Diversified boards and the achievement of environmental, social and governance goals

Article

Accepted Version

To link to this article DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/beer.12606

Publisher: Wiley

Alawadi, A., Kakabadse, N., Morley, M., & Khan, N. (2023). Diversified boards and the achievement of environmental, social, and governance goals, Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility, 00, 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12606

Diversified Boards and the Achievement of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Goals

Abstract

We explore the impact of board resources arising from diverse board members on the achievement of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) goals. Employing resource dependence theory (RDT) as our frame, and drawing on qualitative data from 41 interviews with board directors of publicly traded and privately held companies in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), we identify three key mechanisms underpinning the achievement of ESG goals, namely, the leveraging of particular connections, the deployment of different resources, and the harnessing of a range of diversity types. We find that the use of social resources is often related to environmental concerns, and occasionally social goals, but rarely governance issues. We also find that financial motivations often drive environmental issues, while many of the social resources that added value occurred in the public sector. Importantly, the combining of both skill and social resources, rather than relying on each alone, was seen to increase the likelihood of achieving ESG goals. Our findings also point to the importance of board diversity in accomplishing the board's ESG goals, most especially functional diversity. We propose that such functional diversity, along with resources in the form of social resources and skills need to feature more prominently in order to improve ESG performance and outcomes. We highlight the implications of our work, especially regarding the establishment of board diversity policies beyond gender alone.

Keywords: Diversity, Environmental, Social, Governance, Resources, Board Directors.

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have witnessed a growing academic discourse on board diversity and its relevance to the securing of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) outcomes (Barrata et al., 2023). In joining this conversation, we draw on ideas from resource dependence theory (RDT) (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003) as a theoretical point of departure to build insights on the under-researched area of how resources in the form of skills and connections that board members bring to the table serve as endowments for the achievement of ESG goals. In focusing on broader social resources, our work moves beyond much existing scholarship which has largely examined board demographics and experience as proxies for the skills makeup of a board.

This focus on the skills mix has also resulted in a strong proclivity for quantitative investigations resulting in a paucity of research examining connections between directors and ESG and relatively few indictors of diversity beyond gender. In underscoring the importance of rebalancing the overall corpus of scholarship, Zaman et al. (2022) have led calls for more qualitative research on corporate governance and ESG, particularly in under-researched contexts. Our work responds to this call by qualitatively exploring the relationship between board social resources and ESG outcomes, an area that has been notably under-researched.

Specifically, we explore how the resource endowments offered by diverse board members contribute to the achievement of organizational ESG goals. Drawing on foundational ideas from RDT (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003) as a theoretical lens and building qualitative insights from an emerging economy context, we report the findings of a study conducted across listed, public, and private boards in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Our research, comprising 41 interviews with board directors captures and documents the motivations and the particular abilities board members bring to the table, and unpacks the role of these resources in contributing to ESG outcomes.

In examining the significance of board diversity in promoting successful ESG practices via board members' skills and social resources, we strengthen the case for RDT as a theoretical lens of choice. In the context of our study, skills are considered not only as individual capabilities but also as vital resources for the board, interwoven with our central themes of connections, resources, and diversity. These skills, as a specific form of resource, contribute towards ESG outcomes. Furthermore, from a contextual perspective and the value of landscaping practices and approaches in under researched territories, we focus on boards in the UAE, a context which, along with several other emerging economies, features less commonly in academic discourse (Harjoto and Wang, 2020; Sing and Delios, 2017).

Evidence of the growing relevance of board diversity to ESG can be seen in the increasing number of scholarly articles and policy initiatives focusing on these issues (Al-Yahyaee et al., 2017; Masoud and Vij, 2021). In the UAE, this trend is particularly noticeable, with regional policymakers showing an increased interest in board diversity, as demonstrated by the Securities and Commodities Authorities' guide stipulating a baseline of 20% female presence on boards (Williams-Quinn and Taousi, 2022). The UAE policymakers' focus on diversity presents a unique opportunity to examine the impact of diversity in the UAE, with a view to informing debate more broadly on board composition, resources, and the achievement of ESG goals. Our study offers policymakers, in particular, important insights of relevance to devising board diversity policies beyond gender diversity in the UAE and other countries in the Middle East.

The remainder of our paper proceeds as follows. By way of conceptual background and in order to frame our study, we begin by curating key insights from the literature dealing with board diversity, resources and ESG. We then detail the setting in which our study was conducted, and we describe our research methodology. Following this, we present our key findings, including illustrative extracts from participant interviews. Our findings are distilled into three aggregate themes, namely, the leveraging of particular connections, the deployment of different resources, and the harnessing of a range of diversity types, in achieving ESG goals. We discuss these key findings in the context of the enfolding literature, and we outline some directions for future research designed to open up new lines of inquiry around board diversity, resources and ESG.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

We draw on ideas from RDT as the theoretical point of departure for our investigation. RDT maintains that a board member's responsibility entails supplying the organization with certain resources or endowments (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). This may be accomplished via, for example, advice and counsel, networking, market access, legitimacy, and expertise. According to RDT the board of directors' role is to offer resources to the organization. The notion is that diverse board members will have a range of experiences and skills that will enable them to supply the organization with more resources. According to Pfeffer (1972), the board's makeup should match the organization's resource requirements in order for the board of directors to supply it with the resources it requires. For instance, having a diversified board of directors enables the organization to use its resources more effectively. The theory is based on the presumption that an organization's success is directly related to the opportunities accessible to it, which enables it to acquire the necessary resources (Frynas and Yamahaki, 2016). According to RDT, a diverse board would provide additional resources in terms of skills, experience, guidance, and counseling, as well as market access (Fakir and Jusoh, 2020; Gardazi et al., 2020).

Thus, through an RDT lens, the advantages attaching to more diverse boards are accounted for in a range of different ways: a talent and skills rationale features prominently; so too does a market share reasoning vested in the accommodation of the needs of diverse stakeholders. Other commonly invoked logics include those focused on equity and fairness, along with a human resource management rationale, the avoidance of groupthink, and the primacy of effective governance (Booth-Bell, 2018; Catalyst 2004; Fairfax, 2005). Building on these rationales, Booth-Bell (2018) argues that if the RDT's emphasis on the director's capacity to attain key resources for the organization is taken into consideration, social resources might well be seen as a legitimate supplementary justification for board diversity. Meanwhile, research by Harjoto and Wang (2020) points to a positive correlation between board director social resources and ESG performance, something which is more pronounced in areas with significant product industry concentration, and in situations where a large proportion of female board members are present. Booth-Bell (2018) suggests that diverse boards of directors are more likely than their less-diverse counterparts to have social resources that vary from that of other boards of directors because heterogenous social resources may connect the board to additional networks and resources for advice and guidance, reputation, communications networks, and access to significant external inputs. They make a compelling case for the inclusion of social resources as a conduit to board diversity and for a deeper conversation in the extant literature on this front.

Social resources, in the context of our research and the RDT lens, refer to the tangible and intangible benefits derived from social relationships and networks. These resources include access to information, social connections, trust, reputation, and other social assets that can be leveraged to gain advantages and influence outcomes within organizations. In the context of our research on board diversity, understanding social resources is crucial because it helps explain how diverse board compositions can lead to enhanced decision-making processes and performance. By incorporating individuals from diverse backgrounds, boards can tap into a wider range of social resources, such as different networks, perspectives, and knowledge (Fakir and Jusoh, 2020;

Gardazi et al., 2020). These social resources can contribute to better problem-solving, access to critical information, and the ability to build relationships with key stakeholders. Ultimately, the presence of social resources through board diversity can provide organizations with a competitive edge and facilitate their adaptation to changing environments (Booth-Bell, 2018).

A central proposition of RDT is that a board's composition should be in sync with the organization's resource needs (Pfeffer, 1972). Here, the resources not only refer to the conventional assets but also include distinctive capabilities, perspectives, and networks brought about by diverse board members (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). Applying RDT to the ESG context, the resources could be extended to include environmental stewardship, social consciousness, and principled governance, aspects increasingly demanded by stakeholders (e.g., Islam et al., 2022; Romano et al., 2020; Harjoto et al., 2015). The inclusion of diverse board members can help better navigate the complexities of ESG, as they bring to the table a wider array of experiences, perspectives, and skills (Fakir and Jusoh, 2020; Gardazi et al., 2020). Further, RDT's emphasis on social resources extends to ESG performance through diverse board members' unique networks and relationships, enabling greater stakeholder engagement, information access, and collaborative problem-solving (Booth-Bell, 2018). In effect, this positioning of RDT creates a direct link between board diversity, resource acquisition, and improved ESG performance, paving the way for a more nuanced understanding and practical insights for organizations aiming to excel in sustainable practices.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS: BOARD DIVERSITY, RESOURCES, AND ESG

Board diversity may be defined as variety in the board of directors' makeup. There are two types of diversity: observable diversity, which refers to immediately discernible qualities of directors such as race, gender, and age, and less observable diversity such as educational and vocational backgrounds (Milliken and Martins, 1996). Our research employs a suite of elements to define board diversity, namely gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, age, education, occupational background, and board independence. In this way we employ a multi-faceted definition of board diversity, encompassing both observable demographic attributes (gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, age) and unobservable cognitive elements (education, occupational background, and board independence) (Katmon et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2007; Khatib et al., 2023; Erhardt et al., 2003). This definition is rooted in the idea that board diversity is an amalgamation of heterogeneity within the board's composition (Katmon et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2007). This heterogeneity can be manifested through diverse demographics such as gender, nationality, and ethnicity and cognitive aspects like education and experience (Katmon et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2007). Additionally, we subscribe to the idea that board diversity can present as cognitive (experience, knowledge, education) or demographic (age, gender, ethnicity, and nationality) (Khatib et al., 2023; Erhardt et al., 2003). This reflects the premise that the boardroom is a blend of human and social resources, benefitting from a myriad of perspectives (Van der Walt and Ingley, 2003). Our definition is thus aligned with the notion that demographic diversity (age, gender, ethnicity, and race) and cognitive diversity (personality, education, knowledge, and perception) are integral components of board diversity (Baker et al., 2020). Hence, this comprehensive approach not only encapsulates the numerous dimensions of board diversity but also resonates with our assertion that diversity fosters better governance and decision-making within the boardroom.

In the context of our discussion, it is pertinent to explicitly define ESG and its relevance to board diversity. ESG refers to the three central factors in measuring the sustainability and societal impact of an organization (Eccles and Viviers, 2011). The environmental aspect focuses on the organization's impact on the natural world (Rau and Yu, 2023), social concerns itself with how the organization manages relationships with employees, suppliers, customers, and the communities where it operates (Henisz et al., 2019), and governance deals with the organization's leadership, internal controls, and shareholder rights (Low, 2022). ESG has become an essential part of the global business agenda, with an increasing focus on how companies make a positive impact on society and the environment (Baratta et al., 2023). Recent studies, including research on the linkage between board networks and ESG factors by Harjoto and Wang (2020), reveal that the relationship between board diversity and ESG performance illustrates how diverse boards can foster better environmental stewardship, social consciousness, and principled governance. This highlights the essential role that ESG plays in the boardroom, adding nuance and depth to our understanding of board diversity.

Harjoto and Wang (2020) explored the link between board networks and the performance of organizations in terms of ESG factors. They discovered that board networks, as assessed by degree, proximity, eigenvector, betweenness, and information centrality, have a beneficial impact on an organization’s ESG performance. Furthermore, their data indicated that there was a non-linear link between board networks and ESG performance, with this association being stronger when there is a high proportion of women on their board of directors, though the research does not delve deep into the relationship between diversity and networks.

A board’s social resources could be a key factor for engaging in effective ESG practices, particularly with diverse board members because they bring a variety of experiences, education, professions, and nationalities to the table and, in the course of their professional duty, may have been exposed to a range of individuals. This increases their likelihood of having ESG-related social networks to assist them with their ESG initiatives. Additionally, board composition is a critical component of corporate governance since the board is responsible for setting the social itinerary of organizations, assigning and connecting the organization with resources, and developing strategies for sustaining it (Jizi, 2017). By extending the RDT framework to include the ESG context, we emphasize that the resources could encompass environmental stewardship, social consciousness, and principled governance, aspects increasingly demanded by stakeholders. The inclusion of diverse board members aids in navigating the complexities of ESG, providing a broader array of experiences, perspectives, and skills

Board research has also emphasized the occupational or functional backgrounds of members. Harjoto *et al*. (2015) discovered that a greater range of specializations among members tended to lessen concerns about social responsibility. Yaseen *et al*. (2019) examined professional diversity and classified it into five categories: consulting, legal, finance, management, and others. The research unearthed a positive relationship between expertise diversity and corporate responsibility. Shaukat *et al*. (2016) found that boards with financial backgrounds in the audit committee, as well as corporations with socially oriented boards (defined as having a higher proportion of independent directors, financial proficiency, and female directors), were more likely to have a dedicated and inclusive responsible plan for the board. Thus, these organizations would almost certainly perform better on environmental and social fronts. Their results are consistent with RDT which argues that the board of directors allocates resources to the organization. Kanadli Sadi *et al*. (2020) discovered a positive correlation between board diversity in terms of occupational background and the board’s ability to achieve strategic tasks.

Age diversity research on boards has often produced mixed findings. Yaseen *et al*. (2019) observed that age diversity on the board was positively connected with improved social performance. In contrast, research conducted by Liu and Zeng (2017) reached a different conclusion; they discovered that age diversity has a deleterious impact on the effectiveness of corporate social activities. They argued that this was due to the competing viewpoints held by individuals of various ages. This argument challenges the heterogeneity hypothesis, which asserts that conflicts resulting from diversity result in improved conflict resolution and solutions (Watson *et al*., 1998). Furthermore, Harjoto *et al*. (2015) discovered a negative correlation between age diversity and corporate responsibility intensity and concerns. However, of note, this research comprised a broad range of ages. All directors under the age of 40 were grouped together, but some were as young as 25. According to Hafsi and Turgut (2013) older directors are more concerned with welfare, whilst younger directors are more concerned with ethics and the environment.

Scholars who have examined the links between board gender diversity and ESG practices have come to a variety of different conclusions. Numerous studies on board gender diversity have shown a positive correlation between board gender diversity and ESG performance (Endrikat *et al*., 2021; Nadeem *et al*., 2017), a positive correlation between female directors and ESG reporting (Arayssi *et al*., 2020), as well as mixed results (Rodríguez-Ariza *et al.*, 2017). According to the authors, this might be linked to the notion of critical mass, defined by Kanter (1977) as the minimum proportion of individuals required to achieve a collective action. Harjoto *et al*. (2015) discovered that increasing gender diversity on boards of directors was associated with a decrease in corporate responsibility concerns and an increase in corporate responsibility strengths.

Building on this, recent studies offer deeper insights into the importance of board diversity for managing corporate sustainability, particularly amid unforeseen events like the COVID-19 pandemic. Research by García-Sánchez *et al.* (2023) illuminates the integral role of female leadership in guiding organizations towards the goals of the 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Their work with a sample of 4,089 international organizations showed that those led by female CEOs and/or chairpersons, and those with increased gender diversity in management teams and monitoring bodies, exhibited stronger commitment to the *Agenda*. Concurrently, they identified gender stereotyping prejudices that could limit women's influence over corporate decisions. In parallel, Amorelli & García-Sánchez (2023) examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on boards with higher representation of women. They found that companies with greater female board representation were less likely to see a decline in stakeholder commitment during the pandemic. This resilience was particularly noticeable in organizations hardest hit by the pandemic. In further contribution to this discourse, Maggi et al. (2023) analyzed environmental disclosure practices in family and non-family owned organizations, focusing on the impact of board gender diversity. They found that family owned organizations generally had lower levels of environmental disclosure, but this gap was reduced when there was a critical mass of women directors on the board. The study highlights the interplay between family business structure, gender diversity, and corporate social responsibility. Collectively, these studies underscore the resilience of gender-diverse boards during crises, their contribution to sustainable corporate commitment, and the role of female leadership in advancing sustainable development, while also acknowledging existing social barriers and prejudices.

In a comprehensive examination of the banking industry, Gangi et al. (2023) delved into the nuanced interplay between board cultural diversity and bank stakeholder engagement, mediated through the enhancement of corporate social performance. Their study unearthed evidence that cultural diversity contributes positively to the engagement with socially responsible initiatives within the banking sector. Additionally, research examining the relationship between board networks and ESG performance found that boards with greater gender diversity had a higher level of “network centrality” and higher ESG performance (Harjoto and Wang, 2020).

Recent innovations in ESG research have centered on multifaceted relationships and nuanced considerations. Chen et al., (2023) explored the alignment between environmental efforts, government subsidies, and non-environmental R&D in Chinese organizations, highlighting the need for strategic alignment. Gao et al., (2023) examined the complexity of CSR and its impact on financial performance, emphasizing contextual factors. Chen et al., (2023) investigated employees' perceptions of CSR and its effects on work attitudes, providing insights into person-organization fit. Wu and Li (2023) shifted focus towards the link between CSR and corporate competitive advantage, uncovering an inverse U-shaped relationship that explains the inefficacy of many CSR strategies. Collectively, these studies underscore the growing complexity of ESG considerations and point towards the need for balanced approaches and alignment between various corporate and social factors.

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

The UAE has seen a remarkable transition in the last several decades, going from a largely undeveloped desert to being named the best place to open a business in 2022’s Global Entrepreneurship Index (Sharma, 2022). The UAE's governance code establishes standards for Public Joint Stock Companies (PJSCs) and Limited Liability Companies (LLCs). A PJSC shall have a board of directors comprised of executive and non-executive members with a minimum of three and a maximum of eleven members. A limited liability company with fewer than seven partners should designate management, but it is not necessary to establish a board of directors (Choueiri and Macharia 2019). In terms of board composition, the UAE imposes no limitations on board members based on their age. However, the board of directors of a PSJC must be composed mostly of UAE nationals, but this restriction does not apply to LLCs (Choueiri and Macharia 2019). Furthermore, the UAE requires that all publicly traded enterprises in the country include at least one female member on their boards of directors (Nair, 2021). Moreover, members of PSJCs are not permitted to hold both the chairman and chief executive officer roles (Choueiri and Macharia 2019).

In terms of social structures, the MENA region's social systems emphasize the significance of personal networks as sources of social sustenance and commercial opportunity (Arayssi and Jizi, 2019). The board structure is expected to profit from a broad network that enables the achievement of favorable outcomes (Arayssi *et al*., 2020). In the Middle East, using connections to get something advantageous or economically beneficial is practiced and the deployment of one's social resources is a prevalent method of doing business (Gold and Naufal, 2012).

As a result of the UAE's success in incorporating some elements of diversity (e.g., gender) and the dearth of studies in this sector in the UAE, it serves as a valuable research context for our work. Additionally, due to the differences between the Middle East and the West with respect to both social structures, and role of social resources in business (Gold and Naufal, 2012), it is worthwhile to investigate the relationship between social resources and effective ESG practices and solutions.

We used an inductive qualitative approach to investigate the underlying research questions (Corbin and Strauss, 2007). A qualitative approach was chosen because it holds the prospect of allowing for the unearthing of respondents' statements about their relationships, the development of a rapport between the participant and the researcher, and, as has been suggested in the literature, allows for the observation and interpretation of the complexity of the entity, the appreciation of embedded practices, and the building of more pluralistic, contextual insights (Kakabadse and Morley, 2021; Lee and Morley, 2021).

The design of a survey study could not have allowed for the development of a rapport in which board members would feel comfortable discussing their interactions on the board. Semi-structured interviews, which permit open-ended inquiry and the potential for additional probing were therefore utilized in this study. This provided us with a comprehensive collection of considerable experience from which to discover significant contextual details in order to address our research area.

Exploring our unique study environment (board directors in the UAE) necessitated purposeful sampling (to qualify for participation, board members in the UAE were required). Purposeful sampling involves selecting individuals in settings where the phenomenon of interest was apparent (Patton, 2014). Participants were recruited using online professional networks such as LinkedIn, as well as through snowballing, a strategy in which initial participants were requested to suggest other participants, who were then asked to suggest further participants. Our final sample comprised 41 board members representing a diverse range of demographic characteristics, including eight nationalities, 31 male and 10 female participants, ages ranging from 25 to 66, and a variety of different religions and beliefs, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Atheism, and Jainism, as well as a variety of different educational levels, including high school, bachelor's, master's, PhD, and executive education attainments and qualifications. Numerous functional backgrounds were represented, including finance, law, engineering, environmental protection, medicine, marketing, mathematics, sharia, computer science, information technology, shipping, oil and gas, human resources, and philosophy. Table 1 below summarizes the participant profiles.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Table 1. Participant Profiles

Interviews lasting between sixty and seventy-five minutes were conducted on-line. With the participants' agreement, interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, yielding 1,100 pages of text. In accordance with well-established interview protocols, the questions ranged from the broad to the more particular (Bernhard 1988) and were conducted in the following manner: First, we inquired on the personal background of the participants before moving on to questions regarding their current board. A series of questions regarding the board's context, followed by questions on the diversity of the board were then posed. Subsequently, they were asked several ESG questions and about the board's contributions to the organization's ESG practices, and finally, they were questioned about the board's access to resources such as skills and social resources. A detailed interview protocol can be found in appendix 1.

Following this structured approach, we made sure to allow space for elaboration and clarification, ensuring an authenticity to each interview. An inductive questioning approach was utilized, offering scope for follow-up questions, pivots, and probes. This was essential not only to build a rapport with the interviewees but also to gain deeper insights and perspectives that could not be achieved through a rigidly structured protocol. Unanticipated but relevant issues frequently surfaced during these discussions, prompting us to explore those where necessary, thus adding richness and complexity to the gathered data.

The concept of social resources was indeed a challenging aspect to unearth. Given its intangible nature, we used an indirect approach to gauge it. Participants were asked to share instances where connections or skills/background opened opportunities for their board or the organization. Questions such as “Can you provide an example when a board member's connection helped to navigate a complex ESG issue?” were posed to capture the depth and breadth of social resources at play, along with the unique social dynamics and their effects within each board.

We took a number of steps to diminish the likelihood that their replies were influenced by a perceived need to promote socially desirable board diversity and ESG initiatives. We assured participants that neither they nor their boards would be disclosed in the reporting of the findings. To handle the conflict between asking interview questions that effectively expose a theme and elicit responses, we refrained from explicitly pointing out the connection between board diversity and ESG objectives and instead relied on the participant to provide pertinent events. We also inquired about their own or other board members' efforts, allowing them to impute conduct to others. Academic terms and theories, including RDT, were omitted from the dialogue in order to prevent swaying participants’ interpretations and views of these notions. As a matter of course, instances of board diversity and ESG arose, and we then asked probing questions about the context, the implications of resources, and who provided resources in these cases. The majority of interviewees recalled at least one significant experience with board diversity, resources and ESG.

The process of analyzing qualitative data is continual. To develop theory pertaining to board diversity and ESG, we used a continual comparison process, cycling between data collecting, coding, and consultation of established theory (Glaser and Strauss, 2009). We kept track of new insights as they arose, comments on subsequent interviews, and corroboration with our theoretical lens (Glesne, 1998). Interviews proceeded until overlap was reached indicating theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 2009). Nevertheless, eleven further interviews were undertaken to ensure saturation.

We then followed a three-step approach to code the data. Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994). Initially, open coding was used to identify ideas with the intention of studying the data and considering all potential interpretations (Corbin and Strauss, 2007). The transcripts were reviewed in numerous instances, and two researchers individually allocated first-level codes to the material. We also modified our interview methodology based on the first insights and themes that emerged from the initial coding. Using the NVivo software we produced codes to classify occurrences, categories, narratives, and discoveries. For instance, we classified the many categories of board diversity (e.g., educational, occupational, age, and gender), board resources (e.g., use of government contact), and the impacts of board diversity (e.g., using past experience to reach a goal).

In order to establish how our first-order codes corresponded to bigger, theoretical categories, we combined codes of similar nature into "Second-Order Codes". We examined the data multiple times to confirm that their content corresponded to the designated categories. By comparing and contrasting, we were able to establish connections between the many notions that developed during open coding. This was an iterative procedure that entailed returning to the original codes created in stage one and making the necessary modifications. To aid this procedure, we extracted generic codes from the data pertaining to board diversity and ESG objectives articulated by participants. We resorted to current board theories and research on board diversity, board resources and ESG throughout our investigation (e.g., Pfeffer, 1972; Harjoto and Wang, 2020).

The last round of analysis used theoretical coding. We shifted between data and theory more frequently to corroborate the emergent trends (e.g., Pfeffer, 1972; Harjoto and Wang, 2020; Booth-Bell, 2018). Although we were informed by current literature, as opposed to attempting to accommodate our research within the limits of the literature, the majority of which has been generated in a Western hemisphere, we chose to acquire new findings from our data. The coding categories were combined into a table of quotations. Table 2 depicts the unfolding of our data, including the aggregate themes, the second-order codes to which they relate, and illustrative examples. The RDT was based on the theoretical aspects outlined in the coding analysis. To visualize the extensive analysis from a theoretical perspective based on the data and key themes, we developed a visual model illustrating how board diversity in the form of functional diversity and heterogeneous teams leads to valuable resources in the form of skills and networks, which ultimately result in improved ESG outcomes (See Figure 1).

FINDINGS

The majority of participants claimed that they provided resources to the board in the form of connections and skills. They also discussed how they made their contacts work for them in order to pursue ESG strategies and approaches. They then shared their thoughts on the significance of board resources in accomplishing ESG objectives. Furthermore, the majority of participants took the view that having a diverse board of directors would provide the organization with access to a greater range of resources to assist it in meeting its ESG goals. Three significant themes emerged from the analysis, namely (1) the leveraging of particular connections, (2) the deployment of different resources, and (3) the harnessing of a range of diversity types among board members in order to achieve ESG goals. Table 2 provides a synthesis of the key findings.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Table 2. Synthesis of Key Findings

In what follows, we provide an in-depth examination of these three major themes that emerged from our analysis, including illustrative quotes from participants.

Leveraging Relationships to Achieve ESG Goals

When asked to describe a time when their connections aided them in achieving an ESG target, the majority of participants mentioned environmental challenges. Environmental advocacy is often accompanied with a financial advantage for the organization. For example, a director discusses their electric vehicle franchise:

> *I have an e-bike franchise... It is the optimal method for decreasing noise and air pollution. I am now in the process of pushing this initiative via a government contact in order to get it off the ground.* (Participant 26)

Subsequently, they delved into an analysis of the deeper implications of their interpersonal connections:

> *I needed to utilize someone within my connections who cares about this issue. Now, we'll have to attempt to work together to possibly get the government to impose noise and air pollution restrictions so that others will begin to take this issue as seriously as I do. Then we can attempt to push this forward.* (Participant 26)

The following presents another instance when a participant used their relationships in the government sector to advance an environmental goal because that benefited their organization financially:

> *We have a paper recycling facility, which is environmentally friendly. We have been lobbying to prevent the export of rubbish from here so that we can collect and recycle it, which was not easy because of a free market, and we had to convince the government of the benefits that it will bring to the UAE .... After three or four years of lobbying, they essentially established the policy... I played a role in enlisting the right individuals to listen to our case.* (Participant 30)

Additionally, environmental goals were linked to cost-cutting activities inside the organization. For example, a director described how they leveraged their relationships to assist them in achieving an environmental goal that had been proposed by the organization in order to save money:

> *"Let's go solar since it'll save us money," we said. The core of it was that we wanted someone who could accomplish something on a large scale. As a result, I have solar construction businesses on the board of an energy-saving company. So, I called them and said, "you know some companies that do contracting?".* (Participant 10)

The participant worked to introduce their external contacts to the organizational management, thus initiating a dynamic integration of disparate networks within the organizational framework:

> *I connect them with the management and engineering team and they responded, "We can do this, but we can't pay for it." Because of my background in banking and finance, I was able to link [them] with the appropriate lenders. That would have funded a project like that. I only linked them, and they then devised a financial strategy.* (Participant 10)

Many others enlisted the assistance of their professional connections to assist them in clarifying laws and regulations pertaining to the environment. For example, a participant sought clarification from their network on the processes that needed to be performed in order to formally label one of their buildings as green:

> *I have a connection with a Dubai-based firm. They are the ones that provide consultants and landlords with green building construction guidelines. So, I linked them with our consultant so they could learn about the green construction rules to make sure our building is green.* (Participant 9)

In social situations, members might use their community ties to bring a community stakeholder to the board, demonstrating their awareness and regard for community issues:

> *With cement, I can say we introduced one of the community members on the board. . . the area where you have most of the industries, cement plants, and all that. And there is a community that also resides around it. Now a community member is involved. And then when we are rolling out the initiative, it has far more credibility and acceptance. And also, … you end up spending money in [a way that is] more relevant to the community.* (Participant 27)

Others, notably those in the venture capital industry, have backed social projects in order to get investment from their contacts who impact investors in the long run. In this way, their contacts and familiarity with impact investors compelled them to pay attention to a business that had a social model to begin with:

> *I highlighted two significant aspects of a food delivery app seeking investment. One is the empowerment of women angle. The second notion is a healthy diet. I said that we could reach out to some impact investors that we know that invest in ESG. Consequently, we could then contact impact investors with a focus on social effect. (Participant 32)*

Several participants reported that when it came to social activities, they occasionally drew on clients from their own enterprises for support. For example, this participant described how they communicated any social initiatives that the organization was keen on to their customers and how many times the clients expressed an interest in being involved:

> *We have partners; we try to engage them to be a part of one event, for example, going and helping some children on some occasions. And we find out that once they get involved with us in one project, then they write to us and say, "Okay, I want to be with you, a long-term partner on several projects going on."* (Participant 15)

Some, on the other hand, attributed their worldwide ties with enabling them to successfully complete their international social efforts with relatively little difficulty. One participant added that having a Vietnamese board member enabled them to implement social projects more readily in Vietnam since they already had a large number of connections in the country, which was beneficial:

> *We've implemented CSR projects in Vietnam... Because we have a Vietnamese board member, we have knowledge of social efforts beyond our borders.* (Participant 4)

Some participants attributed their ability to network in the area of ESG to earlier work they had done in the ESG domain area. They consulted with these individuals on a regular basis for guidance on how to properly implement environmental, social, and governance principles inside the organization:

> *Definitely. Due to my work in the ESG field, I had a better understanding of ESG and access to many ESG analysts and sustainalytics, or ESG, investors, global, and all of them; by establishing these networks and analysing their criteria, we're able to bring this information to the board and say, "Actually, these are the best practises. These are the matters on which we must concentrate."* (Participant 25)

Scholars have claimed that the best way organizations could fully incorporate social and environmental concerns into their business objectives is by establishing an economical value or a business case for the social and environmental initiatives (Epstein and Roy, 2003). It has also been suggested that programs established purely for this purpose without any economic benefits are prone to the whims of shifting public agendas, changes in management, and financial fluctuations. Additionally, the absence of a defined business case hinders the initiatives, as managers would continue to seek funding (Epstein and Roy, 2003). The differences between business case and business performance when talking about the drivers of environmental initiatives have also been alluded to in the extant literature. The business case occurs when organizations receive economic benefits from the initiatives, whereas business performance is said to occur when they achieve cost cutting (Williamson *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, studies have shown that networks among governments and other organizations have an effect on environmental practices (Pasquini and Shearing, 2014). This is consistent with the findings above. Moreover, research shows that the financial relevance of ESG criteria provides a more compelling reason for venture capital investors to participate in ESG activities (Botsari and Lang, 2020).

According to academic research, an enterprise's networks formed by its board members assist the boards' capacity to make greater successful strategic choices (Thorgren *et al.*, 2010). This could come in the form of knowledge from social resources. Additionally, Harjoto and Wang

(2020) found that there was a link between the board's network and ESG performance. However, since it was a quantitative study, it is difficult to determine how their network aided them in achieving higher ESG performance. Stakeholder inclusion may enhance board outcomes by adding credibility and legitimacy to the board, but networks most definitely help by providing instruments for securing additional resources and solidifying relationships (Gazley *et al*., 2010).

Deploying Different Resources in Achieving ESG Goals

Some participants described ESG as a relatively recent concept. Many interviewees felt that establishing international relationships in ESG-aware countries is critical because they may provide organizations with a wealth of information about how to undertake ESG activities and become more ESG compliant. Thus, for example, one of the participants noted:

> *ESG is the area which is actually very recent. Especially in this part of the world, [it] has gotten recent attention. It's very important that you are connected with those countries and those sets of people who have actually evolved much earlier in this particular discipline, where there's a lot of knowledge available.* (Participant 27)

This also entails engaging subject matter experts to expedite the process of knowledge acquisition and skill development, thereby enhancing the learning curve:

> *So, you connect, and network with those people who will really help to speed up the learning curve here. You can bring in that expertise; you can use your network and call those people. In that aspect, it's very important.* (Participant 27)

A blend of skill and social resources, rather than exclusive dependence on network or talent alone, was advised by the participants for board resource allocations. For example, they felt that relationships were important when they needed the assistance of a certain stakeholder, such as regulators or suppliers. They also felt that the director's abilities would broaden the pool of individuals who would be willing to engage in environmental and social activities in the future:

> *Networks help in areas where you are asked to reach to certain suppliers, certain contractors, other stakeholders, legal advisors, and so on. And then you invite them to participate in an overall program. Obviously, it does help. The skills of the board members, definitely [help].* (Participant 2)

The participant characterizes the acquired skills as facilitating a broader inclusivity of individuals in environmental and social initiatives, thereby expanding the pool of participants:

> *The skills will open the pool wider for people to participate in environmental and social programs. The wider skills that we have, the wider access [will be] to different industries, which would allow bigger pools of participation in that area.* (Participant 2)

Other directors believed that networking is significant since it makes achieving their goals simpler and allows them to operate more efficiently. However, they claimed that using a network is not the only option for ESG since the organization may depend on its own resources although the process would be longer:

> *I think networks are really important, and especially if they're senior networks, they have an impact, especially in ESG. If you have contact in that sector and you sit on the board, there's more because you can propose companies to benchmark with, companies to contact, to learn from, even to use, you know, to propose to use as service providers in order to start implementing ESG initiatives.* (Participant 9)

They articulated that in the absence of pre-existing networks, individuals would essentially rely on the organization's procurement processes and independent research efforts, thus emphasizing the necessity for establishing connections to facilitate more efficient and informed decision-making within the organization:

> *And the thing is, if you don't have any networks there, you're just asking the company to go through their procurement and to do their own research. But having that network, it makes things much easier. It's very important.* (Participant 9)

Participants regarded resources in the form of expertise and connections with the board of directors as critical for accomplishing ESG goals. Current research supports this. Thus, for example, it has been suggested that board connections have a positive influence on ESG objectives (Harjoto and

Wang, 2020). According to RDT, the directors on the board of directors contribute vital resources to the organization, enhancing its competitive profile and achievement (Pfeffer, 1972).

Harnessing a Range of Diversity Types in Achieving ESG Goals

While discussing their views on the availability of various director resources, many participants maintained that having a diverse board of directors would provide the board with additional connections to rely on in the event that they needed assistance with anything, including support with ESG goals.

> *Diversity is fundamental because at the end of the day, what you're trying to do is have a network of people that you can tap into, and even if you don't have that network, you know, somebody that might know somebody that you're able to—I mean, Dubai works like that.* (Participant 12)

While most other participants thought that having a diverse range of functional experiences on the board of directors would benefit the organization's ESG efforts, according to one of the participants:

> *We have someone who's from an HR background, someone from investment bank background, someone from environmental background. So, each will bring their own insight to the board and their own direction to the management.* (Participant 25)

The participant proceeded to delineate ESG priorities as perceived by an individual with a human resources (HR) background, thereby providing insights into the specific areas of emphasis within the ESG framework from an HR perspective:

> *So, for example, with a HR background, they look at diversity and inclusion, human rights and safety, and so on.* (Participant 25)

Likewise, they undertake a comparable analysis of the ESG priorities from the vantage point of individuals with financial backgrounds:

> *With the financial markets or the investment banking backgrounds, they look at financing sustainability projects, which is a very important part of ESG. . . having that diversity, through experiences and backgrounds, definitely adds a lot of value in ESG.* (Participant 25)

Participants noted that varied directors bring their unique perspectives, skills, and connections to the table, all of which might be beneficial to the organization's efforts to fulfil its ESG goals. One director illustrated this by using the example of a board of directors comprised entirely of accountants:

> *When having a diverse board, then each person comes with their own train of thoughts, their own connections, their own groups, . . . It's different. If we were five accountants in the board, and those five accountants know another five accountants, and they know another ten accountants, then nobody's getting any help from anyone over there.* (Participant 3)

Subsequently, they elucidated the contrasting effects of cultivating diverse backgrounds, expounding on the transformative outcomes associated with embracing a heterogeneous range of experiences, perspectives, and expertise:

> *But if you have, people from different backgrounds who are connected in different ways, that adds a lot of value.* (Participant 3)

Almost all respondents believed that a diverse board of directors, particularly functionally diverse directors, would equip the organization with a range of resources to assist it in achieving its ESG goals. The relationship among board diversity, resources available to the organization, and effective ESG practices has not been explored in many other studies. However, when looked at from a RDT standpoint, the assumption stands to reason. Harjoto and Wang (2020) looked at the relationship among gender diversity, contacts available to the organization, and effective ESG practices and found a positive relationship. Nevertheless, this approach overlooks other characteristics of diversity.

DISCUSSION

The leveraging of relationships and connections to accomplish ESG objectives emerges as a critical issue. The relationships in this context may also be classified as social resources, community capital, and knowledge capital. When it came to achieving ESG objectives, respondents most often highlighted social resources. These results are consistent with Gold and Naufal's (2012) assertion that accessing and leveraging social resources is a popular mode of conducting business in the Middle East. Community capital was mentioned in relation to the results of social initiatives, stakeholder participation, and credibility. The term "knowledge capital" was used to refer to occasions in which participants were required to gather information from a variety of countries, institutions, and specialists. The theme of resource dependency in achieving ESG objectives can be further subdivided into two types of resources: social resources and skills. According to RDT theory, boards can allow enterprises to reduce their reliance on external sources or acquire new resources (Pfeffer, 1972). Our study shows how this can be achieved via the director's resources of social resources and skills. Social resources allow directors to acquire new resources while their skills would lessen their dependence on external sources. Social resources facilitated directors' access to information and resources, as well as streamlined and eased ESG implementation. Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of director skills in assisting networks in making the most use of existing resources and implementing ESG practices by identifying ESG opportunities. The theme of deploying the resources of diverse board members in achieving ESG objectives was subdivided into two sub themes: heterogenous teams (including gender, age, nationality, and religion) and functional diversity (occupation, education, and experience), which were the most frequently mentioned types of diversity by respondents. Heterogenous teams, respondents suggested, would likely result in new networks for directors to tap into when pursuing ESG objectives, distinct viewpoints on ESG, and diverse ESG talents that might be beneficial on the board. The most frequently mentioned aspect of diversity was functional diversity. This is referred to as establishing "diversity of thought" by Participant 23. Respondents anticipated that functional diversity would result in the development of relationships across disciplines, increasing the likelihood of having a network to tap into for ESG. They also noted that this would result in differing perspectives and approaches to ESG, as participant 25 illustrates how one with an HR background would focus on diversity and inclusion on the board, whereas someone with a different background might look at different aspects of ESG, prompting them to tackle different areas of ESG while serving on the same board. A visual depiction of the findings is presented in figure 1 below.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

Figure 1. Visual depiction of findings

RDT posits that board size and composition influence the supply of essential resources to the organization (Pfeffer, 1972). Our research, however, examines this via the prism of ESG contributions, along with a variety of other dimensions of diversity, including age, gender, education, occupation, nationality, ethnicity, and independence. However, individuals identified general diversity (a cross-section of all measures) and functional diversity (background) as significant contributors. Our research contributes to the existing body of literature in a number of ways. First, there have been very few studies on the influence of diverse board members' resources on ESG practices. While qualitative research of the kind that we undertook here is relatively uncommon in examining boards, the method privileges more in-depth insights and serves to augment the numerous quantitative studies pointing to positive relationships between ESG and board diversity (Endrikat *et al*., 2021; Nadeem *et al*., 2017). Second, since one must identify the hypothesis earlier in quantitative investigations, the result is often a narrower investigation in which inevitably only a limited number of factors can be included, as opposed to a more grounded and contextual analysis of the kind that we offer here. Lastly, the UAE is still significantly unexplored as a context for this kind of investigation, but is likely to grow in importance as it is becoming an increasingly sought-after location for companies.

Overall, our analysis revealed that when asked about an instance when their connections aided them in achieving an ESG objective, the majority of respondents focused on environmental concerns. Some social objectives were mentioned, but governance difficulties were seldom cited. Often, environmental problems were motivated by financial considerations. This finding is reinforced by studies that argue that the best approach for organizations to completely integrate social and environmental issues into their goals is to develop a monetary value or a business case for the social and environmental activities (Epstein and Roy, 2003). Additionally, much of the time, the contacts that assisted them were from the public sector or from disciplines related to ESG. This is noteworthy since research shows that environmental practices are influenced by networks between governments and other entities (Pasquini and Shearing, 2014). Occasionally, foreign relationships were beneficial in international initiatives. While there has been relatively little research on international exposure on boards so far, work by Butler (2012) does suggest that international exposure, along with different forms of diversity on boards, is necessary for boards to stay competitive in today's borderless world economy.

When questioned on the role of both talents and social resources in accomplishing ESG goals, participants advocated integrating knowledge and social resources for board resource allocation rather than relying exclusively on one or the other. Networking, directors believed, is critical because it simplifies and streamlines their jobs. They felt that the director's abilities will result in more future involvement in environmental and social activities.

Many participants believed that having a diverse board of directors would afford the board the opportunity to have recourse to additional contacts on whom they could depend on if they required assistance with their ESG objectives. Most participants agreed that a board with diverse functional backgrounds would help the organization's ESG initiatives. Participants indicated that diverse directors bring different ideas, talents, and connections to the table, which may help the organization achieve its ESG objectives, an insight supported by RDT (Booth-Bell, 2018; Fakir and Jusoh, 2020; Gardazi *et al*., 2020).

Our study builds insights from an RDT perspective by better defining the ways in which diversity contributes to the resource (skill and networks) acquisition of the organization and further evidences how these resources can be used to attain goals (ESG in this case). We argue that the theory provides a useful lens through which to observe aspects of boards. RDT maintains that the composition of the board of directors should correspond to the organization's resource needs in order for the board to provide it with the resources it requires (Pfeffer, 1972). The theory itself makes no explicit reference to board diversity or the types of resources that could result from it. This is addressed in the research by focusing on two resource streams resulting from board diversity: networks (social resources, community capital, and knowledge capital) and skills. The study also underscores how these tools may benefit the current ESG movement by leveraging networks across several disciplines, streamlining ESG operations, providing unique viewpoints, expanding access to information, and enlisting stakeholder support. We recommend that diversity, in the sense of functional diversity, as well as resources, in the form of networks and talents, be included in RDT in order to improve ESG performance/outcomes.

Our study aligns with the premise of Harjoto and Wang (2020), emphasizing that board networks and diversity significantly impact an organization's ESG performance. The value placed on social resources, community capital, and knowledge capital in our discussion is congruent with the observations made by Harjoto et al. (2015) and Yaseen et al. (2019), suggesting that diverse skill sets and specialties on the board contribute positively towards ESG outcomes. Age diversity's mixed effects, as found in the studies by Liu and Zeng (2017) and Yaseen et al. (2019), are mirrored in the divergent views of our respondents, underscoring the complex role age plays in ESG performance. Although our research didn't delve deeply into gender diversity due to participants' focus on other aspects, the important role of women in board leadership, highlighted in research by García-Sánchez et al. (2023) and Amorelli & García-Sánchez (2023), suggests an area ripe for future research. Additionally, our findings support the assertions of Jizi (2017), Harjoto et al. (2015), and Kanadli Sadi et al. (2020) on the crucial role of board composition, diverse backgrounds, and ability to fulfill strategic tasks in driving ESG initiatives.

In this study, we offer a nuanced and innovative extension of RDT by incorporating the concept of board diversity and explicitly outlining the types of resources it generates. Our conceptual expansion demonstrates that diverse boards are not just representative entities but active contributors to the resource pool of an organization. We posited that diversity on boards can lead to increased resource streams in the form of networks, such as social, community, and knowledge capital, and skills. This signifies that board diversity doesn't merely entail variations in age, gender, or ethnicity, but also variations in experiences, expertise, and networks that serve as endowments that members bring with them. We further elucidated that these augmented resources can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of an organization's ESG initiatives.

In calling attention to these issues, we enrich the current academic discourse surrounding RDT, traditionally centered on inter-organizational dependencies and exchange of resources, by bringing the focus on intra-organizational dynamics of resource acquisition. Our study challenges the view of boards as mere strategic apexes, and instead, places them at the core of resource provisioning. Thus, we provide a more comprehensive understanding of resource acquisition within the organization, shifting the theoretical emphasis to a more inclusive and granular analysis of the resource contributions from diverse board members. This expanded perspective of RDT not only strengthens the theory's robustness but also enhances its applicability to the contemporary organizational environment, particularly in relation to ESG performance.

Although our research focuses on eight elements of diversity (gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, age, education, occupational background, board independence) through the collection and analysis of data, however, non-observable aspects of diversity, such as educational and professional backgrounds, have become more prominent. This was evident with many interviewees calling attention to networks acquired via functional backgrounds or international experience as part of their account of the harnessing of diversity types to achieve ESG goals.

By way of future lines of inquiry, further qualitative studies of this nature with a larger sample size and more extensive interviews could examine the resources that directors bring to the table and their potential influence on the organization’s successful ESG policies. Additionally, studies examining other outcomes produced by diverse board members' resources, such as firm value, would also be a welcome addition to the literature.

CONCLUSION

Our study was centered around board diversity, the allocation of resources, and the influence of ESG in the largely unexplored context of the UAE. In undertaking this research, we took up the call issued by Harjoto et al. (2020) to investigate the connection between board social resources and ESG outcomes in diverse global settings, particularly in emerging economies (Singh and Delios, 2017). Through a comprehensive study conducted across various boards in the UAE, including public, private, and listed ones, we highlighted the role of board diversity in promoting efficient ESG practices, leveraging board members' unique skills, and the contributions of their networks. Our analysis points to the centrality of three key mechanisms for achieving ESG goals, namely, the leveraging of particular connections, the deployment of different resources, and the harnessing of a range of diversity types.

In this study, we extended elements of RDT by incorporating how board diversity contributes to different streams of resources. By underscoring that diverse boards serve as more than just representative bodies, but as active contributors to the resource pool, we've emphasized their role in augmenting resource streams. These include networks (social, community, knowledge capital) and skills, enhancing the conventional understanding of board diversity beyond just differences in age, gender, or ethnicity. This expansion of RDT foregrounds intra-organizational dynamics and positions boards at the heart of resource provisioning, facilitating a deeper understanding of resource acquisition and strengthening the theory's applicability, especially in relation to ESG performance.

Our research addresses a gap in the academic literature by presenting evidence of board diversity and ESG linkages in the context of the UAE. By doing so, we respond to calls from Zaman et al., (2022) for more qualitative research on corporate governance and ESG in under-researched contexts. We add to the theoretical literature by extending the contribution of diversity on ESG from the perspective of RDT theory in a distinct economic context. The results of our research show that, within the context of RDT theory, the diversity of skills and experiences represented on a board is a significant endowment that may help an organization gain a competitive edge. We found that in response to questions about how their relationships helped them achieve an ESG goal, most respondents focused on how such relationships assisted with environmental issues. Although, some social goals were highlighted, only a few governance issues were mentioned. Both skills and social resources were significant in achieving ESG objectives. Furthermore, our analysis suggests that board members find that combining knowledge and social resources was preferred to relying on each one alone. Moreover, networking is vital to directors because it streamlines their tasks. We find that a diverse board is more likely to provide the organization with additional connections to help them achieve their ESG goals.

Our work underscores the explanatory power of the RDT lens as a theoretical platform around which to build insights on the connections between board diversity, resources, and ESG. We found that the majority of participants cited their functional backgrounds rather than any other kind of variety when it came to discussing the skills they brought to the board. The combination of functional, industry, organizational, and international experience that participants had acquired were seen to provide an important skillset for securing board goals. Also, of particular note, when discussing situations in which their ties aided them in meeting an ESG objective, the majority of respondents mentioned environmental concerns, along with several social objectives, but few highlighted governance concerns. Participants also called attention to the critical nature of skills and social resources in achieving ESG goals and advocated the combining of knowledge and social resources, rather than depending on any one exclusively in the securing of board goals. For directors, networking is seen as critical since it streamlines their job. Furthermore, it was widely perceived that a diverse board of directors it likely to provide the organization with a broader array of connections to assist them as board members in achieving their ESG objectives.

Our findings aid policymakers in establishing board diversity requirements in the UAE and other countries in the middle eastern region by identifying mechanisms that may be leveraged in the pursuit of ESG goals. Based on our analysis, policymakers are advised that when establishing board diversity guidelines in the UAE, a particular emphasis on occupational and educational diversity is merited as part of the effort toward increasing and leveraging diversity types. Our findings are also helpful for organizations in establishing the criteria for identifying board members who can promote their business strategy.

We recognize that our findings should be taken conservatively in light of several factors. First, our sample size of 41 individuals may be regarded as modest, despite being among the largest in qualitative board research. Second, the gathered data is biased towards bigger firms since the majority of the SMEs we approached in the region lacked boards. Thirdly, we utilized numerous industries, including banking, commerce, communications, technology, and oil and gas. It would have been challenging for us to reach a critical mass had we focused on one industry. Fourth, we emphasize the qualitative focus of our study. Despite some of these limitations, our research is timely and important in the context of the UAE where the topic of board diversity is gaining public attention. Our results should prove instructive for policymakers and regulators in the UAE in establishing board diversity parameters that are suitable for the UAE environment in particular, and indeed in the region more generally. We recommend that future research focus on the combined impact of the various board diversity features on ESG, focus on specific industries if a critical mass can be reached, and study other outcomes of board diversity such as, for example, firm value.

REFERENCES

Al-Yahyaee, K.H., Al-Hadi, A.K. & Hussain, S.M. (2017). Market risk disclosures and board gender diversity in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) firms. *International Review of Finance*, 17(4), 645-658.

Amorelli, M.F. and García-Sánchez, I.M. (2023). Leadership in heels: Women on boards and sustainability in times of COVID-19. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 1-24.

Arayssi, M., & Jizi, M. I. (2019). Does corporate governance spillover firm performance? A study of valuation of MENA companies. *Social Responsibility Journal*, 15(5), 597-620.

Arayssi, M., Jizi, M., & Tabaja, H. H. (2020). The impact of board composition on the level of ESG disclosures in GCC countries. *Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal*, 11(1), 137-161.

Baker, H.K., Pandey, N., Kumar, S., and Haldar, A. (2020). A bibliometric analysis of board diversity: Current status, development, and future research directions. *Journal of Business Research*, 108, 232-246.

Baratta, A., Cimino, A., Longo, F., Solina, V. & Verteramo, S. (2023). The impact of ESG practices in industry with a focus on carbon emissions: Insights and future perspectives. *Sustainability*, 15(8), 6685.

Bernard, R. (1988). Research methods in cultural anthropology. Sage Publications.

Booth-Bell, D. (2018). Social capital as a new board diversity rationale for enhanced corporate governance. *Corporate Governance: The International Journal of Business in Society,* 8(3) 425-439.

Botsari, A., and Lang, F. (2020). *ESG considerations in venture capital and business angel investment decisions: Evidence from two pan-European surveys* (Working Paper No. 2020/63). EIF Working Paper. https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/222301

Butler, S.R. (2012). All on board: Strategies for constructing diverse boards of directors. *Virginia Law & Business Review*, 7(1), 61-96.

Catalyst, (2004). The bottom line: connecting corporate performance and gender diversity, Retrieved from: www.catalyst.org/knowledge/bottom-line-connecting-corporate-performance-and-gender-diversity.

Chen, X., Hansen, E., Cai, J., & Xiao, J. (2023). The differential impact of substantive and symbolic CSR attribution on job satisfaction and turnover intention. *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility*, 00, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12572

Chen, W., Lv, D. D., & Wong, C. W. Y. (2023). Corporate environmental efforts, government environmental subsidies, and corporate non-environmental R&D intensity: Evidence from listed firms. *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility*, 00, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12574

Choueiri, Z. and Macharia, E., (2019). Corporate governance and directors' duties in the United Arab Emirates: overview. Retrieved from: https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/0-608-9147?transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default)&firstPage=true&bhcp=1

Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2007). *Basics of qualitative research Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Eccles, N.S., and Viviers, S. (2011). The origins and meanings of names describing investment practices that integrate a consideration of ESG issues in the academic literature. *Journal of business ethics*, *104*, 389-402.

Endrikat, J., De Villiers, C., Guenther, T.W. and Guenther, E.M. (2021). Board characteristics and corporate social responsibility: A meta-analytic investigation. *Business & Society*, 60(8), 2099-2135.

Epstein, M.J., and Roy, M.J. (2003). Making the business case for sustainability: linking social and environmental actions to financial performance. *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, (9), 79-96.

Erhardt, N.L., Werbel, J.D., and Shrader, C.B. (2003). Board of director diversity and firm financial performance. *Corporate governance: An international review*, 11(2), 102-111.

Fairfax, L. (2005). The bottom line on board diversity: a cost-benefit analysis of the business rationales for diversity on corporate boards. *Wisconsin Law Review*, 58(1), 795-853.

Fakir, A., and Jusoh, R. (2020). Board gender diversity and corporate sustainability performance: Mediating role of enterprise risk management. *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics, and Business*, 7(6), 351-363.

Frynas, J.G. and Yamahaki, C. (2016). Corporate social responsibility: Review and roadmap of theoretical perspectives. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 25(3), 258-285.

Gangi, F., Varrone, N., & Coscia, M. (2023). Board cultural diversity and bank social performance: The mediating role of corporate social responsibility strategy. *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility*, 00, 1–11.

Gao, Y., Nie, Y., & Hafsi, T. (2023). Not all stakeholders are equal: Corporate social responsibility variability and corporate financial performance. *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility*, 00, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12576

García-Sánchez, I.M., Aibar-Guzmán, C., Núñez-Torrado, M. and Aibar-Guzmán, B. (2023). Women leaders and female same-sex groups: The same 2030 Agenda objectives along different roads. *Journal of Business Research*, *157*, 113582.

Gardazi, S., Hassan, A., and Johari, J. (2020). Board of directors attributes and sustainability performance in the energy industry. *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics, and Business*, *7*(12), 317-328.

Gazley, B., Chang, W.K., and Bingham, L.B. (2010). Board diversity, stakeholder representation, and collaborative performance in community mediation centers. *Public Administration Review*, *70*(4), 610-620.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (2009). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Transaction Publishers.

Glesne, C. (1998). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*. Longman.

Gold, G.D., and Naufal, G.S. (2012). Wasta: The Other Invisible Hand A Case Study of University Students in the Gulf. *Journal of Arabian Studies*, *2*(1), 59-73.

Hafsi, T., and Turgut, G. (2013). Boardroom Diversity and its Effect on Social Performance: Conceptualization and Empirical Evidence. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 112(3), 463-479.

Harjoto, M., Laksmana, I. and Lee, R. (2015). Board Diversity and Corporate Social Responsibility. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 132(4), pp. 641-660.

Harjoto, M.A., and Wang, Y. (2020). Board of directors network centrality and environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance. *Corporate Governance: The International Journal of Business in Society*, 20(6), 965-985.

Henisz, W., Koller, T., and Nuttall, R. (2019). Five ways that ESG creates value. *McKinsey Quarterly, November.*

Islam, R., French, E., and Ali, M. (2022). Evaluating board diversity and its importance in the environmental and social performance of organizations. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, *29*(5), 1134-1145.

Jizi, M. (2017). The influence of board composition on sustainable development disclosure. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, *26*(5), 640-655.

Kakabadse, N. K. & Morley, M.J. (2021). In Search of Stewardship: Advancing Governance Research. *European Management Review*, 18(3), 189-196.

Kanadli Sadi, B., Zhang, P., and Kakabadse Nada, K. (2020). How job-related diversity affects boards' strategic tasks performance: the role of chairperson. *Corporate Governance: The International Journal of Business in Society*, 20(4), 583-599.

Kang, H., Cheng, M., and Gray, S.J. (2007). Corporate governance and board composition: Diversity and independence of Australian boards. *Corporate governance: an international review*, 15(2), 194-207.

Kanter, R. (1977). Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82(5), 965-990.

Katmon, N., Mohamad, Z.Z., Norwani, N.M., and Farooque, O.A. (2019). Comprehensive board diversity and quality of corporate social responsibility disclosure: Evidence from an emerging market. *Journal of business ethics*, *157*, 447-481.

Khatib, S.F., Abdullah, D.F., Elamer, A., Yahaya, I.S., and Owusu, A. (2023). Global trends in board diversity research: A bibliometric view. *Meditari Accountancy Research*, 31(2), 441-469.

Lee, B. & Morley, M.J. (2021). Reaffirming Opportunities for Pluralism in Management Scholarship. *European Management Review*, 18(2), 3-8.

Liu, P., & Zeng, R. (2017). Age Diversity and Corporate Social Responsibility—Evidence from Chinese Listed Firms. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(4), 1-8.

Low, L.A. (2022). The All Important" G" in ESG and Its Relationship to Good Governance and Corporate Compliance in Anti-Corruption: Towards a More Holistic Approach. *Southwestern Journal of International Law*, *28*, 340.

Maggi, B., Gjergji, R., Vena, L., Sciascia, S., & Cortesi, A. (2023). Family firm status and environmental disclosure: The moderating effect of board gender diversity. *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility*, 00, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12578

Masoud, N. & Vij, A. (2021). The effect of mandatory CSR disclosure on firms: empirical evidence from UAE. *International Journal of Sustainable Engineering*, 14(3), 378-389.

Miles, M., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis*. Sage Publications.

Milliken, F. J. and Martins, L. L. (1996). Searching for Common Threads: understanding the multiple effects of diversity in organizational groups. Academy of Management Review, 21(2), 402– 433.

Nadeem, M., Zaman, R. and Saleem, I. (2017). Boardroom gender diversity and corporate sustainability practices: Evidence from Australian Securities Exchange listed firms. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 149(1), 874-885.

Nair, D. (2021). Why the UAE's move to include more female directors is good for business'. Retrieved from: https://www.thenationalnews.com/business/economy/why-the-uae-s-move-to-include-more-female-directors-is-good-for-business-1.1184681

Pasquini, L. and Shearing, C. (2014). Municipalities, politics, and climate change: An example of the process of institutionalizing an environmental agenda within local government. *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 23(2), 271-296.

Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage Publications.

Pfeffer, J., and Salancik, G. R. (1978). *The external control of organizations: A resource dependence perspective.* Stanford Business Books.

Pfeffer, J. (1972). Size and Composition of Corporate Boards of Directors: The Organization and its Environment. *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 17(2), 218-228.

Pratt, M. (2009). From the editors: For the lack of a boilerplate: Tips on writing up (and reviewing) qualitative research. *Academy of Management Journal,* 52(5), 856–862.

Rau, P.R., and Yu, T. (2023). A survey on ESG: investors, institutions and firms. *China Finance Review International.*

Romano, M., Cirillo, A., Favino, C. and Netti, A. (2020). ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) performance and board gender diversity: The moderating role of CEO duality. *Sustainability*, 12(21), 9298.

Sharma, A. (2022). UAE ranks first globally in entrepreneurship. Retrieved from: https://www.thenationalnews.com/business/start-ups/2022/02/10/uae-ranks-first-globally-in-entrepreneurship/

Shaukat, A., Qiu, Y., and Trojanowski, G. (2016). Board Attributes, Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy, and Corporate Environmental and Social Performance. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 135(3), 569-585.

Singh, D., and Delios, A. (2017). Corporate governance, board networks and growth in domestic and international markets: Evidence from India. *Journal of World Business*, 52(2), 615-627.

Thorgren, S., Wincent, J., and Anokhin, S. (2010). The importance of compensating strategic network board members for network performance: a contingency approach. *British Journal of Management*, 21(1), 131-151.

Van der Walt, N., and Ingley, C. (2003). Board dynamics and the influence of professional background, gender and ethnic diversity of directors. *Corporate governance: An international review*, 11(3), 218-234.

Watson, W. E., Johnson, L., and Merritt, D. (1998). Team Orientation, Self-Orientation, and Diversity in Task Groups: Their Connection to Team Performance over Time. *Group and Organization Management*, 23(2), 161-188.

Williams – Quinn, S. and Taousi, N. (2022). Board Diversity: Women on Boards, Retrieved from: https://www.pwc.com/m1/en/media-centre/articles/board-diversity-women-on-boards.html

Williamson, D., Lynch-Wood, G., and Ramsay, J. (2006). Drivers of environmental behaviour in manufacturing SMEs and the implications for CSR. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 67(3), 317-330.

Wu, D., & Li, X. (2023). The curvilinear relationship between corporate social responsibility and competitive advantage: Empirical evidence from China. *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility*, 00, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12563

Yaseen, H., Iskandrani, M., Ajina, A., and Hamad, A. (2019). Investigating the relationship between board diversity & corporate social responsibility (CSR) performance: Evidence from France. *Academy of Accounting and Financial Studies Journal*, 23(4), 1-11.

Zaman, R., Jain, T., Samara, G., and Jamali, D. (2022). Corporate governance meets corporate social responsibility: Mapping the interface. *Business & Society*, 61(3), 690-752.

Appendix 1. Interview Protocol

1. Welcome the Participant:

- Introduce the interviewer and research.
- Briefly explain the purpose of the study.
- Assure confidentiality and anonymity.
- Ask for consent to digitally record the interview.

2. General Background Questions:

- Age, gender, nationality, religion/belief, education, functional background (e.g., finance, law, engineering).

Section A: Personal Background and Current Board

1. Can you describe your current role on the board and your professional background?
2. What led you to become a board member, and how long have you been in this position?

Section B: Board's Context and Diversity

1. Can you describe the current composition of your board in terms of diversity (e.g., age, gender, education, occupation)?
2. Do you think diversity within the board affects its functionality and decision-making? If yes, how?
3. What are your thoughts on diversity and its contributions to the board? Does it contribute to the board? If yes then which type of diversity?
4. Does the diversity of [diversity characteristic mentioned by participant] within the board contribute to the organization's ESG efforts?
5. Can you describe specific instances where different backgrounds within the board have added value or unique perspectives to your ESG practices?

Section C: Environmental, Social, and Governance Goals

1. Can you describe any environmental, social and governance practices that your board or firm currently engages in?
2. Can you please describe your ESG goals?
3. Have you ever utilized your connections or a board member's connection to navigate complex ESG issues? If so, can you provide examples?
4. Does your board contribute to the firm's ESG practices?
5. Are there any instances where diversity within the board helped in achieving an ESG goal? If so, please describe them.
6. Are there specific instances where leveraging relationships directly led to achieving ESG goals? If so, please describe them
7. Are there any stakeholders with whom you have connections with that have contributed to advancing ESG initiatives within the organization?

Section D: Board's Access to Resources

1. Does your board access and leverage different skills, networks, and social connections?
2. Can you share any examples where your or a board member's skill or connection opened opportunities for the board or firm?
3. Does diversity within the board facilitate access? If yes, please describe the situation.
4. Do the networks and connections within the board contribute to its capacity to make successful strategic decisions? How about in the context of ESG?
5. Does your board establish and maintain international relationships specifically for ESG goals? If so, can you provide examples of how these relationships have contributed to your ESG practices?

6. Do you use skills or networks to achieve ESG goals? Can you give examples?
7. Does your board engage with certain stakeholders when it comes to achieving ESG goals? If so, can you describe specific instances where this has been effective?
8. Who does your organization rely on for accomplishing their ESG goals?

Section E: Unanticipated Topics & Open Discussion

1. Are there any other topics or insights related to board diversity and ESG that we haven't covered and you would like to share?
2. Are there any questions you have for us, or anything else you'd like to add?
3. Are there any challenges or limitations that arise from having a diverse board in the context of ESG, and how are they managed?
4. How does the organization plan to leverage different types of diversity within the board in the future to support ESG goals?

Conclusion:

- Thank the participants for their time and insights.
- Provide information on how the interview data will be used and stored.
- Reiterate confidentiality and inquire if there are any concerns.
- Offer to share the study findings with the participant if desired.

Table 1. Participant characteristics

Participant Profiles									
Participant	***Gender***	***Age***	***Nationality, Race, Ethnicity***	***Religion***	***Educational background***	***Foreign or locally educated***	***Educational level***	***Occupational background***	***Board Independence***
Participant 1	Male	25	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Finance	Local education	Bachelors	Real Estate	Non-Independent
Participant 2	Male	64	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Finance	Local and Foreign education	Bachelors and Executive education	Investment banker	Independent
Participant 3	Female	43	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Accounting and Finance	Local education	Bachelors and CFA	Audit	Independent
Participant 4	Male	45	Emirati, Arab	Islam	IT and Business management	Local and Foreign education	MBA	Software Engineer and Non-profit	Independent
Participant 5	Female	45	Emirati, Arab	Islam	IT and Business management	Local education	Bachelors and Executive education	IT	Non-Independent
Participant 6	Male	40	British, White	Christian	Law	Foreign education	Bachelors	Investment banker and Lawyer	Independent
Participant 7	Male	41	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Mathematics and Sharia law	Foreign education	Masters	Soverign wealth fund and Sharia	Independent
Participant 8	Male	34	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Finance and Banking	Local and Foreign education	Bachelors	Banking and Logistics	Non-Independent
Participant 9	Male	42	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Medicine, Surgery and Management	Local and Foreign education	Masters	Surgeon, Researcher, Healthcare management	Non-Independent and Indepenedent
Participant 10	Male	46	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Economics	Local and Foreign education	MBA	Accountancy and Finance	Non-Independent and Indepenedent
Participant 11	Female	27	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Electrical engineering	Local and Foreign education	Bachelors and Executive education	Consulting and Academia	Independent
Participant 12	Female	44	Emirati, European, Arab	Islam	Business and Law	Foreign education	Masters	Tech	Non-Independent and Independent
Participant 13	Male	62	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Business and Politics	Local and Foreign education	Bachelors	Banking and Investment	Independent
Participant 14	Male	58	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Math, economics and computer science	Foreign education	Masters	Banking	Non-Independent and Indepenedent
Participant 15	Male	59	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Law	Local and Foreign education	Masters	Law, Shipping and Marine	Independent
Participant 16	Male	49	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Communications	Local education	Bachelors	Management	Non-Independent
Participant 17	Male	59	Netherlands, White	Christian	International Management	Foreign education	Masters	Banking	Independent
Participant 18	Male	56	France and US, Arab	Islam	Economics, Law and Finance	Foreign education	PhD	Investment banker, Developer, Consultancy	Non-Independent
Participant 19	Male	34	Pakistan	Islam	Business Administration	Foreign education	Masters	Supply chains and Logistics	Independent
Participant 20	Male	36	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Aerospace engineering, Mathematics and Business	Foreign education	Bachelors and CFA	Finance and Investment	Independent
Participant 21	Male	66	Canadian, Arab	Islam	Engineering and Business	Foreign education	MBA	Banking	Independent
Participant 22	Male	48	United Kingdom, White	Atheist	Professional Business qualifications	Local education	High school	Banking and Investment	Non-Independent
Participant 23	Female	42	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Engineering	Foreign education	PhD	Consulting	Independent
Participant 24	Male	32	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Law	Local and Foreign education	Bachelors	Law	Non-Independent and Indepenedent
Participant 25	Male	31	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Real Estate development and Corporate finance	Foreign education	Bachelors	Real estate and Investments	Independent
Participant 26	Male	32	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Finance and Philosophy	Foreign education	Bachelors	Financial underwriter and Family business	Non-Independent
Participant 27	Male	45	Indian	Hindu	Accounting	Foreign education	MBA	Investment and Strategy	Independent
Participant 28	Male	37	Jordanian, Arab	Islam	Electrical engineering	Local education	Bachelors	Energy	Independent
Participant 29	Female	32	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Management information system	Local education	Masters	Food and Beverage	Independent
Participant 30	Male	65	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Economics	Foreign education	Masters	Banking and Project finance	Non-Independent and Indepenedent
Participant 31	Male	40	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Science and Mechanical engineering	Foreign education	Bachelors and Executive education	Oil and Gas	Non-Independent and Indepenedent
Participant 32	Male	41	Indian	Hindu	Medicine and Business	Foreign education	MBA	Investment	Non-Independent and Indepenedent
Participant 33	Male	47	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Marketing	Foreign education	Masters	Marketing, Development and Sales	Independent
Participant 34	Male	58	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Chemical and Petroleum engineering	Foreign education	Masters	Environment protection	Independent
Participant 35	Female	48	British, Arab	Islam	Mathematics and Finance	Foreign education	MBA	Investment banking	Independent
Participant 36	Female	30	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Marketing and Psychology	Local and Foreign education	Masters	Entrepuener and Real estate	Non-Independent
Participant 37	Male	47	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Multinational Commerce	Local and Foreign education	Masters	Shipping	Non-Independent
Participant 38	Male	40	Indian	Jain	Commerce	Foreign education	Bachelors and Executive education	Family business, Banking, Investment	Independent
Participant 39	Male	46	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Environmental and Business Sustainability studies	Foreign education	PhD	Logistics, Marine assurance, Consulting, Sustainability, Environment	Non-Independent
Participant 40	Female	42	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Consulting	Foreign education	Masters	Consulting	Independent
Participant 41	Female	27	Emirati, Arab	Islam	Finance and Banking	Local education	Bachelors and CFA	Finance and Investment	Non-Independent

Source: Compiled by the authors

Table 2. Synthesis of key findings

Illustrative Examples	Second-order codes (sub-themes)	Aggregate Themes
"I had access to a lot of ESG analysts and sustainalytics, or ESG, investors, global…" "We could reach out to some impact investors that we know that invest in ESG" "I have a connection with a Dubai-based firm… I linked them with our consultant" "I connect them with the management and engineering team… I was able to link [them] with the appropriate lenders"	Social resources	Leveraging particular connections to accomplish ESG goals
"We've implemented CSR projects in Vietnam... Because we have a Vietnamese board member, we have knowledge of social efforts beyond our borders." "Due to my work in the ESG field, I had a better understanding of ESG"	Knowledge Capital	
"We introduced one of the members from the community on the board... And then when we are rolling out the initiative, it has far more credibility and acceptance. And also, it's the best utilization of capital because you end up spending money in [a way that is] more relevant to the community."	Community Capital	
"The skills of the board members… will open the pool wider for people to participate in environmental and social programs. The wider skills that we have, the wider access"	Skills	Deploying different resources to accomplish ESG goals
"So, you connect, and network with those people who will really help to speed up the curve here… where there's a lot of knowledge available... You can bring in that expertise." "I think networks are really important, and especially if they're senior networks, they have an impact, especially in ESG"	Networks	
"If you have a diverse board, then each one of the different types of diverse people that you have around you comes with their own train of thoughts, their own connections, their own groups" "Diversity is fundamental… what you're trying to do is have a network of people"	Heterogenous Teams	Harnessing a range of diversity types to accomplish ESG goals
"For example, with a human resource background, they look at diversity and inclusion, human rights and safety, and so on. With the financial markets or the investment banking backgrounds, they look at financing sustainability projects…" "if you have, people from different backgrounds who are connected in different ways, that adds a lot of value"	Functional Diversity	

Figure 1. Visual depiction of findings