



LUND UNIVERSITY
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Mixed Messages in a Gender Diversity Initiative

by

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May 2017

Master's Programme in Managing People, Knowledge and Change

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Abstract

This thesis explores how the workforce perceives and responds to gender diversity initiatives. While it is easy for companies to start talking about gender diversity and initiate different campaigns, it becomes challenging or even difficult to implement them in practice. In male-dominated industries gender diversity initiatives are facing different challenges and the progress remains slow. Our case highlights possible reasons for this: contrasting opinions challenge the initiative, an unclear approach for the implementation of theoretical concepts confuses the workforce as well as an unclear communication that leads to responses and could cause resistance. Our aim for this research is first to critically develop the theoretical and practical approaches to diversity initiatives and second to address the role of communication in diversity initiatives.

Keywords: Diversity, Diversity Management, Gender Diversity Initiatives, Equal Opportunities, Communication, Resistance.

Acknowledgement

A big thank you goes to our supervisor Charlotta for providing us with guidance and feedback.

Also, we are grateful for our amazing families' unconditional love and encouragement!

Many thanks to our awesome friends at Delphi Corridor C1 right, for the food, the dancing and cheering us up, we would not have survived without you!

Finally, we would like to thank all the interviewees and our HR contacts for giving us this opportunity and their time to conduct this study.

Lund, Sweden 19.05.2017 Sara M. E. Galaleldin & Lisa Kunz

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

We fundamentally believe that we will make better business decisions if we have diversity in thinking ... and that requires equal gender participation (Jonas Prising, 2016 in World Economic Forum, 2017).

This statement from the chairman and CEO of ManpowerGroup, emphasizes how gender diversity has become important for businesses nowadays. Companies work with gender diversity in widely varying ways and implement gender diversity initiatives for different reasons. For example, legislative requirements can force companies to work on the improvement of women's representation in the workforce, as well as in higher managerial positions. Also, companies start campaigns voluntarily in order to improve their business performance or attract a wider talented workforce. However, the idea of diversity campaigns might sound easier than the practical implementation of them. In industries that are traditionally male-dominated such as the technology industry, companies face higher pressure to diversify their workforce. Therefore, it is no surprise to see various companies striving for more equality within their workforce to reach competitive advantages (Cox & Blake; 1991, Richard, 2000).

Researchers such as Foster and Harris (2005) indicate how the interpretation of the term diversity could influence the approaches of individuals to initiatives. They argue that managing diversity is complex and therefore can imply different things to different people. Their findings highlight that managing and implementing diversity initiatives create tension and fear of discrimination against others. Another study focused on the implementation of diversity initiatives, for example, Caven, Navarro-Astor, and Diop (2016) carried out a study on gender diversity initiatives with the focus on women in the architecture sector. The study showed that women did not particularly receive initiatives positively while men remain neutral. Nonetheless, other scholars such as Dass and Parker (1999) argue that there is not only one way to manage diversity but that there are different ways depending on the organization's commitment to diversity and the type of diversity the organization strives to attract. They also argue that the managerial approach influences diversity management.

The success and failure in implementing diversity initiatives might be influenced by various factors and challenges (Wentling, 2004). Scholars such as Windscheid, Bowes-Sperry, Mazei and Morner (2015) have a similar perspective on this issue and state that diversity initiatives remain challenging. Explanations for this can be the contradicting approaches to managing diversity, which can lead to resistance or confusion (Dass & Parker, 1999). A closely linked aspect to this could be the perceptions and stereotypes that are shaped by the industry and seen by different people. For instance, Grogan (2016) claims that within the technology industry gender diversity needs to be discussed continuously in order to explain how women will contribute to the working environment.

While diversity initiatives in these industries appear as a reasonable step to take, the impact of such initiatives remain unclear and involve many challenges. One of these difficulties are the perceptions of the workforce towards gender diversity campaigns (Foster & Harris, 2005). As these opinions can be quite different, it becomes interesting to study the understanding and responses of the workforce in such industries. This kind of research might help to understand from the beginning how perceptions might influence the implementation and outcomes of driven diversity campaigns. Therefore, we carried out a study on a multinational company in the technology industry, which we will refer to as Techworks. The company's headquarter is based in Gothenburg, Sweden with further locations around Europe, Asia, and South America. Techworks started a gender diversity initiative, which was at the time of our research recently launched and the first campaign initiated on a bigger scale to address gender diversity within the organization.

1.2 Research Purpose and Question

Our aim for this research was to analyze a top-down gender diversity initiative through understanding the perceptions and responses of employees in an organizational setting. Thus, we studied the responses of individuals and further complexities that existed within the understanding of the initiative. Our research was guided by the following questions:

1. How did individuals at Techworks understand and respond to the gender diversity initiative?
 - a. How was the concept of diversity management approached within Techworks?
 - b. How did different hierarchical levels at the organization perceive and respond to the initiative?

2. What factors influenced the understanding and responses of Techworks' staff?

1.3 Research Outline

Our thesis is structured as follows:

The literature and theoretical review will be addressed in chapter two. First, we will outline the definitions of central concepts we worked with in this study, such as diversity, diversity management, and diversity management initiatives. Then, we will give an overview of the topics of equal opportunity and diversity management with a brief discussion of the business case and social justice case for diversity. The chapter concludes with Cox's (1991) different types of organizational diversity stages, which presents various types of organizations. We move forward to describe how a change in organizations can be communicated and finally describe the different levels of perceptions based on the Bennett scale, which we will use as the basis for our study.

In Chapter three the methodology will be presented. This includes an explanation of the qualitative approach that we used in our research. The data collection focuses on our idea to work with primary sources such as semi-structured interviews in different variations. We conducted interviewees face-to-face, on Skype as well as in groups and individually. The data analysis will outline how we worked with the collected data and will give an idea of our process and research techniques. Finally, some points about the validity and reliability of our study will be presented, whereby we include the limitations of our work.

The empirical data will be reviewed in chapter four in an in-depth analysis. We first give an overview of the company's background. Subsequently, the perceptions of the organizational staff will be analyzed in a broader review of the Swedish perspective first followed by a comparison between the Swedish and British viewpoints divided into the different hierarchy levels. Then we will present our main topic of complexities that influenced the diversity initiative: the paradoxes of diversity initiatives, the mixture of the equal opportunities and diversity management approach and lastly, we examine the confusion in communication within Techworks.

In chapter five we will discuss the main points that came up in our analysis. First, it includes our analysis recap. Second our interpretations of the responses of the workforce will be presented and include a discussion of the paradoxes in diversity management. Third, the topics of equal opportunities and diversity management will be examined, and tension

between the two concepts in practice will be debated. Finally, the uncertainty and confusion about the implementation approaches for the diversity initiative will be illustrated.

Lastly, we will summarize our analysis and discussion by presenting our conclusions in chapter six. This will include a brief study recap followed by our main findings, which will mention the contradicted approaches of equal opportunities and diversity management for diversity initiatives. We will also discuss the confusing messages communicated by the top management in our study, which led to confusion among employees and caused tensions resistance. Subsequently, we will explain how our study contributes to the theoretical and practical literature and finally we will present suggestions for further research studies.

2 Literature and Theoretical Review

2.1 Diversity and Diversity Management Definitions

Diversity and diversity management as concepts have been defined by several authors in the last few decades and have been talked about largely by business schools, organizations, and media. The understanding and thinking of diversity revolves around something different and not homogenous and includes aspects of ethnicity, gender, ages, experiences, abilities, etc. Diversity is defined as “the variation of social and cultural identities among people existing together in a defined employment or market setting” (Cox, 2001, p.3). The concept of diversity management refers to “the voluntary organizational actions that are designed to create greater inclusion of employees from various backgrounds into the formal and informal organizational structures through deliberate policies and programs” (Mor Barak, 2005, p. 208). For the purpose of our study of a diversity initiative, we will use this definition, which seems to fit our topic.

2.2 From Equal Opportunity to Diversity Management

To understand what drives companies to do diversity initiatives and its goals, we have to understand the explanations for the emergence of diversity management. The demographic trends are an essential aspect of the progression of workforce diversity (Mor Barak, 2005). The changes in demographics such as increasing population and immigrants have led to more diverse environments, where it became essential for organizations to adapt and manage the changes. Historically in the United States and the United Kingdom, the social policies that aimed at promoting equal opportunities for social minorities contributed to the emergence of managing diversity as a concept (Basset-Jones, 2005). For instance, In the United States, these policies moved towards a form of affirmative action (Basset-Jones, 2005). Affirmative action policies are mainly concerned with economic ethos and social justice (Mor Barak, 2005). The logic behind affirmative action lies in correcting past discrimination by giving priority in employment and promotion to groups that have been discriminated against in the past (Mor Barak, 2005). These policies also focus on improving the representation of traditionally disadvantaged groups in well paid, managerial and leadership roles. Discussions on diversity management often revolve around the social justice case and business case for diversity. The social justice case argues that humans are not treated equally and therefore aims to resolve discrimination practices, by indicating the need for modification in organizations and society to become fairer (Coleman & Glover, 2010). Approaches that focus on fairness

and equality, can be illustrated in equal opportunities which deals with the moral and ethical aspects to improve opportunities for disadvantaged groups by treating everyone the same (Leopold & Harris, 2009).

A critique of the traditional view of equal opportunities provided by Wilson and Iles (1999), is that it is based on the promotion of sameness, underlying differences, and diversity in a negative light. Whereas, managing diversity as a term recognizes and values individuals' differences (Leopold & Harris, 2009). Thus, the business case for diversity, which emerged in the late 1980s, argues that the marginalization of ethnic minorities or women from the workplace is no longer financially rewarding (Kalonaityte, 2010).

One notable difference between equal opportunity and managing diversity is the defining driver for change (Wilson & Iles, 1999). The change motive for equal opportunity is typically external with a broader concern for equality between individuals and grounded on ethical arguments. On the other hand, managing diversity is motivated internally by the organization and its key figures, and it is grounded on the business case, which suggests that a diversified workforce will improve the profitability. Cox and Blake (1991) suggest that companies that are capable of attracting and retaining individuals from different cultural backgrounds could have competitive advantages such as creativity, problem-solving and cost reduction by retaining highly skilled and qualified staff. This was also suggested by Richard (2000), who mentions that cultural diversity adds value and could contribute to a company's competitiveness within the right context. Even though diversity has shifted beyond fairness and equal opportunities, the general perceptions of diversity continue to overlook the possible conflicts within a diverse workforce that could undermine economic results (Prasad, Mills, Elmes & Prasad, 1997). For instance, scholars that have studied conflicts within diversity were Tsui, Egan, and O'Reily (1992). They suggest that individuals who were different in gender than other group members were less connected to the organizations and less motivated to stay. Ely (1994) also found that women in junior positions in male-dominated firms were less likely to bond with women and perceive them negatively in higher levels, whereas it was easier for them to connect and find support from women in senior positions in sex integrated firms. Thus, as Miliken and Martins (1996) suggest, diversity seems to be a double-edged sword; on the one hand it provides opportunities for creativity, on the other hand, it could cause troubles such as the feelings of discontent and dis-identification among team members.

Therefore, they argue that diversified groups in organizations impact the end results such as higher turnover of employees than homogenous groups.

Today, large companies operate within a global context, which implicates for them the need to adjust to the cultural and social differences as well as utilize those differences and diversity to achieve maximum results and higher organizational performance. Thus, nowadays it is not surprising to see various private and public organizations, which are initiating diversity campaigns for different kind of reasons, ethically and morally as well as for organizational profitability and performance.

2.3 Diversity Management Initiatives

Arredondo (1996) defines diversity management initiatives as specific methods, which are cohesive, multifaceted and deal with “organizational culture, systems, policies, practices and people” (p. 28). She suggests that successful diversity initiatives are founded on a vision, ongoing leadership aligned with an organization’s culture and appreciation of individuals, for instance by encouraging their learning process. This opinion was supported by Wentling’s (2004) study on multinational companies which suggested that integrating diversity programs into a company’s strategy and culture, supported by the top management could act as success factors for initiatives. On the other hand, she mentions that individuals’ unawareness of diversity’s values serves as a barrier for initiatives. Nonetheless, managing diversity initiatives continues to be problematic (Windscheid, Bowes-Sperry, Mazei & Morner, 2015). Windscheid et al. (2015) offer a critical view and argue that working with gender diversity initiatives often involves a paradox. The paradox implies that when companies start gender diversity initiatives in an attempt to increase the number of women in their businesses, these initiatives are likely to be perceived negatively by women and men because of the moral and ethical concerns related to fairness and equal opportunities. Furthermore, Heilman, Block, and Lucas (1992) suggest that affirmative action policies are linked negatively with incompetence. They argue that employees, who were chosen, based on these policies, are more likely to be perceived as less competent because of the involvement of affirmative action in the hiring process. Gilbert and Stead (1999) also point out that women in these situations experience less job satisfaction and a higher level of stress. Moreover, the study by Windscheid et al. (2015) mention that men might be concerned with their possible disadvantaged position within these initiatives for example that they might see the gender initiative as a threat to their current jobs. The findings of Caven, Navarro-Astor, and Diop (2016) in their study of women

architects in different countries followed the same critical outlook. It suggests that gender diversity initiatives are discouraging females more than encouraging them because either women do not have the time to take part in them or they try to avoid being classified as activists. They also argue that these kinds of initiatives tend to focus solely on women and exclude the men who are dominating and influencing the industry.

According to Wentling and Palma-Rivas (2000), organizations were found to plan diversity initiatives on two levels. First, a macro level which includes top executives and diversity units, and second, a micro level that involves business unit managers who implement the initiatives with the help of diversity departments, councils, and internal consultants. The study found that the planning structure for diversity was very attractive for the business unit managers because it gives them the flexibility to adjust according to their needs and at the same time guide them to the company's objectives. In that sense, understanding the roles of each level and expectations seems to be relevant to manage diversity initiatives internally within organisations. However, Foster and Harris (2005) suggest that managing diversity is often influenced by how individuals perceive and respond to diversity initiatives. Other researchers such as De Meuse and Hostager (2001) developed a framework to measure the perceptions by dividing them into positive and negative categories to find out if the responses of affected people are mostly negative or positive towards diversity campaigns.

Other studies focus more on the approach companies take to handle diversity. For instance, Windscheid, Bowes-Sperry, Jonsen, and Morner (2016a) and Windscheid, Bowes-Sperry, Kidder, Cheung, Morner, and Lievens (2016b) expound that companies with a low level of diversity are confronted with the dilemma of either a truthful or untruthful communication. An honest communication might attract fewer women to the company because they might believe that it will not offer much to them, while a dishonest communication may decrease the moral legitimacy of the company by hurting its image and credibility (Windscheid et al., 2016a). Hence, Windscheid et al. (2016a) and Windscheid et al. (2016b) suggest more honesty regarding the company's status on diversity through explanations of the reasons. Additionally, they mention that companies should be clear on the actions that are taken to improve and support diversity.

Although studies on diversity initiatives indicate a rising trend within companies and governmental bodies worldwide, their findings suggest that the progress remains slow. For instance, Caven, Navarro-Astor & Diop (2016) study showed that women continue to be

underrepresented in particular industries, such as architecture. More studies are needed to explore how diversity initiatives can influence the gender imbalance in organizations. Therefore, our study is important, since it focuses on how individuals understand and respond to a new gender diversity initiative.

2.4 Diversity and Stages of Organizations

Cox (1991) suggests three types of organizations in relation to the stage of diversity: the monolithic, plural and multicultural organization. First, the monolithic organization is typically homogenous concerning culture and demographics, and in this kind of organization, the level of conflict is considered to be low because individuals have one culture and are alike. For instance, a typical monolithic organization in the United States features mainly white male employees as the majority in overall workforce population with few minorities in managerial positions.

Second, the plural organization's workforce is heterogeneous, and in this kind of organization, minorities are represented in higher numbers but still symbolize a small percentage of management positions. Additionally, the plural organization takes steps to provide equality and inclusion in the workplace for people from different backgrounds than the dominant workforce. This often includes using policies for hiring and promoting minorities, and in that sense, the plural organization achieves more structural integration than the monolithic organization. While this type of organization reaches a level of integration, it continues to adopt an approach of acculturation that is characteristically found in the monolithic organization. Thus, the plural organization fails to address cultural aspects of integration.

Third, the multicultural organization is considered as the ideal type in which all individuals from all backgrounds can contribute with their full potential, in which "the value in diversity" is achieved (Cox, 1991, p.47). In developing and creating organizations into multicultural ones, Cox (1991) suggests various tools to accomplish this, for example, training programs for managing diversity, orientation programs for new employees, promoting minorities at all levels of organizations, and the inclusion of diversity in the statements of the mission and strategy.

These types of organizations provide a comprehensive overview of how companies are constructed regarding diversity. It could be a useful tool to understand how organizations that

are initiating and striving for change, transform from one type to another. Thus, it will be relevant in our study of an organization that aims to influence diversity in the workforce. In preparing for the new initiative, another important topic to consider is how the change will be communicated to the intended audience whether internally or externally.

2.5 Communicating Change

Communication often plays a major role in organizational change, such as introducing new processes, business strategies, and organizational culture. It includes the transfer of data and meaning (Palmer, Dunford & Buchanan, 2017). In new initiatives, communication takes an important role in releasing information internally to the organization's employees and to the external environment to clarify the reasons and the aim of the initiatives.

Figure 1 describes the main components of communication: the transmitter, receiver, message, channel, feedback, perceptual filters and noise (Shannon & Weaver, 1949, cited in Palmer, Dunford & Buchanan, 2017). The transmitter is someone who wants to express a message. This person is responsible for the construction and coding of a message. Then this message is sent through a channel to the receiver, who gets the message and is in charge of decoding it. The success of the communication relies on the receiver's understanding of the language and implicated meanings. In that sense, the transmitter needs to ensure that the receiver understood the intended message by getting feedback from him/her. Other factors such as perceptual filters and noise might affect the communication process. Perceptual filters may involve a person's readiness to hear or not hear particular kind of information, while the noise refers to anything that could interfere with a communication signal such as personal filters, coding, and decoding problems and errors (Palmer, Dunford & Buchanan, 2017).

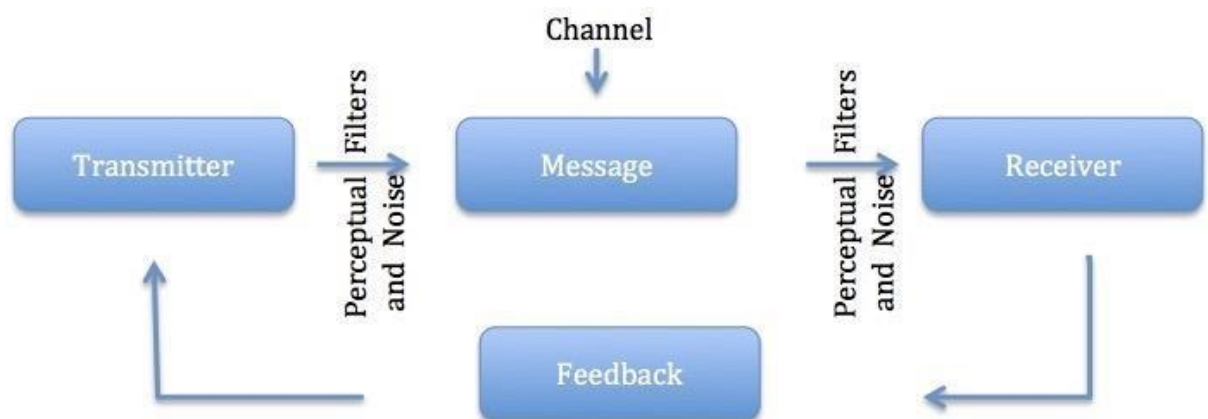


Figure 1: Communication Model

When organizations communicate significant changes internally as well as externally, it is often influenced by how individuals perceive information. These perceptions might differ from one person to another considering that people have different backgrounds, gender, experience, etc. The context in which change is communicated whether physical, social or cultural is significant because, for instance, when organizational staff are spread in different locations and not concentrated in one place, sharing and comparing perspectives between them becomes challenging (Palmer, Dunford & Buchanan, 2017).

In addition to the communication process, it is significant to understand how individuals perceive information and messages. This will be explored in more detail in the next section.

2.6 Bennett Scale

Milton J. Bennett (1986) has developed a theoretical model that targets to understand the reactions of people in certain situations. In his work on the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS), he focused on the categorization of people's responses when they are confronted with another culture than their own and cultural differences. The DMIS or Bennett scale identifies six possible steps in an individual's development from denial to integration and tries to give explanations of why various people react differently in the same situation. Even though Bennett used this scale to analyze responses of people in an intercultural context, we believe that his model may also suit our study for the understanding of how people react towards gender diversity initiatives. We considered the Bennett scale helpful in our case and reasoned this with our assumption that in both situations people are confronted with a new situation, which motivates reactions that we want to examine. In a male-dominated industry, such as the one our studied company operates in, we aim to explore how stereotypes about gender might exist.

In the first stage of the Bennett scale, people who are confronted with another culture than their own react with denial. Due to a significant lack of experience, their opinions have not been challenged whereby their own reality occur as central to every other viewpoint. As a result, disinterest and aggression towards the new culture can occur.

To develop and move from the denial stage to the next stage, one has to change his attitude from defense to noticing differences between cultures. Considering and defending the differences people at this level have a pronounced they-versus-us thinking. This is reflected in

either a strong belief of seeing their culture as the better and superior one compared to others or the existence of mostly negative stereotypes associated with the other group.

People in the next step try to minimize the recognized differences, while acknowledging some similarities between both cultures. But since these differences are not seen as important, and similarities between both cultures are more important people at this stage do not understand the necessity and importance of diversity and how it may add value. Before moving towards the next stage, a fundamental change in the mindset has to take place.

People at the fourth stage make a step away from the ethnocentrism, which includes the first three stages. In contrast to the previous stages, in stage four, the own as well as other cultures are seen as parts of a complex environment and are accepted as such. As a result of this, contrasting aspects of other cultures are accepted as existing and are also valued as such. People at this stage want to learn and discover the alien culture to form their own opinions. Although people in this stage show interested in other cultures, only the next step truly adapts to it.

The fifth stage in the development is the adaptation to the differences. On the basis of empathy, people can act and think in agreement with another culture than their own to understand and be understood across the borders. For instance, interesting and fitting questions can be formulated that support the ability to think and act outside the own point of view. A mere imitation is thereby not enough because it is not truly based on empathy.

The sixth and last stage on the Bennett scale is integration. At this stage, people can move effortlessly between different cultural views and thereby integrate different viewpoints easily into their own opinion. Moreover, an ability to judge and evaluate different perspectives is part of this stage.

In conclusion, this scale is showing the development of people's perceptions towards the unknown from resistance to openness. Thereby people can move from lower levels to higher ones through experience. Additionally, we want to mention that this development is a very individual one. Therefore, everyone develops in his/her own pace and can start from individual starting points. Lastly, depending on the personal abilities, different human beings might also end at individual stages. Using this scale now, initially in the setting of diversity management initiatives instead of cultural differences, allows us to evaluate how the participants at Techworks see the gender diversity campaign in our study. The Bennett scale

is often used as explanation model for the need of intercultural training (Intercultural Development Research Institute, 2017). Applying the DMIS into a different scene, perceptions on gender diversity initiatives, we wish to generate a richer understanding of people's sense-making and responses.

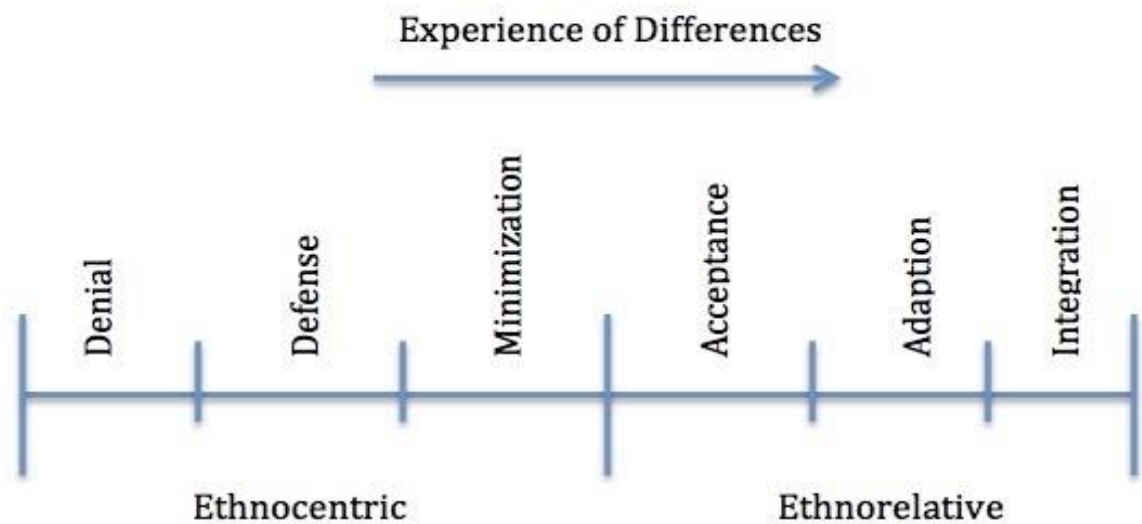


Figure 2: Bennett scale

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

We have attempted to develop a sense for different perspectives on diversity within Techworks, in particular, gender diversity, and how different hierarchies make sense and respond to diversity management and the newly implemented gender diversity initiative. We were guided by a qualitative approach, which is not concerned about numerical data analysis but rather focuses on the understanding of the observed phenomenon (Prasad, 2005). This allowed us to explore how mindsets are constructed and linked and how people respond to certain situations.

In particular, we were inspired by the hermeneutic approach, as explained by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009). This approach aims to explore interviewees' understanding and responses to a certain researched topic. Consequently, to gain new insights, it is important not only to interpret and explain but also to understand and make sense of the acquired responses. In order to reach an understanding for the interviewees' sense-making, we adopted the hermeneutic circle. This circle was explained by Prasad (2005), who suggests working with the pre-understanding parallel to the collected information from, for example primary sources such as interviews. Thereby we moved between the new data and our previous understanding of the concept backwards and forwards, as proposed by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009). The application of the hermeneutic circle allowed us to look beyond the interviewees' statements and used language by considering the context of the statements to interpret and find new insights. Through this method, we applied the hermeneutic circle in our study, while reviewing our pre-understanding and the collected data to attain and understand a more broader and more complete picture of the perceptions of gender diversity and gender diversity initiatives at Techworks.

3.2 Data Collection

We aimed to work with primary sources to find clues that may lead us to formulate a general understanding of the perceptions of diversity and to explore how a diversity management initiative was perceived by Techworks staff. Furthermore, working with direct primary sources allowed us to uncover meanings and insights to develop a deeper understanding of diversity. This helped us to generate knowledge of the organizational workers' sense-making of diversity.

Our main sources of data are semi-structured interviews at different hierarchical levels. According to Kvale (1996) interviews are a useful method to understand people's point of view about themselves and the world around them. Semi-structured interviews are prepared interviews but still give enough room for interviewees to stress the most important and interesting points with a certain degree of freedom. Clifford, Cope, Gillespie and French (2016) state that this kind of dialogues leaves space to respond and act on the interviewees' reactions, which are expressed in language, facial expression, and body language. Hence, this interview type seemed to be aligned with our chosen approach of a hermeneutic method. We made use of individual interviews and two group interviews with the aim to collect data for a broader viewpoint on the subject.

Individual interviews took place with the CEO and five managers of both gender as well as two employees in the United Kingdom. The reason for our choice to interview the upper hierarchies individually is that the newly implemented gender campaign was a top-down decision announced by the CEO, and managers have to apply it now. Since the campaign also aims to increase gender balance at the managerial level, we were curious to see how managers reacted and answered during the interviews to understand their mindsets and responses regarding gender diversity and the gender diversity initiative.

Within our research, we conducted two group interviews. Clifford et al. (2016) define group interviews as a group of several selected people talking interactively in an informal setting about a topic given by the researcher. We chose the approach of group interviews for the lower hierarchical level, employees of both gender, due to our belief that this level of Techworks organizational employees did not have much knowledge about the new initiative yet but were affected the most by the initiative. The group discussion helped to start a conversation about the gender diversity initiative among employees whereby it helped us to gain a picture of their perceptions and reactions.

As we conducted all interviews ourselves, we did not depend on the trustworthiness of a third party (Alvesson & Sköldböck, 2009). Moreover, all meetings took place in English, through which we reduced the chance of translation mistakes. The meeting duration ranged between 20 minutes and around one and a half hour, with an average of 45 minutes. We interviewed 15 workers of Techworks in twelve sessions; two were group interviews and ten individual ones. Included were the CEO, five managers, five employees, and three employees of the HR department. The group interview with employees took the longest time. Furthermore, one

interview was held on Skype, due to the manager's availability. The other four Skype interviews had to be kept online due to the managers' geographical location in the United Kingdom and our location in Lund, Sweden. But the majority of seven meetings took place in face-to-face interactions in a semi-informal setting in conference rooms at the company's headquarter in Gothenburg, Sweden.

We interviewed employees of Techworks in Sweden and the United Kingdom to examine similarities and differences to generate an understanding of what diversity means to the organizational workforce in different parts of the world. We conducted the study in Sweden because the Swedish department has nearly reached the target of the initiative and reaches today a representation of 32 percent of women. The United Kingdom office in comparison has only 19 percent female employees. With the start of the new campaign awareness of the figures was create. Out of these reasons, we had the impression that employees and managers in both countries may have different points of view regarding the initiative, which allowed us to reach a wider perspective in our study.

Pseudonyms	Gender	Position	Country	Type of interview	Duration
Clara	F	Manager	Sweden	Individual, Face-to face	51 min
Emma	F	Employee	Sweden	Group, Face-to face	82 min
Filip	M	Manager	Sweden	Individual, Face-to face	37 min
Harvey	M	CEO	Sweden	Individual, Face-to face	58 min
Ida	F	Manager	Sweden	Individual, Face-to face	47 min
Jens	M	Employee	Sweden	Group, Face-to face	82 min
Linnea	F	HR	Sweden	Group, Face-to face	49 min
Luis	M	Communication Director	Sweden	Individual, Face-to face	60 min
Matilda	F	HR	Sweden	Group, Face-to face	49 min
Mats	M	Manager	Sweden	Individual, Skype	23 min
Oscar	M	Employee	Sweden	Group, Face-to-face	82 min
Charles	M	Employee	UK	Individual, Skype	20 min
Diana	F	Employee	UK	Individual, Skype	29 min
Elizabeth	F	HR	UK	Individual, Skype	50 min
William	M	Manager	UK	Individual, Skype	26 min
15 interviewees & 12 interviews	F=7 M=8	Manager=5 Employee=5 HR=3 Others=2	Sweden=11 UK=4	Individual=10 Group=2 Face-to-face=7 Skype=5	Shortest=20min Longest=82min

Table 1: Interviews Overview

3.3 Data Analysis

While we conducted semi-structured interviews, we were aware of the possibility that interviewees might bring up additional topics we have not yet thought through. This would give away additional topics, whereby further investigations would then be needed to explore the newly arising questions.

In addition to the recording of the interviews we took notes to capture the way participants responded to the questions. We evaluated the collected data timely and also kept attention to our notes to ensure that the data remains as valid as possible. In doing so, we, for example, reduced the risk of forgetting details in the way interviewees behaved in facial looks and gestures additionally to their responses. These extra observations gave us further insights on what interviewees truly think and not only verbally express.

We analyzed the data, through searching for repetitions, similarities, differences, and metaphors within the interview statements and documents (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). We then sorted and coded our collected data through and interpreted them subsequently. Through this approach, we strived to categorize the information into different themes to present richer examples of our observations and findings. Initial themes were closely linked to the statements of the interviewees. For example, when participants were talking about required competences, we coded it as competence theme. Reviewing the first round of coding a second and third time, several primal thoughts were reorganized, deleted or turned into our main findings for the analysis, which would answer our research question.

Our analysis will consist of an overview of the campaign from the Swedish perspectives of all eleven interviewees in Sweden and then will move on to compare these perspectives with the British ones. In doing so, our analysis will move in accordance to the hermeneutic approach back and forth between the different individuals and hierarchies. The reason for this is that we wanted to examine how individuals with different responsibilities understood and responded to the initiative in Sweden and the United Kingdom. In that sense, we wanted to explore how each hierarchy, whether the HR or managers, would approach the campaign from their perspectives.

Maintaining an open mind and curiosity during this process was important to stay flexible and reflective as Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) recommend. Nevertheless, we kept in mind our primary purpose of this research is to explore how the workforce of a company respond and

make sense of a top-down initiative as it is the case within Techworks and how we can, therefore, contribute to the existing literature.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

In order to give our study validity and reliability, we were aware of different influencing factors. Firstly, conducting interviews with a variety of people during a short period of time led to a broad overview of different perceptions of the studied company's workers. For instance, we had the chance to interview different individuals from several hierarchical levels of the company within two weeks. This approach enabled us to get a sense of the understanding of the initiative from various perspectives.

Secondly, our data collection method assisted in building credibility for our findings. Putting interviewees into such an interviewing environment and situation might cause pressure, which might have had an impact on the interviewees' responses and thus might have an effect on the outcomes. For instance, interviewees might have had answered differently if the setting of the interviewees were simple conversations between colleagues. As we are aware of this, we tried to take the nervousness of the participants away by informing them about the agenda and content of the interview beforehand and started the interviews with general questions about their careers and general thoughts on the initiative. In order to keep the validity and reliability, we recorded all interviews. We were also conscious of the fact that recording might affect the interviewees' openness but did not have the impression that it affected the discussions in reality. For instance, interviewees tended to be talkative and interested in sharing their thoughts about the campaign without necessarily giving the impression of withholding information. Additionally, we tried to reflect continually on our work. For instance, coding and continuously questioning our interpretations through several repetitions and reviews of the coding supported our reflections.

Thirdly, referring to Alvesson (2003), we are aware of the fact that the employees can be affected by their loyalty towards the employer. This can especially be noticed in departments close to the headquarter, which was the case in our study and led to further investigation and interpretation. For example, interviewees at the headquarter seemed to support the initiative readily, while participants in other departments challenged the campaign more often.

Fourth, we are sensitive to the fact that we both are females, working on a sensitive issue in a male dominated area with the aim of exploring results and consequences of an initiative that

strives to increase the number of women within the company. This fact might have affected the responses of our participating interviewees. For instance, interviewees could have had responded in a way they believed we expected them to do. Therefore, we did not take their responses as facts but kept an open mind and continuously reflected on the statements.

4 Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Company Background

Techworks is a multinational technology company, which was founded in Sweden in 1980. Over the years, the company managed to expand in new locations locally as well as internationally. Nowadays, Techworks has more than 2000 employees and operates in more than 25 locations in Europe, Asia, and South America with the head office in Gothenburg, Sweden. In the last quarter of 2016, the company announced the launch of a gender diversity campaign that aimed to attract more women and improve the gender imbalance at the company. Techworks reported 27 to 73 percent women to men representation, and with the new initiative they set up a quota of 40/60 split to be reached within the next five years. This campaign was based on the company's re-launch of their business strategy, which indicated a need for having diversity to meet the different end users' needs in the market. In a traditionally male-dominated industry, the company's position on gender diversity was different in the two countries. In the UK, Techworks had 81 to 19 percent men to women representation while in Sweden, the status of gender equality was much better and stood at 68 to 32 percent men to women split. The campaign targeted not only to increase the overall numbers of females at the company but also to improve women's representation at the managerial level. Within the diversity campaign, the company planned to follow a two steps strategy for diversity. In the first step, the recruitment will be based on competencies; in the second step Techworks will use affirmative action as a tool to increase the representation of women in the organization. From this strategy, the company aimed to ensure equality for everyone based on the required competencies. In that sense, the gender campaign would not result in discouraging any group.

The following two chapters will illustrate first the perceptions of the Techworks workforce and second three identified complexities that were influenced by the perceptions and also influenced them. By doing so we will move backwards and forwards between the Swedish and British perspectives and compare in every chapter directly the viewpoints of the HR, managers and employees of both countries with each other.

4.2 The Workforce's Perceptions

4.2.1 Overview of Techworks' responses

When new things are introduced to an audience, different reactions may follow. For instance, there might be curiosity or even anticipation, but also feelings of rejection or skepticism can be caused by an introduced change or innovation (De Meuse & Hostager, 2001). In our case, the company decided to implement a new gender diversity campaign, which was seen positively especially by our interviewees in Sweden. More critical voices came from the company's office in the United Kingdom. Theoretically, we will use the previously explained approach of Bennett and the Bennett scale, see chapter 2.6, to understand the interviewees' statements and mindsets.

First, from the Swedish perspective, the interviewees mostly welcomed the idea of a campaign and held a positive position. This was expressed from their point of view as a natural and great thing to do by the company. The top management expressed that this campaign was important for the company's success and performance by having a variety of opinions. They further explained the need to improve the gender imbalance to encourage other women in the company by creating role models in all managerial positions and break the stereotypes of the industry. By communicating this value of gender equality the company's management believed that they would attract more competent workforce that would contribute to the organization. Moreover, the need to be a gender equal company was recognized by the CEO, as a must-have in today's society to make the company more competitive on the market. Therefore, the top management approach to the campaign was expressed as a clear target that appeared to be tough but achievable and not up for discussions anywhere in the company.

Moreover, the Swedes strongly outlined and showed their support for the initiative and identification with the company. For instance, participants stressed how proud they were to be part of Techworks and how this campaign might improve the work and the work environment. This was explained in phrases like 'more fun' and 'more creativity'. Different employees were supportive and excited about the idea of having more female representation and role models at Techworks. They believed that this mixture of gender would also improve the quality of their work by adding a variety of viewpoints.

Overall, the Swedish office was supportive and positive about the new initiative. Nevertheless, their responses were often mixed with concerns that relate to the implementation of the campaign. For instance, the nature of industry and lack of female applicants would make it challenging for the campaign to reach the target in time. Another example that was given concerned the announced quota of 40/60, which also made the Swedish office question if the target would be achievable.

At my time at Techworks, this is one of the best initiatives so far (Mats, Manager, Sweden).

I think every modern company needs to talk about [gender diversity], otherwise you will look like some really old-fashioned company (Jens, Employee, Sweden).

We think that having different perspectives is better for group dynamics and team work and it also becomes a more fun [working place] (Luis, Communication Director, Sweden).

Second, we look closely to the Swedish perspective in comparison with the United Kingdom office. While we have seen in the broader overview how interviewees in Sweden have positively responded to the gender diversity campaign, most of the participants of the office in the United Kingdom seemed to be skeptical. The discussion of the new initiative caused initially negative responses as well as mixed feelings about the implications of the campaign. The British group of interviewees associated the initiative with words such as ‘trouble’ and ‘challenge’. Instead of agreeing with the initiative, as presented by the CEO and upper management, employees questioned the implementation and outcome of the campaign. From their viewpoint, it caused more discussion and difficulties than a positive result.

It’s not necessarily something that I agree with. I think sometimes initiatives like this can cause more trouble (Diana, Employee, UK).

[The initiative] is a challenge. When you look at the different business areas, the industries that we work within, I would see some hindrances or some issues of how we might achieve that KPI (Elizabeth, HR, UK).

To begin with the HR department, we interviewed the HR responsible Matilda in Sweden and her counterpart Elizabeth in the United Kingdom. While Matilda, like all the other employees of the Swedish branch of Techworks, was relaxed and positive about the initiative, Elizabeth took a more critical position. On the one hand, Matilda stressed the benefits of the campaign and the outcomes of diversity for internal employees, and external future candidates and customers. In her opinion, people would bond easier with someone whom they have

something in common with. She believed that this was what a diversity campaign would naturally imply and positively add. On the other hand, Elizabeth pointed out to the stereotype of the industry, as being male-dominated. Thus, from her perspective, it was difficult for people in the United Kingdom to understand why an initiative like the ongoing one was important and what benefits it had for the company. Instead of directly supporting the campaign she questioned the set quotas critically, and found the initiative's targets hard to reach or even unrealistic. This was well spotted in her sarcastic responses.

I think it's a great initiative. I can see that if you are a customer or candidate who is looking for a job if you could meet someone who looks or has the same background or the same gender or the same interest it is easier to feel familiar (Matilda, HR, Sweden).

I said so what are we gonna do? Stop working in automotive and go work in an industry where there are more females just so that we can tick a box and say yes we've reached this KPI (Elizabeth, HR, UK).

Nevertheless, Elizabeth acknowledged that this initiative might challenge the way of thinking and acting in the company's office in the United Kingdom and lead to more openness and innovation in the own company as well as the sector and society.

I think it will cause people to think more and potentially open us up a little bit more to bringing in new ideas and new people rather than just always going with what we've always done (Elizabeth, HR, UK).

Also on the level of managers there appeared to be a discrepancy between the understandings of the initiative between both countries. While Filip, a Swedish manager, easily highlighted the advantages this campaign entails, William, his counterpart in the United Kingdom, seemed to be just as Elizabeth more critical towards the planned actions. Filip named internal and external advantages of the initiative, which were in line with what Matilda from the HR department in Sweden explained. Additionally, Filip pointed out to the targeted audience Techworks wanted to reach. According to his gender statistics, the campaign sounded like a needed step to reach a broader range of customers and also to improve the existing products to make them suitable for everyone. On the contrary, William stated that even though he understood the campaign, he did not see any necessity to implement it. From his point of view, there was no need to initiate campaigns like this. Moreover, he saw the past and present employment of the workforce in the sector as something that was difficult to change, and also did not need to be changed because it was caused by a natural process from his perspective.

We are 50/50 in the world when it comes to gender. If we only understand 50 percent of the population, we cannot say we understand the end users. So we need both sides to understand and be the experts to create more creative solutions that will fit into more people's world (Filip, Manager, Sweden).

I understand the campaign and support it, but I don't believe that we should necessarily target anybody in particular. You know race, gender, whatever (William, Manager, UK).

The last comparison of interviewees consisted of four employees, two in each country. While employees in Sweden, stressed the initiative as a natural step, the employees in the United Kingdom, seemed to be against such an initiative. The Swedes both felt that the campaign was highly valued by the employees in Sweden and also described themselves as active supporters who were proud to be part of the company and the campaign. One employee emphasized that only companies which have an equal workforce will survive the fight for clients because especially in Sweden a high awareness of equality and a balanced society in all aspects was represented. The British counterparts, on the other side, appeared indifferent or even unwelcoming to the initiative. Whereas their manager, William showed at least a bit of comprehension for the gender diversity campaign, the two employees seemed entirely to reject the idea of differentiating between employees by gender. Both indicated that highlighting gender strongly in a campaign might create issues since gender was not a topic that concerned the company before therefore they did not understand how it was important now.

I was really proud to be part of this company. I actually went up to CEO at the Christmas party and told him because it was so good (Oscar, Employee, Sweden).

It's kind of survival of the fittest. Companies that don't do this will not survive in the future because people are aware, at least in Sweden, that companies need to be kind of equal (Oscar, Employee, Sweden).

I think sometimes a sort of forced initiative can raise questions in the wrong [way] Sometimes outlining it very strongly can be an issue. Because gender has not been an issue (Diana, Employee, UK).

4.2.2 Applying the Bennett Scale

Summarizing and comparing the different perceptions of the employees of Techworks, we used the Bennett scale, which was examined in Chapter 2.6 theoretically, to make sense and understand our participants' mindsets and responses towards the new gender diversity

campaign. Since the Bennett scale is only considering individual responses, and is less concerned about the contextual background, we took the model as a starting point to understand the different perceptions.

Two main points attracted our attention regarding the variety of responses. Firstly, we were able to distinguish the responses and interviewees of the two countries Sweden and the United Kingdom into the two main groups of ethnocentric and ethnorelative. Thereby, we saw the participants of the United Kingdom as part of the ethnocentric stages with indications of the denial, defense, and minimization stages. In contrast, interviewees in Sweden showed perceptions of the ethnorelative stage with implications of acceptance and adaptation. We excluded the integration stage of the development of individuals in the analysis and interpretation. Our justification for this decision was that we did not feel that the people we interviewed in the company necessarily reached a full understanding of what diversity means to the company. An interesting aspect we noticed while applying the Bennett scale was that employees seemed to move between the different stages. For instance, interviewees showed an understanding the reasons for the campaign but were uncertain about what to expect from the outcomes and therefore fell back to a more ethnocentric stage than ethnorelative, which they expressed in defensive statements. The same applied to the Swedes, whereby they responded with less resistance than the British and therefore were mostly found in the ethnorelative stage.

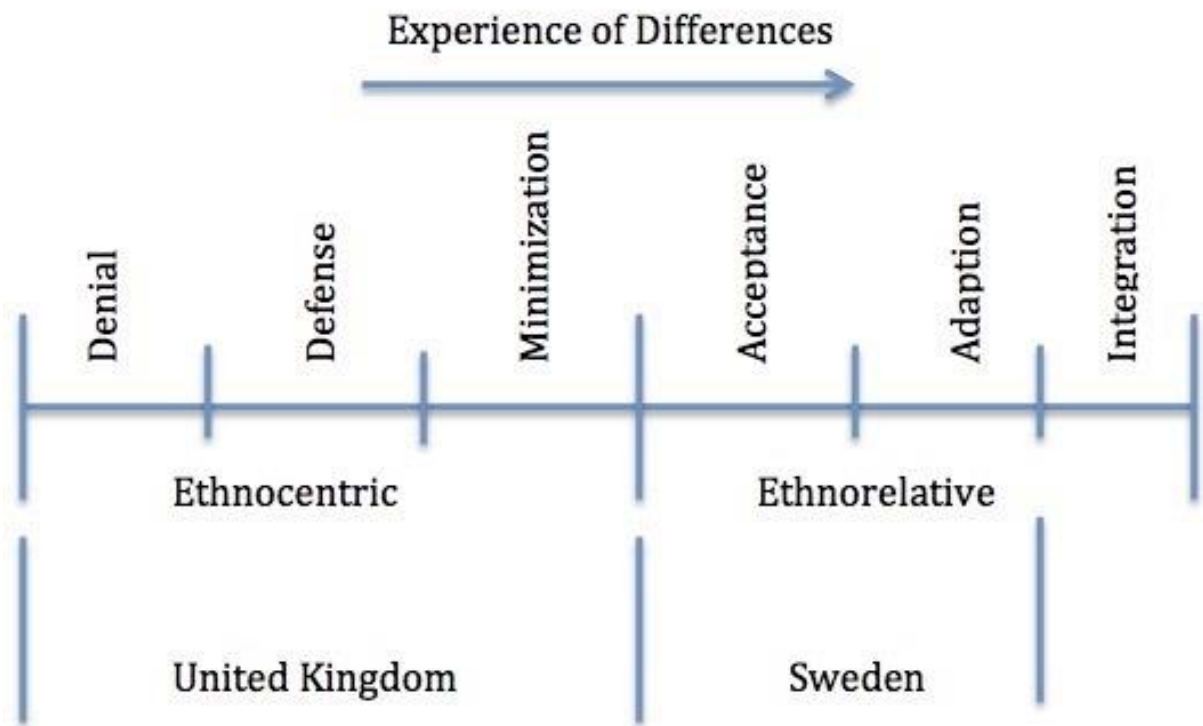


Figure 3: Applied Bennett scale

Secondly, we noticed in our case that the higher the position of the interviewees at Techworks, the more likely the participants were to move upwards on the Bennett scale in the direction of acceptance and adaption. Possible reason for these shifts in the movements will be explained later in chapter 4.3.3 Confusing Communication, which described the top-down communication. This would explain how the top positions knew more about the new campaign and therefore also perceived it differently than the lower ones. However, this finding also supported the development explained by Bennett, who underlines an increase in the experience of differences as a need to progress on the scale.

In addition to the Bennett scale, we identified a number of influencing factors on and within our interviewees' interpretation towards the gender diversity initiative. These complexities included an identified paradox of diversity initiatives and mixed messages as we will examine in the following chapters.

4.3 Complexities

4.3.1 The Paradox of Diversity Initiatives

As we saw different people might have different perceptions on a defined topic due to their level of experience as described by Bennett (1986) and supported by an analysis. Furthermore, we outlined an indicated paradox in chapter 2.3 Diversity Management Initiatives, which described different consciousness towards gender diversity initiatives regarding male and female participants. According to Windscheid et al. (2015) females as well as males will respond negatively to gender diversity campaigns for different reasons. We saw some elements of this paradox in our case and therefore we analyzed and examined it in detail within this section.

Reviewing the general responses in Sweden, we saw a less strong paradox than described by Windscheid et al. (2015). Interviewees from both genders were supportive of the initiative. Male interviewees showed an even more open perception towards the initiative. For example, they easily named advantages for the outcome of the initiative and did not hesitate to stress their support towards the campaign. On the contrary, women needed when asked a moment to think of the advantages their gender might bring to the company. A pausing in their responses indicated to us that females did not particularly see a need to emphasize gender but rather they were critical of how women would be perceived in the future. They expressed concerns about the future hiring and employments and choosing women only to reach the campaign's targets rather than based on their competencies.

On the other hand, the top management reflected an awareness of the paradox. This was evident in how they talked of the need to work with the different mindsets to change and influence them into accepting the gender diversity campaign. From their perspective, the constructed mindsets of different individuals would either help or obstruct the progress of the campaign. For instance, Techworks CEO and some of the managers, explained the issues that would arise as a consequent from the message signaled to the male gender. Still, we take the view, that in Sweden the described paradox of Windscheid et al. (2015) did not exist or only existed in a slight degree to our knowledge.

The question is does this [initiative] means that you are sending a signal to all the men in the organization that they cannot become managers, because that's the dangerous part (Harvey, CEO, Sweden).

I never think 'is it a male or is it a female?'. I think about 'will he/she fit in?' (Clara, Manager, Sweden)

Second, we compared the Swedish and British perspectives. To begin with the HR responsible personnel of both countries, we sensed that while Matilda in Sweden saw the gender diversity campaign as an opportunity to improve women's representation in the company, Elizabeth in United Kingdom criticized the initiative and saw adverse outcomes, which from her perspective would outweigh the positive results Techworks aimed for. Observing Elizabeth's statements in more detail, we saw a clear link between her responses and Windscheid's et al. (2015) described paradox regarding women's reactions towards such initiatives. Elizabeth in her position as HR responsible was fearful of the responses of Techworks employees as well as the external environment.

I don't think it should be like a banner. I think it's quite offensive to women (Elizabeth, HR, UK)

The managers, Filip in Sweden and his counterpart William's response in the United Kingdom, reflected parts of the paradox of Windscheid et al. (2015). Filip was like the rest of the Swedes less concerned about the initiative and emphasized the need to implement it. To him the campaign did not undermine his position as a male manager at all. Instead, he saw only advantages for everyone in the company. William was concerned about his team who questioned the need for any campaign and the meaning of them.

The team often questions the majority of any sort of campaign that Techworks does and people often don't connect with it. It doesn't mean anything to them (William, Manager, UK).

Furthermore, we compared the perceptions of employees in both countries. While the employees in the United Kingdom were worried and repeated what others thought and said about the initiative. The female employee was concerned about the way people would think about women and also her in the company. She did not see the initiative supporting her position but instead as a kind of a troubling situation in which she had to explain her work and position in the future. The Swedish employees showed as well as the other Swedes fewer concerns about the initiative. Our interviews with the employees of Techworks in the United Kingdom therefore underlined the paradox, which was described by Windscheid et al. (2015).

There were a couple of people coming into the office and said 'well it's just another project for the company to look good' (Charles, Employee, UK).

If people did want to take it the wrong way they could look and think ‘oh well she was the only girl here now she's been promoted to just sort of put ticks in boxes for this initiative’ (Diana, Employee, UK).

Summarizing this comparison, we wondered why the people of the Swedish office were so unconcerned towards the campaign while the British seemed to be so strictly against it. Internal figures of the company showed that the Swedish office was already quite diversified while the British office highly struggled with the diversification and only employed an average of 20 percent women. These numbers explained to a certain extent why the Swedes seemed to be so calm. Other factors such as culture and different national context within the two countries could explain the different perspective.

Our analysis hinted that companies that are already diverse have a much easier starting point to work with diversity and diversity initiatives than companies that lack diversity. This was examined in the Bennet scale and illustrated in Windscheid’s et al. (2015) paradox of diversity initiatives. Within the Bennett scale, we illustrated that people could move within the different stages, which could be explained by their different levels of experience, knowledge about the initiative or even gender.

If you don’t have the gender equality today it is harder because people don’t understand why it is important (Emma, Employee, Sweden).

4.3.2 Mixed Concepts - Equal Opportunities and Diversity Management

The topic of competence and providing equal opportunities to both genders appeared to be the first concern that came to interviewees’ mind while talking about attracting, recruiting and retaining more women in the organization. Most of the interviewees stressed the importance of having a gender equal company. However, they expressed the importance of hiring the right person, the right fit, regardless of gender. A concern that was voiced regarding the campaign was whether the company would focus on diversity management, without considering equal opportunities, or if they would target an equality approach first and work on diversifying gender in the organization afterwards. Consequently, there was confusion about what the campaign means for the company and if the concept of equal opportunity or diversity management should be applied to the campaign. All the interviewees stated that the diversity initiatives should be approached by competence first and gender second. First, from the broader Swedish perspective, gender equality was rooted within the company in the different managerial levels. The Swedish culture can perhaps provide an explanation of the

current positive emphasis on equality at the workplace. Nevertheless, interviewees from the top management mentioned that having the right set of skills would always be the primary factor for choosing employees. Although the Swedish participants provided positive viewpoints on the gender campaign, the argument seemed to go back to the importance of managing equal opportunities. We sensed that the support of the workforce for the campaign was conditioned with the idea not to discriminate anyone who has the qualifications to do the job.

We have been very clear that competence is always the most important thing (Harvey, CEO, Sweden).

In the first stage you look at the competence and in the second stage if people have the same competence you can look at 'ok we need more females we take the woman' but if they don't have the same competence you have to take the one who's right for the job (Ida, Manager, Sweden).

While we compared Sweden and the United Kingdom HR offices we understood that they had the same views when it came to hiring and retaining competent employees regardless of gender. In that sense, the campaign would not focus too much on the gender and hire females to reach the campaign's quotas. The emphasis on competences was reflected not only in the company's culture but also in the participants' personal perspectives. Since the new campaign set a quota to achieve gender diversity, it was unclear to both HR offices how to implement the campaign in practice, taking into account the nature of the industry, which is known to be traditionally male-dominated with fewer female applicants. The HR personnel were very supportive of applying diversity management approaches to attract female applicants. However, with an equality approach in mind, on the other hand, Elizabeth in the United Kingdom was more critical of the new initiative where it would lead to regarding internal processes and signaled messages. She reflected that focusing on a diversity management approach to attract only females would require changes in the internal process and would potentially create unwanted 'artificial environment'.

For me the most important thing is the right person whether it's a woman or male (Matilda, HR, Sweden).

We've been given the message that says: 'competency first gender second'. Now I haven't seen that happen in practice (Elizabeth, HR, UK)

The managers in the Swedish and United Kingdom offices shared the same views as expressed by all participants that equality towards everyone has to be followed strictly. While the Swedish managers' views on diversity management were positive, considering gender was ignored when the conversation turned about decisions about employment. Thus, this gave the indication of a lower motive on managing diversity within the initiative. On the other hand, William in the United Kingdom, explained how setting quotas could discourage other talents, and how such an initiative might bring concerns, such as discrimination against groups.

I understand the campaign and support it but you don't want people to feel like they are discriminated because they are not part of KPIs (William, Manager, UK).

On the employees' level, both countries continue to follow the thought of competencies above gender. From the Swedes' perspective, gender equality was seen as a natural step for the company to take. However, they believed that women should be targeted only for their capabilities and not on the basis of their gender. Therefore, it would ensure that the campaign would remain fair. On the other hand, the employees in the United Kingdom pointed out that they would rather prefer gender blindness than a campaign that would attract the wrong people. For instance, the possibility of hiring unqualified females in particular roles was considered as unwelcomed and unwanted result of the initiative.

It is important that you hire the people with the right competencies so that women don't feel that they have been recruited only because they are women (Emma, Employee, Sweden)

I would rather much have a completely competent manager that knows his stuff than have a woman in that role for the sake of having a woman in that role (Diana, Employee, UK).

It's about work and it doesn't matter if you're black, white, male, female. The reason you have been employed is you're the best person for the job that's why you are in (Charles, Employee, UK).

The responses from both the Sweden and United Kingdom offices hinted that the campaign has not managed to define a clear meaning and objective. The participants appeared to be uncertain of the processes that would follow according to the initiative. This gave the indication of an unclear communication of what the gender diversity campaign meant to the employees within the company. Out of this uncertainty, the discussion evolved around how the campaign should focus on managing equality and then gender diversity. The central question, in the minds of the participants, remained about how the company would approach

the campaign in practice especially with the influence of a 40/60 quota targeted within a certain time frame. Although the participants within the different hierarchical levels expressed their support to the gender diversity, they seemed to be more concerned with equality and less focused on how to work towards having gender diversity in the organization.

4.3.3 Confusing Communication

First, we will look into the broader Swedish perspective. The gender diversity initiative at Techworks was launched in late 2016 in which a live broadcast by the CEO was held to communicate it to all employees working in the company in the local and global offices. Thereby, we spotted two levels of communication within the company. On the top management level, the participants talked about how the initiative was discussed extensively and how it would be approached and implemented by the different business areas. From their perspective, the campaign had been continuously communicated to the employees within the organization. However, participants from lower hierarchical levels expressed the opposite. They mentioned that they heard little about the initiative after its launching but claimed that most of what was discussed were positive and supportive of the campaign. The lack of communication between different levels of hierarchies was hinted by one of the interviewees whose response indicated that the communication of the campaign seemed to be a one-off event during the launching and that employees were unlikely to remember what it was about. Overall, the analysis showed that the individuals were not necessarily on the same level of knowledge when it came to the initiative and that there was a lack of communication as indicated by some participants. We noticed that among the hierarchical levels a difference in the distribution of information existed. While the upper management indicated that there had been an ongoing communication about the campaign, participants from the lower levels expressed otherwise.

You can't imagine the communication we have done in this because we know that there are people with different mindsets (Luis, Communication Director, Sweden).

What I have heard [about the initiative] is positive and mostly from female workers (Ida, Manager, Sweden).

I think people forgot about [the initiative] by now because it was like two months ago or [so] (Oscar, Employee, Sweden).

Second, comparing the two offices in Sweden and the United Kingdom, the HR participants in both offices explained how it would be challenging to implement the initiative. They reasoned this with the challenges of the industry, such as the acquirement of female talent from a largely male market. An important aspect that was also stressed by the participants was the difficulties and challenges that needed to be addressed from the campaign perspective, according to the different national contexts of Sweden and the United Kingdom. While Matilda, from Sweden, was concerned about the implementation, Elizabeth, from the United Kingdom, was more critical of the quotas announced within the campaign and questioned what the company would do if they did not hit the quotas. She questioned if Techworks would change the direction of the business in a way that would accommodate the desired goals and if the internal processes would change accordingly to attract more women or stay unchanged.

I [am] just wondering how to implement [the initiative] in our countries since we do have some different challenges (Matilda, HR, Sweden)

Should you change the direction of the business for [the initiative] or do we carry on as normal?
I don't feel like that clarification has been given (Elizabeth, HR, UK).

The uncertainty on how to implement the initiative was present at the managerial level in both offices in Sweden and the United Kingdom. The two managers were unsure of how they would work toward attracting females because of their inexperience. Filip, in Sweden, in particular, pointed out that the campaign could be problematic because different individuals could interpret it differently and this would lead to an ambiguity in implementation.

I just started to think [that the initiative is] very good but 'how to do it'? Because the topic is complicated, it can be different things for different people (Filip, Manager, Sweden).

On the employees' level, the critical views were expressed mainly from the British office, criticizing the quotas and wondering what the company would do and how it would react in reality to unachieved targets. The Swedish perspective, on the other hand, was more concerned with how it would be challenging for the initiative to achieve its goals in the short period and limited availability of female applicants on the market.

I think my problem with [the initiative] is putting the quotas on it because what happens when we haven't [reached] those quotas how Techworks [would] react to that (Diana, Employee, UK).

Both locations reflected clearly a level of uncertainty about the communication and the diversity approach. This was well explained by the lack of clarity and communication between the upper management and other hierarchies within the company. From the top management perspective, the new initiative was widely communicated through different activities across Techworks. However, our analysis showed that the participants were not particularly well informed or did not have a complete understanding of the progress of the campaign. Moreover, we sensed that the interviewees, especially in the United Kingdom, were doubtful towards the communicated messages of the upper management.

In summary, we examined the perceptions of Techworks workforce in Sweden and the United Kingdom. Within the responses of the participants, a number of complexities were found in the initiative. These complexities could help to explain the influencing factors on the understanding and perceptions of the participants in our study, which we will elaborate more on in chapter 5 Discussion.

5 Discussion

5.1 Analysis Recap

In the previous chapter, we presented our data and analysis, in which we explored how individuals in an organization understand and respond to a new gender diversity initiative. Another objective of our study was to examine the circumstances that might have influenced the sense-making of our participants. Exploring in-depth the participants' responses, guided us to define several challenges that were brought up by the new gender campaign. We spotted a mix of responses ranging from positive to negative among interviewed staff in both locations. In the United Kingdom office, the interviewees were more critical towards the campaign. This could be explained by the distance to the company's headquarter, which resulted in a disconnection between the two offices in the two locations. We got the impression that the location of the company's headquarter in Sweden might have influenced how employees perceived and responded to the initiative. Also, we were aware that the different national context in Sweden and the United Kingdom might have impacted the participants' perceptions and responses. The lack of clarity in the campaign's communication and activities was noticed during our analysis and interpretations. The different hierarchical levels at the company displayed varying levels of knowledge of the campaign. For instance, the participants' responses from the top management indicated a higher involvement and knowledge of the campaign, which is explainable through the top-down approach. On the other hand, the participants on the lower level showed little knowledge and confusion around the new gender campaign.

5.2 The Trouble with Diversity Initiatives

Using the Bennett scale within our study illustrated how employees were spread out on the scale at different stages from denial to adoption. The variety in responses could be attributed to different factors, however we named three that arose from our case. First, the geographical location of the company's headquarter might have led to a disconnection to their office in the United Kingdom. Thus, the ability to distribute information and compare different perspectives among employees in two sites becomes complicated (Palmer, Dunford & Buchanan, 2017). For instance, language barriers or distance and time differences might have influenced the responses, and thus led to disagreements between the headquarter and other offices. Furthermore, the national context of both countries might have played a crucial role in how perceptions were shaped. While Swedes perceived the initiative as a natural thing and

were very supportive of the idea of a gender equal company, the British were less enthusiastic and more skeptical towards the campaign and its outcomes. This could be explained further by the fact that Sweden is considered as a leading country in gender diversity.

Second, the different hierarchical levels showed that the participants had a different knowledge and understanding of the campaign, which was clarified by the fact that the initiative was a top-down decision. This indicated an unstable distribution of information across the hierarchy, which led to less support for the campaign on the lower level.

Third, we want to point out that the gender of the participants seems to have affected the interpretations of the interviewees. Men in Sweden were more likely to see the initiative as a natural step to bring in more women into the company while men in the United Kingdom did not understand the need for this action, considering the nature of the industry. On the contrary, women in Sweden were already used to equality and supported the campaign with enthusiasm, while women in the United Kingdom were uncomfortable being targeted by a particular gender campaign. Nonetheless, we see a need to emphasize that all these responses might also have been highly influenced by a personal viewpoint on this issue.

Concluding these three main points, it is clear that the initiative was not seen in a positive light by all individuals. Our analysis reflected that even if a company does campaigns to improve the circumstances for minorities, it is not seen necessarily as positive by neither the minority nor the majority (Windscheid et al., 2015).

5.3 Tensions between Equal Opportunities and Diversity Management

Our case analysis showed contradictions and tensions between the concepts of equal opportunities and diversity management. The different viewpoints of the interviewees in our study reflected an apparent confusion about what the campaign means to the current employment and the future strategy of the company in light of the new campaign. The main discussion revolved around the question if the campaign would ensure equality and equal opportunities for everyone or if it would focus on diversifying the workforce based on gender. This uncertainty made us question how the company can apply two contrasting approaches to the diversity campaign, and how this contradiction would influence the implementation.

In our study, all interviewees repeated one striking point over and over again: competence first and gender second. The viewpoints of the workforce reflected a strong emphasis and high value on competence and appeared as kind of a mantra for the organizational members.

This indicated that the company was more focused on equality and treating everyone the same instead of concentrating on managing diversity. Our interviews with the campaign initiators and employees hinted that neither of them showed an awareness of the differences between equal opportunities and diversity management. Instead, the company used both terms interchangeably in practice. As a result, this reflected a struggle and confusion to move from an equality approach, which is gender blind, to the application of a diversity approach that is gender conscious. Willson & Iles (1999) suggest that the application of equal opportunities in practice mainly focuses on a process that aims to produce actions in the correct way while Iles (1994) argues that diversity management embraces a strategic approach, which is considered as essential for the implementation. Besides, Windscheid et al. (2015), support the view of Iles (1994) and argue that the concept of diversity management is the preferable one to promote diversity. Reasons for this are, according to Windscheid et al. (2015) that gender blindness, as it would be the case for equal opportunities, leads in practice to no improvement for the minority. On the contrary, gender consciousness in diversity management would contemplate the minority in specific to improve their circumstances and therefore would be given preference.

Reflecting on these studies, we argue that Techworks was either unaware of the need to adopt a new approach and viewpoint or an unwilling to move from their old approach of equal opportunities to an approach that embraces diversity management. In that sense, the company's actions seemed to be in contrasts with their statements. As a result this led to a confusion and tension among the employees.

5.4 Passing on Responsibility

Another significant question, which was left unanswered within the initiative, was the meaning of the campaign. In our case, we did not focus on finding a definition for the concept diversity from the participants' perspective but we were rather interested in how Techworks workforce perceived and responded to the new gender diversity initiative. We understood that the new campaign has not managed to clearly define what diversity means to the company and its employees. The participants in our study were unsure about how to approach the subject from the campaign's perspective. Beside that point, a lack of transparency about the progress made the employee continuously speculate and restless.

Our analysis led us to the assumption that the top management left the question of the meaning and execution of the campaign to the employees to handle, without considering the possible contradictions that could occur.

The only thing I wanted to hear from [the managers] is, ‘is [the campaign’s goal] possible to reach, yes or no?’ And all the [managers] raised their hands and said ‘yes we will do it’ (Harvey, CEO, Sweden).

A vague communication with little information was provided to the workforce. This unclarity led to various interpretations by the employees and increased the skepticism among all affected groups. Even though that the participants were generally positive about the campaign, they were concerned about how they would deal with the diversity initiative in practice. This uncertainty might have possibly caused some kind of resistance as it was reflected in some of the responses from the company’s United Kingdom and Sweden office. The issue of discussing resistance within diversity often comes from commonly established expectations that managing diversity should be beneficial to the workforce in the organization (Mills, Mills & Thomas, 2004). Resistance is caused by various reasons, which might include for example ambiguity and the absence of conviction (Palmer, Dunford & Buchanan, 2017). Wentling (2004) supports these two reasons by explaining that people might also resist to diversity initiatives when they do not recognize the value that it adds to the company.

In our study, we spotted some forms of resistance in responses like ‘what is the problem’ and ‘I don’t see an issue’. These unanswered questions about the campaign’s approach and increasing tension led to a range of responses among the interviewees. This included for example negative feelings and disconnection with the campaign. Additionally, the workforce might have felt pressured to implement the initiative because of the set quotas and a short period for the realization of the initiative without necessarily understanding the reasons for the campaign. At the same time, quotas might raise attention and inspire people (Franceschet, Krook & Piscopo, 2012). A top-down decision can be in its effects similar to these quotas. While quotas might create pressure, the announcement of such initiative by top management can have the same impact on employees. However, a top-down decision can be effective in the sense that it gives a clear direction for the company to take.

In summary, we argue that the unclear communication within Techworks led to a high level of confusion among the workforce. Even though the campaign set a direction for the company, it seemed as no thought was given to the implementation and possible

contradictions between the approaches of equal opportunities and diversity management. Instead, the workforce was left to deal with these struggles, which led to different forms of resistance rather than support for the initiative.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Brief Study Recap

Our purpose with this research was to examine how employees at Techworks understood and responded to a newly introduced gender diversity initiative. With this aim in mind, we strived to explore the factors that might have influenced the understanding and responses of Techworks staff. The hermeneutic approach inspired us through the interpretation and analysis of the collected data. Our data collection approach involved a qualitative method, with the focus on semi-structured interviews. Moreover, we used the Bennett scale (1986) to make sense of the interviewees' perceptions and responses. Our overall goal was to contribute to the theoretical and practical literature relating to gender diversity initiative within male-dominated industries. In this chapter, we will summarize our main findings, discuss our research limitations and possible future research topics.

6.2 Main Findings

Our research showed that the understanding of diversity campaigns might differ and range from positive to negative responses among different individuals. With the help of the Bennett scale we saw that the staff was moving between the denial stage up until the adaption stage and thus they were not on the same level of understanding. The perceptions of the studied interviewees were shaped by different levels of experiences and hierarchies as well as influenced by gender and the national contexts. This triggered us to question how the company dealt with this kind of complexities and what their impacts on the initiative were in practice. Taking our analysis further, we identified three main findings that could support our interpretations of the employees' responses at Techworks.

The first finding was that gender diversity campaigns could provoke both positive and negative responses. Launching these initiatives was not necessarily seen as something good for females or males, as we spotted in our case and was mentioned by Windscheid et al. (2015). Therefore, highlighting diversity in a gender conscious focus might cause negative responses, due to the fear of discrimination against other groups. In that sense, we argue that gender blind initiatives might be perceived more positively than gender conscious campaigns. However, as claimed by Windscheid et al. (2015), gender blindness leads nowhere. This concern was also reflected in our participants' responses. Since this campaign is a new one, we wanted to stress that it might be difficult to assess how the participants would respond in

practice, without having real life examples. Nonetheless, we believe that exploring the mindset and responses from an early point might provide companies with insights to understand the issues within the campaign and address them right from the beginning, rather than being confronted with unexpected challenges during the implementation of the campaign.

The second finding that we identified was that the top management was sending messages that were perceived as confusing. The main confusion revolved around the concepts of equal opportunity and diversity management. The participants in our study showed signs of uncertainties about which approach they would apply in the future. Even though these messages about what concept to apply might have been intentionally or unintentionally signaled by the upper management, we believe that they were not necessarily aware of this mixture. This confusion over the concepts seemed to be problematic to our participants who were confronted by a need to stress the equality topic on the one hand, and gender diversity on the other hand. A critical aspect can be seen in the lack of knowledge of the understanding of the concepts. Therefore, it would have been helpful for the preparation of a new diversity initiative to have some kind of diversity training or education on diversity management (Arredondo, 1996). In that way, a sense of awareness for diversity campaign management would have been created and would have had consequently reduced the uncertainties.

The third finding built up on our second one and is based on the unclear communication of the campaign within the company. We argue that the top management left it to the managers and employees to implement the campaign to their best knowledge. This led to a workforce, who did not fully understand what they were supposed to do, which impacted them, and caused different forms of resistance such as sarcasm or ignorance towards the initiative. Hence, it indicated that without a clear definition of the campaign, the diversity initiative might not progress as planned. Having a top-down campaign could potentially push the company towards specified targets. Nevertheless, it might also cause pressure on the workforce to reach the set quotas, which would lead to more skepticism as reflected in our study and thus employees would not necessarily support the campaign.

6.3 Practical and Theoretical Contribution

Diversity and diversity management have been discussed largely by various scholars. The existing literature often argues about the distinction between the equal opportunities and diversity management approach. Some scholars argue for the need to shift from an equality

approach to a diversity management approach (Wilson & Iles, 1999). Applying the two concepts for diversity initiatives is problematic because both concepts approach diversity in different ways. Not deciding on one approach and passing on managerial responsibilities is even more problematic because individuals are left to deal with the contradictions of equal opportunities and diversity management. This leads to tensions among the perceptions of the employees as illustrated in our case. Therefore, our research contributed to a better pre-understanding of possible challenges within the implementation of diversity initiatives.

6.4 Reflections on Further Research

In addition to the existing literature, we believe firstly, that more research is needed to explore the understanding and perceptions of gender diversity campaigns to examine if other companies or sectors struggle with the same challenges. Secondly, it is important to stress that a clear communication and message is relevant to diversity initiatives since a confusing communication might lead to an undesired outcome such as resistance. Whereby more investigations are essential since the communication is often a significant factor affecting diversity initiatives. Lastly, further research on the top-down initiative is required to evaluate how they affect people and influence diversity initiatives.

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