Just an Illusion of Equality?
The Gender Diversity Paradox in Norway

Berit Sund
PhD Scholar at the Department of Strategy and Management at NHH Norwegian School of Economics.
E-mail: Berit.Sund@nhh.no

ABSTRACT
Gender diversity in the workforce is a goal that organizations in many countries are working toward. This is the case also in Norway where gender equality is an important value, but even there the gender distribution in positions of power remains tilted in favor of men. The present article draws attention to the apparent contradiction between gender equality as a value and the lack of gender diversity in upper-echelon positions, and seeks to improve our understanding of this gender paradox by reviewing role theory and literatures on managerial cognition, gender as “doing”, and values. An alternative approach where these literatures are woven together is presented, and it is suggested that gender equality in Norway may be an illusion.

Keywords
gender diversity, gender equality, values, role theory, managerial cognition, gender as “doing”, Norwegian culture.

INTRODUCTION
The male dominance of upper-echelon management has in recent years attracted much attention from researchers, who have commonly interpreted it as an issue of gender diversity and sought explanations from a variety of angles. Different interpretations of this perceived lack of gender diversity include viewing it as a consequence of incongruence between gender roles and job roles (e.g. Eagly, 1987; Eagly et al., 2000; Eagly & Karau, 2002); as a consequence of people’s limited cognitive capacity leading to a preference for similar people in hiring and promotion decisions (e.g. Chattopadhyay et al., 1999); as an outcome of power (e.g. Huse & Solberg, 2006); as a result of the way gender is “done” (e.g. West & Zimmerman, 1987; Gherardi & Poggio, 2001; Pesonen et al., 2009). Regardless of theoretical orientation, the underlying issue is the same and has been identified in countries around the world: Women remain underrepresented in jobs and organizational levels typically associated with power, influence, status, and ultimately, money.
This article approaches gender diversity from the context of one particular national culture: Norway. Norway makes an interesting case for discussing gender diversity, not only because of the strong egalitarian tradition which this country has in common with its Nordic neighbors, but first and foremost because Norway has been a pioneer in the introduction of gender diversity measures. In 2006 Norway became the first country in the world to mandate gender diversity on the boards of public limited companies (PLCs). The law, which requires PLCs to ensure a board composition of at least 40% of both sexes, has sparked both media attention and the interest of other countries (Strom, 2015). Inspired by Norway, Spain, Iceland, Italy, Finland, and the Netherlands have since passed similar gender quotas (Bertrand et al., 2015). With the introduction of the quota, the distribution of female PLC board members has gone from 7% in 2003 to 41% in 2015. This positive development has not yet spilled over to other types of companies, however. In private limited companies, 18% of the board members were women in 2015, and this number has remained practically unchanged over the past decade.

The gender representation law is arguably symptomatic of something bigger, namely the value placed on equality in general, and gender equality in particular, in Norway. Norway has a history of government legislation intended to ensure gender equality going back to the Norwegian Gender Equality Act of 1978. To administer the law, Norway became first in the world to create an ombudsman role for gender equality in 1979 (NOU 2012:15). Various surveys and indices consistently promote Norway as one of the best countries to live in on account of, among other measures, gender equality. One example is the Human Development Index produced by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), where Norway has repeatedly been ranked as number one over the past decade, most recently in 2014 (HDI, 2014). The World Economic Forum’s (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report has ranked Norway among the top three countries in terms of gender equality for the past nine years (GGG, 2014). Norwegian women’s access to opportunities and freedoms similar to those of Norwegian men, and vice versa as paternity benefits are improving and causing redistribution of parenting obligations, indicates a high degree of gender equality in this country. In fact, gender equality as a value and fundamental principal seems to have reached such a level of public recognition and support that it can be considered an important characteristic of the Norwegian society and national culture (Andreassen & Folkenborg, 2002; Hofstede, 1980, 2000; Bertrand et al., 2015).

Provided with this information, it seems fair to conclude that Norway is indeed one of the most gender egalitarian countries in the world. As Andreassen & Folkenborg (2002;5) put it: “Over the past ten years, Norwegians have viewed themselves as world champions of gender equality work”. One might even assume that Norway must surely have impressive numbers of women in

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1. Figures from regjeringen.no and Statistics Norway.
2. Figure from Statistics Norway
higher-level positions and professions typically considered prestigious. But taking a closer look at the gender distribution in these areas, a different picture emerges. Women remain underrepresented in jobs associated with influence, money, and decision-making power, and they still receive lower pay than their male counterparts in most jobs (Andreassen & Folkenborg, 2002; Bertrandt et al., 2015). A closer look at the 2014 Global Gender Gap report indicates that while Norway has a high overall ranking on gender equality, this can be attributed in large part to the closing of the gender gap within educational attainment. Norway still has a way to go when it comes to gender gaps within “senior positions, wages, and leadership levels” (p. 43). On the indicator measuring the female-to-male ratio among legislators, senior officials and managers, Norway was ranked 58th, beaten by countries like Colombia, Barbados, Ghana, and Kazakhstan (GGG, 2014). A recent survey by the International Labour Organization (ILO) paints a similar picture. Measuring the gender balance among leaders at all levels in both the private and the public sector, the survey ranks Norway 50th, while Jamaica, Colombia, and Saint Lucia topped the list. Within the 19 largest public companies in Norway, there were no female CEOs (ILO, 2015). In private limited companies, in 2013 only 16% of CEOs were women (SN, 2015). These numbers have been increasing over time but still do not reflect the composition of the Norwegian workforce, which consists of about as many women as men (SN, 2014). Importantly, they indicate that the gender diversity law has not had a “trickle-down effect” to affect women at lower levels or in other sectors – at least not yet (Bertrandt et al., 2014). Additionally, the Norwegian labor market remains highly gender segregated; women dominate the public sector while constituting a minority in the private sector. More women than men work part-time (SN, 2015).

The statistics above are important because they indicate that gender diversity in many Norwegian organizations still remains a goal. This is particularly the case in upper-echelon jobs within the private sector, as well as on boards of companies that are not publicly listed. This raises the question of whether gender equality in Norway is real or whether it is actually just an illusion. The characteristics touted by surveys such as those of the UNDP and the WEF can be argued to primarily address values and not practice, uncovering a paradox which has been noted by several researchers (e.g. Foss, 2005; Andreassen & Folkenborg, 2002; Teigen, 2008 in Pesonen et al., 2009), in other countries as well (e.g. Pesonen et al., 2009). The distinction between values and practice is important in this context. While many people will probably agree that a value such as gender equality is important at least in theory, some of these people will, for various reasons, perhaps have problems demonstrating this value through actual behaviors in real life. As such, values and practice may overlap only partially, and this opens up the possibility that Norway’s public and media-friendly image as a gender equality haven may not be entirely merited.

Joining the debate on gender diversity, the present article suggests that a gender paradox exists in Norway: Gender equality is generally perceived to be an important value in Norwegian culture but is not reflected in gender diversity in
important areas of Norwegian businesses. Norway’s pioneering introduction of legislation that forces increased gender diversity on PLC boards exemplifies the value placed on gender equality in Norwegian culture. However, the lack of female presence in upper-echelon leadership coupled with the gender segregated labor market and the male-female wage gap suggest that gender inequality is still reality to a considerable extent. There remains, in other words, a gap between gender equality as an ideal that is taken for granted and gender equality as reality manifested as gender diversity in Norwegian organizations. It should be noted that the type of gender paradox treated in this article is different from what typically is referred to as a gender paradox in Norway, which points at the discrepancy between gender equality and the gender segregated labor marked in Norway (e.g. Reisel & Teigen, 2014). The present article focuses on the lack of gender diversity among top leaders in the private sector and seeks to improve our understanding of how this can be the case in light of the emphasis placed on gender equality in Norwegian culture and politics alike. In order to shed light on this apparent gender paradox, four possible and complementary theoretical explanations of gender inequality are presented. An alternative approach to those provided by existing literatures is suggested, as none of these seem to address the issue from the perspective of the values literature. Drawing on insights from role theory, literature on managerial cognition, and the perspective of gender as “doing”, and supplementing these with insights from the well-established values and cross-cultural leadership literatures, an alternative approach to the apparent gender paradox is forged which seeks to provide insight into the diversity issue by offering a possible answer to the question: Is gender equality in Norway just an illusion? This question has relevance not only to the Norwegian reality but also to other national contexts where gender diversity is a struggle. Norway can be considered a model system in that equality is generally perceived as an important value. If a country with this characteristic cannot manage to bring about gender diversity, what hope is there for countries where equality is perceived as less important?

Before the merits of diversity are addressed, a distinction that appears to be missing in much of the literature should be made: Gender diversity and gender equality are not the same. There seems to be a tendency to equate the two while they in reality may entail very different things. In the following, equality is viewed as a value or norm, while diversity is viewed as one of several possible outcomes of this value or norm. It may be a primarily semantic issue, but a sloppy use of these concepts blurs the insight into the underlying issues and complicates the assessment of possible remedies.

In the following, the rationale behind diversity is addressed through a brief outline of relevant literature. Next, four different theoretical perspectives for viewing gender diversity are presented, followed by a discussion where they are applied and integrated. Finally, conclusions are offered and suggestions for future research are made.
Why should we care about diversity?

Any discussion of diversity begs the very basic question, “Why should we care about diversity?” The leadership literature offers one point of departure for providing an answer. Diversity can be viewed as demographic diversity (such as gender, age, and ethnicity) and cognitive diversity (Miller et al., 1998). The focus will in the following be on gender diversity. The leadership literature has been late in incorporating dimensions of diversity in research and theories (Chin, 2010), and the justification for diversity has often been approached from an ethical, moral or political point of view rather than by emphasizing the financial rationale behind it (Wright et al., 1995). Diversity tends to be presented without factual evidence of return on investment and other tangible benefits, focusing instead on the moral aspects or the social desirability of including it among the organization’s goals (Robinson & Dechant, 1997; Kossek et al., 2002) or the consequences diversity may have for individual women in terms of career opportunities, pay, work-life quality, and evaluation of performance (Melkas & Anker, 1997). Within an equal opportunities perspective, diversity is closely associated with justice and equal rights for all (Billing & Alvesson, 1989). This means that on the one hand, diversity is viewed as a goal in itself (Randøy et al., 2006). On the other hand, and more rarely, arguments for diversity from a shareholder point of view focus on the impact on company performance (e.g. stock market valuation and profitability) through enhanced innovative capability and improved understanding of diverse customer needs (Carter et al., 2003). Following the latter line of reasoning, diversity warrants attention because it makes financial sense and not simply because of its ethical and moral implications (Wright et al., 1995). Within the context of company boards, a positive and significant relationship between board diversity and company value has been identified (Carter et al., 2003). This has also been identified in Norway (Kleveland & Ying, 2001, in Andreassen & Folkenborg, 2002). The costs associated with poor integration of a diverse workforce mean that companies mindful of diversity may have a cost advantage because of reduced absenteeism and turnover by women dissatisfied with their careers and opportunities for advancement (Wright et al., 1995; Carter et al., 2003). Put simply, companies with discriminatory practices may have higher cost structures. Avoiding certain groups based on reasons not funded on economic performance means that human capital is not put to its most efficient use, and companies thinking outside the box may then have an advantage and potentially achieve higher returns (Randøy et al., 2006). In short, diversity has bottom-line impact and should be treated like any other business investment (Robinson & Dechant, 1997). In the case of Norway, as many women as men are currently pursuing higher education (Andreassen & Folkenborg, 2002), and from a resource perspective it is simply difficult to justify why it wouldn’t make sound financial sense to put this human capital to use. This vein of reasoning was used by the Norwegian government when the gender representation rules for boards were introduced (Seierstad & Opsahl, 2011). In addition to these rationales for gender diversity focusing on what men and women have in common, Alvesson & Billing (1989) note a different perspective that revol-
ves around the differences between men and women. Here, diversity is viewed as important because women have different experiences, values, and behavioral patterns and thus can complement men’s contributions to the organization.

The value ascribed to gender diversity is subjective and varies from researcher to researcher, as this brief overview of the literature indicates. It can also vary between national cultures, and assessments of gender diversity should take the cultural and legal context into account (Randøy et al., 2006). The cross-cultural leadership literature shows that different countries place different value on gender equality (e.g. Hofstede, 2010), and it follows from this that gender diversity can be expected to be lower in some countries than others as a consequence of value priorities. Research carried out within the Norwegian cultural context shows a large acceptance of feminine values and gender equality in this country, as in the other Nordic countries (e.g. Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2010, Hofstede, 1980). Norway, along with its Nordic neighbors, has long traditions of democracy and egalitarianism, and this is reflected in its institutions, legislation, and the general expectation that women are entitled to participate in the workforce in the same way as men. To the author’s knowledge, no studies after Hofstede (1980) have set out to empirically map gender equity as a value in Norway. However, we can infer from the strong presence of diversity measures, which in turn stem from political considerations at the national level that gender equity must be a priority in this country. Gender equity is viewed as “(...) a correct and just measure of societal development” (NOU 2012:15:21), in line with the fundamental assumption in Norwegian society that everyone has the right to participate in society and be treated equally and with respect (NOU 2012:15). That women remain underrepresented at higher organizational levels while the overall workforce gender balance is fairly equal is therefore puzzling. Let us now turn to the literature and some potential explanations for this apparent paradox.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE #1: ROLE THEORY

First, let us take a look at literature on social roles and stereotypes, where the central proposition is that the leader role is considered a male role. This perspective thus offers an understanding of gender diversity which acknowledges the impact of social forces on organizational gender composition. Social role theory3 (Eagly, 1987, 2000) is a good starting point for understanding why leaders have traditionally been men. Central to social role theory is the concept of gender roles, which define commonly held expectations about the qualities and behaviors considered to be appropriate for individuals depending on their gender. Some of these expectations are normative, describing qualities and behaviors judged as desirable for men and women respectively and giving guidance regarding behaviors effective in a given situation and behaviors likely to result in approval from others. Gender differences trigger behavior that conforms to

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3. The following two sections draw on Eagly (1987, 2000).
gender roles. Stereotypical gender differences are typically viewed as appropriate because humans are inclined to assume a correspondence between people’s behavior and inner dispositions. It has been demonstrated that as behaviors become more associated with one gender than another, people judge these behaviors as increasingly suitable for that particular gender. In other words: Not only do people think that men and women are different; they also believe they should be different. The male and female gender roles can be described along two dimensions of attributes: communal and agentic. Attributes such as expressiveness, social orientation, and femininity constitute the female dimension, which means that women are typically assumed to be concerned with the welfare of other people, to be caring, nurturing, and selfless, and to have interpersonal sensitivity and emotional expressiveness. The agentic dimension consists of attributes like task-orientation, masculinity, and instrumentality, leading to perceptions of men as assertive, ambitious, task-oriented, and controlling.

Because gender roles are founded on the very wide-ranging social categories of men and women, they are rather diffuse and can be relevant to more or less all portions of people’s everyday lives. Subsequently, gender-related cues are easily triggered, leading to activation of beliefs about women and men that cause people to see women as more communal than agentic, and men as more agentic than communal. People adjust to gender roles by acquiring the skills and resources assumed to be role-appropriate, and they also adapt their social behavior to role requirements because this is likely to elicit positive reactions from the surroundings. Within the context of leadership, this means that to the extent that leadership is considered to be a male role, women may expect negative reactions when displaying the agentic, masculine behaviors common in such roles. They may therefore refrain from taking on leadership roles. This is arguably particularly likely to happen in organizations with few women in leadership positions.

Role congruity theory takes the concepts from social role theory one step further, and predicts that achieving leadership positions is easier for men than for women. This is explained by the fact that there is congruity between the skills and behaviors associated with the male gender role and those associated with the leader role. The leader role is also considered to be a male role, and women are consequently perceived as lacking the necessary abilities. Additionally, it is often preferred that women do not exhibit the abilities needed for the leadership role, even if they do possess them (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This is closely related to the concept of prejudice. Generally speaking, a prejudice can arise when people have a stereotype of a social group that is incongruent with attributes assumed to be required for success. Stereotypes are cognitive structures that manifest themselves as convictions about the attributes of a certain social group (Weber & Crocker, 1983; Eagly & Karau, 2002) and can result in stereotypic behavior even when they are not internalized in the individual because of the power of groups or individuals who support the stereotypes (Eagly, 1987). In order to climb to the top, women are expected to be able to
deliver excellent work; however, female gender stereotypes imply that women do not have what it takes to be successful in activities traditionally associated with men (Heilman, 2001). Because women are typically assumed to be emotional, nurturing, warm, indecisive and passive, they are more likely to be hired for jobs where these qualities are appropriate (Glick et al., 1988). This can have a direct impact on the number of women becoming leaders, as it results in women being perceived as less optimal for the leadership role than men. Prejudice can also have an indirect impact on the number of women becoming leaders by contributing to less favorable evaluations of women’s leadership behaviors than men’s (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Women are of course sometimes viewed as competent: their accomplishments cannot be attributed to any other reasons than their qualifications. However, in such cases, women risk violating beliefs about how women should behave. This can in turn trigger unfavorable evaluations such as personal derogation and dislike (Heilman, 2001). Additionally, expectations based on stereotypes can lead to biased attributions, such as explaining the failure by a male leader as bad luck, and explaining similar failure by a female leader as lack of the internal traits necessary for being a successful leader (Reskin, 2000). As Deaux & Emswiller (1974:80) put it: “What is skill for the male is luck for the female”. Being competent does not guarantee a woman the opportunity for promotion to the same organizational level as a man with equal qualifications, and leadership positions are typically considered to be male in sex-type: “(...) not only are most upper level managers men, but good management is also thought to be a manly business” (Heilman, 2001:659). In other words, the assumption is that this type of job needs aggressiveness, achievement orientation, and emotional toughness: agentic attributes deemed appropriate for men and inappropriate according to both descriptive and prescriptive elements of female stereotypes. Given this, one would perhaps think that it might be advantageous for a female leader to be perceived as similar to a male leader. However, the female leader can risk violating the female gender role by displaying male-stereotypical, agentic behavior rather than communal, female-stereotypical behavior. In this way, a female leader may experience positive and negative reactions simultaneously when trying to meet the requirements of both gender roles, making it difficult to become successful in the leader role.

Possible remedies to gender-based prejudice have been suggested, ranging from active to passive in the way they approach change, and also differing in terms of their view on the possibility of actually achieving change. One approach sees equal representation in sex-typed occupations as the key to changing job stereotypes (Glick et al., 1988). A second approach focuses on the role of organizational culture in driving change. Characteristics of organizational culture typically associated with women will be related to opportunities for female leaders, meaning that diversity can be managed through cultural change supported by senior and visible leaders in the organization. Increasing the number of women can help drive the change, but only if they are placed in positions with power to actually contribute to the change (Bajdo & Dickson, 2001). A third approach emphasizes the importance of reaching a tipping point.
in the number of women, because a minority group is unlikely to have much of an impact on negative social processes such as discrimination until it reaches a critical mass of about 35% (Kanter, 1977). Until a tipping point is reached, women entering the upper echelon of organizational life may not be able to change the general stereotypes within the group, because they are perceived as unrepresentative token members of the group and as such have little power (Weber & Crocker, 1983; Yoder et al., 1989). The tipping point approach has been embraced at various organizational and institutional levels in many countries, but some researchers caution that it may have outlived its usefulness. Challenging its basic assumption of a linear relationship between numbers and outcomes introduces the idea that what matters is not what ‘women’ do but what actors do, and that we should perhaps refrain from assuming that only women can speak and act on the behalf of women (e.g. Childs & Krook, 2009). Different strategies for reaching the tipping point can be envisioned. A gradual approach would imply increasing the number of female leaders over time, for example, through gender representation laws such as the ones implemented in Norway. Having at least a few female leaders would fill the function of role models and make it easier for women to achieve similar positions over time (Seierstad & Opsahl, 2011). In a recent empirical study examining the effects of Norwegian gender diversity law, spillover effects such as increased numbers of high-level female leaders in other industries and types of companies than the ones targeted by the law were not demonstrated (Bertrand et al., 2015). Thus, it is possible that the role model effect on gender diversity plays out over longer periods of time. Alternatively, the earthquake approach implies conscious and deliberate efforts by top management to rapidly increase the numbers of female leaders. The rationale behind the latter is that a gradual demographic shift might spark competition over resources as the minority group slowly becomes a competitor for scarce resources, potentially prompting the majority group to engage in discrimination to counteract the demographic shift (Kossek et al., 2002). The resource competition explanation may provide a reason why Norwegian male leaders seem to believe that female leaders have alternative characteristics that can contribute to the organization, while simultaneously being indifferent or negative to the question of gender balance (Andreassen & Folkenborg, 2002).

While role theory provides insight into the driving mechanisms of discrimination, it may be insufficient for explaining the observed lack of gender diversity in Norway, because the appropriateness of this theory for the Norwegian cultural context can be questioned. Both social role theory and role congruency theory revolve around the concept of roles; which roles are typically held by women versus men, and how these roles coexist with the leader role. They deal with socially accepted behavior, and the assumption is that there is a large degree of consensus about what the roles entail. Neither one of these theories takes the cultural context into account when describing the types of behaviors and qualities typically accepted as part of the respective roles. However, it can be argued that these roles, and particularly the gender roles, are defined from a Western perspective in general and a North-American perspective in particu-
lar. Hofstede (1980, 1998) claims that psychologists tend to assume that the roles, behaviors and values of genders are similar in all societies and that the dominant gender role in the research literature is American as most publications on gender issues are produced in the United States. To the degree that gender roles are indeed found to be different across countries, it is assumed that they over time will change toward the American conception of gender roles. However, the reality is that there is variation in gender roles even within Western countries. Because the Norwegian culture places relatively high value on feminine values as opposed to masculine values (Hofstede, 1980), two things pertaining to the leader and gender roles can be argued. First, it is possible that the leader role in Norway is characterized by more communal behaviors and attitudes compared to leader roles in other countries. Second, it is possible that the female gender role in Norway allows for more masculinity than the equivalent role in other countries. Indeed, applied to role theory, this indicates a larger fit between the leader role and the female gender role so that women are perceived as appropriate leaders and can take on leader roles without violating the female gender role. A research study of Norwegian leaders indicates that this may indeed be the case, and claims that the leader role in Norway in later years has gone from “(…) being explicitly masculine to becoming more gender neutral” (Andreassen & Folkenborg, 2002:51). This study found that women felt comfortable with the demands and requirements posed by the upper echelon leadership role, which may indicate that the leader role has indeed shifted to accommodate the female gender role to a larger extent than it traditionally has. A recent empirical study examining the lack of gender balance among top leaders in Norway provides another indication of a more gender neutral leadership role in Norway. Here, traditional gender stereotypes were viewed as unimportant for explaining or understanding the prevalence of male leaders (Halrynjo, Kittelrød & Teigen, 2015). This casts doubt on the appropriateness of role theory for exploring the gender equality illusion in Norway. It is perhaps better suited for understanding the mechanisms behind gender discrimination in general, when no particular cultural context has to be accounted for.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE #2: MANAGERIAL COGNITION

To complement the role theory perspective on gender diversity in organizations, the literature on managerial cognition offers interesting insights by approaching this topic from a point of departure which emphasizes the part played by individual organizational actors in bringing about a certain gender composition. Drawing on this theoretical approach requires an explicit focus on the leader as decision maker and holder of power to change or preserve the gender composition within the organization as a consequence of his or her beliefs. The importance of executive cognition on strategic processes and outcomes has received increased attention in recent years, and the effects of executive beliefs on strategic decision processes have been supported empirically (Chattopadhyay et al., 1999; Markóczy, 2001). The leader’s beliefs can there-
fore be expected to influence the decisions concerning hiring and firing that he or she makes, which are the decisions that will ultimately determine the gender diversity within that organization. Companies often have a shortage of diversity among top leaders because existing leaders tend to hire or promote individuals who are similar to themselves. The reason appears to be a preference for people who have similar mindsets (Foss et al., 2008). Heilman (2001:670) writes that “Upper management is sometimes referred to colloquially as a ‘club’. Members of such clubs are apt to blackball the entry of those who seem inappropriate or distasteful”. Experimental studies have found that top leaders with demographic similarities tend to interact more frequently or efficiently with each other, and exert a larger influence on each other’s beliefs than team members who do not share these demographic characteristics (Chattopadhyay et al., 1999). People are generally more comfortable with members of their own group, and they tend to trust and like them more. The result is an avoidance of people who are different, while people who are similar are preferred (Reskin, 2000). Exploring this, a vicious circle appears. Leaders hire similar people, based on cognitive processes that may be less than optimal, not to mention politically incorrect in their society. This selection of like-minded individuals to the management team (Chattopadhyay et al., 1999) in turn leads to less diversity and increased homogeneity, which perpetuates the cognitive process, and the hiring. This homosocial reproduction leads to homogenous leader groups that are not representative of the workforce (Kanter, 1977).

Learning theories offer additional insight into the process of homosocial reproduction, as it can be viewed as a case of single-loop learning. According to Argyris (1976), humans have two different theories they use to determine what action to take in a given situation, and these theories are based on two different learning processes. The first is an espoused theory of action. This theory of action is founded on a single-loop learning process, which implies that decisions may change, but the decision maker’s mental models remain the same. Single-loop learning allows for convenient and rapid decision making, and it often represents a source of confidence to an individual because it is seen as a way of functioning effectively. People therefore perceive it as risky and difficult to change the resulting theory of action, and hesitate doing it. This makes single-loop learning the predominant method of learning, and it is particularly common when dealing with other people and issues of a controversial nature.

The other theory of action is based on double-loop learning, which allows for feedback and changes in the individual’s understanding, and has the potential to result in more effective decision making. As suggested by the human tendency to prefer single-loop learning, achieving shifts in understanding is not necessarily comfortable for the individual, especially if the change entails a threat to current power holders and fundamental aspects of the organization (Argyris, 1976). The controversial and challenging issues inherent in the gender diversity question may represent the perfect conditions for single-loop learning among the current decision makers, also in Norway.
To overcome some of the cognitive shortcomings of the human mind, organizational practices pertaining to human resource management (HRM) can be addressed. In hiring and promotion decisions and performance evaluations, relying on subjective criteria and informal networks tends to reproduce the existing patterns of gender composition (Bielby, 2000). However, introducing seemingly objective HRM practices may not always get rid of this problem. Imagine an organization with historical barriers to the entry of women, which decides to begin using seniority as the decision rule for promoting people into leadership positions. Seniority can indeed be objectively measured, but using this as the decision rule will perpetuate the past discrimination, because there is a lack of women to promote. As a result, men will continue to dominate these jobs (Bielby, 2000). And while objective evaluation criteria for performance may contribute to transparency in promotion decisions and reduce the chance of homosocial reproduction, it can be difficult to find such evaluation criteria within the domain of upper-echelon positions as they by nature tend to be difficult to define and pin down (Heilman, 2001).

In Norway as in other countries, the decisions of hiring, firing, and promotion, which are the ultimate deciders of gender diversity in organizations, are typically made by individuals in upper-echelon positions. As these individuals have traditionally been men, theories of homosocial reproduction and single-loop learning make it possible to understand why male leaders tend to hire replicas of themselves rather than women with equal qualifications, and consequently, why we even today observe few women in positions typically associated with power, influence, and money. The study by Andreassen & Folkenborg (2002) exemplifies this by pointing at the prevalence and importance of networks of men with similar backgrounds and qualifications as talent pools from which to fish when filling available leader positions. Single-loop learning can perhaps also explain the large number of PLCs that in the wake of the gender quota introduction changed their company status to private. Of the 563 PLCs in 2003, only 179 remained in 2008 (Bertrand et al., 2014). If this change of status is interpreted as reluctance to adjust to the new gender quota, which in practice would force these companies to put women on their boards, an aversion to engage in potentially uncomfortable or expensive double-loop learning can explain it.

However, the literature which states that men tend to hire men and that changes to this picture are prevented by the human reluctance to engage in potentially uncomfortable double-loop learning does not do much more than confirm what we already know from observations: male leaders tend to hire male leaders, also in Norway. It gives us a static image of the organizational realities and does not seem to address the dynamics involved.
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE #3: “DOING” GENDER

A third theoretical lens through which one can view gender diversity is the “doing” of gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987), which posits gender as something that is ‘done’ rather than something that ‘is’ and offers a process-based and dynamic view of gender diversity. Gender is seen as a product of social situations: “…a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction.” (West & Zimmerman, 1987:125), and “…a set of practices situated in a specific historical and cultural context and sustained by rituals conducted by men and women” (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001:257). This social interaction is of course carried out by individuals, but more important is the interplay between the individuals as gender does not necessarily reside in the individuals across situations. Gender is “produced” through the interaction, as the individuals taking part in it reflect or express their gender through their various activities and interpret the behavior of others in the same manner (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender arises from the relationship between what is considered to be the “female” and “male” genders respectively. The definition of what is female will define what is male, and vice versa, because the two are mutually exclusive, inseparable, and alternative categories (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). In other words, the behaviors considered appropriate for men in a particular situation will be considered inappropriate for women, and what is appropriate for women will be inappropriate for men. One gender cannot be defined without the other. Certain behaviors and actions come to be seen as expressions of masculine or feminine natures (West & Zimmerman, 1987), which can explain why the behaviors and actions that constitute leadership are typically associated with masculinity and the male gender.

Gender is “done” at all levels of society, including organizations. Organizations do not simply produce goods or services, but also social beliefs about gender relationships (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). In addition to being an output of social situations, gender can become a rationale and justification for certain social arrangements that eventually become perceived as natural and normal (West & Zimmerman, 1987), such as organizations dominated by one gender or the practice of offering different pay for equal work depending on gender. The unique organizational dynamics bring about a certain gender order within that organization, and this gender order tends to be reproduced and sustained through rituals carried out by both men and women (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). An implication of this is that the responsibility for the current organizational gender order, even if it is tilted in favor of one gender, lies with both genders. Working out the gender balance is often fraught with tension as apparent contradictions between the genders raise questions that can seem paradoxical. Research studies carried out in different cultural contexts illustrate these tensions. An exploratory study of the discourse of Finnish female board professionals show how gender is actively “done” through discourse that is apparently paradoxical, centering on competence on the one hand and gender on the other. Here, competence was seen as equally distributed between men and women and a prerequisite for board participation, while the business world was defi-
ned as largely male and not conducive to female participation, as women were perceived as lacking the qualities needed in that world. Gender seemed to be “done” in these women’s discourse in a manner which exposed a paradox between what women can and cannot do in the business world; men and women were perceived as equal yet different (Pesonen et al., 2009). A study from Italy, where women entered a traditionally male-dominated organization, provides examples of how such paradoxes can be solved by the women who experience them, and shows that the process of solving them will actually contribute to the doing of gender. The female “intruders” employed different tactics to deal with the male gender role prevalent in the organization, ranging from leaving femininity behind and acting like men to actively playing on female stereotypes to avoid being perceived as a threat triggering unfavorable reactions from male colleagues. Gender was “done” not only through the male/female collision, but also through the tactics used by the women to deal with the collision (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). These studies illustrate the simultaneous interdependence and opposition between the male and female, and point at the ambiguity and conflict women may experience as they confront the way gender is “done” in a male-dominated field while attempting to preserve their perception of their own gender.

This conflict is something we recognize from theoretical perspective number two, role theory, which suggests that a woman who engages in behaviors that break with the female gender role by taking on the leader role may experience negative evaluations for violating norms of female behavior while simultaneously violating norms related to the leader role. Indeed, both role theory and gender as “doing” make use of the role concept, but in a somewhat different manner as “doing” gender goes beyond gender roles. Here, gender is viewed as the product of a social interaction: “…gender is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sort” (West & Zimmerman, 1987:129). As noted in role theory, the “male” and “female” categories can be relevant in almost any situation and this makes it difficult to avoid relying on gender as a basis for classification; “…we are always women or men” (West & Zimmerman, 1987:139). Simply put, the reality is that individuals often have to engage in balancing acts of displaying both appropriate and inappropriate behaviors simultaneously.

The perspective of “doing” gender opens up the possibility of change in the gender balance, as gender is seen as the outcome of a social process rather than something static that just “is”. The influence and importance of the organization’s culture should not be understated in this regard, as noted by Gherardi & Poggio (2001:246): “…equal opportunities programs are bound to fail if they are implemented in organizational cultures that reproduce a dichotomous symbolic order of gender keeping women to ‘their place’”. Gender is viewed as a practice, and the activities, behaviors, and even rhetoric, constituting this practice will actively reproduce or change the gender relations (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). Making gender dynamics more visible can expose clues to how they can be challenged (Martin, 2006). Thus, if change in gender relationships
is desired, it needs to be translated into the language of the organization’s social practice. The social and cultural context in which gender is “done” must also be taken into account if change is desired, as gender practices can take on different meanings in different contexts (Martin, 2006). The gender diversity practices in Norway are situated within a historical and cultural context where equality has been a guiding principle for social development, and they must be understood against this background. A core tenet of the Norwegian society is a balance between receiving and giving. All citizens have a right to participate in society on equal terms and to be treated with respect and fairness, but should in return contribute to society and the welfare state by working (NOU 2012:15). On the basis of this, women should receive the same opportunities as men also when it comes to work. A recent empirical study of top-level leaders in Norway indicates that this may indeed be the case, as the surveyed leaders seemed to actively support the notion of female participation also in upper echelon leadership and viewed this as natural (Halrynjo, Kittelrød, Teigen, 2015). Based on the extent of Norwegian legislation aimed at ensuring equal rights for men and women both inside and outside of the workplace, it seems reasonable to conclude that Norway has a well-deserved reputation for being a pioneer on gender diversity matters. In fact, one might even argue that the strong diversity legislation in Norway is to be expected when viewed within the historical and cultural context of this country. It therefore appears unlikely that a complete explanation of the apparent gender equality illusion can be found here.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE #4: VALUES

Literature on values provides the fourth and final perspective utilized in this article for approaching the question of a gender diversity illusion in Norway and offers an explanation which complements the three previously discussed theoretical perspectives. The value concept enjoys an interesting status in the world of research. It has been applied in all social science disciplines in addition to being in use in public discourse (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998), and theorists in many fields view the understanding of people’s value priorities as a tool for understanding and predicting their attitudes and behaviors, potentially leading to overuse or abuse of the values concept (Rohan, 2000). Nevertheless, values are believed to have motivational, cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Rokeach, 1968). The interest in values is nothing new: the significance of human values has been recognized by scholars going back to ancient Greece (Maio, 2010). Our current understanding of values within the social sciences is founded on the models of values developed in the 1960s (e.g. Allport et al., 1960; Rokeach, 1968) and refined over the past 20 years (e.g. Schwartz, 1992). Research on values has been clouded by the overlapping aspects between this and related concepts such as attitudes and goals (Rohan, 2000), and this can be illustrated by considering different definitions of the values concept. A value has been defined as “A broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others.” (Hofstede, 2001:5); “…conceptions of the desirable that guide the
way social actors (e.g., organizational leaders, policy-makers, individual persons) select actions, evaluate people and events, and explain their actions and evaluations” (Schwartz, 1999:24, in Rohan, 2000), and “…an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence” (Rokeach, 1968). These are only three of a multitude of definitions, spanning from a focus on values as verbs or nouns, to categories of judgments and priorities, and personal, social, or cultural systems (Rohan, 2000).

Accepting the idea that values are “abstract ideals that are important guiding principles in one’s life” (Maio, 2010:4), it becomes vital to understand the structure and functioning of these principles. Values are believed to be structured in a system which is shared by all humans, meaning that we all have the same values but prioritize them differently in terms of the relative importance we place on each of them (Rohan, 2000). The relative difference in value importance is thus more psychologically meaningful than the importance of any particular value on its own (Rokeach, 1973). This means that our personal value system is shared with all humans in terms of the values it includes while being personal in terms of the way these values are arranged. Personality will influence the categorization of values to a certain degree, but socialization forces such as culture, social systems, education, and occupation are believed to exercise the largest influence and lead to similarities in value systems across individuals (Rokeach, 1968). The abstract and intangible nature of values makes it difficult to assess them through studies, for instance, equality can mean different things to different people and result in erroneous conclusions regarding the value’s content (Maio, 2010). A slew of examples of studies where the purpose evidently was to study the work values of women, referenced by Meglino & Ravlin (1998), illustrates this: Cherrington et al. (1979) found that females were less likely to work hard toward advancement than males. Powell, Posner & Schmidt (1984) found that females were more career-oriented versus family-oriented than males. Buchholz (1978) could not find any significant differences between males and females on work devotion and ethic. In other words, different studies of values have come to different conclusions regarding the importance of particular values for men and women respectively. Thus, value measurement issues can be imagined to play a part in the picture of gender equality that we see in Norway today. For example, while the value “equality” is surely part of Norwegians’ value systems, it may differ in relative importance from person to person. One person might rate equality as extremely important in terms of his/her value hierarchy, while another person might rate it as unimportant even though the value is included in the hierarchy. If the relative difference in value importance is not accounted for, one might erroneously conclude that equality is important to both individuals. Aggregated to the national level, this would lead to mistaken perceptions of equality within the specific country. Research on gender equality as a value in Norway does indicate important differences between individuals depending on gender and education. In general, women are more positive to gender equality
than men, and people with higher education are more positive than those without higher education (NOU 2012:15).

The assessment of values is further complicated by disagreement between researchers regarding whether values predict the desired or the desirable; whether value priorities denote what people want to do or what they ought to do (Braithwaite & Scott, 1991, in Rohan, 2000). Indeed, values can be seen as cognitive representations of underlying, personal needs after external forces, such as institutional goals and demands, have been taken into account (Rokeach, 1979), which suggests that the desired (personal needs) and the desirable (social goals) can be intertwined. Viewing this from the context of cross-cultural research, Hofstede (2001:6) cautions that one should take great care to distinguish between desired and desirable states of affairs when using values as predictors of outcomes like behaviors, attitudes, and emotions as there may be obvious differences between reality and social desirability: “…what people actually desire versus what they think they ought to desire”.

At the level of collectivity, Hofstede notes, desired states of affairs represent statistical norms indicating the values held by the majority. Desirable states of affairs, on the other hand, relate to norms indicating ideology or what is ethically right. Discrepancies commonly exist between the desired and the desirable, just like there can be discrepancies between the desirable and people’s actual behavior, or the desired and people’s actual behavior (Hofstede, 2001). In short, what people say they care about, for instance, in surveys, may not represent a completely accurate picture of what they really care about. Looking at gender equality in Norway, it follows from this that surveys announcing Norway to be a gender equality haven may actually be reporting the importance Norwegians believe they ought to attach to gender equality and not the importance they actually attach to it. The distinction between what people think they should desire versus what they actually desire implies judgment of value priorities on part of the individual. People’s value priorities can express a want to survive in their social environments; they can function as guides for goodness; and they can provide guides for living the best way possible (Rohan, 2000). Values expressing the desirable can have been learned in the social environment, but aspects of the individual, such as personal experiences and attributes, will interact with the socially learned values and contribute to the dynamism of individuals’ value systems (Rohan, 2000). There is little consensus in the literature regarding how social value systems are structured compared to individual value systems, how individual value systems can be aggregated to the level of collectivity, and how different social value systems will interact and influence attitudes and behaviors of an individual who belongs to more than one group (Rohan, 2000), although most theorists view values as a product of a social system that the individual is socialized into (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998). Situations can easily be imagined where an individual belonging to different social groups might face discrepancies between the values of those groups or between personal values and those of the groups, and that resolving such discrepancies might be difficult and lead to behaviors that are hard to predict. Looking at gender equality in Norway, a person may find equa-
The abstract yet concrete nature of values complicates their application and assessment even more. Values often function as ideals that are difficult to disagree with, as in the case of equality and freedom (Edelman, 1985, in Maio, 2010). Such values represent fairly broad categories and can therefore connote different things to different individuals, for instance, equality can mean equality of opportunities as well as equality between genders or races (Maio, 2010). But while values can be perceived as fairly abstract, they are also concrete in that they are applied concretely – they refer to something (Maio, 2010). It is not necessarily easy, however, for an individual to bridge the gap from the abstract mental representation of a value to actually applying it in concrete judgments and actions, as Maio (2010) elaborates on. Because fundamental values like equality are perceived as broad and difficult to disagree with, their actual application in concrete situations can be perceived as so complex that people find it easier to bypass them and engage in behavior inconsistent with the value (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998, in Maio, 2010). While the values are considered important, they are still overridden. It is possible that this might be the case for equality within the Norwegian cultural context. Another consequence of the abstract nature of values is that the context can influence the application, meaning that a value which seems relevant in one context is not perceived as relevant and subsequently triggered in another context. For instance, equality might be perceived as relevant in a situation of gender discrimination but irrelevant in a situation of discrimination based on sexual orientation, and therefore result in different judgments or actions in the two situations. Maio (2010) goes on to note that the mental representation of values may influence the manner in which they are triggered. A value may thus be perceived as relevant to a larger number of contexts when the individual has a relatively clear mental representation of the value. In the example of equality, it is possible to envisage that the vague and broad nature of this value makes it difficult for individuals to internalize it in a clear manner.

DISCUSSION

The topic of gender equality and diversity is fraught with paradox. At the national level, it is a paradox that although equality is a fundamental value in Norway, the gender balance in upper-echelon positions still remains tilted in favor of men. At the individual level, there is a paradox in the manner in which women “do” gender by juggling the notions that women are both similar and different to men (Pesonen et al., 2009). Four different theoretical lenses for viewing the issue of gender diversity in Norway have been presented. First, role theory attributes the lack of females in upper-echelon positions to a definitional mismatch between the leader role and the female gender role which suggests that women do not have the abilities needed for jobs traditionally
occupied by men and that fear of negative evaluations keep women from attempting to take on such jobs. This perspective may be insufficient for explaining the observed lack of gender diversity in Norway because the Norwegian cultural context may allow for larger congruency between the female gender role and the leader role than role theory suggests. Second, literature on managerial cognition addresses intentional and unintentional shortcomings of the executive’s mind leading to the hiring of similar people, which within the context of higher-level positions means exclusion of women. However, the insight provided by this perspective is limited in that it represents an overly static image of the process leading to the organization’s gender composition. Third, “doing” gender suggests that the organizational gender distribution plays out through a process of continuous social interactions, and that the debate on gender diversity itself is actually a part of this process. Because the “doing” of gender in Norway takes place within a context of strong diversity legislation and apparent appreciation of equality, the insight provided by this perspective may be insufficient. Fourth, the values literature proposes that gender equality is a fundamental value in Norwegian society, but that it is perhaps somewhat misunderstood or misapplied due to the illusive nature of the value concept.

This article adopts a values approach as a starting point to the gender paradox and proposes that the understanding of gender diversity in Norway can be improved by perceiving it as a value-related issue. Gender diversity can be viewed as an outcome of gender equality, and should be researched and understood against this background. However, a purely values approach may be too restrictive, and it is suggested that uniting this perspective with gender as “doing”, role theory, and insights from the literature on managerial cognition may be fruitful. Uniting the four different perspectives opens for an understanding of the gender diversity picture in Norwegian organizations which goes beyond a static snapshot and recognizes that gender diversity is the result of interactions of social actors, with all the unpredictability this implies.

Norwegian national culture is characterized by, among other things, an acceptance of equality as a fundamental value. It can be argued that the gender equality illusion is in part reflective of a misunderstanding and overstating of this value. This can be explained by applying knowledge from the literature on values: First, there is a difference between values denoting the desired and the desirable, and it is possible that our current understanding of equality actually refers to the desirable; what people ought to value rather than what they actually value. If this is the case, the value of equality may refer to perceptions of an ideal situation rather than reality. Second, fundamental values such as equality have a broad and vague character, which means that social actors can actually find it difficult to apply them to real-life situations. Thus, it can be imagined that equality simply has not spawned the behaviors one might expect from this value. Third, there is disagreement regarding the structure of value systems and how a social actor’s personal value system interacts with value systems of the various social groups to which he/she belongs. While equality may
be an important value in the value system of Norway as a culture, this value may not have the same position in the individual’s value system and therefore not produce behavior consistent with the value.

The value of equality provides the backdrop for the process of “doing” gender in Norway. As an espoused value, equality is perceived as something that should be acknowledged and taken into consideration in the decisions we make and the behaviors we engage in, both inside the organization and in our private lives. This is reflected in legislation intended to increase gender diversity and protect the rights of women in the workplace. It is also reflected in the discourse and debate on gender diversity, inside organizations as well as between individuals and at the national level as reflected by the media. In this way, equality influences the way gender is “done” in Norway, and the manner in which the respective gender roles and job roles are defined. We then approach the domain of role theory: It is possible to identify a male gender role and a female gender role, and these will define what men and women should and should not do, effectively limiting the selection of possibilities for women because the leader role tends to be more or less equated with the male gender role. While this can be expected to hold true within the cultural context in which role theory was developed and elaborated, a word of caution is warranted when the theory is applied to the Norwegian cultural context: In Norway, men and women are perceived to be more or less equal, which means that the female gender role in this cultural context is not necessarily a diminutive version of the male gender role, as seems to be the case in some other cultures. Borrowing insight from the perspective of gender as “doing”, there is a realization that because of the unique way in which gender is “done” in Norway, which reflects fundamental cultural values such as equality, the gender roles and job roles may be different in Norway, leading to more opportunities for women in this country than in many others. Looking at certain sectors, for instance the health sector, the gender diversity situation is actually positive in that the number of female leaders is relatively large. This illustrates how the female gender role in Norway may be less restrictive in relation to possibilities than it is in many other countries, because of the unique composition of values this country has.

Based on this, it may be argued that the value of equality perhaps has a guiding function in spite of potential limitations in terms of being more of an espoused value than a realized value, and that the female gender role lends itself to upper-echelon positions to a larger degree than in many other countries. When we then remember that the overall picture of gender diversity in Norway is rather unimpressive, the literature on managerial cognition provides some possible explanations. It is a fact that homosocial reproduction in hiring and promotion happens also in Norwegian organizations, and that this contributes to the gender diversity status quo where men outnumber women in most upper-echelon positions and occupations associated with power, influence, and money. Male leaders hire male leaders, even if they consider equality to be an important value. This might be a consequence of some of the previously
discussed characteristics of values, for instance, that fundamental values like equality may be so vague that activating them in all situations may be perceived by the individual as difficult or unfeasible. Another explanation can be found in theory on single-loop and double-loop learning. Breaking with a well-established pattern of homosocial reproduction to engage in double-loop learning which might change behavior may be perceived as so uncomfortable and undesirable that it is easier to just stick with the well-known and trusted behaviors of homosocial reproduction, in spite of recognition of equality as an important value, or the many outcomes of diversity that have a direct and positive effect on the bottom line.

Integrating the perspective of “doing” gender with other approaches to understanding gender diversity may be useful for driving the debate forward as it opens up the possibility of “un-doing” gender by both men and women. Role theory, on the other hand, takes a rather passive approach to the underlying issues. Gender equality and gender diversity is seen as something we either have or would like to have and the assumption is of course that we do not have it because of the way roles are defined. Within the cultural context of Norway, where we from the values literature know that equality is considered a fundamental value, the perspective offered by role theory seems insufficient on its own as it does not offer the opportunity of women engaging in driving change. If we instead view gender roles as nothing more than a way gender is “done”, it opens up for a larger degree of involvement by women to influence the definition of gender roles as well as the leader role. In other words, women are empowered to influence the definition of their role and are not passive bystanders confined to accepting whatever comes their way. However, with freedom comes responsibility, and it is important that women are aware of their responsibility to engage in the “doing” of gender in a manner that is conducive to a fitting future.

We have now seen how the values perspective can contribute to shedding light on the relative lack of gender diversity in the perceived egalitarian country of Norway. The values perspective, by itself or in combination with other perspectives, can also be applied to understanding and exploiting the potential inherent in gender diversity for more efficient organizational behavior. In section two some of the benefits of diversity identified in the literature were discussed, and they included processes important to good organizational functioning such as innovation and understanding of the environment (Carter et al., 2003) and decision making (Miller et al., 1997). It was also noted that because as many women as men are currently pursuing higher education, it simply would not make any sense to not take advantage of all available human capital by including women at all organizational levels and professions. In the section on the theoretical perspective of managerial cognition, we saw one example of how homosocial reproduction and subsequent lack of gender diversity can lead to less efficient decision-making processes: male leaders tend to hire male leaders, thus making decisions that are not based on a financial rationale, as research associates diversity with positive effects on the bottom line. It follows
from this that increased gender diversity, or ideally gender balance, in positions with decision-making power may have very real and tangible benefits for the organization through introduction and presence of values identified by research as typically associated with women. The underlying assumption of this vein of reasoning is somewhat in line with the theoretical perspective offered by role theories, where some values and attributes are associated with men and others with women. Some values research supports the notion of identifiable differences between men and women in terms of values, and the similarities to the gender roles central in role theory are noticeable. For instance, women have been found to be more likely than men to express concern and responsibility for the well-being of others and less likely to accept competition and materialism (Beutel et al., 1995), and women have been found to rank altruism as more important than men (Dietz et al., 2002). A consequence of this reasoning is that gender diversity will give organizations access to a more complete specter of values, with all the consequences this implies in the form of improved organizational processes like decision making. It may also have consequences for the implementation of decisions in situations where the overall gender composition is balanced while the leader team composition is male dominated. In this situation, implementation problems can be envisioned because one may have neglected to realize aspects of the process or the content of the decision to which women may react strongly. Having a balanced leader team in terms of gender composition may offer the possibility of greater understanding of the diverse needs and expectations of the organization and allow for adjustments to ensure optimal implementation. A balanced leader team does not necessarily consist of 50% men and 50% women. Kanter (1977) discusses the notion of a tipping point, and argues that 35% of one gender is needed to achieve the benefits of diversity and prevent the negatives associated with a lack of gender diversity. Thus, the 40% gender representation rule introduced in Norway may be a good rule of thumb.

Returning to the aforementioned point of differences in values between men and women, Sternberg’s (1998) balance theory of wisdom can serve to illustrate one way in which the recognition and exploitation of value differences, particularly the value associated with altruism and recognition of other’s needs, might benefit the organization through improved decision making. The balance theory sees wisdom as inherent in the interaction between an individual and a situational context so that there is balance between them (Sternberg, 1998), which applied to decision making means that a specific decision may be wise in one situation, but not in another. Tacit knowledge and practical intelligence are used to balance the interests of different constituents to achieve a balance of the responses to the environmental context in order to achieve a common goal, and values will mediate how individuals use this tacit knowledge for balancing interests and responses (Sternberg, 1998). In other words, wise decision making is balanced decision making; it takes place when the individual manages to go beyond own needs and wants and take the interests of others into consideration and realize the importance of the big picture. If women’s values are indeed oriented more toward “the greater good” than
men’s, it is possible that decision making in organizations would benefit from the perspective and the balance which women represent. In this manner, the values perspective opens our understanding of the very real implications of gender diversity in upper-echelon positions and professions and suggests that wiser decision making may be attained through greater gender diversity.

A limitation of the values perspective can be identified from the above discussion, where the association of certain values with certain genders closely resembles ideas promoted by role theory. A problem with role theory is that it is fairly static and does not provide a good understanding of potential effects of evolution in roles but sees gender roles as leader roles as relatively stable and incapable of change. Thus, this theory may not give a sufficient reflection of reality, which arguably has changed at least somewhat in favor of greater convergence between the female gender role and leader roles. It is possible that role theory actually contributes to perpetuating the very stereotypes it deems counterproductive by focusing on such a narrow understanding of roles. Similarly, relying on a distinction between “female values” and “male values” to predict behavior may provide a weak approximation of reality, particularly in situations where such a distinction may be irrelevant. It may be feeble to claim on the one hand that men and women are equal, and on the other that women are better suited than men for certain tasks because of differences in values.

Future research may benefit from exploring the structure of values in Norway to a larger degree, so that the extent and influence of equality can be better understood and used to elaborate on existing theories. From the above discussion of the benefits of gender diversity on decision making, possible indirect effects of equality can also be identified as other values associated with the female gender may impact the display of certain organizational behaviors such as decision making. Interaction effects between different values can be imagined, which suggests that more research is needed in order to get a clear picture of values in Norway in general, and the possible presence of female values in particular. A better understanding of equality as well as possible interaction effects between this and other values may contribute to future theory building and also have implications for the production of gender legislation and other measures designed to improve the gender diversity situation. Future research may also apply the value perspective, alone or in conjunction with the perspectives of role theory, gender as doing, and managerial cognition, to other cultural settings. Norway can be considered a model system for the study of gender-related issues due to the perceived recognition of equality as a fundamental value, and insights obtained within this cultural context may aid the understanding of similar questions in other countries.
CONCLUSION

Gender diversity in the workforce is an important topic as it has consequences for the organization’s bottom line as well as for individuals and society in general. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that gender diversity is difficult to achieve, particularly in upper-echelon positions and occupations associated with power, influence, and money. This article has approached gender diversity within one particular cultural context, Norway, and asked the question “Is gender equality in Norway just an illusion”? An answer to this question has been attempted by reviewing four different theoretical approaches and suggesting a way to unite them through focusing on the values approach. Role theory, literature on managerial cognition, the perspective of gender as “doing”, and values theory represent four conceptions of the observed lack of females in prestigious positions and occupations. Role theory sees the lack of gender diversity as the outcome of a mismatch between gender roles and job roles. The literature on managerial cognition notes the tendency to homosocial reproduction and single-loop learning in organizations. Gender as “doing” provides a process view of gender, suggesting that it is the outcome of social interactions at different levels of society and can lead to a specific gender composition in organizations. Last but not least, the values approach puts the spotlight on the value “equality”, and stresses how this value is an important part of Norway’s national culture as reflected by surveys touting Norway as a gender equality haven. It is proposed that neither one of these approaches on its own can fully explain the issue of gender equality in Norway, and that unifying each perspective with insights from the value approach might be a fruitful way to approach the topic. By doing so, we see that the composition of female and male gender roles in Norway is unique to this national culture in part because of the value of equality, and that there is probably a smaller gap between gender roles and leader roles in this culture than in many others. The process of “doing” gender will be influenced by the national culture in which it takes place; this means that the value of equality will contribute to the unique characteristics of this process as well as to the definition of gender roles. Homosocial reproduction can also be viewed as one way in which gender is “done” in Norway.

For these reasons, it can be argued that gender equality in Norway is perhaps more of an illusion than reality. Equality appears to be a commonly held value, but this is not reflected in the actual gender diversity situation. Perhaps it is time to stop claiming that Norway is such a gender equality paradise and instead focus our efforts on measures that can actually change this situation?

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