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The Magic to Change Cinderella's Glass Slipper

A qualitative study on breaking the norm preserving gender
inequalities in the construction industry

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Subject: BUSN49 Degree Project in Managing People, Knowledge, and Change
Hand in: 20.05.2016

Abstract

Title	The Magic to Change Cinderella's Glass Slipper: A qualitative study on breaking the norm preserving gender in the construction industry
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Submission Date	20 th of May 2016
Keywords	Gender Inequalities, Norm, Horizontal Segregation, Glass Ceiling, Glass Slipper, Ideal Worker, Occupational Identity
Purpose	The purpose of this study is to provide insights on how organizational norms maintain gender inequalities within masculine organizations.
Research Question	How do employees of BM Construction group perceive gender inequalities?
Methodology	Following an interpretive paradigm, we explored in-depth the perception of gender inequalities at BM Construction Group, Sweden. Using a qualitative research approach, we conducted 13 interviews, and interpreted the collected data in a reflexive way.
Findings	Alongside other findings we discovered that without acknowledging the influence of norms distinguishing between the ideal worker and the others, it seems unnecessarily hard to change occupational identities.
Contributions	We contribute to the discussion on gender inequalities in organizations by providing insight on how the change of occupational identities is hindered by the norm of the ideal worker. Further, we will contribute by illustrating an example of how to break these norms in order to enable occupational change with the aim of reducing gender inequalities.

Acknowledgements

At this point, we would like to take the opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to all those who supported us during this project.

First of all, we would like to thank our supervisor Sverre Spoelstra for your valuable feedback and support. Sverre, you did a tremendous job, guiding us and challenging our ideas and directions within the research process.

Moreover, we want to thank all interviewees for their time and the exciting insights about their view on diversity, gender inequalities and leadership. Further, we acknowledge their honesty to tell us their personal narratives and opinion.

However, we did not only gain knowledge from our interviewees on our thesis topic. They further enabled us to see the interconnection between all aspects within our Master Program Managing People, Knowledge and Change, and gain an understanding of organisational processes.

A special thank you to our contact person in the organisation, who enabled us to easily access the company and by contacting the interviewees on beforehand, providing us with a starting point where the interviewees showed honesty.

Last, this thesis would not have been possible without our beloved friends and classmates who have made our time at LUSEM and LUX a pleasure. Sharing with us both lunches and 'fikas', thesis limitations and life experiences.

We thank you all,

Erika Gräns & Wiebke Müller

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Abbreviations

HR(M) Human Ressource (Management)

CFO Chief Financial Officer

CEO Chief Executive Officer

1 Introduction

In 1995, Hilary Clinton made a famous speech in Beijing about women's rights. Sadly, many of the things she wanted to change are still a reality today.

But what stood out for me the most was that only 30 per cent of her audience were male. How can we affect change in the world when only half of it is invited or feel welcome to participate in the conversation?

Men — I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue too.

Emma Watson, 2014

Within our thesis, we would like to mirror Emma Watson's concern of including men in the discussion of gender equality in the business world. Many organizations within conservative industries, like the construction industry, nowadays face problems of how to increase the inclusion of women within their organization. Within this thesis, we argue that the first step towards increasing the inclusion of women, might have to be taken by a man.

1.1 Initial Ideas

Our initial idea was to engage with the topic of diversity. Our personal interest in diversity awakened during our Master Studies at Lund University in Sweden. We studied in a diverse group of students, which showed us both the benefits and challenges of a diverse workforce. Consequently, we became interested in investigating how diversity is approached within Swedish organisations. Sweden is famous for its egalitarian and family-friendly policies (Charles & Grusky, 2006), and is globally ranked fourth in gender equality (World Economic Forum, 2015). Surprisingly, within some industries, like the construction industry, organisations are conservative and deeply sex segregated (Numhauser-Henning, 2015). Within such industries, Sweden is also ranked significantly lower than the European average on gender equality (European Commission, 2013). However, by talking to potential organisations to study diversity within, we acknowledge a frustration among practitioners in Human Resource and Sustainability of how to gain different competence to their organisation.

Further, the expressed obstacles to have a more diverse workforce. Especially practitioners within male-dominated industries expressed their organisation to be far behind the society, in gender equality. Since the obstacle seems to remain even in the case where top management in the organisation expressed the question of gender as important, we understood there was a gap in knowledge of the reasons behind the prevailing inequality. To be able to give insight in the expressed obstacles, we decided to focus in our study on gender inequalities within Swedish organisations. Our perception of Sweden as a progressive country in contrast to the prevailing standards in conservative Swedish organisations sparked our interest in identifying what is hindering the inclusion of women in such organisations. In other words, to identify why people outside the norm¹ are excluded from the organisation.

1.2 Background Information

Within gender studies often Acker's (2006) idea of the ideal worker, which is described as a white, heterosexual men, is used as an example to show inequalities within organizations. Inequalities are often defined as existing between men and women as rooted in values and norms that are embedded within organizational and societal culture (Alvesson & Billing, 1992). Several glass metaphors have been developed to describe inequalities (Haslam & Ryan, 2008; William, 1992) and the one society is most familiar with is the one of the glass ceiling (Eriksson-Zetterquist & Styhre, 2008). However, since we are able to find women within top-management in Sweden today (VA, 2015) society seems still to overlook existing horizontal segregation (Charles & Grusky, 2006). Therefore, we believe it is necessary to widen the definition of the glass ceiling. We agree with Prokos and Padavic (2005, p.526) idea of "cumulative disadvantages", and belief that there are cultural beliefs and power relations that makes it unnecessary difficult for women to move up in organizations. Horizontal segregation (Charles & Grusky, 2006) occupations are divided into operational and support functions, where the occupational identity is viewed as fixed. However, this theory does not acknowledge the possibility for occupation to change identity. Last, we like to present Ashcraft (2013) who argues that occupational identities are socially constructed, and therefore can be changed. In order to illustrate her findings, she introduced a new metaphor the one of the glass slipper. Thus, we aim at contributing

¹ A norm is "an accepted standard or a way of behaving or doing things that most people agree with". (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.a)

to the discussion by providing further insight into gender inequalities, by engaging with exiting theories and metaphors. Further, we will engage with the glass slipper and investigate how the existing norm within a male-dominated industry effect the change of occupational identity.

The company BM Construction Group attracted our attention, as a case study. This construction company is based in Sweden, but has not only plants all over Sweden, but also in several European countries. Consequently, we assumed as they work in an international environment and being based in a progressive, egalitarian country, gender equality would be approached by the company. However, when having a first glance at the company's annual report it struck us that only white, Swedish men in their 50's were part of the board of directors. In addition, it is stated that no women are working in executive positions. Our external impression of the company, as being a male-dominated organisation, was also confirmed during our initial conversation with employees of BM Construction Group. Further, the company representative emphasized BM Construction Groups desire to break with the norm of being a masculine organization. Hence, this company exemplifies the conservative and deeply segregated nature of some Swedish organisations.

1.3 Research Purpose and Aim

The aim of this study is to provide insight into how organizational norms maintain gender inequalities within masculine organizations by exploring how employees at BM Construction Group understand gender inequalities.

The purpose of our study is to contribute to the on going discussion on gender inequalities by providing insights into what is hindering the inclusion of women in masculine organizations and what makes it so difficult to break with the norm of the ideal worker. Therefore, we will explain the factors that are maintaining the norm, and thus gender inequalities. Further, we will make a contribution to the discussion by showing limitations of Ashcraft's metaphor of the glass slipper within the context of a strong masculine organizational culture. At last, we will make a theoretical contribution of practical relevance by illustrating on the case of BM Steel how the norm of the ideal worker can be broken by a person that fulfils this norm. We further hope that our study is expanding the literature, and induces further research on how to break the norm.

In order to fulfil our aim, we developed the following research question as guidance for our study:

How do employees of BM Construction group perceive gender inequalities?

In order to answer this research question, we designed a qualitative study within the interpretive paradigm. In total, we conducted 13 in-depth interviews with employees within BM Construction Group on different management levels. To be able to understand the employees' perceptions, we analysed the values prevailing in the organisational culture. Further, we examined how the ideal worker is described within BM Construction Group, in order to gain a deeper insight into how these gender inequalities arise. Moreover, we also analysed narratives on gender inequalities, in order to be able to locate the inequalities within the organisation. At last, we more closely looked into one of the subsidiaries of the group; BM Steel. We selected this subsidiary as Erik, the CEO of BM Steel, started an initiative to reduce gender inequalities. Our aim is not to provide insight on the particular change process of the CEO. However, by analysing the differences between BM Steel and the group, we aimed at gaining a deeper insight on how to break the norm within BM Construction Group.

1.4 Structure of our Thesis

In the following section, we outline the structure of our thesis. The first chapter has served as introduction. It provided relevant background information to our study, and presented an overview of our research. In the second chapter of this thesis, we will outline the methodology for our research by explaining our philosophical grounding including our epistemological and ontological foundations. Further, we explain our research process, including reflexive narratives of how we explored our research question and the empirical data. The chapter concludes with an explanation of our reflexivity, the quality of our research and the limitations of our study. Although we have structured our methodology in different chapters, we would like to highlight that we collected and analysed our data simultaneously. This is in line with our abductive approach and allowed us to circulate between our understandings and pre-understandings. In the third chapter, we will review the most important theoretical concepts relating to our topic of gender inequalities. These includes literature on the

social constructionist perspective on gender, gender in organizations, the glass metaphor, and horizontal segregation. In addition, we will review the metaphor of the glass slipper, which is the main concept we will engage with in this thesis. Next, we will present our findings and interpretation, which we divided into three chapters. In the fourth chapter, we explain our interpretations of how employees perceive the norms and values embedded within the organizational culture of BM Construction Group. Afterwards, in the fifth chapter we will on the basis of narratives uncover gender inequalities, and explain our interpretation of the unintended discrimination of women at BM Construction Group. We will also link the findings of this chapter to the findings of chapter four, and show how the norms embedded in the organizational culture induce gender inequalities. As a consequence, women often feel excluded. In the sixth chapter we will present how Erik, the CEO of the subsidiary BM Steel breaks the existing norm at BM Construction Group. Afterwards, in the seventh chapter we will relate our findings to the literature on perceived gender inequalities, power relations, and the glass ceiling, which we presented in the third chapter. In particular, we will thereby show the limitation of the glass slipper metaphor in the context of organizations with a strong prevailing norm of what constitutes the ideal worker. In the last chapter we will conclude our thesis by providing a summary, and giving insights of limitations of our study. Finally, we will in this chapter also give recommendations for further research.

2 Methodology

Within this chapter, we provide an overview on how we investigated our research questions. First, we explain the philosophical grounding underpinning our research. Afterwards, we outline how we have collected and interpreted the data for our research. Finally, we review the reflexivity within our research process. We would like to emphasize that although we have structured our methodology into different phases, during the actual research process the different steps have been executed simultaneously. This is in line with the hermeneutical approach of our research and allowed us to move between our understanding and pre-understandings.

2.1 Philosophical Grounding

The following part consists of important assumptions about how we view the world. These assumptions corroborated the design of our research (Merriam, 2002). The primary interest of our study is to understand how employees at BM Construction Group perceive gender inequalities with the organization. Therefore, we decided to conduct a research within the interpretive paradigm (Merriam, 2002) as this enables us to we assume that social reality is subjective and socially constructed (Merriam, 2002). Further, we reject the idea of a single truth and accept that multiple realities exist (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). In our research this means that we seek to understand the social world that employees at BM Construction Group create from their interpretations and contextual understandings. Therefore, we aim at understanding how employees perceive gender inequalities by analysing how they talk about their knowledge on inequalities and the norm, their experience, what it means to them and how they react to the idea of breaking the norm that is excluding the others. We understand that when we engage with the question of how gender is perceived, we deal with an issue that is socially constructed. Thus, no absolute solution or answer exist (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). We also accept that we as researchers, who are the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2002 p.5), are value-laden. However, instead of trying to eliminate our values, we believed it was more important to be reflexive on how our values might have influenced our work as researchers. Further, we understand that our analysis was filtered through our pre-understandings, the way we talk, and the frameworks we are aware of (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007).

As we were interested in understanding how the employees at BM Construction Group perceive gender inequalities, we took a hermeneutical approach within the interpretive paradigm (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). In line with this approach, we have looked at our pre-understandings and the understandings of the study in a circulating way so that we gradually gained greater insight on how gender inequalities are perceived in the particular context of a conservative organizational culture.

In this study, we used abduction as a method to explain and understand the underlying gender inequalities and the existing organisational culture in the context of BM Construction Group. Abduction allowed us to interpret the collected data with a pre-understanding of the topic (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). We started by conducting interviews and interpreted it through theoretical preconceptions. This means we used the existing theory as a source of inspiration to find new connections that allowed us to gain a deeper understanding. This movement between pre-understandings and understandings is also in line with our hermeneutical approach. Further, moving between the whole and the parts allowed us throughout the research process to specify our research towards gender inequalities and the inclusion of the others in a conservative organisational culture. We are aware that we were not going to find one objective truth. However, we aimed at gaining a deeper insight into the topic of gender inequalities and the how to break the norm within a conservative organizational culture.

2.2 Research process

Our interest in the topic of diversity arose during our Master studies in the programme Managing People, Knowledge, and Change at Lund University, Sweden. The groups of students within this programme was very diverse, which showed us benefits and challenges of working in a diverse workforce. We started to wonder how diversity is approached within Swedish organizations. On the one hand, Sweden is considered a progressive country, and well known for its approach to gender equality (Charles & Grusky, 2006). However, on the other hand, especially companies operating within the construction industry are still deeply sex-segregated (Numhauser-Henning, 2015). As a consequence of this contradiction, we developed an interest in understanding why some organizations are still male-dominated, although the perception of gender equality seems to be embedded within the values of the Swedish society (World

Economic Forum, 2015). Thus, we decided to conduct our research on gender inequalities prevailing within masculine organisational cultures.

By acknowledging the importance of the context when studying how social reality is constructed (Janssens & Zanoni, 2005), we made the decision to study an organisation in which gender inequalities are perceived to occur and a masculine organisational culture is historically prevailing. Through a personal contact, we had an initial meeting with the Sustainability Manager of BM Construction Group. During this first interview, she told us that at that moment BM Construction Group is not working in a structured way with decreasing gender inequalities or encouraging the development of a diverse workforce. However, she explained that the management plan to start an initiative in spring 2016. In addition, she illustrated some gender inequalities prevailing within the organizational culture, which enabled us to gain a first insight into the organization. After this first meeting, we decided that BM Construction Group fulfilled our selection criteria of having a male-dominated organisational context and a conservative culture, and, thus we selected it as case company for this study.

The name of the group, its subsidiaries, and the interviewees have been changed and are fictional in order to ensure anonymity. BM Construction Group serves as a case study within this research. The organization is based in Sweden, however, also operates internationally. The group is family owned and has roots back to the year 1942. So, it has a long history in the production industry. The Group includes five subsidiaries, with in total around 4000 employees. In our study, we interviewed employees working on the group level and of one subsidiary, BM Steel. The group has a group management team, which we refer to as top management, whose task it is to steer the group. Furthermore, each subsidiary has a distinctive management team. The culture is simply explained by the employees of the company as entrepreneurial, family-owned and historically male-dominated. Especially, the latter is also nowadays still prevailing within the organization, which consists of around 80% men and 20% women (Rebecka).

2.3 Data Collection

In order to select the interviewees, we have applied purposeful sampling. In collaboration with our company contact, we developed selection criteria for the interviewees. We decided to select people that (1) are involved in the initiative of working with diversity in a structured way, and (2) have an influence on the development process within the organization. In addition, we decided to conduct interviews with both men and women, as we believe that in order to gain an encompassing insight it is necessary to talk to both genders. Thus, we decided to conduct in-depth interviews with HR-managers and executive management within the BM Construction Group. By using this qualitative approach, we acknowledge the central role of the interviewees within the hermeneutic approach, who are the only one who are able to express their understandings (Kvale, 1996). Thus, they become our primary source of data (Mason, 2002). Our company contact person contacted seven HR-managers and executive manager, that fulfilled the selection criteria, and advised them to schedule an interview with us. Hence, the scheduling process proceeded without difficulties. Via phone and email we scheduled seven interviews of each 1 hour at the head office during the week from the 30th of March to the 4th of April. During the time at the head office, we were able to conduct six additional interviews. We selected these additional interviews by using a snowball sampling. This means, that while conducting the initially scheduled seven interviews, the interviewees referred to other possible interviewees, who were also engaged with our topic, and hence, could also provide a deeper insight.

Before collecting primary data at the site of the BM Construction Group, we started our study of the organisation by examining their webpage, annual report and annual review. Through this pre-study of the organization, we received an insight on how they portray themselves. This enabled us to gain an initial understanding of the existing norm; how we perceived it from the outside. However, we agree with Alvesson and Billing (2000) that counting male and female bodies is not sufficient in order to understand how employees at BM Construction Group perceive inequalities. Therefore, it was important for us to receive a deeper insight through rich stories and narratives of employees, which we collect in our interviews.

Before the start of the interview, we informed all interviewees about the confidential handling of their data. We explained that we will change their names so that it will not be possible to link them to any specific quotes in the thesis. However, to ensure they felt confident to speak freely on the topic, we reassured them by reconfirming the correctness of the quotes we used within the thesis via email. This process also enabled us to be confident that we understood them correctly. Before each interview, we asked for permission to record the interviews, which all interviewees gave. We recorded the interviews with our mobile phones and transcribed them later. All interviews, except one, were conducted in English as only one of us researchers is Swedish. However, we were able to tell the interviewees that if they could not find the formulation or missed words, they could always say it in Swedish. This enabled us to weaken the limitation that the interviewees, might not be able to express themselves properly in English as they are not native speakers. Seven of the interviews were conducted in the interviewee's office and six in the conference area of the BM Construction Group office. We scheduled each interview for one hour, however, we allowed flexibility in time. Our conducted interviews lasted between 30 minutes and up to two hours. The majority of interviews lasted one hour.

Prior to conducting the interviews, we developed an interview guide and discussed this with our academic supervisor to ensure the feasibility of it, and to reduce the likelihood of potential problems that might occur during the interviews. For the design of our interview guide, we draw upon Kvale's (1996) suggestions for interview questions (s. Kvale, 1996, pp.133-135). Further, instead of using the questions within the guide as strict guidelines, we used it more as a broad pool of questions we could make use of in case the interview was hold up, for our aim was to allow the interviewees to speak freely on the topic. As a consequence, the interviewees talked about different things depending on their understanding of diversity and gender inequalities. This allowed us to collect and interpret data on different point of views on our research topic. Our interpretation of the data started while conducting interviews in the form of asking follow-up questions and asking for a specific example illustrating the interviewee's opinion.

Further, we believe the researcher and the studied object are mutually effecting each other in the research process (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Within our in-depth interviews, we, therefore, saw the interview situation as an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee where the text to be analysed was produced. For instance, in one interview we realized at the beginning that the interviewee seemed to be sceptical of what the aim of our interview was. As a consequence, he gave very vague and short answers. Thus, we were not really able to receive an insight on his understandings. However, during the interview, we were able to decrease his scepticism so that he gave more extensive answers. This example illustrated one way of how we as researcher affected the research process.

During the interviews, both of us researcher were present. Further, we took turns in being the one asking questions and the one taking notes whereas the one taking notes was also able to ask follow-up questions. By working in this way, the one taking notes was able to pay attention to changes in tone, voice, and body language, as well as making interpretations during the interview. The interviews were scheduled with idle time in between, which allowed us to discuss and note down our interpretations, remarks, and initial thoughts after each interview. In addition, each evening we sat down and made a daily summary. We also discussed if there was something we should change for the coming day. By working in this way we were able to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the prevailing organisational culture, inequalities and the norm at BM Construction Group. We also aimed at listening and interpreting each employee's stories and narratives with an open-mind. Therefore, we decided to interview our initial contact, the Sustainability Manager and initiator of the diversity project within the organization, at last. Thereby we avoided to be influenced by her assumptions on the organisations as she has been very engaged with the topic herself and thus seemed to have a strong opinion on the incidents within BM Construction Group.

2.4 Data Analysis

After conducting the interviews, we transcribed them. In line with our hermeneutical approach, we acknowledged that the interpretation of the collected data has started before we have started to read through our transcripts. As previously described, it commenced during the first contact with the company and during the interviews, but in the following we will focus on the analysis after finishing the transcripts. We did the first analysis of our transcripts individually. On the computer, each of us marked and commented on interesting findings. Especially, we then looked for repetitions, transitions, similarities and differences, narratives, and metaphors (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In order to distinguish the different findings, we colour coded them. Afterwards, we exchanged documents so that the other one could note down its interpretations in the same document. As we had collected an extensive volume of data, we quickly understood that we had to limit our analysis. At the same time, we participated in a Ph.D. lecture on diversity. Afterwards, we decided to only focus on findings relating to the organizational culture and the in it embedded norms and values, and gender inequalities. This also reshaped our focus of the literature we wanted to engage with in this study, which is literature engaging with gender inequalities and how this is effected by the organisational culture. Thus, we narrowed the focus of our study from understanding diversity management to understanding gender inequalities.

As a consequence, we restarted the analysis of the transcripts. In a similar way as described before we analysed the transcripts individually, made comments and used colour coding. This time, we sorted our findings into three categories; the norm, perceived inequalities and changed mind-set, and printed the related quotes. We then read and discussed these quotes together, and divided them into different themes. During this process, we also noted our interpretations on the back-side of the paper, which facilitated the writing of the findings chapter. After writing down our findings, and starting our discussion, we realized that the findings were rather ambiguous and needed to be re-structured, in order for the reader to follow our story in a logical way.

The method we used to analyse our data is described by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003, p.968) in the way of:

Work with the challenge of accomplishing a good trade-off between the theoretical inspiration and openness toward the empirical material, between

reading into data a certain vocabulary and certain preferred results and a naïve empiricism in which theory-free data are believed to lead the researcher to the truth.

We adopted this method by for example attending a Ph.D. lecture on diversity, and a Diversity Management Academy leadership training, during the time of our data analysis. This was a way for us to move within our hermeneutic circle and allowed us to see our findings in a different light. Thus, we were able to interpret our interpretation of our findings in a self-reflexive way.

2.5 Reflexivity, Quality and Limitations

In contrast to the quantitative research criteria of quality such as validity, reliability and objectivity, within this study, we aimed for transparency and self-reflexivity, awareness of our effect on others, and thick and rich descriptions (Merriam, 2002). In order to discuss the credibility of our work, we will in this section acknowledge our biases and limitations. In order to do this, we have sought to keep a high level of reflexivity (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009) and tried to be critical to how our biases and limitations have directed and affected our research process.

In order to reach our aim of conducting a reflective research, we made careful interpretations and reflections. This means that everything we refer to as empirical data is produced by interpretation through us, as researchers (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). When we interpreted our data, we were aware that these interpretations were filtered and influenced by our pre-understandings and biases. Instead of neglecting these biases, we acknowledged them, which we will elaborate in the following. First, we acknowledge that within the society we have been raised in the notion of gender equality is deeply embedded. Our parents and teachers taught us that we, as women, are equal to men. For instance, they taught us that we are free to choose and can be successful any type of career. However, we have also been exposed to a discussion on prevailing gender inequalities on management level. Thus, we are influenced by how the Swedish and German society views this question. As a second bias, we understand that the occupations of our parents and role models affect our view of how women and men are perceived within organizations. One of us has a mother working within a male-dominated industry and one has a mother working at a senior management level. This biased us in terms of how we view gender inequalities, for example, prevailing within

career development opportunities. Third, we acknowledged that one of us has worked within the construction industry and therefore has a pre-understanding of inequalities and assumptions within this sector.

In addition to recognizing our own biases, we also understand that the interviewees are biased. For instance, we acknowledge that the effects of the financial crisis in 2009, also nowadays still has an impact on them in terms of making them less open-minded towards changes of existing practices. Further, we acknowledge that the interviewees tend to present themselves in a way to be perceived as a good person in the society, and therefore create narratives that mirror this perception. This bias was in particular evident when we asked, for example, about their opinion on inclusion and exclusion of others. We quickly realized that they answered this question in a way that presented themselves in a positive light, and thus decided to avoid such questions. Therefore, we recognized that it is important to read between the lines in order to carefully understand their subtle expressions of feeling and thinking.

A reflexive methodology also implies that we made interpretations of interpretations (Alvesson & Sköldböck, 2009). To remain self-reflexive about our interpretation, we openly challenged each others interpretations, and tried to acknowledge our assumptions. For instance, we realized because of our different backgrounds (one of us is Swedish, and the other one German) we interpret some quotes differently. Within the interviews, coding and interpreting we asked ourselves questions like *“What is the underlying reason for this feeling?”* and *“When we interpret this, was there a reason for this association?”* and *“If we interpret the answer from a different angle, what do we hear then?”*. Further, we looked for contradiction within what one interviewee has said. For instance, we asked women whether there are any occasions when they feel excluded within the organization. Most of the negated. However, at a different stage in the interview these women mentioned that as a women working at BM Construction Group one has to be “strong”, and “tough”. By identifying these contradictions, we were able to reflect on their different answers, and thereby increase our understanding of their perception.

To create a thick and rich description we tried to keep our subjective voice alive and let us be “seen” in the research. Instead of trying to be objective, we acknowledged our subjective view and let it show through the thesis. Additionally, we tried to be transparent about the research process and explained the turns our working process

took. In this way, we allowed the reader to understand our reflections and how we made sense of the empirical data.

At last, we acknowledge the limitations of this research. First, the limited timeframe of 10 weeks did not allow us to conduct follow-up interviews of our findings, which could have further increased our understanding of the topic. Second, besides one person, the employees we interviewed were not native English speaker. This might have also limited their ability for expressing details. Further, their selection of words may become less colourful. Fortunately, we had the opportunity to allow the interviewees to express themselves in Swedish, if needed. Third, as we have conducted some interviews spontaneously, because of our snowball sampling technique, there was a differentiation between how much the interviewee had thought about the topic of diversity, organizational culture, and inequalities before the interview. We argue that on the one hand this was beneficial for our study as the interviewees spontaneously responded to our questions without prior preparation. For instance, we asked in the interview: “What do you associate with the word diversity?”. In one of the spontaneously conducted interviews, a respondent stated that he has never thought about that word before. This reaction provided good insight in his level of engagement with the topic. However, on the other side we think this also limits our study. For example, at the end of same interview, which we have used to explain the benefits, we realized that in a subtle way the interviewee is engaging with diversity management. Unfortunately, we reached then also the end of interview, so that we only could collect limited data on his insights. This, also shows another limitation the scheduled time for interviews. Most interviews were scheduled for one hour. Often we could extend the scheduled interview time. However, in few cases the interviewees wanted to provide us with more insights, but unfortunately they had scheduled meetings afterwards so that we could not continue the interview. At last, although we assured every interviewee before the interview that we will treat the collected data confidentially, we realized that the interviews still felt uncomfortable providing insight into certain topics. For instance, one interviewee always switched the topic as soon as we asked him how he actively encourages diversity.

2.6 Chapter Summary

Following an interpretive paradigm, we acknowledge that reality is socially constructed and reject the notion of one objective truth rather we are going to explain the specific gender inequalities and narratives within the context of BM Construction Group. In order to provided insight on these gender inequalities, we designed a qualitative study seeking to understand gender inequalities in the context of BM Construction Group. In total we have conduct 13 in-depth interviews with HR-Managers and CEOs of BM Construction Group. Further, we explained the biases and limitations of our study, and exemplified how we acknowledged them by a reflexive research project.

3 Literature Review

The aim of our research is to provide insight on gender inequalities existing within organisational cultures, in order to break the norm excluding others. In the following literature review we present the key debates within the field, which serves as a starting point for our research. In particular, it highlights the social constructionist approach towards gender inequalities, the changed metaphor of the glass ceiling and the metaphor of the glass slipper.

3.1 Gender and Social Constructionism

Within the field of diversity studies, there are two broad approaches, the functionalist approach and the social constructivist approach. The *functionalist approach* views diversity as an outcome, and investigates how a diverse workforce acts as a strategic asset for the organisation (Zanoni et al. 2010). In contrast to the functionalist approach there is the *social constructivist approach*, which views diversity as a discourse, socially constructed and embedded in power relations (Prasad, Prasad & Mir, 2011; Zanoni & Janssens, 2003). This critical diversity literature is built on three fundamental arguments. First, the assumption of the social construction of identities, in contrast to the positivistic view of identities as objective entities (Zanoni et al., 2010). Second, the inclusion of societal and organisational context in the creation of meaning of diversity (Zanoni et al., 2010). Third, the acknowledgement of power relations within organisations (Zanoni et al., 2010).

The social constructivist approach investigates diversity in terms of workplace equality (Sunding & Billing, 2006) and how institutional norms and values create inequality between men and women (Acker, 1990; Zanoni & Janssens, 2003). Acker (2006, p.443) defines inequality in organization as:

Systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organize work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations. (Acker, 2006, p.443)

By acknowledging inequalities as power relations, the inequalities existing between men and women are rooted in values and norms that are embedded within organizational and societal culture (Alvesson & Billing, 1992). Further, these values and norms are of particular influence for the construction of gender by defining what it means to be a woman or a man, and what is expected of them (Alvesson & Billing, 1992). This process of gender construction is defined as doing gender.

“Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual interaction, and micro political activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine “nature”.” (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p.126)

Further, a person’s construction of gender, not only depends on the expectations of its surroundings. It is more an ongoing process of finding the answer to the question ‘Who am I’, which is referred to as identity work. Identity work relates to how persons identify themselves with a certain gender (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). However, it is also important to acknowledge that a person’s identity is connected to organizational culture. How a person in an organisation views their personal identity is connected to the organisational identity. Thus, it is also connected to the organizational culture and the in it embedded norms and values.

3.2 Gender and Organization

For long, management scholars assumed organizations to be gender neutral (Kanter, 1977; Wharton, 2011). Fundamental theorists like Karl Marx and Max Weber, for instance, have never alluded in their observations the affects of gender on organizations (Wharton, 2011). In a landmark study, Acker (1990) introduced the concept of gendered organizations. Before management studies often overlooked that within organizations “advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity” (Acker, 1990, p.146) are shaped through a differentiation between men and women.

Against this background of gendered organizations, Acker (2006) further contributed to the discussion by introducing the concept of the ideal worker. The ideal worker defines who usually is the privileged person in organizations. Mostly this is a white, heterosexual man, who is the primary breadwinner and unconditionally dedicated to

work (Acker, 2006). Everyone not included within this male norm is often referred to as *the others* (Billing, 2011). Within the scope of our study, we will in this part only consider inequalities arising in organizations and systems similar to the organisation that this study investigates, thus conservative male-dominated organizations.

In order to understand how this perception of the ideal worker has developed it is important to bear in mind the historical development of most organizations. Traditionally, most organizations are made of and for men (Acker, 2006; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). As a consequence, masculine organizational cultures develop (Billing, 2011; Acker, 2006) in which the others simply do not fit in (Wharton, 2011). Especially, within male dominated industries, like the construction industry, this can be seen (Numhauser-Henning, 2015). Hence, systematic privileges for the ideal worker and disadvantages for the others arise.

This distinction between men and women is produced through interactions and social relations, within institutional context and organizational arrangements (Wharton, 2011). Especially, male traits are often considered superior to female traits (Charles & Grusky, 2006). Philips and Taylor (1980, p.86) illustrate this by explaining that

Craft has been increasingly identified with masculinity, with the claims of the breadwinner, (...). Skill has been increasingly defined against women – skilled work is work that women can't do.

Women, in turn, are considered to excel in nurturing jobs and are responsible for taking care of the family (Charles & Grusky, 2006). Although these stereotypes on gender difference seems to be still embedded in many organization (Charles & Grusky, 2006), they have at least declined within the last two decades (Billing, 2011). Nowadays, studies have shown that gender identities are not as strictly divided anymore, and, for instance also women can be career-oriented (Billing, 2011). However, although these studies noticed in the perception of gender, they do not explain why gender inequalities are still prevailing in many organizations. One possible explanation is that the context is often downplayed, which in this case is the context of a masculine organization (Prasad, Prasad & Mir, 2011). Thus, these changes in perception may not be applicable for masculine organizations. Another explanation is that many organizations hire through employee referrals, but often only people of the same gender talk about

work (Wharton, 2011). Thus, men tend to refer men, and typical male organization remain masculine. These inequalities during the hire process lead to another problem within the internal labour market. Often employees are promoted internally. However, if especially the jobs at entry-level positions are highly segregated than this will also be reflected within higher positions (Wharton, 2011). Hence, no women in leading positions. But not only during the hiring processes inequalities can be found. Also, hierarchies are considered highly gendered (Acker, 2009). Women are often considered less powerful than men in the same position (Padavic & Resik, 2002). A reason for this is not only the stereotypes on the different genders (Acker, 2009), but also that status and resources are allocated unequally between men and women. At last, also activities outside the work (e.g. team building activities or after work) are often designed particularly with regards to male interests. Billing (2011) explains, for instance, that if hunting or visiting strip clubs are scheduled, this excludes mostly the women. During such social activities, however, important relations between colleagues are developed (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Hence, women are disadvantaged.

However, even though studies have acknowledged this disadvantage and inequalities, they remain within organisations. In the following, we therefore want to highlight how these inequalities can persist within organizations. First of all, it is important to note that these inequalities are often highly institutionalized. As a consequence, they are easily sustained within organizations (Wharton, 2011). Jackmann (1994, p.8) explains: *“When a relationship is regularized, institutionalized it is simply a case of c’est la vie”*. The extent to which they can, however, be seen as *“c’est la vie”* depends on the visibility and legitimacy of inequalities. Often, dominant groups do not recognise inequalities within their organization (Acker, 2006). Wharton (2011) adds that even if they recognize the existing inequalities, they *“are unlikely to feel personal responsible or guilty”* (p.231). For instance, men tend to not recognize their advantages over women (McIntosh, 1995 cited in Acker, 2006).

With regards to sexuality Acker (2006) states that it is often just expected to be heterosexual. Hence, sexuality is invisible. Of course for minorities such inequalities may be visible, however, often they think these are *“just the way things are”* (Wharton, 2011, p.231), which leads us to the second variable that influences the persistence of inequalities: legitimacy. Legitimation is *“the process through which inequalities are*

justified" (Wharton, 2011, p.231). For instance, that some masculine traits are considered superior to female traits is often widely accepted (Acker, 2006). Glenn (2002 cited in Acker, 2006) explains that such inequalities are often naturalized and hence legitimate, within male-dominated industry. In addition, the privileged group often have high interest in maintaining the existing relationships within organizations, as they feel threatened if it is changed (Acker, 2006). Surprisingly, Wharton (2011) states that minorities often feel powerless to change these inequalities. In contrast, Acker (2006) noticed that minorities attempt to challenge inequalities. As a consequence, the legitimacy decreases and the visibility increases, which threatens the existence of inequalities.

The categories of gender and sexuality, how they have been described in the previous section, seem to be stable. However, for us it is important to highlight that we assume that they are socially constructed. Hence, they are argued to be changing (Billing, 2011) and so are the inequalities resulting from these differences (Acker, 2006). As a consequence, also the perception of the ideal worker can change.

3.3 The Metaphor of the Glass Ceiling

The distinction between male and female in gendered organization identified by Acker (1990) is often illustrated by the term sex segregation, which is the division of men and women into different occupations (Wharton, 2011). Although one might now argue that significant time has passed by since Acker introduced the concept of gendered organizations and that during this time several gender equality policies and movements have been introduced or took place (Eriksson-Zetterquist & Styhre, 2008), it is important to note that sex segregation is still pervasive in many societies (Wharton, 2011). Surprisingly, especially, in culturally progressive countries like Sweden sex segregation is also nowadays ubiquitous (Charles & Grusky, 2006). During the last two decades, a compelling discussion on metaphors describing gender inequalities in organizations has been hold. Several glass metaphors have been developed (e.g. the glass escalator (e.g. William, 1992) or the glass cliff (e.g. Haslam & Ryan, 2008). The most debated metaphor is the one of the glass ceiling (Eriksson-Zetterquist & Styhre, 2008). Hymowitz and Schellhardt introduced the metaphor of the *glass ceiling* in 1986 by explaining:

Even those few women who rose steadily through the ranks eventually crashed into an invisible barrier. The executive suite seemed within their grasp, but they just couldn't break through the glass ceiling. (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986 cited in Eagly & Carly, 2007, p.64)

Further, the metaphor implies that the career development of women is impeded by invisible, cultural beliefs implying that women are less suitable for leading positions than men (Eriksson-Zetterquis & Styhre, 2008). In line with this belief, is the principle of male primacy (Charles & Gruskey, 2006). From this follows the vertical segregation, which signifies that men “occupy the most desirable occupations (e.g. most prestigious, high paying, most powerful)” (Wharton, 2011, p.196). These beliefs are constantly reproduced by a reciprocal relationship of men’s perception of themselves and the employer’s expectations of men (Charles & Grusky, 2006). Both sides perceive men as primary breadwinner. Men themselves, try to live up to this role, for instance, by making career choices that enable them to fulfil this role. At the same time, employers acknowledge this intrinsic commitment by believing that this motivation distinguishes men from women. Hence, they believe men are more committed to work and as a consequence promote and sponsor men instead of women (Charles & Grusky, 2006). For us, this reciprocal relationship is like a self-fulfilling prophecy. If many individuals believe in this role of men as primary breadwinner, then they may take actions in order to fulfil these beliefs. As a consequence, the more a woman moves up in an organization, the more she is confronted by these beliefs of male primacy (Baxter & Wright, 2000), which leads to women not being able to reach executive positions within male-dominated organisations.

However, Hymowitz’s and Schellhardt’s explanation of the glass ceiling is nowadays not accurately describing the prevailing situation in organizations, especially among Swedish organizations. One limitation with this metaphor is the assumption of an invisible barrier stopping women from entering top management positions. Nowadays, this assumption can easily be proven false (Baxter & Wright, 2000) by observing that, for instance, the Swedish companies SEB, Corem Property Group, and Electra Gruppen all have women as CEO (VA, 2015). Critics remark, however, that those women in leading positions take on a masculine leadership style in order to be appreciated as leader. Thus, only focusing on the number of women in leading

positions may provide false insights on how feminine an organization is (Wharton, 2011).

As a consequence of the egalitarian movements within the Swedish society, researchers stated that these cultural beliefs that legitimate gender discriminating behaviour weakened (Wharton, 2011; Charles & Grusky, 2006). However, we noticed these studies often fail to acknowledge whether it is the perception of what is considered appreciated leadership style is changing or if it is the perception on gender in general. For instance, Eagly and Carli (2007) warn that the identified cultural believes are not the only reasons that prevent women's promotion. For example, women are often excluded from social networks, which are of significant importance for promotions. At last, also the assumption that the more a woman moves up in an organization, the more her chances of promotion decreases seem misleading. Research has shown that at least in Sweden women already tend to be especially disadvantaged when moving from lower to middle management level (Baxter & Wright, 2000). Unfortunately, they also warn that only the most visible forms of male primacy have been diminished. As a consequence, also nowadays, discriminations hindering women's advancement are still existing and deeply rooted within organizational practises. However, these discriminations are rarely discovered or questioned. Consequently, even though this dimension of segregation seems to decline we can still find a deep sex segregation among Swedish organizations (Numhauser-Henning, 2015). The reason for this is, that these traditional theories and egalitarian policies fail to acknowledge the second dimension of segregation; the horizontal segregation (Charles & Grusky, 2006).

We have now shown that the popular metaphor of the glass ceiling seems not to be accurate for describing the inequality between men and women in Swedish organizations. However, when looking at the Swedish organization's today, we can still observe that several occupations are deeply sex segregated (Numhauser-Henning, 2015) and that men are dominant in the most desirable occupations (Charles & Grusky, 2006). Therefore, we think, it is necessary to widen the definition of the glass ceiling. We agree with Prokos and Padavic (2005, p.526) definition, which "simply assumes that the cumulative disadvantage of blocked opportunities (no matter where they occur) causes women's under-representation at higher ranks". In other words,

there are cultural beliefs and power relations that makes it unnecessary difficult for women to move up in organizations. In the next section we will further investigate the reasons for these difficulties.

3.4 Gender Essentialism

Ample researchers have acknowledged that the principle of male primacy is not the only factor inducing gender inequalities in organizations (Wharton, 2011; Charles & Bradley, 2009; Charles & Grusky, 2006). Another important principle to consider when analysing gender inequalities is gender essentialism, which induces horizontal segregation. According to this principle, men and women excel in different tasks. As a consequence, occupations are often typical male or female reaffirming the gender stereotypes (Wharton, 2011). These stereotypes are stimulated through popular culture and media and within interactions of family, friends, teachers or colleagues (Charles & Grusky, 2006). As a result, identities and life experiences are shaped as either masculine or feminine (Charles & Bradley, 2009).

Interesting to note is, that horizontal segregation is preserved through both demand-side and supply-side. A presumption for this preservation is that most occupations can be either allocated to the male category (typically manual occupations) or to the female category (usually non-manual occupations) (Charles & Grusky, 2006). On the one hand, employers take in these stereotypes and recruit men and women accordingly (Charles & Grusky, 2006). On the other hand, workers hold essentialist preferences and aim for occupations that are in line with their own understanding of their sex (Charles & Grusky, 2006). In other words, it is assumed that men prefer to work in typical masculine occupations whereas women prefer to work in typical female occupations. One limitation of Charles and Grusky's explanation however is the use of the term preference as it may indicate that the workers choose their work freely. Charles and Bradley (2009) criticise that the term preferences can only be used in its wider meaning as the workers are exposed to the institutionalized beliefs on gender. Hence, their choice of preference is embedded within their understanding of gender and thus, of themselves. As a consequence, horizontal segregation has been mostly resistant to egalitarian initiatives (Charles & Grusky, 2006). The reason for the persistence of this type of segregation is also likely to endure within the modern culture of industrialized countries as it perfectly aligns with the western value of self-

expression (Charles & Bradley, 2009). Hence, until people stop to define themselves in gendered terms (Charles & Bradley, 2009), horizontal segregation will exist. In contrast to vertical segregation, horizontal segregation is often overlooked as its underlying principle, gender essentialism, is often not considered to be discriminating (Charles & Bradley, 2009). Instead it is just a "taken for granted feature of the work place" (Wharton, 2011, p.191). However, considering our assumption that gender is socially constructed, we assume that it is possible to reduce horizontal discrimination. Admittedly, we agree with Charles and Bradley (2009) that it will be a long process.

In conclusion, we are now able to explain why Sweden, although culturally progressive, is still deeply sex segregated. As the egalitarian policies only counteract the principle of male primacy, horizontal segregation is still deeply rooted within the Swedish culture.

3.5 Cinderella's Glass Slipper

In the previous section we have explained the metaphor of the glass ceiling and have shown that it is not as accurate anymore nowadays as it neglects the existence of horizontal segregation. However, also Charles and Grusky's study has a major limitation. The main weakness of their study is that within their theory a presumption is that occupations can be divided into male and female occupations. In contrast, Ashcraft (2013) argues that occupational identities are socially constructed, and therefore can be changed. In order to illustrate her findings, she introduced a new metaphor the one of the glass slipper.

Ashcraft (2013) explains that occupations are designed to fit the best candidate. By drawing on the fairy tale of Cinderella, she explains that it is like a shoe that was only made for such best candidates. As a consequence, it is not surprising that this shoe does not fit minorities. In other words, if minorities try to enter an occupation, it is like trying a shoe that was designed against them (Ashcraft, 2013). So, similar to the metaphor of the glass ceiling, and the horizontal segregation, the metaphor of the glass slipper uncovers privileges and discriminations prevailing within an institution. However, instead of rooting the cause of this unequal circumstances within the organizational culture or values of the society, Ashcraft (2013) claims that these inequalities are also "stemming from interdependence among occupations and

embodied social identities” (p.26). Admittedly, also Charles and Grusky (2006) talk about inequalities stemming from identities aligned with occupations. However, the identity of occupations seems to be taken for granted in their research. As a consequence, the criteria used to judge people’s suitability for a certain occupation are considered reliable (Ashcraft, 2013). In contrast, Ashcraft (2013) explains that it is important to understand that occupational identity is socially constructed. In other words, not only the employee adjusts its identity to the occupation, but also the occupation derives its identity from the respective employee. Ashcraft (2013) further clarifies that occupational identity could be fixed through perceptions in society. However, it can also be changed. These changes can either be planned or occur unpredictable, and can be contradictory to the previous identity. In brief, it is important to understand that occupational identities, and thus selection criteria to find the best candidate, are to some extent fixed, but are also constructed. Hence, as it is constructed, it means it can also be changed and different. This is in line with Wharton (2011) who identified that there can be a difference within the segregation associated with occupations and jobs. Occupations refer to a particular type of work whereas the term job describes what individuals are actually doing within one organization (Acker, 2009). In comparison to occupational segregation, segregation on the job level is more expanded and can differ from different organizations (Wharton, 2011). This confirms Ashcraft’s (2013) view that occupations are socially constructed.

3.6 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, we have within this chapter outlined literature on gender inequalities within the social constructionist approach. We have explained that traditionally, male primacy was considered a reason for inducing gender inequalities. However, ample researchers agree that this belief is decreasing in relevance nowadays. Further, we discussed the existing glass metaphors and argued that the glass ceiling seems to not be accurately for describing the inequality between men and women in Swedish organizations. However, because of the deeply rooted sex segregation between occupations (Numhauser-Henning, 2015), we believe it is important to widen the definition of the glass ceiling. The definition will instead include an understanding that there are cultural beliefs and power relations that makes it unnecessary difficult for women to move up in organizations. Further, we have introduced Ashcraft’s (2013)

concept of the glass slipper. We agree with Ashcraft, that it is important to understand that occupational identity is socially constructed. The occupational identities can change, either planned or occur unpredictable. Further, this occupational identity and a person's personal identity draws up on each other. Therefore, we argue that gender inequalities within Swedish male-dominated industry, not only are rooted within the values and norm within the organisational culture, but are also embedded within occupational identities. In chapter seven, we will especially engage in a discussion with Ashcraft's metaphor of the glass slipper. In particular, we will on the basis of our empirical data illustrate the limitation of this metaphor. Based on an example, we will show how without the legitimacy from the surroundings the occupational identity cannot change.

4 A Macho Culture and Norm

Within the following three chapters, we outline our findings with regards towards our research question How do employees at BM Construction Group perceive gender inequalities? We have divided the findings into three different chapters. In chapter 5, we present our interpretation of the prevailing discrimination of women in the organisation and the feeling of exclusion. In chapter 6, we show how the subsidiary BM Steel breaks the existing norm in the organization.

Within this chapter, we present the prevailing organisational culture within BM Construction group. Further, we explain the BM norm and how this norm is remained within the organisation by outlining three sustaining factors. Finally, we provide insight on the leadership style, that is appreciated within the organisation. We aim with this chapter to provide insight into the existing power relations, which preserve the conservative culture within BM Construction Group, in order to provide the background information necessary for understanding how inequalities arise within the organization.

4.1 A Macho Culture

In our interviews, we found out that the organizational culture at BM Construction Group can be described as entrepreneurial, family business, and masculine. Erik simply explained it as: *“People hate to say that BM is conservative, but still we can point at things that are”*. Although we found it not surprising to find a conservative culture within an organization like BM Construction Group, we still believe to elaborate on how it is constituted. We believe that in order to be able to understand how gender inequalities arise within an organization, it is important to analyse the organizational culture. Therefore, we have interpreted the specific culture in BM Construction Group in order to be able to understand the existing feeling of exclusion and existing power relations between the norm and the others at BM Construction Group, which we will explain in chapter 5.

BM Construction Group was founded in 1942 by the BM family. Until today, the company is owned by this family, which is reflected in the organizational culture. The CEO of BM Construction Group once said: *“An employment at BM Construction is a lifetime employment, because of the very good culture, its values and the involvement of the family”* (Olof). In our interpretation, by stating it is a “lifetime employment” the

CEO indicated that within BM Construction Group they want everyone to feel included within the organization like in a real family. Further, he expressed pride in this statement. We think they want the employees to be proud of working at BM Construction. This notion of pride is also reflected in Olof's reports on working at BM Construction. When he described how it is to work at BM, he mentioned "the BM Way of Production" or the "BM Way of Sales". For us, this indicates that within the organization, the name "BM" is used proudly. This intense relation to the name BM also reveals the power of the family, or the top management representing the family, within the company. Frederika confirmed our opinion on the power of the family. She explained: *"It is the top management that actually colours the company"*. Hence, the top management is very influential and important for enforcing changes. During the interviews, however, we found out that the company seems to be rather inflexible. Olof stated that *"thinking outside the box"* was not something that has been done traditionally within the company. Also, Frederika explained that within the organizations *"things are done as we always have done it"*. Hence, we think that the organization is very inflexible in terms of changes. Especially, we believe this is the case in terms of gender equality. However, before we elaborate further on gender within the organization, we would like to illustrate the entrepreneurial spirit prevailing in the organization.

The entrepreneurial spirit of the family can still be found within the organization nowadays. Erik explained: *"The founder was an entrepreneur (...) being a really big company today, we still have that entrepreneurial spirit in our genes"*. We found it very interesting that Erik explained that this spirit is in the "genes" of the company. For us, this indicates that this mind-set is still prevailing and deeply embedded within the organization. Frederika used the word *"commercial"* to describe this entrepreneurial mind-set. In our opinion, both, Erik and Frederika, are describing that within BM Construction Group a money making culture is prevailing. Anna even called it a *"scrap dealer mentality"*, which for us has a negative connotation. We interpret this *"scrap dealer mentality"* as a label for showing that within the organization the overall goal is to make money. Erik illustrated this by the example of an incident that happened between an HR-Manager and a plant manager.

Within the culture HR is considered as a burden. It only cost money. Don't use them. (...) There was one incident. A plant manager promoted an office salesman and increased its salary. It was not in his power and responsibilities. She told him, but he didn't listen. He doesn't respect my HR manager. (...) And here we have this culture. If you deliver money, entrepreneurial, you can do whatever you like. As long as you delivered money, you could do whatever you liked. Of course not breaking the laws, but breaking BM rules was okay. (Erik)

Erik's example illustrates what seems to be the most important goal of the organization: to make money. Further, his example depicts that by having this overall goal of making money other rules and functions within the organization, in this case HR, are considered as less valuable. We found this particularly interesting as within BM Construction HR is a typical female occupation. We will elaborate on this distinction at a later stage more extensively, however, for now, we would just like to highlight that against this background we found it not very surprising to find a male-domination within the organization. Traditionally, organizations within the construction industry, like BM Construction Group, are dominated by men (Anna). Erik explained:

If you go back 70 years in the industry, the business was all men. Even 50 years ago there was not a discussion of equality. That is something that you see in the culture of the organization, too. (Erik)

Erik's illustration of "the business was all men" can still be seen in the gender division of the company today. Within BM Construction Group around 80% of the employees are men. Women are mostly working within the support functions like HR-Management, Sustainability Management or Communication. In addition, within the Board of the Group and among the executive management of the companies no women can be found. Further, he explained the male-domination prevailing within the organization is historically rooted within the construction industry. Moreover, it is embedded within the organizational culture. Erik simply called it a "men's world", which for us indicates that the company and its culture is constructed for men. A number of women in our interviews simply called it a "macho culture" (Eva, Anna).

A macho is “behaving in a way that is thought to be typical of a man, especially by seeming strong and powerful, but also seeming too determined to avoid showing weakness and sympathy”. (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.b).

We think, the example of Erik illustrating how the HR department is perceived within the organization, is one instance of the “*macho culture*”. The occupation of HR, which is within BM Construction a typical female occupation, seems to be disrespected within the organization. In this example, the plant manager ignored the HR manager’s advice, and thereby showed his strength and power. Hence, he behaved like a macho. We found this example very interesting as it shows the dominance of men and its role as money maker within the organization. Further, this is an example of existing power relations within the organization, not only between men and women but also between occupations. In order to provide deeper insight, we think it is important at this stage to describe how the top management of the organization perceives diversity.

The problem is that it is such a male-driven world. There are few men that see the value of diversity. There is a value of course to have diversity in the management team, but I think most male managers are blind to what that value is. Or they do not want to see it. (Edward)

Edward described that within the management team, men are unintentionally or intentionally neglecting the value diversity could add to their team. Against the background of Edward’s interview, we interpret diversity in this case as including gender, age, ethnicity, and sexuality. However, we believe, the statement “*there are few men that see the value of diversity*” is one of the reasons, why no women can be found within the top management. For us, this perception seems like a glass ceiling hindering women to move up in the organization. Further, if we recall that the organization is highly influenced by the top management, we found it not surprising that the organization is male-dominated.

We also interpret, an inflexibility to take an active role in engaging with the society to give opportunities. Additionally, we also interpret that the top management has a mind-set that does not acknowledge the opportunities of having different kinds of competences. This statement does not directly indicate that there is resistance towards

the discussion gender inequalities in the top-management. However, we believe this is an indicator of the macho culture. By being reluctant to talk about creating opportunities for everyone, the top management is avoiding to admit that they are not doing it at the moment. They seem to be stuck within their practices, which have been designed for men. However, Anna was confident that the situation will change soon:

But that I think is changing, because the board is getting older. I think I would say, it's the last generation that is doing this. That has not understood the full potential of having management teams with equality gender wise. (...) because they are afraid of their own position. (Anna)

We found especially interesting the end of her quote stating that the management is afraid of losing their positions. For us, this again illustrates the macho culture prevailing within the organization. In a similar manner to Anna, Rebecka described the changing perception among the employees:

It's maybe more a fact now that diversity gives a better result. (...) Because we have been speaking about women in the board for twenty years. Ten years ago it was shown that companies, which have women in the boards, have better results, than those who don't have it. "Oh, I don't believe it. How could it be like that?". But now I think it is more a truth that it was ten years ago, I hope. (Rebecka)

Both Rebecka and Anna elucidated that the perception of women is slowly changing within the board. In our interpretation one trigger for this change is as Rebecka described the evidence that more women in top-management lead to a better financial outcome. For the board, it seems nowadays evident that diversity increases profitability. Against the background of a commercial culture, we believe that the board sees the possibility for better business opportunities by hiring women. Since the top-management's practices have significant impact on how the rest of the company is behaving, we believe it is important to acknowledge that Rebecka explained: *"there is a difference between saying things and doing things"*. Thus, we interpret that a change mind-set alone may not be sufficient for actually changing the circumstances. This

interpretation explains why this macho culture is preserved within the organization, although the mind-set is changed.

4.2 The BM Norm

Within this section, we describe how we interpreted the employee's description of the norm in the company, which we named the BM Norm. A norm implies the usual way of looking, acting and thinking within a specific context (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.a). By defining the norm is, it is possible to define what Acker (2006) labelled as the ideal worker. This understanding allows us further to identify the others within BM Construction Group. We believe it is important to understand who is defined as the norm and the others in order to be able to uncover what is hindering the inclusion of the others in a conservative culture.

Expressions like *“the norm”*, *“the average office worker”* and *“what is seen as competence”* were used repeatedly in the interviews. Some interviewees used these expressions for describing obstacles within the organization, while others seemed to not recognize the existence of the norm. In order to provide a deeper insight into these different understandings, we outline in the following how we interpreted the prevailing view of the BM norm and thereby explain how the ideal worker is viewed within the existing organisational culture.

When we asked the employees “What is diversity for you?” or “What is a diverse workforce?” we realized that they define diversity by stating, what the norm is. Anna explained for her diversity includes *“everything that is not a man, around 50, Swedish and white”*. Further, Frederika clearly expressed that there is a norm existing in the organisation and in the mind of BM employees by talking about the *“average office people”*. In particular, Frederika answered our question: *“Not so much if you go into this yellow building because here is the office, I think we will find mostly the average office people in this building”*. For us, this illustrates how the employees perceive the existing norm and by saying *“the average office people”* they maintain this norm within the organisation, for if there is something as the average, there is also something as the other.

Further, we understood that there is a prevailing understanding of what is viewed as competence within the organization, which also influences the view of the ideal worker. We connected this perception to the historical roots the company, which Susan explained:

I started to think about it exactly the moment I started to work here. We have to realize this is an industry that has been managed by men all the times before, and they have been raised in a kind of way. If you go back 15 years, there was a company Original Construction. If you had not worked there, you did not know anything. So it is a big transition from what is competence now and before. Before it could be, you have worked there? That is nothing. (Susan)

However, even if this might be changing according to Susan, we found evidence that this old perception is still embedded within the organisational culture. Since Susan is working within HR, we understand that she is more engaged with the topic, and therefore maybe also has a more advanced view on it compared to the rest of the organisation. Our interpretation seems to be confirmed by Susan's statement on norms (roles) that need to be broken within the organization: *"That is a challenge (...) it is a small minded way of looking (...) first you have to break those kind of roles and then you can look in other ways"*. Here, we interpret that Susan thinks that before you can reduce gender inequalities and existing power relations, it is necessary to change what is seen as competence. Further, Eva told us a story, which we interpret as an example for a narrow-minded way of looking:

We had one example of a really talented girl with and for the company unusual degree that came in with one of the trainee programs. She was almost ready to leave us, because she felt that she was placed in a position not linked to her education, and she didn't feel that she could deliver on it. The company did not seem to understand in what way she would be able to contribute because she has a background and education that is not really common for a company like us. Her degree as an industrial designer, and her talent is very good for the company, because she is doing something nobody has done before and there is also a growing market demand for her skills. She has some innovative

thinking. (...) Finally, there was a position available that she was interested in and she is still here. (Eva)

Within this narrative, Eva, as we interpreted, expressed that within the organization a habitual view of what is considered as the right competence is prevailing. She further explained that because of this habitual view, there is a risk of losing talents, for they do not fit the BM norm. Further, we interpreted that Eva expressed a way of thinking and behaving that is prevailing in the organization and consequently preserving the existing norm.

4.3 Keeping Up with the Norm

To be able to break the norm and increase inclusion of the others, we understood the need to explain how the organisation views their position as leading the industry in gender equality. Andreas explained that for him, criteria like gender are irrelevant. He explained: *“The first thing I look at is the competence, but it does not matter if the competence is in a female or a male”*. This neglect of gender with regards towards recruiting processes seems also to be mirrored in his perception on gender equality. Andreas stated that in his opinion the subsidiary he is working for is performing very well with regards towards gender equality. Olof, CEO of the same subsidiary, explained *“Equal opportunities, of course everyone has equal opportunities within our organisation.”* He corroborated his opinion on equal opportunities by comparing the current gender distribution within BM Properties to other companies within the group.

If you take and look at gender; male, female. Look at the board. The group board; 100% men. Business area management: 100% men. And the majority of the daughter company boards: 100% men. In our management team we have HR, Sustainability, Communication and my assistant that are females. Four out of ten. And I think there is no other company that is that balance. (Olof)

In Olof's explanation, the gender distribution within the management of his subsidiary served as proof of existing equal opportunities. However, although a high percentage of the management team is female, Erik noted that the females only occupy the support functions, which traditionally are female occupations. Hence, we think Erik implied that the opportunities are not equal. We think, an explanation for Olof's explanation is

that on the one hand he is a member of the dominant group (men), and thus may not notice the existing gender inequalities (Wharton, 2011). On the other hand, we think he might be presenting himself, and his company, in a good light. If the world is socially constructed, people tend to see themselves and their efforts positively compared to their surroundings (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Moreover, we found it interesting that Olof linked gender equality to the number of women working within the organization. During the interviews, we found that increasing the number of women seems to be a popular approach for establishing gender equality. For instance, we asked Edward on how to decrease gender inequalities within the organization, and he explained:

I think the first thing is to get the status of right now, get some numbers. Then we can target an improvement. For example, go from 20% to 40%. How we do that? Not hard to answer that because the basic requirement needs to be the level of competence, and once you get to that you can start to choose by gender, but the level of competence has to be there. (Edward)

We found it interesting, that Edward linked the increase of number to the decrease of inequalities. In other words, for us it seems that he thinks by increasing the number of women the discrimination of women will be vanished. However, in this context, we would like to mention that many employees raised concern over hiring someone outside the norm. Samuel expressed “*Not everyone as a manger dares to promote people outside the norm*”. Similar Erik said “*It is less risky to hire a man. You need to dare to hire a woman.*” If we interpret these two statements together, we found a prevailing feeling of risk of hiring someone outside the norm. Additionally, we understood that this “*outside the norm*”, includes women since “*you need to dare to hire a woman*”. We interpret this as a potential reason why the “*average office people*” is found in the organisation and the BM norm of a man, around 50, Swedish and white, is still prevailing, even if the management believes that equal opportunities for everyone exist within BM Construction Group.

There is an ongoing discussion within society of whether adding women to an organisation is the solution for creating equality. We can see this discussion within the narratives, however, we also acknowledge different point of views within the BM

Construction Group. Even if they see themselves as leading the industry for a diverse workforce, we still find horizontal segregation within the management team by having women only occupying support functions. Therefore, we would like to further explain our interpretations of the prevailing leadership style within the organisation.

4.4 Leadership Style Norm

BM Construction group is a male-dominated organization. Within the Board of the Group and among the executive management of the companies 0% of women can be found. We think this domination of men also is reflected within the leadership styles, as we found in the interviews that a prevailing leadership style within BM Construction Group, that is expressed as authoritarian and label by interviewees as masculine. We asked in our interviews if there is a difference between men and women in leadership styles and how this is shown in the company. Samuel explained:

I see there is a big difference between female and males. (...) If you take the norm there is a difference how they are leading. And I think that is the reason also why BM Construction Group has few females (...) in the top management. Therefore, we have a quite male leadership organization and hard for females to fit it in. (Samuel)

So, similar to the BM norm worker there is also a norm for leadership styles, which is described as a masculine style. Samuel also noted “*that it is hard for females to fit in*”, which we interpret as one of the reasons why there are no women within the top management. Andreas, describes this leadership style as “*quite authoritarian*”, which we associate with a masculine style of leadership. However, for us, this also implies the existence of power relations in the organisation, not only towards women but also between management levels. Since we earlier defined the culture as a “macho culture” we interpret a similar norm for the appreciated leadership.

A macho is behaving in a way that is thought to be typical of a man, especially by seeming strong and powerful, but also seeming too determined to avoid showing weakness and sympathy” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.a).

Also, Karin confirmed Samuel's opinion of exclusion of women. However, interesting to note is that whereas Samuel directly linked his opinion to sex, so men and women, Karin highlighted that it is not just about sex, but more about gender:

There is only one type of leadership that is appreciated in today's culture. (...) I think we have many clever leaders now, but they do not see the structure that is hindering the other kind of leadership. For instance, I think we have many very clever men as well, but they are not becoming maybe leaders, because they have another kind of leadership, they do not make it to the top because they have another kind of leadership. So gender yes, but not only. (Karin)

So, in this case, we think it is shown that also inequalities for men arise, because of the prevailing norms within the organization. However, we received the impression from Karin's statement that also women, who have a masculine leadership style, could be successful. However, we found this contradictory to Anna's opinion on how she is perceived as a female manager. She told us about a manager that would not listen to her "because he does not listen to women". Hence, we think that at BM Construction Group not only the female leadership style may not be appreciated, but also women in general in leading positions.

4.5 Chapter Summary and Reflections

To reflect upon our findings, we interpret the values prevailing in the organisational culture as entrepreneurial, family business and masculine, which acknowledged the concept of gendered organisations (Acker, 1990). Further, we recognised pride for the company, and a commercialised mind-set, which implicates that making money is more important than complying with the rules of the organization. Moreover, we revealed the horizontal segregation prevailing at BM Construction Group according to which women typically occupy support functions and men operational functions. Thus, we showed prevailing power relations between typical female and male occupations.

Our interpretation of the interviewees' narratives further expressed the organisational culture as inflexible, macho and hierarchal. The organization is inflexible in a way of how to value different kinds of competence. This competence is connected to the BM

norm, which describes the ideal worker (Acker, 2006) within BM Construction Group as a white, Swedish man, around 50. Further, we showed that the top management does not seem to believe that diversity adds value. As the top management has a significant impact on the rest of the organization, this belief seems to be mirrored throughout the organization. In addition, interviewees expressed that a masculine leadership style is prevailing within the organization, which makes it difficult for women to fit in.

5 Unintentional Discrimination

In the chapter 4, we have analysed how the organisational culture, the ideal worker norm and the leadership norm at BM Construction Group privileges white Swedish men over women or even feminine men. In this second chapter of data analyses, we examine how women perceive this situation. We would like to acknowledge that it is based on our interpretations and the feeling of inclusion and exclusion is diffuse. The women we interviewed expressed that it is difficult to make this feeling of exclusion explicit. This difficulty is one of the reasons why it is hard to uncover unintentional discrimination or exclusion, embedded in the organisational culture. However, we believe in order to be able to change existing power relations, it is important to uncover these discriminations. In the following, we will show that women often feel excluded within the prevailing organisational culture.

When we asked Karin about her experiences as a woman in the organisation she told us a story she heard on the radio, that explains how she feels like as a woman within the organisation. We think it is a good narrative to illustrate the feelings of inclusion and exclusion within BM Construction Group.

I was listening to the radio the other day and an anecdote that can explain what I feel came. He came here as a refugee, a young boy, and he was about 25 years today. He explained what he felt when he went to school. The teacher was talking to him in another way than to the Swedish students. It was nothing wrong from a harassment point of view. But it was, they were more inclusive in the discussion with Swedish student, asking: What have you done yesterday? Oh, you played football, very interesting. This boy didn't get these kind of personal questions. They were also expecting more from the Swedish students than from him. They had a discussion with him as well but they were not as personal as they were when talking to the Swedish students. And I think we have a bit of that in the BM Construction culture as well. (Karin)

We observed that Karin used this analogy to mirror how women feel excluded within BM Construction Group. We interpret it as follows: The refugee is coming to Sweden. He is different from the norm of pupils in that school, as he is not Swedish. Hence, he sticks out. Similar, women within BM Construction Group stick out as they differ from

the norm by not being a man. Karin explained, “*it was nothing wrong from a harassment point of view*”. We believe, this is also applicable for BM Construction Group. From our point of view, the women seem to be formally included and accepted. In our interviews, we did not hear any stories in which women were deliberately mistreated. However, they are treated differently than men. As a consequence, they feel excluded. Karin added to the analogy the following:

If you are a leader with the appreciated leadership talent, then you are in the club. Then you get all the information, and it is more personal. (Karin)

This quote relates to the appreciated leadership style, which we explain within the previous chapter. Karin stated that employees are only included in the club and get all the information, when they have the right traits. The “*club*” we interpret as a group of people sharing the same interests. Against the background of this narrative and Karin’s interpretation, we received an insight on the feeling she is expressing and the exclusion of gender that is created in the organisation. This power relation excluding women that do not have the masculine leadership style, is not easy to pinpoint. However, we believe that within BM Construction Group the values embedded within the organisational culture are relevant for this exclusion.

To provide more insight on how this exclusion is shown within the company, we will quote two narratives of Karin, which can be seen as an example of how the behaviour of men leads unintentionally to uncomfortableness of women.

It is very small things. The other day I went up to the coffee table, when I came in, entering the room, there were ten people. Men, all of them. And one of them, it was an HR Manager, said: “Finally, here comes some female beauty”. He did not mean anything negative, he just wanted to say: “I can see you entering the room, welcome”, but in a very wrong way. And when I said: “Okay, it is very interesting that the HR Manager is saying that, but let’s have some coffee”. It was a bad feeling in the room, it was silent. (Karin)

Within this example, Karin feels offended, for she is treated differently than the rest of the group. Although we think the men just wanted to recognise her entrance by making

her a compliment, Karin perceived it as discrimination. Karin also explained that this being treated differently is also reflected during work practices. Also within this example, Karin was the only women in the room. Hence, a minority, which makes her, similar to the refugee, stick out of the group. Further, Karin emphasised that it was an HR Manager, who made that comment. We think she was so upset about this fact, for in her opinion the HR Manager is responsible for equality policies within the company. However, by making the comment on her “beauty”, he showed that he, himself, seems not to have internalised, what it means to treat women and men equally.

We had a trainee, they are not thinking sometimes, we had a young trainee (...) she had a period at one of the plants. The first day when she entered the room to have her lunch, all the men where there as well; with no pants. Sitting there in their underwear. (...) the reason why they were sitting in their underwear was because they had new chairs. They didn't want to make them dirty. (...). It is not a natural thing to think of everybody needs. (Karin)

In this example, we think it is important to note that the intention of the men when taking off their pants, was good. They tried to protect the chairs, which indicates that they are caring about their surroundings. However, they still created an uncomfortable atmosphere for the trainee. For us, this shows that they are not used to be surrounded by women. We think that they either did not expect her to enter the room or that they were not aware of how uncomfortable it would be for her. In both cases, we think they did not try to create this uncomfortable atmosphere on purpose.

In both narratives men meant well, but women felt either offended or uncomfortable. We think that these examples reflect the historical background of the company. Traditionally the majority of BM Construction Group's employees are men. Further, we have already analysed that it is a masculine company. At the end of the second narrative, Karin explained “*It is not a natural thing to think of everybody needs*”. We think that with “*everybody*” she meant everyone outside the BM norm of a BM. Further, we believe that those two narratives show that the manners that are prevailing within the organisational culture are very masculine. As a consequence, women often feel uncomfortable or offended.

Also, with regards towards social gatherings for teams and with clients, we identified an exclusion of female's interest. For instance, Rebecka made clear that the social gatherings organised within BM Construction do not mirror her interests.

Well, I mean it is a culture where you go on hockey together. Do I like hockey? No. We don't go to Scandinavian when its horse jumping, together, for example. We go on hockey; we go on speedway. I mean, it is not theatre for example. (Rebecka)

Within this quote, Rebecka emphasised that she would like to do something else than hockey or speedway, which we interpret in her opinion represent typical male interests. We think, that her opinion highlights a masculine organisation, which is clearly reflected in the social gatherings in which the masculine interest is taken for granted. We also think that women, like Rebecka, feel excluded from such gathering as she is not interested in attending those activities. As a consequence, we believe, the relationship, which should be build up during these activities will not be as strong between women and men as it will be between men and men. By not sharing interests, you will also not like to discuss about things like a Hockey game. However, this is an important factor for building good relationships in an organisation. In this situation, as Karin has described before, women are not part of the "club". Although women formally attend the meeting, they are excluded from the informal discussions. As a consequence, the relationship will not be as personal.

Samuel seems to be aware of this problem of different interests and tried to organise social gatherings in a way that suits the interest of the majority of people. He explained:

Another thing I always try to do is when I am getting a new management team is to do some activities. My next idea is actual to have group exercise connected to our work. It is something everyone can do. I have both females and males in my group, young and old. (Samuel)

This example of Samuel highlights that he tried to plan a gender neutral activity at which nobody feels excluded. However, we question whether it is actually possible to create a gender neutral activity, especially, if it is connected to the work of company,

which is construction. We think it is very important to acknowledge his awareness of the exclusion of women, but we also acknowledge that he may not be able to reach his aim of creating a gender neutral activity.

In conclusion, we believe that the narratives within this chapter have shown that women are often unintentionally excluded by the behaviour of men. This behaviour of men seems to be embedded within the values of the organisation culture of BM Construction Group. The company has traditionally been men dominated, which is also shown within the prevailing practices of the organisation. Our interpretation that these behaviours are embedded within the organisational culture is confirmed by Rebecka who said:

I mean it's really a man company (...) that's in the walls. I can't really explain. (...) I can't really give you any good examples of how you feel as a woman in the company. I mean you need to be quite brave as a woman in this company and also quite strong. (Rebecka)

By explaining that a woman needs to be “*brave*” and “*strong*” within BM Construction Group, Rebecka is confirming our interpretation of women feeling excluded. However, it is not the fact of being women, it is the feminine way of action, that seems to not be appreciated within the organisation. We interpret to be “*brave*”, as having a masculine way of handling professional situations. Consequently, we also interpret that women in order to feel included at BM Construction Group have to adapt a masculine style. Further, Rebecka’s characterization of being “*brave*” and “*strong*”, and her expression of “*that's in the walls*” indicates for us that an exclusion of femininity occurs on a regular basis. Also, the fact that she cannot illustrate her feelings by a specific example links to Karin’s opinion that “*it is very small things*” that create these feeling of being unwell. In our opinion, it seems that this feeling is created by small things that are difficult to grasp. We think that those tough environments for women, or for a feminine behaviour, are often created unintentionally by men.

Although so far we have only described how women feel excluded, it is also important to note that not every woman felt that way. A number of times the women we have

interviewed expressed a feeling of belonging to the organisation, which we interpret as a feeling of inclusion. Susan and Marit expressed:

I did not fit in here when I started, I was 26 years old and had worked with disable children and was a sales person for a bus company (...) but I felt at home from the beginning. (Susan)

Personally I do not experience any difference. I can think in form of the culture. But I do not feel that it been different because I'm a women and young. I experience the climate as very helpful and friendly. (Marit)

This feeling of inclusion might be as prevailing as it is said in the statement. However, these women also expressed a view of the organisation as having a masculine culture and a macho culture, as mention before in this section. We find the combination of the feeling of inclusion and exclusion, among women in the organisation very interesting, and will reflect on this feeling in the next section.

5.1 Chapter Summary & Reflections

In conclusion, in this chapter we elaborated on how women feel excluded and included within BM Construction Group. By understanding the difficulties to express the feeling of not being in the “club”, we acknowledged that there are obstacles embedded within the organisational culture, which create this feeling of exclusion for women at BM Construction Group. For us, it seems that during social gatherings women often feel excluded. However, we also highlighted the difficulties of creating gender neutral activities, and we question whether this is possible. According to Acker (1990) no gender neutral organisation exist. So, could there then be a gender neutral activity? Within the scope of this research, we will however unfortunately not be able to answer this question.

On the other hand, some of the narratives in this chapter provided an insight into more visible, however as we believe, still unintended discrimination. For instance, the example in the coffee room. It seems that within the organization a masculine way of acting is embedded. For example, women expressed a need to be “brave” and “quite

strong”, which for us showed that within the organizational culture rather masculine traits seem to be appreciated.

Moreover, some women in the organisation also expressed a feeling of inclusion. We, therefore, think it is important to bear in mind that also by belonging to a certain type of occupation, the feeling of inclusion can be created (Ashcraft, 2013). So, for instance, one explanation for this feeling could be feel that they feel included in their occupational identity, by identifying with a feminine occupation. At the same time, however, they can feel excluded from the organisational culture by not fitting to the norm. As a consequence, women can feel excluded as they do not meet expectations embedded in the organisational culture. We further acknowledged within this chapter is that it is the small things, embedded in the organisational culture, that leading to women being treated differently than men. This create a feeling of not belonging to the group, and instead being one of the others.

6 A new Era?

Within the two previous chapters, we have outlined BM's organisational culture, the BM norm and existing indicators of prevailing power relations. In this chapter, we present the subsidiary of BM Construction Group BM Steel. Historically, within this subsidiary prevail the same values and organisational culture as we have presented it above. As mentioned in chapter 4, there is a prevailing norm of how employees perceive competence within the organisation. As a consequence, BM Construction Group is deeply segregated, so that men typically work in operational function, and women occupy support functions. We are particularly interested in the case of BM Steel as this is the only subsidiary within BM Construction Group in which a woman occupies a leading role in an operational function.

In the following section, we will present how BM Steel has approached their goal of reducing gender inequalities. It is important to note, that we will not focus on the change process within the organization, but rather present our interpretation of how the leadership style of Erik, the CEO of BM Steel, differs from the norm prevailing in the BM Construction Group. In addition, we present how in this case can be seen as a way of breaking the norm excluding the others.

In order to provide insight on the context of BM Steel and Erik's leadership style, we start with a historical perspective. The previous CEO of the company hold his position for 18 years, until nine months ago Erik as new CEO started. Traditionally, people, who wanted to work for the management of BM Steel needed to have a long experience within the industry (Susan). Erik, in contrast, was selected as CEO because he was *"not from the business"* (Susan). Although this was contradictory to the prevailing practices at BM Steel, Erik expressed that he was selected on purpose: *"I have never been into steel business (...) but the board knows that. They know that I don't have the experience. So it's a choice from their side"*. For us, this implies that the board has selected him on purpose in order to change practices within the organization. Further, we interpret that he felt supported and therefore had also the courage to change things in the organisation. In the interviews with the management teams of BM Steel, we realized that one factor that distinguishes Erik not only from the former CEO, but also from the norm prevailing in the Group, is his leadership style, which we elaborate in the following.

When we just looked at Erik's appearance, we thought he fulfils the BM norm. He is a white, Swedish men in his mid forties. However, we interpret his leadership as a non-hierarchal, open-minded, and mediating style. In contrast, to the macho leadership norm, which we have described in chapter 4, Erik's leadership seems to be based upon the assumption that showing weaknesses is a way of decreasing power relations. As a consequence, we think he also challenges the prevailing BM norm and raises the awareness of inequalities in the organization.

Before we show how Erik's leadership challenged the BM norm, we think it is important to note that especially in the beginning he encountered resistance by having a different leadership style: *"And I was a bit naïve, because if I would have understood how much they (the management team) not wanted me...but it went rather quick, to change that style."* However, even if he met resistance, the acceptance went rather quick according to Erik.

For instance, Erik explained how he challenged the BM norm by breaking the horizontal segregation within his management team by employing a woman as operations manager, which was a position typically occupied by men. However, he emphasized that it was easy to find a woman for this position. For finding the best candidate for this position, BM Steel collaborated with a head-hunter. Erik explained that the first time the head-hunter sent him a list of potential candidates, no women was included. For us, this shows that also the head-hunter is affected by the existing BM norm, which is mirrored in his work. However, Erik persisted that at least a few women, of course with an equal competence level than men, should be included in the list.

He (the head-hunter) had to put more effort in the search (...) and if you have a women and a man that is equal, you need to dare (...) because it is less risk to take a man. (Erik)

In this expression, we interpret Erik's understanding of the need to take a risk to hire someone outside the norm. We interpret this as the risk to choose someone outside the norm. Further, against the background of the BM's culture we interpret that in this

notion of risk is implied that it is maybe unclear what women are going to contribute with. To choose a woman could in that context mean to dare to take someone outside the norm. This risk would we like to combine with an opportunity to gain a competence that you did not expect. By saying that it is a risk to hire someone, Erik explained for us that it also is an opportunity, to get something different. Further, we think that hiring someone outside the norm, creates uncertainty; the employment can either be successful or fail. As Erik “*dared to take the risk*” and hired a woman, we believe this underlines his leadership style of not being afraid of making a mistake.

Another aspect of Erik’s leadership is that he shows a belief in people and gives them opportunities for development. For instance, he told us the story of a talented man, who applied for the position as CFO. However, in Erik’s opinion this man lacked some competences, so that Erik promised him that if he starts as a business controller and learns the missing skills, he will be promoted within two years. In this way, we interpret that Erik believes in the development potential of people, and gives them opportunities to do so. To further explain how we understand Erik leadership for the organisation, we will elaborate on Erik’s explanation of how he leads by asking his managers three questions.

If I am your boss and you come to me and say she does not, I cannot have her, she is useless, she is not good. You, as a manager, will have three questions for me. Have you been really precise in what your expectations are? Is that fully clear? If you say yes on that, then one more finger points on you. Okay, next question have you given feedback on that? (...) Have you given the employee the right resources? (Erik)

Here we interpret a leadership style working with clear direction, however also providing space for development, which includes the possibility to make mistakes and learn from them. Further, he explained a situation in which a middle manager did not respect the HR manager’s instructions. However, Erik said: “*Because, we of course must coach this guy to change his behaviour*”. This shows that he has a coaching leadership style. Together with a coaching leadership style, we found that he appreciates different personalities. For instance, he expressed an understanding that a team with different personalities will create more discussions: “*you got more conflicts,*

it is tougher to manage that group and to work together, but that is actually what we want and you must remember that.” It is interesting, that Erik views conflicts as a positive aspect, in the way that it is creating new ideas and new point of views. We interpret that this different leadership style implies more mediation work for the managers. Within this way of working, we also interpret a way of changing the organisational culture towards being more flexible and open for accepting difference, which as we interpret clearly challenges the prevailing norm in BM Steel. By acknowledging how Erik acts as a leader, we also acknowledged how he is different to the BM leadership norm, which we defined in chapter 4 as being hierarchal and close-minded to new competences. Additionally, we found it interesting how we interpret Erik’s way of acting against us during the interview and interpret this as an example of his leadership and personality:

E: (...) I do not really know the English word here

W: Nationalities

E: Now you make me sound like I'm stupid.

W: No, no, no

E: I am kidding, I'm kidding. I really was joking (laughing at the situation). I have no problem with that. (Erik, Wiebke)

What we experienced was a feeling of being on the same level as Erik, even though he has a formally higher position than us as he is the CEO of the company and we are researchers. We interpret this as an example of his personality, which exemplifies his open-minded and non-hierarchal leadership. Hence, we see this as a difference compares to the BM norm. Further, we noticed how he decreases distance between the line managers and the executive management. He does this by explaining their different views upon questions and take time to give the employees narratives for understanding each others situations. For us, this is an example of a leadership where mediating is prevailing. Further, we interpreted this example in a way that he was able to make fun of himself, which is a way of not being afraid of showing weaknesses in front of us. We are aware that how he acted towards us might not be how he acts towards the management team. However, we see a connection between showing weakness, be open and decrease power relations in the leadership style.

As mentioned above BM Steel, is the only company that has women within the operational management team. Hence, we expected to also find a different perception of the HR Manager within this company. Within the interviews our expectations were confirmed. Erik, the CEO of BM Steel, clarified the distinction between two types of HR; “*You can use it as a tool for developing your business or a tool for executing things*”. Susan explained that employer responsibility, which was a former HR question, is “*now a quite big part of our strategy*”. Hence, we believe that within this company HR is considered as a part of business operations. This, for us, is another example of how BM Steel broke some of the existing norm within the organisational culture. By empowering the role of HR managers and including it in the operational management team, they seem to start to weaken the existing power relations, in particular, the power relation preserving the distinction between typical male-dominated occupations and female-dominated occupations. As Erik said it: “*The HR manager liked her job, but if she would not have got more strategic decision making and power, I do not know if she still would have been here.*” Further, we interpret how Erik changed the power of the HR manager occupation, and allowed the HR manager to work strategically by having resources for it. In the following narrative, Susan expressed how she not matched the norm when she started working at BM Steel, and how this perception has changed:

I was the only one who did not match for the framework for the last management group, and now we had said that it is much better if you do not come from the industry...because all the industry has the same conservative way of seeing things, and we need to breaking those frameworks. So first you have to break those kinds of roles and then you can look in other ways. (Susan)

Additionally, we interpret the Susan acknowledged that the obstacles of breaking the norm are embedded, and historically rooted in the thinking of BM employees. Susan, further, expressed “*(...) and we need to break those frameworks (...) you have to break those kinds of roles*”. When Susan is referring to “*frameworks*” and “*roles*”, we interpret that she is referring to the BM nom. Further, we understand that something needs to be changed to break this norm.

From the narratives we also noticed a change in the mind-set among the management team. When putting together new teams, managers now express that they need to have someone in their team that has a different point of view (Susan):

It is not just me anymore, someone says “I do not have anyone who is going to be that person, the provoking person”. The one that does not have the same perception as anyone else. (Susan)

Further, she explained that this is something that the managers would not have thought about nine months earlier. For us, this indicates a change in the mind-set towards a more openness to different personalities. We have to admit, that this narrative is difficult to connect directly to gender. However, we believe it still shows an idea of including people outside the typical BM norm. Additionally, it is showing a change in what is appreciated as competence, and what is valued as group composition.

Further, Susan explained how the work with gender equality and differentiations within personalities has started, and she expressed a feeling that it will be easier to change more of the existing BM norm, when one thing starts to change:

“Now when we have started, we can open ourselves a bit easier (...) because I really want us to attract anyone, you should not be hindered just because you do not think you fit in.” (Susan)

In this statement, Susan indicated that although they have been started the process of reducing inequalities, it will still take until everyone will be respected within the organization. For instance, Erik mentioned an incident of a middle manager not respecting the HR manager’s instruction. However, we think this section has shown how Erik’s leadership style changed the perception of the norm within BM Steel.

6.1 Chapter Summary & Reflections

Within in this final chapter of our findings we illustrated a way of breaking the existing BM norm within one of BM Construction Group's subsidiaries. By acknowledging a leadership style that is decreasing the power relations between hierarchal levels, we presented a leader that has started to change the prevailing BM norm. Further, we also showed how Erik simultaneously empowered the role of the HR manager, to become operational manager, and increased the openness towards the others among the managers. In chapter 4 and 5, we have acknowledged how the existing organisational culture creates gender inequalities within BM Construction Group. However, against the background of the example of BM Steel, we recall Ashcraft (2013) stating that inequalities not only rooted within the values and norms embedded in an organisational culture, but are also created by occupational identities. In this specific case we showed how the role of the HR manager has drawn identity from Susan. However, by acknowledging the leadership of Erik, we interpreted a connection between the challenging of the norm and the changing occupational identity. With this said, we interpreted breaking the norm as part of the process towards gender equality for BM Steel. We believe, it is however important to notice that also within BM Steel gender inequalities exist. However, we recognised a change in the mind-set of the managers, towards appreciating different competence, which we interpreted as a way to dare to hire people not fulfilling the existing BM norm. Finally, from the outside, the visual appearance as man, white and 40 years, makes Erik fulfil the BM norm himself. However, his leadership style is different from the within BM Construction Group appreciated style. Thus, the perception from the outside, mandates him the legitimate power to enhance the role as CEO and be accepted from the employees in the organisation. Furthermore, by provoking the BM norm with a different leadership and daring to hire people from outside the norm, he seemed to have decreased the power relations and gender inequalities embedded in the organisational culture.

6.2 Summary of Findings (Chapter 4, 5, and, 6)

Within this chapter, we outlined our findings to the research question How do employees at BM Construction group perceive gender inequalities? In the first chapter of the findings, we described in our interpretation that the employees perceive the prevailing organisational culture as macho, inflexible and a single way of defining competence. We further defined in our interpretation the existing BM norm as a white, Swedish man, around 50. Moreover, we explained that next to the BM norm there is a leadership norm, which we understood as quite authoritarian and not showing weakness. Within this chapter, we also highlighted the existing horizontal sex segregation within the management team. In the second chapter, we expressed our interpretation of the unintended discrimination of women in the organisation. Our main finding within this section was the difficulties women experienced in expressing the feeling of exclusion. As a consequence, it is difficult to pinpoint one common form of exclusion. However, we interpreted a number of existing power relations embedded in the organisational culture, which promote the maintenance of gender inequalities. In the third chapter, we presented how the subsidiary BM Steel broke the BM norm. However, we acknowledge that our interpretations as socially constructed, and thus cannot be generalized. However, these findings provide insight on gender inequalities by recognising power relations to break prevailing norms within BM Construction Group.

7 Discussion

In the chapters 4, 5 and 6, we have illustrated how our empirical material can be interpreted in order to gain a deeper insight in the gender inequalities prevailing within BM Construction Group. In this analyses, we provided insight on unintended discrimination of women in BM Construction Group. We interpreted the organisational culture as macho, inflexible and having a single way of defining competence. Further, we interpreted the prevailing BM norm and appreciated leadership style. However, by uncovering the existing power relations between men and women, we were also able to present how the subsidiary BM Steel broke the BM norm. In this chapter, we relate our empirical findings to the theoretical grounding, which we have discussed in chapter three. Therefore, we will engage in the existing literature, presented in our literature review. Especially, we will relate our findings to the metaphor the glass ceiling, the horizontal segregation and the metaphor of the glass slipper.

As a reminder, the purpose of this study was to provide insights on how organizational norms maintain gender inequalities within masculine organizations. In addition, we aimed at providing in-depth insights into how employees understand gender inequalities existing within the context of BM Construction Group in order to gain insights into what is hindering the inclusion of women within male-dominated organizations like BM Construction Group. Within this discussion, we will now elaborate on our findings, explaining how we have fulfilled the purpose of our study.

We divided the discussion into three sections. In the first section, we will reflect upon the existence of glass ceiling within BM Construction Group. In the second section, we discuss how the existing norm is maintained, and how occupational identities remain fix.

Further, we will show how the strong BM norm hinders the change of the glass slipper. In the third section, we will on the basis of the case of BM Steel illustrate how a different type of leadership breaks the norm, and enables the occupational identity to change. In particular, we will debate about the interdependency of organisational culture and occupational identity.

7.1 The Glass Ceiling at BM Construction Group

To recall, in the literature review, we have explained that the metaphor of the glass ceiling seems to be outworn and too narrow for describing the prevailing situations within Swedish organizations. In our findings, however, we have shown that the glass ceiling is still adequate for describing the situation at BM Construction Group. The most obvious evidence proving that the glass ceiling still seems to be an adequate metaphor in the case of BM Construction Group is the absence of women among the senior executives within the company. Moreover, our interpretation of the empirical material has shown the embedded values, beliefs and norms of the organization that seem to reinforce the preservation of the glass ceiling. For instance, we interpreted that the top management, who has a significant influence on the group, does not believe that women would add value to the business. This links to the principle of male primacy, which we have identified in the literature review as the one of the underlying principles of the glass ceiling. Although ample scholars agreed that this principle of male primacy has diminished (Wharton, 2011; Charles & Grusky, 2006; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Baxter & Wright, 2000), it seems that in the case of BM Construction Group it is still existing, at least among the top management. Hence, it seems that at least in traditional, conservative and family owned business within industries, like the construction industry, the principle of male primacy can still exist. Thus, it should not be neglected as a reason for gender inequalities, as in the case of BM Construction Group, where the belief of male primacy has significant impact on the maintenance of the glass ceiling. However, it is important to note that many interviewees stated that this belief in male primacy is a question of generation. Therefore, we interpret these results with caution as mainly the senior management team believes in male primacy. The belief of male primacy, however, is not the only reason why gender inequalities persist within the organization.

Besides the belief in male primacy, many interviewees stated that they believe that men and women excel in different things. As a consequence, occupations within BM Construction Group seemed to be either typical men (operational functions) or typical female (support functions) whereas the operational functions seem to be privileged to support functions within the organization. These results corroborate the widely supported idea of gender essentialism as a reason for discrimination of women (Wharton, 2011; Charles & Bradley, 2009; Charles & Grusky, 2006;).

Although most of the interviewees seemed to agree with the notion of gender essentialism, we think it is also important to highlight that Erik and Susan seemed to counteract the horizontal segregation by antagonizing gender stereotypes. We will further elaborate on this finding towards the end of our discussion. However, for now, we would just like to highlight that within this study not all of the interviewees support the idea of horizontal segregation. So, in contrast to earlier findings, which suggested that gender essentialism is often overlooked (Wharton, 2011; Charles & Grusky, 2006), we found in our current study that at least two of the interviews recognized gender essentialism as a reason for inequalities. In brief, we pointed out in this section that our findings explaining the emergence of gender inequalities are broadly consistent with the explanations identified in the literature review. We further acknowledged that the principle of male primacy still exists. However, we have also detected a tendency that this is likely to change with the generation shift. Further, some interviewees believe that women and men excel in different things, and therefore, are good in different occupations. Our most interesting finding is, however, the approach of Susan and Erik, who counteract the stereotypes corroborating gender essentialism. In the following, we will further elaborate on these finding by discussing the leadership of Erik and how that challenged the BM norm. Further, we will elaborate on the argument that the strong BM norm hinders the change of the occupational identity, however, Erik's leadership legitimized the change, and consequently it changed.

7.2 Cinderella's Glass Slipper at BM Construction Group

Within the previous section, we discussed the prevailing male primacy and gender essentialism at BM Construction Group. We acknowledged that this creates power relations between men and women, which in turn remains the glass ceiling in the organization. At this stage, we would like to recall Ashcraft's (2013) study on the glass slipper. Her study made a major contribution to the discussion on sex segregation within organizations by developing the glass slipper metaphor as a tool for understanding the development of gender inequalities. In particular, she emphasized that occupational identities not only influence the identities of the employees, but also derive identity from the respective employee. In short, this means occupational identities are socially constructed and can change. However, in our findings we presented that at BM Construction group gender is seen as fixed. Further, we showed that many interviewees belief that men and women excelling in different things. Our

interpretation has shown that within the organization gender is not perceived as socially constructed, but rather as embedded within the genes of men and women. As a consequence, gender typical occupations arise. Hence, we acknowledge this view as one factor sustaining the idea of viewing occupational identities as fixed within BM Construction Group.

We acknowledged Ashcraft's idea of the possibility that occupational identities can change either planned or unintentionally, therefore we questioning why occupations in BM Construction Group have not changed identities. Why do not the occupations draw identity from the personal identity of the person entering the occupation?

A first reason why the occupational identities are not changing is the norm of the leadership style. Within the findings chapter we showed that a macho² leadership style prevails at BM Construction Group. Especially, managers within BM Construction Group typically seem to comply the definition of a macho leadership style. Within our findings, we have also shown that this leadership style is seen as a norm. This norm seems to be highly relevant for recruiting processes as it is considered risky to recruit outside the norm. As a consequence, it seems that always similar persons are recruited for certain positions, which reinforces the norm. Further, it seems that occupational identities are perceived as fixed, as the BM norm enforces the preservation of these stereotypes distinguishing between men and women. Within the findings we have recognised how manager tend to hire people similar to themselves, and often do not dare to hire someone from outside the norm. This maintains the occupational segregation.

Further, we understand that the real problem in the organisation hindering the change of the occupational identities, is not the small number of women in the organisations, but the existing norm. In the fifth chapter we have analysed that women within the organisation have to be brave and tough. Thus, they are adjusting to the norm by taking on a masculine behaviour. Therefore, increasing the number of women in the organisation, would most likely not increase the acceptance of feminine behaviour.

² Macho is defined as "behaving in a way that is thought to be typical of a man, especially by seeming strong and powerful, but also seeming too determined to avoid showing weaknesses and sympathy" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.b).

However, there is still a feeling of not belonging to the masculine organisation, which further creates a power distance between the majority and the minority, in this case between men and women. We have interpreted a feeling of not belonging to the club, however, this is hard to grasp and therefore even more important to acknowledge as a reason for the prevailing power relation.

7.3 The Magic in BM Steel's Leadership

Within our findings, we pointed out that although BM Steel has historically similar values and norms to the whole group, it seems that within this company the gender inequalities are comparatively minor to the rest of the group. We interpreted that a main explanation for this difference is the leadership style of Erik, the CEO of BM Steel, which is a more non-hierarchical form of leadership. In the following, we will now discuss this finding with the theoretical grounding of the glass slipper metaphor.

In short, this section will outline an example in which occupational identities are viewed as socially constructed and thus, changeable. In the sixth chapter we have interpreted the case Erik, the CEO of BM Steel. When we interpreted Erik's leadership style, we defined it as non-hierarchical and mediating. Further, we explained that he seems to be not afraid of showing weakness (e.g. by making a mistake), which is different from the prevailing leadership norm at BM Construction Group. As a consequence, he changed the occupational identity, of being a manager within BM Steel. For instance, instead of giving proper instructions, he is empowering his employees. So, this example of Erik confirms Ashcraft's (2013) notion of socially constructed occupational identities. However, we have mentioned before that occupations among the majority of interviewees seemed to be considered as fixed. Thus, it can therefore be assumed that within organizations, like BM Construction Group, the awareness of the convertibility of occupational identities might need to be raised.

Admittedly, so far we have not talked about gender inequalities. So, one might now wonder: How does Erik changing the occupational identity relates to our research aim of providing insight on gender inequalities existing within organisational cultures, in order to break the norm excluding others? In order to answer this question, we will in the following discuss our empirical findings on Erik's leadership style against the metaphor of the glass slipper. In our findings, we discussed that the case of BM Steel.

Erik, the CEO of BM Steel, seems to be aware of the gender inequalities prevailing within BM Steel. In the following, we will discuss this finding with Ashcraft's metaphor of the glass slipper, and will thereby show the limitations of Ashcraft's metaphor in the context of the BM norm.

Our findings showed that Erik acknowledged the prevailing norm in the organization. Further, he seems to be aware of the inequalities for women that arise because of this norm, and thus seems to understand that it is necessary to change the occupational identity in order to reach his goal of reducing inequalities in order to attract and retain talents. Thus, his awareness is in line with Ashcraft's (2013) glass slipper metaphor, which illustrates that an occupation is often designed to only fit the best candidate. We believe that the example of how he changed the occupation of his HR-Manager from a support function to an operational function is confirming Ashcraft's notion of how occupations can be changed.

However, this also highlights a limitation of Ashcraft's metaphor. Ashcraft argues that occupational identities can change, for they derive identity from the particular worker. In the particular example of Susan, the HR manager at BM Steel, has been working in this position for nine years already. Our interpretations have shown, that she was about to leave the company, for the norms and values embedded in the organizational culture devalued her position. It was not until Erik enforced her position within the company, that she decided to stay. According to Ashcraft's (2013) metaphor, the occupation has changed as it derives its identity from Susan. Hence, this alone seems not to decrease gender equalities. It seems that also Erik, as CEO, had to reinforce this new identity, so that it is accepted within the culture. He was the first one to put women in operational management position. He did not only empower the HR manager, he additionally made effort to find women as candidates for the position as supply chain manager. As Ashcraft (2013) mentions, the change of occupational identity could be either planned or occurring unintentionally. We interpret a planned effort to change the occupational identity, in Erik's case, with an aim of reducing inequalities in order to gain the best talents and additionally create more equal opportunity for the others. Thus, it seems that changing the identity of an occupation within an organization like BM Construction Group, cannot happen without the support of a leading person, like the CEO. Therefore, we acknowledge a limitation with the assumption that occupational identity

drives identity from the personal identity as proposed by Ashcraft, within BM Construction Group. A possible explanation for this might be that the norms and values that are strongly embedded within the organizational culture, seem to remain the norm in the organization. The previous mentioned male primacy together with the existing glass ceiling, is creating unnecessary hard conditions for women to enter higher positions.

So, combining our finding from the beginning of this chapter with our last finding, we explain how Erik's leadership broke the BM norm and changed the occupational identity of the HR manager. At the beginning of this section, we have explained how Erik changed the identity of being a typical CEO within BM Construction Group by having a leadership style, which is outside the norm. However, it is important to note that besides his leadership style, he fulfils the BM norm. This means his outside appearance, being a white, Swedish men around 50, fits the BM norm. Therefore, he is appreciated and accepted within the organization, even though he has a leadership style that challenges the BM leadership style. Billing (2011) offers a possible explanation for this acceptance: if you are of the same gender, you will share more during social gatherings at which important relations between colleagues are developed (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Therefore, we argue, by being a man you are in the club and this legitimize a different leadership. In the particular case of Erik, we think by being a white, Swedish men around 50 is visual appearance met the norm. Thus, he is "included" in the club. Although his leadership style is different from the norm, we believe that within the organization it was accepted as he is in the norm, which legitimizes his behaviour. Admittedly, it is not the case that he did not meet any resistance in the organization while making these changes to the norm, however, as we have outlined in the findings this resistance only lasted a short time. Thus, we believe by meeting the BM norm visually, the scepticism within the organization was lower towards him than it would have been in the case of someone initiating these changes, who would not fit the norm. Further, a reasons for the acceptance in the organisation, we believe is the understanding the Board in BM Steel had of the need of new competence to the company. This understanding allowed the HR to hire a person, that dares to challenge the existing norm. However, they did not go to far in including the others in the organisation. The new CEO, Erik still had the visual appearance of fitting then norm, which we believed was another reason for legitimacy

among managers in the organisation. We further, combined this with the timing of the perception in society influencing the organisation.

Also, we have shown in our findings that some people within BM Construction Group have prejudices against women, for instance, because they are afraid of losing power. However, he as a man within the norm, we believe, is most likely not to be exposed to those prejudices compared to if a woman would take the position. Now, with regards to our previous finding, which indicated that in order to decrease gender inequalities, it is not only enough to change the occupational identity, but also this seems to be enforced by a manager in order to increase the acceptance of it within the organization. Thus, we believe that our findings show that in order to reduce gender inequalities by breaking the norm within a conservative organization, like BM Construction Group, it may be necessary to first hire a person, which is following the norm from the outside, to be breaking the norm.

This is highlighting a way of initiating a change towards breaking the norm, by giving resources and mandate to a person following the norm from the outside. An important presumption for the change agent is to understand occupational identities as socially constructed, and rejects the idea of gender essentialism. Further, change agent needs to have a provoking mentality to put women in operational management positions. We additionally acknowledge the process that breaking the norm and changing occupational identities includes. Even if this thesis does not emphasize the change process we see this contribution as a first step for BM Construction Group to break the norm and towards having women in leading strategic and operational positions. With this said, we will not make a general contribution and avoid to say this would work in every context. However, we would like to raise awareness of the positive effect the new CEO has on BM Steel and their mind-set.

7.4 Reflections

To summarize, in the first subsection of the discussion chapter we showed that our findings seem for the most part confirm the literature discussed in the review. We recognise a prevailing glass ceiling within BM Construction Group based on the principle of male primacy. Together with a tendency to change with the generation shift.

Further we discussed Ashcraft's (2013) metaphor of the glass slipper. By elaborating on the view of occupational identity as socially constructed and the reason why personal identities are not changing the occupational identities within BM Construction Group. In the following, we will now discuss the interdependence of our findings. To recall, Ashcraft (2013) introduced in her article the glass slipper metaphor, which is based on the assumption that occupational identities are socially constructed. Thus, inequalities arise from an interdependence of the occupational identity and the worker's identity. Previous studies, for instance Charles' and Grusky's (2006) study on horizontal and vertical segregation or the metaphor of the glass ceiling, failed to acknowledge this interdependency. Ashcraft (2013), however, also stated that she does not reject those studies. Instead she explained that her findings are adding an additional view on the discussion. We believe, that within our discussion we have shown that all these different views on gender inequalities are interrelated. For instance, we explained how occupational identities can be changed within BM Construction Group.

For example, we have presented the case of Erik, who changed the identity of the CEO from a macho, authoritarian leader towards a more mediating leader. In this case, we believe that the identity of being a CEO changed, for it derived its identity from Erik's identity. However, we also highlighted the limitations of this interdependent relationship between a worker's identity and the occupational identity. In the case of Susan, we also assumed that her identity changed the identity of the HR-Manager. However, it seems as it was not until Erik's reinforcement of Susan's role that this identity change was fulfilled. Before, the beliefs of gender essentialism and male primacy that are embedded within the organizational culture hindered the change of the occupational identity. In brief, this example showed that the change of the occupational identity is highly related to the norms prevailing within an organizational culture. In other words,

without acknowledging the influence of norms distinguishing between the ideal worker and the others, it seems unnecessarily hard to change occupational identities. As a consequence, instead of seeing the different studies as separate reasons for inequalities, we think it is important to acknowledge their interdependency.

However, our analysis has shown that the problem of gender inequalities arises from power relations between occupational identities. As we think, the real problem in the case of BM Construction Group is not that there are no women in leading positions, but that the existing norm, created by the organisational culture, does not include the others. In other words, the norm and values embedded in the organizational culture must be changed simultaneously with empowerment of women, in order to increase the inclusion of woman. Our study has shown that this cultural change could be completed by a man, who fits the norm visually and is accepted by the majority. However, has a different leadership, that will acknowledge the existing norm excluding women from operational occupations. Further, we recognized that in order to break the norm it is important that the person initiating the break is appreciated within in the organization, so that his actions are considered legitimate. At the case of BM Construction Group this person was a man, who fit at least visually the norm. We, further believe that in this specific case and within this macho culture a woman would probably not be shown the same appreciation. We have shown in the narratives that people respond with scepticism and resistance to new things, especially if they are initiated by people outside the norm. Thus, if a woman would attempt to change a norm in a way Erik did, we assume that she would meet more resistance, and thus it would be harder to change it.

Further, we recognise the importance to visually fit the norm to be able to gain the legitimacy to break the norm and the organisational culture. With this said, we believe breaking the norm is a process and that the next leader could be a woman with a leadership following the norm in the new era.

8 Conclusion

In this last chapter of our thesis, we will conclude our research by presenting how we fulfilled our research purpose. In addition, we will sum up the findings of our thesis. Afterwards, we will elaborate on the theoretical contributions of our study. At last, we will present the limitations of our findings, and will give suggestions for future research.

8.1 Summary

The purpose of this study is to provide in-depth insights on how organizational norms maintain gender inequalities within masculine organizations. Within an interpretative study, we collected data by conducting 13 in-depth interviews with employees working at BM Construction Group. These employees provided insights on how they understand gender inequalities, and thus provided the empirical material needed in order to fulfil the purpose of this study by answering the following research questions:

How do employees of BM Construction group perceive gender inequalities?

We answered our research question by elaborating on narratives collected in the interviews. Within these narratives, we found that often women are unintentionally discriminated within the organization, which leads to a feeling of exclusion. Further, we identified that the root cause for this inequalities lies in the norms and values embedded in the organizational culture. First of all, a strong norm describing the ideal worker prevails at BM Construction Group. The interviewees described that within the BM norm “white, Swedish, men, around 50” are included. In addition to the visible criteria determining who is in the norm, we also found out that only one type of leadership is appreciated within the organization. Both of these norms are enforced through the prevailing culture in the organization, which we described as inflexible and macho. Against the background of these values and norms at BM Construction Group, we reached the main finding of our thesis.

Ashcraft (2013) argues that an occupational identity is socially constructed, and thus derives identity from the worker. Hence, occupational identities can change. The main finding of this thesis is the insight that occupational identities are hindered to change by the strong norm prevailing in the organizational culture of BM Construction Group. Therefore, we acknowledge an interdependence between the norms prevailing in the

organizational culture and the convertibility of occupational identities. This finding highlights an interconnection that has been downplayed in earlier studies (e.g. Ahscraft, 2013; Charles & Grusky, 2006). In addition, this study has demonstrated a potential way of how to break these norms, and thus enable the change of occupational identities. An important presumption for breaking the norm is that the “breaker” fits visually to the norm, so that he is accepted within the organization and part of the group. Our analysis has also shown that the norm and values embedded in the organizational culture must be changed simultaneously with empowerment of women, in order to increase the inclusion of women. In the case of BM Construction Group this person was a white, Swedish man, who fit visually the norm. Thus, this our theoretical contribution of practical relevance. This is a new insight within the the gender inequality literature (Charles & Grusky, 2006; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Wharton, 2011) and therefore of interest for future research.

In addition, we also realized that the glass ceiling is still prevailing at BM Construction Group, however, employees believe that it only a matter of a generation shift until the underlying believe of male primacy vanishes. These results concur with other studies that show that the glass ceiling is not prevailing within the Swedish society anymore (Baxter & Wright, 2000). Further, we agree with Prokos and Padavic (2005) that within the organization there are “cumulative disadvantages” (p.526), which make it unnecessary hard for women to reach executive positions.

Further, we believe that the unintended discrimination and inequalities resulting form horizontal segregation is often downplayed in literature. However, with our study have been able to give vital inside in the discussion of how power relations between gender are constructed within a male-dominated industry.

8.2 Limitations of the Study

The study has, as all research, a number of limitations. We have explained that one of our aims throughout the research process was to stay self-reflective, which also includes reflecting on the limitations of our research. The first limitation of this thesis is that we have only used the terms of men and women, which implies a notion of stereotyping. We acknowledge that gender is not black or white, however, we have understood throughout the research the importance of acknowledging these stereotypes in order to be able to change them. Therefore, we have categorised the gender, but also emphasize the spectrum of differentiations that occur within gender. Second, we acknowledge our time limit. Within the short time frame of 10 weeks, we did not have the possibility to do a second round of interviews for asking follow-up questions. Third, even though we assured every interviewee before the interview that we will treat the collected data confidentially, we realized that the interviews still felt uncomfortable providing insight into certain topics. Further, we afterwards understood how some of the interviewees directed the interview, in a for them, beneficial way. For instance, one interviewee always switched the topic as soon as we asked him how he actively encourages diversity. Last, we do not attempt to give a contribution that can be generalizable to other organisations, in other context or to the same industry. We acknowledge the specific timing for the break of the norm. Both with consideration to the personality, the mind-set in the society and the company's need for something different. Therefore, we limit ourselves to giving insight to the discussion of gender inequalities with one specific example.

However, these findings can contribute considerably to the development of insight and understanding of gender inequalities, power relations and how occupational identities and organisational culture is interconnected. Further these finding gives insight to the development and evaluation of practical implementations for organisations, of how to break a prevailing norm.

8.3 Future Research Opportunities

Our research has provided insights on how a strong norm within a masculine organization hinders the change of occupational identities. As a consequence, power relations causing gender inequalities are maintained. The case of BM Steel has shown that a man, who fit that norm visually, was able to change the existing power relation, by having a less hierarchic leadership style compared to the prevailing macho leadership style within the organization. For future research, we think it would be interesting to investigate whether this phenomenon can also be identified in a different context. For instance, conducting a study within a typical feminine organization could be of interest. Further, we think it could be of interest to study the same phenomenon in one of the other subsidiaries of BM Construction Group in order to identify whether similar results could be generated there. At last, we think it would be interesting to do a follow-up study in BM Steel, and see whether the existing power realities can be further reduced.

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Appendix

Appendix A: List of Interviewees

Name	Occupation	Company
Anna	HR-Manager	BM Construction Group
Samuel	Operational Manager	BM Construction Group
Frederika	HR-Manager	BM Construction Group
Olof	CEO	BM Construction Group
Rebecka	Sustainability Manager	BM Construction Group
Frida	Sustainability Manager	BM Construction Group
Andreas	Operational Manager	BM Construction Group
Marit	HR-Manager	BM Construction Group
Eva	Sustainability Manager	BM Construction Group
Erik	CEO	BM Steel
Edward	HR-Manager	BM Construction Group
Susan	HR-Manager	BM Steel
Karin	Sustainability Manager	BM Construction Group