After recruitment, then what?
Five executives’ experiences seen in relation to organizational culture

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Increasing demands in the market create a need for retaining highly qualified leaders in companies today. The undesirable consequences and high costs of a mismatch between a new hire and a new company underline the need for an investment of time and resources in the recruitment of potential employees.

This leads into the aim of this study, which is to investigate what executives consider to be important aspects in their recruitment, position and new companies. The aspects emphasized will then be presented, analyzed and discussed in relation to theoretical concepts in the field under study.

Research on organizational culture is introduced and seen in relation to aspects such as recruitment, innovation and creativity. The concept of leadership is also discussed, followed by an account of some of its different facets.

A qualitative inquiry method is used, entailing in-depth interviews with five executives with different types of positions and from diverse companies. The results show that various aspects, such as the perceived level of procedural justice in the new company, the level of influence and decision-making, the quality of the superior-subordinate relationship and the overall organizational culture, have an effect on the executives’ abilities to perform their work responsibilities, as well as on their contentment with their position and company.

Key words: Organizational culture, Leadership, Executives, Procedural justice, Superior-subordinate relationship, Decision-making, Influence
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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In a market with increasing competition and international demands, companies must be able to attract and retain highly qualified leaders and employees in order to remain competitive. According to Souza and Zajas (1995), an executive has to be able to respond to a growing need for increased productivity, innovation, leadership and managerial adaptability. In recruiting executives an organization usually looks for candidates within the existing work force as a first step. By doing this, the company aims at sustaining the firm’s culture and to pass on internal knowledge of the business. However, sometimes the “right” candidate is not found within the company due to any number of reasons, the primary cause usually being a shortage of candidates. Other reasons may be the company’s interest to change its strategic direction with the hope that new perspectives and values brought in by an outsider will help in changing the company vision. An organization may also recruit externally to strengthen its senior management team, for example by increasing diversity. Many reasons exist for why recruiting an internal candidate may not be the ideal solution, and it becomes necessary to recruit externally (Souza and Zajas, 1995).

Forty percent of people who are recruited into high-level positions fail within eighteen months, according to McCune (1999). The main reason for this is a disparity between the new hire’s old culture and the culture of the new company, where the recruited executive has little prior knowledge of existing management styles, ways of doing things and modes of communication (McCune, 1999). Therefore the main focus lies on ensuring a proper fit of values between the executive candidate and the organization. Because of the undesirable consequences of a mismatch, the recruitment process involves a significant investment of time, energy, resources and capital (Souza and Zajas, 1995). According to McCune’s study done in the USA with a 100 managers and executives dealing with replacement costs (McCune, 1999), the average one-year cost came out to $750,000, which includes finding a replacement and getting the new employee up to speed by training and development. This figure does not include any severance payments for the previous hire. Even though the study was limited to the United States, it still gives an idea of the effort and costs involved in a corporate mismatch.

One can also envision the efforts and costs that are involved for the executive recruit when a poor fit occurs. Time and effort has usually been put in the interview process. Starting a new position involves an emotional investment and an adjustment process that can be lengthy and resource demanding.

1.2 Purpose of study

The aim of the study is to investigate what executives consider to be important aspects associated with their recruitment, position and their new companies. Due to the fact that there is a limited amount of research on this subject, an explorative study like this seems justified.
1.3 Limitations

The generalizability of this study is limited, due to a small sample size and a sample consisting only of men. However, offering generalizations beyond the sample size have not been the purpose of the research. The aim has been to conduct an in-depth study in order to find out what aspects executives underline as important in being content with a new place of employment. Furthermore, it cannot be excluded that a different sample consisting of an equal amount of men and women, or solely of women, would have yielded different results.

1.4 Organization of the study

Presented below is an overview of the study to facilitate the reading. To make it possible for a non Swedish-speaking public to read this thesis, I have chosen to write it in English.

- Chapter two contains an account of theoretical concepts central to this study, with an emphasis on organizational culture and different related aspects. The concept of leadership is also explored.
- Chapter three offers a discussion of methodological choices and issues, and includes a description of the procedures used in carrying out this study.
- Chapter four is a presentation of the results of the conducted interviews. The chapter starts off with a short introduction of each participant followed by several sub-categories in order to display the different aspects brought up in the interviews. The section ends with a summary of the results, leading into the following chapter.
- Chapter five is divided into two sections. First there will be an analysis of the previously presented results seen in relation to earlier mentioned theoretical concepts. Following this is a discussion based on the results and theories used in the study.
2 Theory

2.1 Organizational culture

Organizational culture as a concept has grown from something that was little mentioned a few decades ago to a phenomenon that is widely popular in the field of organizational theory. Researchers who study organizational culture have typically tried to identify aspects that will aid in describing, explaining and predicting people’s behavior in organizations. This, however, is complicated by people’s feelings, attitudes and goals, and by them functioning in changing surroundings within a structure constructed beyond their control. These matters have historically made it difficult to form one encompassing theory of organizational culture. Researchers have approached the subject from different angles, and there have been few attempts to establish connections between the different theories and results (Bang, 1999).

According to Wallace et al. (1999) it was first asserted in the 1960’s that organizational culture consists of both informal and formal dimensions, and that to understand an organization there is a need to look at its informal nature. However, it was not until the late 1970’s that the informal dimension gained attention in the work of organizational theorists. Pettigrew (1979), cited in Wallace et al. (1999), proposed that cultures consist of cognitive systems guiding the way people think, reason and make decisions. The same author continued by suggesting that culture exists on different levels, and that the deepest level consists of values, assumptions and beliefs that characterize the way a company functions. A few years later Pfeiffer (1981), cited in Wallace et al. (1999), emphasized the notion that an organization may have different cultures, suggesting the idea of sub-cultures. Around the same time Hofstede (1980) proposed that culture is a construct “which manifests itself in an organisation as a result of the organisation’s location within a particular society” (cited in Wallace et al., 1999: 549). Hofstede focuses on culture on a national level and argues that employees’, and thereby companies’, values are based on the country within which they exist, and that an organization’s culture varies mainly on a superficial level – the articulated and more obvious aspects such as language used, dress codes and status symbols (Hofstede, 1994). This is, however, a belief that has been contested over the years, and Eckhardt proposes that Hofstede’s cultural framework and research on cultural variations on a national level “is perhaps most appropriate as a teaching aid for introducing the notion of cultural differences to business students” (Eckhardt, 2002: 89). The unit of analysis in this framework is on a national level, and thus cannot be used to study individuals in relation to organizational culture (Eckhardt, 2002).

As a result of the lack of homogeneity in this field, there is no one definition of organizational culture and the meaning of it vary to a large degree. This is due to different purposes and foci of literature within the field, as seen above. Publications on the subject have also varied from mainstream popular to serious scientific publications. The concept of culture seems to lend itself to very different uses. In sum, researchers have focused on culture as ideas and cognition, as symbols and meanings, as values and ideologies, as rules and norms, as behavior patterns and as the collective unconscious (Alvesson, 2002).
However, most authors can agree on the concept of culture being central in all aspects of organizational life (Alvesson, 2002). How people in a company think, feel, value and act are guided by a shared system of meanings, beliefs and underlying ideas of a unifying nature. These common systems are necessary for an ongoing organized activity. They facilitate interaction between organizational members by removing confusion of interpretations and re-interpretations of meanings. Senior organizational members are always, in one way or another, managing culture and underscoring what is important and what is less so, thereby framing how the corporate world should be understood.

The significance of meanings depends on the interpretation by those involved, which can lead, for example, to the same rule causing different behaviors and consequences in different organizational cultures. This illustrates how essential the use of cultural context is when trying to understand behavior, social events, institutions and processes. Culture is the context in which these phenomena become comprehensible and meaningful. Increasing the capacity for understanding organizational culture helps managers and others shaping organizational life to act wisely. Being alert to the possibilities of cultural analysis can lead to insightful interpretations of organizations, management and working life (Alvesson, 2002).

Alvesson uses the term organizational culture as an umbrella concept and is influenced by culture definitions by authors such as Frost et al. (1985) and Kunda (1992), cited in Alvesson (2002). In his umbrella concept he includes values and assumptions about social reality, the interpretation of events, ideas and experiences, and sees meanings and symbols as central for cultural analysis. Culture provides “the shared rules governing cognitive and affective aspects of membership in an organization, and the means whereby they are shaped and expressed” (Kunda 1992, cited in Alvesson, 2002: 3).

2.1.1 Culture as critical variable versus culture as root metaphor

In a traditional overview of organizational culture, Smircich (1983), cited in Alvesson (2002), identifies two main concepts for use in organizational analysis. One regards culture as an independent variable that is separate from other features of the organization, such as structure, technology, business concept and strategy. Researchers who treat culture as such a variable draw upon a more traditional, objectivist, and functionalist view of social reality. The other concept views culture as a root metaphor and researchers who subscribe to this paradigm approach organizations as if they were cultures, and that this image guides all perception and interpretation of what goes on in organizations (Alvesson, 2002). These two approaches also have other characterizations, such as functionalism and symbolism, as defined by Schultz (1995), cited in Wilson (2000).

Within the first approach it is recognized that an organization has cultural traits such as values, norms, rituals and ceremonies, and that these elements affect the behavior of managers and employees (Alvesson, 2002). This paradigm also sees culture as something that can be influenced, changed and manipulated, and in turn can influence, change and manipulate members and features of the organization. The functionalist aims at finding the answer as to what function culture plays in an organization. With this approach a universal framework is proposed that is applicable to all organizations,
which leads to comparable and potentially generalizable results produced by different organizations. This approach is primarily diagnostic (Wilson, 2000).

The root metaphor approach, or symbolism, moves away from considering culture as something an organization has, and stresses that it is something the organization is. As Pacanowsky and O’Donnell-Trujillo (1983) put it in Alvesson (2002: 24), “organizational culture is not just another piece of the puzzle, it is the puzzle.” The social reality here is seen as constructed by people and reproduced by symbols and meanings that people share, rather than the objective, tangible and measurable view of the variable/functionalist approach. The research within this paradigm therefore seeks to understand the shared meanings and subjective experiences of the phenomena at hand. An inquiry highlights a situation without proposing an argument of cause and effect, and focuses on achieving understanding (Wilson, 2000). It should be emphasized that one cannot single out something as clearly outside of culture (Alvesson, 2002).

Worth noting is that this classification is not without problems. Many researchers fail to find themselves within any of the categories and end up falling between the two. One issue is that meanings, concepts, values, rites and rituals are not easily quantifiable. Researchers working within the variable approach tend to adopt a qualitative approach, thereby diminishing the sought after predictions and the objective reality. Another matter is that the root metaphor approach leaves little room for aspects other than symbols and meanings and has a difficult time including aspects of organizations such as competition, performance and external environment. According to Alvesson (2002), there may be a problem with the culture metaphor encompassing too much of the organization. The breadth and the vagueness of the metaphor may call for a more distinct and sharpened metaphor. Studies can therefore appear in both classifications, variable and root metaphor (Alvesson, 2002).

Based on the above complications, Alvesson (2002) continues by proposing the use of a perspective he calls multiple cultural configuration view, and says, “Organizational cultures are then best understood not as unitary wholes or as stable sets of subcultures but as mixtures of cultural manifestations of different levels and kinds” (2002: 190).

2.1.2 Culture as a constraint

As seen earlier, culture can be a source of positive functions for organizational members by providing a feeling of clarity, meaning and purpose. It follows that culture is viewed as an integrating, unifying phenomenon in the sense that it is shared by all. These integrated patterns of ideas and meanings provide stability and a point of departure for coordination (Kemp and Dwyer, 2001).

Nevertheless, culture can also be seen as exerting a negative influence on the questioning and reflecting capacity of organizational members. The shared meanings, ideas, values and social patterns to which employees are subject can foster a strong sense of organizational identity and thus can, to an extent, become a handicap. By subordinating themselves to these commonalities people refrain from critically exploring the reasons for embarking on a particular path or from considering alternative ways of creating social reality. These cultural meanings can then be seen as freezing social reality (Alvesson, 2002; Kemp and Dwyer, 2001).
Culture can also work as a source of control through the deliberate act of managers and organizational arrangements such as hierarchy, rituals, rules, objectives and various frameworks of operation. Powerful and skilled actors can influence the direction of shared ideas and meanings and thereby affect the connotation of such concepts as true, false, good, bad, possible and sensible. According to Alvesson (2002), the power aspect of these collectively dominating ideas must be taken seriously, since they often counteract independent thinking and the questioning of existing social conditions. He continues by saying that “it is important to investigate whether a commitment to ideas and values are ‘genuine’ or a matter of conformism and compliance” (Alvesson, 2002: 118). Corporate ways of exercising power can manifest themselves in systematic efforts to establish a particular world view, a particular set of values and/or emotions among corporate employees. Kemp and Dwyer (2001) draw attention to another limitation of a strong organizational culture when they talk about the socialization of new organizational members. They stress that it can be difficult to bring in externally recruited people at the top levels of the organization and that “the acceptance of new blood may present an ongoing problem” (Kemp and Dwyer, 2001: 90).

However, this is partly what cultural life is about. To have shared ideas and meanings as a guideline for clarity, stability and direction in an organization, it is necessary to limit alternative interpretations, in particular those divergent from the dominant interpretation. This process of selectivity is to an extent unavoidable and is characteristic of organizations. Nonetheless, emphasizing these constraints brings about awareness and may be useful in encouraging questioning, exploration, reflection and insightfulness when it comes to organizational life (Alvesson, 2002).

2.1.3 Organizational culture and creativity and innovation

According to Martins and Terblanche (2003), organizational culture appears to have an influence on the degree to which creativity and innovation are stimulated in an organization. Creativity and innovation have a role to play in a market where companies need to be more knowledge-oriented to survive. As a result, organizations and leaders need to create a framework in which creativity and innovation will be seen as basic cultural norms that affect individuals and their behavior.

Martins and Terblanche (2003) discuss the concepts of creativity and innovation and, for the point of discussion, the concepts are regarded as two overlapping stages in the creativity process. In the following text these two concepts will be used interchangeably. This process is context specific and, as a result, it may vary from one group, one organization and one culture to another, and it can also vary over time. Therefore, it should be seen at a level of the individual, organization or profession, or whatever area is defined as a framework for the research. In this text the creativity process is seen in the context of organizational culture and as affecting the individual’s work performance, and attention is given to the aspects that may influence creativity and innovation. As with all aspects of organizational culture some overlapping occurs to a certain degree.

Organizational culture has an effect on the encouragement of creative solutions (ideas for products, services, processes, procedures) and the extent to which they are supported and implemented. The understandings of employees on how to act and behave affect the creativity and innovation within the organization. Some cultural aspects such as values
and actions of top management, organizational structure, strategic approaches, and decision-making processes are associated with the level of support of creativity and innovation within the organization. These are discussed in the following sections.

To achieve an environment favorable for idea generation, and for the development and implementation of new products, processes and services, there needs to be support for it on a strategic level. Related to this aspect are certain factors conducive to creativity and innovation. One is that the vision and mission should be focused on the future, as well as being customer and market oriented. It should also be shared and understood by the organization’s employees. Closely related to vision and mission are organizational goals and objectives, which reflect the priorities and values of organizations and which, as a result, may promote or hinder innovation. The personal and organizational goals should focus on quality instead of effectiveness, and should allow employees great freedom within the context of the strategic goals (Martins and Terblanche, 2003).

Structure is another aspect that is affected by the organizational culture, and consequently has an influence on the promotion or restriction of the creativity process. According to Arad et al. (1997) and the CIMA Study Text (1996), cited by Martins and Terblanche (2003: 70), “a flat structure, autonomy and work teams will promote innovation, whereas specialization, formalization, standardization and centralization will inhibit innovation.” Some cultural values that influence the way a structure promotes or hinders innovation are, respectively, flexibility, freedom and cooperative teamwork on the one hand, or rigidity, control and predictability on the other hand. In particular, flexibility and freedom are emphasized as supporting creativity. Flexibility involves a high level of adaptability and responsibility, whereas freedom is manifested in autonomy, empowerment and decision-making. This last statement means that employees are free to achieve their goals in an independent fashion within set guidelines. Another factor has to do with effective teamwork, which means that team members should trust and respect one another, be open to one another’s ideas, perspective and style of functioning as well as being able to communicate effectively.

Support mechanisms are an equally important aspect that has to do with factors such as rewards, recognition, and availability of resources. Apart from rewarding well-proven, trusted methods and fault-free work, organizations should reward risk taking, experimenting and idea generating. Giving employees time to think creatively and time for experimenting is also seen as a positive influence on the creative process.

In addition, an organization’s values and norms also have an influence on creativity and innovation. One behavioral aspect is the manner in which the organization handles mistakes. This sends a signal to the employees as to what is acceptable or not. Tolerating mistakes and regarding them as learning opportunities promotes creativity. Ignoring them or using them to punish someone is less conducive to creativity. A broad support for change, a tolerance of conflicts and a way of handling conflicts constructively all play an important role. The fifth aspect refers to communication. To have a positive creativity process, the organizational culture should support a mode of open and transparent communication based on trust between individuals, teams and departments – in its essence, an open-door communication policy (Martins and Terblanche, 2003).
2.1.4 Organizational culture and recruiting

The issue raised in the introduction is the role that culture plays regarding the success or failure of an externally recruited candidate. Souza and Zajas (1995) point out that the selection of an executive is an important opportunity that involves risks and investment, and therefore demands the same commitment as any other strategic decision. The organization must consider all important factors. Assessing the organization’s culture and business needs, and identifying the characteristics valued and required for success in the position and company, will define what functional and managerial traits, abilities and experience one is seeking in a candidate. This demands self-assessment and self-criticism by the organization. A potential mismatch between the newly employed individual and the employing company does not necessarily have to concern skill or ability issues, but a lack of assessment of values. If the company values are not identified, the candidate cannot be evaluated in relation to them. The time invested in assessing the company’s culture and in becoming aware of what the organization deems important, will increase the possibility of candidate success (Souza and Zajas, 1995).

However, the sole responsibility does not lie with the hiring company. The success of a match increases if the candidate understands that the selection process is a two-way street. In the recruitment process the candidate evaluates the organization and its members as well. Nevertheless, there are ways that the company can be helpful in this process. For example, communicating the nature of the position and of the company, including the less desirable characteristics, as well as letting the candidate meet with other employees and providing a visit to the workplace will aid in the process (Souza and Zajas, 1995).

2.1.5 An interpretive approach

In the metaphor/symbolism approach to organizational culture, reality is defined as subjective and multi-dimensional, with the possibility of different meanings attached to the same phenomenon. Schultz (1995), cited in Wilson (2000), takes this one step further by arguing that culture can never be totally understood and explained, and must be discovered through interpretation and deciphering. This is to some extent due to the partially non-conscious deeper level of meanings, ideas and symbols that exist in
organizational cultures. Alvesson (2002) also subscribes to the interpretive approach and says that it is “one of the best ways of understanding a broad spectrum of aspects of management and organization” (Alvesson, 2002: 12).

The interpretive approach emphasizes sensitivity and reflectivity in analyzing organizational culture. It goes beyond the surface and looks at the complex pattern of interaction, which takes place on different levels, as between people, roles, other organizations and the external environment. The interpretive approach also deals with how people relate to seemingly objective, accessible and practical matters. On understanding leadership, this approach is not as interested in looking at the correctness of a leader’s action, but stresses how the action is interpreted by others. The interpretive approach also becomes useful when looking at the dual nature of culture, in reflecting upon its usefulness for making complex interaction and coordination possible and reflecting upon constraints.

According to Alvesson (2002) there is no recommended framework for the interpretive approach. However, there are some aspects that are emphasized within this view when trying to understand organizational culture. These aspects are something to have in mind and can be seen as guidelines to facilitate interpretation, reflection and insight. The cultural aspects in this approach focus on specific cultural manifestations such as specific events, situations, actions and processes. The meaning of these cultural manifestations should be seen as guiding feeling, thinking and acting. Meanings should also be viewed as situated, stressing that concepts are not static nor do they take the same appearance in different situations. It is also important to keep in mind that cultural elements frequently vary, and may even contradict one another within an organization. It is also prudent to recognize that cultural meanings are affected by influential agents, which thus highlights the need for a sensitivity to how social reality is shaped in certain situations. Values and meanings that are invoked by actors reflecting sectional interests can also influence the situation to various degrees (Alvesson, 2002).

2.2 Contextualized leadership

Leadership research has typically suffered from much of the same difficulties of heterogeneity as studies of organizational culture. There have been numerous definitions proposed throughout the years, and they include focusing on traits, behaviors, influence, interaction patterns and role relationships. Definitions of leadership are likely to vary according to researchers’ past experiences, current circumstances, future aspirations, as well as their values and ideals. Stogdill (1974), quoted in Yukl (2002: 2), concludes that “there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept.” What most definitions do have in common is that they involve “a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization” (Yukl, 2002: 2). This commonality indicates the tendency of an ideological overtone to be associated with the concept of leadership. This outlook sees leaders as omnipotent, unidirectionally interacting with subordinates. It neglects the fact that most managers are themselves part of a hierarchy and a context which, in turn, influences them. Studies on leaders have typically focused on what effect the leader has on organizational culture, seeing him as someone with a strong influence on culture and thereby as somebody managing
organization. These definitions neglect the organizational culture context of leadership (Alvesson, 2002).

Duke (1998) reviews several different perspectives on organizational leadership, which includes the thinking of interactionists, cognitive psychologists and advocates of value-based leadership. What he derives from this research is that leadership is situated and therefore cannot be understood apart from its context, the organization. Leadership can thus be seen as a social construction, and, as a result, it can be linked to different meanings, depending on the existing beliefs, expectations and circumstances at a particular time. For different groups leadership has different meanings and values. It becomes clear that leadership is of a complex nature. Yukl (2002) continues by saying that leadership is also affected by the interplay of organizational demands, constraints, choices and situational aspects. In other words, leadership can be seen as a function of interaction between the leader and the situation.

Senge (1990), cited in Duke (1998), notes that individuals constantly influence and are influenced by their context. Leaders derive a sense of what is expected of them from these contexts. An aspect worth underlining, as part of the context, is the beliefs of organizational members. These beliefs influence how employees think about their leaders. This includes thoughts on the need for leaders, the circumstances where leadership is necessary, and the ideals and standards they view leadership should have. These beliefs form expectations concerning leaders’ objectives and how they should be realized. They also reveal important information regarding the values, ethics and norms of organizations. Consequently, leadership is closely related to organizational culture (Alvesson, 2002; Duke, 1998; Yukl, 2002).

Although the cultural context guides managers in regards to how leadership should be carried out, it is not entirely implied that a leader is forced to subordinate himself to a specific orientation, or style or that he functions merely as a bearer of a given set of meanings and ideas. The relationship between leadership and culture is much more complex. Leadership deals with meanings, feelings and thinking, and influences shared understandings of objectives, core ideas and values – thus affecting culture. This, however, does not mean that it necessarily is an active process of manipulation but rather a gradual change, where the interaction is more of a process of negotiation. Senior members or leaders can in extraordinary circumstances rise above cultural aspects or even have an impact on organizational culture. Nevertheless, “it is still debatable whether top managers can be seen as captains of culture. Arguably, culture forms leadership rather than the other way around” (Alvesson, 2002: 106).

2.2.1 Superior – subordinate relationship

The leader-member exchange theory describes the development of an interpersonal relationship between a leader and an individual subordinate. The definition of this theory has, according to Yukl (2002), varied to a large degree depending on the study or research focus. The commonality, however, is that the quality of an exchange relationship usually involves such factors as mutual trust, respect, affection, support and loyalty.

The dyadic exchanges develop in a different manner for each subordinate over time. It is therefore not necessary to treat all subordinates exactly the same, but each person should perceive that he is an important and respected member of the team. Yukl (2002)
points out that it is not clear how much a new employee can actually influence the negotiation of this exchange, but he continues by saying that “it is likely that some subordinates are proactive about developing a favorable relationship rather than passively accepting whatever the leader decides to do” (Yukl, 2002: 119). The type of exchange relationship that has been formed influences the manager’s interpretation of the employee’s behavior, in a positive or a negative fashion.

There have been several research studies on how the exchange relationship is related to other variables. One set of studies has examined aspects that predict the quality of the superior-subordinate exchange relationship. From these studies it was concluded that a favorable relationship is more likely to occur when the subordinate’s values and attitudes are relatively similar to those of the leader (Yukl, 2002).

Other studies have examined how the exchange relationship is related to the behaviors of the superior and subordinate. Here it was found that where the exchange relationship is favorable, the leader’s behavior will be of a more supportive nature and thus consultation and delegation, mentoring and less micro-management will be predominant. According to Yukl (2002), a leader also appears to be less critical of subordinates with whom he has developed a high-exchange relationship. A favorable relationship will also entail an increased openness and support from the subordinate towards the leader. Increased support and commitment will prove valuable when tasks arise that demand an investment of time and effort by the subordinates to ensure success. In a favorable setting, members of the team can also contribute by maintaining cooperative working relationships and sharing leadership functions. However, in a low-exchange relationship there is a low level of mutual influence, respect and loyalty, and it will be difficult to gain support for the above-mentioned benefits (Yukl, 2002).

2.2.2 Procedural justice

The term fair process, or procedural justice, refers to perceived fairness used in the decision-making process as experienced by employees. When decision-making is shaped by fairness, it influences attitudes and behaviors of managers and employees, and by extension, builds trust and cooperation and promotes idea-generation (Kim and Mauborgne, 2003). Procedural justice is based on the premise that all individuals want to be seen and heard as human beings, and not just as company assets. This constitutes the need for their ideas to be taken seriously, and a need to understand the rationale behind certain decisions. “People are sensitive to the signals conveyed through a company’s decision-making processes. Such processes can reveal a company’s willingness to trust people and seek their ideas – or they can signal the opposite” (Kim and Mauborgne, 2003: 131).

It follows that concerns regarding fairness affect work related phenomena, such as the dyadic exchange between superiors and subordinates. Procedural justice is more likely to be more important to subordinates, as they usually are the less powerful party in the exchange relationship. Perceptions of fairness are influenced by the interpersonal treatment employees receive from the superior, the decision-maker, and the level of participation offered to them in decision-making processes. This includes such aspects as courtesy, feedback, and the opportunity for expressing one’s views (Wesolowski and Mossholder, 1997).
For companies wanting to make the most of the energy and creativity of their managers and employees, the conclusion pointed out in Kim and Mauborgne (2003) is that individuals are more likely to display a high level of trust and commitment, and bring about an active cooperation, when fair process is observed. Employees are more prone to commit to a decision, even one they disagree with, if they believe that their views were considered in the process. Worth noting is that procedural justice does not refer to decision by consensus, but is concerned with giving merit to every idea in the process of decision-making. Elements that lessen the quality of superior-subordinate dyadic exchanges, such as an inadequate procedural justice, may eventually affect the subordinate’s perceptions of the exchange, and could negatively affect the attitudes towards the job itself (Kim and Mauborgne, 2003; Wesolowski and Mossholder, 1997).
3 Method

Following is an account of the methodological decisions that were made, based on the purpose of the study and the theoretical concepts presented in the previous chapter. The intent is to explain the choice of the method of inquiry, which, by extension, affects the direction of the study.

3.1 Choice of method

Deciding on the appropriate method of inquiry can sometimes be a daunting task considering that there is no single ideal standard for carrying out research. There are no rules or formulas to follow in making the necessary choices and decisions. To further complicate matters, Patton (1990) points out that “these are not choices between good and bad but choices among alternatives, all of which have merit” (Patton, 1990: 166).

However, there are a few aspects one can consider to clarify one’s perspective and reduce the number of possible alternatives. One should start by reviewing the purpose of the study and explore what kind of information is needed in achieving this purpose. It is also of interest to determine the level of accessibility of the data and to examine what options are available for retrieving such information. It can also be helpful to look at what research has been done before within the defined area of study, and to have in mind the purpose for which the study is going to be used. Considering this, there are some practical concerns that may take precedence over some of the above-mentioned aspects, they are the time and resources available for conducting the study (Bryman, 2002).

The chosen strategy then gives basic direction for the study and provides a framework for different efforts within the study in order to lead towards a common purpose. It also serves as guidance in selecting techniques or methodological practices for specific situations (Patton, 1990).

3.2 The qualitative research approach

The qualitative research approach builds on several premises that are designed to facilitate the understanding of the individual’s social reality. The research strategy emphasizes a holistic perspective, which entails studying social entities in their entirety and understanding a phenomenon as a whole. This is in contrast to the quantitative approach, which aims to describe a phenomenon by separate independent variables that can be quantifiable. The holistic theme is closely connected with contextualism, which strives to understand people and actions in relation to a context.

The qualitative approach is also naturalistic in that the researcher avoids any manipulation of the study setting. When conducting such a study one is interested in keeping an open mind as to what may emerge during the research that may be of importance in understanding the settings. Here the quantitative strategy uses experimental design, which is concerned with controlling the conditions of the study, emphasizing that all variables be known beforehand. It also has an interest in the prospect of statistical generalizations. Adherents of the qualitative approach argue that the variables-based approach of the quantitative design strategy oversimplifies the complexities of real world experiences, and is unsuccessful at seeing the outcome as
part of a whole. Although this critique may be somewhat harsh (Patton, 1990), the quantitative approach does in fact prove unsuitable for this study, since the whole point of the study is to explore the experiences of externally recruited executives – that is to say, the situation itself and the complexity of the context within which they exist.

Qualitative methods are also oriented toward inductive logic, which involves making sense of the outcome without imposing preexisting expectations on the research setting. As in this study, where the focus is on individuals, the inductive approach begins with the experiences of those individuals without delimiting in advance what those experiences will be. An inductive analysis uses themes and categories that emerge from the gathered information and the understanding of the individual cases as a whole, as well as general patterns that may have surfaced during the process. In so doing, the theories that result from the findings will have been grounded in the collected data, rather than imposed on the basis of predetermined, deductively derived constructs as in the quantitative approach (Patton, 1995; 1997).

3.3 Interviews

The purpose of interviewing is to gain access to information that cannot be observed. Patton (1990) points out that it is not a matter of observable data being more desirable or valid, but the fact that all things cannot be witnessed. For the purpose of this study, interviewing becomes essential when the information sought after is the past experiences of executives, which includes feelings, thoughts and behaviors that took place at a previous point in time. As the researcher I am interested in finding out what is on the interviewees’ minds, to gain access to their perspectives on the topics at hand and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences (Patton, 1990). For the purpose of this study I am also interested in depth and detail; therefore an approach that will facilitate information richness is of interest. This kind of interviewing is referred to as in-depth interviews or as qualitative interviews and has a few variations (Bryman, 2004).

Patton (1990) describes these variations as the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach and the standardized open-ended interview. The first interview approach relies on questions spontaneously generated in the course of an interaction, usually during an ongoing observation. The general interview guide approach is based on an outline of issues or themes that are to be explored with each interviewee, while the third approach is based on the use of set questions that are worded and used in the same sequence for each interview, thus reducing the flexibility of the interview. Since I have little prior knowledge of the experiences of the executives, it is difficult to create set questions beforehand and flexibility becomes an important issue. The general interview guide becomes the logical choice for this study.

Based on the common information that should be obtained from the interviewees, issues or themes are outlined and the interview guide serves as a basic checklist to make sure that all topics are covered. It is not necessary to attend to the themes in any particular order and the interviewer is free to adapt the phrasing and the sequence of questions to the specific respondent in the context of the interview. Consequently the emphasis is on the interviewee’s interpretation of questions and occurrences, patterns and behaviors (Bryman, 2002).
The interview guide (see appendix) used in this study consists of three basic subject areas; the way the executives experienced the early stages of their employment in the new company; the way they describe their view on the organization and any changes to the image since starting; the experiences or aspects they describe as having affected their working situation the most. These themes are complemented by suggested questions for each theme, where necessary, to keep the interview going. The first part of the interview was to gain a certain sense of their point of departure, and this entailed questions on what the recruitment process looked like, what their expectations were while being interviewed and when starting the new position as well as their initial experiences. The second theme aims at obtaining their thoughts on the organization, their positions, performing their responsibilities and whom they interacted and worked with. It is also about gaining the interviewee’s thoughts on their experiences since starting the position. Lastly it was interesting to see if anything or anyone stood out in their experiences. This was done partly to find out if there were any specific incidents or individuals that shaped their understanding of what they have gone through since being hired.

I considered the setting important when meeting with the interviewees in order to facilitate a situation of openness and honesty and to encourage the respondents to speak more freely about their experiences. Therefore, I asked that we conduct the interview in a closed off area such as an office or conference room when meeting with the interviewees. Since my previous interview experiences have been limited, I conducted a test interview with a friend to discover possible backup questions and areas that could present problems for the flow of the interview.

3.4 Selection and sampling

The focus of this study is not to simplify or generalize the experiences of recruited executives to all executives of all groups, but to highlight the complexity of their experiences and, consequently, to be open to the possibility that several different aspects can play a role in affecting them in their positions and companies. What is sought after is variation of experiences as well as common patterns within the variation. Following this, it becomes important to purposefully select a small sample of information-rich cases for in-depth study, from which one can learn about important issues pertaining to the study.

There are several purposeful sampling strategies discussed in Patton (1990), and for the aim of this study, a combination of maximum variation sampling and criterion sampling has been utilized. Since the sample size is small, it was important to select information-rich cases with great diversity in an attempt to obtain high quality detailed descriptions of each experience. Of particular interest would be to explore any common patterns that emerge, as well as to capture core elements and experiences that cut across the selected cases. In doing this, if any commonalities arise, their significance would be increased by their heterogeneity. The selected interviewees show diversity within the predetermined criteria selected for the study. The first criterion according to which they were selected concerned length of time at the new employment. This was defined as a minimum of circa one year in order for them to have some depth in their experiences, but not more than two years so that their experiences would still be relatively fresh. The second criterion had to do with their level of authority. It was deemed important that they were managers with some authority (department or program responsibility), but that they
were not at the top of the hierarchy within their respective companies. This is related to
the respondents having work responsibilities that include interacting with subordinates
and colleagues as well as being apart of a larger context with its own conditions. Even
though they have this in common, the executives’ previous employment prior to being
recruited is different from each other, as are their new employment, thus yielding
experiences from companies of different size, organizational structure and foci.

As with most studies having limited time and resources available to it, other aspects
affected the process of selecting cases. Accessibility weighed in, since it was
geographically easier to meet with the interviewees that were situated in the vicinity of
Lund and Malmö. To find and select appropriate respondents, I relied on contacts that,
in turn, directed me to people who were potentially suited for the purpose of the study.

The above-mentioned time constraints and conditions also affected sample size. It
became more valuable to seek depth instead of breadth and to gather penetrating
information from a small number of people. Patton (1990) explains that the
meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with
information-richness of the cases than with sample size. I narrowed down the sample
size to five interviewees who I determined would provide the information needed for
the purpose of the study.

3.5 Ethical considerations

There are certain ethical matters to consider when conducting an empirical study relying
on material based on interviews. In the humanities and social science research field
there are ethical principles concerned with how to undertake research. Included in these
are directives constructed with the intent to protect the research participants. These
ethical principles provide a guideline for the relationship between the researcher and the
participants of the study, in this case the interviewees. These requirements also serve as
a basis for examination of research projects within this field of study (Vetenskapsrådets
forskningsetiska principer).

The discussion of ethical principles within social science research usually revolves
around four main areas, which also overlap to a certain degree. These concern the
degree to which any harm occurs to participants, whether there is a lack of consent from
the participants, whether there is any intrusion on the participants’ privacy, and whether
there is any form of false pretences on the part of the researcher in respect to the
withholding of relevant information. In the case of qualitative research involving open-
ended interviews, harm does not mean a process that results in physical injuries, but is
concerned rather with aspects such as self-esteem, increased stress and anxiety. The
question of harm also becomes valid regarding the subject of storing the data in a
confidential manner. This means that the interviewees’ identity should be protected, and
it should be assured that the information gathered cannot be traced back to the persons
in question in a subsequent report. Since it is common in qualitative research reports to
present excerpts from interviews, it becomes even more important to keep this in mind
(Bryman, 2002).

The question of consenting or accepting to participate in a research study is, according
to Bryman (2002), the most discussed area in the classification of ethical principles. The
greater part of this question is focused on studies that involve observations concealed
from the targeted surroundings and is therefore not relevant to the study at hand.
However, other aspects that are applicable entail the need for full disclosure of the purpose of the study, the way it is to be conducted, and the department that is supporting the researcher. This means not withholding any information that might affect the prospective interviewee’s willingness to participate.

The third principle deals with the participant’s personal life. This has to do with the need to avoid a situation where the interviewee is not aware of being interviewed or studied, as in the second principle. The interviewees’ unawareness makes it impossible to fend off any intrusion into his or her privacy. Another matter of importance is the respondent’s anonymity, which leads to the need to properly store any personal information or perhaps to destroy it if the information is of a sensitive nature.

The principle concerning false pretense and withholding pertinent information is another indication of the interrelatedness of these aspects. This, as with the others, is about the need to be as honest as possible when describing the study and its consequences. If this is not adhered to it may also negatively reflect back on the researcher and research studies in general (Bryman, 2002).

It is worth adding that all information collected within the scope of the study should only be used for the purpose of this research. This means that the information cannot be used in any other research study, or for commercial or other non-scientific purpose (Vetenskapsrådets forskningsetiska princper).

3.6 Data processing

The data processing was initiated by carefully reviewing the interview transcripts one by one in order to gain a general overview of the collected data. Each interview transcript resulted, on average, in eleven pages. Considering the small amount of set questions in the interview guide, the interviews generated a large quantity of information within each theme. I then decided to do a cross-case analysis (Patton, 1990) to obtain a clearer picture of what was being said, before attempting a content analysis. I grouped together answers from the interviewees to see their different perspectives on central issues. Since I used an interview guide approach, in contrast to a more structured, standardized interview, the relevant data would not be found in the same place for each interview, thereby making the process a bit more time consuming. When finished with this, I moved on to qualitative content analysis.

Content analysis is, according to Bryman (2004), the most prevalent approach in qualitative analysis. The process entails identifying, coding and categorizing the primary patterns and underlying themes in materials being analyzed. This approach is a creative process that emphasizes the investigator’s role in the construction of meaning. Qualitative analysts do not have statistical tests that stress which pattern is significant and, as a consequence, they must rely on their own judgment. In qualitative content analysis there is also an emphasis on allowing the patterns and categories to emerge out of the data and on recognizing the significance of the context in understanding the meaning of what is analyzed, thereby adhering to the inductive nature of this type of research studies (Bryman, 2004; Patton, 1990). By using the product of the cross-case analysis and referencing the transcripts when needed, I started a process of determining if the data could be categorized in different ways. After revising the themes and categories that emerged from the data, I decided on fewer categories than what had been used in the cross-case analysis. This was done in part to avoid one of the most
commonly mentioned criticisms of this approach: that is by extracting parts of a text, in this case an interview transcript, there is the a possible problem of losing the social setting, the context of what is said (Bryman, 2004). I have also been interested in making sure that the uniqueness of each interviewee is visible. The results are therefore presented with the context and the uniqueness of the respondents in mind. I have made some of the sections longer than was of my initial intention. As a measure to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, some less important aspects in the interview excerpts have been altered to make the identification of the participants impossible.

3.7 Methodological issues

In the following section I attempt to describe and discuss the quality aspects pertaining to this study. The quality concepts used below have been developed to assess the quality of qualitative research as an alternative to the criteria of reliability and validity, commonly used in quantitative research. Qualitative researches do apply such terms to their studies, although the possibility of altering the meanings has been discussed, to dispense with the connotation of measurement that these criteria carry with them. I therefore feel more comfortable using the criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity suited for qualitative research, as proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1994), cited in Bryman (2004). The following concepts are taken solely from Bryman’s Social Research Methods (2004).

3.7.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness consists of four components: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility entails making sure that the research is carried out according to the principle of good practice, which includes adhering to the ethical guidelines described above. This criterion also entails the submission of the research findings to the participants of the study to conform that their recounts of experiences and their social setting have been correctly understood. Due to the time limit for this study, I have not been able to present my findings during the research process and will submit this to the interviewees following the conclusion of the study. However, since it has not been the intent to publish or to make the study known in any other form to the general public, the level of consequence that this might entail is lowered.

Transferability is concerned with the possibility of generalizing the findings to other situations or contexts. Qualitative research usually focuses on depth rather than breadth. By extension, the study typically consists of a small sample size which makes the possibility for generalizations rare. Such studies are more interested in the contextual uniqueness of the social reality under study, and the possible generalization can be seen as a working hypothesis to be explored in further research. The qualitative researcher is instead encouraged to provide the reader with thick descriptions to enable the reader to make their own judgments on the transferability of the findings (Patton, 1990). This has been my aim when presenting the results as comprehensively as possible.

To ensure dependability in qualitative studies, it should be possible to establish that the researcher has followed proper procedure in the research process. This can be done by what Bryman (2004) calls an auditing approach, where complete records are kept during the process to enable others to access and assess the information. This is a problem, however, with studies that for the most part rely on interview transcripts. To ensure the
anonymity of the interviewees, this might prove difficult unless there is some way of removing identifying information beforehand. The literature sources reviewed can of course be traced back through the references at the end of this thesis.

Confirmability is concerned with objectivity in conducting the research. Although some subjectivity is inevitable, considering that it is essentially impossible to avoid the influence of one’s own values and perspectives in social research, the researcher should show that he has acted in good faith. It should therefore be apparent that he has not allowed personal values or theoretical perspectives overtly to direct the research findings derived from the study. In this study the issue of subjectivity is somewhat heightened by the need to translate the interview transcripts from Swedish into English in order to present the results for the reader. There is always a risk that the meaning that I have interpreted is changed in the translation. This, of course also, holds true when a researcher accounts for the collected material by choosing quotes or summarizing the answers, translation or not. The point is to be aware of these issues as a researcher conducting the study, as well as a reader reviewing this study.

3.7.2 Authenticity

Authenticity refers to the issue of presenting the different views of the participants of the study in a fair and balanced manner. I have aimed at doing this by using mainly quotes from the interviewees when presenting the results. This, of course, cannot be a certainty since I have not, as mentioned above, had the possibility of receiving feedback from the respondents on the collected data. There is also an issue of authenticity that is concerned with helping the participants achieve a better understanding of their social world. Although both the interviewees that have stayed on and those that are no longer with their companies may have a good understanding of their experiences, there might be some aspects or ways of interpretation in this study that they have not previously considered that may broaden their perspective.
4 Interview Results

In a qualitative inquiry descriptions and quotations from the conducted interviews are essential ingredients for the subsequent analysis. By including them in the thesis I intend to make it easier for the reader to understand the situations and experiences of the individuals presented in this study. This enhances the possibility for the reader to make up his own mind about the collected data (Patton, 1990).

While going through the interview transcripts I have found common themes and concepts that are appropriate for presenting the results. My aim has been to present objectively the interviews and let the interviewees’ experiences speak for themselves. Therefore I have not theorized in this section but have saved that for my analysis and discussion. The interviews took somewhere between 35 and 50 minutes while the majority were about 45 minutes long. They were recorded on tape and transcribed for analysis. The interviews were conducted in Swedish and I have translated the excerpts into English in order to present them below. I have used fictitious names for the interviewees to facilitate the reading.

4.1 The interviewees

All of the interviewees were externally recruited for their positions. Some were contacted by headhunters, while others had come into contact with the companies through an acquaintance or had knowledge of the company through prior employment. The interviewees are all men between the ages of 35 and 50 and have a high level of education. They work, or have worked, in companies in Lund and Malmö, at companies of varying size, structure and industry foci. They have all had different experiences of their new companies and employment, leading to different end results for the executives. A further introduction of the interviewees is presented below.

Bill was hired as a market and sales director in a small technology firm of about thirty employees. He was contacted by a headhunter but also had a chance to meet with the CEO before he took the position. He had a team that was made up of five to seven employees. The management team consisted of three other members including the CEO. The organization’s structure was flat. His work responsibilities included building a “sales network in Europe, with agents, marketing companies and distributors.” Bill is no longer with the company.

John got in touch with his company through an acquaintance who knew someone in the organization. He was contacted by a management consultant and among his responsibilities he was to “pitch projects and [work with] quality assurance.” He also became the manager of the project managers and the consultants in the company, and in the management team he represents consulting and sales. The management team consists of three other members, including the CEO. When he started the company had about sixty employees, but has through gradual changes reduced in size. The organizational structure is flat. John is still working at this consulting firm.

James was recruited to this technology firm through a contact who worked there. He was hired to be the head of marketing and his responsibilities included “to get the department functioning.” He says that “there was a lot of tension between the employees and [this] had been the case for a while before I got there. The other element
was to change the company’s marketing focus.” The company was hierarchical with several levels. This was true within his department of sixteen employees as well. The management team had seven other members, including the CEO. The company is part of a larger corporation. James has left the company.

Robert had been in touch with the company through an earlier employment. His responsibilities are customer service, which has over 200 employees. Customer service is part of a larger business area, marketing and sales, which in turn is a section of a large corporation. The organization is fairly hierarchical. Robert is still with the company.

Mark was contacted by a headhunter and was hired to be the head of the larger of two divisions within the company. During the interview process he met with most of the key members of the organization. Within this division he had “product developers, coordinators, four subsidiaries around the world and a lot of agents.” The organizational structure was fairly flat. Mark was also hired to take over as CEO after a period of two years. Mark is no longer with the company.

4.2 The interviewees’ accounts

4.2.1 Expectations

When starting, the interviewees had all formed an idea of the company and the position for which they were interviewing: the work responsibilities, work load, what was expected from them, company history, present and future foci, the subordinates as well as their manager. These aspects created an image that made the employment something they wanted to accept. Even though some were entering new industries, they felt that their previous experience and competency would be of use and welcomed in the new situation. Thus, they felt confident that they could succeed in the new employment. As Bill puts it, “I don’t know a lot about IT, but I do know people and markets.”

They all had positive feelings and a sense of excitement of being useful for the new company. Some talk of the focus or size of the company as having appeal to them: “It’s a large corporation, it’s international if that’s what you want, something worth trying out, exciting” [Robert], as well as exciting products, and the possibility to make an impact within their new employment. James points out that by being part of a management team it would enable him to take a higher level of responsibility: “Of course I was going to focus on my job as head of marketing, but I think that if you’re part of a management team you also have a duty that goes across departmental barriers.” Mark mentions that “everyone told me very early on that they needed a proper leader…they wanted someone a little older and a little more senior…for everything, structure, management style, ways of handling people and more long-term thinking.”

Two interviewees also touched upon their sense of the culture at the new company. Mark mentions in his interview that the new company “seemed to be very flat, very open, everyone focused on their work responsibilities instead of organizational nonsense.” He also mentions company values, and says, “[The company] seemed to have a stable foundation of values when it came to co-workers and business development, which I liked. So I had a very positive image of it.” John also talks about the subject of culture: “when I started to talk to [a would-be colleague] I started to feel that this was right, when it came to personal chemistry and also culturally.”
4.2.2 Work atmosphere

Bill says that “some of them [employees] had never worked at other places and [the company] had a large turnover, especially if you looked at the technical side, very few were there a long time.” He also brings up non work-related activities: “We had a coffee break every day, and then you played…I think it was every afternoon…you played [computer game].” Bill also talks about ethics within the company:

I always pay on time [invoices], it’s a given. It’s something I hope one is raised with. But not there, if you could deceive someone, then you did. This is not an attitude that I’m comfortable with. Ethics wasn’t, in my view, something that was highly regarded.

John describes the atmosphere in his company: “I think it’s very unpretentious, and you have to listen to the client…we get feedback that we are very professional, we take care of the client, and we are sensitive to their needs…we are small in the way that one answers the phone when it rings and gives service.” About the employees he says, “The people here are very unpretentious…down to earth and straight shooters.”

James talks about a hierarchical environment: “I understood it as important to have a large department. It meant that you were higher up in the hierarchy.” He also points out the importance of politics:

It was a mistake that I made, it was tremendously important to market yourself internally within [the company], not just the organization but the whole corporation. I thought that it was idiotic to use energy internally. Better to focus on the market and customers. So, I didn’t really care about selling myself internally and then afterwards I realized that it was a necessity in order to function [in the company].

The company was also technical-oriented and “if you weren’t proficient with the technology then you didn’t count.” In the interview it also became clear that the same held true for the length of time you’d been in the company. “If you hadn’t worked at [the company] a long time then you weren’t listened to.” James continues, “The problem was that the company lacked people with commercial experience, and we were a few that came from other companies, head of sales among others…We knew how this worked in other companies. We had done it before. We weren’t recent graduates, we were 45 years old.” He also talks about the business sense within the company: “You didn’t see to the business, this was true for the whole organization as well as the work within the marketing department…You didn’t see the whole picture.”

Robert describes the atmosphere within his organization as well as within the corporation. Within his organization he describes an openness where everything can be brought up or discussed. “We always encourage new ideas…Many question why we do this or that. You have to realize that we have a large amount of academics here.” There is also a willingness to make changes throughout the organization: “Jokingly we usually say that if you’re not disposed to changes here in customer service, then you shouldn’t be here.” On the cooperation within the organization, he says, “We have a large understanding since we are in daily contact with the customers…So there’s a greater willingness.” The corporation has more of an old fashioned mentality, and he says that “they are not oriented towards customers and markets.” On the corporation making decisions that have an impact on his customer service organization, he says, “It’s important to think about the customer…otherwise someone is going to suffer.”
About the climate in his company, Mark says, “We had a lot of meetings where everyone sat in and discussed. So there was quite an open and positive spirit. It wasn’t very efficient, which you noticed after a while, but it was very open and nice.” The company had established values and they were posted around the company.

This openness, or these values that were dictated that were very good: of how to work, how to act towards each other, how to promote competency and live in a knowledge-based society…But, what I noticed after…it took six months or so…was that people didn’t live up to them. The CEO said one thing and did another. And that took a while to discover, what was really happening. There were a lot of things that were wrong, where you said A and did B.

Mark also brings up the CEO having a group of favorites:

…and what was apparent after a while was that all knowledge in the company was centered in [the CEO]…who didn’t want to share at all…[the CEO] surrounded himself with favorites who he shared a little of his knowledge with… But there was no doubt of who was in charge. They were very loyal subordinates who didn’t do anything without his blessing.

4.2.3 Co-workers

All of the interviewees had good experiences with their colleagues and subordinates and talk about both vertical and horizontal cooperation and support. They talk about the employees in their companies being creative, competent, accomplished, nice, dedicated and positive. In the interview with Bill it became clear that most of his subordinates had the same opinion on strategy and work and that there was cooperation within the team. James got feedback from a few subordinates: “They thought that I was really good as their manager.”

John emphasizes the importance of support and talks about his relationship to the other members of the management team: “You have to have someone you can talk to about everything, work-related.” Bill mentions one colleague in particular who gave him support, and says, “We had the same outlook on things and we were just as frustrated over the lack of information and about top management.” Robert about his colleague: “It’s great with him as a sounding board,” and about the other co-workers, he says, “I see that they also want to make changes, and that we think alike.” James mentions a good working relationship with a few colleagues in the management team: “We worked together and we tried, felt that it worked, and that was great.” Mark says about his co-workers and colleagues: “We worked well with each other…me, the managers of the subsidiaries and the organization. I felt that I had a lot of support within the organization.”

4.2.4 Their superior

All interviewees, except Robert, had a manager who was also the CEO. Robert’s manager was head of the division. In the interview John talks about his manager: “We have a good relationship,” and when managing subordinates, he says, “I got a lot of support from my manager.” Robert says the same thing about his manager: “It is good [the relationship]. Informal and formal at times, very discussion-oriented.”

In the interview with Bill, he talks about not seeing eye to eye with his CEO on how the company should be managed: “He ran it with a liberal view on what costs should be
here or there, and what was or wasn’t deductible. Priorities could differ from one day to the next.” Bill also talks about how the manager treated people: “I don’t take offense to spitefulness. I just get pissed off. But others get hurt.” Bill also talks about not agreeing with the CEO on the direction of the company:

> We had the first board meeting and I had to choose sides, if I was going to…not say the whole truth and continue with my boss’ view on how the business should be run, or if I should be more loyal towards the board of directors and say what the situation at hand looked like. So it wasn’t easy. I chose the board of directors and that may have been a big mistake. He [the CEO] understood my position and I think it was the first time he and I disagreed, officially.

Both Bill and James comment on the manager’s relationship with the co-workers. Bill says, “He had a specific view on what type of persons one should have, and if they didn’t fit in he got rid of them.” James points out that “it’s not a question of right or wrong, but she was the CEO and wanted to run things her way and naturally she was going to surround herself with people who want to run it the same way.”

James says that “the CEO had a management style that was very dominating.” He says that the CEO’s approach was “full speed ahead, solve all problems as fast as possible. It wasn’t the kind of leadership where it was assumed that everyone did their best.” Mark disagreed with the CEO on the necessity of changes and future strategy for the organization.

### 4.2.5 The executives’ work responsibilities

The five managers all had a similar management style and approach to their work. Both John and James talk about the importance of trusting that the competencies exist within their departments. From the interviews it was clear that they approached management in terms of coaching the subordinates and making them feel responsible for their tasks and having them take their own initiatives. John puts it in the following way: “They need some form of management and follow-up…some form of leadership. But at the same time they need inspiration and enthusiasm and for me to let them go. It’s a hard balance.” James says about himself as a manager: “I’m pretty delegating and I don’t feel that I as manager know everything the best but presume that there are competencies that can solve this very well. I see myself more as a sounding board.” He also worked on evening out the work load among his subordinates.

Bill worked with his team in coming up with marketing and sales strategies that were cast aside by the CEO’s reprioritizing. Bill describes this work in the following way:

> My subordinates and I had the same understanding, most people had the same understanding. So if you were more or less clear-sighted and humble before the situation, I don’t think it was that hard to reach that conclusion [what the situation looked like and what strategy was needed]…so it wasn’t one of those first-rate efforts from my side…we of course talked about it together and then it was just about presenting it. We realized that [the company] had a faulty view on who the customer was.

> We talked a lot about this [prioritizing business opportunities] and we had the whole company with us, twice, to implement the new strategy. But it took…I don’t remember if it was one or two weeks…that we all the same were going to do something that wasn’t agreed upon in the strategy.
Robert says the following: “What I encourage, I hope, is that I want a very open and honest climate...if someone thinks I’m doing something wrong, then I want to know...I want the kind of openness where everyone can bring up and discuss everything...so when a decision is made...you’ve either bought it or you haven’t. If you haven’t bought it you’ve at least said it. In any case you’re onboard and aware that we have to do this now.”

Robert talks about his work, and says, “There is a constant flow of new challenges to dive into and it’s exciting.” On the cooperation between the sales-focused areas and his customer area: “It’s really hard to work on having an even work load [in the division], and at the same time have colleagues who make decisions that limit us. It’s a tricky combination.” The margin is in the buying and selling: “That’s where the revenue lies, which makes it more focused on, and it’s really just about production, it has nothing to do with the market. But it is reflected in the decisions not being pro-customer.”

Mark talks about the work: “The work itself was very stimulating and the product is fantastic...I am very impressed by the product and the competency behind it, everyone is.” One of the main tasks he had in this position was to structure a sales organization. The restructuring ideas were accepted by everyone, although “there wasn’t a real belief that you needed to concentrate more on sales, that it kind of managed itself.”

4.2.6 Influence and decision-making

In the interview Bill talks about the management team in his company. The management team existed as a condition set by the board of directors and “it was just an illusion, the CEO still called all the shots and I didn’t have any freedom...I’ve been on management teams for over ten years where there’s always been some form of democracy...here there wasn’t even a discussion...you were lucky if you were informed.” From the interview it also became clear that he had a low level of decision-making: “I couldn’t approve any vacation, it had to be approved by the CEO...I couldn’t do anything.” He mentions a few situations:

We have these three ideas for agents or resellers in these countries...I think it seems reasonable but [the CEO] must check, because I wasn’t allowed to sign any papers. There are some moments where you really get something to think about. He bypassed me all the time. I was supposed to be responsible for the marketing side, but he didn’t care about that at all. He went and talked to the guys and gave them assignments without informing me...I always got information back from the sales guys and then I realized that this was untenable, why am I even here?

John says that “we have a good relationship, both me and my manager, and with the management team, so there you get to influence.” John is also responsible for projects and talked about the difference in decision-making there. “It’s not about deciding over people, but almost the other way around, to get motivation in the projects, get people to take responsibility, etc., people here are very good at what they do...it’s about trusting people...To get commitment in the projects. That’s probably one of the things that makes me like it here, that I feel that I can influence.”

James’ department housed different functions and during his employment he worked on reorganizing it, moving some functions away from the department, shrinking it and flattening it out. On cooperation, he says, “...there was very little cooperation between the different [departments].” In the interview James talks about the management team
meetings: “There were a lot of discussions about details. It wasn’t the big picture that was discussed but more the operational, the day-to-day. The meetings were characterized by the CEO handing out orders” and the co-workers trying to avoid blame or responsibility for issues and problems. “I got stuck in a situation where I felt compelled to do things to show the CEO that things were happening, but stuff that I maybe didn’t really think was right.” He says that it was difficult to be taken seriously if you hadn’t worked in the company a long time and that it was hard to get respect or attention for alternative ways of doing things.

Since the start of his employment, Robert has worked on changes and restructuring with a colleague and has implemented some adjustments in the division. “There are always more changes around the corner.” On being on a management team, he says, “I work actively on behalf of customer service in our management team, which means that all the customer contacts that we have, get included somehow and that way this affects other parts of [the corporation].” Robert, works a lot with the rest of the corporation and on decision-making, he says, “decisions can sometimes take a long time…we can do this now, we can make money on this now, so let’s hit the road, let’s go…and I notice that it doesn’t always work. Decision-making through consultation sometimes takes a long time.” He says that he has learned to “do this better…but it’s easier to do that [internally] since I know which players I have to deal with. And we know our strengths here. But when working externally you don’t really know, am I on the same level as the person I’m talking to or is he/she above me? And that can be pretty tiring sometimes.”

On the reception of new ideas, Robert says, “As long as I have a good concept and a good description…what kind of benefits it will yield and so on…then there’s usually no problem.” He also mentions that “as long as we have the money for it, and we see that there’s a possibility, then we make changes and we test a lot. Because here we have to test, we have to try.”

Mark says that “everyone agreed on what needed to be done and in principle on the manner of getting there…it wasn’t shared by the CEO, unfortunately. This led to some conflicts here and there but nothing that we couldn’t handle.” However, when trying to restructure the sales organization, he met with some resistance. When implementing these changes he was not allowed to draw the competence he needed from different parts of the organization. In this process he says that he realized that the company was run somewhat through a group of favorites and they were pointed out as having the “right” competency. “When I tried to draw people that I knew could do the job, then it wasn’t them…it had to be that person or that person and it was the favorites that were pointed out. But, then I said that this is wrong, we need other competencies. And that wasn’t popular and led to conflicts, of course.” There was talk of reorganizing the entire company and Mark’s view was that “it wasn’t a smart idea, so I opposed it…I said it was never going to work….I tried to influence the pattern of thought, but it didn’t work. It was sort of me against everyone else, well, against the CEO.”

4.2.7 Comparison with the initial expectations

Bill says that “the truth turned out to be completely different. You can say that that’s the dilemma of being hired through a headhunter…the headhunters had got an incorrect briefing.” As mentioned earlier he had met with the CEO in the recruitment process, but after some time in the company Bill felt that “he didn’t keep to what he had said…which is unfortunate.” Not long after being in the company he also realized that
he and the CEO had different ideas of what the position entailed: “The CEO thought he
had hired a star salesman. It wasn’t a marketing director but someone who was going to
sell a little more than the others…that was the first mismatch.” On not being able to
make decisions or approve anything, he mentions that “it’s not especially fun if that’s
what you have been led to believe.”

John says in the interview that he had spoken to the CEO and a few would-be co-
workers before accepting the employment, and he says that “the people were
creative…and it suited me. And it does, it does suit me to work like this.” John also
brings up his approach to the situation: “I feel that I have approached this with an open
mind. I know that this kind of business isn’t static, that it changes every three
months…and that it should change.” On the role of having subordinates, he says that “I
was content in that role, but some aspects were tougher than I thought…but I think it’s
due to inexperience in that role.” He also questions if consultants and project managers
in these kinds of companies should have a directing manager: “That kind of role
[consultant and project manager] is very individualistic…the manager becomes more of
a coach.”

James says that he worked on getting his department to understand the importance of
delegating and he tried to encourage more participation. He and the CEO did not see eye
to eye on these efforts: “The CEO didn’t think it was going fast enough. I was of the
opinion that it was going to take time to get the marketing department working properly
and up to the level of performance the rest of the company expected. But the CEO
thought it was going to take a month or two, and I didn’t agree.” He also says that they
disagreed on the manner in which to make these changes as well: “She told me that I
had to tell them [the subordinates] to do it a certain way. I didn’t believe in that. They’re
grown up people, and should be treated as such. If not, they’ll get pissed off. Or they’ll
do what you say and then the next time they won’t take any initiatives of their own. I
didn’t want to put myself in that position.”

Mark reflects: “There was a lot of talk of the fact that it had to be very open, that
everyone had to be able to participate in the decision-making process, everyone had to
be able to make their voices heard, but that turned out not to be the case.” Mark also
points out that the CEO said one thing and did another, and on running the company
through a group of favorites, he says, “once you discovered that you might become a bit
disappointed, even if things like that exist in all organizations, to an extent.” When the
time came for him to take over as CEO, the position was not offered to Mark: “The
CEO probably thought I had too much influence on the organization.”

4.2.8 The interviewees’ reflections

At the end of the interview, Bill reflects on his experiences and the recruitment process.
“I have learned my lesson…to do research beforehand…talk to people who have been
employed there if it is a smaller company…I could’ve heard about it or read about it in
the newspaper instead.” On being recruited by a headhunter, he says, “Headhunters, you
have to realize what they make their money on.”

John talks about the recruitment process and says, “It’s important when looking for
work to be comfortable during the interview process…One can become disappointed if
you start [a job] and the image one got didn’t match, or the descriptions weren’t
correct.” He also talks about having the same outlook on running the company and
work: “[The CEO] had that outlook…then you have a certain way of viewing the job – not the world, but the job – and that’s an important aspect….I got descriptions that agree with how I in fact want to work and how I think you should run a company – ultimately, even if I don’t run the company myself.”

He continues by reflecting on finding a match: “I don’t know why, but I guess it has to do with how you are as a person, if you have a positive attitude, that’s important, and how capable you are of finding out what the situation looks like before you start.” John also gives his views on what makes someone content with a new position and company: “I think it’s a combination of how you are as a person and of course what the culture is like at the company where you work.” John describes why he is content: “I felt welcomed…again to be appreciated, I think that’s something human…One wants to be seen for the work one does…That’s important.”

James reflects on what should happen next time he goes through a recruitment process. “I have realized that when I get a new job, I need to get a feel for the culture beforehand, to feel that it suits me….not just to look at the work responsibilities, but to look at the whole picture.” He talks about what he has come to realize in hindsight about the recruitment process: “I saw some of these signals already when I was hired. It’s about listening to them earlier.” He also contemplates what he would have needed in order to be content in his position: “Above all respect and appreciation for the experience and knowledge I brought with me…[that] was probably the most important thing.”

Robert says that “I was content from the start. I liked the people and the responsibilities that came with the position.” He talks to his colleague and a co-worker for thoughts and inspiration.

On resistance to the changes that Mark tried to make: “It’s probably a fear of too many new ideas coming in…it’s difficult…if you’re running a company and someone comes in with different ideas.” He has a hard time being in an organization where he is not allowed to put his own mark, where it is not based on competencies. He summarizes his experiences at the company as more positive than negative. His work was stimulating, and he really enjoyed the co-workers and clients. “It would have been great if it had ended differently, but I have no hard feelings.” Mark also says that he has learned something from the culture in the company; “I think I’m going to have use for what I learned and saw at [the company]. When it comes to sales problems, and the way you motivate an organization…and to really try to practice what you preach. To really do it and not just paint pretty pictures and then do something else. To be honest.”

4.3 Summary

After reviewing the excerpts from the different interviews a few aspects surface that are of more importance than others. All interviewees enjoyed working with their colleagues, co-workers and subordinates. The only slight exception here is James, but although he did not enjoy working with all of the members on the management team, he still had a good relationship with some of them, as well as with his subordinates. The interviewees also talk about liking the company products or talk about their work being stimulating and challenging. The executives share a positive view of the employees in their companies, saying that they are creative, dedicated, competent and nice. Another
aspect in common is that they had a good relationship with and got support from their closest colleagues.

Some aspects, however, stand out as different among the executives and seem to influence their contentment with their positions. The relationship to their manager is emphasized in all of the interviews, in some more than others. It appears that agreeing with the manager at least when it comes to the manner in which the company is managed and selected strategy, is of importance. To have a good relationship, however, does seem to have an effect as well, which is seen with John and Robert. Another topic of interest is the amount of influence they talk about having and the power to affect their own situation, decision-making process and changes. They also talk about the ability to make their opinions heard and tolerance of differences as well as the level of freedom and flexibility to perform their work responsibilities in the way they seem fit. This includes their approach to running their departments and their management style. An aspect that is also approached in the interviews is their perception of how valued their knowledge, expertise and experience is in the company. The work atmosphere and structure of the interviewees’ companies are also described and can be seen to be of importance in relation to their ability to perform their work responsibilities. These aspects are something I will look into further in my analysis and discussion.
5 Analysis and discussion

In the following analysis, I will relate the results of the interviews to the research and theories presented earlier. My intent has not been to produce final facts on the complexities that have affected these executives, but to describe the conditions, established by the participants, affecting them in their working environment. Following this I will discuss the main conclusions of the study, as well as the models used in the analysis. I will also look into the limitations of this study, and possible topics for further research.

5.1 Analysis

Most of the aspects brought up in the interviews were of a cultural nature, thus making it difficult to single out any one aspect, given that they were interrelated. However, some aspects were given more emphasis than others, and in the following text they are analyzed somewhat independently. These facets are the level of influence and decision-making the executives had in their positions, the relationship to their superior and subordinates, and their leadership options. However, it is important to bear in mind that these aspects overlap and that they are all part the organizational context. Therefore, I have also looked at the culture in its entirety, in each of the interviewees’ companies, to highlight other aspects that affected the executives in their work.

5.1.1 Influence and decision-making

Based on the amount of attention given to the aspects of influence and decision-making in each of the interviews, it is apparent that this is a subject of importance for each of the respondents. With Bill, James and Mark it also seems to be of utmost importance when talking about their now previous employments. The interviewees, except for Bill in some situations, appear to have freedom within their departments or divisions. Martins and Terblanche (2003) uses freedom as a collective word for autonomy, empowerment and decision-making, something the interviewees described having by making changes and restructures within their departments/divisions.

However, freedom, and also the term flexibility, refers to the possibility of achieving one’s goals in an independent fashion, within guidelines determined by the context of the organization’s strategic goals. Flexibility also refers to a high level of responsibility and adaptability (Martins and Terblanche, 2003), which neither Bill nor James had in their positions. They were not allowed to run their departments at their own discretion, which is something Bill realized when the CEO bypassed him continuously. James became conscious of this when he received negative comments from his CEO on his management of the marketing department, and on the time frame he selected for improving the department. James was of the opinion that the necessary changes required more than the few months the CEO deemed sufficient. Time was an important condition for his work and, according to Martins and Terblanche (2003), is a necessary support mechanism for an innovative environment. The higher level of responsibility also eluded Bill and James. Bill had no approval rights within his position, and, from the interview, it seems as if the strategies he and his team worked on never were put to use. Both Bill and James point out that the management team meetings were not constructive. In Bill’s company it was clear that the CEO did not find them necessary.
after making it clear that only his decisions carried weight in the company. Poor cooperation and order giving characterized the management team meetings in James’ organization. The environment created in his company had control as an overriding concern. However, according to Martins and Terblanche (2003), poor communication, cooperation and control is more common with companies defined by hierarchy and centralization, as this organization seems to be, based on James’ interview.

It is evident that the management in the interviewees’ companies is not guided by fair process, which, according to Kim and Mauborgne (2003), is essential for gaining employees trust, commitment and cooperation for the realization of decisions. Although they have some influence within their own department, neither Bill nor James are involved in the decision-making process on a higher level. Fair process also involves an environment where ideas and opinions are heard and discussed. In James’ organization it was difficult, as a newcomer lacking the same technology background as other employees, to gain respect for ideas and alternative ways of doing things. The lack of fair process had implications for Bill, making his work seem fruitless, as the CEO constantly reprioritized without clearly motivating the course of action taken (Kim and Mauborgne, 2003).

Both John and Robert have flexibility and freedom in their positions and overall in their company/division. They both have a high level of autonomy, responsibility and decision-making. The management team meetings are described as constructive and participative, and the team is experienced as a constellation, within which they have influence. In Robert’s division fair process is also evident in a respect for new ideas and initiatives. A valid concept and a business plan are essential, but after that, decision-making is usually an uncomplicated process according to Robert. However, Robert also describes situations in which he is affected by corporate decisions, which have a negative impact on the work responsibilities in his division. Although there are few problems with the decision-making process in the division, it still may be very slow when interacting with the rest of the corporation (Kim and Mauborgne, 2003; Martins and Terblanche, 2003).

Mark can be situated somewhere in between Bill and James, and John and Robert. As head of the larger of two divisions, and as someone on the path of taking over as CEO, a high level of responsibility and freedom was for him implicit in his job description. He had full discretion within his division, working with team members, subordinates, and the subsidiary managers. However, the informal power structure within the company impeded an attempt to restructure the sales organization, as he was not permitted to recruit the competencies he needed (Martins and Terblanche, 2003).

5.1.2 Exchange relationships

The relationship to their superior is important to all of the interviewees. According to Yukl (2002), the quality of this relationship affects the level of support, respect, trust and commitment between the parties. The following sections analyze this interpersonal relationship, as well as the executive’s relationship with their subordinates. These relationships, as well as the executive’s management of their departments and divisions, are also seen in association with the level of procedural justice perceived by the interviewees.
5.1.2.1 Executives’ superior – subordinate relationship

Both John and Robert have a high-quality exchange relationship with their superior (Yukl, 2002). John speaks about his superior supporting him while he was manager of consultants and project managers, and the relationship seems to be defined by openness and commitment. John also talks about sharing the same view on how the company should be run, and that this similarity in values and attitudes increased a favorable dyadic relationship (Yukl, 2002). Procedural justice seems to characterize John’s work environment; there is a high level of participation in the decision-making process and he feels valued for his work (Wesolowski and Mossholder, 1997). Robert speaks of similar conditions in his organization. He has a good relationship with his manager, also characterized by openness and support, and perceives what can be interpreted as a high level of procedural justice in his working climate.

For Bill, James, and to a degree Mark, the exchange relationship between them and their superior was of a low quality. Bill spoke of not having the same values and norms as his manager (Yukl, 2002), which manifested itself in a difference of opinions in relation to the level of ethics, future strategy and the overall management of the company. Their relationship was defined by poor communication and a low degree of support for each other. There was also a discrepancy between Bill’s view of his work responsibilities and the CEO’s expectations of him. If the CEO saw Bill as a star in the sales team, but nothing more, this clearly can be seen as having an impact on Bill’s options as sales and marketing director. The lack of fair process, as seen in the section on influence and decision-making above, affected the exchange relationship negatively (Wesolowski and Mossholder, 1997).

According to James, the relationship between his superior and the subordinates was defined by micro-management, unidirectional communication and lack of support, all of which contribute to a low-exchange relationship (Yukl, 2002). He also talks about not being respected for his knowledge, expertise and experience, clarifying the lack of another condition for procedural justice (Kim and Mauborgne, 2003). There was a low tolerance for diversity, with few opportunities for expressing one’s views, which affected his perception of fairness as practiced by his superior. The lack of diversity also becomes apparent in what Bill and James say about their manager’s view of subordinates. If the employees did not fit in, they were removed. In extension these actions can have negatively affected their attitudes towards the job itself (Wesolowski and Mossholder, 1997).

Mark disagreed with his superior on the future directions of the company and on the reorganization within his division. He also had a difficult time reconciling himself to the underlying norms and values promoted by the CEO, which demonstrated a lack of similarity in values and attitudes (Yukl, 2002).

5.1.2.2 Executives as superior – subordinate relationship

The way that the interviewees managed their departments and divisions is affected by the freedom and flexibility they experienced they had; to what extent they were free to achieve their goals in an independent fashion (Martins and Terblanche, 2003), as seen above. Influenced by these conditions they also talk about how they approached their management responsibilities.
All executives describe their high-exchange relationships with their subordinates (Yukl, 2002) and stress that their own work, managing their sections, is guided by fair process. Robert seeks fair process when he says that he wants an environment where everything can be brought up and discussed before a decision is made. This way he gets commitment to the decision even if the decision is not made by consensus (Kim and Mauborgne, 2003). James focuses on delegating and thereby encourages autonomy, empowerment and decision-making among his subordinates, creating a structure within his department conducive to creativity (Martins and Terblanche, 2003). Both James and John highlight the importance of trusting individuals’ competencies and John, as responsible for projects as well as being the manager of consultants and project managers, encourages a sense of freedom and flexibility among his subordinates and project members. He strives for motivation and commitment as well as promotes a sense of responsibility among the team members.

Cooperative teams and group interaction is also something that Martins and Terblanche (2003) underscore as a step towards an environment of creativity and innovation. Bill subscribes to this notion when he talks about the cooperative nature of his team, working on strategies together and having the same understanding of the situation. Mark also highlights the collaboration with his subordinates and generally within his division. He says that they worked well together and had the same vision of the future and the strategies to be used to realize their vision.

5.1.3 The executives’ leadership

As seen in the above sections on the executives’ ability to influence and their interactions with their superior and subordinates, it is clear that leadership is a very complex issue. This is also manifested in the following section on the analysis of their companies’ culture. Their experiences confirm the conclusion reached by Duke (1998) that leadership is a social construction based on expectations, existing beliefs, and circumstances at a particular time and place. The way that the executives viewed their leadership possibilities and how they acted is closely linked to their initial expectations when taking the job: what they thought the position entailed, what the co-workers were like, and what level of responsibility they were expected to take. The interviewees were influenced by the context, their new companies, as well as the impressions that they brought with them when starting the job. Their leadership possibilities are therefore seen as situational and as being affected by aspects within their new contexts, such as demands, constraints and choices (Yukl, 2002). A constant interaction occurs between the interviewees and their surroundings, which is further clarified in the following section. As Alvesson (2002) points out, executives are also influenced by the beliefs held by the members of the organization. These beliefs reflect the values, ethics and norms in the organization and they form an expectation on the manager, including how he should do his job and what is included in his job description.

5.1.4 Aspects of organizational culture

As stated earlier, organizational culture is a complex matter, and therefore an analysis of several interrelated aspects seems prudent in order to obtain a more complete image of each company’s culture. In his umbrella concept of organizational culture, Alvesson (2002) includes the values and assumptions that exist in a company, defining social reality. He also emphasizes the interpretation and meaning of events, ideas, behaviors
and experiences when trying to understand organizational culture. That an organization also consists of a complex pattern of interaction between people and roles, stresses an interpretive approach towards organizational culture (Alvesson, 2002). In the following an analysis of each interviewee’s company based on the interpretive approach advocated by Alvesson (2002), is presented. The focus in the analysis is on the interactions with company employees, and the events and situations that have guided and influenced the interviewee’s actions and experiences, seen in light of the aspects that influence innovation and creativity, according to Martins and Terblanche (2003).

Bill’s organization has a flat structure, and between subordinates, team members, and members of the management team, there is a high level of cooperation and support. However, these aspects that, according to Martins and Terblanche (2003), are positive in regard to supporting a creative work environment were outweighed by other aspects. Bill’s work was not supported on a strategic level. The future plans, which were put together within his team, were never fully implemented, due to the CEO’s reprioritizations. This, in combination with the fact that company values did not stress ethics, and the computer games, further emphasized the lack of seriousness that seemed to guide the company. Bill had difficulty in reconciling himself to such behavior, which was obvious in the organization. From what Bill describes it is also possible to see that the communication was not based on openness and trust. This is exemplified in actions and events, such as choosing an opposing side from the CEO at a board meeting, decisions overridden, and in not being consulted when there were new directives for his team (Martins and Terblanche, 2003).

John’s consulting firm has a flat structure and its strategy is customer focused. According to Martins and Terblanche (2003), these factors are important for a high level of creativity and innovation within an organization. Being a small firm, relying solely on their clients for success, it only seems natural that the organization subscribes to the notion of service mindedness. Another aspect, related to strategy, is whether organizational goals are focused on quality, which is conducive to creativity, or whether the emphasis is on effectiveness. Quality is stressed in this company, which becomes apparent in the feedback the company gets from the clients, as well as John’s responsibility for quality assuring projects. John also describes the employees at the company as creative, unpretentious and down to earth. Another positive structural aspect is that the work in the company is primarily project-based, thus emphasizing cooperation and teamwork. A broad support for change, which John’s company has, by it being a small consulting firm, is another positive behavior for an innovative working style. Another aspect conducive to this is reward and recognition, and here John expresses that he is seen for the work he does, and that his competency is welcomed by the organization. John also speaks of a high level of support within the management team, and of the open communication among the team members (Martins and Terblanche, 2003). These are all aspects John highlights as positive within his company, and part of the reason why he is still with the company. Another reason, discussed earlier, is the ability to influence.

James describes several aspects within his company with which he sees himself as being incompatible, and which influenced his work performance. There was a high degree of centralization and specialization in the department, and in the organization as a whole. The centralization was manifested by the CEO, as he described it, handing out orders at the management team meetings and trying to influence him on how he ran the
department. The organization was highly specialized, and had several departments and levels within each department. This was also the case in the marketing department, which James attempted to restructure by moving functions that seemed ill placed. He also worked on the removal of levels, and tried to increase participation and autonomy by using a delegating management style. Since these efforts were not completed, due to lack of time, it is difficult to know whether or not they would have worked. He does, however, mention that a manager carried more weight in the company hierarchy if the department was large, something that could have been of importance if his work had continued.

Other aspects from Martins and Terblanche’s (2003) creativity model hindered a creative working climate within James’ company. The arrangement of support mechanisms is one such aspect. It was clear that the employees were not recognized for alternative ways of thinking, or for past experiences gained outside of the company. In general, there seemed to be a lack of support for diversity. Martins and Terblanche (2003) stress that an organization emphasizing efficiency, instead of quality, hinders an innovative working climate. It appears that the time constraint had a negative impact on James’ work performance. Dealing with politics was a necessary element in this company, and Alvesson (2002) stresses the importance of realizing that individuals representing sectional interests can influence the situation, and change the circumstances of the job setting. Alvesson (2002) also makes it clear that senior organizational members, such as the CEO or other department heads, are always managing culture to various degrees, and thus influencing what should be seen as important. James’ company seemed to be under the strong influence of the CEO and her management style.

Robert’s division is described as having the support mechanisms, behavior, strategy and communication conducive to an innovative work atmosphere (Martins and Terblanche, 2003). It follows that a customer service division is customer and market oriented, a strategy emphasized as positive in Martins and Terblanche’s model (2003). There is, however, no guarantee that this is actually the case. Nevertheless, Robert brings up the daily contact with the customers, and it is clear that the division sees them as a first priority. He emphasizes the importance of thinking this way, and struggles with other areas of the corporation that give customers and the market less priority – something that had a negative influence on his work.

Within Robert’s division, there is a broad support for change, and idea generation is encouraged and promoted. Before making a decision on a new initiative, testing and experimenting is encouraged. Support mechanisms, such as reward and support for alternative methods and testing, are positive for creativity in an organization. This category also includes the availability of resources, such as time, for experimenting. Robert describes the communication within the division as open and trusting, and sees the high level of questioning and discussing as positive (Martins and Terblanche, 2003). Due to the dual nature of his work, his division, on one hand and the corporation, on the other hand, he also has negative experiences. Although his organization seems fairly flat, consisting more of teams than structured as a hierarchy, the corporation is described as having an old fashioned mentality. Working with the corporation is a slower process, both when it comes to working on support for decisions as well as to the implementation of them.
In Mark’s organization, the attention is drawn to the different levels of interaction between individuals (Alvesson, 2002), more so than in the companies described above. Here, the organization attempts to steer the culture through a set of values posted around the company, advocating, among other aspects, openness, how to relate to colleagues, and an environment where competency is promoted and living in a knowledge-based society is emphasized. The openness was manifested through meetings, where everyone was allowed to participate and voice their opinion. The more subtle and less obvious meanings, however, signified that this was not the case. Mark describes it as the CEO saying one thing but in reality doing something else. Another aspect that was less obvious was the informal power structure within the organization. Employees from different areas of the company were shown favoritism, which raises a question of managers being able to run their departments and areas at their own discretion. By doing this, the CEO signaled what values and norms one should live by, without them being plainly stated. It was clear that this favoritism hindered Mark in fully executing the reorganization he set out to do. Here it is not so much the case of an unconstructive behavior manifesting itself in a lack of support for change, but an environment where favorites were proposed to hold certain positions, regardless of experience or competency. However, Mark states that his good experiences outweigh the bad. This is in regard to the work within his division, concerning colleagues and subordinates.

5.1.5 The executives’ reflections on the recruitment process

Souza and Zajas (1995) emphasize the importance of the recruitment candidate exploring the employing company and its employees, and evaluating the possibility of a potential match. In reflecting on the recruitment process and his experiences, Bill says that he has learned a lesson. He has realized that he needs to do more research beforehand and talk to the employees of the hiring company during the recruitment process. Bill also reflects on being contacted by a headhunting firm, and talks about the need to keep in mind that these companies make money from the employing company when finding a match. James brings up a similar point in saying that he needs to get a feel for the culture of the new company, to see if it suits him. He also talks about the position and about the need to go beyond the work responsibilities in an effort to see the whole picture. James does say that he received signals during the recruitment process that, in hindsight, indicated some of the aspects he had difficulty reconciling while being employed in the company. He says that he should have been more aware of these signals and realizes that they may play a large role in being content in a new company.

John reflects on how he approached the recruitment process and emphasizes the importance of being comfortable during the interviews. He talks about comparing the descriptions of the company and the position that you are given with your own views on what is important, and evaluating to what extent it corresponds with your own outlook on the job. He spoke to would-be colleagues and the CEO and felt that there was a match in outlooks, personal chemistry and organizational culture. He continues by saying that he has approached this situation with an open mind and is happy at his company. He considers that the capability of finding out what the situation looks like before you start, may play a large role in the success of the employment. On being content in the position and the company, he says, “I think it’s a combination of how you are as a person and, of course, what the culture is like at the company where you work.”

Robert had been in touch with the new company earlier through a previous employment
and therefore knew a little about how things worked there. He says that he was content with his new employment from the start.

Mark talks about getting a feel for the culture at the employing company during the recruitment process. During the process he met with several key members of the company and his division. His perception of the company was that it had a stable foundation of values that concurred with his view on what aspects should be emphasized in organizational life. Mark also thought that the company and its employees seemed to emphasize the business aspect of work, while paying less attention to non-constructive organizational matters. He also got a sense that the company had a flat structure and that openness was stressed in the working atmosphere.

5.2 Discussion

During the course of this study, it has become increasingly apparent that organizational culture is a complex issue. The inquiry has, for me, clarified how difficult it is to form one complete image to cover all aspects. It becomes understandable why a complicated matter such as organizational culture has, over the years, generated a wide variety of interest areas and different angles in researching the subject. It has also illustrated why an encompassing theory has yet to be formed (Bang, 1999), if it is at all possible, and why there is no one definition of culture (Alvesson, 2002). Perhaps describing culture, as a means of enhancing understanding, is more prudent than discovering an exact model that analyzes it. The five executives’ experiences further illustrate that the interrelated aspects that influenced them are mutually reinforcing. This highlights the degree to which their experiences are situational.

Culture as a constraint becomes a valid issue when looking at the experiences of a few of the executives. The level of constraint manifested varies, but it is clear that they are in some way affected by these circumstances. Alvesson (2002) emphasizes that the power aspect in organizations should not be underestimated. Influential members of the organization may affect the connotation of company values and shared ideas and meanings. The influence exercised can stress what aspects should be seen as important, and what are less so, which is indicated through some of the executives’ experiences where the CEO had a strong influence on the company employees, and especially on the top managers. As seen in some of the accounts, culture can become more hindering than facilitating when it promotes such a strong sense of identity and belonging that the company’s employees refrain from contemplating and exploring other alternative ways and means of doing things. This includes listening to and valuing the knowledge and experiences that the executive’s brought with them into the company. The socialization of these executives may also have been hindered by the strong culture as well as the influence of powerful members, making Kemp and Dwyer’s (2001) point on the difficulty of accepting externally recruited executives applicable.

Also clarified in the study is the complexity of leadership, as evidenced by the experiences of the five executives’ and their reflections on their positions and their ability to perform their work responsibilities. Leadership is connected to, and based on, an interaction and negotiation with the executive’s surroundings, the context. This relates to Duke’s (1998) and Yukl’s (2002) arguments that the options of leadership are highly situational and are affected by organizational factors. The experiences of these
five executives alone confirm the importance of not oversimplifying or generalizing the actions of leaders.

The study also brings up an aspect of some interest in regards to the executives’ contentment with their positions. Their experiences illustrate that interesting and challenging work responsibilities, interesting products or a high regard for their colleagues and subordinates do not seem to be sufficient reasons for them to be happy at the company, although they are most likely necessary. This raises an interesting question of what is necessary for individuals at this level. The executives’ accounts do highlight that the perceived level of procedural justice present in the organization does play a role. They stress the importance of being valued for their ideas and experience, and emphasize that partaking in the decision-making process was an essential precondition for their contentment with the organization. This is something Wesolowski and Mossholder (1997) stress as a factor in the maintenance of a superior – subordinate exchange relationship. As we have seen, based on the executive’s experiences, it is of importance that this is a favorable relationship, as opposed to a relationship of low quality that may lead to negative attitudes towards the position and the company. The lack of procedural justice is most likely not only related to the superior-subordinate relationship, but also seems to affect the performance of the work responsibilities and overall feelings towards the organization.

An organizational culture that is conducive to a creative and innovative environment also seems to be related to the executives’ contentment with their new companies. To be in a company with a structure, behavior and support mechanism that, according to Martins and Terblanche (2003), is favorable for a positive working climate seems to aid the executives in their work. Autonomy, decision-making abilities, and the possibility to achieve their departmental goals in an independent fashion are highly regarded. An innovative environment, the level of procedural justice and the superior – subordinate exchange relationship all seem to interact with another. This point is something I will discuss further below.

Souza and Zajas (1995) bring up the point of the recruitment process being a two-way street. The candidates also bear some responsibility in a match with the employing company to be successful. The interviews with the executives’ did not yield an extensive amount of information pertaining to the recruitment process, and therefore not all aspects are apparent in their consideration of accepting the positions. Nevertheless, something of interest is that only two of the executives emphasize that they considered organizational culture in the recruitment process. This is, however, reflected upon by the others in the interviews, and there is a realization that this is an important aspect to consider before accepting a position, so as to increase the likelihood of succeeding in the new company. In spite of this, there is still no guarantee that the perceived image of the employing company’s culture is based on a correct evaluation, which is also seen in the executives’ experiences. Of the two that considered organizational culture, one’s perception concurred with the actual culture of the new company. If a company is guided by subtle, underlying cultural manifestations, it may be impossible to obtain a sense of these from a few meetings with the recruiting parties. So, even if a candidate recognizes the importance of evaluating these aspects, he can only base his judgments on the more obvious, visible aspects of organizational culture.
This brings me to another point made by Souza and Zajas (1995). There are ways in which the employing company can aid in the candidate’s evaluation of the organization and its employees. Even though Souza and Zajas (1995) do not explicitly say that this is a must, the figure of a forty percent failure rate within eighteen months for individuals holding a top level position (McCune, 1999) emphasizes this. With the high cost involved in replacing the employee, the company only does itself an injustice by not taking an active part in ensuring the success of the new candidate. This study emphasizes how important it is for the company to be self-critical and thus aware of its own culture. Making the underlying aspects apparent for itself and potential employees can be seen as a measure that can promote successful recruitment: in other words what skills and experience a candidate should have in order to succeed in the position, and ultimately in the new company. If a company is not aware of its own values, then a candidate cannot be properly evaluated. Once the values are known, the company can decide to bring in a candidate to emphasize similarity or diversity, depending on the future interest in the company.

Yukl (2002) explains that the leader-member exchange theory has over the years gone through several revisions, and has been measured against other variables. However, the author continues by saying that so far there has been little research on the possible affects of situational and organizational factors that may affect the exchange process. Aspects such as structure, work responsibilities, and strategy are likely to affect the relationship. This brings me to consider Martins and Terblanche’s model (2003), which includes several situational factors and behaviors. It would be interesting to see how the creativity and innovation model will benefit from looking at the leader-member theory. Can this model be related to the leader-member exchange relationship, and if so, how? What kind of relationship is created, when it exists in an organizational culture that does, or does not, support a creativity process? What aspects or situations affect what, and how? Furthermore, Yukl (2002) argues that incorporating the concept of procedural justice, and the contrasting distributive justice, into the theory, might clarify what effects the subordinate perception of fairness has on the relationship. This is a subject that Wesolowski and Mossholder (1997) have touched upon, but it may be of interest to further research this relationship. However, the interest in further research on these models does not involve finding correlations between one variable and another – but to see if and how they are all related. Some of these questions have received attention in this study, but further research in this area could prove interesting.

As stated earlier, I deemed the previous research and literature on the subject of executives’ experiences, with a focus on organizational culture, as limited, thus justified this explorative study. Considering its explorative nature, the research sample size and the lack of representation of a correct ratio between genders in top management could be less consequential. However, worth noting is that the study might have yielded different results if the sample had consisted of both men and women, or consisted solely of women. At the same time a point brought up in Bryans and Mavin’s study on women managers proves highly applicable to the results and conclusions of this study. It is argued that “women are never just women” (2003: 130), and that one cannot focus on the same gender as a cohesive group and emphasize sameness. This holds true in a study consisting only of men – men are never just men. Experiences, upbringing, schooling, ethnicity, are some factors, among many more, that affect men’s views and their existing situation. In extension this affects their views on what aspects have
affected them in their new companies, and the nature of their experiences. Thus, this study cannot be generalized to cover all companies or all executives. Patton (1990) brings up the point that qualitative research is more focused on the contextual uniqueness of social reality, which holds true for this study, and that seeking generalizations can be a topic for further research.

As seen earlier, this study emphasizes the complexities of organizational culture. The study also seems to fall between the two characterizations of culture proposed by Smircich (1983), cited in Alvesson (2002), the variable approach and the root metaphor. I feel that the values and norms promoted in some of the above-mentioned companies have an effect on its members and their actions. However, I also feel that culture can be highly subjective. This study has indicated the difficulty of pinpointing a single aspect as being all-important. I therefore lean towards Alvesson’s proposed perspective of seeing culture as mixtures of different kinds of cultural manifestations existing on different levels (2002). I feel that after conducting this study it has left me with more questions than answers, this however, being the nature of an explorative inquiry. Regardless of this, this study has emphasized one thing above all, the importance of culture – it should not be underestimated. As stated in Alvesson (2002: 24):

“Organizational culture is not just another piece of the puzzle, it is the puzzle.”
6 Bibliography


7 Appendix

Interview guide

The interview guide consists of a few themes and questions to help along the interview. The questions were not used in all interviews, and when used, not in the same order or wording as listed below.

Introduction
Aim of the study
Name of university department
Name of advisor
Presentation of how the research is to be carried out
Anonymity and confidentiality issues
Clarification of the use of the interviews – done only for this study

Some background information

Length in the company
Description of title and work responsibilities
Organization structure (superior, colleagues) and size

Position and organization

Description of early stages of employment
Image of the position and company
Expectations
What it really was like

Image of the organization and if any changes since first starting

General feeling of
  Structure
  Support
  Performance of work responsibilities
Role, responsibilities within the organization
  Have there been changes in the initial role?
  Satisfaction with the role and responsibilities
    why, if so, how long did it take – if not, why, what is needed, what is missing?
Decision-making
Influence
How does the interaction work with colleagues, subordinates, superiors?
Do you get the support you need?
Are you content, satisfied?
Have you wanted to change anything, wished anything to have been done differently?

Experiences, incidents or people that have affected the work situation
General
Reflection on initial expectations
Have you thought of changing jobs?
Anything to add?

Additional background information
Age
Education
Number of years since graduation
Previous employment