Chapter 10
Negotiating Ambivalence: The Leadership of Professional Women's Networks

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Editors' Introduction A systems perspective allows us to question popular beliefs about what women need to do to develop as leaders, or common explanations for the limited number of women in top leadership positions. For instance, much of the literature on leadership argues that the most successful leaders are those who engage in networking, or those who develop binding relationships throughout an organization. Because women have fewer opportunities to network and fewer such organizations in which to participate, it is often concluded that the paucity of such opportunities explains why there are fewer women than men in leadership positions. Gremmen and Benschop question the conclusion that networks are always beneficial, and contend that some professional women's networks are not enabling. The general conclusion to be drawn is that not all collaborative networks are successful, particularly those that revert to power struggles rather than collaboration. From a systemic perspective, the limited value of women's networks can be explained by the fact that they operate amidst and in interaction with a variety of other networks and dynamics, which may undermine the role it plays in subtle ways.

In research on gender and leadership and in organizational network studies alike, networking is increasingly recognized as essential to career advancement. Networking provides access to relevant persons, knowledge and information, advice and career support (Flap and Völker, 2004; Mavin and Bryans, 2002). At the same time, there is ample evidence that the outcomes of networking are unequal for women and men in status, influence, careers, information and trust (e.g., Ibarra, 1992, 1997; Krackhardt, 1990; Podolny and Baron, 1997). For example, while the establishment and maintenance of social ties to individuals (still predominantly

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men) who occupy strategic positions in an organization is taken to be an effective route to career advancement (Cialdini et al. 1976), previous research has indicated that women have less access to these high status individuals than men have (Brass, 1985; Ibarra, 1993, 1997; Scott, 1996). Cross and Armstrong (2008, p. 9) note that, paradoxically,

> Women learn through both incidental and collective learning processes that involvement in informal male networks can act as an important "stepping stone" in their career progression, but they are usually denied the "privilege" of being part of this almost exclusively male club (Cross and Armstrong, 2008, p. 9)

Furthermore, networks that work to the advantage of men do not benefit women in the same way (Burt, 1998; Ibarra, 1993, 1997; Forret and Dougherty, 2001, 2004; Van Emmerik, 2006). For example, men are found to gain more profit from work-related socializing behavior than women (Scott, 1996). Even when women occupy similar structural network positions, they receive less job and career related help from their network contacts than men do (McGuire, 2002). Women have to follow different strategies from men or have to invest more than men in order to gain the same network resources or career benefits (Ibarra, 1992, 1997). High potential women are more likely than high potential men and non high potential women to have a wider network of close contacts with women outside their direct working environment in order to gain information and advice (Ibarra, 1997; cf. Scott, 1996).

Cross and Armstrong (2008) strongly recommend the establishment of formal networks for women to bring their individual experiences together to collectively learn how to find a way up in their organizations. Professional (corporate) women's networks in organizations are a case in point. Professional women's networks organize meetings and activities to bring women in one organization together to improve their positions. They "allow for the transfer of knowledge from the individual level to the collective" (Cross and Armstrong, 2008, p. 9).

Indeed, quite a few companies and organizations in various sectors support a corporate women's network. IBM (Women in Blue), KPMG (Female Capital) and Shell (Shell Professional Women Network) provide just a few examples. These organizations frequently parade their women's networks to underline their dedication to diversity issues. At the same time, however, professional women's networks also encounter quite critical reactions in the organizations they are part of. For example, they are criticized for focusing on issues concerning women that are supposedly less relevant and important than "general" issues concerning all organization members (Pini et al., 2004). What is more, professional women's networks are considered to engage in issues that are outdated because women's emancipation is presumed to have been achieved in the contexts under debate. Another criticism of professional women's networks entails that they attract the wrong participants. According to this criticism, professional women's networks attract women who are only looking for social company and the exchange of trivialities such as gossip and recipes, women who indulge in complaints about their positions without taking responsibility for action, women who have individual problems or problematic relationships with men

(Bierema, 2005) or senior women who only want to secure their individual careers (Singh et al., 2006).

As a consequence of the various criticisms, the leadership of professional women's networks faces the need to legitimize the networks' existence when they present the networks to their organizations at large and to potential participants. Therefore, the central question of this chapter focuses on how the leadership of professional women's networks anticipates or responds to the expectation to legitimize these networks' existence. To answer this question, we draw on an empirical study of twenty two Dutch professional women's networks from both Dutch and multinational companies. Our investigation of the leadership of professional women's networks contributes to gender and leadership studies as it addresses how women leaders provide goals and direction to networks that are contested due to gendered power processes.

Below, we first explain our study's theoretical perspective, design and methodological approach. Next, we analyze how the leading members of professional women's networks in our study position and present these networks vis-à-vis their organizations and their potential members in the context of the critical attitudes they encounter. We conclude with some reflections on the role of the discourse of diversity in the presentations of the professional women's networks by their leading members, and on the contribution of our study to gender and leadership scholarship and organizational network studies.

Theoretical Framework

Many studies on gender and leadership address differences between women and men on such issues as their unequal representation in high level management positions in organizations and their leadership styles (Alvesson and Billing, 2009; Kanter 1977; Calás and Smircich, 2003). The same goes for organizational research on networks and networking: if it pays attention to gender issues at all, it conceives of gender as a "demographic" variable (Ibarra et al., 2005) and compares women and men. Sex difference research on management enables the close monitoring of the representation of women in top management positions. It also may test taken for granted assumptions on sex differences concerning women's and men's leadership styles and networks. For example, Ibarra (1997) shows that the stereotyped expectation that women have closer ties than men, may not be tenable: the non high potential women in her study reported fewer very close ties in their career network than either the men or the high potential women. In the same vein, Van Emmerik (2006, p. 33) claims that her study of faculty members "tackles an old stereotype", finding that, in this context, "women do not appear to be the emotional specialists they often are thought to be".

However, sex difference studies have limited capacity to explore and explain the practices in which gender differences come about, or, for that matter, may change (Ely and Padavic, 2007). They may easily assume an essentialist view of women and men as being either fundamentally the same or ontologically different (Alvesson

and Billing, 2009). To avoid these assumptions and in order to contribute to the line of qualitative research that explores the construction of gender and leadership (Alvesson and Billing, 2009; Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008), we depart from a feminist constructionist theoretical perspective.

Social constructionist feminism focuses on the practices and processes of power that simultaneously create gender differences and make the construction of gender invisible (Kimmel, 2004; Lorber, 2005). Social constructionist feminism enables us to avoid the equality-difference opposition concerning gender (Benschop, 2006; Scott, 1988). Argumentations on gender equality and gender difference are often invoked in discussions on equal rights for women and men in general, and issues concerning gender and leadership, in particular (Alvesson and Billing, 2009). Even those participants to the debate who strive for equal rights and social justice apparently employ opposite argumentations. Proponents of the "difference" approach often conceive of women as "ontologically" different from men (e.g., more relationally oriented or more capable of caring and co-operation). They argue in favor of a re-valuation of femininity and masculinity (Fletcher, 1998). While this approach may make women's activities, capabilities and ways of thinking visible, recognized and valued, it runs the risk of being essentialist, a-historical, and non-contextual. It may neglect differences among women (and among men). Thus, the difference approach may amount to the reproduction of gender stereotypes and hierarchical divisions of labor between women and men. Proponents of the "equality" approach generally argue that women and men are equal on principle. Differences between women and men are not seen as ontological, but pertain to their social positions and are caused by discrimination against and oppression of women in patriarchal societies. However, this approach may amount to the view that, due to this discrimination, women lag behind with respect to men and need "fixing" (Ely and Meyerson, 2000) in order to catch up. Thus, the equality approach may reinforce (invisible or implicit) masculine norms, such as those concerning the "ideal worker" (Acker, 1992). The equality-difference debate is complicated by a lack of clarity, for example when difference is implicitly conceived of as ontological difference, or when equality is conflated with ontological sameness. The debate is also confused when women are equated with femininity and men with masculinity. A feminist constructionist approach enables us to avoid these pitfalls, because it conceives of gender (women, men, femininities, masculinities) in a non-essentialist way, as dynamic, contingent and continually being produced, reproduced and/or changed in social practices, including discourse and social interaction. Thus, it enables us to do justice to Scott's (1988) view that a feminist perspective needs both the concept of (non-ontological) difference and the concept of equality (not sameness).

When compared to organizational network studies, a feminist constructionist approach to networking includes the actors that networks consist of, as is recommended by several network scholars (Ibarra et al., 2005; Kilduff et al., 2006; Parkhe et al., 2006). They observe that organizational network studies strongly focus on network structures, and neglect network actors. Furthermore, a constructionist approach to networks and networking includes "process issues", as is also

recommended by organizational network scholars (Parkhe et al., 2006). A feminist constructionist approach to networking proposes a "process-relational perspective" that "enlarges sensitivity to the micro-politics of networking and gendering" (Benschop, 2009, pp. 222, 218). This perspective enables us to investigate how the leadership of professional women's networks leads their networks in a context that is imbued with power.

The fact that, and the ways in which power may be at work in the context of professional women's networks is illustrated when we bring to mind the differences between women's and men's professional networks in organizations. Professional men's networks in organizations are mostly perceived as informal and emerging "naturally". They provide the (often invisible) standard, even when they are criticized as "old boys" networks' that exclude anyone and anything "different" (cf. Cross and Armstrong, 2008). In contrast, most women's corporate networks are consciously and explicitly initiated, and formalized to a certain extent. They are perceived as special or exceptional. Therefore (Pini et al., 2004. p. 290) argue that the position of "women-only networks" is "contradictory":

> They are established because women have been marginalized in mainstream organizations, but then, ironically, accused of separatism and exclusivity because they have named themselves as women-specific groups. In contrast, the mainstream groups [. . .] appear gender neutral. In this sense women are constructed as the recipients of "special" treatment and men are argued to be the victims of "reverse" discrimination. The mainstream groups are not named as andocentric groups or men's associations despite the fact that males dominate decision-making positions.

Power mechanisms, such as implicit gender norms, double standards and stereotyping may be inferred from the unequal representation of women and men in the higher ranks of organizations (e.g., Van den Brink, 2009). Women's professional networks have to deal with these inequalities. As Pini et al. argue:

> There are ranges of critical challenges facing women-only networks. Unlike traditional groups, they may be questioned about their legitimacy and status as well as have problems securing resources and finances (Pini et al., 2004, p. 291).

In this paper we focus on how the leading members of professional women's networks deal with these challenges in the way they present the networks to their organizations at large and to potential members.

Design, Data and Analysis

Our research material concerns the twenty-two professional women's networks that, in March 2007, were official members of the Dutch Platform for Professional Women's Networks (PfPWN). Requirements to become a member of the platform are that a corporate women's network has its own identity (name), has a continuous structure, is supported by the senior management of its organization, has at least 25 members in the company internal target group, and is "alive" and organizes at least two activities per year for its members, apart from social gatherings (PfPWN, 2007). The organizations of which the twenty-two professional

women's networks are part range from two higher education organizations and a regional police organization to international banking and industrial (e.g., oil and steel) companies. Most organizations are for-profit organizations, several are large multinational corporations.

We collected information on the way leading members of professional women's networks present the networks from their accounts in leaflets and information bulletins both on paper and on the internet. We found additional data on some of the organizations' websites, in reports of network meetings in organizations' magazines and on the internet, and in an overview of its members by the Dutch Platform for Professional Women's Networks (PfPWN, 2007). In this overview the range, goals and challenges of each of the networks are briefly listed. We discussed our preliminary findings in a "member check" meeting with five leading members of corporate women's networks and related experts, and have included the results of this discussion in this chapter.

For the analysis of our data we have employed a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). In critical discourse analysis, discourse is considered to be both constitutive of and constituted by the social context, social institutions and social structures. Critical discourse analysis explicitly aims at gaining insight in the relevance and workings of power in these mutual relationships. Discursive social practices may produce, reproduce, and change power relationships (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Phillips and Hardy, 1997). Critical discourse analysis may combine its emancipatory commitment with a constructionist approach (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004). Employing the CDA-approach enables us to explore leading members' presentations of professional women's networks as social practices that are informed by and constitutive of relations of power. We conceive of the professional women's networks' presentations as being constructed in social contexts and relationships in which power is implied, for example through gender stereotypes, double standards and the unequal representation of women and men in high organizational positions. In these contexts, the professional women's network leaders present the networks in social interaction with other parties (cf. Czarniawska, 1998), such as their organizations at large and their potential members. We explore how the network leaders frame their views, argumentations and reactions in addressing these other parties, and how, in so doing, they employ or negotiate dominant discourses on gender, such as discourses of gender equality and gender diversity.

Our analysis of the research material began with an exploration of the network leaders' presentations of their goals and membership profile. After we coded the research material according to these issues, we focused on the argumentations that the network leaders invoke. Furthermore, we focused on expressions of how the network leaders deal with perceived or experienced ambivalence and criticisms related to gendered relations of power. Expressions of countering gender stereotypes provide an example (e.g., "some may think that we are/do/strive for x, but in actual practice, we are/do/strive for y"). Exploring these expressions (both overt and covert forms) through critical discourse analysis may reveal what gendered criticisms and

ambivalence the network leaders perceive, as well as how they reproduce and/or undermine them.

Professional Women's Networks' Leaders' Presentations of Their Networks' Goals

From their presentations it appears that most leaders of professional women's networks posit as their networks' main goal to support women's career and development opportunities. Part of this goal is to increase the representation of women in the higher ranks of their organizations. Improving women's position is argued to benefit both individual women, and their organizations. For example, stressing the benefits for women, one network website argues that women who have participated in mentoring circles make more progress in their careers than women who have not. In another network's magazine it says that the network strives for more women in higher positions in its organization because "who else would better promote women's interests at the decision making level?" Confirming the relevance of their goals for their organizations, several network leaders formulate a "business case". For example, they argue that women in higher positions "know more of the interests of women stakeholders", and may thus contribute to higher returns and profit-sharing by the organization. They claim to "[. . .] help one another develop the leadership skills and career-advancing opportunities needed to drive [the organization]'s success far into the future", to "improve diversity within [the organization] to become a more innovative, creative and successful organization", or to "support [the organization's] Diversity and Inclusion global initiatives to improve the quality of decision making and, in turn, improve [name organization]'s business results." To formulate a business case is the common advice that the specialist literature and consultancy agencies give to women who are establishing a women's corporate network (Catalyst, 1999; Vinnicombe et al., 2003).

The network leaders' main argumentation to legitimize the goal of improving women's positions resembles a "special contribution position" (Alvesson and Billing, 2009, p. 170) in terms of "recognizing and valuing difference" (Ely and Meyerson, 2000, p. 106). Women and "feminine" capabilities are presented an asset to the networks' organizations, in adding different i.e. "feminine" skills, views or attitudes to the organizations. For example, on one network's company website it says:

> [Name of the organization] is convinced that diversity makes a company more creative and innovative, taking better decisions. To this end, the Diversity and Inclusion program has been developed. This program not only aims at recruiting or valuing women, but at balancing the "masculine" and "feminine" competencies that a company needs in order to display good leadership [. . .] It's the balance in management teams that concerns [name of the organization].

Several network leaders explain that the added value of women and femininity for their organizations may only be realized if recognized and valued. For example, in one network leaflet it says: "what's at stake for us is to recognize and value

difference: inclusion." Thus, it is argued, the organization could get the most out of the available talent.

When using argumentations in terms of valuing difference, professional women's networks' leaders may face the need to explain what differences between women and men they consider to be at the basis of women's added value. A few formulate more detailed arguments on this issue. One example is provided by a professional women's network leader in an interview published in the weekly magazine of her organization – a university of technology. She explains:

> Dutch women really are an asset to science. [. . .] Women often have a broader view of things. They always take societal aspects into account more than men do. [. . .] Women practice science differently from men. A lot of research has been done on that. They are more creative, broadly employable, have a broader view of research, and they often have higher grades. With more women [name of the university] can be more innovative and effective. [. . .] Women also have more team spirit than men have, which may increase group solidarity. Furthermore, women are at least as passionate as men. So, science would benefit from employing more women. It would also improve [name of the university]'s image of being a male bastion (Zeijlstra, 2006).

The network leader constructs an opposition between women and men (technology) scientists: she portrays the women scientists as having a broader and more social orientation ("broader view", "societal aspects", "team spirit") and as being more flexible and more innovative employees than men scientists. The latter, in accordance, might have to be portrayed as more focused and more strongly concentrated on the content of their work. Apparently taking into account that men scientists' presumed stance might be due to a positive characteristic – their strong motivation for their work ("passionate"), the network leader explicitly counters the implication that women might be less motivated than their male colleagues.

We observe that the professional women's network leaders in our study generally do not explicitly present their goals in terms of social equality or social justice, called the "equal opportunities position" by Alvesson and Billing (2009, p. 164). The network leaders do not mention that they require the redressing of unjust inequalities concerning women's and men's positions in general or in their organizations. Creed et al., (2002, pp. 491–492) report a similar finding in their study of employee activists in favor of non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. They suggest that the interviewees anticipated that "decision makers feared both increased costs for benefits, and backlash" (492). In the same vein, the professional women's network leaders in our study may anticipate negative reactions in their organizations when they would explicitly argue in terms of inequality and social justice. For example, the leadership of their organizations may consider this reasoning "outdated" in a context where legal equality is in place. Or, it might not consider (further) redressing gender inequality as one of its main responsibilities, especially in a for-profit context. Organization members, both women and men, may in turn resist proposals for measures associated with social justice and equal opportunities, such as affirmative action. Such measures are often considered to go against opinions and myths concerning individual merit (Alvesson and Billing, 2009; Van den Brink, 2009). Creed et al. suggest that the interviewees in their study considered

that using "their insiders' knowledge of corporate values and identity was the best way to gain support" (2002, p. 492). For similar reasons, professional women's network leaders may not consider a general or explicit discourse of social equality and social justice to be attractive or effective enough in the context of presenting their networks' goals to their organizations and to potential network participants.

The network leaders' argumentations in terms of recognizing and valuing difference enable the formulation of a business case and counter criticisms that the goal of improving women's positions is outdated ("women's emancipation has been achieved"), irrelevant (e.g., to organizational goals such as exploring new markets) or too radical ("feminist"). However, these argumentations at the same time entail some of the drawbacks of the equality-difference opposition described in the section on our theoretical framework. Differences between women and men as conceived of in the network leaders' argumentations may easily amount to an essentialist approach. This approach runs the risk of reinforcing and justifying social gender inequality as inevitable ("just the way things are" – Kimmel, 2004), especially because societal power processes involved in the valuing and the very defining of femininities and masculinities go unnoticed. Thus, this way of valuing difference may amount to the inadvertent reinforcement of a traditional (unequal and hierarchical) valuation of masculinities and femininities, and an unequal division of labor between women and men, with women being relegated to relational and emotional tasks (e.g., "have more team spirit") and men granted the tasks of rational and autonomous decision making and leadership (cf. Alvesson and Billing, 2000, 2009).

The challenges the network leaders face here may resemble the issues faced by "tempered radicals" in organizations (Meyerson and Scully, 1995, see also Meyerson, 2003; Meyerson and Scully, 2003; Meyerson and Tompkins, 2007). Meyerson and Scully define tempered radicals as "individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations, and are also committed to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organization" (Meyerson and Scully, 1995, p. 586; see also Meyerson, 2003, pp. 3–18). Like tempered radical individuals, professional women's network leaders may face the need to remain "engaged in the dual project of working within the organization and working to change the organization" towards greater gender equality (Meyerson and Scully, 1995, p. 586),

Professional Women's Network Leaders' Ways to Address (Potential) Participants

In almost all professional women's networks' information in our study it is mentioned that the networks strive for increased participation by network members. Network leaders take some trouble to invite potential members to participate in the network and to convince them of the benefits of participation. For example, they argue that women who have participated in the network's mentoring program make better progress in the organization than women who have not been mentored. Or, they claim that there is strength in numbers to make the network's views heard in

the top of the organization. Still other network leaders contend that "women benefit greatly from having the opportunity to talk to one another", and that network relationships are important to one's career.

While most networks in our study are women-only networks, a few report that they welcome men members. Some other networks encourage men's supportive membership of the network or invite male colleagues to selected events. Several networks especially invite senior women to participate in the network, for example as a role model or as a coach to younger women. One professional network for senior women only reports that each participant mentors at least two younger women in the organization. In general, network leaders describe the networks as "dynamic". Many strive to attract "active participants" or members who want to "actively contribute" to the network's goals.

Some network leaders clearly anticipate criticisms on the network's membership from the women they consider potential members or from their organizations at large. One example is provided by a network leader who wants to "bring on board the growing number of expatriate workers as new members of [name network] that may have felt a bit hesitant or discouraged from joining in the past". This network leader explicitly argues against "the idea that [name network] is an organization for secretaries only" that "seems to be still prevalent". The leader of a network for women in management positions, in turn, counters perceived or experienced criticisms of exclusiveness. She explicitly claims that "the network is not elitist and does not consist of extremely ambitious women, but, rather, of women who want to create opportunities for development and equal opportunities for all women within [name organization]".

In addressing potential members, network leaders stress the opportunities the network offers for professional development. They focus on women whose ambition it is "to develop professionally". For example, they strive for the participation of "ambitious women" in "all levels" of their organizations, or in management and leadership positions. Several networks organize mentoring or training activities for women who want to get to the top of the organization. Almost half of the network leaders address potential participants by explicitly stating that they not only encourage women's professional development, but women's personal development, as well. For example, one network leader posits that the network provides opportunities to enhance "effectiveness at home and at work". Another argues that the network promotes "networking to share business and personal experiences". One network leaflet goes to some length to explain what it considers "professional" or "business" and what it considers "personal" respectively. It explains that "personal growth in your job" entails "doing your job with competence, enthusiasm and inspiration". It takes professional growth to imply "getting opportunities for career building and promotion".

We conclude that the leaders of the professional women's networks in our study present the networks to their potential members as inclusive, active and professional. Thus, they counter potential participants' and organizational criticisms of being exclusive, passive, complaining and merely for fun networks. At the same time, we observe that the network leaders react to or anticipate a negative image

of the network as a group of "extremely ambitious" women. This image may exist both in their organization at large and with potential participants. We suggest that professional women's network leaders have to deal with the double binds that, for women, are connected to the "paradox of ambition" (Sools et al., 2007). While being ambitious may be an easier role for men than for women, to the extent that it is congruent with traditional masculinity, Sools et al. point out that both women and men may be prohibited to explicitly show ambition in the sense of aiming at upward mobility. On the basis of their empirical study of how women and men managers in a multinational corporation "do ambition", they conclude that it is imperative to "show that you want to gain promotion without showing you want to" (2007, p. 424). While men are assumed to be ambitious, the challenge for them is to show this attitude in the right way, that is, by showing drive and commitment. Women, especially young women, may experience a double bind concerning this paradox of ambition. They are expected to be non-ambitious or to stop being ambitious at the very moment they would have children, but when they do show ambition in order to counter this expectation, they violate the imperatives that forbid them to show ambition. Thus, they are penalized either way: they are either taken to be non-ambitious or viewed as overly ambitious. Both women and men may have such perceptions and stereotyped expectations. Due to the mechanisms described by Sools et al., professional women's network leaders may also find themselves maneuvering between a rock and a hard place: they have to present the networks to potential participants as encouraging ambition, but not careerism. In this context the network leaders may use expressions concerning "personal and professional" development in order to attract members with various types of self-defined ambition. By offering both professional and personal development, they may provide development opportunities for women who have little chances or preferences to move upward, as well as a safe environment to share experiences and exchange advice for women who do strive for upward mobility. Thus, they may broaden support for the network by participants and take into account that improving women's positions in organizations exceeds increasing the representation of women in the highest ranks (Alvesson and Billing, 2009).

Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, we have investigated how the leading members of twenty two professional women's networks in both Dutch and multinational organizations negotiate the ambiguities and criticisms they encounter in leading their networks. Employing a feminist constructionist theoretical perspective has enabled us to go beyond a sex differences approach to explore how the network leaders react to or anticipate these criticisms in their legitimations of the networks' existence. By conceiving of gender as dynamic, contingent and continually being produced and reproduced in social interaction that is imbued with power, we have been able to avoid the equality versus difference dilemma concerning gender. Thus, we have been able to present a multifaceted analysis of how the network leaders' in our study invoke a discourse of valuing femininity. They capitalize on "authentic femininity" as an asset for their

organizations and for potential participants. They do so by invoking a discourse of the business case and a discourse of professional and personal development. In both discourses, the network leaders legitimize their networks' existence through the *discourse of diversity as valuing difference*. They argue that women have special value to their organizations if their special capacities are recognized and valued, and if women are given, and encouraged to seize the opportunities to develop their capacities.

Stressing the added value of women and/or "feminine" capabilities, and refraining from a discourse of equality, may reproduce stereotyped views of femininity and masculinity, and hierarchical divisions of tasks and responsibilities between women and men. The discourse of valuing femininity resonates with a liberal diversity discourse. Here, we refer to Blackmore's (2006) distinction between a liberal version of "capitalizing on diversity", and "transformative diversity" that implies more radical changes in organizations. Generally, the liberal version of diversity discourse focuses on markets and on individual choice (Blackmore, 2006; Fraser, 2009). It implies little attention to the persistent power processes in organizations that cause the differential positions of women and men and the valuing of masculinities over femininities. As a consequence, professional women's network leaders employing the discourse of valuing difference run the risk of being ineffective to the extent that they assume that reaching their goals is simply a matter of achieving recognition of the value of femininity, both by women and in their organizations' culture and top levels. At the same time, however, the network leaders' argumentations in terms of valuing difference prevent or counter criticisms that the goal of improving women's positions is outdated, irrelevant, or too radical. The discourse of valuing difference may even leave room for "transformative" initiatives, such as initiatives that target organizational culture.

By employing a constructionist approach to gender we have also been able to show that the professional women's network leaders in our study deal with the power processes implied in the criticisms and ambivalence they encounter by walking the line between the (disempowering) alternatives of being perceived as either passive and complaining or overly ambitious and oppositional. The network leaders present the networks as professional and active but not pushy contributors to their organizations. In so doing, they not only deal with the ambiguities concerning professional women's networks in their organizations, such as criticisms of being "passive" and "radical". They also include women in the professional network who want to develop themselves professionally and personally irrespective of their preferences or possibilities for upward mobility. Thus, they enact a view of development and ambition that both includes and exceeds upward mobility to high management positions.

The limitations of our study include that our research material concerns professional women's networks in Dutch national and multinational organizations. While it pertains to more networks than previous studies (Bierema, 2005; Pini et al., 2004; Singh et al., 2006), the Dutch context may put restrictions to the generalizability of our findings. One issue in the Dutch context that might not fully translate internationally is that way that professional women's networks address the issue of the

upward mobility of women in organizations. They strive for the advancement of women career-wise but cannot overstress this point for they need to keep with a broader membership that values personal and professional development over career success. Another limitation of our study is that it concerns the professional women's network leaders presentations of the networks to their organizations and potential participants. Further research is needed to go beyond presentations to investigate, for example, whether and how the networks contribute to liberal and/or transformative diversity practices in their organizations.

Future research could also examine to what extent professional women's network leaders indeed resemble the tempered radicals described by Meyerson and Scully (1995). How, and with what effects, do they balance insider and outsider aspects of their organizational positions? How, and with what effects, do they sustain both their commitment to their organizations and their critical view of their organizations? Meyerson and Scully posit that both commitments are equally serious and equally constitutive of the identities of tempered radicals. The same may go for professional network leaders who want to change their organizations from within. Consistent with the suggestion by Meyerson and Tompkins (2007) to explore the positions and identity constructions of tempered radical groups as change agents, further research could also explore how professional women's networks go about these issues as groups.

In line with organizational network studies, future research may also explore who professional women's network leaders maintain relationships with, both within and outside their organizations (e.g., other participants of the network, members of the highest echelons in their organizations, members of HRM departments and members of professional women's networks in other organizations). This research should also explore why, how and with what effects professional women network leaders maintain these relationships. How, in turn, do these other parties maintain relationships with professional women's network leaders? Research into these issues would not only broaden the focus of organizational network studies beyond network structures to networking behavior and processes, it would provide additional insight into how professional women's networks and their leadership attempt to achieve organizational changes that improve women's positions.

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