women in game development.
Which recommendations would you share with other game developer organizations that aim to enhance the recruitment and selection of women?	Are there any policies that have been implemented to ensure the equal treatment of women? →Please share your experiences with them.	This question has been changed after the fifth interview, because the answers were vague and not related to ensuring equality or transparency.
Please share how do you support women in achieving their career goals within your organization?	Please tell me about training and development opportunities at your organization that aim to support the fostering of gender diversity.	The initial question was too vague and changed after the second interview. By mentioning “training and development”, participants could better understand the intention of this question.
What are the best channels to get your attention when you are looking for a new job?	Please share which are the best ways to get your attention when you are looking for a new job?	The word “channels” has confused participants and was changed to “best ways” to encourage the sharing of any ideas that comes to mind.

Note. Changed questions of the semi-structured interview scripts and related explanations.

Appendix D

Interview guideline.

Research goal

The goal is to explore existing gender-focused HR practices and other initiatives that have been implemented by game developer studios in the game industry to foster gender diversity, thereby evaluating their effectiveness on increasing the number of women, as well as on changing problematic organizational cultures.

Central research question

What actions have been taken by game developer organizations in the game industry to increase gender diversity and inclusion within game developer teams?

Overview of topics

- Attitudes & beliefs
- Inclusive cultures
- Gender diversity & inclusion initiatives
- HR policies & practices

Overview of interviewing procedure

Preparation:

- Documents “informed consent” have been signed by the participants and sent back
- Semi-structured interview scripts have been developed and tested before execution
- Recording devices and online meeting software have been tested beforehand

Conduction:

1. Welcoming participants and thanking them for their participation in the study.
2. Short introduction round of researcher and participant.
3. Stating the purpose of the study and informing participant of their rights to withheld information and end the interview at any time.
4. Explaining the process and assuring the confidentiality of participant’s information.
5. Asking for questions before starting and for permission to start recording.
6. Starting the recording and asking the first “icebreaker” question:

“What do you think is the most important thing for organizations in the game industry to understand or change to enable the fostering of gender diversity?”

7. Continuing with using the semi-structured interview script to ask questions fitting the given answer or the topic of conversation. The order is not fixed, and questions can be chosen whenever suitable. The overview can be found in Table C.1.
8. Ending the interview and recording. Thanking participants and asking for feedback.
9. Disclosing researcher’s contact information for any concerns
10. Thanking participants and saying goodbye.

Table D.1

Overview of questions of semi-structured interview script.

Topic	Question HR Manager	Question Game Developer
Attitudes & beliefs of people in charge	1. Please describe what importance is placed on gender diversity and inclusion at your current workplace? → In which ways is this importance communicated or demonstrated?	1. Please describe what importance is placed on gender diversity and inclusion at your current workplace? → In which ways is this importance communicated or demonstrated?

	HR2. Please explain which qualities do you possess that support the fostering of gender diversity in your company?	DEV2. Please share with me which qualities would you want your boss to have that would make you feel comfortable?
Inclusive working culture	<p>HR3. What do you think is important for fostering an inclusive culture in the game industry?</p> <p>HR4. In your opinion, which policies are supportive in ensuring that women feel comfortable and included at the workplace?</p>	<p>DEV3. What do you consider important to ensure that you feel comfortable and included at the workplace?</p> <p>DEV4. Please share your experiences with work cultures of different game developer studios.</p>
Gender diversity initiatives	<p>5. In your opinion, which influence does the dedication of an organization on fostering gender diversity and inclusion have on the design of their games?</p> <p>HR6. In which ways do you signal the company's interest in fostering diversity to the outside.</p> <p>HR7. Please share your experiences of working together with institutions and associations that aim at supporting the fostering of gender diversity in the game industry.</p>	<p>5. In your opinion, which influence does the dedication of an organization on fostering gender diversity and inclusion have on the design of their games?</p> <p>DEV6. Please share your experiences with supportive associations and institutions of the industry.</p> <p>DEV7. Please explain your motivation for becoming a game developer and working in the game industry.</p>
HR policies & practices	<p>HR8. Which recommendations would you share with other game developer organizations that aim to increase the number of women working in game development?</p> <p>HR9. Please share your experiences with successful strategies that have helped in attracting women to your organization</p> <p>HR10. Please tell me about training and development opportunities at your organization that aim to support the fostering of gender diversity.</p>	<p>DEV8. In your opinion, when you are applying for a new job, what needs to be given for you to accept an offer?</p> <p>DEV9. Please share which are the best ways to get your attention when you are looking for a new job?</p> <p>DEV10. In your opinion, what can an employer do to support you in keeping a good work-life balance?</p>

Note. Questions have been derived from literature evaluated in theoretical framework.

Appendix E

Overview of the interviews and participants of the study.

Table E.1

Overview of conducted interviews.

Nr.	Participant	Date	Starting time	Type	Duration
1	HR_1	29-05-24	15:00	Online: Discord	40 min.
2	HR_2	06-06-24	11:00	Online: Discord	43 min.
3	HR_3	13-06-24	15:00	Personal: Office	28 min.
4	HR_4	13-06-24	17:15	Online: Teams	49 min.
5	HR_5	14-08-24	14:00	Personal: Office	39 min.
6	HR_6	27-08-24	15:00	Personal: Office	42 min.
7	DEV_1	12-06-24	19:00	Online: Google Meets	40 min.
8	DEV_2	21-06-24	16:00	Online: Discord	27 min.
9	DEV_3	28-06-24	12:30	Online: Discord	46 min.
10	DEV_4	16-08-24	18:00	Online: Discord	21 min.
11	DEV_5	26-08-24	14:00	Online: Teams	26 min.
12	SPKR	17-06-24	9:30	Online: Teams	53 min.

Note. Information derived from conducted interviews of this study.

Table E.2

Information of participants of conducted interviews.

Participant	Function/position	Studio	Studio size	Experiences
HR_1	Founder	Indie	Micro	>10 years
HR_2	Founder	Indie	Small	>10 years
HR_3	HR-Manager	Mobile	Medium	3 years
HR_4	Leadership	Mobile	Medium	>10 years
HR_5	HR Director	Mobile	Medium	>10 years
HR_6	People & Culture	Mobile	Medium	3 years
DEV_1	Game developer	Indie	Medium	3 years
DEV_2	Game developer	Indie	Small	3 years
DEV_3	Game developer	Triple-A	Large	3 years
DEV_4	Game developer	Mobile	Small	3 years
DEV_5	Game developer	SME	Small	3 years
SPKR	Speaker	Industry-wide	-	>10 years

Note. Information derived from conducted interviews of this study.

Appendix F

Coding procedure.

Table F.1

Overview of coding procedure.

Nr.	Steps	Description/Explanation	Progress/Results
0	Pre-tests	Pre-testing the interview guide and semi-scripted interview script with participants that didn't fulfil requirements to be included.	2 audio files
0	Transcription of pre-test interviews	Turning audios of pre-tests with Microsoft Office into transcripts. Ensuring the correctness of the transcription and the confidentiality of the participants.	2 transcripts (not included)
0	Pre-test skimming	Reading through the transcripts briefly to evaluate the outcomes of the semi-structured interview guides. First codes have been crafted and questions have been adjusted.	Questions were added, changed & removed. 58 initial codes
0	Start of data collection	Sufficient preparations have been made and interviews have been scheduled.	12 interviews scheduled
1	Transcriptions of first interviews	Turning audios with Microsoft Office into transcripts. Ensuring the correctness of the transcription and the confidentiality of the participants.	2 interview scripts
2	Getting familiar with the transcripts	Reading the transcripts multiple times and taking first notes. If applicable, the audio has been rehearsed to interpret tone and message better.	Overview of transcripts + first notes
3	Breaking up into parts	Breaking up the transcript into smaller parts. One part was usually one answer given by the participant.	On average 40 parts per transcript
4	Open coding	<i>Open coding can be defined as the process of finding underlying key ideas within the collected data set that are associated with the unit of analysis (Alhassan, et al., 2019).</i>	79 initial codes
5	Adjustment of interview script	Semi-structured interview scripts were adjusted after fifth interview due to occurring new insights and feedback.	Questions have been added, changed & removed.
6	Transcribing the following interviews	Turning audios with Microsoft Office into transcripts. Ensuring the correctness of the transcription and the confidentiality of the participants.	10 interview scripts 12 interview scripts in total
7	Breaking transcripts into parts	The adjustment of the semi-structured interview scripts resulted in longer and more detailed answers given by the participants.	On average 26 parts per transcript
8	Open coding continued	Codes have been evaluated and summarized using Microsoft Excel, including to compare them based on frequencies and number of participants associated with them.	315 sections coded 71 codes identified

9	Axial coding	<p><i>Axial coding can be described as the process in which the initial codes produced through open coding will be reassembled based on their relations to one another. It includes to draw connections between codes and to define categories that describes these relations (Alhassan, et al., 2019).</i></p> <p>Codes have been evaluated and categorized using Microsoft Excel, including to find relations among codes and underlying relations.</p>	<p>7 categories:</p> <table><tr><td>Ideal characteristics</td></tr><tr><td>Inclusive work culture</td></tr><tr><td>GDI initiatives</td></tr><tr><td>HR initiatives</td></tr><tr><td>Game industry</td></tr><tr><td>Women's voice</td></tr><tr><td>Game Design</td></tr></table>	Ideal characteristics	Inclusive work culture	GDI initiatives	HR initiatives	Game industry	Women's voice	Game Design
Ideal characteristics										
Inclusive work culture										
GDI initiatives										
HR initiatives										
Game industry										
Women's voice										
Game Design										
10	Reviewing categories	<p>Modification and development of categories.</p> <p>Microsoft Excel has been used to compare codes based on frequencies and number of participants associated with them. The conceptual framework of this study was used as guidance for developing categories.</p>	<p>6 categories</p> <table><tr><td>Current situation</td></tr><tr><td>Mindsets & attitudes</td></tr><tr><td>Inclusive culture</td></tr><tr><td>Female future</td></tr><tr><td>D&I initiatives</td></tr><tr><td>Gender-focused HR policies & practices</td></tr></table>	Current situation	Mindsets & attitudes	Inclusive culture	Female future	D&I initiatives	Gender-focused HR policies & practices	
Current situation										
Mindsets & attitudes										
Inclusive culture										
Female future										
D&I initiatives										
Gender-focused HR policies & practices										
11	Selective coding	<p><i>The process aims at the identification of a core category and the systematically connection to other categories that have emerged during the axial coding process, which may result in the refinement and expansion of the theoretical framework (Alhassan, et al., 2019).</i></p> <p>The conceptual framework and findings of the literature review of this study were used as guidance for evaluating the relations between identified codes, themes, and categories. The descriptions and definitions can be found in the codebook.</p>	<p>Order of categories</p> <table><tr><td>Mindsets & attitudes</td></tr><tr><td>Inclusive culture</td></tr><tr><td>D&I initiatives</td></tr><tr><td>Gender-focused HR policies & practices</td></tr><tr><td>Current situation</td></tr><tr><td>Female future</td></tr></table> <p>19 themes</p> <p>Core category</p> <p>Gender-Focused HR Policies & Practices</p>	Mindsets & attitudes	Inclusive culture	D&I initiatives	Gender-focused HR policies & practices	Current situation	Female future	
Mindsets & attitudes										
Inclusive culture										
D&I initiatives										
Gender-focused HR policies & practices										
Current situation										
Female future										
12	Presentation	<p>The last step is about presenting the findings in written form which will be done by developing a step-by-step plan for fostering gender diversity and inclusion in the game industry.</p>	<p>Findings & Discussion Chapters</p>							

Appendix G

Codebook.

The development of a codebook can be explained as a systematic approach to analyse qualitative data sets, including the disclosure of information regarding the development and interpretation of codes (Oliveira, 2022). A codebook can be seen as an overview of codes, themes, and categories with related explanations and definitions that have been created and used in a study research (Roberts, et al., 2019). Within this study, the codebook was interpreted as a working document that was adapted and adjusted constantly throughout the analysis, providing the possibility to theorize about the data in the early stages of the process (Oliveira, 2022). This was supported by opting for a combination of inductive and deductive coding approaches, of which the mix is said to result in a more complete analysis (Roberts, et al., 2019). To explain, the inductive approach can be explained as the extraction of codes based on participants experiences and interpretations, while the deductive approach focuses on establishing codes based on theoretical concepts, such as the conceptual framework of the study (Oliveira, 2022). By combining both approaches, it was possible to lead the coding process by established theoretical concepts and at the same time explore unforeseen insights broad up by participants that would have not been included otherwise (Roberts, et al., 2019). A detailed description of the development of the codebook will be given in the following. The final version of the codebook of this study can be found in the appendices (see **Appendix G**).

As mentioned, the analysis of qualitative data is an iterative process that creates multiple levels of interpretations built up on each other (Turner, et al., 2021). This was also applied to the development of the codebook and resulted in immediate adaptations and adjustments of explanations, definitions, and requirements of codes while they occurred during the open-coding processes explained previously (Roberts, et al., 2019). It included the prompt judgement of codes upon the accuracy of reflection in terms of evaluated theories and collected data (Oliveira, 2022). The first initial codes have been derived from the conceptual framework and were tested during the pre-tests, which resulted in the occurrence of new insights based on participants' perspectives and experiences that needed to be evaluated using an inductive approach to coding. This process continued with the transcriptions of the interviews until a great number of initial codes were created, which is common in qualitative research (Oliveira, 2022). The following steps dealt with the reduction of these codes, which included the consideration of the theories, the research question, and the codes themselves by adding, removing, merging and changing them accordingly (Oliveira, 2022). As indicated, Microsoft Word and Excel were used to support the open coding process, while in total 71 codes have been identified.

The development of themes and categories was done using axial coding, which can be described as the process of reassembling the initial codes produced through open coding based on their relations to each other (Alhassan, et al., 2019). It included to draw connections between codes and themes and to define categories that describes these relations (Alhassan, et al., 2019). This was done by creating Microsoft Word documents for each category and re-reading the coded data under it to decide upon accurate reflection (Oliveira, 2022). In addition, frequencies were compared, while categories and themes were reconsidered and shifted around until a sufficient representation of the relations between codes, themes, and categories was established (Roberts, et al., 2019). To summarize, six categories and 20 related themes were established to organize the 71 codes that have been crafted over the entire coding process. The introduction into the topic will be made by describing *(0) the current situation in the game industry*, which serves as description of the circumstances associated with gender diversity and inclusion in the game industry today.

Included themes were *characteristics of the game industry*, *Comparison of different game developer studios*, and *Lay-Offs*. The first category (1) *Mindsets & Attitudes* summarized ideal characteristics that people, including top management and CEO (or the person in charge of key functions) should possess to allow the fostering of gender diversity. Associated themes are *Self-reflection*, *Valuing individuality*, *Dedication* and *Commitment*.

The second category (2) *Inclusive Culture* deals with the means of developing an inclusive work culture within game developer organizations. Related themes for this category are *Autonomy & Equality*, *Supportive Environment*, *Company events* and *Inclusion within gameplay*. The third category (3) *Gender Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives* explored existing initiatives employed in the game industry to paint a greater picture of possible actions that organizations have taken, as well as the possible impact of them on fostering gender diversity. These initiatives were divided into five themes, namely *Company image and website*, *Networking events*, *Internal educational initiatives*, *Providing support & resources*, and *Consultation and Collaboration*. Combined, these categories aimed at covering essential steps to be taken in building a diverse culture of inclusion (Pless, & Maak, 2004) in the game industry, thereby creating a great basis for developing and implementing (4) *gender-focused HR policies and practices* that may result in an increased number of women working in game development. This category had the greatest number of codes, frequencies, as well as themes, which are *Recruitment in different companies*, *Job descriptions*, *Training & employee development*, and *Flexible working conditions*. This category has been identified as core category, as it seemed to be dependent on the first three categories, while having a direct influence on the remaining categories.

To explain, the development and implementation of gender-focused HR policies and practices may require a mindset that understands the importance of gender diversity and inclusion when developing policies (Stamarski, & Son Hing, 2015), an environment in which these policies are reinforced through supportive behaviour (Biswas, et al., 2020), as well as gender diversity initiatives that signal the importance of these topics to the outside (Ali, 2015). The last category (5) *female future* is about ways to establish a female-friendly gaming industry in the long term, and can be divided into four themes, which are *Career events & supporting programs*, *Role models & female representation*, *Education*, and *Non-negotiable working conditions*. In this context, the assumption of a direct influence of gender-focused HR policies and practices on these categories is based on findings of the literature review and driven by participants' perceptions and experiences. To give an example, the subcode 'diversity & inclusion training' of the fourth category deals with offering unconscious bias training to employees to reduce the unequal treatment of women (Ly-Le, 2022). By implementing this policy, management and employee may be sensitized about related issues, such as stereotypes (Taparia, & Lenka, 2022), which may have an influence on the game they develop (Ye, et al., 2020), meaning the subcode of the fourth category may assert an influence on the subcode 'diversity within gameplay' of the fifth category, as well as on the subcode 'increasing female representation' of the sixth category. This will be explained in more detail in Chapter 5. To conclude the six-phase framework of thematic analysis, the last step is the presentation of the findings in written form (Maguire, & Delahunt, 2017), which will be done in the next chapter.

Table G.1
Codebook.

Nr.	Code	N.	Description	Interview question/quote
0	Current situation	41	Description of the circumstances associated with gender diversity and inclusion in the game industry today.	<i>Please share your experiences with work cultures of different game developer studios.</i>
0.1	Characteristics of the industry	10	Opinions and impressions related to the current situation in the game industry, but unrelated to experienced discriminations.	<i>There is a company that started a big project with menstrual leave, where they enable menstruating employees to take some days-off without reducing vacation days or counting sick days.</i>
0.1.1	<i>Passion</i>	1	The majority of game developer can be defined as passionate gamers that have turned their hobby into a career by developing games themselves.	<i>Especially because compared to other industries, I would say this is such a passionate one because people that are joining this industry, the majority of them always dreamt of making games, which is not something that you see every day</i>
0.1.2	<i>Progress</i>	5	Exploring positive developments regarding the fostering of diversity and inclusion in the wider game industry.	<i>You would say it's a male dominant industry. It is, but female also play games. Females are also passionate about games, which is not something that is necessarily generally advertised, but it's nice to see that lately I could also notice that more and more women are into like coming to this wonderful industry.</i>
0.1.3	<i>Establishment of rules and regulations</i>	2	Lack of established rules and regulations in the game industry, possibly because of their short period of existence compared to other industries.	<i>I think this is because the industry is relatively young. There are other industries in which men work that are older. I have the feeling that due to that many rules have not been established yet and especially the start-ups that want to be so young and fresh, and they need to see that it works and I often have the feeling that these kind of companies don't really have a longtime plan and unfortunately that is why things, such as Female Quotas or Diversity Quotas are not priority.</i>

0.1.4	<i>Crunch</i>	2	Working unpaid overtime, sometimes up to 60 hours a week, to meet deadlines and finish projects (IGDA, 2021).	<i>Above all, stick to working hours, i.e. do good project planning so that no one must crunch in any way either at the end of the project or in between.</i>
0.2	Comparison of Game Developer Studios	13	Comparison of shared experiences within different companies, including gender-related discriminations at the work place based on the type of developer studio, which are triple-A, mobile, and indie game developer studios.	<i>The dynamic at our place was very different because we were driven by our founders who are obviously a group of guys. And so of course, you could feel a bit more of the kind of guy vibe, but at the same time, my interactions with them were also healthy and logical.</i>
0.3	Lay-offs	6	The increased dismissal of employees in the overall game industry.	<i>I don't know if you are aware of it but there are great lay-offs in the industry and I am effected, too, meaning that I know for sure that my contract will not be renewed.</i>
1	Mindsets & attitudes	39	This category deals with important characteristics that people should value in an organization to enable the fostering of gender diversity and inclusion.	<i>Please share with me which qualities would you want your boss to have that would make you feel comfortable?</i>
1.1	Self-reflection	17	The act of judging own behaviour and thoughts and exploring reasons for them. Includes to increase awareness, to know about biases, the exchange of different perspectives and the will/ability to change/adapt.	<i>"Let alone the discussion we have right now, to say, OK, I will have a closer look into it, and I am sensitized at this point about the topics and try to have conversations or I listen to things or read."</i>
1.1.1	<i>Increasing awareness</i>	4	Individually paying special attention to gender diversity and inclusion matters and talking about it during conversations, meetings, or events, while defending minorities if needed.	<i>First of all, the openness and the awareness for the topic [gender diversity], because, as I said, I have had conversations with male colleagues that have asked me "is it a problem in the industry, anyway?"</i>
1.1.2	<i>Knowing about biases</i>	3	The realization of having the tendency to prefer certain behaviours, ideas, actions, etc. over others, while treating the opposites unfairly.	<i>A mindset, that when women are hired that it does not mean that you need to approach them or be careful with them or that they are not as skilled rather just, that they are as capable as men.</i>
1.1.3	<i>Exchange of perspectives</i>	6	The engagement to explore different opinions, beliefs, or ideas and the openness to learn from these exchanges.	<i>But we are like that we are giving each other raps on the knuckles when we realize that we somehow have been stuck in the same thinking patterns.</i>
1.1.4	<i>Self-development</i>	4	The act of using new knowledge or feedback to change own behaviour and thinking patterns accordingly.	<i>I just think as long as you're trying and you're learning and you're open to the feedback and people will tell you nicely if you're wrong</i>

				<i>because that's how we all learn and grow, and it becomes a habit.</i>
1.2	Valuing Individuality	6	To accept and cherish that people have a diverse and unique mix of attributes.	<i>We want, like we give everybody a chance, we want to be as diverse as possible.</i>
1.3	Dedication	14	The state of management being dedicated and taking actions to foster gender diversity and inclusion.	<i>I really hope we don't ever feel like we're done, and we can sit back and stop because I think it will always be something you have to do.</i>
1.3.1	<i>Interest in diversity & inclusion</i>	4	The effort to improve understanding of and increase knowledge about diversity & inclusion.	<i>Well, for my supervisor it is very important, she has an eye on it [gender diversity] and I feel very comfortable there.</i>
1.3.2	<i>Interest in employees</i>	3	The effort to care and learn about the people that work together in an organization.	<i>There were cases where I also reached out to the CEO and he was more than happy to have a conversation with me and actually he's very open, open minded and he wants to know everybody in the company.</i>
1.3.3	<i>Leading by example</i>	7	Providing guidance to others by being a role model, shown through actions and behaviour, rather than solely words.	<i>I think it must be coming from the top and must be supported by displaying role models. If it is not coming from the top, it will not be taken seriously and cannot be implemented throughout the entire company structure</i>
1.4	Commitment	6	Being convinced of the importance of gender diversity and inclusion, while behaving accordingly.	<i>We put people first and we believe that diversity and inclusion are crucial for success in the industry.</i>
2	Inclusive Culture	48	This category deals with the means of developing an inclusive work culture within game developer companies.	<i>What do you think is important for fostering an inclusive culture in the game industry?</i>
2.1	Equality & Autonomy	12	To offer equal opportunities to all employees in terms of access to the same information, resources, and networks, thereby entitling them to take part in the decision-making processes of the organization (Jerónimo, et al., 2021).	<i>We focus on offering more opportunities from the basis for everyone to push up equal opportunities at the beginning of the race. As an example, we show salary ranges for specific roles when discussing the salary of new employees.</i>
2.1.1	<i>Granting autonomy</i>	6	Allowing and expecting employees to work independently in terms of when, where and how.	<i>I would say a lot of our employees are also quite autonomous, which you need to like. You need to have a lot of autonomy when you are in kind of startup environment.</i>
2.1.2	<i>Ensuring equality</i>	6	Treating all employees in the same way and offering everyone the same opportunities.	<i>When we discussed salaries, we tried to settle everyone around the same amount, which was an important thing for me to learn, as I have much higher costs because I am self-employed</i>

				<i>compared to my employees, but I gave myself the same salary.</i>
2.2	Supportive environment	18	Having a comfortable atmosphere with people that treat each other respectfully and care about each other.	<i>I think it's we get the right people in. I really think you can go to anyone with any question, and even if they don't, they can't answer it for you, they'd be understanding and they'd send you to somebody that they think could.</i>
2.3	Company events	8	Get-togethers organized by the organization to have fun and to improve the bonding of employees.	<i>We are friends, too, we play together if it is convenient. And within the office we often do game nights, board game nights or computer game nights, where we say that we stay an hour longer at</i>
2.4	Inclusion within games	4	Exploring the influence and importance of an inclusive culture on creating diverse and inclusive gameplays.	<i>A lot of them should take a look on their culture to see like how inclusive they are and I think this is like not just inclusivity in terms of like just having women or having, I don't know, people from the LGPTQ+ community but also the way that they're doing games is, you know, like in games like the female characters sometimes are, like, maybe not the best portrayed. And so, they should also take a look into that.</i>
3	GDI initiatives	57	This category deals with existing gender diversity initiatives employed in the game industry.	<i>Please share your experiences of working together with institutions and associations that aim at supporting the fostering of gender diversity in the game industry.</i>
3.1	Company image & website	9	Ways of creating a reputation and website of being a fair and supportive employer that may send the right signals to women and other minorities.	<i>I think the fact that we're trying to showcase as much as we can. We can have diversity posts on our social media and also like sending people to conferences and talking about how our company is.</i>
3.2	Networking events	12	Organized conventions that serve as platform for people to socialize and engage with each other to build relationships.	<i>I think networking events help a lot. And there are some really nice ones.</i>
3.2.1	<i>Increasing visibility</i>	5	Ways of reaching a greater audience and increasing the likelihood of being seen/recognized.	<i>I would firstly send an application, maybe it works, but I think I would try networking events and if possible, maybe into such female spaces and see if I can find something there, because it is a bit more comfortable.</i>
3.2.2	<i>Building connections</i>	7	The act of increasing one's network of people by forming new	<i>Met on events, again and again and then talked to them and getting to know one another on a</i>

			and fostering existing relationships.	<i>human level before even asking, "and what do you do?"</i>
3.3	Internal educational initiatives	8	Actions taken by the organization to internally educate the workforce about gender diversity and inclusions matters.	<i>We are always doing a lot, such as during pride month, so we invite speaker, and we are trying to educate and so on.</i>
3.3.1	<i>Sharing information</i>	2	The collection and distribution of knowledge concerning diversity and inclusion matters within internal structures, such as through e-Mails or work channels.	<i>It's Pride Month, which we celebrate as a company. We support it. The company you're putting like you know, they've put together informational updates, and we get one every workday with info about pride that we maybe didn't know just raising awareness.</i>
3.3.2	<i>Inviting speaker</i>	2	Arranging experts and other knowledgeable speakers to have a talk about important issues related to diversity and inclusion.	And so, there were diversity and inclusion speaker and expert and just chatting with them after the event or even just during asking the really important questions. Just that little personal element and the one-on-one type thing and it just makes it more real.
3.3.3	<i>Enlightenment events</i>	4	Internal get-togethers aimed at educating employees and managers about related diversity and inclusion topics.	<i>We want to communicate these issues with the entire workforce, and we hold events for important topics, such as the Pride Month right now.</i>
3.4	Collaborations & Consultation	20	The corporation between companies and associations, institutions and networking events.	<i>At my current workplace, diversity and inclusion are important topics, which is why we corporate with events and associations to increase awareness for relevant topics.</i>
3.4.1	<i>Counselling</i>	5	The assistance of experts to give guidance during changes that are related to fostering diversity and inclusion.	<i>At least from what I've always found the most interesting, is doing it with externals often helps, but not like outsourcing the whole thing, but doing it in connection with kind of relevant trained people.</i>
3.4.2	<i>Signalling interest</i>	6	The act of creating the message of being an employer that cares about diversity and inclusion and sending this signal to the right target audience.	<i>That you participate in initiatives and that you make it public that you participate, so people that belong to a minority do not feel excluded.</i>
4	Gender-focused HRM	75	This category informs about existing gender-focused HR policies and practices employed in the game industry.	<i>Please share your experiences with successful strategies that have helped in attracting women to your organization.</i>
4.1	Recruitment in different companies	26	Comparison of the overall recruitment processes and strategies of different game developer studios, including ways to enter the industry and recruitment goals.	<i>There are still companies that look for rockstars or code guerillas, which is not a gendered expression but you can read between the lines that they are</i>

				<i>looking for cool buddies who are well received in their company.</i>
4.1.1	<i>Entrance into industry</i>	5	Explaining typical ways of entering the game industry.	<i>She applied for an internship. That is the typical career entrance in the game industry.</i>
4.1.2	<i>Recruitment goals</i>	7	Giving insights into which goals have been settled for recruitment processes within different game developer studios.	<i>Because you'll never find the perfect candidate. This doesn't exist. These people don't exist. We're dealing with human beings.</i>
4.1.3	<i>Interview processes</i>	3	Giving insight into interviewing processes of different companies in the game industry.	<i>I was having an interview at a new place and there were 3 white men in the room, and that was a design interview, and I thought, OK, you have such a big team and these three people were the only ones to include?</i>
4.1.4	<i>Vibe-check</i>	4	Giving applicants the opportunity to meet the existing workforce and to have a conversation with them, which leads to a better judgement of fit for both parties.	<i>Our hiring structure is not difficult in a bad way, but like we don't just go OK we spoke to you for 10 minutes, you're hired. You know, we really make sure you've got the skills that will fit us. We really chat to you. We do things like the trial lunches sometimes let other people chat to you and we just make sure are they gonna fit?</i>
4.1.5	<i>Active sourcing</i>	4	To proactively search online and during networking events for applicants that possess required characteristics and skills and directly contacting them.	<i>Active sourcing was my strategy. Now with the latest position, I really put it as a goal, preferably no man and I started on Discord to look and I have explicitly only contacted women.</i>
4.1.6	<i>Employees' networks</i>	3	The act of using employees' network, such as friends or families to spread the message of being a good employer and to increase reach of candidates.	<i>There are also like employees in the company, they advertise their roles on their personal profiles if they know somebody. We actually have quite a good referral rate, like a lot of employees refer people to the company, which is also a good sign that well, they enjoy it here if they want to bring their friends.</i>
4.2	<i>Job descriptions</i>	14	Written document that entails information on requirements that a candidate needs to possess to apply for an open positions at a company.	<i>I personally think and I guess many women would agree that you most often can read between the lines within a job description to find out, how much a company is really interested in gender inclusion or not.</i>
4.2.1	<i>Signalling inclusion</i>	4	Using job descriptions to give individuals of marginalized groups the impression or assurance that they are appreciated and welcome at the company.	<i>Job descriptions. They should be gender-inclusive and what I also like is when there are two sentences directed at marginalized groups that say you should apply if you belong to such a group.</i>

4.2.2	<i>Family mentality</i>	2	Using words or phrases in job descriptions that circle around the message of having a family mentality at work, implying one should treat work matters as important as family matters.	<i>As soon as there is the word "family" in it, I believe 99% of game developer that I know would not want to work there, because it is weird, it is a weird formulation and brings a lot of toxicity with it.</i>
4.2.3	<i>Reduced Requirements</i>	2	The act of reducing required skills, experiences or other characteristics in job descriptions to the absolute minimum.	<i>In general, the list of requirements is quite limited because we want to reach as many people as possible. Women, for example, women tend to avoid to apply if they think they do not meet all requirements.</i>
4.2.4	<i>Online channels</i>	6	Ways of contacting possible applicants, as well as distributing job descriptions using the internet.	<i>Very classic over LinkedIn or E-Mail, these options are always there. I have a website as well, and there is a contact form and yes, these are the possibilities.</i>
4.2.5	<i>Gender-inclusive language</i>	8	Use of language that aims at ensuring the equal treatment and inclusion of all genders when spoken & written.	<i>What is super important to me is a gender-neutral language and in many game companies it is not a big deal because the firm language is often English, so it sorts itself out a bit, but there is still a lot to pay attention to.</i>
4.3	Training & development	7	The voluntary and mandatory participation in workshops or other means of training organized by the organization.	<i>Companies could participate in workshops, for example once a month, which would not only improve team building but also foster the discussion of relevant topics, initiatives or actions to inclusion and diversity by asking questions about these issues.</i>
4.3.1	<i>Diversity & inclusion training</i>	5	The obligatory participation of management in diversity and inclusion trainings, including unconscious and conscious bias training.	<i>Other companies should absolutely make sure their hiring managers are all trained properly, make sure everybody's got clarity on what they're actually looking for within the team, and make sure it aligns to the company. Checking biases for sure.</i>
4.3.2	<i>Employee development</i>	2	The voluntary or recommended participation in workshops or other means of training to gain new knowledge and skills, which are either useful for personal development or business-related purposes.	<i>We can always improve ourselves and I encourage, we are encouraged to learn new things that might or might not be useful at the workplace, but it will help to enrich the diversity of ideas and perspectives and opinions that lead to better decisions because everyone is involved.</i>
4.4	Flexible working conditions	16	The assurance that working conditions are not fixed and leave room for adjustments, such as core working hours or the	<i>Of course, we have people who don't want to come and want to stay at home all the time. Totally fine with that. But in general, like</i>

			opportunity to work remote or in a hybrid model.	<i>the general idea is to attract more people to the office.</i>
4.4.1	<i>Core working hours</i>	4	Deciding upon a timeframe in which every employee needs to be working, while the start and end can be arranged individually.	<i>The general rule we have is that we have 4 hours. Yeah. So it's like, from 9:00 to 4:00. So that means that people can start at 7:00 AM, like earliest. Yeah, and then leave at 4:00. Then we have, like, one hour break. All people can start later and leave later.</i>
4.4.2	<i>Hybrid working model</i>	8	Offering employees the possibility to work from home for a certain number of days but expecting them to be present at the organization at other days.	<i>So even if a company says, there is no chance of 100% remote, then I think hybrid is really good due to many different reasons. There are people with children, people with pets, I don't know, parents to be taken care of or just better for work-life balance.</i>
4.4.3	<i>Possibility of remote</i>	4	Offering employees the possibility to work entirely remote without the obligatory presence at an office or other locations.	<i>Working remotely is super important to me and that is what I am doing right now because my company is in X and ich cannot move right now and therefore I am very thankful that they offered it to me.</i>
5	Female future	55	This category is about ways to establish a female-friendly gaming industry in the long term, including supporting programs and partnerships with educational institutions.	<i>In your opinion, what can an employer do to support you in keeping a good work-life balance?</i>
5.1	Career events & programs	12	The participation in and organisation of events aimed at educating young girls about possible career choices in the game industry.	<i>X is such an initiative, it is for many companies an initiative where you say I am showing my business now and when they start university or doing an apprenticeship, they are going to apply at your company.</i>
5.1.1	<i>First experiences</i>	3	Creating opportunities for young girls to get acquainted with videogames and the development of them.	<i>More opportunities for young girls to learn more about game development, so maybe with clubs at school, or that studios get involved with schools or universities to show some presence and to indicate that the job is for everyone.</i>
5.1.2	<i>Feasible career option</i>	4	Establishing game development as an existing and achievable career path for young girls and other minorities.	<i>Next year graduation. That was really not bad to clarify, as they did not want to continue school, hey, you can do that, too, through an apprenticeship to get into the game industry.</i>
5.1.3	<i>Supporting programs</i>	5	Organising workshops and fieldtrips with the goal to support girls and other minorities in entering the game industry.	<i>We are planning to create mentorships for university students that belong to underrepresented groups to</i>

				<i>getting more women into gaming companies in the future. It is about telling the younger generations that gaming is for everyone and that everyone is welcome to come and work in this wonderful industry.</i>
5.2	Role models & representation	18	The visibility of women working in the game industry and the effort of having them represented within internal processes.	<i>I have two daughters, and I am trying to bring them closer to my job, so they might not be thinking it is something just for boys. I want to show them, how it is to make video games yourself.</i>
5.2.1	<i>Importance of role models</i>	7	Highlighting successful women that are already working in the game industry and increasing their visibility.	<i>It's a problem that goes a bit further back, I suppose, because it's getting women getting young girls into those directions at the right time. So that then they realise, oh, I am allowed to be, you know, a data engineer, I'm allowed to be a a coder or whatever and that's getting better over the time, for sure.</i>
5.2.2	<i>Increasing female representation</i>	18	Ensuring that a greater number of women are working in higher positions to increase the overall representation in the industry.	<i>Well, we have for example the problem, and everybody knows that we have no women in leadership positions or at least not enough women in leadership positions but where should they come from if they do not get into the job or if they are not supported to climb up, how should that be working?</i>
5.2.3	<i>Inclusive gameplay</i>	8	Creating diverse and inclusive games by improving the choice of actions, motivations, and appearance of female characters in videogame design by considering women's input on how they want to be represented.	<i>There are game developer studios "from women for women", which I think is great. Through that, there is a great range of different games that are of course not exclusively for women. At least in this way, special care is taken to ensure that women are not only involved in the decision of their own representation, but also develop it themselves and in this context rarely send a female, half-naked character to war.</i>
5.3	Education	15	The act of gaining knowledge and developing a greater understanding about gender diversity and inclusion matters.	<i>It starts with the education, so I really don't think it needs to be anything like a female quota or anything.</i>
5.3.1	<i>Social exchange</i>	11	Gaining knowledge and developing a greater understanding about gender diversity and inclusion matters through social interactions with	<i>It's the problem with the Internet when you can't see the person that wrote it, you can't see the tone that they wrote it in. You can only read it one way, but at the same time, that's also why the</i>

			others, such as through (online) communications.	<i>education is so important, because then you get educated that that's not a funny joke and then you know not to do it because it isn't funny.</i>
5.3.2	<i>School/University</i>	4	Gaining knowledge and developing a greater understanding about gender diversity and inclusion matters through educational programs of schools and universities.	<i>When I was studying, I explored it by myself, whether choosing it as an essay topic or assignment topic, don't know, have been done by many in my class. I was for example in the student council and the topic was very important there, that was pleasant.</i>
5.4	Non-negotiable conditions	10	Working conditions that cannot be compromised and need to be given in order to enable working together.	<i>I think that like for people with kids, it's super beneficial because they don't have to come to the office and it's kind of like more like flexible for them because as far as they can see that in Germany for example, sometimes like Kinder gardens, just decide, OK, today we don't work, but it's a normal working day for adults, right? Yeah</i>
5.4.1	<i>No crunch</i>	2	The absence of expecting employees to be working over hours without compensation.	<i>For me personally it is clear that work is work and I am selling my time and skill to my employer and I am getting paid for that in return and beyond that, so I am of course interested that the firm is doing fine and my colleagues are doing fine but other than that I am doing what I am being paid for and not so much more.</i>
5.4.2	<i>High degree of flexibility</i>	5	The assurance that working conditions are not fixed and adjustments can be made easily.	<i>I am working now four Days a week and that is a thing for me for example that is really important is if the company is flexible in terms of working days because I personally want to have some freedom to let off some steam professionally in other ways.</i>
5.4.3	<i>Art style</i>	3	The fit between an artist's preferred art style and the demands of the game developer studio.	<i>I have realized that it does not click anymore, and we have creatively been drifting apart, somehow away from the things that we agreed on and I realized, okay, I think I am not that happy right now.</i>