What Women *Really* Think of Women Affinity Groups in Tech
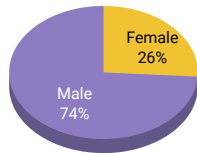
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MOTIVATION

Female 26%
Male 74%

- *56%* women leave IT within **first** 5 years
- Women Affinity Groups (**WAGs**) are present in *93%* companies
- Organizations rely on WAGs to address r**ecruitment, retention & advancement** of women in IT.
- Insufficient knowledge of the **effectiveness & evaluation** of WAGs.
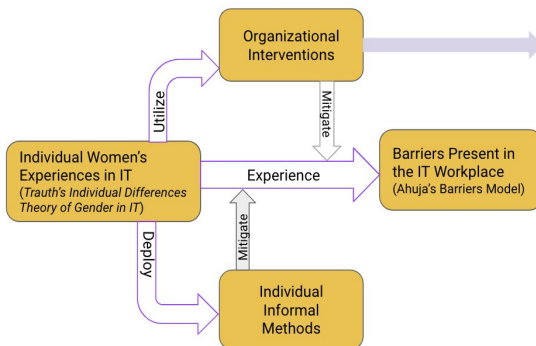
OBJECTIVE

- Determine the **characteristics** of WAGs
- Assess how WAG characteristics impact how WAG **members and non-members perceive** & utilize WAGs

METHOD

- *Qualitative* research technique
- Convivence sample of IT professionals for interviews & focus group

9 interviews (8 members, 1 non-member)

1 focus group (4 non-members))

FRAMEWORK

Catalysts & Objectives	- Enhance corporate social responsibility - Reduce turnover costs - Raise awareness and encourage women - Develop reputation and culture for being supportive - Enhance innovation and team performance - Improved financial business performance - Better reflection of and service to customers - Attract the best people possible - Exclusive to women *
Methods & Practices	- Build a culture of diversity - Examine current practices - Provide Professional Development opportunities - Improve supervisor relationship - Provide Flexible Opportunities
Measurement & Evaluation	- Establish systematic evasion - Use of Specific Metrics - Engagement Surveys - Positive but not measurable

Organizational Interventions Mitigating Individual Barriers Framework (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018)

FINDINGS

I. Characteristics

10/13 shared how WAGs can be perceived as **exclusive to women***
"WAGs make me uncomfortable because I feel like it sends the message of here's all the women trying to figure it out while excluding the men. I think this almost creates greater gender divisiveness"

6/13 said that **attracting the best people** possible (to retain, recruit & advance women) was the most important objective of the WAG

11/13 found **networking & sharing** to be invaluable
"A couple of friends of mine realized that men had this informal opportunity to get to know each other while they just go out for a smoke, we needed something similar. But there wasn't a feasible informal forum to bring people together. That's when we thought, okay, let's come up with a women-focused group."

9/13 referred **leadership support** as an essential component to WAGs design

4/13 shared that there were **limited metrics** to measure the impact of WAGs & most respondents were **unaware about evaluation** of their WAG
"There is a challenge in measuring effectiveness for any of these programs. as it is very difficult to measure impact. Should it be how many people we have reached? We can't collect feedback from all of them & it can't just be related to if someone was promoted based on WAG participation"

II. Perceptions & Utility of WAGs

12/13 explained that the biggest barrier for participation was **opportunity cost**
"I think you have to know what you want from a specific [WAG] because if you don't and you're doing this on company time, you're wasting time from your job."

5/13 perceive WAG as **echo chamber;** need for non-members to be involved

5/13 did not see WAG acting as an **advocate** for the voices in the organization

5/13 compared experiences across AGs; WAGs **lack intersectionality**

CONTRIBUTION

- Develop a theoretical framework to guide future empirical work to assess WAGs' effectiveness at the individual & organizational levels
- Inform WAGs' design to serve individual differences & organizational objectives