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FACULTY OF BUSINESS ECONOMICS
Master of Management: Corporate Finance

Masterproef

*The Belgian and Flemish equal opportunities policy:
opportunities and obstacles for its implementation in
SMEs*

Promotor :
Prof. dr. Patrizia ZANONI

Bert Heedfeld

*Master Thesis nominated to obtain the degree of Master of Management , specialization
Corporate Finance*

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Preface

This master thesis is part of my degree in Master of Management. For this thesis I wanted to study an area of management that was unfamiliar to me. The problems mentioned in the news concerning diversity sparked my interest and directed me towards a topic in this area of study. Because diversity is very broad, I chose to limit it to diversity management in SMEs and even further to the efforts of intermediary actors.

The realization of this thesis was an interesting but not easy job. Therefore I want to extend a word of thanks to everybody who contributed to this thesis.

First of all I want to thank my supervisor Prof. Dr. Patrizia Zanoni for her useful advice, professional opinion and feedback given throughout the year. I also want to extend my gratitude to Hannah Vermaut for her excellent guidance during this educational experience.

Further I want to thank the people I interviewed. This research would not have been possible without their cooperation.

Finally, I want to thank my family and friends who helped me during my studies. The most important people, however, that deserve my deepest gratitude are my parents who gave me the opportunity to complete my studies and supported me every step along the way.

Executive summary

In Flanders the demographics of the working population have been changing for at least three decades. The increasing number of ethnic minorities has led to an incentive policy introduced by the Flemish government to promote diversity management in organizations. This policy also intends to encourage companies to put together a workforce that resembles the proportional demographic composition of the area in which the company is located. Within this policy several intermediary actors are charged with the task of promoting diversity in companies and helping companies with the design of diversity policies. These actors are ERSV, the three main Belgian trade unions and the employers' organizations. Each of these organizations focuses on a different aspect of the proportional employment and diversity.

These facts combined with the fact that 99 percent of the companies in Belgium are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with less than 250 employees, imply that the manner of approaching these SMEs in relation to diversity management has to be customized. This is because SMEs often have less time and resources to develop an extensive diversity management. Because of these specific characteristics of SMEs it is useful to research how the intermediary actors adjust their approach to the specifics of SMEs and what difficulties they encounter along the way. In this thesis I address the question ***"What are the obstacles and opportunities intermediary actors encounter in Flemish SMEs and their diversity management?"***.

To find an answer to this central question I carried out a qualitative study. The data were gathered by conducting interviews with intermediary actors and by an analysis of several documents concerning the activities of the intermediary actors.

The findings showed that the arguments used to persuade SMEs to introduce diversity management in their organization were adapted to the specific needs of the organization and its economic situation. One argument, however, was

mentioned by every respondent, the demographic changes. This argument entails the coming shortage on the labor market.

Several practices used to ameliorate diversity management in organizations were also mentioned by the respondents and in the documents. Here I found that many actions that are proposed by the intermediary actors include all personnel rather than focusing on a specific socio-demographic group. These practices range from competence management, and thus drafting function profiles and competence profiles, to performing a diversity audit and following intercultural communication training.

The findings also showed that the intermediary actors encounter various obstacles. These obstacles, however, cannot always be removed by the intermediary actors themselves. Removable obstacles include a lack of reputation of the intermediary actors with the companies in Flanders and an inefficient system used by the job consultants of Jobkanaal. Obstacles that are out of the hands of the intermediary actors are related to the Flemish government. The fragmentation of the organizations in the policy of proportional employment and diversity is a structural problem that can only be solved by the Flemish government.

There are, however, obstacles relating to the specific context of SMEs as well. A lack of time and financial means are some of these obstacles. These obstacles cannot be overcome, but the intermediary actors already implemented some actions to facilitate the diversity management process in SMEs. These actions include helping employers find employment measures for which employers can apply to receive financial compensation for minorities like disabled and older employees, and, in the case of ERSV Limburg, offering training specifically for SMEs at a low price.

Opportunities could mainly be found in the changing demographics and the consequential shortage on the labor market which increased the interest of SMEs in diversity management. Other opportunities include an increase in productivity and creativity, cost savings and a better atmosphere at the workplace. When

looking specifically at the opportunities related to the provided services of the intermediary actors, I can see that ERSV, for example, decreases the amount of paperwork for their clients and that the job consultants help companies with finding the right employment measures.

The general conclusion is that the intermediary actors have only a few obstacles they cannot overcome by themselves. Other obstacles have to be tackled as soon as possible to help SMEs with diversifying their workforce and get them ready before the shortage comes.

Table of Contents

Preface.....	1
Executive summary.....	3
Table of Contents	7
1 Introduction	9
1.1 Problem outline	9
1.2 Research questions.....	11
1.3 Structure.....	12
2 Diversity	13
2.1 The impact of diversity in an organization.....	13
2.2 Practices for diversity management	14
2.2.1 Diversity perspectives.....	14
2.2.2 Diversity management practices	15
3 HR and diversity management in SMEs	21
3.1 HRM practices in SMEs	21
3.2 Diversity management and trade unions in SMEs.....	23
4 Institutional framework of equal opportunities and treatment in Flanders ...	25
4.1 History	25
4.2 Intermediary actors	26
5 Research question.....	29
6 Methodology.....	31
6.1 Data collection	31
6.2 Data analysis	34
7 Findings.....	35
7.1 Arguments used by intermediary actors	35

7.2	Practices offered by intermediary actors	38
7.2.1	Recruitment, selection and introduction	39
7.2.2	Career and throughflow	41
7.2.3	Training and courses	43
7.2.4	Audits	45
7.2.5	Organizational practices	46
7.2.6	Communication	47
7.3	Obstacles faced by intermediary actors.....	48
7.3.1	Obstacles relating to federal and Flemish policies	48
7.3.2	Obstacles relating to SMEs' context	50
7.3.3	Obstacles relating to the inner working of the intermediary actors..	51
7.4	Opportunities faced by intermediary actors	52
7.4.1	Opportunities relating to demographic changes.....	52
7.4.2	Opportunities relating to SMEs' context.....	53
7.4.3	Opportunities related to intermediary actors	55
8	Conclusions	61
8.1	Arguments	61
8.2	Practices.....	63
8.3	Obstacles.....	64
8.4	Opportunities	65
8.5	Limitations and future research	66
	Bibliography	67
	Appendix	73

1 Introduction

1.1 Problem outline

In the past decade a lot of countries faced an increasing number of immigrants and this number is still growing. This results in a growing diversity in the workforce. To get a clear picture of the issue, we need to know what is meant by the word 'diversity'. In the literature, Nkomo and Cox define diversity as: 'a mixture of people with different group identities (based on membership in social and demographic groups) within the same social system' (Nkomo & Cox, 1999).

The growing diversity in the workforce can lead to conflicts in the workplace if it is not managed properly (Ogbanna & Harris, 2006). Diversity in the workforce can, however, also benefit companies. Robinson and Dechant (1997) state that the advantages of diversity in the workforce are more creativity and problem solving capacity, and an increased number of potential employees.

In Flanders the demographics of the working population have been changing for at least three decades. These changes are, amongst others, due to Belgian policies in the sixties that invited people from foreign countries to move to Belgium. This 'promotion' of Belgium was needed to attract workers for the coalmines. The most important share of migrant workers came from Italy, Morocco and Turkey. After the closing of the coalmines, the number of immigrants kept on increasing. This was due to family reunification and the addition of 10 new member states in 2004 and 2 more member states in 2007 to the European Union (European Union) (Perrin, 2007; Pittomvils, 1997).

This increasing number of ethnic minorities in Flanders led to an incentive policy introduced by the Flemish government that promotes the 'proportional' employment and diversity (EAD). Over time the target group of this EAD-policy expanded to the elderly and the disabled as well (Cornet & Zanoni, 2010).

Within the EAD-policy several organizations are charged with the task of promoting diversity in companies and helping companies with the design of diversity policies for the company. These organizations are ERSV (Recognized Regional Partnership) , the three main Belgian trade unions (ACV, ABVV and ACLVB) and the employers' organizations (Unizo, Voka, Verso and VKW). Each of these organizations focuses on a different aspect of the proportional employment and diversity. ERSV helps with the design of diversity plans, which include customized actions that companies can implement to improve their diversity management (ERSV Limburg, 2007). The trade unions, on the other hand, approach the employees to facilitate diversity management (ACV, 2010). The employers' organizations started a project called 'Jobkanaal' which focuses on the recruitment of minorities in companies (Jobkanaal, 2009). Since it is through these organizations that the Flemish government promotes diversity management in companies, they can be named 'intermediary actors'.

It is important to note that 99 percent of the companies in Belgium are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with less than 250 employees (Eurostat, 2008). More specifically, Flemish SMEs account for 57 percent of the total number of SMEs in Belgium (Graydon Belgium - UNIZO, 2010) and are responsible for about 70 percent of the total employment in Flanders (Trends, 2011). These companies often have less time and resources to develop an extensive diversity management. Because of the limited size of the companies, personnel management is in many cases done in a more informal way (Kotey & Slade, 2005). In many of these companies there is no separate human resources division and if there is a human resources department it usually consists of a limited number of personnel. Contact between management and employees is more direct in most SMEs and more decisions are made ad hoc (Scase, 2007). The question that arises here is how intermediary actors promote diversity management with SMEs and what kinds of obstacles and opportunities they encounter.

1.2 Research questions

The goal of this thesis is to gain more insight in the role of the intermediary actors and the obstacles and opportunities they face with regard to SMEs and their diversity management. This is done by answering the central research question and the related sub questions.

The central research question is:

"What are the obstacles and opportunities intermediary actors encounter in Flemish SMEs and their diversity management?"

To find an answer to this central question, an answer is given to the following sub questions:

- 1. Which arguments are used by the intermediary actors to convince SMEs of the necessity of diversity management?**
- 2. What practices are offered to SMEs by the intermediary actors to improve their diversity management?**
- 3. What are the obstacles faced by the intermediary actors regarding SMEs and their diversity management?**
- 4. What are the opportunities faced by the intermediary actors regarding SMEs and their diversity management?**

1.3 Structure

In this section I give an overview of the structure of this thesis. The thesis consists of 7 chapters.

The introduction gives an outline of the problem discussed in this thesis.

In the second part the literature is reviewed. This literature study encompasses chapters 2, 3 and 4. Chapter 2 gives a general overview of diversity in organizations. In the third chapter the specific characteristics of HRM and equal opportunities in SMEs are discussed. The last chapter of this literature review discusses the legal framework of equal opportunities and treatment in Belgium and Flanders and it also gives a brief overview of the Flemish institutional framework concerning the equal opportunities policy.

The subsequent chapter (Chapter 5) discusses the methodology used for the research. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section explains how the data were collected while the second section discusses the methods used to analyze the data.

In chapter 6, the findings of the research are discussed. The chapter starts with the discussion of the arguments followed by an overview of the offered practices and ends with the formulation of the obstacles and opportunities faced by the intermediary actors with regard to the SMEs and their diversity management.

In the final chapter of this thesis the results of the research are evaluated and conclusions are formed.

2 Diversity

Diversity can have several positive effects on a company's performance and inner working. These advantages of diversity in the organization can, however, only be obtained when managing this diversity properly. In this chapter the impact of diversity on an organization is discussed followed by an overview of the practices that can be used to manage this diversity.

2.1 The impact of diversity in an organization

A diverse workforce can have positive and negative effects on an organization's performance. The positive effects can be seen as arguments that may be used to persuade companies to diversify their personnel and manage this diversity.

Cox and Blake (1991) mention seven areas that can benefit from the management of diversity. A sound diversity management can create a competitive advantage in social responsibility goals, costs, resource acquisitions, marketing, creativity, problem-solving and organizational flexibility. Other positive effects include an increase in creativity and innovation (e.g. a higher number of alternatives that can be considered in a decision-making task), a better reputation with the stakeholders and boundary-spanning communication (Milliken & Martins, 1996). Boundary-spanning communication indicates that diverse workgroups communicate more often with non-group members.

All these positive effects of diversity can be included in a case file that is used to obtain resources needed to manage diversity in the organization. In the literature this type of case file is called "the business case for diversity" (Robinson & Dechant, 1997). Aside from cost savings Robinson and Dechant (1997) mention a few other positive effects of diversity in the organization. These researchers state that properly managed diversity can result in attracting, retaining, and

promoting talented employees from different demographic groups. Additionally, diversity management can also drive business growth (Robinson & Dechant, 1997).

It is important to note that diversity also has downsides. The most important negative implications of diversity management in a company are categorized as affective consequences. Examples of these negative affective implications are the decrease in identification with the group and a lower organizational commitment. (Milliken & Martins, 1996)

From this we can conclude that the most important arguments in favor of diversity management are very diverse. They go from social responsibility arguments to financial arguments and even organizational arguments.

2.2 Practices for diversity management

Before discussing the diversity management practices and their effects that are mentioned in the literature, the factors that affect diversity management in companies are discussed. These factors can influence what practices are used to manage diversity in the organization (Ely & Thomas, 2001).

2.2.1 Diversity perspectives

Diversity can be approached from various perspectives. These views on diversity have an impact on the way diversity is managed (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Liff (1997) proposes two perspectives, an equal opportunities perspective and a diversity management perspective. If diversity is seen from the point of view of equal opportunities, equal treatment is important. Membership of a minority is thus not considered as a relevant criterion in favor of or to the disadvantage of the minority member. The diversity management perspective, in contrast to the equal opportunities perspective, encourages organizations to recognize differences.

Ely and Thomas (2001) found three other perspectives: integration-and-learning, access-and-legitimacy, and discrimination-and-fairness. These perspectives show how organizations view diversity. The view on diversity that, according to the authors, has the best chance of a well-managed diversity is the integration-and-learning perspective. If management adopts this perspective, the result will be a diversity management in which ethnic minorities feel valued and are more likely to associate themselves with the organization. (Ely & Thomas, 2001)

Diversity management practices can, however, also be categorized according to their target group. When practices are specifically designed for a certain group, they are called categorical actions. Practices that target the entire workforce are called inclusive actions. (Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008)

2.2.2 Diversity management practices

Organizations can implement several practices to manage their diverse workforce. The diversity management practices that are mentioned in the literature can be sorted into six categories: recruitment and selection, career and throughflow, training and courses, audits, organizational and communication.

2.2.2.1 Recruitment and selection

In the area of recruitment and selection, it is important to adjust the recruitment process (Bogaert & Vloeberghs, 2005; Aronson, 2002; Kreitz, 2008). The recruitment process should be analyzed to find the pitfalls for minority members. Maladjusted recruitment tests can discourage these minority members to apply and thus reduce the opportunity of diversifying the workforce (Goethals, 2011).

One possible diversity management practice that is related to recruitment is introducing a mentoring program (Bogaert & Vloeberghs, 2005; Kossek, Lobel, & Brown, 2005; Kreitz, 2008). This program is designed to guide newly hired employees finding their way in the organization with the help of a more

experienced employee. This means it can also be seen as a practice related to career development (Aronson, 2002).

2.2.2.2 Career and throughflow

Practices that are concerned with people's careers and promotion opportunities can help manage diversity. In general these practices are designed to facilitate the work experience for all employees. There is, however, one action mentioned in the literature that is specifically meant for elderly workers. This categorical action, called job placement, aims at guiding recently fired elderly workers in their search for a new job (Aronson, 2002).

When employers notice that minority members do not advance within the organization, they can start managing workers' career paths (Bogaert & Vloeberghs, 2005; Aronson, 2002). Another possible action to facilitate advancement of employees within the organization is succession planning (Kreitz, 2008). The purpose of succession planning is ensuring the continuity of the organization by developing a diverse talent pool into potential future leaders.

With regard to career, several practices are proposed to facilitate the combination of work and family. This work-family balance needs to be stimulated (Bogaert & Vloeberghs, 2005; Aronson, 2002; Kossek, Lobel, & Brown, 2005) by introducing labor flexibility and part-time employment (Bogaert & Vloeberghs, 2005).

2.2.2.3 Training and courses

Several types of training and courses in the area of diversity management are mentioned in the literature. Diversity training, or sometimes also named managing and valuing diversity (MVD) training, is one type of training that is frequently mentioned (Bogaert & Vloeberghs, 2005; Aronson, 2002; Kossek, Lobel, & Brown, 2005; Kreitz, 2008; Cox & Blake, 1991). The desired effect of

this training is increasing the cultural awareness, knowledge and skill (Vaughn, 2007).

Other trainings designed specifically for diversity management are intercultural communication training (Bogaert & Vloeberghs, 2005) and training against prejudices (Bogaert & Vloeberghs, 2005; Aronson, 2002). The purpose of intercultural communication training is creating an understanding of different cultures, languages and customs (USLegal, 2001). Effects of the training are better communication with international stakeholders of the organization (USLegal, 2001).

Training against prejudices focuses, as the name implies, on the removal of prejudices in the organization (Bogaert & Vloeberghs, 2005). This training results in a more understanding environment and a greater inclusion.

The last practice related to training and courses for the entire workforce is offering educational and training opportunities (Aronson, 2002; Kossek, Lobel, & Brown, 2005; Kreitz, 2008; Zanoni, Nilsson, Janssens, & Wahlin, 2010). This is a more general practice that includes all personnel and aspires a feeling of commitment to the organization.

Organizations can also offer language courses to their employees (Bogaert & Vloeberghs, 2005). These courses are usually offered to minority employees who are not fluent enough in, for example, Dutch.

2.2.2.4 Audits

Various researchers propose a diversity audit (Cox & Blake, 1991; Aronson, 2002; Kreitz, 2008). This audit points out sources of potential bias that can have negative effects for minority groups (Cox & Blake, 1991). Cox and Blake (1991) point out that hiring an expert can be of great help to consider the audit from an objective point of view.

Hiring a diversity consultant for guidance in the diversity management process can also be useful. If a company chooses to hire a diversity consultant, the selection of this consultant should be handled with great care. (Aronson, 2002)

2.2.2.5 Organizational practices

Organizational practices consist of practices that affect managers and the organizational structure. To increase the commitment of the managerial staff accountability is introduced (Aronson, 2002; Cox & Blake, 1991; Kreitz, 2008). This accountability can be achieved in two different ways: by obligating managers or by appealing to their willingness (Bye, 2005). Obligating managers to be accountable for diversity in the organization is done by tying bonuses to good diversity management (Aronson, 2002; Kossek, Lobel, & Brown, 2005). For this method, and in general, it can be useful to set diversity goals that have to be achieved (Aronson, 2002; Kossek, Lobel, & Brown, 2005).

When choosing to appeal to the willingness of the management team, Bye (2005) suggests using managers' competitive drive. Both these methods show that it is also important that the CEO is on board when it comes to diversity in the company (Aronson, 2002; Bye, 2005).

Aside from getting the managers on board it is also necessary to get the employees involved and thus market diversity in-house (Aronson, 2002). If this practice does not result in an acceptance of the diverse workforce, a zero tolerance policy regarding discrimination can be introduced (Aronson, 2002; Kossek, Lobel, & Brown, 2005). For the implementation of both these practices a diversity task force can be instated (Cox & Blake, 1991; Kossek, Lobel, & Brown, 2005; Kreitz, 2008).

Organizing several social activities for management and employees throughout the year is a practice offered by Zanoni and colleagues (2010). This practice can enhance the feeling of belonging to an organization and ameliorate the contact between employees with different ethnic backgrounds.

An action on the organizational level that is targeted to a specific group of employees is the adjustment of accommodations. This adjustment can be done towards disabled people, pregnant women and religious employees (Aronson, 2002; Childs Jr., 2005), but towards parents as well. In-house day care facilities are an example of accommodations that are specifically meant for parents (Aronson, 2002; Bogaert & Vloeberghs, 2005; Childs Jr., 2005).

2.2.2.6 Communication

An important aspect of good diversity management is good communication. Good communication is not only needed between managers but also between managers and employees (Aronson, 2002). Communicating the company's vision on diversity to the employees can also have a great effect on the efforts of employees for diversity (Aronson, 2002; Kreitz, 2008).

Aside from the employees, the stakeholders also deserve to know that the company is diversifying its workforce (Aronson, 2002). This communication can encourage stakeholders to follow suit and start diversifying their workforce as well.

3 HR and diversity management in SMEs

Research has shown that the size of an organization has an effect on the chance that an organization adopts diversity management (Bogaert & Vloeberghs, 2005). In this chapter I discuss how human resource management (HRM) is applied in SMEs and the role of trade unions concerning HR and diversity management in SMEs.

3.1 HRM practices in SMEs

Little literature is found about diversity management in SMEs. However, articles about HRM in SMEs can be used to generate a general picture of how personnel issues are handled in smaller organizations. This section encompasses recruitment, training, performance appraisal and equal opportunities policy in SMEs.

Researchers found that the size of the company plays a major role in the use of HRM practices (Bacon & Hoque, 2005; Kotey & Slade, 2005). As the organization grows more attention is given to prescribed HRM practices in order to improve efficiency. In small companies HRM is based on more informal processes because this allows for more flexibility (Kotey & Slade, 2005). Other research has shown that the proportion of low-skilled workers also plays a significant role in the adoption of prescribed HRM practices (Bacon & Hoque, 2005). SMEs that employ a high proportion of skilled labor are more inclined to use prescribed practices because they view employees as valuable assets (Bacon & Hoque, 2005).

Since small firms often lack the presence of trained HR personnel, the main challenge these organizations will face, is effectively attracting and selecting candidates (Cardon & Stevens, 2004). However, Kotey and Slade (2005) found that when firms face an increase in workforce, in most cases, there is also an

increase in the use of selection techniques. This is because the company will hire more people from outside the network of family and friends. The consequences of this shift are the increased risk in selection and an elevated cost of recruitment. The shift from hiring family and friends to hiring 'outsiders' will, in most cases, happen first when it comes to filling in operational jobs. At the managerial level this shift will occur at a later stage (Kotey & Slade, 2005).

When looking at training in SMEs, on-the-job training is the most common training method. Other methods of training are more common in medium-sized enterprises. With regard to management training it is important that, especially for micro and small firms, formal procedures should not be emphasized. After all, these formal procedures could lead to a reduction of the flexibility of the organization (Kotey & Slade, 2005).

Owner-managers of small firms can observe and correct wrong performance almost immediately. This is due to the close relationship with employees. When more formal processes are used, performance appraisal occurs at less frequent intervals. An increase in number of stakeholders generally has the effect of an increase in documentation to enable accountability (Kotey & Slade, 2005).

Concerning equal opportunities, Kotey and Slade (2005) suggest that formal human resource policies and procedures 'are important to ensure uniform and fair treatment of employees as their numbers increase'. Kirton and Read (2007) found that European SMEs prefer an informal and flexible approach to employee relations, with equal opportunities being one of the aspects of employee relations. Research shows that when flexible work arrangements were made, this was done in an informal way and the reason behind it was in most cases business related (Kirton & Read, 2007).

Woodhams and Lupton (2006) found that the presence of a HR professional has a positive impact on the presence of gender-based equal opportunities (EO) policies in small firms. The implementation of these EO policies, however, is not influenced by the presence of a HR professional. This could mean that the HR professional does not have the power to enforce the EO policies. If the

professional takes on HR as part of a wider management role, however, there is greater take-up of EO policy. If an organization lacks the presence of a HR professional, as most small firms do, training in equal opportunities is likely to have an effect (Woodhams & Lupton, 2006). With regard to diversity management it is important to note that SMEs 'lack the financial means or the competencies necessary for this process' (Bogaert & Vloeberghs, 2005, p. 489). The SMEs that do opt for diversity management, however, do this from an economic rationale and try to obtain a competitive advantage (Woodhams & Lupton, 2009).

3.2 Diversity management and trade unions in SMEs

Bacon and Hoque (2005) argue that 'trade unions play an important role in making companies aware of professional standards and they can provide important advice on suitable best practice'. Trade unions can also have a major impact on diversity practices of organizations striving to build a competitive advantage through a diverse workforce, even for SMEs (Cardon & Stevens, 2004).

Other findings concerning unions show that they bring experience and knowledge to organizations. This experience and knowledge enables SME managers to learn about, and implement, good practice (Bacon & Hoque, 2005). In Europe, however, there are too few paid union officers present in SMEs to service SME workers and managers in a face-to-face sense (Kirton & Read, 2007).

Kirton and Read (2007) suggest that a cadre of union representatives that pay visits to SMEs to give advice on equality issues should be created. These equality representatives can also give advice on diversity management. This innovation can face up to the challenges of tackling inequalities in SMEs at the level of everyday operations.

4 Institutional framework of equal opportunities and treatment in Flanders

In Flanders several intermediary actors are charged with the task of guiding companies in the diversity management process. These actors find their origins in the proportional employment decree of 8 May 2002 (Flemish Department of Work and Social Economics, 2002). To fully understand the origin of the intermediary actors a brief overview of the history is given. This overview is followed by a discussion of the intermediary actors and their tasks.

4.1 History

In the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1950 an article is dedicated to the prohibition of discrimination (Convention of November 4, 1950). The next step in the fight against discrimination was the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1966 (Convention of March 7, 1966) that led to the federal law of July 30, 1981 concerning the punishment of actions inspired by racism or xenophobia (Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism).

The Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism (CGKR) was founded in Belgium by the act of February 15, 1993 (Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism, 1993). The job of the CGKR is to promote equal opportunities and oppose every form of racism (Act of February 15, 1993). Besides the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism there is also an Institute for the Equality of Women and Men founded by the act of December 16, 2002 (Institute for the Equality of Women and Men, 2002).

The current laws that ban discrimination in Belgium are the laws of 10 May 2007. These laws encompass three directives of the Council of the European Union (2004/113/EC, 2000/78/EC, 2000/43/EC). One law concerns the equal treatment of men and women and is more commonly known as the Gender Law. The second law bans discrimination based on age, sexual orientation, disability, faith or personal belief, civil status, birth, wealth, political belief, language, current or future health condition, a physical or genetic characteristic and social origin. This law, also known as the Anti-Discrimination Law of 10 May 2007, replaces the former Anti-Discrimination Law of 25 February 2003. The third law is the Anti-Racism Law; this law punishes acts initiated by racism or xenophobia.

In Flanders the European directives were implemented in the decree of 10 July 2008. This decree concerns a framework for the Flemish equal opportunities and equal treatment policy. The Flemish government also drafted a decree with regard to the proportional employment and diversity (EAD), the decree of 8 May 2002 (Flemish Department of Work and Social Economics, 2002). This decree has the objective of reflecting the composition of the labor market in the composition of the workforce with a strong focus on the representation of disadvantaged groups in the workforce. For example, the percentage of women at work in an organization in Limburg should be the same as the percentage of female labor market in Limburg. The Flemish government has opted for an incentive policy with subsidies rather than imposing rules concerning the EAD-policy.

4.2 Intermediary actors

The job consultants of Jobkanaal, the diversity consultants of the trade unions and the project developers originated from agreements of the Flemish Economic Social Negotiation Committee (VESOC). The decree of 8 May 2002 regarding the proportional employment and diversity also played an important role in the development of these diversity-related functions.

The VESOC-agreement of 1998 played an important role concerning the promotion of proportional employment of people with a migration background (Lamberts, Pauwels, Schryvers, & Van de Maele, 2005; Cornet & Zanoni, 2010). In this agreement was opted for voluntary action plans that encouraged organizations to draw up an action plan and implement it. This was done with the help of a project developer. Action plans were given the name 'diversity plans' in 2002. With this change of name the target groups were also expanded to the disabled, elderly, immigrants and women.

In 2001, the Pact of Vilvoorde was signed by the Flemish Ministry and the social partners. This pact contains 21 objectives from which 2 pertain to the position of specific socio-demographic groups on the labor market. To reach these objectives two diversity platform texts were drawn up. One of these was signed in 2002 by the ethnic minority associations. In this text the parties agreed to hire diversity consultants in the three main trade unions to raise awareness in their rank and file. Another agreement in this text led to the creation of Jobkanaal. Jobkanaal was defined as an intermediary between companies and ethnic minority candidates. This initiative was to be organized by the main employers' association Voka and two employees for the professionalization of the federations of ethnic minority associations concerning employment. (Cornet & Zanoni, 2010)

ERSV is in charge of these diversity plans and has created four types of plans. The first type of diversity plans is the 'entry diversity plan'. In this plan a few actions can be included and the maximum duration is 1 year. After that a regular diversity plan can be drawn up. This diversity plan contains more actions and has a maximum duration of 2 years. If the company has three or more branches it can opt for a cluster diversity plan instead of a regular diversity plan. In this cluster diversity plan actions for all the branches can be included. Like the regular diversity plans, these cluster diversity plans also have a maximum duration of 2 years. If the company still wants to work on some issues regarding diversity after those two plans they can choose a grow diversity plan with a maximum duration of 1 year. (ERSV Limburg, 2007)

The project 'Jobkanaal' started officially on July 7, 2003. In 2006, Unizo and Verso also joined this initiative. Jobkanaal expanded its target groups with people aged above 50 and the disabled. Unizo and Voka are charged with helping private companies in the recruiting of people from the target groups while Verso is responsible for the social profit companies. (VKW, 2010)

As mentioned above, the trade unions ACV, ABVV and ACLVB also fulfill a role in the EAD-policy of the Flemish government. These trade unions instated diversity consultants that work with their rank and file on the implementation of diversity management in companies, local authorities and within their own ranks. On top of this the diversity consultants of the trade unions also provide training for their members and especially for the union representatives. (ABVV, 2011; ACV, 2010)

Briefly summarized, I can state that ERSV is a non-profit organization that is recognized by the Flemish government and deals with socioeconomic issues. Voka, Unizo, Verso and VKW are all involved in the project Jobkanaal which helps companies with recruiting of three specific target groups. And ACV, ABVV and ACLVB are the trade unions that help guide diversity in organizations from the bottom up.

5 Research question

The goal of this thesis is to gain more insight in the role of the intermediary actors and the obstacles and opportunities they face with regard to SMEs and their diversity management. This is done by answering the central research question and the related sub questions.

The central research question is:

"What are the obstacles and opportunities intermediary actors encounter in Flemish SMEs and their diversity management?"

To find an answer to this central question, an answer is given to the following sub questions:

1. Which arguments are used by the intermediary actors to convince SMEs of the necessity of diversity management?

The answer to this first subquestion gives a general overview of the way SMEs are approached and the factors that influence the arguments that are used. This sub question also shows how specific characteristics of SMEs influence the used approach and arguments.

2. What practices are offered to SMEs by the intermediary actors to improve their diversity management?

Answers to this subquestion give an overview of the proposed practices. If possible, these practices are linked to the practices offered by the literature. Due to the lack of an HR professional in most SMEs (Cardon & Stevens, 2004) these practices are a very important part of the service provided by the intermediary actors to SMEs.

3. What are the obstacles faced by the intermediary actors regarding SMEs and their diversity management?

This subquestion focuses on the obstacles that are faced by the intermediary actors regarding the specific context of SMEs. The obstacles will be categorized based on their nature or origin. This method shows whether or not the intermediary actors can tackle the issue themselves.

4. What are the opportunities faced by the intermediary actors regarding SMEs and their diversity management?

This last subquestion shows what the opportunities for the intermediary actors are when dealing with the specific context of SMEs. In this study opportunities are seen as chances for progress or advancement. By using the same categorization to answer this subquestion as used in the formulation of the answer to the previous subquestion, the obstacles can, if possible, be linked to opportunities and a final conclusion can be formed.

6 Methodology

I opted for a qualitative research because there is limited information available about diversity management in SMEs and a qualitative approach is better suited to explore a topic and to study a phenomenon in its context (Kvale, 1996). The data were collected by means of interviews and documents. The analysis of these data was done based on a thematic coding system.

6.1 Data collection

The data is collected through in-depth interviews because they are suitable to explore a topic in depth. Another reason is to find answers to 'how?' and 'why?' questions. On top of these interviews, policy documents were used for additional information. These multiple sources of data are used for triangulation to ensure the validity of the research.

The in-depth interviews were conducted with diversity consultants of intermediary actors that help companies with drawing up their diversity policy. I opted for a semi-structured type of interview because this type of interview enables the interviewer to pursue an individual subject's answers as strongly as the interviewer thinks is needed. The organizations from which the diversity consultants were selected are ERSV, Voka, Unizo, ACV and ABVV. A total of seven interviews were conducted with consultants. For these interviews three different questionnaires were used: one for the project developers EAD of ERSV, one for the job consultants of Jobkanaal and one for the diversity consultants of the trade unions (see Appendix 1). The topics discussed in the interviews were the profile of the guided companies, the tasks of the consultants, cooperation with other intermediary actors, and the personal perspectives of the respondents on diversity management in Flanders. All seven interviews were conducted at the interviewees' workplace. The average duration of the interviews was 1 hour and was taped for literal transcription.

This table shows the characteristics of the seven respondents:

Function	Organization
Project developer EAD	ERSV
Project developer EAD	ERSV
Job consultant	Jobkanaal, Voka
Job consultant	Jobkanaal, Voka
Job consultant	Jobkanaal, Unizo
Diversity consultant	ACV
Diversity consultant	ABVV

Table 6.1 Overview of respondents

Next to the in-depth interviews, policy documents were used. These documents pertain to the working of the intermediary actors. The documents range from brochures on the working of the intermediary actors to syllabi for courses concerning diversity. Other documents include a fully drawn-up diversity plan, handouts of a presentation that is used to inform organizations about the diversity plans and a collection of testimonials of 20 companies on diversity. A detailed table of the documents is given below.

Document	Related intermediary actor(s)
A. Course guides	
1. Vormingspakket voor diversiteit op de werkvloer	ACV, ABVV and ACLVB
2. Leergids voor diversiteit op de werkvloer	ACV, ABVV and ACLVB
B. Tips and information	
3. Een checklist, werkt dat?	ACV, ABVV and ACLVB
4. Een boekje vol tips, werkt dat?	ACV, ABVV and ACLVB
5. De Non-Discriminatieclausule in jouw bedrijf? Samen kan het!	ABVV
6. Nederlands op de Werkvloer? Samen kan het!	ABVV
7. Werkbaar werk ook voor 50-plussers	ABVV

8. Wegwijs in... de redelijke aanpassingen ten behoeve van personen met een handicap op het werk	FOD werkgelegenheid, arbeid en sociaal overleg (received from ABVV diversity consultant)
9. Voluit voor solidariteit! Diversiteit!	ACV
10. Ramadan op de werkvloer	ACV
11. Diversiteit werkt	ERSV
12. Presentatie Evenredige en volwaardige arbeidsdeelnemers en diversiteit	ERSV
13. Diversiteitsplannen	ERSV
14. Ze passen niet altijd in het plaatje, maar wel in uw bedrijf	Jobkanaal
C. Analyses	
15. Analyse diversiteitsplannen 2010	ERSV
16. Success rates Jobkanaal 2009 and 2010	Voka
D. Examples	
17. 20 bedrijven getuigen over diversiteit op de werkvloer	Unizo, VKW, Voka, ACV, ABVV and ACLVB
18. Filled out diversity plan	ERSV
E. Background material	
19. Hulpmiddel voor een instapdiversiteitsplan	ERSV
20. Hulpmiddel voor een diversiteitsplan	ERSV
21. Hulpmiddel voor een clusterdiversiteitsplan	ERSV
22. Undocumented workers: a guide to rights	ABVV and ACV
23. Uw 'partner' in Ondernemen	Voka
24. Een kleine gids voor grotere loongelijkheid V/M	ABVV
25. De vakbond als opstap naar re-integratie en jobbehoud	ABVV and ACV

Table 6.2 Overview of additional documents

6.2 Data analysis

The transcripts of the interviews were analyzed using a thematic coding system. First, the data is broken down and linked to one of the research question. Along with the transcripts, the additional documents were also analyzed using a similar coding system. An overview of the linking of the data is given in Table 5.3 below. The documentation is categorized in the same manner as table 5.2.

	Interviews			Documentation				
	<i>ERSV</i>	<i>Jobkanaal</i>	<i>Trade unions</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>E</i>
Arguments	x	x	X	x	x	-	-	-
Practices	x	x	X	x	x	x	x	-
Obstacles	x	x	X	-	-	-	-	-
Opportunities	x	x	X	-	-	-	-	-

Table 5.3 Data extraction matrix

From the table above can be deduced which research questions can be answered by which type of source. As can be seen, the documentation does not give any data that helps answer the research questions.

All arguments of the different intermediary actors are discussed together since these arguments can be used by every intermediary actor. As for the data pertaining to practices the same categorization as in the literature study is used (cfr. Chapter 2). The data for the obstacles and the opportunities are also categorized further according to the specific context to which they apply.

7 Findings

The data were analyzed based on the four research questions. In this chapter I discuss each research question individually.

7.1 Arguments used by intermediary actors

In the analyses of the interviews and documents several arguments come to light. The most important and most used argument is that of the shortage on the labor market in the future. This is mentioned by all interviewees but one and four of the additional documents mention this upcoming shortage as well. The reason for this shortage is best explained by the diversity consultant of ABVV. He says:

"Well, the next years a gigantic amount of labor forces is going to leave the labor market because in the sixties a lot of babies were born and those are all going to retire now. And the inflow that has to counter that phenomenon, can't keep up. So we're going to get a shortage on the labor market and the employers acknowledge that. So that pond in which they have to fish to find good personnel keeps on getting smaller."

(Diversity consultant, ABVV Limburg)

This argument is very strong because it almost obligates employers to diversify their staff in order to find good personnel.

Another argument used by two of the respondents is that of performance enhancement through diversity management. This performance enhancement is seen as the consequence of employees who are kept motivated by (constant) training. The project developer of ERSV Leuven believes this argument especially applies to learning organizations.

"Of course we try to promote a good diversity policy with equal opportunities for everyone as something that indeed can improve your

results because it is an important argument. We believe it ourselves as well, especially if you are a learning organization and you can take people along in your assignment and okay, eh, you've got a great ability to adapt than you will also do better on the market."

(Project developer, ERSV Leuven)

The last argument, or better approach, that several intermediary actors have in common is not mentioning anything about minorities in the initial contact with a possible client. Two of the interviewed job consultants wait until the actual face-to-face meeting to mention that Jobkanaal is about the recruitment of people from three specific minority groups. And even then they wait until the end of the meeting to mention this. A similar approach is found with the project developers of ERSV Leuven. They usually approach diversity plans as implementing a sustainable HR-policy that pays attention to equal opportunities or diversity. Their explanation goes as follows:

"Actually we approach it [a diversity plan] as carrying out a sustainable human resources policy with equal opportunities or with attention to diversity and that hopefully also leads to more diversity. But with most employers, especially in the profit sector, you don't have to approach them too often with the 'equal opportunities'-story or with... they don't do it for that."

(Project developer, ERSV Leuven)

One of the respondents noted that before the financial crisis arguments mostly pointed to the social aspect. This is in large contrast to the arguments used today which avoid talking about diversity. An example of such an argument that focuses on the social aspect is given by the job consultant of Limburg:

"Before the crisis... then you actually commented more on the social aspect of the employer. Then it was really like, yes, it is better to have a diverse HR-policy, personnel to have a reflection of the labor market."

(Job consultant, Jobkanaal Limburg)

A frequently recurring remark is that the argument depends on the context of the conversation. Because the services provided by the intermediary actors are customized to the needs of the companies, they also have to tailor their arguments to the specific context of the company. Another reason for these custom-made arguments is that every person has another take on diversity and minorities. Examples of how the intermediary actors adapt to this specific context of organizations is given by the job consultant of Leuven.

"If they need more high profiles, then they say like: 'An ethnic minority? Are we going to find that?' while an ethnic minority member can have gone to college as well as everyone else. So I tell them that I have a colleague, a Moroccan, and I tell them 'that is my colleague at Jobkanaal and he also went to college'. For people with a handicap they think that they all are retarded and then I try to tell them about the organizations we work with, like Goci, here in the area, is an organization that guides people with a handicap and they actually guide more educated profiles, who went to college and who have a disability and who want to work."

(Job consultant, Jobkanaal Leuven)

To find the right arguments you have to get as much information as possible about the company during the first conversation. If employers talk about bad experiences with minority members, then you have to discover what this bad experience was and if it is related to the person or to the group this person belongs to.

One of the job consultants of Jobkanaal tries to change the view on target groups by talking about people with competences. This way they are seen as people like everyone else instead of labeled as handicapped or old.

An argument used by the project developers of ERSV Leuven is a list of companies from the neighborhood that already have a diversity plan in their

organization. This list is included in the informative bundle ('Diversiteitsplannen') that the project developers use as a more tangible tool to tell their story.

The documents provide some additional arguments, most of which are not mentioned by the respondents but can be used as well. Arguments that have been briefly mentioned by the intermediary actors are subsidies, free service and expertise and, in the case of Jobkanaal, an initial screening and selection.

Better anticipation of the expectations and needs of clients is not mentioned by any of the respondents and yet it is mentioned by 'Wegwijs in... de redelijke aanpassingen ten behoeve van personen met een handicap op het werk' as one of the advantages of diversity management in general. The improvement of corporate image by managing diversity is not mentioned by any of the interviewees either, while this advantage has been suggested by the same document and 'Leergids voor diversiteit op de werkvloer'. It is, however, possible that these arguments are only used when the employer mentions that he finds the corporate image important, for example.

From these findings I can deduce that nowadays the changing demographics of the labor market is the most used argument to persuade employers to start with managing diversity in their company. In general, however, the used arguments are adapted to the needs of the organizations. The current economic climate can also influence the used arguments.

7.2 Practices offered by intermediary actors

As mentioned above, the practices are divided into six categories: recruitment and selection, career and throughflow, training and courses, audits, organizational practices, and communication.

7.2.1 Recruitment, selection and introduction

The first and most frequently used general practice has already been mentioned in the previous section, competence management. This practice is seen as one of the most important actions that can be implemented when managing diversity. It clarifies what is expected from potential employees as well as what tasks have to be executed by current or newly hired employees. This clarification is brought through the implementation of function and competence profiles. So competence management is a general practice that consists of several other minor practices. The project developer of ERSV Limburg explains the importance of competence management as follows:

"Competence management is very important. Everything starts with good function profiles and competences profiles. If you select your people based on good profiles then the people also clearly know what their tasks are and what they have to execute."

(Project developer, ERSV Limburg)

Another important practice – that is also obligatory in Flanders – is the welcome policy. This welcome policy entails a welcome brochure or a sometimes a welcome video and can be combined with a checklist for reception. It is important that companies make their welcome policy a whole as explained by the project developer of ERSV Limburg.

"Several companies say, if I ask if they have a welcome policy or a welcome brochure, 'yes, here is a document, there is a document, there is a document'. So it is spread out a bit. What they can do is bundle everything in one clear document that makes it easier for people, newcomers, but also for steady employees that they see 'these are my tasks, that is what I have to do, I have breaks between then and then.' Because as newcomer everything is new to you, even where the toilets are, something very trivial. Everything is new to that person so it is

important that they are well-guided from day one or else you get a revolving door effect. A welcome policy or a welcome brochure can help with that."

(Project developer, ERSV Limburg)

The checklist for reception states what has to be done and what information has to be given to the newcomer in the next six months. This process can be facilitated by installing a mentoring system. Mentors can guide new employees and familiarize them with the inner working of the organization. Mentoring is also mentioned by eight of the additional documents that were analyzed.

Now that the most important practices are discussed, I will discuss the practices for recruitment and selection in chronological order. The first part of the recruitment is designing the job application. In this application it is better to mention the competences required for the job instead of the diplomas needed. To make sure minorities feel welcome as well, an encouragement for these groups can be added. An example is:

"Regardless of your ethnicity, gender or age, you are most welcome in our company."

(Project developer, ERSV Limburg)

After putting in the effort of making the job application accessible to minorities, the job application has to be spread out so that it reaches these minorities. This can be done by using the services of Jobkanaal. But other, more creative practices are possible as well. One playful action could be:

"[...] announcing in a mosque that you need employees. This already has been done by a company, of course. It is naturally a very extreme case but it did help for that company."

(Project developer, ERSV Limburg)

Once the job application has been spread it is time for the selection procedure. This can include tests so it is important that these test are culture-free or gender-neutral as proposed by the checklist of the trade unions.

After a new employee has been hired, he or she can start working under an IBO-contract (Individual professional education in the organization). This contract is designed to give an organization, and the newcomer, the time to assess whether it is the right man at the right place. A standard IBO-contract is designed for unemployed people who are going to start working. VDAB, however, also has other types of IBO-contracts. One type is designed specifically for non-Dutch-speaking people while another is specifically meant for the disabled. The duration of an IBO-contract ranges from one to six months. (VDAB, 2011)

There is still one practice left that cannot be assigned to a specific part of the recruitment and selection procedure, the non-discrimination clause. When implemented this practice influences the whole procedure. This action also has to be taken up in the labor regulations in order to be effective.

7.2.2 Career and throughflow

One of the practices that is proposed to SMEs by the project developer of ERSV Limburg is performance interviews. These interviews are closely linked to competence management, which is discussed above. Conducting performance interviews is proposed by four additional documents as well. Amongst these four documents there is one that is based on real life, '20 companies testify about diversity at the workplace'.

In the domain of career and throughflow HR managers have to keep the career of the elderly in mind. Such an age-aware HR-policy is a general practice that consists of adjusting work pressure, adjust work, adjust work duration, assign special functions, draw up an age pyramid and the assurance of knowledge. Adjusting work pressure is aimed at reducing stress for the elderly while adjusting the work is a practice designed to literally lighten the load. Special

functions that are assigned include advisory roles, coach and mentoring positions. (Werkbaar werk voor 50-plussers)

To safeguard the knowledge that is in the company, an age pyramid could be drawn up in order to plan how the assurance of knowledge will be organized. The project developer of ERSV Leuven gives the following definition for knowledge assurance:

"Knowledge assurance. For the people who are about to retire a system of knowledge sharing is set up."

(Project developer, ERSV Leuven)

Keeping employees happy is also part of the career and throughflow category. This can be measured by a satisfaction survey. This is a tool that can be used when an employer thinks employees are faking illness and skip work. The project developer of Limburg explains the usefulness of a satisfaction survey.

"If your company is confronted with non-attendance, a lot of sickness, there can be causes that have to be investigated and be given in a plan but that is also tied to the results of a satisfaction survey with the personnel."

(Project developer, ERSV Limburg)

Keeping employees happy also keeps them in the organization. Retention of employees can be linked to a good training policy, competence management, career path guidance etcetera. Retaining your employees is the result of good HR- and diversity management. This means it is the result of all practices combined.

Other practices that can be linked to career and throughflow but are only mentioned in the documents are outplacement, 'exit talks', work and family balance, flexible hours, working from home, assigning a new function (e.g. desk job for employee who had an accident) and job rotation.

7.2.3 Training and courses

When discussing training and courses that can be included in a diversity plan we talk about:

"[...] various aspects of education that are not technical courses – because that doesn't fit in a diversity plan because it belongs to the core business and assignment of the company – but everything that deals with communication, leadership, mentoring, attitudes... that is all possible."

(Project developer, ERSV Leuven)

When dealing with competence management, one of the actions within this practice can be a personal education plan. This plan develops one's skills and competences needed for the job he is already doing or for a job that he aspires in the future. Personal education plans are designed based on the individual needs and desires of employees. Within the same area a training can be given concerning performance interviews.

Other trainings related to previously discussed topics include training selection skills for the HR-representative in an SME. This training is provided for an SME-friendly price by ERSV Limburg along with mentoring training, age-aware HR training and talent management training. All these trainings eventually benefit the whole of the organization because several key persons (HR-representatives and mentors) professionalize their skills and thus affect the entire company.

When dealing with conflicts in the company due to diversity, a course on dealing with differences on the workplace can be useful. This practice informs the employees about differences in culture and improves the relation between minority and majority groups.

"Suppose that you notice some communication problems with a minority. In some companies where there are a lot of ethnic minority members, cliques are formed and you know that this will result in internal tension. If

you have one group of Flemish people and one group of ethnic minority members and the ethnic minority members are talking in their own tongue, the group of Flemish people could think that the minority members are talking about them, even if it is not the case. There can arise communication problems [...]. Then you can give the members of the personnel a course on how to deal with diversity."

(Project developer, ERSV Limburg)

When managers are new to the aspect of leadership and coaching, they can follow coach training or a leadership training.

"Suppose you have a very masculine company, there are only men at the top level, and a woman wants to promote to a management function and is in need of extra courses, you can undertake action for this woman."

(Project developer, ERSV Limburg)

Other courses or training are offered with a specific target group in mind. When talking about a hard-working ethnic minority member that does not possess enough skill in talking Dutch, he or she can take on a course of Dutch at the workplace (e.g. 'Diversity works' and 'Diversity plans'). When it concerns, for example, an elderly that does not know how to operate a computer, life-wide learning can be a solution.

"Life-wide learning, what is that? For example pc basic although they don't have to use a computer at work it still is a competence that you can't live without on the labor market. Suppose those people end up unemployed, if you don't know the bare minimum use of computer you won't get anywhere, even it is only to apply for your holidays."

(Project developer, ERSV Leuven)

Life-wide learning is a practice that consists of several courses that teach people skills that are important in case they ever end up on the labor market again. For example, life-wide learning is also applicable to learning languages and using the internet.

Another practice that can be assigned to a certain disadvantaged group is ergonomic training. This is mainly meant for the elderly but it can also be implemented for all staff as mentioned by the project developer of ERSV Leuven.

Another important practice that was mentioned by the job consultant of Jobkanaal Leuven is jobcoaching. An example of a situation in which jobcoaching can be applied is given below.

"For example, I've had a company here and he said that he had someone working for him that does a great job but has a bad hearing. The guy himself doesn't experience any problems with his being hearing impaired but his colleagues have a lot of problems because the communication goes bad. So I've directed them to GOB who offer jobcoaching, even with employees with a handicap, so they've immediately contacted GOB."

(Job consultant, Leuven)

7.2.4 Audits

In the interviews, no audits were mentioned. The documents, however, mentioned three audits. The first two audits are more or less alike. They are both diversity audits but the actual diversity audit is used to find problems concerning diversity in the organization before implementing actions while the DIVA-audit is a mandatory practice in the diversity plan. The DIVA-audit examines the progress of the diversity plan and creates a general picture. Although this audit is quite outdated, it still can be used to accomplish other important goals.

"It [DIVA] already exists since '99 or so, so it is very outdated and something that has to capture all sectors and all sizes of companies. So some questions are not applicable to certain companies at all. But it is still

done. Why? Because, yeah, it is mandatory and because that is a moment for us where we can talk with people from the workplace. Then some employees we don't usually get to see can express their opinion, which is in some companies a special occasion. There, someone that works at the production line isn't always asked for his or her opinion about what way the personnel is managed."

(Project developer, ERSV Leuven)

The third kind of audit that is mentioned in the documentation is an audit of the recruitment and selection procedure. This audit can bring to light several pitfalls that can discourage minorities to apply for a job with the company. After the audit the pitfalls can be removed and the company is more likely to create a diverse workforce.

7.2.5 Organizational practices

The first organizational practice is that of adjusting the mission statement. In this mission statement there has to be clearly stated that diversity is supported by the organization and thus everybody is welcome regardless of skin color, age, gender etcetera. Almost every document of ERSV points to this practice.

A second action that needs to be taken in order to avoid accidents at the workplace is visualizing security prescriptions along with machinery instructions and work regulations. According to the project developer of Leuven this should benefit everyone in the company. This is why:

"Visualization occurs often because it is something you can do in the area of language policy. It does, however, work better for the Dutch-speaking employees as well to express your safety prescriptions in photos [...] instead of putting up a text. Nobody reads that text and then people don't know what to do and accidents happen, for example."

(Project developer, ERSV Leuven)

When using a diversity plan to implement a diversity management strategy, two mandatory actions have to be implemented. The first, a DIVA-audit, was discussed in the previous section, the second is creating a workgroup for diversity or a diversity task force. In organizations with at least 50 employees this task can be performed by members of the committee or the works council. Smaller companies are free to choose the members of their diversity task force.

Diversity management can also include more fun actions like social group activities. This can be staff parties or a trip to, for example, Brussels. The diversity consultant of ACV thinks these social activities are very important.

"Try to treat people humane and search for things to improve collegiality. We are asking to do things like that too. For example, last year I got an organization that succeeded in organizing a little football match every month and that was something the entire company looked forward to."

(Diversity consultant, ACV)

Within the organizational practices you can also find a zero tolerance policy for racism, exemplary behavior of managers according to this zero tolerance policy and a few practices that require an infrastructural adjustment for the disabled. These actions that can be taken to the advantage of disabled workers are adjustments to the workplace so it is accessible, and adjusted materials for these workers. This is needed to improve their mobility according to 'Wegwijs in...'.

7.2.6 Communication

Communication is a very important aspect in the organization. It can create a certain image of the firm to the outside world. That is why 'it is important that customers are satisfied as well' (Project developer, ERSV Limburg). This can be accomplished by making sure the communication occurs in a straight line and that everyone communicates the same message to the outside world.

Another practice that concerns communication is implementing intercultural communication. This type of communication shows respect for the other culture and takes into account the differences between the two (or more) cultures. This type of communication is suggested by 'Diversity works', 'Diversity plans' and '20 companies testify about diversity at the workplace' amongst others.

7.3 Obstacles faced by intermediary actors

The intermediary actors face various obstacles that can be assigned to federal and Flemish policies, the specific SME-context and the inner working of the intermediary actors.

7.3.1 Obstacles relating to federal and Flemish policies

The obstacle that is mentioned by most of the respondents is that the intermediary organizations that are charged with one or more aspects of the EAD-policy are fragmented. There are so many organizations that it is not clear what organization handles which aspect of the EAD-policy. Especially smaller SMEs have trouble finding the right organization. This is because in smaller organizations employees have to take on more responsibilities than those of a well-structured large enterprise and they thus cannot spare the time needed to plow through this confusing structure. On top of that, SMEs often do not have HR personnel that can take up this task. The job consultant of Voka in Leuven explains it like this:

"From the point of view of Jobkanaal we see that solely for the region of Leuven there are about 40 organizations that work around diversity. How do you expect a company to gain insight in this if it is not his core business?! That is not possible. Even we sometimes have to search and

look and think 'OK, what do they do again and what do they do, OK, and they do this but with another emphasis and they do that'. So in my opinion it is too much fragmented."

(Job consultant, Jobkanaal Leuven)

Another obstacle that finds its roots in a high degree of fragmentation is that of the employment measures and subsidies. Both the federal and the Flemish government offer a wide range of financial compensations but these measures do not always reach the companies who can use them the most. This is best explained by the job consultant of Jobkanaal Leuven.

"I think that something has to be done to, perhaps, place it all under one thing because sometimes it's just hard to see the forest through the trees. It is good that there is so much and that has to be there to warm people up to certain things but if there is so much that it is difficult to... You can feel that when you visit companies, there is so much and they just don't know where they can go. There are so many employment measures that if I had to recite them all now, I would still be reciting later this day, I think. So it all gets a bit much sometimes."

(Job consultant, Jobkanaal Leuven)

The respondents, however, also state that a decrease in these measures is bad for diversity in organizations. They stated that these measures are important to win employers over when it comes to hiring people from disadvantaged groups. For small companies these measures can be important to bridge the period in which a newly hired employee can adjust to the new environment and the pace of work. Especially for the employment of disabled people these measures are important.

7.3.2 Obstacles relating to SMEs' context

The biggest obstacle with which intermediary actors are confronted is SMEs' lack of time and people. Diversity management requires a lot of attention and thus time. As the literature review has shown most SMEs do not have an HR professional, let alone an HR department. This implicates that an employee or in most cases the employer has to take on these responsibilities in combination with his other tasks. An explanation is given by the project developer of Leuven.

"Especially in smaller companies that often lack the presence of an HR officer this has to be included in the tasks of someone who is responsible for the coordination of other things. They want to do it but they see that their core tasks require a lot of attention and time as well. So it is often purely the lack of time that plays a role."

(Project developer, ERSV Leuven)

The lack of time is not the only constraint faced by SMEs. They often lack the financial means or the organizational capacity needed for some actions of diversity management. An example of the lack of financial means is given with regard to the diversity plans. The diversity consultant of Leuven states that a diversity plan requires a significant financial investment that is not proportionally compensated by the subsidies linked to these plans. For small enterprises a cost of, for example, 10.000 Euro is rather high while this cost is almost negligible in large enterprises.

The lack of organizational capacity comes to the surface when discussing training for all employees. An example given by the project developer of Leuven states that if the company wants to train its employees that work at a production line they do not have the luxury of temporarily shutting down their production. A large enterprise on the other hand has the required manpower to make sure production does not have to be shut down.

Another obstacle that is directly related to family-owned SMEs is that employees sometimes are so loyal to the owner that they do not dare to question him. According to the diversity consultant of ACV, this is the consequence of the more easy-going approach of the family man that runs the company and is respected for it by his employees. This implicates that it is up to the employer to decide whether the company takes up diversity management or not.

7.3.3 Obstacles relating to the inner working of the intermediary actors

The obstacles relating to the intermediary actors are the lack of reputation with the Flemish companies, a lack of efficiency of the used technological system and the requirements that are needed for a diversity consultant of the trade union to be present in a company. The first obstacle relates to all the intermediary actors. More publicity is needed to be able to work on diversity in more companies. Especially SMEs do not find their way to the intermediary actors easily while these are the companies that need the guidance the most.

The obstacle that relates to the lack of efficiency of the technological system is one that is faced specifically by Jobkanaal. It sometimes takes some time before the employment agencies read the job advertisements. This results in the fact that sometimes vacancies are already filled before they get a chance to redirect a candidate for the job.

"Sometimes it happens that we proactively call a few employment agencies to see if they have the right profiles so they can actually anticipate more rapidly. This is done because we notice that employment agencies sometimes visit the site only once a week and then the vacancy is either already filled by someone else, especially last year this was the case because there was no shortage then [...], so a lot of candidates could react speedily. This while it takes about two weeks before we actually receive the first CVs through Jobkanaal so by acting proactively, you pick up the phone and you call employment intermediaries and you say 'this is

the company, this is the vacancy, do you think you have somebody? Send the candidate along.”

(Job consultant, Jobkanaal Limburg)

In the case of the diversity consultants of the trade unions the obstacle is that they cannot be present in companies with less than 50 employees because these companies do not have a union representative present. Diversity consultants can answer questions from employees of small companies but actively working on diversity management in these companies is not possible because of this requirement.

7.4 Opportunities faced by intermediary actors

There are several topics in which the opportunities pertaining to the intermediary actors can be categorized: demographic changes, the specific context of SMEs and the inner working of the intermediary actors. Some of the opportunities mentioned below are not directly related to the intermediary actors but they can be used as arguments to convince SMEs of the use of diversity management. From this point-of-view these opportunities also pertain to the intermediary actors.

7.4.1 Opportunities relating to demographic changes

Relating to demographic changes there is only one opportunity mentioned. This is the fact that there will be a shortage on the labor market in the future. According to the respondents this shortage will occur in the next 5 to 15 years. This a large time span because it combines the prognoses of one respondent saying that the shortage will manifest in 5 to 10 years while another’s prognoses

is that we will have to deal with the shortage in 10 to 15 years. This is seen as the biggest opportunity by the project developer of ERSV Leuven.

"They will have to try employing everyone they can get because we're going to have a huge shortage on the labor market within ten to fifteen years. All data proves this and this is actually the biggest opportunity."

(Project developer, ERSV Leuven)

The opportunity in this demographical change is that if companies start managing their diversity now and open themselves up to the disadvantaged groups they increase the pool in which they can find adequate employees. One of the respondents even expects that companies will have to find their employees in other countries, which will increase the multicultural aspect of our society even more.

7.4.2 Opportunities relating to SMEs' context

The opportunities relating to SMEs' context can be divided in opportunities related to all SMEs, those related to family-owned SMEs and those related to growing SMEs. For every SME where diversity is managed correctly an increase in productivity, more cost savings and a better atmosphere are detected.

"[Companies] notice that fewer new employees resign since they did a better screening, since we have a good welcome policy and mentoring program and since they started to check in with the newly hired employees after one week, after two weeks... So that can be a very specific result that they also notice. And eventually, always replacing those employees costs money. It is difficult to determine how much money but it uses up massive resources."

(Project developer, ERSV Leuven)

The increase in productivity is, according to the project developer of Limburg, a result of the fact that everything becomes more transparent and thus everybody knows what his tasks are and what tasks are not his. An increase of creativity is due to the fact that people from various backgrounds are hired. The job consultant of Voka Leuven said it was better for the company if they did not only employ 'average Joe's'. A much more dynamic company is created when people with different perspectives, different backgrounds and different characteristics are put together. The better atmosphere that was mentioned by the diversity consultant of Limburg is said, by other respondents, to be one of the aspects that adds to the productivity and the decline in turnover.

Another opportunity for SMEs in relation to diversity management in their organization is that, according to several respondents, it is possible in every single company to work on diversity. They do mention that it might take some more time in SMEs than it does in large enterprises but it is possible nonetheless.

"[Diversity management] should be possible in every company because there are so many different topics that can be addressed and every company has its own difficulties."

(Diversity consultant, ABVV)

Other related opportunities can be assigned to the specific context of the family-owned SME. The diversity consultant of ACV notices that this type of SME often already works on some of the topics of diversity management without labeling them as such. This should make the process of diversity management run more smoothly.

Another opportunity related to the specific context of the family-owned SME is the easy adaptation to the company for starters. The job consultant of Unizo in Leuven formulates it like this:

"Sometimes it is easier to start working in a small company where you aren't treated as a number and where you get guidance and support from

everybody. In a large enterprise you end up in an entire system where it can be more difficult to find your place than in a smaller company. It is possible that in smaller companies they don't have the time for guidance and support but when they do, in my opinion, you will find your place faster than in a bigger company."

(Job consultant, Jobkanaal Leuven)

The biggest opportunity of working on diversity and using a diversity plan is for growing businesses. These companies need more structure as they grow in order to keep up with the changes. The project developer of Leuven explained it like this:

"A moment when we can do very useful things in a company is when a small SME starts to grow. At first everything was easygoing and very informally organized and then suddenly it starts to grow dramatically and then you work on structure and everything goes wrong. They come to a point where they want to grow more but they cannot grow because they do not control their processes anymore. That is a difficult time but it's also the moment that there are a lot of opportunities to work on HR and diversity."

(Project developer, ERSV Leuven)

7.4.3 Opportunities related to intermediary actors

The opportunities that are related to the intermediary actors can be divided into three topics: cooperation, specific services and diversity plans.

7.4.3.1 Cooperation

When the intermediary actors cooperate more they can get better results. This means that the project developers of ERSV, the job consultants of Jobkanaal and

the diversity consultants of the trade unions should try to approach companies together. Especially for the project developers and the job consultants this approach could be more effective because they both approach the employers. Nowadays they work together in the sense that they often have meetings with each other and try to synchronize their services but by approaching companies together this could be done much more effectively.

"Actually, we just need to make sure that we offer added value to each other, that a company is better off, that it is better supported, that you actually can do much more about your diverse staff or that you can approach it more professionally. [...] actually we should hit the road together to tell our story."

(Job consultant, Jobkanaal Limburg)

Not only the cooperation amongst the intermediary actors has opportunities, the cooperation of Jobkanaal and VDAB has those as well. The first reason for this opportunity is that because of this partnership the job advertisements are also controlled by an extra professional who also searches for possible candidates from the target groups of Jobkanaal.

Another aspect of this partnership is that they use the same system which gives advantages to SMEs because, for example, companies can choose to meet with someone from Jobkanaal just by checking a box when uploading a job advertisement. This is a very easy way for companies to get in touch with the job consultants and get to know what Jobkanaal is about.

The opportunity that combines the previous two is that by using the same system and having an extra professional working on the job advertisements the job advertisement automatically also has to be handled according to the rules set up for VDAB. The employees of VDAB have to undertake action for a job advert within three days after it is uploaded. This way companies are more likely to fill their vacancies in a short amount of time. The job consultants of Jobkanaal could

use this opportunity to convince employers of the advantages of hiring staff with the help of Jobkanaal.

7.4.3.2 Specific services of the intermediary actors

With regard to the specific services of the intermediary actors, numerous opportunities are mentioned by the respondents. First the opportunities that relate to the services offered by ERSV are discussed followed by a discussion of the opportunities relating to the trade unions. The last part consists of opportunities relating to the services offered by Jobkanaal.

ERSV offers two important opportunities for SMEs when it comes to their service of drawing up diversity plans. The first opportunity is directly related to these diversity plans. Both the project developer of Leuven and the project developer of Limburg mentioned that they try to do as much paperwork as possible themselves. This way SMEs have more time to focus on their core business and the implementation of the diversity plans. This is shown in this statement:

"We draw up a proposal with their input in order to relieve their administration. So they don't have to do much administrative work for it. We also draw up the end report. After the duration of the diversity plan we go to the company to see what has been implemented and put it in one structured report."

(Project developer, ERSV Leuven)

The second important opportunity is that ERSV Limburg organizes several courses during the year that are specifically meant for small SMEs because of their budgetary restraint. The topics of these courses include mentorship programs, age awareness in HR policy and selection skills. All of these courses are offered at a low price.

Another service, aside from that of drawing up diversity plans, is that the project developers help the companies with finding the right employment measure for

the right employee. This is also important for SMEs because they are usually not up to speed when it comes to these matters.

Trade unions' main concern is the expansion of the basis for diversity. The union representatives that are guided by the diversity consultants are people who have been chosen by the employees so they have faith in them and follow them when they say that they support diversity. These union representatives have a lot of power in the organization that cannot be ignored by the employers. In SMEs and large enterprises alike it is important to gain the support of the union representative. This can be done by asking the diversity consultant for help.

The diversity consultant of Leuven also stated that they have courses that are customized based on the requests they get. This can be useful for SMEs to get their employees informed on diversity. After all, the diversity consultants can adjust their course to the level of the employees and use more practical examples that are easier to understand.

Opportunities for SMEs relating to Jobkanaal can be divided into several effects of the different services. The first effect is that the companies can save time by using the services of Jobkanaal. This saving of time is realized in the process of the service of recruitment and in the guidance in the employment measures. When using Jobkanaal for recruitment the only tasks the employer has to do are drawing up a job advertisement, conduct the interview and passing along the information of the newly hired employee to the job consultant. Time in this process is also saved because of the screening and selection that is done in advance by the employment agencies.

The guidance in the abundance of employment measures also saves time for the companies. They do not have to disentwine all the employment measures themselves. Another advantage of this service is that companies can get money from the government for hiring a certain type of person. A lot of small companies do not know what measures there are and this service offers them the measures they can apply to on a silver platter.

The fact that the screening and selection of candidates is done by professionals also offers an opportunity for SMEs, especially for those who lack an HR professional. If a candidate is applying for the job via Jobkanaal it is probable that he has the profile that the company is looking for. The number of applications also diminishes because of this service. This again can save the company time in the recruitment process.

One of the most important effects of using Jobkanaal is that companies can reach a larger group of candidates. Most of the target groups of Jobkanaal cannot be approached through the regular labor market and the employment agencies Jobkanaal works with can approach these groups.

There is an opportunity for SMEs that can be linked specifically to the job consultant of Unizo in Leuven. They offer the services of an HRM coach that is specialized in the coaching of SMEs.

7.4.3.3 Diversity plans

Some opportunities can be directly linked to the specific characteristics of diversity plans. For SMEs it is important that the plans are customized to the specific needs and characteristics of their company. This is one of the aspects that is emphasized by the project developers.

Diversity plans are also very flexible tools for managing diversity. This is ideal for SMEs and large enterprises in general but especially for growing SMEs. Because of their growth some actions in the diversity plan do not apply anymore. In that case the action is either removed from the plan or replaced by another action that does apply in the new context of that company. This is explained by the project developer of Limburg.

"Suppose, you included 5 actions in your diversity plan but the reality is that you only had time to implement 3 of them, then that isn't a problem. You just include those actions in the next diversity plan. If you included

only 2 actions in your plan and you want to add other actions then that is possible. It is a flexible tool customized to the needs of the company.”

(Project developer, Limburg)

In a diversity plan actions can be included for promotion opportunities for employees. Promoting, however, can happen in a vertical line and in a horizontal line. An example of a 'vertical' promotion is when you move from worker on a production line to foreman. 'Horizontal' promotion is when you get to do another job on the same level. This horizontal promotion is important in smaller SMEs because in small companies employees will often have more responsibilities than in a larger company. This is because larger companies are more structured and their employees are more specialized.

8 Conclusions

The increasing diversity of our workforce asks for a proper management in the workplace. This seems especially difficult for SMEs because of their lack of HR professionals (Cardon & Stevens, 2004). There are, however, in Flanders intermediary actors to support and guide this diversity management in companies. ERSV, Jobkanaal and the trade unions ACV, ABVV and ACLVB provide their services free of charge. Their job is to convince companies of the advantages of diversity in the organization and to identify and suggest diversity management practices these organizations could implement to raise the employment rates and career opportunities of disadvantaged socio-demographic groups while enlarging the pool of labor companies can draw from. To achieve this the argument that is used the most by the intermediary actors is the change in demographics that will result in a shortage on the labor market. From the research it became clear that many SMEs still consider diversity as a sort of taboo. The intermediary actors have to adjust their approach to this by approaching the issue from other angles, e.g. a sustainable HR policy with attention for equal opportunities. Aside from this, the intermediary actors face several other obstacles. Naturally opportunities are present as well. In the research presented above, I wanted to find out what obstacles and opportunities the intermediary actors come in contact with.

8.1 Arguments

The first findings of my research are the arguments used by intermediary actors to convince SMEs of the use of diversity management. Arguments that are mentioned by the respondents and the policy documents include the shortage on the labor market, an enhancement of company performance, working on a sustainable HR-policy, free services, subsidies and an initial screening and selection of candidates (this latter only by Jobkanaal). In general the interviewees state that they have to adapt their arguments to the specific needs and priorities of the potential client. Aside from the specific needs and priorities

of the companies, the diversity consultants also have to take the economic situation of the company into account.

The arguments used by the intermediary actors show only little resemblance to the arguments proposed by the literature. Arguments that are used the most by the intermediary actors do not resemble any aspect of the business case. This could be explained by the changing demographics and thus the upcoming shortage on the labor market (Flemish department of work and social economics, 2011; Standaard, 2011; Unizo, 2008). This is because the changing demographics are presented as a given (an environmental constraint) rather than indirectly through the development of new 'opportunities' such as creativity, innovation, etcetera.

Arguments also have to be adapted to the overall economic situation. When the economy is booming the social aspect of diversity can be used as an argument while during and after a financial crisis the emphasis lies on changing demographics and performance. This indicates that diversity management is still not fully accepted as a needed social commitment by Flemish employers but rather as a mean to enhance performance.

A difference in arguments can be found between those proposed by the literature and those mentioned in the interviews. Arguments in the literature are very diverse but with an emphasis on the business case and thus mostly arguments related to the company's performance in terms of creativity and innovation, servicing specific markets segments and reduced personnel costs. A possible explanation for this difference in argumentation is that the Flemish government has chosen an incentive policy to increase the use of diversity management. In this framework, diversity management consultants implement labor market policy with companies. Where diversity is rather enforced primarily through the law, companies will more likely hire a private diversity consultant who can approach clients with arguments focusing on business enhancement and growth. This indicates that argumentations not only reflect the SME specificity and the

economic conjuncture but also the specific institutional context including governmental policies.

8.2 Practices

Several practices that were mentioned in the interviews - like mentoring programs, career path management, diversity audit, diversity task force and work-family balance - are similar to those proposed by the literature. The only practices that were mentioned in the literature and could not be found in the interviews and policy documents are training against prejudices, accountability of managers and setting up in-house day care facilities. This could mean that SMEs can implement the same practices to manage diversity as large enterprises. However, just implementing random practices does not work. Another conclusion that can be drawn from this resemblance is that the actions proposed by the literature have become more mainstream and accessible.

I found, however, that the intermediary actors also propose numerous practices that cannot be directly linked to the practices in the literature. Those practices include competence management, welcome policy, IBO-contracts, ergonomic training, job rotation, visualization and training selection skills, to name a few. Some of these practices, e.g. IBO-contracts and welcome policy, are related to specific organizations in Flanders. The IBO-contracts are designed by VDAB so they cannot be mentioned in international literature. Introducing a welcome policy is a practice that has been obligated by the Flemish government. Other practices could be linked to the specific context of SMEs because they often lack trained HR personnel and thus have to train their skills (e.g. training selection skills and leadership training). This fact can explain the absence of these practices in the literature which is mainly based on diversity management in large enterprises.

The general conclusion with regard to the practices is that SMEs can implement practices that were designed by and for large enterprises as well as practices designed specifically for SMEs. This while it can be assumed that large

enterprises can only implement practices designed by and for large enterprises. A logical explanation is that SMEs lack some expertise on certain topics and thus have a greater need to further train their employees.

8.3 Obstacles

The findings show that the fragmentation of the intermediary actors, SMEs' lack of time, people, financial means and organizational capacity, a lack in reputation of the intermediary actors themselves, a lack of efficiency of the used technological system and the requirements that are needed for a diversity consultant of the trade union to be present in a company are some of the main obstacles faced by the intermediary actors. Not all of these obstacles can be tackled by the intermediary actors themselves. For instance, the obstacle of fragmentation of the organizations of the EAD-policy can only be handled by the Flemish government.

The obstacles that can be tackled by the intermediary actors, however, are mostly related to the working of the intermediary actors themselves. Several respondents mentioned the lack of reputation with the Flemish companies. This obstacle can be overcome by using advertisement and other promotion means. The only obstacle that can intervene in this solution is a lack of funding.

Another obstacle that can be overcome is the lack of efficiency of the used technological system to communicate vacancies to the labor intermediaries. Reviewing the system and looking into the possibility of mailing the vacancy could be an option.

Diversity consultants of trade unions encounter the specific obstacle that trade unions are present by law only in organizations with at least 50 employees. To solve this problem the diversity consultants could be given more rights so they can offer their expertise to smaller firms as well. But first, an analysis of their usefulness in smaller firms should be made.

Intermediary actors cannot bring much change to the lack of time, financial means and organizational capacity SMEs are confronted with. They can, however, anticipate these restraints and take on the paperwork that comes with a diversity plan. The financial means are partly provided by the subsidies attached to a diversity plan. This leaves the organizational capacity constraint as the only obstacle left.

8.4 Opportunities

The findings concerning the opportunities include the shortage on the labor market, an increase in productivity, more cost savings and a better atmosphere at the workplace, the possibility of diversity management in all SMEs and the fact that family-owned SMEs often already work on some of the topics of diversity management. Other findings are that growing businesses can profit from the services of the intermediary actors, a better cooperation between the intermediary actors can be beneficial to SMEs and that the services of the intermediary actors can save time for SMEs in the area of paperwork and recruitment.

An upcoming shortage on the labor market is mentioned as the biggest opportunity. This could make SMEs see that diversity management is a necessity that cannot be ignored for much longer. Intermediary actors can, and already do, use this to their advantage in the promotion of diversity management.

The findings concerning cost savings, increase in productivity and an increase in creativity suggest the presence of the business case for diversity (Robinson & Dechant, 1997). These are arguments that could be used by the intermediary actors to convince SMEs of the use of diversity management.

Another finding is that diversity management should be possible in every company, including SMEs. The only requirement to achieve this is the willingness and the capacity of the employer to find suitable approaches and solutions.

The fact that family-owned SMEs already work on topics of diversity management without naming them as such can be used by the intermediary actors. If they can make these topics visible to these employers it could be easier to convince them to further develop diversity management policies and practices.

8.5 Limitations and future research

This thesis was focussed on three intermediary actors to find opportunities and obstacles. If a more detailed overview of the opportunities and obstacles across the various sectors is needed, the sector consultants should be included in the research.

Further research on the intermediary actors could be done across all Flemish provinces. This research could show differences in the approach in other regions. These other regions could also be influenced by a different composition of companies, a different composition of the labor market, and a different representation of the minority groups. All these factors could influence the approach used by the intermediary actors.

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Appendix

Questionnaire ERSV

Inleidende vragen:

Kunt u uzelf even voorstellen (achtergrond, opleiding, carrièreverloop...)?

Wat is uw functie in deze organisatie? Wat zijn de taken verbonden aan uw functie binnen deze organisatie?

Wat doet u hier specifiek naar diversiteit toe?

Benadering bedrijven:

Wat is het profiel van de bedrijven die u begeleidt in hun diversiteitsbeleid? Grootte? Jonge bedrijven/oudere bedrijven? Alleen private sector? Welke arbeidsmarktsectoren (ook social profit)?

Hoe gebeurt de toeleiding van bedrijven naar uw organisatie? Komen de bedrijven die u helpt allemaal zelf naar u toe of contacteert u ook bedrijven om ze aan te zetten een diversiteitsbeleid te voeren? Werkt u samen met andere actoren om bedrijven toe te leiden?

Indien bedrijven twijfelen aan een diversiteitsbeleid of aan bepaalde aspecten van een diversiteitsbeleid, hoe probeert u hen dan te overtuigen? Welke argumenten gebruikt u om bedrijven te overtuigen van de meerwaarde van diversiteit/ een diversiteitsbeleid voor hun organisatie? (verschil KMO's?)

Welke voordelen zien bedrijven zelf in het voeren van een diversiteitsbeleid? Wat is voor hen een meerwaarde? (verschil KMO's?)

Welke nadelen zien bedrijven zelf in het voeren van een diversiteitsbeleid? Wat zijn voor hen de obstakels? (verschil KMO's?)

Diversiteitsplan:

Algemeen:

Hoe gaat u te werk om een diversiteitsplan op te stellen? Wat doet u? Wat wordt door de bedrijven zelf gedaan?

Ik heb gezien dat er 4 types diversiteitsplannen zijn (instap, standaard, groei en cluster). Kunt u in het kort even zeggen wat juist de verschillen zijn tussen die diversiteitsplannen?

Welk van deze types is het meest geschikt voor/wordt het meest gebruikt bij KMO's? Waarom?

Wordt een diversiteitsplan opgesteld aan de hand van standaardpraktijken of worden er regelmatig volledig nieuwe praktijken voorgesteld? Worden reeds toegepaste diversiteitspraktijken geïntegreerd in een diversiteitsplan?

KMO's:

Als u een diversiteitsplan moet opstellen voor een KMO, waarop moet u dan letten? Welke verschillen tussen een KMO en een groot bedrijf hebben een impact op de aanpak van het opstellen van een diversiteitsplan? Wat zijn de meest voorkomende verschillen in de diversiteitsplannen tussen grote bedrijven en KMO's?

En hoe verschilt dat tussen een middelgrote onderneming en een kleine/micro onderneming?

Kan u aangeven op welke manier een diversiteitsplan wordt aangepast aan de strategie van een bedrijf? Hoe verschilt dit tussen KMO's en grote bedrijven?

Kan u aangeven op welke manier een diversiteitsplan wordt aangepast aan het reeds aanwezige personeel in een organisatie? Houdt u rekening met de samenstelling van het reeds aanwezige personeel bij het opstellen van een diversiteitsplan? Hoe verschilt dit tussen KMO's en grote bedrijven?

Kan u aangeven op welke manier wordt rekening gehouden met de klanten van het bedrijf bij het opstellen van een diversiteitsplan? Houdt u rekening met de samenstelling van de markt waarbinnen het bedrijf actief is? Hoe verschilt dit tussen KMO's en grote bedrijven?

Kan u aangeven op welke manier wordt rekening gehouden met de sector waarbinnen het bedrijf actief is bij het opstellen van een diversiteitsplan? Hoe verschilt dit tussen KMO's en grote bedrijven?

Kan u aangeven op welke manier wordt rekening gehouden met reeds bestaande informele beleidsprocessen en praktijken in KMO's?

4 gebieden:

Op de site staan 4 gebieden waarin de acties van het diversiteitsplan zich situeren: Instroom, doorstroom, structuur en cultuur, en verhinderen van uitstroom. Wordt een diversiteitsplan altijd opgesteld aan de hand van deze 4 gebieden of kan er geopteerd worden om maar 1 of enkele van deze gebieden op te nemen?

Kunt u kort beschrijven wat het idee achter elk gebied is? Hoe draagt elk gebied bij tot een verbetering voor het bedrijf?

Kan u voor elk van deze gebieden aangeven welke praktijken worden toegepast? En hoe verschillen die praktijken tussen grote bedrijven en KMO's?

Instream:

Met welke criteria moet u rekening houden bij het gebied instroom in het diversiteitsplan? Speelt bijvoorbeeld de samenstelling van het huidige personeel hierbij een rol? Op welke manier?

Wat wordt er aangepast binnen het selectie- en aanwervingsproces?

Zijn er ook acties die gericht zijn naar het personeel dat verantwoordelijk is voor de aanwerving?

Wat zijn de meest voorkomende initiatieven die worden toegepast na de aanwerving om bijvoorbeeld de nieuwe werknemer te begeleiden met de introductie in een nieuwe omgeving?

Doorstroom:

Wat zijn de criteria waar u rekening mee moet houden binnen het gebied doorstroom in het diversiteitsplan? Wat zijn hier de grote verschillen tussen grote bedrijven en KMO's?

Structuur en cultuur:

Kunt u mij vertellen met welke criteria u rekening moet houden binnen het gebied structuur en cultuur in het diversiteitsplan? Wat zijn hier de verschillen tussen grote bedrijven en KMO's?

Probeer u de minderheidsgroepen ook te integreren in de informele processen (vb. met collega's iets drinken na het werk, vieren van verjaardag...) Hoe probeert u dit te bereiken?

Moet dit anders aangepakt worden in een KMO?

Eén van de acties die op de site binnen het gebied 'structuur en cultuur' voorgesteld wordt is communicatietraining. Wat zou ik mij bij zo'n communicatietraining moeten voorstellen? Op welke manier draagt dit bij tot het diversiteitsbeleid in zijn geheel?

Ook heb ik gelezen dat er ook acties zijn als loopbaandienstverlening en -ontwikkeling. Kunt u mij uitleggen wat dit is?

Verhinderen uitstroom:

Het uiteindelijke doel, voor het bedrijf, is het verhinderen/beperken van uitstroom. Worden hier nog specifieke acties voor gebruikt? Of mag ik dit zien als een resultaat van geslaagde acties in de andere 3 gebieden?

Implementatie:

Na het opstellen van een diversiteitsplan, hoe gebeurt de implementatie van het diversiteitsplan in het bedrijf? Hebt u daar een rol in of is de implementatie volledig in handen van de bedrijven?

Hoe wordt het diversiteitsplan opgevolgd? Wat is uw rol hierbij?

Evaluatie:

Hoe wordt een diversiteitsplan geëvalueerd? Wat is uw rol hierbij? Welke andere partijen evalueren het (bedrijfsleider, werknemers, overheid)?

Wordt de vooruitgang van het bedrijf geëvalueerd nadat het diversiteitsplan volledig geïmplementeerd is? Aan de hand van welke criteria?

Hoe evalueren bedrijven zelf het uitvoeren van een diversiteitsbeleid? (zowel tijdens als achteraf) Welke voordelen/nadelen zien zij? Welke meerwaarde zien zij? Welke obstakels komen ze tegen? Zien bedrijven die met uw hulp een diversiteitsbeleid hebben ingevoerd, een positieve evolutie in hun prestaties?

Samenwerking:

Werkt het ERSV samen met andere organisaties rond diversiteit in ondernemingen? Met welke organisaties?

Wat houdt die samenwerking juist in?

Persoonlijke visie:

Hoe zou u diversiteit definiëren?

Denkt u dat diversiteit/ een diversiteitsbeleid in ieder bedrijf een haalbare kaart is? (verschil KMO's?)

Wat vindt u persoonlijk de grootste opportuniteiten voor het voeren van een diversiteitsbeleid in ondernemingen? Wat vindt u persoonlijk de grootste belemmeringen?

Wat vindt u van de inspanningen die de Vlaamse overheid doet rond diversiteit in ondernemingen?

Wat kan volgens u beter op vlak van diversiteitsbeleid voor ondernemingen in Vlaanderen?

Vindt u dat de werking van het ERSV rond diversiteit nog verbeterd kan worden? Hoe? Zijn er voorwaarden die eerst vervuld moeten zijn voor die verbeteringen (vb. aanpassing van wetgeving...)?

Is er nog iets dat u kwijt wilt?

Questionnaire Jobkanaal

Inleidende vragen:

Kunt u uzelf even voorstellen (achtergrond, opleiding, carrièreverloop...)?

Wat is uw functie in deze organisatie? Wat zijn de taken verbonden aan uw functie binnen deze organisatie?

Wat doet u hier specifiek naar diversiteit toe?

Benadering bedrijven:

Wat is het profiel van de bedrijven die u begeleidt in hun diversiteitsbeleid? Grootte? Jonge bedrijven/oudere bedrijven? Alleen private sector? Welke arbeidsmarktsectoren (ook social profit)?

Hoe gebeurt de toeleiding van bedrijven naar uw organisatie? Komen de bedrijven die u helpt allemaal zelf naar u toe of contacteert u ook bedrijven om ze aan te zetten gebruik te maken van de diensten die Jobkanaal aanbiedt? Werkt u samen met andere actoren om bedrijven toe te leiden?

Indien bedrijven twijfelen aan de voordelen van een divers personeel, hoe probeert u hen dan te overtuigen? Welke argumenten gebruikt u om bedrijven te overtuigen van de meerwaarde van een divers personeel voor hun organisatie? (verschil kleinere en grotere bedrijven?)

Welke voordelen zien bedrijven zelf in het aannemen van allochtonen, personen met een arbeidshandicap of 50-plussers? Wat is voor hen een meerwaarde? (verschil kleinere en grotere bedrijven?)

Welke nadelen zien bedrijven zelf in het aannemen van allochtonen, personen met een arbeidshandicap of 50-plussers? Wat zijn voor hen de obstakels? (verschil kleinere en grotere bedrijven?)

Jobkanaal:

Algemeen:

Hoe werkt Jobkanaal precies? Wat doet u? Wat wordt door de bedrijven zelf gedaan?

KMO's:

Als u een vacature/functieprofiel moet opstellen voor een KMO, waarop moet u dan letten? Welke verschillen tussen een KMO en een groot bedrijf hebben een impact op de aanpak van het opstellen

van een vacature/functieprofiel? Wat zijn de meest voorkomende verschillen in de vacatures/functieprofielen tussen kleinere en grotere bedrijven?

En hoe verschilt dat tussen een middelgrote onderneming en een kleine/micro onderneming?

Kan u aangeven in welke mate de bedrijven die een beroep doen op Jobkanaal, dit doen uit strategische overwegingen? Hoe verschilt dit tussen kleinere en grotere bedrijven?

4 stappen:

Op de site staan 4 stappen die gevolgd worden om werknemers te vinden voor de bedrijven die een beroep doen op de diensten van Jobkanaal: eerste kennismaking, samen in één netwerk, screening & selectie en advies voor een soepele aanwerving en integratie op de werkvloer. Kunt u kort beschrijven wat het idee achter elke stap is? Hoe draagt elke stap bij tot het uiteindelijke resultaat, de tewerkstelling van een persoon uit een kansengroep?

Zijn er bedrijven die na de kennismaking toch beslissen om niet verder te gaan? Kan u de redenen geven waarom ze dit besloten hebben? Merkt u hier een verschil tussen kleinere en grotere bedrijven?

Opvolging:

Eens de vacature opgesteld en verspreid is, hoe gebeurt de opvolging van die vacature door u? Wordt deze vacature ook nog opgevolgd door andere instanties (vb. het bedrijf zelf, VDAB, ...) ?

Evaluatie:

Gebeurt er ook een evaluatie om te kijken of de vacature is ingevuld met een persoon die tot één van de kansengroepen behoren? Weet u ongeveer wat de slaagkansen zijn?

Is uw taak na de aanwerving volbracht? Of heeft u nog een verdere adviserende rol?

Hoe evalueren bedrijven zelf de toevoeging van een persoon uit een kansengroep aan hun personeel? Welke voordelen/nadelen zien zij? Welke meerwaarde zien zij? Welke obstakels komen ze tegen? Zien bedrijven die met uw hulp een meer divers personeel hebben samengesteld, een positieve evolutie in hun prestaties?

Samenwerking:

Jobkanaal is de samenwerking van heel wat organisaties. Kunt u toelichten welke organisaties dit allemaal zijn en wat de taak van iedere organisatie binnen dit project is?

Werkt Jobkanaal/u ook nog samen met andere organisaties rond diversiteit in ondernemingen? Met welke organisaties?

Wat houdt die samenwerking juist in?

Persoonlijke visie:

Hoe zou u diversiteit definiëren?

Denkt u dat diversiteit/ een diversiteitsbeleid in ieder bedrijf een haalbare kaart is? (verschil kleinere en grotere bedrijven?)

Wat vindt u persoonlijk de grootste opportuniteiten voor het voeren van een diversiteitsbeleid in ondernemingen? Wat vindt u persoonlijk de grootste belemmeringen?

Wat vindt u van de inspanningen die de Vlaamse overheid doet rond diversiteit in ondernemingen?

Wat kan volgens u beter op vlak van diversiteitsbeleid voor ondernemingen in Vlaanderen?

Vindt u dat de werking van Jobkanaal/Voka/Unizo rond diversiteit nog verbeterd kan worden? Hoe? Zijn er voorwaarden die eerst vervuld moeten zijn voor die verbeteringen (vb. aanpassing van wetgeving...)?

Is er nog iets dat u kwijt wilt?

Questionnaire trade unions (ACV & ABVV)

Inleidende vragen:

Kunt u uzelf even voorstellen (achtergrond, opleiding, carrièreverloop...)?

Wat is uw functie in deze organisatie? Wat zijn de taken verbonden aan uw functie binnen deze organisatie?

Wat doet u hier specifiek naar diversiteit toe?

Bedrijven:

Wat is het profiel van de bedrijven die u begeleidt in hun diversiteitsbeleid? Grootte? Jonge bedrijven/oude bedrijven? Alleen private sector? Welke arbeidsmarktsectoren (ook social profit)? Komt dit overeen met het profiel van de bedrijven die een vakbondsafgevaardigde hebben?

Hoe gebeurt de toeleiding van bedrijven naar u als diversiteitsconsulent? Komen de bedrijven die u helpt zelf naar u toe of contacteert u ook bedrijven om ze aan te zetten een diversiteitsbeleid uit te werken?

Indien bedrijven twijfelen aan de voordelen van diversiteit op de werkvloer of aan bepaalde aspecten van een diversiteitsbeleid, hoe probeert u hen dan te overtuigen? Welke argumenten gebruikt u om bedrijven te overtuigen van de meerwaarde van diversiteit/een diversiteitsbeleid voor hun organisatie? (verschil KMO's?)

Welke voordelen zien bedrijven zelf in het voeren van een diversiteitsbeleid? Wat is voor hen een meerwaarde? (verschil KMO's?)

Welke nadelen zien bedrijven zelf in het voeren van een diversiteitsbeleid? Wat zijn voor hen de obstakels? (verschil KMO's?)

Taken diversiteitsconsulenten vakbond:

Diversiteitsplannen:

Hoe helpt u bij het opstellen en implementeren van diversiteitsplannen? Bent u er zelf bij betrokken of moet u de betrokken militanten begeleiden?

Wat zijn de meest voorkomende problemen/vragen die militanten hebben rond de diversiteitsplannen? Merkt u een verschil in problemen tussen deze van militanten in KMO's en deze van militanten in grote bedrijven?

Welke voordelen zien de militanten in het voeren van een diversiteitsbeleid? Wat is voor hen een meerwaarde? (verschil KMO's?)

Welke nadelen zien de militanten in het voeren van een diversiteitsbeleid? Wat zijn voor hen de obstakels? (verschil KMO's?)

Als u in een bedrijf geholpen heeft met het diversiteitsplan, wordt dit dan nog opgevolgd en geëvalueerd? Ziet u een positieve evolutie in prestaties van deze bedrijven? Zien bedrijven een positieve evolutie in hun prestaties?

Informatie verstrekken:

Komen de militanten ook naar u toe met vragen over diversiteit in het algemeen? Wat zijn hier de meest voorkomende vragen? Stellen militanten uit KMO's andere vragen of meer vragen dan militanten uit grote bedrijven?

Welke instrumenten gebruikt u om militanten te informeren over diversiteit in de onderneming? (Heeft u ook brochures en dergelijke om militanten beter te informeren over diversiteit in de onderneming? Over wat voor brochures gaat het dan?) Wie heeft deze instrumenten ontwikkeld? Wat is de inhoud van deze instrumenten? Hoe werden ze ontwikkeld (adhv eigen ervaringen, literatuur over diversiteit, met hulp van andere organisaties...)?

Geeft u vorming aan militanten over diversiteit in ondernemingen? Wat houdt die vorming in? Wat zijn de verschillende vormingsmodules? Wat is het idee achter iedere module? Moet de vorming aangepast worden als het gaat om militanten uit KMO's?

Samenwerking:

Werkt u samen met andere organisaties die met diversiteit bezig zijn? Met welke organisaties?

Wat houdt die samenwerking juist in?

ACV/ABVV heeft samen met andere vakbonden het initiatief effechecken.be op poten gezet. Wat houdt dit initiatief precies in?

Er wordt bij effechecken een checklist aangeboden om de werking van het personeelsbeleid te analyseren en aan de hand van deze analyse concrete tips te geven. Hoe is deze checklist tot stand gekomen? Op wat heeft u zich gebaseerd bij het opstellen van deze checklist?

Wordt het initiatief goed onthaald door bedrijven/militanten? Wat zijn de voordelen die zij zien in het initiatief? Wat zijn de nadelen?

Hoe verloopt de samenwerking met de andere vakbonden rond 'effe checken'? Is er een verschil in de benadering van diversiteit?

Persoonlijke visie:

Hoe zou u diversiteit definiëren?

Denkt u dat diversiteit/een diversiteitsbeleid in ieder bedrijf een haalbare kaart is? (verschil KMO's?)

Wat vindt u persoonlijk de grootste opportuniteiten voor het voeren van een diversiteitsbeleid in ondernemingen? Wat vindt u persoonlijk de grootste belemmeringen?

Wat vindt u van de inspanningen die de Vlaamse overheid doet rond diversiteit in ondernemingen?

Wat kan volgens u beter op vlak van diversiteitsbeleid voor ondernemingen in Vlaanderen?

Vindt u dat de werking van het ACV/ABVV rond diversiteit nog verbeterd kan worden? Hoe? Zijn er voorwaarden die eerst vervuld moeten zijn voor die verbeteringen (vb. aanpassing van wetgeving...)?

Is er nog iets dat u kwijt wilt?

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Ik/wij verlenen het wereldwijde auteursrecht voor de ingediende eindverhandeling:

The Belgian and Flemish equal opportunities policy: opportunities and obstacles for its implementation in SMEs

Richting: **Master of Management-Corporate Finance**

Jaar: **2011**

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Datum: **20/08/2011**