



LUND UNIVERSITY
School of Economics and Management

Starting a Career in Sweden

International Students' Perception regarding Future Careers and Diversity in the
Swedish Corporate Environment

by

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Abstract

In an increasingly globalized world, the contact with diverse individuals on a daily basis is unquestionable. Individuals regularly seek intercultural experiences and skills as a way to enrichen their professional and personal approaches and stand out in today's competitive markets. This study focuses on international master students from Lund University's School of Economics and Management (LUSEM) that wish to stay in Sweden post-graduation and start their careers abroad. It describes their main perceptions regarding what type of work challenges they believe they will encounter when applying for jobs and working in Sweden, in addition to their overall perceptions on professional approaches and diversity, which include topics such as culture, values, teamwork, management and leadership styles. The research found that language barriers, interpersonal attraction behavior and networking are the biggest perceived challenges and that culture and values possess a significant influence in their overall perceptions on the challenges and opportunities of starting a career in Sweden. Furthermore, a sizable proportion of respondents believe their master programmes can assist them in overcoming some of their perceived challenges.

Keywords: Diversity, International Master Students, Challenges, Opportunities, Culture, Values, Perception, Career, LUSEM

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1 Introduction

Throughout the last century, the world has seen rapid and never before changes. From the second industrial revolution to digitalization and the second machine age (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014), these changes have had an impact in everything we do, opening borders and creating a truly globalized world (Baldwin, 2016). As Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) argue, for consumers this means having an increased access in the bounty of goods and services worldwide; for businesses, becoming multinational companies that compete in different markets; whereas for society as a whole, the contact with diverse individuals on a daily basis is unquestionable.

The easiness in crossing borders, accessing diverse ideas and interacting with people from different nations has had a significant impact in the modern society. Individuals are increasingly seeking intercultural experiences and competencies as a way to enrichen their professional and personal approaches and stand out in today's competitive markets. According to a study from the United Nations (2016), between the years 2000 to 2015 there was a 41% increase in the number of people living abroad worldwide: in 2000, 2.8% of the world's population was living abroad, whereas in 2015 around 244 million people (3.3% of the world's population) were living in a country other than their home countries. The same study points out that Europe, North America and Asia are the places with the most international immigrants.

Among the many motives on why one would wish to move abroad, to work has become ever so popular. A report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2016 cited in Forbes, 2016) forecasts that there will be a 50% increase in the number of those travelling internationally to work by 2020. Forbes (2016) comments on the topic, stating that amid the reasons why people move abroad to work are to build new networks, remuneration, to boost their skills and competencies, to create experiences and memories.

Although not as popular as the United States for moving to work, over the years Sweden has continuously proved to the world why it is an attractive destination for international talents, raking 3rd as one of the best countries for career-driven expats in a HSBC (2017) report and as the world's 8th most attractive country to work in according to students' preferences in an Universum (2013) worldwide research. There are plenty of reasons why one would want to experience their career abroad in Sweden. First, Sweden is considered one of the most equal countries in the world in regards to economic participation, educational attainment, political empowerment and health (Cochrane, 2007), where it regularly ranks among the best in the world in regards to these four equality markers.

The well-known work-life balance and welfare state benefits add to its growing attractiveness. According to the Annual Leave Act (Unionen, n.d.), regardless of the position or age, an employee in Sweden is entitled up to 25 full days of vacation every year. Moreover, Sweden is one of the top countries in the world when it comes to parental leave, where the time can be split between the mother and father (Duvander, 2014) and one of the highest ranked countries in the world when it comes to employees belonging to labour unions, where 80% of workers belong to one (Torkelson, Holm & Bäckström, 2016) pertaining to their type of work and have substantially strong rights, insurances and protection.

Furthermore, Sweden's professional approach and values may also add to the attractiveness of international individuals wanting to move to the country. According to the World Business Culture (2017), flat management and egalitarianism are extremely emphasized in the Swedish workplace, which contrasts for example to well-known Asian workplace values that tend to hierarchy and rules. Flexibility, teamwork and consensus add to the professional styles seen in Swedish businesses (World Business Culture, 2017) and may appeal to individuals coming from countries that practice more rigid and traditional professional approaches.

Due to its high-level education, Sweden is also known as a top destination for students from all over the world seeking diverse experiences, which adds to the country's overall attractiveness not only in a professional scope, but also in an educational one. A recent study conducted by Study in EU (n.d.) ranked Sweden as the 5th most attractive country to study abroad within the European Union. As The Local (2017) states, Sweden ranked 5th in quality of education and 8th in life and career, making the country attractive for students to study abroad, especially due to the fact that it provides free tuition fees for European citizens.

According to The Times Higher Education World University Rankings (2017), Swedish universities frequently rank among the best 100 universities in the world and institutions such as Karolinska Institute, Uppsala University and Lund University regularly appear. The latter currently has 8000 students that are international (representing around 20% of all the students), of whom 60% of those attend one of the 100 English master programmes being offered (Lund University, 2018). According to Lund University's official website (2018), the institution has exchange deals with 520 other universities from 70 countries, and is regularly the most popular Swedish university for international students applying to study in Sweden.

It is within Lund University's scenario that this study takes place, where all the above reasons also contributed towards the researchers choosing to study one of the English master programmes offered. Stephanie, a Swedish-American citizen, has lived for over 10 years in the United States and decided to move back to Sweden to pursue her master's degree in Management. Kely, a Brazilian-Italian citizen, previously lived for 6 years in England before accepting her place in the master's degree in Management also.

Having dealt with diversity all of their lives, studying what management means in today's globalized world was crucial for the researchers. Through learning in classroom about

different management styles, how individuals from diverse countries and values may possess different ways of working and approaching projects and also learning in practice the challenges of working in multicultural teams, an interest arose into whether the international students currently studying their master's degree at Lund University's School of Economics and Management (LUSEM) also had an interest in staying in Sweden to start their careers abroad. If so, the researchers were interested to see what their perceptions were regarding starting a career in a different country: whether the students were attracted to Sweden due to its values and professional approach, if being from a different country affects their overall perception of starting a career abroad, what they think of diversity and if they perceive any work challenges and opportunities in regards to being an international student seeking a job in the Swedish corporate market, among other topics.

No previous research on LUSEM's international master students regarding their future careers has been found, which shows the need for more research in this area. The closest kind of studies which has been conducted by LUSEM students are mostly on immigrants and refugees coming to Sweden for work and what their challenges and opportunities are when applying for work (Al-Atassi & Alebiary, 2017). Additionally, research was found on broader themes such as managing diversity in school (Hellblom-Thibblin, 2018; Azasu, Hungria-Gunnelin & Edstrom, 2010), employment expectations (Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016) and also on studying abroad and cultural awareness with nursing students (Bohman & Borglin, 2014; Hadziabdic et al., 2016; Green et al., 2008), yet none that combine diversity, cultural awareness and professional approaches on international master students at LUSEM.

1.1 Purpose and Objectives

The aim of this thesis is to provide readers with information on the perception of international master students studying at LUSEM in regards to the beginning of their careers in Sweden. It focuses on areas like job process, diversity and professional approaches, providing a comprehension on how international students perceive the implications associated to the Swedish job market. It shares insights into the challenges and opportunities students believe they will face when beginning a career in Sweden, which could be used strategically by academic institutions to better understand the target group and assist their future employment process.

This study uses a mixed-method of quantitative and qualitative research to gather data from international master students studying at LUSEM. The method is primarily qualitative, and consists of a survey and structured interviews for a deeper insight into the students' perception.

The research aims to answer the two following research questions:

1. *What are the work challenges international students believe they will encounter when applying for jobs and working in Sweden?*

2. *What are the main perceptions international students have associated with professional approaches and diversity in general?*

For the first research question, a focus was given to academic authors that talk about themes related to possible challenges of working in a diverse professional environment, which include unconscious biases, networking, communication styles, leadership and management approaches, mind-sets, among others. As for the second research question, the broader topic of diversity, national values and cultural awareness is discussed primarily through the work of Hofstede (2001).

The following chapter describes the main theoretical framework this study focuses on, with several authors that argue on topics like diversity, culture, multicultural teams and professional approaches. For the purpose of the research questions and diversity as a sensitive field, we give special focus to Hofstede's (2001) academic model.

Section three outlines the method chosen for this thesis, in addition to detailing more on how the research was created, possible limitations and the target group. Following the method, the empirical findings are displayed with overall results and main insights.

The analysis and discussion of results can be found subsequent to the empirical findings. On this part, the main results and insights are compared to the authors previously discussed for connections and possible considerations. The thesis ends with insights in regards to the research questions and suggests recommendations to both the university and academic environments in general.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 The implications of diversity within individuals and teams

To succeed in the 21st century marketplace, the need for individual professionals to understand the importance of diversity and how to work effectively with different people is crucial, yet extremely challenging. The following sections focus on theoretical views found important for this paper and that may impact the concept of a professional working in a different country, connecting diversity in regards to teamwork, leadership and management approaches, among others.

2.1.1 Diversity

The term diversity is described by authors in innumerable ways. Williams and O'Reilly (1998 cited in Mannix & Neale, 2005, p.31) broadly explain the idea as “any attribute that another person may use to detect individual differences”. These attributes can be further understood when thinking about it as two different types: the inherent and the acquired diversities, as argued by Hewlett et al. (2013). The former represents the traits we possess due to our genes, such as our gender and ethnicity; whereas the latter relate to all the aspects that we learn from experience, like ways of thinking, lifestyles, beliefs and values.

Although Hofstede's (2001) view on individual diversity is similar to the definition given by Hewlett et al. (2013), the author further defines the idea in a way that is less categorical and more intertwined and complex, as diversity is. Hofstede (2001) talks about the concept of mental programming, where each person's mental system is “partly unique, partly shared with others” (Hofstede, 2001, p.2). He divides the idea of diversity in not two but three levels: the universal, collective and individual. Here, the universal level are the aspects commonly shared by every human being (such as laughing, breathing and are mostly inherited); the collective are shared with some but not all people (and are mainly acquired, like the language we speak, traditions, values etc) and finally, the individual level is what makes us truly unique, and what the author defines as our personality and behaviors (and that can be a mixture of both inherited and acquired attributes).

What Hofstede (2001) mainly argues in the book *Culture's Consequences* is that people's mental programming also carries values of national cultures and impacts heavily the way we think and act, including in a professional environment. According to him, it “affects human thinking, feeling and acting, as well as organizations and institutions, in predictable ways”

(Hofstede, 2001, p.19). The author's unique view that links diversity to management and leadership approaches differs greatly from the main managerial articles available and is one of the reasons why this thesis focuses on his model as its main theoretical framework, which will be further discussed next.

2.1.2 Hofstede's (2001) model

Geert Hofstede's work on diversity dates back to 1980, where for over thirty years the author has dedicated his research towards the topic and organizations. The main objective of his research was to show that our nationality/culture contribute towards a predisposition in the way we think and act, a factor that had been neglected by many business and even psychology authors during those years. For Hofstede (2001, p.xv), "a better understanding of invisible cultural differences is one of the main contributions the social sciences can make to practical policy makers in governments, organizations, and institutions – and to ordinary citizens".

The author's main argument is that people from different societies have naturally different ways of thinking and interacting, which mostly comes from what individuals learn during the development stages and are deeply rooted in values, traditions and beliefs (Hofstede, 2001). In this sense, by understanding and reflecting upon our national differences, it will not only be easier to predict a person's professional approach, but to also effectively work together in an international setting or a multicultural environment.

The book focused on a research made on IBM employees from over 40 countries, mostly about how the respondents' cultural values may influence the way they work in organizations and how organizational cultures are shaped by national customs and values. Hofstede (2001) combined results from employees of the same countries for statistical inferences. The author then compared countries' results in regards to five different and independent dimensions on organizations, as follows:

1. *Power distance, which is related to the different solutions to the basic problem of human inequality;*
2. *Uncertainty avoidance, which is related to the level of stress in a society in the face of an unknown future;*
3. *Individualism versus collectivism, which is related to the integration of individuals into primary groups;*
4. *Masculinity versus femininity, which is related to the division of emotional roles between men and women;*
5. *Long-term versus short-term orientation, which is related to the choice of focus for people's efforts: the future or the present (Hofstede, 2001, p.29).*

By way of explanation, *power distance* concerns how societies perceive the distribution of power and equality, such as in decision-making styles (whether subordinates are afraid of disagreeing with their bosses), hierarchy and division of roles. *Uncertainty avoidance* deals with how people acknowledge the uncertainties regarding the future, like when dealing with

employment stability, stress, rule-orientation, among others. On the other hand, *individualism versus collectivism* involves how individuals interact with and behave in society. As Hofstede (2001, p.209) mentions “in some cultures, individualism is seen as a blessing and a source of well-being; in others, it is seen as alienating”. Furthermore, *masculinity versus femininity* shows how societies think and approach gender and how gender affects emotional and social roles, where “universally women attach more importance to social goals such as relationships, helping others and the physical environment, and men attach more importance to ego goals such as careers and money” (Hofstede, 2001, p.279). Lastly, *long-term versus short-term orientation* focuses on the aspects of Confucian thinking: how individuals persist and thrift to personal stability and tend to respect tradition.

The results from the five different dimensions show impressive correlations to modern economic indexes. For example, most of employees’ responses from the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland) display high individualistic and feminine (gender equality) values, whereas responses from South American countries (such as Ecuador, Colombia and Mexico) rank high on the opposite side, showcasing predominant values towards collectivism and a more masculine society (Hofstede, 2001). Although one study cannot and should not represent a whole country, renowned economic reports such as The Global Gender Gap 2016 Index from The World Economic Forum (2016) present similar findings, with Nordic countries among the highest in regards to equality and developing countries like Venezuela ranking as low as 74 in gender parity, meaning that their national culture has a tendency towards sexism and inequality which can also greatly impact the what business is done.

Results for uncertainty avoidance and power distance (Hofstede, 2001) further complement the view that Hofstede’s (2001) work might not be too far from the truth. Taking into consideration the same countries previously mentioned, Nordic societies (Denmark, Sweden, Norway) ranked very weak in regards to uncertainty avoidance and with a small power distance. According to Hofstede (2001), this would mean that organizations in these countries tend to prefer less hierarchy, encouraging change and new ideas: “competition between groups and leaders is encouraged, control by leaders is limited because members can join several organizations, democratic politics are fostered [...]” (Hofstede, 2001, p.84).

Furthermore, according to Hofstede’s (2001) findings South American countries (such as Mexico, Venezuela and Brazil) rank large in power distance and have strong uncertainty avoidance. The 2018 Global Entrepreneurship Index by the Global Entrepreneurship and Development Institute (2018) present data that matches Hofstede’s (2001) findings, with Nordic countries being among the most innovative (weak in uncertainty avoidance) and South American countries appearing amongst the lowest in the ranking, which represents their tendency towards avoiding change and preferring predictability and planned strategies.

2.1.2.1 Sweden according to Hofstede's (2001) model

As previously described, Hofstede's (2001) findings and dimensions help towards an overall understanding on how different countries may vary in relation to values that influence professional approaches. In regards to Sweden, Hofstede's (2001) model and dimensions illustrate interesting findings. Below, the country's rankings for each of the author's dimensions are shown (figure 1):

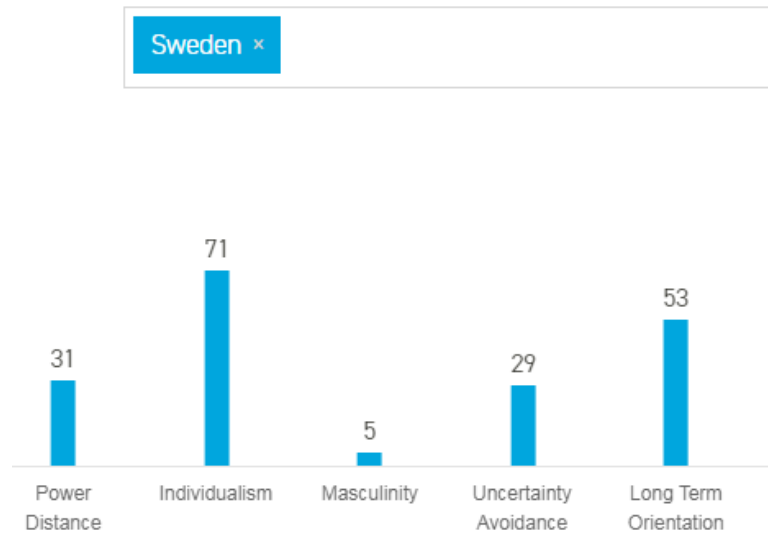


Figure 1: Sweden according to Hofstede's (2001) five dimensions (source: Hofstede Insights, 2018)

Overall, Sweden's results according to Hofstede's (2001) model go in accordance with the country's well-known international perception (described in the introduction), which showcases the link between the author's argument and today's scenario. Sweden's low score (31) on power distance means that independency, equal rights, accessible superiors, participative communication and empowerment are some of the characteristics frequently found in Swedish businesses in relation to hierarchy.

For individualism, scoring high (71) relates to the fact that Sweden has a tendency towards being an individualist society (Hofstede, 2001), where people focus more on their own well-being and direct family members, with being reserved seen as a value and corporate promotions being strictly merit-based, in contrast to some countries where networking also impacts promotions.

As for the masculinity dimension, Sweden's extremely low score (5) exhibits the country's popular preference towards a more feminine approach, where instead of competition and results an emphasis is given to quality of life, consensus, equality and solidarity (Hofstede, 2001). This score can be associated to Sweden's renowned work-life balance approach and the *lagom* mind-set, with the culture valuing moderation and ensuring that nobody goes without anything or too much of something.

The country's score on uncertainty avoidance (29) can help to explain the Swedish society's relaxed attitude to norms, its flexible schedules and a liking for innovation. Here, a low uncertainty avoidance illustrates a value of not being afraid of changes or taking risks. In addition, scoring 53 on long-term orientation further emphasizes these qualities, with values that show how the Swedish society tends to encourage efforts with results that will be seen only in the long-term, such as its entrepreneur projects.

2.1.2.2 Criticism towards Hofstede's (2001) work

Although Hofstede's (2001) work has become one of the main references in regards to diversity and social sciences, numerous critiques have also followed the research and must also be acknowledged. The main criticisms most authors seem to agree on (such as Cooper, 1982; Roberts & Boyacigiller, 1984) was that surveys are not the ideal tool to measure or evaluate cultural differences; one cannot base research on just one company to validate entire countries and values; that the data comes from 1980 and has become obsolete for recent studies and that five dimensions are too limited, among others (Hofstede, 2001).

More recent critics (Nakata, 2009) comment that due to globalization and borderless opportunities, we are now in a time where nations are more heterogeneous with better integration of diverse cultures, in addition to counting with more cultural intelligence. In this sense, Hofstede's (2001) data findings cannot be utilized in the same way, as the main research on IBM employees was executed in the beginning of the 70's when individuals did not have a diverse perspective (Nakata, 2009), contrasting to today's modern societies' views. Peterson (2003, p.130) also mentions an important issue, arguing that people should look for distinctions among Hofstede's (2001) five dimensions and that it is important to consider other elements of culture that goes beyond values, in addition to the fact that standardizing data into five dimensions also contributes in a way to stereotypes and biased visions of societies.

All critiques are extremely applicable, in a way that even Hofstede (2001) acknowledged it, producing a reviewed second edition of his seminal book in 2001, the book used as a reference for this paper. As Hofstede (2001) argues, the main idea behind his work was not to create a universal model or categorization of cultures, but to start the conversation that values and national cultures possess an influence in the way individuals approach scenarios.

For this paper, all mentioned limitations and critiques are valued and agreed with. It is unquestionable that nations cannot be fully standardized into dimensions, that each individual is also extremely unique (through the combination of the universal, collective and individual diversity levels discussed previously) and should not be viewed as a product of a country. However, the broad proposition that values and cultures can influence our way of perceiving the world and, more importantly, our professional approach is enriching.

By reflecting on Hofstede's (2001) work, it can be seen how the five dimensions connect to and complement the main concepts of management, leadership and teamwork available today. Yet, many business authors still lack cultural sensitivity and its implications when arguing about these topics or proposing solutions towards working effectively with diversity. The next section showcases this reflection, bringing together renowned concepts of teamwork and professional approaches that link to diversity through the cultural lens of Hofstede's (2001) work. The theories show different aspects related to the idea of individuals working in a country other than their home country, which will be further reflected upon findings from the survey and interviews carried out with international students that wish to stay in Sweden upon graduation.

2.2 The possible challenges of diversity

2.2.1 Unconscious biases and stereotypes

Among the many aspects associated with diversity, the practice of unconscious biases towards other people is arguably one of the most practiced by individuals, even if we are not aware of it. Wallace (2014, p.1) connects these biases to what he calls our "natural default-settings". According to the author, all individuals look at the world through their own lens of self, in a way that everything we experience is about us and what this means to our existence, where we are the center of everything around us.

Wallace's (2014) view of default-setting connects to Hofstede's (2001) explanation of mental programming: everything we know and learn is transferred to us during our entire lives, being a combination of other people's individual mental programming (such as our parents and what they teach us) and collective mental programming (values of the society we live in, from school, from organizations we work). According to Hofstede (2001), most of what we learn and what later become our reference points are acquired during the first ten years of our lives and "this is why children who are disadvantaged in their early years will suffer the consequences for life" (Hofstede, 2001, p.4).

In this sense, we try to understand the world, scenarios and people around us through our previous experiences, reference points and knowledge – unconsciously looking for similarities and associations into what we already know. When we cannot find similarities, we tend to connect what is different from us to something automatically negative: the so called unconscious biases. Thus, meeting someone who looks, wears, talks or acts differently than we do might lead to the start of many subconscious fast judgements such as questioning what a person is wearing, seeing a different approach to leading a project or presenting a work as the wrong way, among others.

One of the biggest consequences to looking at the world only through our own default-settings (Wallace, 2014) is the possibility of stereotypes and ethnocentrism – other negative challenges that can impact diverse individuals working together. Many studies (Clement & Schiereck, 1973; Nelson & Klutas, 2000) have shown that both these consequences mostly happen when Hofstede’s (2001) conception of collective level diversity is taken to extreme and categorized as a way for individuals to make sense of others. Diversity linked to values, culture, beliefs and gender (among others) would thus become classifications in which people analyze others - the social categorization theory (Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963).

Hofstede (2001) comments on this issue. The author claims that stereotype “is a fixed notion about persons in a certain category, with no distinctions made among individuals” (Hofstede, 2001, p.14). The author further argues that stereotypes can become hetero-stereotypes (a negative generalization of others) and even auto-stereotypes (a positive generalization of the group/culture that you belong in). The idea of hetero-stereotypes and auto-stereotypes will be one that shall be reflected in this thesis’ research findings, whether or not students unconsciously perceive their birth societies with positive generalizations, whilst comparing them to the Swedish society in which they are currently living.

According to Mannix and Neale (2005), categorizing others may lead to exaggerating differences towards people different than you, whilst perceiving individuals that may have something in common as more similar than they actually are: “once categorization occurs, we tend to think of others not as unique individuals but as examples of a relevant group stereotype” (Mannix & Neale, 2005, p.41). Based on studies, Mannix and Neale (2005, p.41) rightfully argue that “the end result is likely to be biased behavior directed toward out-group members and favoritism and preference directed toward in-group members”.

Although stereotypes and biases may be natural challenges in teams with diverse members, Wallace (2014) defends that there are ways to overcome this. The key is to be aware of how we automatically tend to think through our lens of self so that we can consciously decide to think differently. As Wallace (2014) argues:

Learning how to think really means learning how to exercise some control over how and what you think. It means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience (Wallace, 2014, p.2).

Wallace’s (2014) alternative to unconscious biases is, in other words, what Gosling and Mintzberg (2003) describe as having the reflective mind-set, which will be discussed in more detail later. To Gosling and Mintzberg (2003), practicing the reflective mind-set means understanding how to manage your own self, where you possess self-knowledge of your weaknesses and strengths and use this introspection to better perceive the world, the people and the environment around you: looking at people more as unique individuals than as generalized categorizations of societies. We agree with this view and support the notion that individuals who have a more developed reflective mind-set and awareness of their own

mental programming – specially their own cultural background, values and beliefs - may be able to better reflect and be aware of the possible challenges they will face when working in a different country, and become employees who work more efficiently in diverse teams.

2.2.2 Interpersonal-attraction theory and networking

As described above, biases and stereotypes are one of the most common possible challenges associated to diversity, where people automatically search for similarities to their known mental programming with the objective of making sense of new surroundings or when meeting new people – the well-known interpersonal-attraction theory formulated by Newcomb (1961; 1968) and explained by Mannix and Neale (2005). According to this theory, people tend to be naturally more attracted to individuals whom they share similar attributes in regards to values, beliefs or even attitudes, facilitating interpersonal liking and interaction.

Many authors further studied this topic, with results that support Newcomb's (1961; 1968) theory. Byrne's (1971) research showed that not only do individuals tend to be more attracted to people similar to themselves, but they also rate similar individuals more positively than those different from them, with words such as intelligent and knowledgeable.

In the workplace, the interpersonal-attraction theory has also been found to have some kind of influence. Schneider's (1987) early work showed that businesses naturally have a tendency to select and hire employees that show similarities to those hiring them. It also showed that prospective candidates usually apply for organizations that they believe are similar to them in values. Although Schneider's (1987) work was published decades ago and the world has changed drastically since then, with many human resources initiatives and equality laws and rules, it is still a plausible point to reflect upon. In this sense, the survey and interviews carried out for this thesis aim to also shine a light into this topic - if international students that wish to stay in Sweden to work are attracted to the country because of similar values, work approaches and beliefs, or whether they have experienced any occasions where they felt as an outsider due to not being similar to the Swedish society, for example.

More recent works (Carley, 1991; Ibarra, 1992, 1993) still show similar findings to Schneider (1987), where people unconsciously seek homogeneity even in networking groups, both career-wise and socially (Mannix and Neale, 2005). Jackson et al. (1991) go further with research results that suggest that teams with great diversity in companies have higher turnover levels and may be more likely to quit than homogeneous teams - a point that may connect to individuals feeling like outsiders or not feeling a sense of belonging to the organization.

Among the alternatives to this issue, many authors (Rock, 2009; Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; Edmondson, 2002) defend that people and companies must invest time in diverse individuals getting to know each other first – the contact before content and psychological safety

approaches. This approach argues that when heterogeneous team members begin to share ideas, personal experiences and points of views, the inherited diversity becomes a secondary aspect and they create similarities within the acquired diversity levels, such as personal taste, educational backgrounds and hobbies, among others. Even though this alternative helps members feel closer to others, it further emphasizes the interpersonal-attraction theory, basing its principles on the fact that individuals should aim towards being similar, instead of embracing and learning from the diversity within each of them.

Mannix and Neale's (2005) review on previous research show the opposite: instead of helping group performance, when team members from racially diverse groups were asked to focus on similarities it created the opposite effect, where "the attempt to highlight commonality in the racially diverse groups only served to highlight their differences" (Mannix & Neale, 2005, p.38). What Hofstede (2001) proposes is not for people to look for similarities, but that there needs to be environments (such as universities, business spaces, gyms and clubs) where culturally diverse groups and people can meet, integrate and mix. These environments would thus "allow trust and friendships to develop between culturally dissimilar persons, in which the culture gap gradually loses its threat" (Hofstede, 2001, p.425). With this in mind, some questions within this paper's research also focus on the students' perception of the university itself, such as if they feel the academic environment and its initiatives have facilitated towards networking with diverse people and businesses in Sweden.

2.2.3 Language barriers and communication styles

One of the most easily found diversities among groups and people are, of course, languages. In today's world, being fluent in more than one language is increasingly important for multinational businesses, executives and young professionals looking to start their career abroad. Although English continues to be the main corporate language across countries and companies, professionals may still face other types of challenges. This is one of the main arguments made by Brett et al. (2006), where the authors state that misunderstandings and stressful situations may still happen due to different accents, fluency levels and translations issues when speaking the same corporate language as international colleagues.

Another challenge associated with language barriers is the difficulty in expressing your expertise in a language other than your mother tongue. According to Brett et al. (2006), interpersonal conflicts in multicultural teams can easily happen due to impatience and frustration of team members that do not fully understand what the other person means, leading to less information being shared. Even if the international colleague has the most knowledge within the team, not being able to communicate it effectively leads to the whole team underusing diverse experiences and expertise, and may even "influence perceptions of status or competence" (Brett et al., 2006, p.2), where team members associate lack of fluency to lack of qualification and know-how.

Hofstede (2001) points out that communicating in a foreign language means adopting another person's frame of reference, which connects to Wallace's (2014) idea of broadening our view and stepping away from our automatic mental programming. For Hofstede (2001, p.425) "if one does not know the language of one's country of residence, one misses a lot of the subtleties of the culture and is forced to remain a relative outsider, caught in stereotypes". This is due to different communication styles and contexts proposed by Edward Hall (1976) and may be one of the most influential aspects when starting a career abroad.

Meyer (2014) discusses Hall's (1976) idea of communication styles from the perspective of high and low-context communication. According to Meyer (2014), cultures have unique nuances within their languages, where Western countries tend to be more direct and explicit when talking and Eastern countries more subtle and contextual. Hall's (1976) and Meyer's (2014) approach to communication emphasizes Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, where a country with a high collective value (such as Japan) tends to give more importance to traditions, societal norms and groups, thus being more prone to using an indirect communication as a way of respect and politeness in a business setting. The United States, on the other hand, scores high in being an individualist culture, which connects to the fact that individuals tend to use a direct and to-the-point approach when communicating in a professional environment.

As Meyer (2014, p.44) argues "when considering the impact of cultural differences on your dealings with other people, what matters is not so much the absolute positioning of a person's culture on a particular scale, but rather their relative positioning in comparison to you". Bret et al. (2006) also comment on this issue, stating that non-Westerners might have an easier time understanding the direct communication style of a Westerner in international business negotiations. As such, not speaking the local language when working abroad might influence a person's ability to network, understand subtle comments or informal contexts, highlighting the feeling of not fully fitting in.

2.2.4 Leadership and management approaches

Although not always linking to diversity, the way a person leads and manages might also impact effective teamwork when working in a multicultural team, where individuals have different ways of approaching the same task. Dating back to the 1900s, the most traditional management principles were based on the idea of command, control, planning and hierarchy (Fayol, 1908; cited in Kiechel III, 2012). Hence, an efficient manager would be someone that establishes order and monitors everything.

Fayol's (1908, cited in Kiechel III, 2012) conception of management might be considered by some as outdated, yet it is still widely used as the main idea of what managing truly is. This management approach can be linked to Hofstede's (2001) perception of societies with a higher uncertainty avoidance, power distance and individualist values. In other words,

societies that come from a culture that values avoiding uncertainty “look for structure in their organizations, institutions, and relationships, which makes events clearly interpretable and predictable” (Hofstede, 2001, p.148), and would be more likely to appreciate command and control in a business environment. Similarly, high power distance and individualism may even be associated with academic thinking such as the Agency Theory (Ghoshal, 2005) where individuals act mostly on their own interest and the main motivator is financial (Glinkowska & Kaczmarek, 2015). In this way, “the manager’s task is to use hierarchical authority to prevent the opportunists from benefiting at the cost of others” (Ghoshal, 2005, p.85).

By contrast, modern leadership principles may reflect Hofstede’s (2001) perception of societies that possess more feminine, low uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation views. According to Kotter (2001, p.3) “what leaders really do is prepare organizations for change and help them cope as they struggle through it”, where a leader sets a direction, aligns, motivates and inspires people, while management plans, budgets, organizes, staffs, controls and solves problems. Mintzberg (2009) highlights this idea, commenting that business practices today and leadership must be based on respect, collaboration, empowerment and knowledge exchange.

As traditional management might be associated with the Agency Theory (Ghoshal, 2005), one could say leadership is more closely related to the Stewardship theory (Davis et al., 1997). The key motivator is satisfaction and the professional relationship is based on trust and support (Glinkowska & Kaczmarek, 2015), where “people want to find meaning in their work and will contribute in positive ways if the work is well designed” (Kiechel III, 2012, p.77).

As Hofstede (2001, p.313) discusses, masculine cultures tend to view managers as more decisive and forceful, whereas in feminine cultures a manager is “less visible, intuitive rather than decisive, and accustomed to seeking consensus” – the modern leadership approach which values team work. Moreover, having a long-term orientation value helps towards a more entrepreneurship spirit and the establishment of a sense of direction to the team. The focus is on becoming strong in the marketplace instead of extreme concerns over quarterly results in the short-term and control systems.

Combining employees with a more traditional management approach with others that seek innovation, independency and change may therefore cause clashes and teamwork dilemmas. In the Swedish corporate environment, where consensus, flat structures and entrepreneurship are encouraged on a daily basis, students that wish for predictability and control may face bigger challenges to start a career in the country.

Another aspect that relates to leadership and management and can be influenced by diversity is the way people approach decision-making. Hammond et al. (2006) argue that making decisions are among the most important, toughest, riskiest and critical job an executive can do. Their line of reasoning bases decision-making on something that has to do with heuristics,

anchoring and indirect biases, depending on where we come from and what our routines are – a similar approach to Hofstede’s (2001) view.

According to Hammond et al. (2006), a heuristic decision is a decision made from our habits and can be based on unconscious routines. Basing parts of our decisions on our routines can result in good and bad choices. As our routines are psychological, they may become traps when making an executive decision with different risks and factors that need to be taken into account. Humans tend to do something which is referred to as anchoring. To anchor a decision means to heavily depend on the first bit of information received (Hammond et al., 2006), where the first impression is crucial and important when making a decision – creating a space for fast judgements and biases.

Within businesses, the most common type of anchoring trend is relying on past experiences – our automatic lens of self and mental programming discussed previously by Wallace (2014) and Hofstede (2001). While this approach can lead to more accurate estimates, it relies too much on the past and does not weigh in other important factors which can lead to bad decision making (Hammond et al., 2006) and managerial dilemmas.

2.2.5 Mind-sets

Although not the focus of this thesis, the different ways a person may look at and analyze the environment around her/him can influence to a great extent the possible challenges to diversity mentioned above and thus need to also be taken into consideration. Mind-sets are not challenges themselves, but can help to either promote conflict or greater performance in regards to diverse individuals working together. As previously discussed, mind-sets are in line with how we choose to look at the world based on our mental programming (acquired experiences and inherited diversity) (Hofstede, 2001) and different lenses defended by Wallace (2014), and are extremely important in a professional environment.

Gosling and Mintzberg (2003) define five different types of mind-sets that good managers must have in order to succeed in today’s multicultural and competitive workplace. According to them, these mind-sets are “five ways in which managers interpret and deal with the world around them” (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003, p.56). Even though this paper focuses on graduate students and not managers, these mind-sets are understood as crucial for the development of any employee, especially international graduates with great career aspirations like the ones focused here, which will probably become leaders and managers in the future. In this sense, Gosling and Mintzberg (2003) divide the mind-sets as following:

Managing self: reflective mind-set

Managing organizations: analytic mind-set

Managing context: worldly mind-set

Managing relationships: collaborative mind-set

Managing change: action mind-set (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003, p.56).

The authors discuss that understanding how to think in certain ways helps when it comes to diverse situations in the workplace. For example, the reflective mind-set allows the employee to focus more on self-knowledge, realizing where his strengths work best and take insights from his introspection; the analytic takes into consideration all different information, data and reasons to make a thorough decision; the worldly explores the external environment to enrich our vision; the collaborative engages teamwork and involves more people for better solutions and distribution of responsibility; in addition to the action mind-set that aims on having awareness into what needs to be achieved and how to do it.

As previously mentioned, for the purpose of this thesis it is our contention that individuals who have a reflective mind-set and understand their own mental programming and surroundings possess an easier time in regards to knowing what to expect when starting a career in a different country, thus probably being more prepared to challenges that may arise. It is also believed that in addition to the reflective mind-set, having the worldly mind-set is of great importance when dealing with diversity.

To be worldly suggests knowing and understanding the people you work with - their backgrounds, habits and cultures. Mintzberg and Moore (2006) comment that it means proceeding from a position of personal strength, from an individual's own background and culture that serves as an opening to other people's worlds. In other words, the reflective mind-set and conscious awareness allows for a more worldly view and respect of the people around us and surroundings. We argue that the international students should have a worldly mind-set when starting a career in a new country for the first time, as they are entering a workplace with a different culture, language and people. So not only do managers require certain mind-sets, but so do employees in order to execute a good job in another country other than their own.

Instead of a worldly mind-set, Fatehi and Ghadar (2014) talk about the concept of a global mind-set. According to them, a global mind-set is the ability to view the world with an open and broad perspective (Fatehi & Ghadar, 2014). Mintzberg and Moore (2006) question this definition, stating that a global mind-set suggests being a conformist, where everyone's beliefs are the same, with similar attitudes and behaviors to group norms no matter what their background is.

Hofstede (2001) defends a similar view to that of Mintzberg and Moore (2006), stating that it is naïve and arrogant to say that a person can think globally, and here lies the main argument in Hofstede's (2001) book. For Hofstede (2001), all individuals think according to their own mental programming. Yet, as the author suggests "what intercultural encounters are about is recognizing that we think differently but resolving our common problems anyway. The slogan should be 'think locally, act globally'" (Hofstede, 2001, p.454).

As such, it is possible to work effectively with diversity when we stop trying to change our ways or try and make a team work and think the same way. When diverse professional styles, values and cultures are acknowledged, we begin to understand and respect the fact that each person is different, using diversity towards our benefit. As Hofstede (2001, p.454) argues “if we begin to realize that our own ideas are culturally limited, from that moment we need the others: we can never be self-sufficient again. Only others with different mental programs can help us find the limitations of our own”. Gosling and Mintzberg (2003, p.63) share a similar view, stating that it is almost unrealistic to think that a person can possess all five mind-sets, as each one “naturally tilt to one or another, depending on their situations and personal inclinations”. Their suggestion is that employees can combine their strengths when they understand each other, a view also shared by De Vries (2007, p.30), when the author comments that “complementarity is vital to a team: all is well if an individual’s weaknesses are counterbalanced by others’ strengths”.

2.3 The possible benefits of diversity

Whether seen as attributes, differences or mental programming, diversity constitutes an individual’s identity and greatly influences the way a person communicates, interacts and approaches work. It can thus be perceived as a positive or negative attribute, depending on how it is fostered both individually and within groups. In this sense, even though the focus of this thesis is on describing the possible challenges of diversity towards beginning a career in a different country, both the positive and the negative views of the topic to modern companies need to be taken into consideration and will both be included into the research questions for a non-biased approach.

Although the many authors discussed above argue that diversity may lead to several challenging aspects, it could be that international students do not perceive it the same way and see diversity as a true opportunity when applying for jobs in a different country – something enriching as it goes against many renowned academic views.

According to Mannix and Neale (2005), one of the optimistic views of working in diverse teams is that it improves group performance and results, as different professionals working together mean the possibility of combining different points of view, information and experiences. This is known as the information-processing approach (Mannix & Neale, 2005).

Other authors, such as Robinson and Dechant (1997) mention a similar consequence, noting that diverse individuals working together lead to more creativity and problem-solving skills in a company, especially as mixed teams have a higher probability of understanding costumers and create custom-made solutions to markets and demands – a point also made by Hewlett et al. (2013, p.2) as “inherently diverse contributors understand the unmet needs in under-leveraged markets. We’ve found that when at least one member of a team has traits in

common with the end user, the entire team better understands that user". Additional researchers, such as Toegel and Barsoux (2016) and Eisenhardt et al. (1997) further argue that after resolving potential team conflicts, the end result of working with diverse individuals include more participation, a richer range of business solutions, strategic decisions, more understanding of possible issues and better decision-making.

Overall, there is no doubt of the importance of diversity everywhere and its benefits to businesses, society and individuals. The increased amount of management research that takes into account diversity, the creation of international master programmes everywhere and highly sought after global trainee programmes are just a few concrete examples of this. Yet, putting individuals with various mental programs to work effectively together may not be an easy task. This thesis aims to see the views of students that have an interest in experiencing working in a different country than their own, and whether or not their perceptions match with the authors' views mentioned in this chapter. The next section outlines the details into the method of research - from the conception of the research approach, to the creation of the survey and interview and the possible limitations that it implies.

3 Method

As previously seen, working with diverse individuals in today's globalized markets also imply working with professionals that have different communication styles, ways of thinking, professional approaches, values and beliefs, where these issues can be fostered either positively or negatively. Considering that the target group for this thesis focuses on international master students studying at LUSEM who may have an interest in staying and starting a career in Sweden, and that the two research questions aim to describe what the students think about work challenges related to these topics and what their perceptions are in regards to professional approaches and diversity in general, the research philosophy for this work is based on interpretivism (Saunders et al., 2007).

A research philosophy based on interpretivism (or constructionism, as argued by Sekaran and Bougie, 2016) suggests that different meanings and interpretations are created by each unique individual, in a sense that observations may be different and there are no absolute rights or wrongs. The fact that both research questions focus on perceptions and feelings make this philosophy the most suitable, as it is based on interactions and context. Thus, the research carried out for the purpose of this thesis reflects the target group's interpretation of the world, and may have different results from other studies. As Saunders et al. (2007) state, interpretivism also means that perceptions are constantly changing and readjusting according to the subject matter's experience and evolution.

This section details the methods chosen to answer the two research questions, like the design, data collection and analysis, and takes into consideration the chosen research philosophy.

3.1 Research Approach

The thesis first addresses the main theories associated to topics on working abroad, which discuss diversity within the workplace and society, leadership, management, decision-making and team work, among others. Although other authors are also taken into consideration for a broader literature review on the topic, the main theoretical framework is based on Hofstede's (2001) model that argues that national cultures and values affect the way we work and look at the world. In this sense, the research approach is a deductive one (Silverman, 2001), where the research carried out hopes to shine a light on whether Hofstede's (2001) view and what other authors argue connect or differ to students' perception on the same topic. To support the chosen approach, a mixed-method research was carried out, with a special emphasis on qualitative data but also using quantitative methods.

3.2 Research Design

To answer the two research questions, a mixed-method approach with survey and interviews was the most appropriate, as it provides different types of data that complements one another. Therefore, the study follows the *sequential explanatory design* (Creswell, 2003), a mixed-method design with two phases, where the quantitative data is collected first followed by the qualitative data (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006). For the purpose of the study, the survey was carried out first for the main data and the interview was developed subsequently to complement some of the survey's topics. The overall research was a cross-sectional study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), with data collected only once during a defined period of time.

In relation to the survey, it focused on providing data towards the first research question: *What are the work challenges international students believe they will encounter when applying for jobs and working in Sweden?* Here, a survey was specifically chosen as this question is easier to quantify with percentages and categories. It also reflects the type of research Hofstede (2001) carried out, in a way that results from the survey could be more easily compared to conclusions from the author's findings and cultural dimensions.

As for the interviews, it aimed at complementing the data gathered from the survey and to provide deeper insights towards the second research question: *What are the main perceptions international students have associated with professional approaches and diversity in general?* As the second research question targets perceptions and feelings, carrying out interviews where respondents could openly express themselves seemed the most fitting.

It is important to note that although surveys tend to be classified as quantitative data, in this case many of the survey questions were open-ended and with possibility for short and long answers to reflect the interpretivist research philosophy and questions. As such, the mixed-method approach is mainly qualitative to give importance for unique feelings and perceptions.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Survey

The survey was a one-time survey executed with a non-random sample, also known as non-probability sampling (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), where a distinct target group is chosen out of the whole population. In this case, the chosen population were the international master students currently studying at LUSEM, specifically those who have an interest in staying in Sweden to start their careers.

The entire student body of masters' students currently studying at LUSEM consists of 800 students, of which 400 are international students. This meant that up to 50% of LUSEM's population of master students could potentially complete the survey, where 400 responses would be a 100% possible response rate for this study's targeted group.

To collect data from the survey, the questions were designed to reflect the main ideas from the authors discussed in the theoretical framework chapter, so that posteriorly results could be easily compared to the authors' views and arguments for data analysis. The questions therefore included topics such as language, diversity, networking, working in teams and leadership, among others, and many items indirectly reproduced Hofstede's (2001) five dimensions: for example, reaching decisions connects to power distance and innovation with uncertainty avoidance. Furthermore, an emphasis on culture and values was also given to some questions to relate to Hofstede's (2001) main argument and to gather students' views on how diversity affects them. The survey can be found in the appendix.

The survey consisted of 9 sections with 20 questions in total. The questions were styled differently to keep the student interested and to gain more information. The survey's first two questions had the requirement of answering "yes" or "maybe" for the respondent to be able to continue the survey. The first question asked if the student was international (non-Swedish) and the second if he/she had an interest in staying in Sweden post-graduation. If any of these questions were answered with "no", the survey would automatically close and submit. This was strategically done as there was no way of knowing exactly which master students from LUSEM were international and wish to stay in Sweden. As such, the survey was open to all of LUSEM's master students for an overall universe and response rate, and the first two questions served as a filter to the specific target group to be the only ones to continue answering the survey, thus not receiving any biased information from students who were not international or did not have any interest in staying in Sweden for work post-graduation.

The questions were styled with the possibility of yes/no/maybe answers, open short/long answers, multiple choices and through a rate scoring system for different data collection purposes, as follows:

- Yes/No/Maybe - Collected personal information from the international master students
- Short/Long answers - Collected more insights on specific questions regarding their thoughts and beliefs
- Multiple choices - Collected both personal information and more on their insights in regards to specific topics
- 1-5 rate scales – Collected students' positive or negative views on different subjects and issues of daily life. These specific styles of questions are from the *Rate-Likert-Type-Scoring-System* and aims to measure attitudes in a 5 or 7 point ordinal scale (Sullivan & Artino, 2013).

The survey was created through Google forms as it was a free, sustainable and a familiar option for the respondents, where the target group could take the survey at their preferred time. Furthermore, Google forms also allowed the researchers to edit the survey innumerable times before sending it, in addition to providing an automatic overview of responses.

The survey was left open for nine days and monitored constantly. The overall responses were as follows:

- Out of the universe of 800 LUSEM master students, 177 responded. This equals to a participation rate of approximately 22% out of the whole population
- From the 177 respondents, 118 were international and were allowed to continue the survey. As there are 400 international master students at LUSEM, the survey therefore had a 29.5% response rate out of the non-random sample
- Out of the 118 international master students, 75 respondents had an interest in staying in Sweden post-graduation and were allowed to fully complete the survey. This means that 63.5% of the international master students who participated in the survey had an interest in staying in Sweden and were the target group

3.3.2 Interviews

The interviews were one-time interviews in the structured style (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), where the content was prepared in advance and included an introduction to the interviewees, with topics and questions based on the theories discussed in the theoretical framework chapter and that complemented the survey with deeper insights. In addition, open-follow up questions were also asked depending on how the discussion with the participants went for more in-depth information, discussions or to raise other issues respondents considered important. Below, the overview of the interviews:

- 32 questions were designed to ask the students, but throughout the discussions additional questions followed depending on their answers and perceptions
- The interview questions were divided into sections and themes based on the theoretical framework and are presented in the appendix
- The 32 questions were created by analyzing the survey, where a few of the survey questions were turned into open-ended questions for a deeper insight into the qualitative data
- Some questions were close-ended but most were open-ended so more discussions would take place when interviewing
- A few questions referred back to Hofstede's (2001) model about values and cultures

To collect the qualitative data for the study, six interviews were conducted with different interviewees through the *critical case sampling* method (Strewig & Stead, 2001), which equals to 8% of the 75 international LUSEM master students that completed the whole survey. The six interviewees were purposefully selected based on their diverse backgrounds,

gender, age, education and nationality for the most balance in terms of diversity. Here, the aim was to interview one student from each continent to reflect and compare Hofstede's (2001) view on national cultures and values affecting individuals' perception and approaches. However, no respondents from Antarctica or Oceania that took the survey were available to be interviewed. For this reason, an additional interviewee from one of the Nordic countries was selected for a more thorough perception on how he/she perceives Sweden, being a country from the same region. All of the participants had completed the survey prior to the interview. Although their anonymity remains, below are their overall profiles:

1. XXX, Mexico / Latin America, Male, 28, Entrepreneurship and Innovation
2. XXX, South Africa / Africa, Male, 29, Management
3. XXX, Thailand / Asia, Female, 26, Economic Development
4. XXX, USA / North America, Male, 37, Management
5. XXX, Portugal / Europe, Female, 32, Management
6. XXX, Finland / Nordics, Male, 24, European and International Tax Law

Additionally, half of the six interviewees were purposefully chosen from the MSc in Management program, since some questions regarding management, teamwork and leadership are from themes emphasized in that master program and therefore an interest to see if they perceived those topics differently from the rest was raised. The remaining three chosen participants are in three different master programs to keep the data diverse and to gain a broader perspective.

All interviews were recorded with the interviewees' verbal consent and the discussions were posteriorly transcribed for further analysis. The interviews were recorded instead of taking notes for the data to be as accurate as possible and so that the interviewers were able to pay full attention and interact, listening and possibly asking follow-up questions.

3.4 Data Analysis

For the data analysis, a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was executed for both the survey and interview data. This is due to the fact that a deductive approach was chosen for this study, where the data is later compared and analyzed in relation to the theory discussed previously. As such, both the quantitative and qualitative data of the survey and interviews were analyzed under the same subtopics found in the theoretical framework chapter, which are: diversity; unconscious biases and stereotypes; interpersonal-attraction theory and networking; language barriers and communication styles; leadership and management approaches; mind-sets and the possible benefits of diversity. This was strategically done to make the comparison of results to the different authors' main ideas easier and clearer.

To analyze the survey data, a focus on group data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016) was given, where responses were merged and categorized into groups depending on the question and varies among groups based on rates, countries, multiple choices and yes/no answers, among others. As the survey received 75 responses, the main objective was to understand the overall perceived challenges, which is why group data and statistical methods were chosen. For this, an excel file with all the results was used for specific results, to manually search for key words or perceptions within open-ended questions and to create percentages. At first, averages were also used as a method, however those findings did not reflect the perceptions of the students towards answering the first research question, as averages do not take into account very low or very high perceptions. Due to this, a focus on percentages was given instead, where positive and negative results were looked at independently from each other and the neutral responses (those ranked at 3) were dismissed, as the objective was to describe the possible negative and positive perceptions from respondents, and not those in between. In addition to percentages, the collected data has also been presented in tables, graphs and texts for an easier analysis of results.

On the other hand, the analysis of the interview results was focused on individual data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), as in this case unique perceptions were the most important information. The analysis was mostly based on the comparison of main ideas and keywords from the transcriptions, where specific quotes from interviewees were presented depending on the question. Since qualitative data is based on meanings expressed through words, the collection of the results required in some cases categorization (Saunders et al., 2007). Here, some tables that summarize categories such as similarities and differences in perceptions were created for an easier data analysis. As the interview data had the objective of complementing the survey data where needed, only the most important perceptions that provide new insights and information are presented in the empirical findings, with other answers that were similar to those from the survey being dismissed from the analysis and the study.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

To test the reliability and validity of the chosen research methods, a pilot survey was conducted with three students. The three students were selected based on their diverse backgrounds, cultures and experiences for a more balance feedback and suggestions. In this case, the accidental sampling method was used (Etikan et al., 2016) and for this reason all three students were from the master in management program. The pilot survey's objective as for outsiders to view the research questions and provide feedback, making sure the researchers were not being biased on how they had formulated the questions, if all topics made sense for respondents, the survey's length and overall improvement suggestions. As an example, a suggestion that came from the pilot survey was to divide the survey into different sections to make it more organized and attractive, which was implemented straight away.

Additionally, a pilot interview was also conducted with one student as a way to test the validity and reliability. The student was one of the three students who had given prior feedback to the survey, who was also chosen through the accidental sampling method (Etikan et al., 2016). With similar objectives to the pilot survey, the aim was to make sure questions were not misleading, that the interview questions were clear and neutral and that the length was ideal. One of the suggestions was to organize the interview into themes that summarize the topics discussed in the theoretical framework chapter, which was implemented before conducting the real interviews.

Moreover, another way to ensure validity and reliability for the research was in regards to the survey distribution. As some of the international master students personally knew the researchers and could lead into a biased approach towards answering the survey, a solution for the researchers to remain anonymous was to have the master coordinators of LUSEM send out the survey to each of their master programmes. As there are fourteen master programs at LUSEM, a strategy was to contact the overall programme coordinator for the Department of Economics, who then asked all the other coordinators to kindly forward this thesis' survey link to each of their classes. A visit was also paid to each of the master programmes' coordinators to personally introduce the researchers, the purpose of the study and to remind them to send the research to their students. The survey link was sent to the students' academic email accounts by their coordinators with a message that explained the aim of the research and without releasing the researchers' names or emails, which contributed towards the integrity of the survey and for more respondents to answer in an unbiased way.

3.6 Limitations

Due to the fact that this study's target group was chosen by a non-probability sampling technique (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), where the focus is on an specific group from a larger population, it also means that the interpretations and perceptions from the international master students at LUSEM here presented are subject to their unique context and cannot be generalized as findings that represent all international master students in Sweden or in Lund University. Furthermore, as 400 students are the maximum students within the target group that could answer the research (representing a 100% response rate), it also mean that statistical inferences are not made due to the sample's limited size.

The 75 respondents that answered the whole survey are from 33 countries, yet only one country group (Germany, with 19 respondents) may be considered large enough for possible country considerations. In this sense, as Hofstede's (2001) model bases its conclusions on dimensions from statistical inferences that exemplifies countries, this study does not give full attention to Hofstede's (2001) country generalizations, focusing instead on the author's main arguments related to culture and students' individual perceptions and thoughts, as previously commented. However, if interesting data that show country's perceptions are found, it may be described in the discussion.

With any research, the possibility of biases may be present from the researchers' side, the participants and with the choice of authors discussed in the theoretical framework chapter. To minimize the effect of possible biases, actions such as pilot surveys and interview were executed, anonymous distribution of research, in addition to the researchers' being careful to not lead the interviews, where one spoke to the interviewee and the other observed for guarantee. Although choosing only some authors to focus on naturally shape a study's overall view, to reduce a biased approach the authors for this thesis were carefully chosen from diverse research fields for a broader overview, such as the social sciences, psychology, business and management. Moreover, the media choices ranged from online articles to books, websites and academic research for a more even balance.

At last, another limitation may be having too many students from one specific master programme answering the survey and not many from the rest, as collected data may show perceptions that are quite similar to each other due the respondents' currently studying the same topics. Having too many students with similar backgrounds or in the same master programme may result in the data being too homogeneous and not diverse enough, leaving not much to be compared. Additionally, as with any research there may be the possibility that the findings are irrelevant to the theories used and may not provide enough considerations towards the theory. This has been minimized by focusing on authors from diverse fields and that discuss several different themes that relate to the research questions.

4 Empirical Findings

4.1 Quantitative data results

In this section, empirical findings from the survey conducted with LUSEM's master students are presented. As described in the method section, the survey data is based off 75 respondents who completed the whole survey. However, the survey itself was opened to all international master students from LUSEM for an overview of the bigger population, as follows:

- The survey was sent out to all 800 master students currently studying at LUSEM
- Overall, the survey received 177 responses in total
- From the 177 respondents, 33.3% were Swedish students (59)
- From the 177 respondents, 66.7% were international students (118)

As the focus of the survey was on international students, Swedish respondents were thanked for their participation and asked to leave the survey. The 118 international students that responded to the survey were allowed to continue, where:

- 63.5% answered that they have an interest or might have an interest in staying and working in Sweden post-graduation (75)
- 36.4% stated that they do not have an interest in staying and were asked to leave the survey (43)

Thus, the full survey was available for 75 international master students who have or might have an interest in staying in Sweden post-graduation – the target-group in which this study focuses on. The results given below are based on these 75 respondent's perception.

4.1.1 Participants' Profile

The summary of the participants' demographics are as follows:

- The 75 respondents come from a total of 33 countries (presented in figure 2 below)
- The largest number of respondents from the same country come from Germany (19), Finland (7) and the Netherlands (6)
- There were respondents from all of LUSEM's master programmes. However, largest number of students from the same programme were from Management and International Marketing and Brand Management, representing 16% each. The programs of the participating students are presented in figure 3
- 58.7% were 24-27 years old, whilst 13.3% were over 31 years old and 12% were between the ages of 20 and 23 years old

- 60% of respondents were female and 40% male

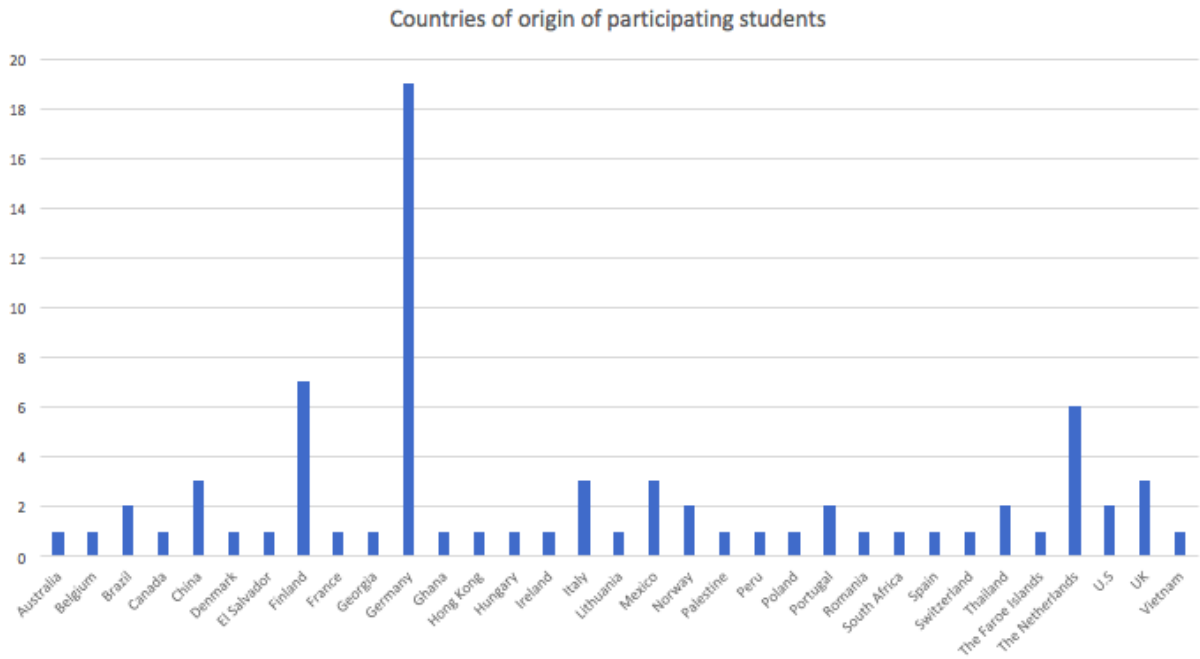


Figure 2: Countries of origin of participating students (source: primary data)

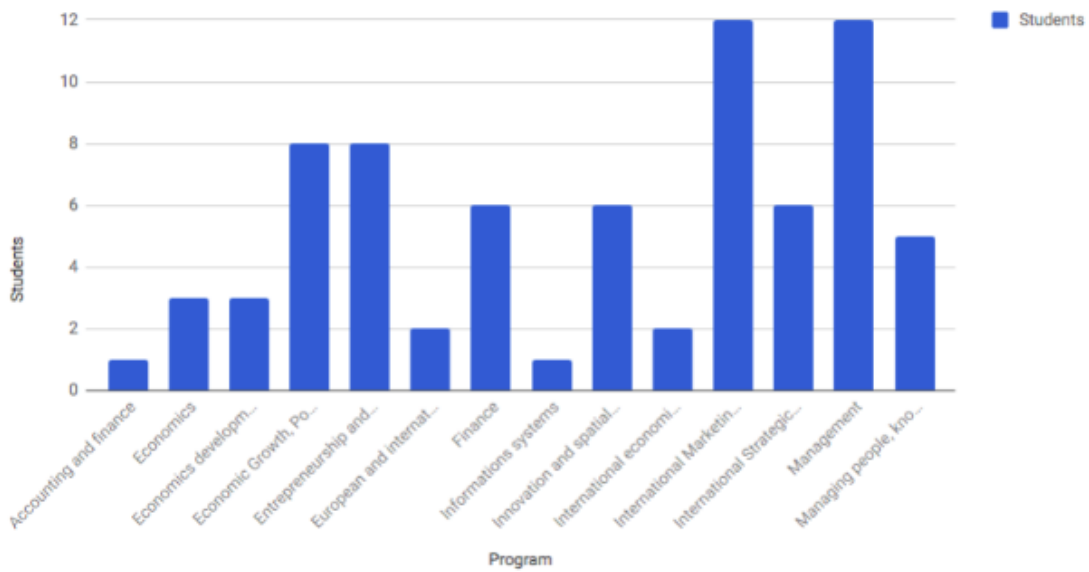


Figure 3: Participants' master programmes (source: primary data)

4.1.2 Job application process

- 62.7% (47 respondents) have already been applying for jobs in Sweden, while 37.3% (28) have not started applying for jobs yet

- Country-wise, it could be seen that most German and Finnish respondents had not started applying for jobs yet, whilst all Chinese and all Italian respondents had. This may show that individuals from countries less similar to Sweden think it will be harder or might take longer to find a job, thus the need to start looking in advance

When asked if they believe their master programme has helped to prepare them for a job in Sweden, 40% (30) answered neutral, stating that it did not help positively but neither negatively. Interestingly, 41.4% answered “yes”, but a significant percentage of students (18.7%) also replied “no”, saying that they think their master programme did not help them towards getting a job post-graduation.

Following this question, the survey asked the students that answered “no” what they believe their master programmes could improve on to assist them towards a future career in Sweden. The main response (with nearly 30% of answers) was:

- The need for more career activities with more opportunities for international students, with English speaking events and companies that want to hire international applicants

Additionally, other answers that were said by more than one student include:

- Offer small courses for specific job skills
- Offer workshops on employability, career tutorials and the Swedish culture
- Need to assist students in regards to learning the Swedish language
- That the programmes are too theoretical and thus hard to apply the knowledge into the workplace

4.1.3 Values, background and professional approaches

The next section of the survey focused more on their views regarding topics like their culture and professional experience. An important question asked if the international students feel that their different culture and values are a challenge or an opportunity when looking for work in Sweden. The results to this question are given in figure 4 below:

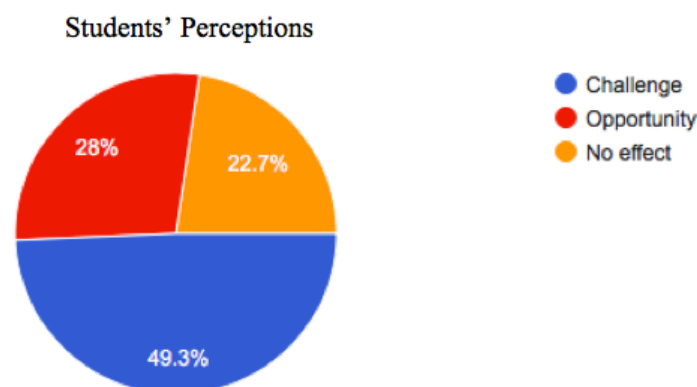


Figure 4: Students' perception on diverse background being a challenge or opportunity (source: primary data)

- 49.3% (37 respondents) believe it is a challenge
- 28% (21 respondents) feel it is an opportunity, while the rest of respondents were neutral about it
- Country-wise, most German respondents (8) stated that their culture had no effect, whilst an additional 7 believe it is an opportunity. Similarly, most Finnish respondents stated they believe it is an opportunity, while all respondents from Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Portugal and Palestine perceive it to be a challenge, among others

Nearly half of the participants in this study feel that being an international student in Sweden is a challenge when applying for jobs. For more insights into what challenges and opportunities the students were referring to, this question was followed by a short open-styled question that gave students the chance to be more specific. The results were enriching, with many students sharing the same perspective.

The two biggest common results on why the 49.3% of students believe it is a challenge were:

- Not speaking Swedish (language barrier), with an impressive 20 responses
- That employers seem to prefer hiring their own kind (Swedes), with 8 responses

Moreover, other answers for challenges that were shared by more than two students include:

- Discrimination and stereotypes
- Visa issues
- Lack of network

The table below illustrates a summary of the main challenges perceived by the students:

Table 1: International master students' perceived challenges (source: primary data)

Challenges		Why this is a challenge for the international students
1	Language barriers	The most frequent response with 20 responses was the lack of being fluent in Swedish. Many students have realized that most jobs require fluency in Swedish and applying without it is the biggest challenge.
2	Employees' similarity preference	The second biggest perceived challenge with 8 responses was that the international students believe Swedish employers prefer hiring Swedes over foreigners. These responses included comments like "Swedes like working with Swedes", "Swedes prefer their own", and "Swedish employers recognize people with the same culture as them".
3	Visa Issues	Some students who come from outside the European Union have expressed the challenge of extending their visa post-graduation.
4	Lack of diversity / Discrimination	Other students expressed concerns on lack of diversity and discrimination. This included the concern that Swedish employers tend to prefer Swedes and that Swedish employers do not strive for diversity within the workplace.
5	Networking	A few students expressed that having a network in Sweden is important when applying for jobs. This might be hard for a few of them because of language barriers and not being used to the Swedish way of networking.

On the other hand, for the 28% of students that believe it is an opportunity to have a diverse culture and values for starting a career in Sweden, common views were also shared. Among the top answers:

- Diversity contributes to adding more perspective, with 7 responses
- Being unique by having a diverse educational background, with 3 responses
- That being German is seen as a good thing in Sweden, with 3 responses
- That having knowledge of Nordic countries is a plus, with 2 responses

In general, after analyzing the collected data of the perceived opportunities and challenges of the international students, it can be concluded that there are more perceived challenges than opportunities for international students when applying for jobs in Sweden.

Another open-ended question for all 75 respondents was if they believe their international background and experience will make them stand out from Swedish applicants. The answers for this question were nearly balanced between no and yes.

Those that replied “No”, shared top common reasons why:

- No, as Swedes also usually have international experience, with 12 responses
- No, due to the language barrier, with 11 responses
- No, as cultural differences weight more, with 4 responses. This answer was followed by additional descriptions such as that German, Dutch and Finnish culture/people are close to the Swedish one and therefore do not make them stand out

When analyzing the “no” responses for this question, it was very similar to the perceived challenges which the international students have. They continue to mention language barriers, not being fluent in Swedish, and that Swedes prefer their own. A new finding was that some believe that Swedish students already possess enough international experience and English skills, which would make international students not stand out as much.

Those that replied “Yes” also shared top common reasons why:

- Yes, due to their intercultural competence, with 13 responses. This answer was followed by further descriptions like being adaptable, open-minded and having flexibility skills
- Yes, due to speaking more than one language, with 7 responses
- Yes, due to having a different perspective on things, with 6 responses
- Yes, as it shows ambition to live in another country, with 3 responses

4.1.4 Swedish Language Abilities

From the findings presented above, it can be seen that the ability to speak Swedish is a major concern for international students. The following questions gave emphasis to this topic and asked the international master students about their language abilities. Overall:

- 65.4% do not speak Swedish, whilst only 10.7% speak Swedish well (ranked 4-5)
- However, 94.6% stated they would be willing to learn the language if hired in Sweden

The high percentage of how willing they are to learn Swedish may show that the international students are adaptable, being willing to work hard towards learning a new language – something that also shows their ambition to overcome obstacles to start a career in Sweden.

Respondents were then asked if they feel that not speaking fluent Swedish would impact their networking abilities even for English-speaking companies. The results were as follows:

- 84% said it would impact their networking negatively
- Only 6.7% stated that it would not impact negatively
- Moreover, 36% stated they think not being eligible for the free Swedish language course (due to their one year master programmes) affected negatively their adaptation towards Swedish society

The findings above describe respondents' perceived challenges and opportunities, what they have to offer as international students and that Swedish language is seen as a significant barrier. The last part collected the international students' different perspectives on teamwork, leadership, management and cultural/social norms.

4.1.5 Daily life in Sweden

This section of the survey focused on the students' perception of topics and issues frequently dealt by them on a daily basis in Sweden, whether within university projects, social life or in professional occasions. These questions were based on a 1-5 ranking, where 1 meant that the topic affects the person very negatively/it is hard, while 5 meant that it does not affect them in a bad way/it is easy. The main insights are found below:

Stereotypes

- 60.5% said it does not affect them, yet 22.3% said it affects them negatively
- Country-wise, most German respondents ranked 4-5 to this topic, believing it does not affect them so much. Respondents from The Netherlands were the most optimistic, with most of them ranking the issue as a 5. On the other hand, all Mexican respondents ranked 2 for stereotypes, with Peru and Poland respondents ranking it as a number 1

Language barriers

- 38.7% say it does not affect them, while 35% stated it affects them negatively

Belonging to a Swedish network

- 39.2% said it is hard/affects negatively, while only 16.4% stated being easy (rank 5)

Being innovative in teams

- 84.6% considered it easy, with only 7.7% saying it is hard/affects them negatively

Working efficiently in multicultural teams

- 66.6% answered being easy, and 12% say it is hard
- Country-wise, most German respondents ranked as easy working efficiently in diverse teams, whilst Finnish respondents were mostly neutral on the topic (rank 3). By contrast, both respondents from the United States said it is somewhat hard (rank 2), the same from the respondent from Palestine

Defending your point of view in a group

- 65.3% replied believing it is easy, with 17.3% considering this aspect hard

Reaching decisions through broader views

- 61% stated that it is easy, and 15.6% believe it is hard/affects them negatively

Aligning goals in multicultural teams

- 67.1% replied being easy, whilst 15.7% answered as something that is hard

Using diverse views for creative solutions

- 68% commented on being easy, with only 14.66% saying it is hard/affects them negatively

4.1.6 Leadership

In regards to leadership and professional approaches, the students replied that:

- 41.3% had a leadership role before coming to Sweden
- 58.7% of LUSEM's international master students have not had a leadership role prior

This finding shows that many of the international students may not be that experienced professionally, which can also be a factor for difficulties and challenges when applying for jobs in Sweden. Furthermore:

- 66.6% were confident in engaging in leadership roles at university
- 21.4% stated they do not feel confident in engaging in leadership roles yet

This shows that one fifth of the respondents have not been very confident at engaging in leadership roles while studying in Sweden, which may add to the difficulty in getting hired in the country.

4.1.7 Personal approaches and values

In relation to values and personal styles, an important stand-alone question asked the students to choose between four different subjects on what influences their working style and professional approach the most. Here, the students were allowed to choose up to two options. The total answers were 144, meaning that some students only chose one instead of two options. The findings are intriguing and presented below in figure 5, with high percentages in all four possible options:

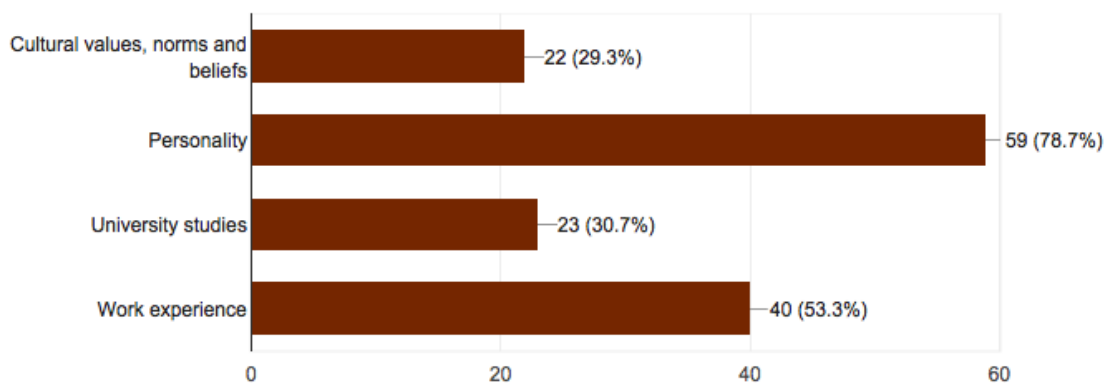


Figure 5: Students' influences on professional approaches (source: primary data)

From the figure, it can be seen that students believe that personality and prior work experience have a bigger perceived influence in their working style than the rest, which include the way they approach decision-making, teamwork, leadership and management, among others. Moreover, findings from country groups showed that German and Finnish respondents mostly opted for personality and work experience, whereas respondents from Denmark, Hong Kong, Peru, Thailand, United States and the United Kingdom mostly chose personality and cultural values. By contrast, both respondents from Thailand only chose cultural values as their biggest influence.

A follow up question asked the students if they feel that they would need to compromise their real self/personality in a Swedish corporate environment, with interesting common insights:

- “No” was the top common answer, with over 32 responses
- “No, as the Swedish corporate environment tend to be less hierarchical and more open-minded”, with 6 responses
- Additional no answers include descriptions like: “German customs are similar”; “the differences between my culture and the Swedish one is small”; “I am reserved like the Swedes”

- “A little”, with 4 responses
- “Yes, I need to be less direct/more politically correct/speak my mind less”, with 9 responses
- “Yes”, with 2 responses
- “Yes, I think I can be me only in my own language”, with 1 response
- “Not sure”, with 3 responses

The last section of the survey aimed to see how international students perceive the Swedish values in their daily routine. Similar to the questions about their daily life in Sweden, these questions were based on a 1-5 ranking, with 5 being that it affects them very positively and 1 being that it affects them very negatively. The results are as follow:

Consensus in decision-making

- 57.3% said it affects them positively, while 18.66% stated negatively
- Country-wise, findings show that most respondents from the Netherlands ranked the topic as positive, while most German respondents ranked it as somewhat hard (rank 2). Respondents from South Africa, the United States and Mexico also shared the same view, with most of them ranking the issue as a 2

Fika for social interactions

- A significant 86.6% said it affects them positively

Lagom mind-set

- The answers were divided, with 20% believing it affects them positively and another 20% replying that it affects them negatively

Swedish labor laws

- Again, a significant 86.6% believe it affects them positively

Swedish high government taxes

- Another topic that raised mixed answers: 34.6% replied that it affects them negatively, whilst 29.3% stated it affects them positively

Flat structure/less hierarchy

- The point with the most impressive insight: 82.66% stated that this value affects them positively, and one 1 response believed it is negative (rank 2)

4.2 Qualitative data

This section shows the findings from the six interviews conducted with international master students from LUSEM. The collected data is divided into four main themes. The themes consist of their personal information, how the job process has been for them so far, language barriers and values, background and professional approaches as a last theme. The full interview questions can be found in the appendix. The list of interviewees and their personal information are presented in table 2 below:

4.2.1 Interviewees' profiles

Table 2: Interviewees' profiles (source: primary data)

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Master Program	Previous Education	Country of Origin	Interview Date
Interviewee 1	Female	26	Economic Growth, Population and Development	BSc in Economics	Thailand	April 18 th , 2018
Interviewee 2	Male	37	Management	BSc in Psychology and Sociology	USA	April 18 th , 2018
Interviewee 3	Male	24	European and International Tax Law	BSc in Business Administration	Finland	April 18 th , 2018
Interviewee 4	Male	29	Management	BSc in Structural Engineering	South Africa	April 19 th , 2018
Interviewee 5	Female	32	Management	BSc in Nutrition, MSc in Public Health, PHD in Nutrition	Portugal	April 20 th , 2018
Interviewee 6	Male	28	Entrepreneurship and Innovation	BSc in International Relations	Mexico	April 22 nd , 2018

4.2.2 Job application process

The six interviewees have been in Sweden for different amount of times and arrived for different reasons. They all have had different experiences when applying for work and a few have had prior employment in Sweden. The interviewees' perceptions and opinions differ when it comes to being an international student in Sweden.

Interviewee 1 has lived in Sweden since August 2016 and moved mainly for studies. She has had one interview for an internship within the subject of her studies, but was later not offered the position due to the lack of Swedish language abilities, even though she has relevant experience from an internship in Thailand. She felt it is a disadvantage being an international student since she has not achieved fluency in Swedish.

In regards to having to be fluent in Swedish, *interviewee 2* has had similar experiences during his time in Sweden. He moved to Sweden in June 2016 to live with his partner. He was employed as a substitute teacher for the subjects English and Swedish at a school in Gothenburg and as a waiter for different restaurants before being accepted into the

management program at Lund University. He states *“It was very challenging for me to get these jobs due to my lack of knowledge in Swedish”*. Since August 2017, he applied to 12-15 trainee programs and lower entry positions which have not specifically required Swedish, but has not been invited for any interviews yet. He also believes that recruiters might not find his bachelor studies (psychology and sociology) relevant for the applied positions. He feels that he is at a disadvantage as an international student mainly because of language barriers and possibly his bachelor degree.

For a different perspective, *interviewee 3* has already been hired in Malmö within a position related to his studies and is working while completing his master’s degree. He has been in Sweden since August 2017 and has been hired since March 2018. His job started off as a thesis training and he was offered a full-time position in April 2018. He states *“The only disadvantage I have is that I do not fluently speak Swedish. Without my previous experience in the field, I would not have gotten this job”*.

Interviewee 4 moved to Sweden in August 2017 for studies and his wife was hired for a job in Lund. He has had two online interviews for graduate programs in Sweden but has not been offered a job yet. He thinks the online application process is lengthy and that it takes time to go through each step. He is mostly applying for international companies, but not speaking Swedish is still an aspect that bothers him as some of the other applicants most likely do. Even though he does not speak Swedish, he feels that he is not at any disadvantage by being an international student.

Differentiating from all the interviews, *interviewee 5* has been in Sweden since 2009 for studies and work. She moved to Sweden in 2009 for her first master’s degree, later staying for PHD studies and research work, afterwards started her master in Management in August 2017. During the last year, she applied for three positions as a nutrition specialist. She strongly believes that she has a large disadvantage by being international as she does not speak Swedish, does not necessarily want to engage in social common events like *fika* and that employers deny her application due to her foreign last name.

Lastly, *Interviewee 6* moved to Sweden in August 2017 mainly for studies. He has been applying for consulting and analyst positions but has not been invited for any interviews yet. He finds the process complicated as some positions do not specifically say that they require fluency in Swedish, yet he still does not get called for interviews even though he has relevant work experience from Mexico and Canada. He feels that it is a disadvantage being an international student since most jobs fairs and workshops are focused on Swedish speaking students and also due to the fact that he is not eligible for a personal number.

In regards to LUSEM’s offering of several workshops, networking events and career fair for students, some of the interviewees have taken full advantage of this, while others have not:

“I have been to several of them, and will be attending one tomorrow, but it isn't really helpful because they tell me things which I already know, like CV, cover letter and LinkedIn, but they don't give any feedback or help me improve to get a job in Sweden. It is better than nothing at all, but doesn't give too much knowledge” - Interviewee 1

“Yes, I have taken advantage of it. More or less. I attended the job fair. I thought it was useful and helpful since I was exposed to companies and had a chance to meet them” -Interviewee 2

“No, I have not attended anything. I am not interested. I knew I would find a job without any help from the school” - Interviewee 3

“Yes, I've done most of them. They are very useful for someone who doesn't know how the Swedish job market works. The LinkedIn workshop and one on how to find a job for foreigners in Sweden helped me. They explained the whole application process in Sweden” - Interviewee 4

“I've done some courses for improving the CV and LinkedIn, and it helped to cover the different possibilities and was very useful for the motivation letter” - Interviewee 5

“I attended the work fair but didn't really take advantage of it. Because 80% and more is directed towards companies which require Swedish. And some companies which are not specifically located in Sweden require European citizenship which is something I do not have” - Interviewee 6

4.2.3 Swedish language barriers

A question was asked on whether interviewees believed that they would feel more competitive and have the same chances of being hired as a Swedish applicant if they spoke the local language. Some of the answers were as follows:

“Yes I would be more competitive” - Interviewee 1

“I believe so, as an American” - Interviewee 2

“No. I believe that you need to have a Swedish surname to pass the first stage. There was a study conducted a few years ago in The Local where they sent out the same CV to different job openings, one had a Swedish name and the other a Muslim name, and of course the Swedish name came through the interview 5 times more than the Muslim name, so then they tried an English name instead of Muslim, and it was still much more common for the Swedish CV to go through to the interview” - Interviewee 5

“Maybe not the exact same chances, but very close. I think there is still a certain bias and preference towards people who are educated and grown up here” - Interviewee 6

4.2.4 Values, backgrounds and professional approaches

Since most of the interviewees were from different continents, it was natural for them to notice different aspects regarding the Swedish work environment and school society, when comparing it to their home countries. The table below illustrates the summary of what the interviewees feel are the similarities and differences between Sweden and the country they come from:

Table 3: Home country vs Sweden: Perceived similarities and differences (source: primary data)

	Thailand	US	Finland	South Africa	Portugal	Mexico
Similarities	None mentioned	The use of the internet. It's challenging to get a job interview with just a CV	Application process, and that the work culture is similar	Not many mentioned	Only the fact that people work	Privileges of State employees
Differences	More hierarchy in Thailand, master's degree there is worth more, Sweden's work/life balance	Easier in Sweden to receive a middle range management position	People are more social while working in Sweden	Hierarchical structure, less equality and gender roles in South Africa, wage gaps, educational requirements	Credentials, degrees and experience are worth more in Portugal	Work culture, longer working hours in Mexico, gender equality

As found in the quantitative data, many international master students expressed the perception that Swedes tend to prefer hiring other Swedes. Some of the interviewees also expressed major concerns on this particular challenge:

“I think people here are afraid of risks and are shy. The idea of hiring someone different is a risk for them and a challenge” - Interviewee 2

“It doesn't really apply to me since I have a job. I don't feel as if I have been treated different in any way” - Interviewee 3

“I also thought this way before moving here, but I have only seen the opposite since I arrived. Many Swedes have been excited and willing to meet me. I have been welcomed with opened arms. I disagree with that” - Interviewee 4

“Of course when you hire, you hire people who are similar to you. I understand from a practical point of view, because it isn't as risky and it is safer” - Interviewee 5

The interviewees also possessed different approaches in relation to their decision-making styles, found below:

- Interviewee 1: Thinks a lot, cares about other opinions
- Interviewee 2: Very collaborative, likes modesty. More similar to the Swedish way when making decisions
- Interviewee 3: Very fast towards decision-making, sometimes too fast
- Interviewee 4: Very structural and logical
- Interviewee 5: Very logical and analytical
- Interviewee 6: Chooses the option which offers the biggest reward with the least risks

Furthermore, the interviewees expressed their opinion of what they thought of working in diverse teams and how they had experienced it so far at LUSEM, in addition to if they believed it to be easier working with people similar or different to them:

“We do not have much group work in my class, but we’ve had a lot of group discussions in our lectures, but in these cases I don’t think the group members have been a good representative for the country...I prefer working with people of different backgrounds” - Interviewee 1

“It has been rough. Much harder than expected. Not so much on being international, more of diversity of talents, abilities, work styles, age and experience...I prefer similar backgrounds. People like-minded already know the way things should be done” - Interviewee 2

“Mostly nice. I’ve been lucky to have nice people in my groups. But with some cultures in our program, some people are just not so nice to work with, I think it comes from the culture but I can’t say for sure...It depends on the person. But I think similar people work better together compared to a diverse group” - Interviewee 3

“I am used to working with different cultures. But this is the first time I’ve worked with different people from different areas, all in one team. It was noticeable how different people from different cultures approach things differently...It is easier with similar background because it is what we are used to. Makes it easier to not have much of a cultural and language barrier. But I think it is more beneficial to have a diverse team” - Interviewee 4

“It is not the first time I’ve worked in multicultural teams. It’s fun when you are open for differences. So if this would have been my first masters a few years ago, there would have been more clashes for me, but I’ve learned throughout the years with experience that there are many different ways of reaching the goal. No way is better than the other. In my base team we had early responders, mid responders and late responders which we all had to take into account on everyone’s different working styles. I have become more patient and more open for differences...It is easier to work with people with similar personalities and work approach. I don’t think that the country which you are from fully determines how you work. It is easier but it doesn’t mean that it is better. The end results might not be as exciting or innovative as it would in a diverse team” - Interviewee 5

“The team work has been good, but it has been very European so the cultures aren’t as different as I’ve experienced in Canada. I have learned about the European mind-set and their way of working...It depends on the task. There are certain projects where I would prefer to work with people who are different from me, business related mostly, because otherwise you create loops where everyone makes the same mistakes and the same cultural biases” - Interviewee 6

Interestingly, when the international master students were asked to rate 1-10 on how much they believe that culture, values and beliefs impact the way they work, all 6 interviewees rated it 8-9, meaning all perceive that it has a significant impact on the way they work.

When asked if they believe that it is possible to change or learn a new professional approach when working and collaborating with international people, all interviewees said yes, with two of the responses below:

“I think it is possible to always learn, to have some standard, or understanding. With the international diversity, we have so many things, but we always might need more. We will all have common goals which we need to share”- Interviewee 1

“I think we can to a certain degree, and also depends on what age you are trying to make this change. I think if you do it in a later age when you are far in your management career, it is a little bit harder in changing of how you are used to doing this. But for our age, starting in our careers, it is easier to make a certain change” - Interviewee 4

The interviewees expressed different concerns and opinions due to their own personal experiences encountered while being in Sweden. When *interviewee 1* was asked on what her biggest concern was when applying for jobs in Sweden, she stated that:

“Language, that’s the only thing I am concerned about”.

While none of the interviewees speak fluent Swedish, *interviewee 2* had other major concerns which did not relate to language abilities. He was mostly worried about the Swedish working culture and whether he would fit into it. He stated that:

“Sweden has too much group thinking and very little room for differences in opinions, or diverse approaches to the problem. There is a lot of group thinking mentality here. I think diversity of opinions is good and to be able to stand out”.

Interviewee 3 did not express significant concerns about working in Sweden, since he already has a position. His major concern was more on a personal level. He commented that:

“I don’t really have concerns about working in Sweden, since Finland is quite similar. The only concern I have is that many of my friends are moving right now while I’m staying. But that’s just a consequence of studying in a foreign country”.

Like similar expressed concerns and challenges, *interviewee 4* described concerns of the language barrier when working in Sweden. He mentioned that:

“At the moment, language is my major concern. But I am willing to do something about it, so it is only a temporary concern”.

On the other hand, for *interviewee 5* the working culture and social structure in Sweden is different from what she was used to in Portugal. She states that:

“I am concerned about fitting in the Swedish way of doing things a certain way, for example fika, talking about the stuga and the children. My main concern is how to socialize within work. I do see how uncomfortable Swedes get when I bring a different opinion to the table”.

At last, *interviewee 6* expressed concerns which some of the other interviewees have also shared. He stated that:

“My major concern is to fit in culturally since I have not worked in Europe before”.

At the end of the interview, the interviewees were asked for any additional comments that may pertain to the interview questions. Some of the comments included:

- That Sweden is attempting to incorporate different opinions and people
- Sweden is one of the easiest countries to work in as a foreigner
- That international companies understand that diversity is the key to improvement
- Sweden is in a good direction but should be more open
- Sweden should not overlook the things which can be improved
- Sweden has a very good reputation for job quality

Overall, the six conducted interviews gave different and broad insights on how they perceive the challenges of finding work and being hired in Sweden. From the findings, the main challenges in the interviews were that none of them are fluent in Sweden and that some interviewees feel worried about how to fit into the Swedish work society. The next section uses these empirical findings towards a more detailed analysis and discussion, showcasing possible considerations and connections to the main arguments presented by the authors found in the theoretical framework chapter.

5 Analysis and Discussion

For this thesis, the survey and interviews carried out on international master students at LUSEM aimed to see whether the students that have an interest in starting their career in Sweden upon graduation perceive any work challenges associated with the proposition of working abroad, in addition to their perception on diversity and professional approaches in general. Below, the research results are further described and compared to the main ideas defended by the authors seen in the theoretical framework. For an easier discussion of results, they are presented under the same subtopics found in the theoretical framework chapter.

5.1 Diversity

5.1.1 The attractiveness of the Swedish market

From the 118 international master students that responded to the survey, 63.5% answered that they have an interest or might have an interest in staying and working in Sweden post-graduation. The high proportion of students wishing to continue in Sweden after graduating instead of starting their careers in their home countries (where it might be easier due to existing networks, language and customs) emphasizes the country's attractiveness to young people, previously seen in the introduction.

This proportion can be further understood by the positive perceptions regarding Swedish values – showcasing Schneider's (1987) findings, where the author defends that prospective employees tend to usually apply for places that they believe hold similar values to themselves. An impressive 86.6% rated that the Swedish labor laws affects them positively in their daily lives, *fika* for social interactions was also ranked positively by 86.6%. In addition, the Swedish corporate culture that tends towards a flatter structure and less hierarchy (Hofstede, 2001) was ranked by 82.6% as being positive for their daily lives, whereas the value of consensus towards decision-making was appreciated as positive for 57.3% of respondents. These considerations are further highlighted from the interview results, were interviewees from Thailand, South Africa and Mexico mentioned Sweden's flatter hierarchical structure, equality and work-life balance as being differences to their home countries, findings that illustrate Hofstede's (2001) dimensions, as these three countries rank high in power distance and masculine values.

5.1.2 The influence of diversity towards their professional approach

One of the most important questions asked the respondents to choose what they believe has the biggest influence in their professional approach, with intriguing perceptions:

78.7% chose personality

53.3% stated work experience

30.7% feel it is university studies

29.3% chose cultural values, norms and beliefs

According to Hofstede (2001), our cultural values, norms and beliefs (the collective level of diversity) are one of the biggest influences towards the way we naturally act, think and approach scenarios, impacting our mental-programming. It is of such importance that by understanding national cultures and values we can predict a person's tendency towards professional styles and avoid many of the challenges associated with multicultural teams. However, students ranked cultural values as the one with the least influence within their professional approach, opposing Hofstede's (2001) argument.

For nearly 80% of respondents, personality is considered to have the biggest impact in their professional style. In other words, the individual level of diversity (Hofstede, 2001), as opposed to the collective level. Students therefore perceive themselves as truly unique individuals, where their decisions and approaches come from their own experiences and views.

The follow-up question opens space for several considerations. When asked if respondents believe they will need to compromise their personality in the Swedish corporate environment, almost all detailed answers mentioned cultural values as the reason why and emphasized Hofstede's (2001) five dimensions:

"No, as the Swedish corporate environment tend to be less hierarchical and more open-minded"

"German customs are similar"

"The differences between my culture and the Swedish one is small"

"I am reserved like the Swedes"

"Yes, I need to be less direct/more politically correct/speak my mind less"

"Yes, I think I can be me only in my own language"

What this shows is that, although respondents choose personality intentionally in regards to influencing their professional approach the most, when asked indirectly for the reasons why, most students unconsciously mention cultural values and societies as influencing their work approach and style, proving that the collective level of diversity does in fact influence their perceptions. This consideration also can be seen from the interviews. When the interviewees were asked how much they perceive culture, values and beliefs to impact the way people work, all six interviewees ranked it as an 8 or 9. This shows that when the topic is presented

by itself, the influence becomes a lot more significant than if respondents have to choose from other options. The examples above also illustrate how respondents tend to think of them and of Sweden in a collective level. For example, the need to be less direct and speak their mind less connects to the Swedish value of consensus, Swedish companies being less hierarchical and open-minded to Hofstede's (2001) dimension of power distance and uncertainty avoidance, whereas mentioning the small differences between their own culture and the Swedish ones emphasizes the interpersonal-attraction theory (Newcomb, 1961;1968).

Both findings result in an interesting insight similar to that of Hofstede (2001) and Wallace (2014): that people make sense of the world through their natural default-settings and mental programming, yet they are not aware of it. Additionally, this may be also associated to a lack of awareness (Wallace, 2014) and self-knowledge from the respondents' side, and a need to practice the reflective mind-set (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003) more towards cultural sensitivity.

In regards to their perception of starting a career in Sweden, students were asked whether they believe having a different culture and values are a challenge or an opportunity when looking for work:

49.3% believe it is a challenge

28% feel it is an opportunity, while the rest of respondents were neutral.

The above results shows that nearly half of the respondents have thought about the possible challenges regarding starting a career abroad in addition to the positive sides, demonstrating that they have critically analyzed their situation from different perspectives – a practice of the reflective mind-set argued by Gosling and Mintzberg (2003). From a country-group perspective, most German and Finnish respondents stated their culture and values to be positive, whilst all respondents from Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Portugal and Palestine perceive it to be a challenge. Although a limited sample, these country considerations may demonstrate Hofstede's (2001) argument that people from similar cultures and values have easiness in working together (Germany, Finland and Sweden), in contrast to South American countries where their values mostly contrast to the ones found in Sweden. The next sections describe in more detail which challenges and opportunities they perceive the most.

5.2 Unconscious biases and stereotypes

Although not so prominent within the respondents' answers, discrimination and stereotypes appeared on more than 2 students' perception when asked what type of challenges they face to start a career in Sweden. Throughout the whole survey, not many students expressed negative stereotypes towards the Swedish society – by contract, they ranked Swedish values as highly positive to them. This goes against the idea of hetero-stereotypes (Hofstede, 2001) and it may

be due to the fact that the students have an interest in staying in Sweden, therefore the respondents naturally appreciate the Swedish approach more.

However, when asked how stereotypes affects them on a daily basis in Sweden, 22.3% said it affects them negatively – a quite high percentage for a country known for its equal rights. Taking into account that half the respondents believe it is a challenge to have different cultures and values when starting a career in Sweden, these findings might shine a light into the fact that they as foreigners feel more categorized (Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963; Mannix & Neale, 2005) by the Swedish society and even feel like outsiders.

Overall, both these topics do not seem to have a true importance for international students in regards to working in a different country and with diverse teams, a fact that opposes numerous authors (Hofstede, 2001; Mannix & Neale, 2005; Clement & Schiereck, 1973; Nelson & Klutas, 2000) and is commonly seen in managerial articles as one of the main difficulties for multicultural teams to surpass.

From a country-group perspective, respondents coming from countries with similar values of Sweden (such as Germany and the Netherlands) mostly do not perceive stereotypes as something that affects them, yet all respondents from Mexico and Peru ranked it as something that does affect them. Again, this may connect to Hofstede's (2001) cultural values and dimensions, where individuals from countries with more contrasting national values perceive more challenges than the rest.

5.3 Interpersonal-attraction theory and networking

Among the top common answers as to why students believe it will be a challenge having different cultures and values when starting a career in Sweden, approximately 21.6% stated that “*employers seem to prefer hiring their own kind (Swedes)*” – a finding that connects to the interpersonal-attraction theory (Newcomb, 1961; 1968) not only within an academic environment, but surprisingly when talking about professional settings.

This opinion was further emphasized when the survey asked whether their international background and experience will make them stand out from Swedish applicants. Among the top common answers were “*no, as Swedes also usually have international experience*”. Their perception illustrates that when companies have the option of choosing two applicants with similar experiences and skills, they possess the tendency of choosing the applicant that belongs to their society instead of the out-group member (Mannix & Neale, 2005) – a result that goes along with the idea of unconscious biased behavior towards people similar to you (Schopler & Insko, 1992), Hofstede's (2001) view of how our collective level of diversity affects our ways of acting and Schneider's (1987) study that businesses indirectly select employees with similarities to them.

Another common answer to the same question stated that “*no, as cultural differences weight more*”. This view was shared by students from societies that hold values similar to the Swedish ones, such as Finland, Germany and The Netherlands. According to them, coming from a society that is close to the Swedish society does not make them stand out, and further connects to Mannix and Neale’s (2005) argument that given a choice, individuals would prefer choosing and hiring the ones most similar to them. In the 21st century marketplace, this is a surprising perception for international students to hold.

Similar perceptions could be found from the interviews, where interviewee 5 and 6 expressed their concern with the interpersonal attraction behavior. Most intriguingly, the Finnish interviewee stated he does not believe he is treated differently for being Finnish, a finding that may illustrate the fact that Finland is quite similar to Sweden in regards to beliefs, values and customs and further highlights the interpersonal-attraction theory.

The networking aspect was another point which proved to be in line with many authors’ line of reasoning. Lack of network appeared among the challenges towards starting a career stated by more than two students. Peculiarly, 86.6% said that *fika* for social interactions affects them positively on a daily basis – the most important scenario towards Swedish networking. Yet, when asked how they feel about belonging to a Swedish network, a surprising 39.2% stated that it is hard, with only 16.4% saying it is easy. This may mean that, although students participate in social settings that could lead to networking, being diverse still makes them be perceived as out-group members, a finding also shared by Carley (1991) and Ibarra (1992).

In regards to their master programmes helping to prepare them for a job in Sweden upon graduation, 41.4% stated that their academic programmes helped positively. On the other hand, 18.7% replied that they believe their master programmes did not help them. Among the answers into what their master programmes could improve on, the main common response (with nearly 30% of students) was:

The need for more career activities with more opportunities for international students, with English speaking events and companies that want to hire international applicants.

Additionally, other common answers included the need to offer small courses for specific job skills and workshops on employability, career tutorials and the Swedish culture. From the interviews, findings showed mixed feelings in regards to fairs, where some expressed that they were helpful, and others that there was not anything new and that most were directed towards companies that require Swedish. However, workshops were seen as helpful for most of the interviewees.

These suggestions support Hofstede’s (2001) argument that specific environments can create the ideal space for diverse groups to meet and mingle as equals, thus improving the possibility of networking and also of minimizing the similarity-attraction behavior. The academic

environment can thus become an active player into assisting students in overcoming their perceived diversity challenges.

5.4 Language barriers and communication styles

By far one of the most mentioned issues through the research, language barriers appeared as the biggest perceived challenge to international master students at LUSEM that wish to start their career in Sweden. For the respondents that stated they believe it is a challenge to have different cultures and values when applying for jobs in Sweden, 54% mentioned not speaking Swedish as the reason why. Additionally, 14.7% commented that even though they possess an international background and diverse experiences, due to the language barrier they believe they would not stand out from Swedish applicants. The issue was also raised as one of the suggestions for master programmes to improve, where “*the need to assist students in regards to learning the Swedish language*” appeared more than once. The interview results accentuate this perception, as all interviewees expressed language barriers as their main concern and work challenge, where most believe knowing Swedish would make them more competitive in the job market.

In relation to networking, an impressive 84% believe not speaking fluent Swedish affects them negatively. The topic was also mentioned on adapting to the Swedish society, where 36% believe not being eligible for the free Swedish language course affected them negatively in this aspect. An interesting fact is that although 65.4% stated they do not speak Swedish, a significant 94.6% said they would be willing to learn the language – a figure that shows how international students are open towards fully immersing into the foreign country.

As it can be seen, language barrier was shown to have a powerful impact on students towards effective networking, adaption to society and overcoming the similarity-attraction behavior that favors Swedish applicants (Schneider, 1987; Newcomb, 1961; 1968). Although it was the most common challenge raised, an interesting insight is that respondents did not mention different accents, misunderstandings or diverse communication styles as a perceived challenge – a fact that opposes to most authors’ view on issues regarding language barriers (Brett et al., 2006; Edward Hall, 1976; Meyer, 2014). This could mean that either respondents do not feel that the smaller issues associated to language impacts them significantly, or that they lack the self-awareness (Wallace, 2014) and reflective mind-set (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003) to consciously realize they are affected by them too. Moreover, the actual issue of not speaking the local language is not fully addressed by managerial or social sciences’ academics and usually dismissed, yet it is perceived as the main challenge towards working abroad for the respondents, showing the need for further understanding and research in this area.

Another observation to take into account was that although language barriers was raised numerous times, when asked how they believe it affects them on a daily basis, only 35%

stated it affects them negatively, with 38.7% believing it does not affect them. In this sense, the data might reveal that studying in a highly international city and in English-speaking master programmes help respondents to not feel as affected by it in their daily lives.

5.5 Leadership and management approaches

Pertaining to the topic concerning respondents' view on leadership and management, 41.3% of participants had a leadership role before coming to study at Lund University, while 58.7% had not: a positive proportion for this study, as it shows perceptions of both experienced and non-experienced individuals.

When asked how they feel in defending their point of view in a group, 65.3% stated they believe it is easy, whilst 17.3% consider it hard. This perception was further emphasized when asked how confident they are at engaging in leadership roles at university, where 66.6% said they are confident and 21.4% say they do not feel confident in leadership roles yet. Both findings may illustrate several considerations. First, that at masters level, nearly 20% of students that participated in the study are insecure when it comes to leadership: a data that may connect to the fact that these students come from countries with values and corporate cultures used to a more managerial approach of planning, certainty and control (Fayol, 1908). In Hofstede's (2001) view, individuals with this preference tend to come from countries with higher ranking in uncertainty avoidance, power distance and individualist values.

Moreover, this argument is complement with the fact that 18.66% stated that they believe consensus in decision-making affects them negatively and 15.6% that reaching decisions through broader views is hard. In addition, when asked if respondents' believe they need to compromise their real self in the Swedish corporate environment, a top common answer was "*Yes, I need to be less direct/more politically correct/speak my mind less*", with 9 responses.

From a country-group consideration, findings showed that respondents from Germany, South Africa, the United States and Mexico find it somewhat hard to work with the consensus approach, linking to Hofstede's (2001) national values that place these countries as having a more direct approach towards decision-making, which contrasts to the Swedish way and may impose challenges. The interview results also point to this issue, with the American interviewee expressing his concern towards the consensus approach, stating it is too much group thinking and not room for different opinions. Additionally, when asked how they would describe their decision-making approach, the answer given by the interviewee from Mexico stands out: he states that he prefers making decisions that give results with small risks, clearly connecting to Hofstede's (2001) dimension that ranks Mexican society as one that values high uncertainty avoidance and a masculine culture.

From these findings, a second consideration is that a significant percentage of students perceive it is easier to work in corporate environments where there are more direct decision-

making styles and less consensus – a predisposition to a more traditional management approach (Glinkowska & Kaczmarek, 2015; Ghoshal, 2005; Fayol, 1908) and a result that connects to Hofstede's (2001) dimension of high power distance and more masculine cultures, where business results and career have higher importance than consensus, collaboration and relationships among peers.

Thus, this showcases a third consideration: that for nearly 20% of respondents, Swedish corporate culture and professional styles are inclined to clash to these students' preferred professional approaches, and therefore can become a great challenge when starting a career in Sweden. As previously seen, Sweden is ranked as a more feminine, low power distance and low uncertainty avoidance country: values that illustrates Sweden's preference for innovation, collaboration, consensus and empowerment – the leadership approach (Kotter, 2001; Mintzberg, 2009).

On the opposite side, Sweden's cultural values seem to be highly appreciated by the large majority of respondents. Within the same question on whether students believe they need to compromise their real selves in the Swedish corporate environment, another common answer was *“No, as the Swedish corporate environment tend to be less hierarchical and more open-minded”*, with 6 responses. This presents how many participants value the leadership approach and may be related to those who feel confident at engaging in leadership roles. Moreover, Sweden's low power distance value (preference for flat structures and less hierarchy) was viewed by an impressive 82.66% as a value that affects them positively, and may explain why a high percentage of students from countries ranking high in power distance wish to stay and start their career in Sweden instead of returning to their home countries.

5.6 Mind-sets

As formerly mentioned, mind-sets are an extremely unconscious and unique part of someone's mental programming (Hofstede, 2001) and therefore also remarkably hard to measure or quantify. Although the research questions did not have direct questions linked to mind-sets, participants' answer can shine a light into how they tend to think and perceive their process in beginning a career in Sweden.

The fact that most respondents stated their personality as the biggest influence towards their professional approach and ranked cultural values as the lowest, strongly opposes Hofstede's (2001) argument that our collective level of diversity impacts our styles and ways of thinking. Yet, as it can be seen from most of their answers to other topics regarding team work, leadership and job process, similarities and differences in cultural values and customs are repeatedly mentioned as top reasons why they perceive starting a career in Sweden might be a challenge or opportunity. This may illustrate a lack of self-awareness on how their previous experiences and background actually affects their lens of self (Wallace, 2014), and therefore a

need to develop the reflective mind-set (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003) more: an opportunity for master programmes to invest in additional courses on mentoring and coaching.

However, the fact that 49.3% believe it is a challenge to start a career abroad already shows that these respondents are already utilizing their reflective mind-set, understanding both the positive and negative aspects related to their future. The 28% that feel starting a career in Sweden is more of an opportunity can also illustrate that the respondents incline towards the more worldly mind-set presented by Gosling and Mintzberg (2003): seeing the context and foreign environment as an opportunity to enrich their vision and approaches. This consideration is further emphasized by respondents' common view that diversity is an opportunity as it adds different perspectives and points of views to businesses and contributes towards intercultural competence – a similar finding of authors like Hofstede (2001), Gosling and Mintzberg (2003) and De Vries (2007), whom comment that diverse individuals can complement each other and combine their strengths.

5.7 The possible benefits of diversity

Lastly, respondents' view on values and approaches show how they believe diversity contributes more positively than negatively in a corporate environment. Top common answers as to why they believe it is an opportunity to have diverse culture and values when starting a career in Sweden include that diversity contributes towards more perspective - the same argument made by Mannix and Neale (2005). Furthermore, other answers mentioned that having cultures and customs similar to that of Sweden (like the German culture and knowledge of the Nordic countries) is an opportunity, which proves Hofstede's (2001) point that individuals with similarities in the collective level of diversity (national cultures and values) might have an easier time working together.

The high positive perception of working in multicultural teams shows intriguing considerations. 84.6% believe it is easy being innovative in diverse teams, 66.6% stated finding it easy working efficiently in multicultural teams, 67.1% replied being easy aligning goals and 68% that using diverse views for creative solutions are considered easy in multicultural teams. First, these findings reinforce Robinson and Dechant's (1997) and Hewlett et al.'s (2013) views of creativity and innovation associated to diversity. It also sustains the contention that diversity helps towards business solutions and strategic decisions (Toegel & Barsoux, 2016; Eisenhardt et al., 1997).

Findings from the interviews affirm this perception. Although most interviewees expressed that they believe it is easier working with people from similar backgrounds (showcasing that they believe national culture does affect the way people work), interviewees also stated that although harder to work with multicultural teams, there are more benefits such as gaining from broader views and increased innovation. As for country-group perceptions, most German respondents ranked as easy working efficiently in diverse teams, whilst both

respondents from the United States said it is somewhat hard (rank 2). This may also connect to Hofstede's (2001) dimensions, where the American society has a preference towards being direct in decision-making, focusing on results and larger hierarchies – a significant contrast to the way Swedish businesses tend to work.

Curiously, these same findings oppose most arguments made by managerial and business authors presented previously. The majority of respondents do not consider a challenge working effectively in a diverse team and all it implies, which include alignment of goals and objectives, using broader views and reaching decisions. In fact, most participants ranked it as easy and positive. From the academic perspective, the aspects of stereotypes (Hofstede, 2001), biases (Wallace, 2014), networking (Mannix & Neale, 2005), similarity attraction (Schneider, 1987), diverse communication styles (Bret et al., 2006; Meyer, 2014) and leadership approaches (Kotter, 2001; Mintzberg, 2009) all are argued as to contribute negatively to working effectively in teams and imply a difficulty for multicultural teams to align goals, visions and use different views for business solutions.

6 Conclusion

As this thesis discussed, the idea of diversity can impact in both positive and negative ways individuals and teams. In today's professional environments where employees from diverse backgrounds and experiences require working effectively together, diversity has an even bigger significance.

Wallace (2014) and Hofstede (2001) talk about the easiness in creating unconscious biases and stereotypes towards other people due to each person's natural default-settings and mental programming; Mannix and Neale (2005) that we may even create categorizations of other people, leading to the preference towards working with individuals who are similar to ourselves (Newcomb, 1961; 1968) – an issue seen still today within networks, social groups and with organizations that tend to unconsciously prefer hiring individuals who have similar values or backgrounds as they do (Schneider, 1987; Carley, 1991; Jackson et al., 1991).

Moreover, diverse ways of communicating and approaching projects (Meyer, 2014), reaching decisions and managing tasks (Mintzberg, 2009; Kotter, 2001; Hofstede, 2001) add to the hardness in working effectively in multicultural teams. Yet, as other authors comment, after resolving these initial issues regarding diversity, team can enjoy numerous positive aspects such as improvement in group performance (Mannix & Neale, 2005), increased creativity and problem-solving skills (Robinson & Dechant, 1997) and richer range of business solutions with more perspectives (Toegel & Barsoux, 2016; Eisenhardt et al., 1997), among others.

This thesis aimed at describing what work challenges international students believe they will encounter when applying for jobs in Sweden, in addition to their main perceptions related to diversity and professional approaches in general. As it can be seen, the study found that the majority of students perceive coming from different countries and having a diverse background as a challenge to begin their careers in Sweden.

In relation to culture and values, the study revealed that these had a significant influence in the participants' responses and was commonly mentioned as reasons for either challenges or opportunities, proving Hofstede's (2001) main argument that cultural values influence our way of thinking and working. The lack of self-awareness in realizing their answers were mostly based on their mental programming and diversity on the collective level showcases the need for students to develop their self-knowledge and reflective mind-set more.

The biggest challenges perceived by international students are described as language barriers, the tendency for Swedish companies to prefer hiring applicants similar to themselves and difficulty in networking. Yet, diverse professional approaches such as working with different

communication styles, working effectively in multicultural teams, biases and reaching decisions are not perceived as challenges to students, thus not being regarded as important.

On the positive side, this thesis also demonstrated that students perceive diversity as something that adds perspective to the business and the individuals, enriches their vision and improves creativity in the corporate environment, going along with the authors that defend the positive aspects of diversity. Respondents also seem to appreciate Swedish corporate values and approach to work, which illustrates the attractiveness of Sweden as a country for recent graduates and support their interest in wishing to begin a career in the country.

The findings from this thesis hoped to assist in a better understanding of how international students perceive their future career paths and topics regarding diversity and businesses. For management authors, the data illustrates the need for further research in how international employees are affected by not speaking the local language instead of diverse communication styles, in addition to a bigger focus on the similarity attraction behavior and networking.

The usual emphasis on the difficulty in working effectively in teams and reaching decisions are seen as irrelevant to the main work challenges perceived by most international students. In addition, the impact that cultural values had on participants' responses clearly indicate the demand for more studies on cultural sensitivity and how diversity on the collective level affects business approaches and styles – something that is usually dismissed by most management authors.

The findings also relate to the broader field of international individuals moving abroad for academic and professional reasons, something that can be found in any other country. It helps to understand overall aspects of what immigrants might face and perceive in an unfamiliar country and how institutions could help. Although this study had a limited sample size and cannot be used for statistical inferences or towards a deeper correlation to Hofstede's (2001) country dimensions, it suggests that a future larger research with students from the entire Lund University could be beneficial towards understanding the topic in a deeper sense, where even recruiters could gain insights into the perceptions that international prospective applicants have and how businesses could be more aware on the way they portray themselves to future employees.

As for the academic environment, a positive implication of this thesis is that students' main perceived challenges towards beginning a career in Sweden can be tackled with the help of their master programmes. More networking events focused on English-speaking companies and ones that wish to hire international students, mentoring and coaching sessions on self-awareness, elective Swedish language courses to complement their degree and small courses on specific job skills and the Swedish values can significantly influence their positive perception towards beginning their career abroad, in addition to minimizing their perceived challenges and impact the way international students look at diversity in the 21st century business world.

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Appendix A

Working in Sweden: students' perceived challenges and opportunities for the future

This survey has been made for academic purposes. It hopes to collect data from international master students at LUSEM in regards to what their views, perceived concerns and opportunities are on possibly staying in Sweden upon graduation and starting their international career. The questions focus on topics such as values, languages, leadership and work environment Thank you for participating!

1. What country are you from?
2. Age?
3. Gender?
4. Which programme are you studying?
5. Have you been applying/attending job interviews in Sweden?
6. Do you feel that your master program has prepared you to get a job in Sweden post-graduation?
7. If not (rank 1 or 2), what do you think should be improved?
8. Do you feel that having a different culture and national values will be a challenge, opportunity or will have no effect when applying for jobs in Sweden?
9. If a challenge or opportunity, why do you think so?
10. Do you think your international background and experience will make you stand out from Swedish applicants? How so?
11. How are your Swedish speaking abilities?
12. How willing are you to learn Swedish if hired in Sweden?
13. Even for English speaking companies, do you feel that not speaking Swedish fluently may impact negatively your networking opportunities?
14. For one-year masters students without a personal number: has not being eligible for the free Swedish Language course affected you negatively in adapting to Swedish society?
15. Rate the items below on how/if it affects you on a daily basis
 - Stereotypes due to nationality
 - Language barriers
 - Belonging to a Swedish social network
 - Being innovative in a diverse team
 - Working efficiently in multicultural teams
 - Defending your point of view in a group
 - Reaching decisions through broader views
 - Aligning objectives/goals in a multicultural team
 - Using diverse views for creative solutions
16. Have you had a leadership position prior moving to Sweden?
17. How confident have you been at engaging in leadership roles in school-work in Sweden? (group projects, unions, nations...)
18. What do you think has had the biggest influence in your professional approach/style? (E.g. decision-making, management, leading...). Please choose up to two
 - Cultural values, norms and beliefs
 - Personality
 - University studies
 - Work experience
19. Do you feel that you will need to compromise your real self/personality in a Swedish corporate environment? Why?
20. Rate how you think the Swedish values below affect you within the university/future job environment
 - Importance of consensus in decision-making
 - Fika for social interactions

- “Lagom mind-set” (being moderate)
- Swedish labor laws/work balance
- Swedish high taxes
- Less hierarchical roles/more flat structure

Appendix B

Hey! As you know, for our thesis we are focusing on what views international students have about starting a career in Sweden - especially their perceived challenges and opportunities. It focuses mostly on topics like professional approaches, job process, cultures, languages etc.

For this open interview, we just want to go a little bit deeper to really understand how different students perceive their path towards working in Sweden as a non-Swede. Is it ok if I record it with my phone? Your name will not be published anywhere (just your age, gender and country).

Thank you so much for participating! Any questions midway, feel free to ask and interrupt whenever.

PERSONAL INFO

1. Your Name?
2. Age?
3. Master Program?
4. Previous background education?
5. Country of birth?
6. Which countries have you lived in so far?

SWEDEN AND JOB PROCESS

7. How long have you been in Sweden? In addition to studying, have you also worked here?
8. Have you been attending any job interviews?
9. How many?
10. For what positions?
11. How has the process been going?
12. Have you been offered any jobs?
13. Do you feel that you had any disadvantages for being an international student in job processes? In what way?
14. At our university, they offer a few workshops, lectures and work fairs, Such as the EEE days for the students. Is this something you have taken advantage of? If so, what did you think of it? Has it helped you in any way?

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

15. Many students who participated in our survey commented on language barriers being one of the main challenges. What are your views on language barriers in the Swedish job market/society?
16. Do you think knowing Swedish would give you the same chances of getting hired like a Swede?
17. In a multinational company in Sweden, when having Fika or socializing outside of work, do you think that it would be held in English, or Swedish?

PROFESSIONAL APPROACHES

18. What do you think about networking in Sweden?
19. Reflecting back on your home country, what do you think are the biggest similarities and differences job market wise and in ways of working?
20. Do you think that cultural values helps to shape an organizational culture and the way people work individually and as a team?
21. Many students also commented that Sweden as a society usually prefer their own versus someone new or stepping out of their comfort zone. What is your view on this? What have you noticed with the time you have spent in Sweden?
22. Reflecting on your own professional style, do you feel that you are more of a manager or a leader? How so?
 1. Have you ever held a management or leadership role before?
 2. What do you think are the main differences between being a manager and a leader?

23. What is your approach in decision making? (Steph will elaborate)

TEAMS

24. Your program has a lot of international students. How has it been working in multicultural teams?
25. What has been the main challenges so far?
26. How do you think teams can overcome these challenges? Do you feel that you might face the same challenges in companies?
27. What are the positive aspects of working in a diverse team?
28. What do you think is easier? Working with people with diverse backgrounds, or similar backgrounds to yours?

CULTURE

29. If you had to rate from 1 - 10, how much do you think our culture, values and beliefs impact the way we work in a company? And why?
30. Do you think we can truly change our way or learn a new professional approach (in terms of working, leading, managing) to work with international people?
31. Or do you think we just need to understand that people naturally have different approaches built in them due to our values and personalities and find a way to work with it?
32. And just to end it, when you think about working in a company in Sweden, from the top of your mind, what are the things that you are most concerned about?