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Diversity and Inclusion Through the Lens of Employees

Individual's Perspectives of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives

by

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Abstract

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Keywords	Diversity, Inclusion, Equality, Perceptions, Reflexivity
Purpose of the study	Aim to contribute to individuals' perceptions of organizational diversity and inclusion initiatives.
Research Question	What is the employee's perception of the D&I initiatives?
Methodology	We conducted a qualitative study and abductive approach, influenced by the symbolic interactionism tradition. We interviewed ten employees with diverse gender, nationality, age, and hierarchical positions.
Findings	The perceptions of D&I initiatives are based on the personal experiences associated with the term diversity. Following the definitions, we found four varying perspectives: reflecting, believing, skeptical, and limited.
Contribution	Our study aims to contribute to the importance of understanding the types of experiences or values associated with the term diversity on an individual level. In addition, a deeper understanding of the variations of the definitions can allow for comprehending which dimensions of diversity are present in a particular organization.

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We hope you enjoy our thesis!

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Abbreviations

D&I	Diversity and Inclusion
HR	Human Resources
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease

1 Introduction

The introductory chapter of this thesis will outline the theoretical background that has determined our research. First, we summarize the research area we decided on, which is the existence of diversity and inclusion initiatives in an organization and how the employees perceive the initiatives. Then, we continue by explaining the challenges that lie in the D&I programs to justify our research direction. Lastly, we introduce the research question that creates a base for our research.

1.1 Background

Diversity and inclusion, or D&I, have become an essential topic in most organizations in the twenty-first century as the workforces today are commonly made up of various gender, race, ethnicities, sexual orientations, generations, and lifestyles (Roberson, 2006). Diversity and inclusion became more in the spotlight in the late 1990s and early 2000's when many large corporations faced multimillion-dollar lawsuits (Dobbin & Kalev, 2009). For example, significant financial industry firms, such as Morgan Stanley and Merrill Lynch, were in the spotlight for discrimination lawsuits, which ended up costing one of the firms billions of dollars (Dobbin & Kalev, 2009).

Research on diversity and inclusion has been changing over the years because of its complexity (Cañas & Sondak, 2011). When external factors, such as current events, shed light on issues concerning inclusivity of a specific underrepresented group, organizations have the social responsibility to address those issues by at the very least offering their stance on the issue (Rabl et al., 2018). For example, in recent years, Black Lives Matter and MeToo movements have been in focus to promote racial and gender equity (Zajac, 2018). Hence many organizations reacted by concentrating on those two areas of diversity management. With these types of societal challenges, companies and their leadership rely on diversity and inclusion to bounce back from these crises as it strengthens organizational health and performance (Hunt et al., 2020). In past research, effective diversity management practices were shown to positively

influence businesses (Ely & Thomas, 2001). The key problem with this explanation, however, is that many of the studies are only looking at the benefit for the business when it comes to diversity management, which is also known as the business case (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017).

The business case for diversity argues that valuing diversity would create a wider pool for recruitment, provide more opportunities for innovation, lead to a broader customer base, and lead to a positive organizational image, leading to gaining competitive advantage (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). However, a significant drawback of this approach is that the business case for diversity is not enough to create an environment where people feel included (Thomas & Ely, 1996). According to Pringle, Konrad and Prasad (2006, p. 534), the business case is described as “being narrowly focused on the bottom line effects of diversity, and objectifying diverse social groups.” In other words, they suggest that organizations are mainly focused on “positive trade and commercial gains” (p. 534). Despite this critique, the fact is that an increasing number of companies are taking action to create D&I initiatives. However, some social groups remain underrepresented, demonstrating that simply implementing D&I initiatives and increasing the number of underrepresented people does not automatically lead to the production of benefits in the workplace (Ely & Thomas, 2020).

1.2 Problem Area

According to Mor Barak (2015), even though diversity in the workplace has increased over the years, organizations struggle with the exclusion of underrepresented groups that keeps them from fully contributing and benefitting from the involvement. Hence, organizations need to distinguish ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ as separate concepts for the benefits to be apparent (Roberson, 2006). There is much research surrounding these two terms, and many companies emphasize this by developing initiatives centered around education, career development, mentoring, talent retention, and employee participation (Roberson, 2006). According to Roberson (2006), diversity is the observable characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, and generations. Furthermore, diversity has evolved into representing the diverse perspective and approaches employees of different identity groups to bring (Roberson, 2006).

Diversity is a complex topic as the aforementioned observable characteristics have multiple layers that need to be considered, which becomes a challenge for organizations to touch on all aspects of diversity. Additionally, themes of diversity do not explain the importance of inclusion and do not consider the dynamics and consequences of exclusion (Prasad, 2001). Inclusion thus becomes an integral part of building a workplace that feels equal.

Inclusion is defined as the extent to which employees perceive belonging in their workplace and how much influence they have in decision making processes (Pringle, Konrad & Prasad, 2006). In other words, inclusion is focused on whether employees feel that they are “a part of critical organizational processes” (Roberson, 2006, p. 215). Today, there is an increasing number of studies on inclusion and how an organization can achieve inclusivity (Sturm, 2006). Still, employers also understand that “workplace equality is achieved by connecting inclusiveness to core institutional values and practices” (Sturm, 2006, p. 249). According to Sturm (2006), this requires constant institutional change by identifying barriers and removing them.

One of the activities that organizations engage in toward this effort is the D&I initiatives. However, a limitation of these initiatives is that there are varying contexts, such as culture, geographic location, and other underlying factors that need to be considered to understand why the specific D&I initiatives exist and their effect on the employees (Mamman, Kamoche & Bakuwa, 2011). Understanding how employees perceive these initiatives is essential in determining what type of differences exist in organizations (Hostager & De Meuse, 2008). The difference in mindset means that there will be differences in challenges of navigating diversity management. Therefore, practitioners need to be exposed to different perspectives about the D&I initiatives and why and how those perceptions are formed. This will allow a deeper understanding of the variations of D&I programs and understand why certain activities work and why possible gaps exist.

In this study, we set out to introduce a case study of a global company, CGC, explicitly focusing on the offices in the Nordics. We aim to contribute perceptions of the employees that are part of an organization engaged in various D&I initiatives and how the individuals inside the organization view those programs.

1.3 Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The overall purpose of this study is to offer perspective through a case study that highlights what D&I initiatives look like in practice and assess how employees perceive them. By getting individuals' perceptions of organizational diversity and inclusion initiatives, we aim to fill the gap in the literature of the "insufficient concern about the employees' views and experiences relating to diversity" (Pringle, Konrad & Prasad, 2006, p. 534). Furthermore, there are numerous resources on how to increase and effectively implement diversity and inclusion initiatives. However, little attention has been paid to examine how people perceive and experience these initiatives (De Meuse & Hostager, 2001).

We will use a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the purpose of these initiatives and the influence they have. This approach enables us to collect perceptions and experiences from employees at CGC with diverse backgrounds. Therefore, the purpose of our research is to gain an understanding of how employees perceive D&I initiatives. As we clarify later, one of the findings is that the D&I programs have a positive impact overall, but there are underrepresented groups that may be overlooked. Furthermore, we evaluate how this phenomenon of unintended exclusion affects employees.

Many companies are engaged in addressing gender and racial equity challenges because those are the topics gaining the most attention in society today. However, we feel that how employees perceive D&I initiatives on an individual level is vital to understanding what works and what does not. Hence, we aim to understand the different approaches to the D&I initiatives in an organization and how the employees perceive them. Furthermore, our study will fill the gap in the literature of the employees' views by painting an image to connect existing theories with practical situations. Hence, our thesis aims to answer the following research question:

- What is the employee's perception of the D&I initiatives?

Our study aims to define what diversity looks like in an organization and raises awareness from our findings and literature review on the complexity of the term. Furthermore, in the findings, we also illustrate the four main perspectives associated with how the employees perceive the D&I initiatives. Finally, this research aims to provide a unique insight to D&I practitioners responsible for strategizing D&I initiatives in the future.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis contains six chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Preliminary Findings and Analysis, Discussion, and Conclusion.

In **Chapter 1**, we introduce the background and problematization area. This enables an initial understanding of our topic and the aim of our study to the reader.

In **Chapter 2**, we will provide a theoretical framework to the readers through the literature review. Initially, we will analyze the concept of diversity and its dimensions to comprehend its complexity. Then, we will focus on the term ‘inclusion’ and its relevance for diversity management. Later, we will examine organizational perceptions to engage in diversity and inclusion initiatives. Finally, we will discuss individuals' perceptions of diversity and inclusion initiatives. These concepts will form the basis for our empirical study.

In **Chapter 3**, we will explain the methodology approach for our study, which is based on symbolic interactionism. Then, we will detail the process of collecting our data and its analysis process. Finally, we will reflect upon some limitations and influences for our research approach.

In **Chapter 4**, we will analyze our empirical data to provide a deep understanding of the problem area. Finally, we answer our research question by presenting individuals’ perceptions in four categories: reflective perspective, believing perspective, skeptical perspective and limited perspective.

In **Chapter 5**, we discuss our findings and link them to the existing literature. Then, we will present the practical implications for our study.

In **Chapter 6**, we will conclude our thesis by summarizing our findings and practical implications for future research.

2 Literature Review

In this chapter, we review the literature that exists related to our study. First, we will define the term diversity and explain its relevance for organizations. Then, we will explain the importance of inclusion for diversity management as it represents employees' perceptions of feeling included in the organizations. In this section, we will emphasize the relevance for organizations to get from diversity to inclusion. Later, we will focus on organizational perceptions to elaborate diversity and inclusion initiatives on a collective level. Finally, we will outline individuals' perceptions of D&I practices, which show two different approaches. Some individuals perceive D&I programs as a source of reflexivity, while others see them as lacking relevance. As we conduct the review, the section will clarify the lack of literature that focuses on employees' perceptions of diversity and inclusion initiatives. These concepts will, in turn, form the basis for our empirical study.

2.1 Understanding diversity and its dimensions

Diversity is a complex topic because it can have various definitions in narrow and broad senses (Otaya-Ebede & Loliya, 2020). According to Otaya-Ebede and Loliya (2020), the narrow definitions consider race, gender, religion, ethnicity, etc., while the broad definitions consider individuals' visible and non-visible characteristics. They explain that the main limitation to this concept of diversity is that vagueness often can create confusion on how to manage diversity as it is a growing field. The Society for Human Resource Management (2021) provides a vital definition of the term diversity, which comprises an infinite unique aspects and characteristics. Moreover, diversity is associated with experiences, physical condition and learning ability (Cañas & Sondak, 2011). These definitions show the multiple aspects and characteristics that can be attributed to diversity.

The dimensions of diversity have been established in existing literature, but the arguments of which dimension needs to be included make the definition of diversity complex. Loden (1996) exemplifies through the diversity wheel how primary and secondary dimensions are laid out. She mentions that the primary dimensions consist of age, gender, mental and physical abilities, race, ethnic heritage, and sexual orientation. Furthermore, she explains the secondary dimensions, which consist of eleven dimensions less visible but more dynamic, as are illustrated in Chart 1. The secondary dimensions complement the primary dimensions.

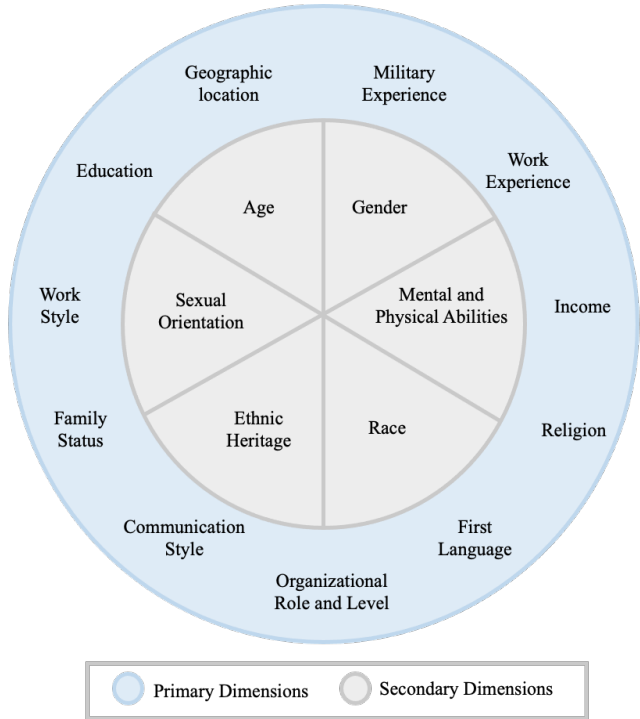


Chart 1- Diversity Wheel (Loden, 1996)

To further illustrate the complexity of diversity, Gardenswartz and Rowe (1994) introduce two additional dimensions of diversity to Loden’s diversity wheel, which are personality and organizational dimensions, as seen on Chart 2. They argue that personality, which sits at the center of the four layers, is the unique aspect that ingrains all dimensions and unifies them. For them, the organizational dimensions would be placed as the outermost layer of the four layers, and it includes dimensions such as management status, work field, seniority, and department unit. However, one question that needs to be asked is whether organizations can raise awareness of the increasingly complicated concepts to communicate their values to their employees.

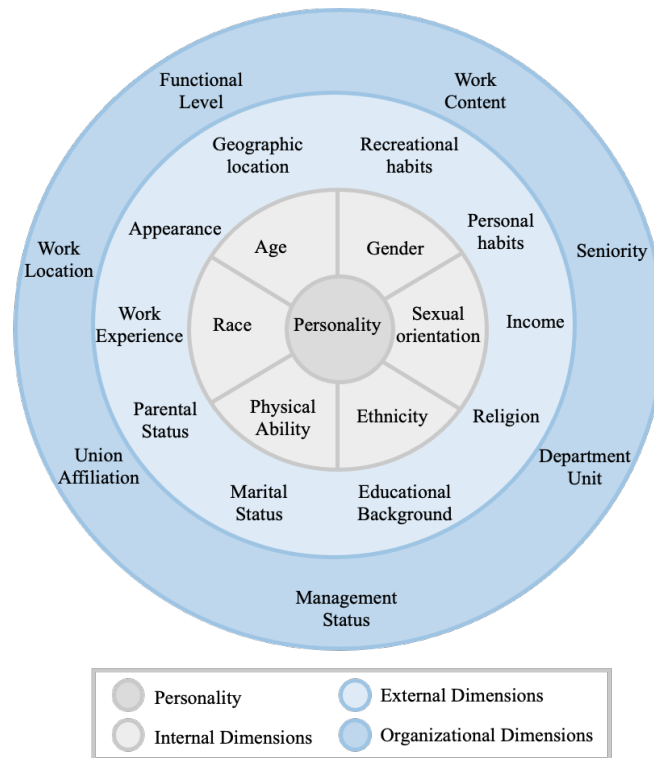


Chart 2 - Four Layers of Diversity (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1994)

The increasing additions of dimensions of diversity only increment its complexity. This difficulty also complicates how employees further understand diversity, impacting how employees perceive the initiatives formed around the term (Prasad, Pringle & Konrad, 2006). According to Prasad, Pringle, and Konrad (2006), a clear definition of diversity enables the comparison of findings and contributes to discovering a concordance among the definitions. Even with the complexity of diversity management, organizations focus on allowing different strategies to create a diverse workforce. In the next section, we will explore the reasons why organizations decide to work on diversity management.

2.1.1 Relevance of diversity management for organizations

Despite the complexity of diversity management, many organizations are focused on becoming more diverse. More specifically, organizations today are aware of the business case of diversity. According to Beardwell and Thompson (2017), the business case explains why embracing a diverse workforce is beneficial to a company and its efficiency. They argue that the business case of diversity management states that a diverse workforce creates a broader pool for recruitment, provides increased opportunity for innovation, leads to a wider customer base, and

leads to a positive organizational image (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). As important as the business case is, that economically minded perception becomes problematic (Farmanesh et al., 2020). A pivotal explanation by Prasad, Pringle, and Konrad (2006) states that because of the increase in globalization, the world needs to include and recognize different social identity groups based on more profits to the organization or enabling a fair treatment to everyone.

The above explanation defines the social justice case for diversity which is vital to co-exist with the business for employees in organizations to perceive it as something necessary (Livingston, 2020). Moreover, the social justice case states organizations have the moral obligation to apply fair treatment to their employees (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). However, as you will see in our findings, many employees see diversity as a merit to the business to gain a competitive advantage. Still, they do not see attending D&I initiatives as an obligation. Because the business case and social justice case are not in parallel, inclusion becomes a challenge. Hence, many organizations form initiatives as an effort to get from diversity to inclusion, but they often fail when employees do not perceive the initiatives as impactful or purposeful (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017; Quinn & Thakor, 2018).

2.2 Inclusion is the goal in terms of perception

There is progress in increasing the representation of diverse groups in work organizations, and employees in organizations are able to perceive the positive results (Mor Barak, 2015). Nevertheless, the increase in diversity leads to the challenge of a more inclusive organization and at the same time, being inclusive is a big challenge to accomplish (Bernstein et al., 2020). Therefore, there is much research on diversity management and the necessity of separating ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ (Roberts, 2011). According to Mor Barak (2015), ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ are used interchangeably, but they have different meanings and impact. For her, diversity refers to the observable and non-observable demographic differences among members. In contrast, inclusion refers to the perception of the employees that their uniqueness is contributing to the organization and that they are appreciated (Mor Barak, 2015).

Mor Barak (2015) argues that instead of increasing diversity, one of the most significant issues in a workforce is exclusion. She defines exclusion as the perception of employees that they are not viewed as an integral part of the organization. This statement is represented by the study of Hunt et al. (2020), which shows that even though 52% of employees had a positive sentiment of diversity in their companies, 61% of the same group of employees had a negative sentiment of inclusion. Thus, only increasing diversity does not assure a culture of inclusion and that even the more diverse organizations must work on inclusion. (Hunt et al., 2020).

Inclusion is defined as the extent to which employees perceive the involvement in their workplace and how much influence they have in decision making processes (Pringle, Konrad, & Prasad, 2006). By accomplishing inclusion, organizations can engage employees, consider their perspectives into their practices to be more innovative and build a strong employee brand. (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017; Hunt et al., 2020). With inclusion, full participation is also encouraged by the organization (Mor Barak, 2015). According to Mor Barak (2015, p.87), “[t]he inclusive workplace is an action-oriented model for integration of organizations with society via expanding circles of inclusion”. Therefore, inclusion is a crucial component in diversity management and essential for our research. By understanding individuals' perceptions of D&I initiatives, we can comprehend how the programs impact the inclusion of employees in the workplace.

2.3 The organizational perspective of the D&I initiatives

In this section, we will explain two perspectives that organizations consider for devising D&I programs. These approaches are known as the sameness and difference perspective. We will analyze both approaches to understand their influence in the creation of D&I initiatives.

2.3.1 Sameness and difference approach

In an effort to devise a policy or create initiatives for diversity and inclusion that are perceived as effective by the employees, it is important to be clear and transparent on how the organization treats people to ensure fairness (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Furthermore, organizations must consider whether to consider the differences between employees and treat them equally or recognize the difference between people and treat them differently (Beardwell & Thompson,

2017). Based on the perspective that the organization decides to choose, diversity policies and programs will be implemented (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). It is equally important to communicate the perspective taken by the organization and what that means for the employees, so there is transparency in the perception of the policies and the initiatives (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013).

If organizations ensure equal treatment for all of their employees, they are considering a sameness perspective. According to Beardwell and Thompson (2017), the sameness approach acknowledges differences but views attributes that are related to intelligence, value, and other cognitive characteristics to be distributed evenly amongst groups. They argue that these attributes do not belong to a specific dimension of diversity but rather from contextual factors such as experiences or interactions with other individuals. The main limitation of this perspective is that the contextual factors can overpower the perceptions of D&I initiatives (De Meuse, Hostager & O'Neill, 2007).

Prasad, Pringle and Konrad (2006) consider equality, or the sameness approach as a principally political approach, which means that it is promoted by the government or political parties to ensure a fair treatment to their population. They emphasize the case of Scandinavia, which is considered as a region with a strong conviction to treat everyone fairly and promote equal opportunities. However, a constraint of this perspective in Scandinavia is that as the population is convinced that the system guarantees an equal treatment, there is not support for public policies for equal employment of minorities (Prasad, Pringle & Konrad, 2006). As a result, these cultural and structural aspects can hinder bias that might be affecting part of the population. (Prasad, Pringle & Konrad, 2006). These biases could lead to excluding minorities through unconscious behaviors that even turn into microaggression (Shenoy-Packer, 2014).

According to Otake-Ebede and Akobo (2020), an unconscious bias is a form of not being aware of stereotyping a social group of people, which is influenced by the individual's background and triggers a quick judgement. They state that dangerous thing about unconscious bias is that it could lead to microaggression in the workplace if it is not addressed correctly. Additionally, Otake-Ebede and Akobo (2020) define microaggressions as verbal or nonverbal insults that communicate derogatory or hostile messages based on the receiving person's marginalized group. Microaggressions can occur consciously or unconsciously, being the final form challenging to detect because the aggressors do not realize that their comments offend other people (Dalton & Villagran, 2018). Therefore, to minimize these negative actions,

organizations must consider the differences and be taken into account for devising diversity and inclusion policies and deciding their impact on employees (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017).

When diversity and inclusion initiatives are formed, assuming the differences between employees is the starting point for the difference approach. According to Beardwell and Thompson (2017), the difference perspective acknowledges the difference between employees to tailor diversity and inclusion programs to reduce the disadvantages for minorities. They argue that ignoring differences can create more disadvantages for underrepresented groups because they do not have the same conditions as their colleagues to accomplish the same performance. However, the challenge of the difference approach is that it still tends to perceive the performance of diversity programs in terms of the generation of profits to the business (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017), which is the relevance of the before mentioned business case.

Organizations that take one of the perspectives as mentioned earlier over the other run the risk of overlooking some of the disadvantages (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). To avoid the limitations of the sameness and difference perspective, organizations can consider both approaches to devise their diversity and inclusion programs (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013). This combination of approaches is known as the mixed policy. According to Beardwell and Thompson (2017), a mixed policy of the sameness and difference perspective is essential in order to create an equal environment. However, they explain that the key problem with this explanation is distinguishing when the sameness perspective is needed and when the difference perspective is relevant.

A pivotal research is conducted by Holvino and Kamp (2009), where they point out the sameness-difference dilemma. They challenge through this dilemma that if employees are different, then equality is not possible, and if employees are exactly the same and do not have differences, then there is no reason to focus on diversity management. Instead, for organizations that run into the issue of differentiating the sameness and difference perspective, it is important to consider how the differences are understood in discourses (Holvino & Kamp, 2009). Holvino and Kamp (2009) explain that the discourses amongst employees do not explain the underrepresented groups in a consistent way. They stress that sometimes differences are considered as positive aspects that add value to organizations, while in other circumstances, the same differences are catalogued as disadvantages. This double discourse confuses employees who cannot distinguish if differences are an advantage or limitation for their company.

Understanding how organizations conceive diversity and apply strategies to ensure the inclusion of their employees is crucial for devising D&I initiatives. Organizations have different approaches for diversity management, such as the sameness perspective, difference perspective or the combination of both approaches in the mixed policy. However, as we mentioned in this section, all of the perspectives have limitations that might interfere with the effectiveness of D&I practices (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017; Holvino & Kamp, 2009). As it is not possible to avoid the limitation of each approach, organizations must constantly measure individuals' perception of D&I practices to track their efficacy. We will focus on these individual perceptions in the next section of this chapter.

2.4 Individual perceptions of D&I initiatives

This section will describe the existing literature on how employees perceive organizational programs. According to Pringle, Konrad and Prasad (2006), there is not sufficient evidence of employees' views and experiences related to diversity. This limited information is the gap in the literature that our study aims to cover. However, we present in this section some perceptions of D&I initiatives with strategies to challenge these conceptions. These perspectives are presented as a learning opportunity through reflection or as lacking relevance.

2.4.1 D&I Initiatives as a learning opportunity through reflection

Psychological safety is an important concept to keep in mind to create an environment where D&I initiatives are seen as learning opportunities. According to Page, Boysen and Arya (2019), they argue that these types of environments provide employees with a feeling of comfort to share their thoughts and ideas, as behaviors such as accountability, appropriateness, and ownership are valued. However, the main weakness of this theory is that it only takes into account the environment set forth for the employees and does not consider their personal motivations or ideals to join a D&I initiative.

Employees need to perceive a purpose in order to be engaged in the diversity and inclusion initiatives. This argument is illustrated by Quinn and Thakor (2018), who argue that purpose is a complex concept to touch because it defies what employees learned in school or through their experience. They assume that employees see work as essentially contractual and tend to reduce their efforts or personal costs. To minimize this self-interest, organizations can practice empathy by asking challenging questions to the employees, listening to their answers and reflecting on their thoughts (Quinn & Thakor, 2018). By constantly repeating this practice, organizations will gain a deep understanding of their workforce's common needs and purposes. (Quinn & Thakor, 2018).

When the purpose is found, the meaning of the employees' work deepens. As a result, employees "become more committed and engaged. They take risks, learn, and raise their game" (Quinn & Thakor, 2018, p. 81). This statement means that the workforce assumes more responsibilities in uncertain contexts and demonstrate more eagerness to learn. Quinn & Thakor (2018) highlight the importance of learning and unlearning about the organization in which employees work. In other words, knowledge about diversity must be constantly added and subtracted upon reflection by the employees (Hislop, Bosua & Helms, 2013). Relating to our study, when employees consider diverse opinions and perceive the diversity and inclusion initiatives as a learning experience, the purpose of diversity programs become clear.

Generally speaking, despite all of the attention that diversity gets, organizations "have largely failed to adopt a learning orientation toward diversity and are no closer to reaping its benefits" (Ely & Thomas, 2020, p.117). Learning-and-effectiveness paradigm is an essential aspect of our literature review as it builds on the psychological safety that was previously reviewed. The learning-and-effectiveness paradigm centers the diversity management on learning opportunities by arguing that cultural differences must be considered as a resource for learning. According to Ely and Thomas (2020, p. 120). "If company profits come at the price of our humanity, they are costing us too much.". In other words, mainly focusing on the business case is not sufficient in creating an environment that perceives diversity as a merit. However, it is important to consider the difference in context for each employee. Without reflection and reflexivity, the facilitation of these learning opportunities and the employees perceiving it becomes problematic (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017).

As we will clarify in our findings, reflecting on what employees learn from the D&I initiatives is one of the primary purposes for them. According to Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017), reflection is an important part of being engaged, even though the engagement varies on the employees' interests. They understand reflection as a natural activity of humans that is based on the individual capability to think about and evaluate previous experiences constantly. If employees perceive the D&I initiatives as a mode for reflection, it can lead to reflexivity about their thoughts on diversity and inclusion. According to Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017, p. 14), reflexivity is defined as “the ambition to carefully and systematically take a critical view of one’s own assumption, idea and favored vocabulary and to consider if alternative ones make sense.”

The main weakness with reflection and reflexivity in relation to D&I initiatives is that it is tough to find the right angle with the countless definitions of the term diversity (Loden, 1996; Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1994; Cañas & Sondak, 2011). Finding a common meaning and relevance is important to achieve transparency in understanding the benefits as previously outlined in this literature review. However, the research on reflexivity is a pivotal one as it becomes the backbone of psychologically safe, purpose driven, and learning centric organizations that want to create a diverse and inclusive environment (Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Quinn & Thakor, 2018; Ely & Thomas, 2020). Hence, these different practices will be an effective mode to challenge D&I initiatives and align organizational efforts of inclusion with individuals' perceptions and expectations.

2.4.2 D&I Initiatives as lacking relevance

Organizational programs could be considered non-relevant for employees if they do not perceive their benefit or the objective of its creation (Quinn & Thakor, 2018). In the case of D&I initiatives, a perception that could become a challenge is if employees consider the programs as a simple response to follow a trend in the world. Prasad, Prasad and Mir (2010) present this idea through the concept of a fashion, which plays a significant role in organizations engaging in diversity management practices. They argue that many organizations facilitate diversity management as a fashion in response to influences from other companies and to stay relevant and innovative.

As mentioned earlier, diversity and inclusion have been a topic that has gained attention in the late twentieth and into the twenty-first century, as many sectors have become increasingly aware of equal treatment (Prasad, Pringle & Konrad, 2006). Additionally, external factors, such as current events, shed light on issues concerning the inclusivity of a specific underrepresented group. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement represents a social pressure for organizations to demonstrate their support for social justice and see the necessity to act (Zajac, 2018). Therefore, organizations have the social responsibility to address those issues by, at the very least, offering their stance on the problem (Rabl et al., 2018).

Prasad, Prasad, and Mir (2010) argue that following a fashion also is a tool to legitimize a strategy or a new initiative such as the ones for diversity and inclusion. Because the motivation is coming from external factors, they critique that a fashion often lacks local relevance and impacts the perception of the employees about the D&I initiatives. For them, the shortcoming of the context can be associated with the initiatives' illegitimacy because they are synchronized with external trends but not necessarily with the internal context. If fashion is clearly the only reason for an organization to have diversity and inclusion programs, employees can perceive the activities with great skepticism.

Acting out of fashion can only heighten the ambiguity of why D&I initiatives exist. To Jordan, Ferris, and Lamont (2018), new HR initiatives in general, including inclusion practices, can create uncertainty in employees. They also argue that these programs can lead to a negative perception in which they see the initiatives as unfair and a mode of exclusion. Based on this argument, to avoid employees perceiving the initiatives as just a way to follow the trend, organizations need to clarify why they engage in the programs and be transparent with their relevance (Hostager & De Meuse, 2008). In addition to D&I initiatives being perceived to respond to a fashion, it is also important to consider the context in which the organizations exist to avoid employees seeing the programs as irrelevant.

There are numerous resources on how to increase and effectively implement diversity and inclusion initiatives, but a little attention to examining how people perceive and experience these initiatives (De Meuse & Hostager, 2001). According to De Meuse and Hostager (2001, p.34), "diversity programs have the potential to influence the perceptions, attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors of employees." This focus on the perception of the D&I initiatives is an essential aspect in creating diversity and inclusion initiatives because the programs can be tailored with their necessities and expectations. In addition, the purpose of the diversity and inclusion

initiatives is to trigger many emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, which can be either positive or negative (De Meuse & Hostager, 2001). However, as the perceptions are influenced by context and personal experiences, evoking positive feelings from D&I initiatives is a big challenge for organizations (Carr et al., 2019).

For Daniels, Neale and Green (2017), the issue arises that organizations tend to assume an accurate understanding of employees' perceptions of diversity that often do not reflect their reality. They mention that this limitation is represented by the spillover bias, which occurs when they have reached inclusivity for one dimension of diversity; this effect is generalized to other dimensions even though they are not covered by the diversity management programs. This means that employees start to perceive that they are diverse and inclusive in different dimensions as well. Spillover bias explains that some of the dimensions that are important to employees are being overshadowed by the dimensions in focus by the organization. The spillover bias helps to explain why certain groups feel empowered, but others do not share the same feeling of inclusion (Daniels, Neale & Greer, 2017). The complexity is grounded in the fact that organizational programs manage different efforts of inclusion, but employees who belong to minorities not covered by these efforts still feel excluded.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on presenting the theoretical framework for our study. We presented the existing literature related to diversity management and different perspectives of diversity and inclusion initiatives from the organizational and individual side.

First, we focused on defining 'diversity' in order to show its complexity by having multiple meanings, which complicates how employees further understand diversity and perceive the initiatives formed around the term. This definition is a starting point for our study to understand how employees understand the initiatives. However, the reason that organizations engage in D&I is also a crucial factor to consider when trying to understand why the initiatives exist in the first place (Quinn & Thakor, 2018). Existing literature states that organizations mainly consider two views on diversity management: the business case and social justice perspective (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Considering the two cases is important because the literature

does not explain how these views impact how the employees define diversity and how that affects their perspective on the D&I initiatives (Thomas & Ely, 1996).

To respond to the challenge of being more inclusive, many organizations form initiatives in an effort to get from diversity to inclusion. For Mor Barak (2015), instead of increasing diversity, one of the biggest problems in a workforce is exclusion. However, there is a lack of literature that explains why employees perceive exclusion in specific contexts. Our study aims to contribute to the employees' views on inclusion and understand the reasoning behind them.

To further our understanding of how perceptions of D&I initiatives are formed, we also explored two perspectives that organizations take into account for devising diversity and inclusion initiatives. This is important because understanding the perspective taken by the organization can be the basis of analyzing the alignment of values in regards to the D&I initiatives. These approaches are known as the sameness and difference perspective (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). The complexity of diversity further complicates these perspectives because if a dimension is perceived as overlooked, individual perceptions can be significantly influenced. Thus, it was essential to consider the existing literature on individual perception to form a basis for our study.

Finally, we described the existing literature of individuals' perspectives of D&I initiatives. A limited amount of theoretical framework is explicitly focused on perceptions of diversity and inclusion initiatives. The following table summarizes the main theories described in the literature review that suggest different strategies to influence these perceptions. We follow the structure of the literature review by dividing the perceptions into D&I programs as a source of learning through reflexivity or as lacking relevance.

Table 1 - Literature related to Individuals' Perception of D&I initiatives

Perception of D&I practice	Influences on individuals' perceptions from the literature associated	Authors
Learning opportunity	<p><i>Psychological Safety</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide an environment to employees where they can share their ideas and thoughts. 	(Page, Boysen & Arya, 2019)
	<p><i>Purpose-driven practices</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initiatives attached to individuals' purpose for engagement. - Work on empathy to minimize self-interest. 	(Quinn & Thakor, 2018)
	<p><i>Learning-and-effectiveness Paradigm</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adopt a learning orientation of D&I practices. 	(Ely & Thomas, 2020)
	<p><i>Reflexivity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Through reflection and reflexivity, facilitate learning opportunities. 	(Alvesson, Blom & Svenningsson, 2017)
Lacking relevance	<p><i>Fashion discourse</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoid the adoption of D&I practices just to synchronize with external trends. 	(Prasad, Prasad & Mir, 2010)
	<p><i>Finding a purpose of D&I initiatives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examine how people perceive and experience D&I initiatives 	(De Muse & Hostager, 2001)
	<p><i>Spillover bias</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One dimensional program of D&I can generalize the idea that other dimensions of D&I are covered too, which is not accurate. 	(Daniels, Neale & Greer; 2017)

As mentioned before, few studies focus on understanding individual's perceptions of D&I initiatives. From the theories discussed above, only De Muse & Hostager (2001) suggest the relevance of examining how people perceive and experience D&I initiatives to engage them in the activities but do not explain how to accomplish it. The other theories suggest different ways to influence individuals' perspective based on different strategies that do not respond to perceptions. This is the reason why this study will focus on answering: what is the employee's perception of the D&I initiatives?

3 Methodology

This chapter aims to explain the methodology conducted for our study. First, we will describe how our research approach is guided by the symbolic interactionism tradition. By using this interpretivism tradition, we can understand employees' perceptions and meanings of organizational efforts. Then, we will detail the process of collecting our data and explain our research setting by describing the information provided by the organization and relevant characteristics of our ten interviewees. After that, we will explain how we analyzed the empirical material to formulate our findings and reflect upon some limitations and influences for our research approach.

3.1 Philosophical grounding

For the nature of our research problem, we intended to understand employee's perceptions of the organizational diversity and inclusion efforts. Hence, an interpretive perspective was appropriated since it focuses on understanding how individuals perceive the world and then act upon these perceptions. Moreover, the interpretative traditions subscribe that the world of each individual is socially created, and this construction is possible due to the individual's ability to connect meanings to objects, experiences, and interactions (Prasad, 2018). Hence, we decided to choose an interpretivism position. By analyzing the meaning that employees attach to diversity and inclusion practices, we will comprehend the relevance that individuals attribute to these initiatives.

Our research is based on the interpretive paradigm, specifically in the symbolic interactionism presented by Prasad (2018), which focuses on the searching for self and meaning. This tradition considers that the social phenomena are symbolic, which means that individuals create different meanings for experiences and objects around them. Likewise, as Mead's theory explains, "these meanings are not completely predetermined but are constantly being modified through a series of individual interpretations" (Prasad, 2018, p. 21). This constant adjustment or creation of new meanings enables the adjustment of organizational initiatives to align employees' perceptions

by taking their perspectives into account. Based on this, symbolic interactionism will be relevant for our study to understand employees' meanings of corporate events, experiences, or objects. Furthermore, by recognizing these perceptions, we can analyze the effectiveness and impact of organizational efforts for inclusion.

The organizations form many diversity and inclusion strategies. However, we believe that individuals' perception should be taken into account. Hence, organizations must focus on constantly understanding the needs, challenges, and limitations of the employees for including them in the workplace. Therefore, we aim to explain through this research how inclusion is perceived by its employees. To guide this research through the symbolic interactionism tradition, we analyzed the organization from various angles. In the following sections, we will detail these processes.

3.2 Data Collection Method and Research Setting

As mentioned in the introduction, we focused our study on a local office of an international consumer goods company. This organization is a global actor, has thousands of employees and sells its products in most countries globally. Specifically, our study will be conducted in the company's Nordic office, which manages the operation of Northern European countries. This local office will be called 'CGC' due to reasons of confidentiality. We divided the process of collecting data into two phases to get a deep understanding of employees' perceptions during the interviews.

First, we focused on the analysis of the company on a global scale, reviewing the diversity and inclusion annual reports and public information of its corporate webpage. During this investigation, we discovered that the global organization is primarily focused on gender initiatives and cross-cultural training. Furthermore, the company enables each local office to tailor the programs to their context. With these insights, we arranged our first interview with the Human Resources Manager of CGC. The manager explained to us how the global initiatives are adapted to the Nordic operations. This customization of the initiatives is required as their challenges for diversity management are different from other offices around the world (Interview, 30 March 2021).

For example, in the Nordic offices at CGC, women representation is not an issue as they have already accomplished an equal representation of both genders. However, gender balance is an issue in the rest of the world where CGC operates. Hence the programs tend to be focused on gender as it is promoted through the global headquarters. In the context of the Nordic offices at CGC, they are primarily focused on enabling equal treatment to all the employees. However, CGC employees in the Nordic offices also have access to the D&I initiatives that the company manages on a global scale. To better understand our analysis, we prepared a list of the CGC’s initiatives for diversity management planned for 2021 in Table 2. This summary describes D&I programs, explains their purposes, the month of 2021 that the initiative is expected to execute, and the audience that attends them. The attendance of all the initiatives is voluntary, as the employees have the autonomy to be involved in the more relevant programs for them.

Table 2 - CGC’s Diversity and Inclusion initiatives 2021

Initiatives	Description and Purpose of the initiatives	Timeline for 2021	Audience
Well-being Program	Trainings focus on Managing Unconscious Bias	January	All employees
Global Workshops	Workshops to reflect how they can create an inclusive culture	Recurring Event	All employees
Training Academy	Workshops to share learnings and establish a cross-functional expertise	March	All employees
Cross-cultural training	Multicultural training for closer collaboration between employees	February, April and May	All employees
International Women’s Day	Leaders reflect with their teams about the importance of Women’s Day	March	All employees
Parental Webinars	Coaching sessions to support the transition to maternity and paternity	April and October	New Parents and Managers
Gender Workshops	Workshops for women to share their positives and negative experiences	Recurring Event	Women

(CGC internal and external information, 29 March 2021)

Additionally, the Human Resources Manager shared the data of each employee with their gender, age, nationality and hierarchical position. We analyzed the information and found that the workforce is composed of an equal number of women and men in all the hierarchical levels. Moreover, CGC's employees represent 27 nationalities from all of the global regions. Unfortunately, we were not able to analyze religion or sexual orientation because CGC does not measure them as it is considered private information. We will explain this limitation in the last section of this chapter. Nevertheless, by understanding CGC's diverse background, we were able to have a better comprehension of the company. As Bowen clarifies, "by examining information collected through different methods, the researcher can corroborate findings across data sets and thus reduce the impact of potential bias that can exist in a single study" (2009, p.28).

Second, we used the inputs of the D&I initiatives and demographics to tailor our questionnaire for the interviews (Appendix A). Our study is based on ten semi-structured interviews with employees of diverse genders, ages, positions and nationalities. As Kvale (1996) explains, the purpose of these conversations is "to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (pp. 5-6). To explore different perspectives among employees, the study was conducted through semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured format gave us the flexibility to adapt the interview as it developed and gained a deep understanding of an individual's perception of D&I practices.

Based on the data provided by the Human Resources Manager, we selected the ten employees that we wanted to interview. We acknowledged that by conducting qualitative research, we could not generalize the perceptions of the interviewees to the whole organization. However, we intended to select the most heterogeneous sample of CGC employees (Table 2) to obtain different perspectives and analyze and contrast their meanings from different angles. The prioritized aspects are position in CGC, nationality, gender and age. To maintain the anonymity of the interviewees, we changed their names, replaced their exact age for ranges and supplanted the country of origin for regional areas. We intended to cover almost all the geographical regions. However, the majority belong to Northern Europe as the offices are situated in Scandinavia. Likewise, each gender has the same representation, and there is a variety of organizational levels and ages among the interviewees.

Table 3 - Interviewees' Demographics

Interviewees changed names	Organizational Level	Region of Origin	Gender	Group Age
Ulvi	Entry Level	Asia	Male	25 - 30 years
Anja	Manager	Northern Europe	Female	40 - 44 years
Seymur	Manager	Northern Europe	Male	30 - 34 years
Sara	Manager	America	Female	30 - 34 years
Jerry	Senior Manager	America	Male	45 - 49 years
Simon	Manager	Northern Europe	Male	40 - 44 years
Sam	Senior Manager	Northern Europe	Male	40 - 44 years
Daniela	Entry Level	Western Europe	Female	20 - 24 years
Lisa	Senior Manager	Northern Europe	Female	35 - 39 years
Raisa	Entry Level	Western Europe	Female	25 - 30 years

(Database of CGC's employees, 06 April 2021)

All the meetings lasted around 40 minutes and were conducted digitally by Microsoft Teams due to the restrictions of COVID-19. We decided to set up the meetings with the general topic of diversity and inclusion and not give any further information to have genuine responses to our questions during the interviews. Even though the interviewees did not have a previous understanding of the aim of our research, they were friendly and open to share their perspectives about D&I initiatives. Even five of them were curious about the outcome and asked us if it was possible to receive the final thesis. From the information provided, we aimed to comprehend individuals' perceptions of CGC diversity and inclusion initiatives.

3.3 Data Analysis Process

Through an open minded perspective, the study was conducted in three series with the abductive approach (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). The first analysis was conducted at the beginning of April after our first interview. We decided to interview a Senior Manager, as we assumed that he would be more familiar with D&I initiatives by having a leadership position. After finishing this first interview, we asked the interviewee if he felt comfortable with the questions, and we were provided positive feedback from him. Due to the sensitivity of our topic, we wanted to corroborate if we were managing the conversations correctly to gain genuine examples from the interviewees. After transcribing this first interview, we were able to understand how the interviewee experienced the initiatives that we had previously investigated.

The second analysis was after conducting our sixth interview in the middle of April. We decided to elaborate a preliminary analysis of the conversations with the interviewees to find common ideas and experiences among the employees. This enabled us to maintain an open-mind approach to validate our interview guide and adjust our literature review. By this practice, we intend to challenge existing theories and identify ‘mysteries’ that need to be explained. A mystery is considered an empirical finding that differs from the existing literature and can evoke different ideas to solve this enigma (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013). For example, a ‘mystery’ that we found at this point was that most employees perceived the D&I initiatives as having a positive impact. However, some still perceived a lack of inclusion of certain underrepresented groups. As Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) explain, “self-critique and reflexivity are important elements, as antidotes to the tendency to be carried away by the prospect of constructing a true mystery” (p.1272). The third analysis was focused on the last four interviews by transcribing and analyzing. This last series was at the end of April.

To compile the conversations, we recorded and transcribed the audio file in the transcription software Otter. We split up the transcription of the interviews to corroborate that the audio is correctly reflected by the application and adjust any possible error. During these transcriptions, we start exchanging preliminary interpretations of the experiences and behaviors of the interviewees. As we were analyzing individuals’ perceptions related to D&I initiatives, we had several positive or negative experiences that interviewees associated with the programs. Additionally, in some cases, interviewees shared their perception of diversity with activities that were not related to the official D&I programs of CGC, such as the recruitment process that

was mentioned in four interviews. According to Rennstam and Wästerfors, having different materials responds to the “problem of chaos” (2018, p.71). In this case, the different materials were the diverse individuals’ experiences related and not related to the purpose of our study. Thus, after transcribing all the interviews, we read all the conversations deeply again to avoid overlooking important details (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

Then, we focus on understanding what interviewees were experiencing and how they explained the experience. Gubrium and Holstein (1997) denominate this practice as the ‘analytical bracketing’, which consists of switching between ‘what’s’ and ‘how’s’. This sorting practice is aligned with the symbolic interactionism tradition that guides our study. With this approach, we attempted to understand individuals’ meanings and perceptions that are attributed to events, experiences or objects (Prasad, 2018). Hence, we sorted the interview declarations on ‘what’ individuals said. They were following with ‘how’ they were experiencing and demonstrating the practices. This method enabled us to understand the social interactions and their meanings to discover ‘why’ they are occurring (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). For example, while Sam shares ‘what’ he learned from the unconscious bias training, he reflects on ‘how’ he challenged his perceptions as a recruiting manager. He tended to select young male professionals, but he triangulated his hiring decision with other team members in order to shift his view. This experience enabled us to understand ‘why’ Sam uses the learnings from the unconscious bias training to challenge his actions. We follow the same exercise in all the experiences related to D&I initiatives that interviewees shared with us. By this practice, we were able to explain how the phenomenon is achieved and recognized how individuals perceive D&I programs.

After discovering these explanations, we found common themes between interviewees’ perceptions and discussed preliminary categories to prioritize for the analysis. We reduce our material finding common reflections to have a manageable amount of data to analyze (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). After categorizing the main ideas, we sorted our statements. Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) define this process as the ‘analytical induction’ and recommend focusing on one statement at a time. For them, the benefit of this practice is to develop and clarify the explanation of the phenomenon and at the same time that researchers are interacting with the data. By applying this strategy, we were able to find explanations for our statements and discover common perspectives. Continuing with Sam’s example, he uses the D&I practice of unconscious learning as a source to challenge himself in the recruitment process to enable a fair treatment for candidates. As other interviewees also mentioned being

encouraged by the D&I initiatives to learn and rethink their actions, we categorize this common perception as the ‘reflective perspective’. During all this process, we maintained an open perspective to find alternative themes, concepts and understandings of the phenomenon (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007).

For writing our analysis, we built our discussion and argument based on the ‘excerpt-commentary-units’. As Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) suggest, we captured through individuals’ interactions and actions the explanation of our phenomenon. Aligned with the tradition that guided our study, this mechanism let us analyze the meanings used by the employees when they were explaining D&I initiatives. Under each category, we formulated an analytical point, followed by interviewees’ excerpts and concluding with analytical comments (Rennstam and Wästerfors, 2018). As we were analyzing individuals’ perceptions, we focused on understanding what and how interviewees were describing through their experiences. This practice provided relevant insights to our material and let us understand the meanings individuals’ attribute to D&I initiatives.

3.4 Limitations for Data Collection and Analysis Process

We acknowledge that our study was potentially influenced by different limitations and biased aspects that may impact the quality of our empirical material. Thus, in this section, we will recognize and discuss various constraints that might influence our data collection method and data analysis process.

First, we feel it is important to recognize that the company does not collect on their employees’ database information related to religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation. As previously mentioned in the Data Collection Process, we intended to select a heterogeneous sample of CGC employees (Table 3) to obtain different perspectives in our ten interviews. However, as we did not have the information on religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation, we might be overlooking their perspectives. These groups are part of the dimensions of diversity management and might need a voice in the organization.

Another constraint is that due to the COVID-19 crisis, we conducted all the interviews virtually. This mechanism limited the understanding of individuals' body language. As we are analyzing individuals' perceptions, body language is an essential factor to comprehend how they are expressing their ideas. Additionally, as the interviews were recorded, some interviewees may conceal the veracity of their answers or feel fear of sharing negative experiences related to D&I initiatives in CGC.

Our last limitation is that we might not understand some aspects of Northern European culture as both of us are international students. Moreover, as the cultural context is a critical aspect in diversity management, we might not comprehend some cultural practices of this region that can influence our analysis and interpretation of interviewees' experiences.

3.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we explained the methodology conducted for our study. Initially, we described that our research approach is based on symbolic interactionism (Prasad, 2018), which focuses on the searching for self and meaning. Then, we detailed the process of collecting our data. We focused our study on a local office of an international consumer goods company, called 'CGC', due to confidentiality reasons. We divided the process of collecting data into two phases. First, we examined D&I initiatives and analyzed the database of employees to select our ten interviewees. Second, we used all the information to tailor our questionnaire for the interviews and selected our ten interviewees.

After that, we analyzed the empirical material in three series with the abductive approach (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). The analysis was after the first, sixth and last interview to elaborate a preliminary analysis of the conversations with the interviewees. During the research, we focus on understanding what interviewees were experiencing and how they explained the experience by using the practice of the 'analytical bracketing' (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997). We found common themes between interviewees' perceptions, and for writing our analysis, we built our discussion and argument on the 'excerpt-commentary-units'.

Finally, we recognized that our study was potentially influenced by four limitations that may impact the quality of our empirical material. First, the company does not collect on their employees' database information related to religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Thus, we might be overlooking the perceptions of these dimensions. Second, we acknowledged that by conducting the interviews online, we are losing part of the body language, which is important for analyzing perceptions. Third, as the interviews were recorded, some interviewees may conceal the veracity of their answers. Fourth, as both researchers are international students, we might not comprehend some cultural practices of the Nordic countries that can influence our analysis and interpretation of interviewees' experiences.

4 Preliminary Findings & Analysis

In this section, we introduce and analyze our empirical data to provide a deep understanding of the problem area in our study and answers related to our research question. In our empirical material, interviewees illustrated through different experiences and thoughts about their perceptions of diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives.

This chapter is divided into two parts. Initially, we will explore different meanings and relevance that interviewees attributed to diversity and discuss possible explanations of these differences. The first part aims to demonstrate how individuals' understanding of diversity is attached to their experiences, and this reflection will be the basis for our study. In the second part, we will answer our research question by showing four different perceptions of D&I initiatives from an individual perspective. We name them as follows: reflective perspective, believing perspective, skeptical perspective and limited perspective. Each perception is explained by one section, and the aim in each part is to analyze which aspects contribute to having this perspective and what is the influence of their personal experiences. At the end of the chapter, we show a table that summarizes the findings.

Our analysis is based on excerpts from the conversations with our interviewees. To keep their anonymity, we changed their names and replaced the examples that contained personal information with a generic idea. Moreover, in the examples that refer indirectly to a D&I initiative or an experience related to diversity, we are going to specify which events they are referring to during their explanations. These changes are contained in square brackets to enhance the reader's understanding of the experiences. Finally, statements are grammatically incorrect at times. We decide to maintain their original explanation to show their genuine thoughts and expressions and use the previously mentioned techniques of the squared brackets to clarify any inconsistency.

4.1 Diversity, directly attached to personal experiences

Having in mind our research question to grasp individual's perceptions of D&I initiatives, we started our interviews by asking the participants the meaning of the term diversity. The aim of this question was to understand what influences interviewees' meaning of diversity and what they attribute to this topic. Guided by our theoretical framework, before the interviews, we knew that diversity encompasses multiple definitions in narrow and broad senses. However, after the interviews, we found that individuals' build the concept and relevance of diversity based on their personal experiences. When the interviewees define the term diversity, instead of a straightforward definition, they explain what the value is for them and the business. Furthermore, the personal value is directly attached to a previous personal experience. These findings are demonstrated in the following three excerpts of Lisa, Sam and Ulvi.

Lisa explains why she is encouraged to work with diversity management:

*“I do it [diversity management] because it is **the right thing to do**. I always personally had a sore spot for the underdog, for the not typical candidate, because I think it [diversity] creates super interesting synergies, where we can develop an environment where people can succeed. For me, that is also the reason why I struggle when we talk about diversity because diversity is not only men or women where we often talk about, it could also be cultural or age wise. So for me, it is **how do we create a better, not just what is the right mix.**” (Lisa)*

When you say it is a struggle, why is it a struggle for you? (Researcher)

*“I was once rejected for a position because I had children, **which made me extremely disappointed with my company**. But the rationale was because I had children, it was not because I was not competent. So I always choose the right profile for the job because I think it is how we build a better business but also enable other people to succeed.” (Lisa)*

Lisa justifies her decision to support diversity management because it is “*the right thing to do*”. This understanding is aligned with the social justice perspective, where diversity management occurs because there is a moral obligation for fair treatment to employees (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017).

What is interesting is that when she tries to define the term and explain its relevance, she uses the phrase, “*For me, that is also the reason why I struggle*”. The researcher then asks her, “*why is it a struggle for you?*” finding that her struggle to define the term diversity is connected to a past experience. The rejection for a position for having children influenced her perception of diversity and encouraged her to be fair with all candidates. She might refer to this by admitting “*a sore spot for the underdog, for the not typical candidate*”.

Sam remembers his professional experiences to explain how he experiences the benefits of diversity:

*“Having been at a startup that grew.... over the years, and then the owners sold the company, and I was part of a company with 700 people. So, **having seen a massive change taught me about diversity** and different opinions and ideas. ... **I saw the benefit myself about people growing in more diverse contexts, by having a chance of voicing out their opinion.**” (Sam)*

Sam’s previous experience has shaped the way he appreciates diversity. He mentions the transition from a startup to working in an environment with 700 employees, which enabled him to “[see] the benefit [himself] about people growing in more diverse contexts”. By this comment, he emphasizes that he has personally seen people’s development within a diverse workforce. Then, he argues that “growing” is possible due to “having a chance of voicing our [employee’s] opinion”. Sam's comments point to an essential aspect of diversity. In his view, he sees diversity as a way to create an environment where people are able to voice their opinion.

In addition, after reflecting on his working experiences, Sam emphasized the value of diversity for him and the business:

*“Diversity, actually, **for me**, means different types of opinions and chances to learn from each other from different viewpoints. And **from business terms**, it [diversity] also means less missed opportunities.” (Sam)*

Sam explains that diversity is related to learning from different viewpoints. Rather than a definition, this explanation was about the value of diversity by emphasizing the necessity of “chances to learn from each other from different viewpoints”. In his view, he is able to gain more knowledge by working with people with diverse perspectives and backgrounds. Then he starts describing the benefit for the business, which consists of “less opportunities missed”. This

benefit explains the relevance of the business case for a diverse workforce, which increases the opportunities for innovation (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017).

Ulvi reflects broadly about diversity and its relevance and complexity.

*“It [diversity] is a very **hot topic and in some parts also a bit contentious, the challenges are very different depending on where you are in the world. They are always moderated by society, by culture, by language, and by the company”** (Ulvi)*

Ulvi starts by mentioning that diversity is “*a very hot topic*”, which means that it is a popular concept that has recently gained relevance and popularity. Ulvi also reflects that diversity is perceived differently by each context by saying that “*the challenges are very different depending on where you are in the world*”. In this first part, Ulvi reflected on the general meaning of diversity based on the concept of fashion and reflected on the influence of society.

After reflecting in a broad sense the meaning of diversity, Ulvi explains how he has experienced diversity in CGC:

*“It [diversity] is something that **I did not immediately recognize when I first came here [Nordic country], but the more I spoke to my friends and colleagues about the buzzword variances [of diversity], the more I realize that [CGC] is incredibly diverse and inclusive. ... It [diversity] is not something that you know by reading on a paper but something you noticed by different ways of working with people ... From these interactions, you can kind of pick out learnings or challenges.**” (Ulvi)*

Ulvi did not recognize immediately how diverse CGC was from the beginning, but then he is able to compare his experiences with friends and colleagues and value the work that CGC is doing with diversity management. Additionally, Ulvi mentions that diversity is not something that you “*read on a paper but something you noticed*”. This means that you need to experience diversity in order to learn its value. Similarly, he highlights that you can decide what you would get from being exposed to a diverse working environment. Therefore, the attitude towards a diverse experience can be considered as a “*learning*” or “*challenge*”.

This first section is focused on individuals' perceptions of the term diversity. The aim of asking them to define diversity was to comprehend how they construct the meaning of diversity and what they associate with this topic. Our finding was that individuals reflect upon diversity based on their own experiences related to this topic. Even though they are able to identify the relevance of diversity for the business, they connect this importance with their personal encounter with a favorable or unfair situation. By understanding how individuals connect their experiences with diversity, we will be able to grasp individuals' perception of D&I initiatives and get an idea of how they are shaped. With this base of understanding of the variance of the definition of diversity, we aim to answer our research question in the following sections.

4.2 Perceptions of diversity and inclusion initiatives

As we are guided by symbolic interactionism, we study individuals' creation of meanings for experiences around them (Prasad, 2018). For this research, the experiences are the D&I initiatives that CGC offers to its employees. As mentioned in the Data Collection Process in Chapter 3, we first analyzed CGC diversity and inclusion initiatives to be able to conduct our ten interviews and understand the meanings that individuals attribute to them. We are using this previous knowledge of the initiatives to clarify some examples from the interviewees.

After the ten interviews, we discovered different perspectives that individuals relate to D&I initiatives. We group the perceptions into four categories and name them as: (a) reflective perspective, (b) believing perspective, (c) skeptical perspective and (d) limited perspective. We analyze each approach following the same order.

4.2.1 Reflective perspective

The first group of the analysis of how individuals' perceive D&I initiatives is the source of reflexivity. As we mentioned in the description of D&I programs in Table 2, the company has different strategies to address the inclusion of its diverse workforce. Individuals perceive these practices as a way of thinking about diversity in their daily work and applying their learning to enable fair treatment. Thus, an individual's reflection on D&I practices and their purposes enable fixing behaviors that can exclude other members. (Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Quinn & Thakor, 2018; Ely & Thomas, 2020). We will analyze some interviewees' examples that

represent how they are able to develop this critical thinking through D&I practices and challenge themselves to reflect upon inclusion and fairness continuously.

This excerpt related to the training for managing unconscious bias shows Seymour's reflection after attending the D&I initiative:

*“It [unconscious bias training] is how you reflect on it, and how you choose to use it. **It is not something you can do actively. It is something you need to learn to accept in your subconscious what is right or wrong.** So you do not have to think about it. In the long run, it is **reflecting how you behave around people and how we can change depending on the person you are speaking to.** This bias determines how weight falls on people. **That was probably the biggest eye opener.** It also depends on where you are in your life. If I were a middle 30 year old white man, instead, It would have had a different impact. Whereas being me, I have a lot of different things myself. **It was not new; it was just new that it was being addressed.**” (Seymour)*

Based on this experience, he explains that the effectiveness of the program is based on self-reflection and how you can put into practice what you have learned. He mentions that the D&I initiative of unconscious biases *“is not something you can do actively. It is something you need to learn to accept in your subconscious what is right or wrong”*. This means that in his perception, the effectiveness is related to the participants' willingness and passion for learning and reflecting from the program. The exercise was tailored to realize how some behaviors can affect people around, and for him, this was *“the biggest eye opener”*. By understanding the impact of his behaviors on other individuals, he might try to be more empathetic while he is interacting with their colleagues. Similarly, reflexivity will encourage individuals to think about issues from another viewpoint and, if it is necessary, switch their position (Alvesson, Blom and Sveningsson, 2017). For D&I practices, reflexivity means more empathy to understand a different experience of a peer and avoid these unconscious bias. Even though he recognizes that this D&I practice was not something new for him, the relevance is that the issue has been addressed by CGC.

Sam shares how his experience as a recruiting manager has been challenged after attending to the before mentioned unconscious bias training.

*“I participated in a corporate driven initiative [unconscious bias training] that started revealing discussions about unconscious bias. If we do not think about them and just act, and people may get offended by our actions. ... So, I have been thinking about it because I have had that idea of always recruiting the best candidate at and now it just happens that the best candidates have been guys. And it is not good in terms of diversity in the team. **I have thought, whether it is my bias as a recruiting manager, that I feel that the candidate is better. And that is why I kind of had second rounds of opinions. Also, [Human Resources Manager] has participated in interviewing these people. I have asked my team for feedback and tried to really kind of triangulate from many corners whether this candidate is the best.**” (Sam)*

Sam starts explaining his participation in the unconscious bias training and how after these discussions, he was able to reflect upon even regular tasks such as recruitment. The program enabled him to reflect on his practice as a recruiting manager because he tends to select guys. Sam argues that the “*best candidates have been guys*”. However, he challenges himself and considers that maybe he is unconsciously biased in favor of men. This is the reason why he decides to triangulate with people from his team and the Human Resources Manager to confirm he is selecting the best candidate. This experience exemplifies how D&I programs have been perceived as a source of reflexivity and applied to individuals’ daily work. Sam is able to analyze his decision from different angles and be open to fixing the process if he discovers being biased.

The following excerpt showed a situation when Lisa had a discussion with other managers related to International Women’s Day.

*“We [CGC Managers] all have our own cultural understanding of what actually goes on [how each one perceives diversity management]. **We all have our own luggage and everything, but we actually figured out that some of us experienced the same things.** I want it [D&I initiatives] to be authentic. I want it to be real because I do not believe in this one size fits all, and this is how we approach it. So, **the discussion** [about the relevance of International Women’s*

Day] was super fruitful and where I really left that meeting saying, this is where I made a change, and that is awesome.” (Lisa)

Lisa was describing a past experience with the management team when they were discussing the relevance of International Women’s Day. By saying “*we all have our own luggage and everything*”, she means that managers might have different perspectives. However, she emphasizes that they “*figured out that some of [them] experienced the same things*” to show they find common experiences despite their differences. For her, this discussion represents how diversity is addressed by CGC. Likewise, these interactions between individuals and the exchange of different experiences enable a change. By “*change*”, she means shifting her own and colleague’s perspectives by sharing other viewpoints. This action is known as reflexivity, where the change originates when the new alternative or perspective makes more sense (Alvesson, Blom and Sveningsson, 2017). In this sense, the change is created by the conversation with other managers, by understanding their perceptions.

This section explains, through different experiences from the individuals, how D&I practices have encouraged them to develop critical thinking. Our finding is that individuals perceive D&I initiatives as a source of reflexivity. Even though CGC has diverse practices, it is not possible to control all the interactions between employees. Hence, reflexivity enables individuals to analyze what they learned through the initiatives, challenge themselves and switch practices if they discover a new angle.

4.2.2 Believing perspective

The second classification grouped individuals’ perceptions of the practices as a source of pride and inspiration. Based on the feelings that D&I programs evoke in the participants, we denominate the section as the believing perspective. For individuals, D&I practices can motivate them if they experience in their daily work the message provided during diversity training. In this section, we analyze some interviewees’ experiences that represent how D&I practices are perceived as a positive stimulation.

This excerpt exemplifies how D&I initiatives generate a sense of pride for Anja:

*“I was in one training [Global Workshops] where the trainer asked where we are from, and there were so many countries represented in that meeting. Because you regularly speak English, so you do not know their origins, that was quite exciting. I realized ‘my God’, **how many people were in that meeting from different cultures and regions around the world** ... I have been in quite a lot of different companies, but I do not think I have ever **experienced being proud** in the way I am here. I am normally not like this person that promotes my own company just for the cause of it. But, **I love the way they [CGC] actually act on the vision [diversity] and really live it [experience diversity]**” (Anja).*

Anja realized how diverse the company is during an exercise from the Global Workshops, where the participants needed to mention their nationality. For her, this exercise demonstrates how diverse the company is, and this is her source of being proud of CGC. She emphasizes that despite having worked for other companies, this is the first job that she “*experienced being proud*”. But, then, she confesses, “*I love the way they [CGC] actually act on the vision [diversity], and really live it [experience diversity]*”. This declaration means that Anja believes that CGC manages diversity appropriately, which allows her to experience the benefits from it. From her viewpoint, this is her source of pride as she is living a diverse and inclusive culture.

Sara reflects on one of the situations addressed by the Gender Workshop.

*“I think that **despite being a woman**, I can really try to overcome the barriers that are there. Because even if we say we have the same opportunities, we do not at the moment and even put some barriers on ourselves. So, I think that **we have great leaders that are conveying the right message and encouraging and empowering people [Referring to the messages provided in the Gender Workshops]**. So that is definitely something for me that really makes a change. The relationship between the **leaders** and the rest of the people **gives people courage and passion for really driving the change. I can see that the leaders are taking responsibility**. And not only globally, not only on the person that is talking to you over the webinar [Gender Workshops], but everywhere you see around.” (Sara)*

Sara attended the Gender Workshop, which, as we explain in Table 2, is a space for women to share positive and negative experiences with other women. This is the reason why she starts with a self-reflection on her personal life and the challenges that a woman has to overcome. Next, she mentions the role of leaders and how they are “*encouraging and empowering people*” by having these spaces for sharing their experiences. Then, Sara emphasizes her viewpoint of the contribution of the initiative, by saying “*definitely something for me, that really makes a change*”. For Sara, the Gender Workshops that allow the interactions with other leaders provide employees “*courage and passion for really driving the change*”. This declaration means that sharing personal experiences of women leaders encourages her to transform and are a source of inspiration to change.

Daniela mentions her expectations from the Gender Workshop by being more familiar with female leaders of CGC.

“I was curious about how these people [Females in Leadership from Gender Workshops] are not only women, are all kinds of leaders like the ones you know in the board of [CGC], how they actually live, how they talk. It was also one of the motivations. I just wanted to see how I can be this person and imagine myself in that position, so I wanted to see their personal side, or you know the personality in them.” (Daniela)

For Daniela, by explaining her expectations for the Gender Workshop, she explains that it is a source of inspiration. For her, by discovering the personal stories of female leaders, she can picture herself in a leadership position in the future. This is based on her idea of “just wanted to see how [she] can be this person once and imagine [herself] in that position”. Additionally, Daniela stresses that she wants to discover their “personal side”. By these declarations she evidence that for her is relevant understanding the personality of female leaders, and the authenticity of their messages.

This section explains, through the interactions with D&I programs, how individuals considered them as a source of pride and inspiration. From the example of Anja, she attributes living a diverse and inclusive culture due to the accurate management and communication of D&I initiatives, being this her source of pride. Sara and Daniela reflect on the same initiative of the Gender Workshops. Both of them consider this practice as a source of inspiration, but each one attributes a different relevance for the initiative, for Sara implies changing her mindset of a

working woman, while for Daniela is a way to picture herself in a similar position in the future. Even though Anja, Sara and Daniela have a different understanding of the initiatives, for all of them, it is relevant to be able to experience in their daily work the reflections of the D&I initiative. Thus, D&I initiatives can be a source of pride and inspiration or consider a *believing perspective*, but the coherence of experiencing what the practices mentioned is indispensable. Our finding shows that from an individual perspective, D&I practices are a source of pride and inspiration if individuals' are able to experience the messages in their daily work.

4.2.3 Skeptical perspective

The third denomination contains the interviewee's perceptions of D&I initiatives as a non-relevant practice. Based on the lack of relevance that some interviewees attribute to D&I initiatives, we denominate this section as the skeptical perspective. As we explained in Table 2, CGC manages seven initiatives for different audiences to build a more diverse and inclusive organization. The participation in these programs is voluntary. However, some interviewees do not participate because they are busy with their duties or do not understand their contribution to the programs. Therefore, we will analyze some interviewees experiences that represent their skepticism to D&I practices.

Daniela argues her absence from D&I initiatives due to her busy schedule, but then she recognizes that she does not see them as super important.

*"I might have seen one or two [invitations for D&I initiatives] because, unfortunately, **my job is that in the morning I cannot really attend any Global or Human Resources meetings ...**" (Daniela)*

*"But, **you do not attend because you do not clearly see what the benefit is?**" (Researcher)*

*"I do not attend them [D&I initiatives] because **I do not really see them as super important ... So sometimes I do just put them [D&I initiatives] in the background.**" (Daniela)*

Daniela starts mentioning that she is not able to attend to D&I initiatives because she has a busy schedule, particularly during the mornings. However, the researcher is curious why she is not able to participate in and asks whether it is due to the fact that she is not able to perceive the benefit of the practices. This suggestion encourages her to reflect and realize that she does not perceive D&I as “*super important*”. What is interesting from this viewpoint is that when Daniela is talking about D&I initiatives broadly, she is more skeptical about them. However, when she is talking specifically about the Gender Workshops, she had an entirely different perspective. As mentioned in the previous section, she even considers the Gender Workshop as a source of inspiration, and her motivation is based on knowing female leaders’ stories.

Ulvi mentions that he is not able to attend because he is usually too busy, but then reflects that even most of the D&I sessions are recorded, and he forgets to see them:

*“Of course I will also try to attend [To the D&I Initiatives]. I was not able to attend the activities we had on International Women's Day, as **I had a busy week. ...**” (Ulvi)*

“What motivates you to attend or not to these [D&I] initiatives?” (Researcher)

*“I would say the one thing that is **the factor whether I do attend or not is simply if I have the time for it**. Am I too busy at the time, if I have time, I will always attend. **Most of these sessions are recorded, and I always think I will go back to the recording and see it, but in practice, that never happens because I forget about it.**” (Ulvi)*

Ulvi argues that he could not attend Women's International Day due to his busy agenda. Then the researcher wants to confirm what is the real motivation to participate in D&I initiatives. After this question, Ulvi supports his original idea by saying that “*the factor whether I do attend or not is simply if I have the time for it*”. However, he reflects that even if most of the sessions are recorded, he forgets about them. This last reflection contradicts his initial argument that he does not have time to assist.

Jerry argues that he did not attend the Gender Workshop because he was not clear about his contribution to the meeting.

*“I think the **diversity is a bit of a cool factor** ... I do not want to be there [Gender Workshop] to show and say: ‘someone from management is joining’. **I want to be there because I know that I can make a difference in that meeting, and I should be there.**” (Jerry)*

*“So, you **do not participate if** you feel that they [D&I initiatives] **do not have an impact?**” (Researcher)*

*“**Yes, absolutely.** First of all, the fact that we have them [D&I initiatives] is great. I do not want to bash the [D&I] initiatives, but they **may be irrelevant for me sometimes.**” (Jerry)*

Jerry starts reflecting that diversity is a “*cool factor*”, which can be understood as a trendy topic. He complements this idea with the reason for his absence in the Gender Workshop by arguing that he does not want to attend just as part of the management team. Then, he emphasizes that he wants to be present at the initiatives if he can “*make a difference in that meeting*”. This means that he is critical of the impact he can generate in D&I meetings. The researcher is curious about this last statement and asks directly if his absence is related to not understanding the impact of the initiative. Jerry confirms that this is the reason but recognizes that in his personal perspective, the programs “*may be irrelevant*”. With this last reflection, he acknowledges the personal relevance that he attributes to D&I initiatives.

This section presents individuals’ perceptions of not finding a relevance to D&I practices, denominated as the skeptical perspective. Ulvi and Daniela have contradictory comments by initially mentioning that they do not have time to attend but then reflect on not prioritizing the D&I initiatives or forget to watch the recording when it is not possible to participate in the activity. Jerry is more critical and wants to attend the programs if he knows what he can contribute. Our finding is acknowledging individuals’ self-interest is crucial to an initial incorporation of employees into D&I practices. If individuals have not clear about what they are gaining or learning for the activity, they will not prioritize their attendance.

4.2.4 Limited perspective

The last classification gathers interviewee's perceptions of D&I initiatives as gender focused. Most of the interviewees mentioned the dimension of gender when they were trying to define diversity or remembering D&I practices. As most D&I initiatives are focused on gender, we suggest that the organization might be overlooking the issues derived from other dimensions. First, we will show interviewees' perceptions of CGC as a gender oriented organization. Then, we will illustrate individuals' experiences of demotivation or microaggressions related to different dimensions than gender.

As we mention in the Data Collection Process of Chapter 3, CGC consists of women as a majority in its workforce, and its employees represent 27 nationalities. However, they do not have quotas for underrepresented groups, and the diversification of the workforce relies on selecting the candidate that fits better with the position. This strategy is related to the sameness perspective, where each individual is treated equally as intelligence, values or cognitive characteristics belong to all the dimensions of diversity (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). This viewpoint acknowledges the existence of differences but decided to prioritize an equal treatment amongst groups. However, the perceptions of the interviewees are that CGC has a strong focus on gender.

Sara reflects on the impact of Gender Workshops, encourages her to believe she can have a family and a career and emphasizes how gender is getting stronger every year.

“I was always thinking of myself, that once I have kids, I probably have to think of maybe slowing down my career. And now I can see that there are other realities. My career is something very important for me, and I did not want to sacrifice it. Now I feel more confident. For example, I have seen people that got promoted being pregnant. or maybe some of them got promoted after coming from maternity leave. ...” (Sara)

*“Based on your last comment that now do you feel that it is easier to perform, it is because of **this initiative [Gender Workshops] that [CGC] helps you to believe that it is possible to be a woman and a mom?**” (Researcher)*

“I think definitely. CGC really has a point, which may be easier to be driven in certain areas such as gender. But definitely, you can see that the message is

conveyed to all the teams. I think [CGC] is making this point [Gender] stronger and stronger every year. You can see it, feel it and hear it, messages and promotions of women. I mean, facts around you” (Sara)

Sara reflects, she used to think that it was not possible to have kids and be successful in her job. However, she discovers in CGC through all the initiatives related to Gender and experiences from other colleagues the possibility to balance maternity with professional life. From her individual perspective, CGC’s diversity and inclusion initiatives have changed her perception of maternity and the constraints that she associated with being a working mother. She emphasizes that now she feels more confident and highlights the example of a colleague being promoted while she was pregnant. The researcher asked directly if the Gender Workshops contributed to her change of mindset. Sara confirms this hypothesis and comments that Gender is becoming more relevant for CGC. For her, this confirmation comes from “facts”, as the pregnant woman's promotion.

Raisa mentions that D&I initiatives are focused mainly on gender:

“Is there a specific dimension of diversity that you feel [CGC] touch on D&I initiatives the most?” (Researcher)

“Yes, so they [D&I initiatives] touch a lot of genders. I think it [gender] is pretty well covered. They [CGC] have also shared some reports about salary equality in gender terms. I think they have a lot of transparency in those terms. The others [dimensions] are not that discussed, maybe because it is not given that importance ... about ethnicity or race inequality, I think it could be more reflected at work on a bigger scale because it is covered on a global level, so maybe could be stayed on a market level [Nordic context].” (Raisa)

The researcher asks her directly if she perceives that D&I initiatives have a specific focus. Raisa answers this question that the initiatives “touch a lot of genders”. Then, she compliments this idea with reports of salary equality that CGC shared. For her, this practice reinforces the “transparency” related to the dimension of gender. She reflects that “the others [dimensions] are not that discussed” and assumes that this is due to being “not given that importance”. However, she remembers that ethnicity or race are “covered on a global level”, which means that ethnicity and race are considered on D&I global initiatives. In the end, she suggests that

CGC diversity and inclusion initiatives could also have these dimensions. As we mention in the Data Collection Process in Chapter 3, the global company has different strategies and gives autonomy to its local offices to tailor the programs to their necessities.

Seymour reflects how gender is the priority on D&I initiatives and why other dimensions are more difficult to cover.

“In the Nordics office [CGC], which area of diversity do you feel that the [D&I] initiatives focus?” (Researcher)

*“We focus on **gender equality**. I would say that **is the biggest focus of here [CGC]**, with religion and color [ethnicity], it [diversity management] does not play a role ... I think when it comes to gender equality, that is probably the biggest one right now, **especially for [CGC] it is super important that gender equality remains at the top.**” (Seymour)*

Seymour perceives that gender equality is the most significant focus of CGC. Then, he argues that the dimensions of religion and ethnicity “*does not play a role*”. As we explain in the limitations of the study in Chapter 3, CGC does not measure religion or ethnicity on their database of employees, so there are no initiatives focused on these dimensions. However, there are more dimensions of diversity that Seymour is not capable of recognizing from this example, and the organization is taking into account. He can only emphasize the importance of gender. He perceives that for CGC “*is super important that gender equality remains at the top*”, which highlights the importance that he attributes to this dimension.

As previously mentioned in the examples of Sara, Raisa and Seymour perceive CGC’s diversity management with a strong focus on gender. The summarize of the D&I initiatives present in Table 2 shows that three over seven programs are focused on gender. Nevertheless, some interviewees' negative experiences that involve other dimensions apart from gender might suggest that CGC is overlooking some aspects of diversity.

Jerry misses the inclusion of families in CGC initiatives and shows his disappointment for ignoring this dimension.

*“If there is something that I would miss, it is more inclusion of families into the company [CGC], this is something that you get in a [Nordic Country] and is different from my experience in a [Non-European Country]. There is no school alumni culture. **There is no belonging.** You know, when you are done, you are gone. There is no: ‘alumni’, there is no: ‘oh I am part of...’, there is no: ‘the sweatshirt, you do not get the cap’. **You do not support the team because there is no team.** So you lose that. So connecting the families would be a good inclusion” (Jerry)*

Jerry misses the inclusion of families in the events of CGC as he attributes this feeling to the comparison from his experience in a Nordic country and another country outside Europe. As we mentioned in Table 3, Jerry is from the geographical region of America so that this comparison can be based on this contrast between countries. He reflects that this experience makes him lose the sense of belonging. He is very critical and even mentions that “*you do not support the team because there is no team*”. So he does not feel part of the company as his necessities are not taken into account. Family status is a dimension of diversity, and even though CGC have a strong focus on Gender initiatives and parental support, the inclusion of the families is not considered. From his individual perspective, this lack of inclusion directly affects his sense of belonging.

Ulvi shares an experience of microaggression, but he justifies this bad occurrence.

*“I used to work with a [Scandinavian] colleague, and we have outsourced a service to a company in [Country]. We were struggling with the service levels, but my [Scandinavian] colleague said something a bit derogatory, ‘**In [Country] you can not expect anything from their service**’. Even if the [Country] is not the same as [Ulvi’s Country], I kind of felt like **that was not the nicest thing to hear. There are things that you do experience.** It is not always something that you feel is wrong enough. It is much more subtle. What is complicated is **that people who say something like that do not mean it in a negative way, but they are just simply expressing in the way they are so socially prepared to.**” (Ulvi)*

Ulvi explains how a derogatory comment from a colleague affects him, even though the commentary is not directly related to his country of origin. Then he reflects more broadly about these experiences by saying, “*there are things that you do experience*”. He feels that these episodes are not “*wrong enough*” and are much more “*subtle*”. This means that he understands those comments are not directly meant to attack him. Then, he assumes that these comments are unintentional by arguing, “*people who say something like that, do not mean it in a negative way*”. Finally, Ulvi justifies these actions by mentioning that people are just “*expressing in the way they are socially prepared to*”.

D&I initiatives are perceived as mainly focused on Gender. The only dimension that receives special treatment from the Global Corporation is Gender, as gender equality is the primary worldwide goal. However, some dimensions might require special treatment to include individuals. For example, as we present with Jerry’s comment, he feels unmotivated for not considering families, or Ulvi has to deal with derogatory comments. We suggest that these occurrences are related to overlooking some dimensions of diversity management as the focus is indirectly on gender. Our finding is that some individuals’ expectations regarding diversity are not covered by having an equal approach or an indirect focus on gender.

4.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we analyzed our empirical data to understand the problem area of our study and answered our research question. We divided the chapter into two parts. First, we explored different meanings and relevance that interviewees attributed to diversity. From this analysis, we found that individuals built the concept and relevance of diversity based on their own experiences related to this topic. This insight was the basis for understanding how D&I practices are conceived by individuals.

In the second part, we answered our research question by showing four different perceptions of D&I initiatives from an individual perspective. We categorized each perception as follows: reflective perspective, believing perspective, skeptical perspective and limited perspective. The findings and excerpts related to each perception are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4 - Individuals' Perception of D&I initiatives

Perspective	Finding	Individual Experience associated to the D&I practice
Reflective	D&I initiatives are a source of reflexivity for individuals.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seymour reflects on how the Unconscious Bias training was an “<i>eye opener</i>” for him. 2. Sam challenges his hiring decisions after attending the Unconscious Bias training. 3. Lisa exchanges viewpoints with other managers about the relevance of Women’s International Day.
Believing	D&I practices are a source of pride and inspiration if they are able to experience the messages in their daily work.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anja realized how diverse CGC is after attending the Global Workshops, and that is the first time she experienced being proud of a company. 2. Sara feels inspired by the stories shared in the Gender Workshop and how she perceives them in her daily work. 3. Daniela perceives the Gender Workshop as a source of knowing the personal side of the women leaders.
Skeptical	D&I initiatives are not relevant or just another meetings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ulvi did not attend the Women’s International Day because he has a busy week, but then admitted that he usually forgets to see the recordings of the D&I initiatives. 2. Daniela says she is busy attending the D&I programs, but then she accepts that she does not prioritize them. 3. Jerry argues he decided not to attend the Gender Workshop because he did not know his contribution. But, then, he mentions that some D&I programs are irrelevant to him.
Limited	D&I initiatives are primarily focused on gender, which can overlook other dimensions.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sara reflects how she changed her idea of maternity after working in CGC and that the programs of Gender are getting stronger in the company. 2. Raisa mentions that CGC is focused primarily on Gender and that the other dimensions are not discussed. 3. Seymour argues that for CGC, it is important to prioritize Gender. 4. Sam misses the inclusion of families at work. 5. Ulvi shares an experience with another colleague that can be considered as a microaggression.

5 Discussion

The analysis of our empirical material described in the previous chapter lets us understand individuals' perceptions of diversity and inclusion initiatives. In this chapter, we will discuss our findings related to the four perceptions discovered and link them to the existing literature in Chapter 2. Then, we will show the theoretical contribution from our discussion.

5.1 Reflection on our findings

In general, we found that individuals' build the concept and relevance of diversity based on their personal experiences and four perceptions of diversity and inclusion initiatives in CGC. These perceptions are named as follows: reflective perspective, believing perspective, skeptical perspective and limited perspective.

5.1.1 Diversity concept is built through individuals perspectives

Our first finding was that individuals built the concept and relevance of diversity based on their own experiences related to this topic. Although the participants are able to identify the relevance of diversity for the business, they connect this importance with their personal encounter with a favorable or unfair situation. By understanding how individuals connect their personal experiences with diversity, we gained an initial understanding of how they perceived D&I initiatives. With this base understanding of the variance of the definition of diversity, we were able to answer our research question and grouped the perceptions into four categories.

The way individuals understand diversity based on their personal experiences, which challenges how they also perceive D&I practices. For example, Lisa understood that creating the D&I initiatives need to be perceived as something that is beneficial in the workplace and that it has economic merit. This explanation is aligned with the definition of the business case (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). However, her past experiences of not getting hired because she has

children have shaped her commitment to diversity and inclusion. For her, the “*right thing to do*” is grounded on hiring for competency and avoiding anyone getting discriminated against for an unfair cause such as maternity. This view shaped by her experience is the social justice case of diversity as she sees it as an obligation to treat everyone fairly (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Thus, from her past experiences, Lisa is able to understand the relevance of diversity as the business case and social justice at the same time.

Another example is when Sam based his definition of diversity on his personal experiences. In accordance with the business case, Sam mentioned that diversity means that there will be “*less missed opportunities*”. This definition is aligned with the benefit of the business case, where the diversity of opinion is a factor in gaining competitive advantage (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Moreover, Sam explains the realization he had when working for a startup and experiencing a growing workforce. As the business and the workforce grew, the diversity grew. This experience made him realize the benefit of diverse opinions and the importance of being able to voice those opinions. Being able to voice opinions is part of the concept of inclusion. Inclusion occurs when employees perceive their involvement in the workplace and how much influence they have (Prasad, Pringle & Konrad, 2006). By Sam explaining these benefits, we can argue that he perceived the relevance of diversity emphasized from the business case and social justice.

The context was another consideration associated with defining the term diversity. Ulvi associated diversity as being a “*hot topic*” and “*contentious*” because the challenges are very different depending on where you are. It was thought provoking to hear the different perspectives from the people that were from outside of the region. As Ulvi is from a non-European region, he had a broader view of diversity. According to Prasad, Pringle and Konrad (2006), in Scandinavia, there is a strong conviction to treat everyone fairly. They argue that the main limitation of this conviction is the belief that there is fairness in the overall social system that can create bias because not much attention is on the hidden challenges. Hence, what diversity meant to various employees was an important factor to consider when analyzing the perceptions of the diversity and inclusion initiatives.

The following four sections focus on discussing the four perspectives discovered from our study, which answers our research question.

5.1.2 D&I initiatives as a source of reflexivity

Our second finding was that individuals perceive D&I initiatives as a source of reflexivity. The participants reflect upon how the exposure to different D&I practices encouraged them to develop critical thinking about their own actions. This process of reflexivity enables individuals to analyze what they learned through the initiatives, challenge themselves and switch practices if they discover a new angle to avoid unfair treatment to other individuals (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). Thus, an individual's reflection on D&I practices and their purposes enables changing behaviors that exclude other members. (Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Quinn & Thakor, 2018; Ely & Thomas, 2020). These perceptions are grouped as the reflective perspective.

In our analysis, the reflective perspective was created with the notion that some employees associated the D&I initiatives as a learning experience. According to De Meuse and Hostager (2001), diversity programs have the potential to influence the employees' perceptions, knowledge, and behaviors. Furthermore, the learning-and-effectiveness paradigm centers the diversity management on learning opportunities, as cultural differences must be considered as a resource for learning. (Ely & Thomas, 2020). Therefore, learning becomes an essential part of diversity management, and we found that many employees agree with this vision. This learning from different viewpoints is apparent in the excerpts from Sam when he was defining diversity. In addition, Seymour also emphasized that the D&I initiative of bias training was an “*eye opener*” to learn about how one thinks. Furthermore, Seymour also raised the importance of changing the behaviors through the realization of those biases.

The main limitation is that for diversity to be an opportunity for learning, employees mentioned that self-reflection must take place to see the benefits. Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017) mention that reflection is an important part of being engaged, even though the engagement varies on the employees' interests. Moreover, they state that reflection is important for people to think about and evaluate previous experiences constantly. Some of our interviewees shared the same idea of reflection from the D&I initiatives. They mention initiatives such as Cross-cultural training, Global Workshops, and Training Academy as a source of information to reflect on. Specifically, Lisa mentioned the example of the International Women's Day discussion within the management team. She mentioned that the fruitful discussion and finding out commonalities and differences allowed her to reflect on her views and realize new perspectives.

A limitation of reflection is that it must lead to reflexivity to see real change. However, even if the reflection is there, the reflexivity will allow a critical view of existing thoughts to take place. According to Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017, p. 14), practicing reflexivity means “to carefully and systematically take a critical view of one’s own assumption, idea and favored vocabulary and to consider if alternative ones make sense.” The discussion mentioned above is clearly impactful because Sam demonstrated that he often questions himself, especially when recruiting someone. In terms of reflexivity, employees that see great benefit from these initiatives are able to comprehend the purpose of the practices and can reflect on what they learned from the initiatives to change their perspectives or behaviors.

5.1.3 D&I initiatives as a source of pride and inspiration

Our third finding showed that D&I practices are a source of pride and inspiration for individuals if they are able to experience the messages in their daily work. The interactions during the different D&I programs evoked a positive stimulation in the participants. Each individual has their own reason of pride or inspiration based on their experiences or expectation from the program. Based on the feelings that D&I programs evoked on the participants, we denominate the section as the believing perspective.

In the believing perspective, we found that the D&I initiatives are very relevant to the values and the missions of CGC. Anja mentioned how CGC acts on its values and their influence on D&I initiatives. A psychologically safe environment emphasizes shared vision and values, and they are highly valued by employees (Page, Boysen & Arya, 2019). In this sense, Anja perceived that the D&I initiatives are a way for CGC to act on its values and that action is a source of psychological safety for her, which allowed her to be proud of working at CGC. For Anja, the values of CGC were clear through the communication that she has been provided.

In addition, the employees who were part of the dimensions of diversity covered by the D&I initiatives perceived the programs to be inspirational. For example, Sara and Daniela attended seminars where the women in corporate leadership were speaking. They mentioned that those talks made them feel inspired to keep progressing in their careers. As they were able to find a relevance to these D&I initiatives, they found the purpose in them. With purpose, Sara and Daniela were able to deepen the meaning of their work and seemed more committed and engaged (Quinn & Thakor, 2018). Even though these perceptions were positive, a limitation of

this finding is that the perceptions of inspiration were more apparent from employees from one of the dimensions of diversity, which is gender. Nevertheless, if the objectives are clear and show relevance to the diversity dimensions that the employees belong to, D&I initiatives can be seen as beneficial and even inspirational.

5.1.4 Skepticism toward D&I initiatives

Our fourth finding demonstrated the lack of relevance that some interviewees attributed to D&I practices. To take part in the practices, individuals need to perceive the benefit for themselves and not only a collective benefit such as the relevance for the business or impact on other individuals. Another reason was that if individuals are not clear about what they are contributing to the D&I activity, they will not prioritize their attendance. Some of the interviewees consciously highlighted the importance of understanding their contribution, while others unconsciously justified their absence from the programs due to their busy schedule. As this section contains interviewee's perceptions of D&I initiatives as a non-relevant practice, we named them as the skeptical perspective.

Individuals that do not feel the relevance of the D&I initiatives perceive them as just another meeting. Ulvi, Daniela did not understand what they could get out of most of the initiatives and argued being busy with their work to attend. Jerry did not feel that they could contribute anything to them. These experiences demonstrate the challenge for organizations to merge work and personal interests. According to Quinn & Thakor (2018), employees see work as contractual, and they seek to minimize personal costs and effort (Quinn & Thakor, 2018). We argue that as employees see the work as a contractual relation, they are only looking for their own interest and what they can gain through each experience, such as the D&I initiative.

Even if CGC promoted the D&I initiatives as a resource for learning and reflecting, some employees did not see them as such, and they lacked the purpose and relevance. The impact of this perception is that employees consider the initiatives as not being vital to attend. For example, when Jerry reflected upon the meaning of diversity as a "*cool factor*", which can be understood as something merely trendy. He later mentioned that he did not attend the D&I activity of the Gender Workshop because he did not know what type of impact he can make by attending. The previous judgment of diversity demonstrates that he is evaluating his attendance

based on his individual satisfaction of contributing, rather than analyzing what their peers are gaining with his viewpoint.

Some employees see it as a “*hot topic*”, and the “*cool factor*” means that they perceive the D&I initiatives as a fashion. According to Prasad, Prasad, and Mir (2010), D&I initiatives can be perceived as fashion because many organizations facilitate diversity management as an influence from other companies and in order to stay innovative and updated. However, perceiving D&I initiatives as a fashion makes it more complex to find their relevance on an individual level as existence is influenced by external factors (Prasad, Prasad & Mir, 2010). Therefore, the challenge for organizations in this scenario would be staying updated by covering the external demands while finding an internal purpose to engage their workforce in the D&I practices.

5.1.5 D&I initiatives is too one dimensional

Our fifth and last finding was that individuals’ necessities and expectations related to diversity are not covered by having an equal approach or an indirect focus on gender. As we described in the Data Collection Process, CGC applies an equal treatment for its employees. Additionally, from the Global Corporation, the employees are exposed to different initiatives focused on Gender as gender equality is the primary worldwide goal. This is the reason why from the individuals’ perspective, CGC is mainly focused on gender. Thus, we suggest that the organization might be overlooking the issues derived for other dimensions as the focus is indirectly on gender. We named these perceptions as the limited perspective.

CGC engages in many different D&I initiatives with the objective of touching different areas of diversity. However, the perception of the employees signaled that gender was the one that had the most focus. Sara, Raisa, and Seymour mention that gender is, in fact, at the core of the D&I initiatives. As Sara and Raisa were both women, they perceived these initiatives to be very relevant for them. Hence, the gender initiatives can be argued that they are highly effective because it has empowered the women employees to envision a fulfilling career without the worries of the common disadvantages, such as maternal leave.

While gender equality is a strength for CGC, other dimensions of diversity are also perceived as a strength by many employees, even if it does not reflect reality (Daniels, Neale & Greer,

2017). According to Daniels, Neale, and Greer (2017), the spillover bias explains this phenomenon by arguing that when there is diversity in one dimension or social groups, it is automatically perceived that there is diversity in the other dimensions as well. A pivotal explanation can be the fact that CGC is in the Nordics, where they have been practicing equality for a very long time, especially in the context of gender (Prasad, Pringle & Konrad, 2006). Based on this statement, the concept of equality and fair treatment is embedded in the system in the Nordic countries, which is also known as taking the sameness perspective on diversity management. According to Beardwell and Thompson (2017), this perspective acknowledges that there are differences, but personal characteristics are not determined by a person's gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and so forth.

However, the difficulty arises when the other dimensions of diversity are perceived as being overlooked. As we mentioned, diversity is a very complex topic (Otaya-Ebede & Akobo, 2020). CGC is very diverse with 27 nationalities, they bring various viewpoints, and as mentioned in Table 2, there are initiatives that value the differing opinions. However, because of the expanding dimensions according to the Four Layers of Diversity (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1994) employees can perceive the D&I initiatives to be lacking the important dimensions that are relevant to them specifically. For example, Jerry mentions that more inclusion for families is an important part of his belonging due to his background. As Mor Barak (2015) mentions that one of the biggest problems in a workforce is exclusion. Even if a company is diverse, being inclusive is a very hard challenge to overcome, even for the most diverse organizations.

As previously mentioned, in Scandinavia, a common conviction seems to be that equality is normalized in society, which can lead to source discrimination such as unconscious bias (Prasad, Pringle & Konrad, 2006). Ulvi's excerpts demonstrated that there are forms of expression that are accepted by the society in which CGC is located. The comments made by his colleagues about services being provided by another country as stereotypically poor was a sign of microaggression. Microaggressions are the intentional or unintentional insults about a particular social group that are communicated verbally or nonverbally (Otaye-Ebede & Akobo, 2020). Ulvi recognized that these comments were not badly intended but just an expression of how they are socially prepared. By this comment, we suggest that the D&I initiatives are not perceived to be effective in limiting these types of incidents from happening.

5.2 Theoretical Contribution

The definitions of diversity that individuals conceived illustrate the complexity of diversity. Gardenswartz and Rowe (1994) introduce the four layers of diversity to exemplify how all the dimensions of diversity coexist. They argue that the four layers contain: personality, internal dimensions, external dimensions, and organization dimensions. We agree with their recognition that diversity is more than working on one dimension and that an individual can represent more than one dimension at the same time. Moreover, we support that the complexity for organizations relies on focusing on multiple dimensions through each initiative, as they have limited resources. However, after our study, we challenge the model of Gardenswartz and Rowe in the sense that the framework does not take into account how the different dimensions are experienced by each individual. According to our demonstration through the multiple definitions of diversity that individuals conceived based on their own experiences. Diversity will not be fully understood if it is not considered how individuals perceive the topic and, based on this perception, are more receptive to its practices. It is important to consider the variations of definitions on a organizational level rather than the societal level.

Nonetheless, as personal experiences vary and are based on the upbringing and where individuals are from, the types of exposure to diversity also vary. How they make sense of their experiences cannot be explained by simply labeling them in a specific dimension. This mix of experiences is key for organizations to understand, as it has the potential to shed light on what diversity really means in an organization. Meaning that because definitions of diversity are mainly according to personal experiences, they are a great basis for understanding the types of dimensions that exist in a particular organizational context. It can create a greater sense of empathy about the employee's personal experiences. Understanding this could create relevancy for employees to perceive the D&I initiative as collectively beneficial rather than on an individual basis. Promoting the fact that diversity means different things to diverse employees can be a starting point in which reflection occurs.

The learning-and-effective paradigm, reflection, and reflexivity are all important factors to consider for D&I initiatives to be perceived as beneficial by everyone. However, the difficulty arises because Ely and Thomas (2020) only consider using the differences as a mode of learning and reflection. We argue that this is problematic because, in practice, identifying the origins of differences is more challenging than one might think. As demonstrated through the example of

CGC, diversity is defined through personal experiences, which will influence the way individuals reflect on their differences. If individuals are not able to notice these differences, then organizations cannot even encourage them to learn from one another.

Additionally, as the study reflects, some dimensions might be overlooked by CGC. This issue is challenging most organizations who are working on diversity and inclusion. They are not able to cover all the expectations of their employees. Furthermore, in an organization, people have other duties to serve, such as their daily administrative work, technical meetings, and other projects that are more relevant for their purpose of being at the company. Hence, before finding the differences to learn from, the clarity of the objective of the meeting and why it is important for everyone in the organization must first be the focus of the learning and reflection process. This practice will support D&I practices and the awareness of their importance.

5.3 Chapter Summary

In summary of our Discussion section, understanding how employees define diversity can bring insight into the types of D&I initiatives that need to be created to increase relevance to all employees. The combination of the environment, empathy, and the evaluation of all of the dimensions in the Four Layers of Diversity (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1994) could allow employees at CGC to perceive the D&I initiatives as relevant to everyone and deepen the purpose of the programs.

With this reflection on our findings, we aim to contribute a further understanding of the perceptions of the employees that are part of the organization that engages in D&I initiatives. The challenge is to create programs that feel relevant and beneficial to everyone in the organization. Having a learning mindset is important when communicating about D&I. However, create the mindset and awareness of what those differences are, and the dimensions of diversity that exist in a given organization is very important. This awareness can be created by understanding how and why employees define diversity in various ways because it starts the conversation of what type of experiences they associate with that term.

6 Conclusion

In this final chapter, we will outline the conclusion from our study. First, we will present the key findings and conclusions from our empirical study. These are the multiple definitions and relevance that individuals attributed to the term diversity and the four employees' perceptions of D&I initiatives. Then, we will examine the practical implications for our study and suggest the implications for future research. Finally, we will reflect on our research and the challenge that represents managing diversity.

6.1 Key Findings and Conclusion

Through an abductive approach and the interpretive tradition, we studied employee's perceptions of D&I initiatives. After the research, we found that individuals attributed diverse meanings to the term diversity and four perceptions related to D&I initiatives.

We started our research by asking employees to define the term diversity. By this question, we aimed to get a general understanding of how they perceive diversity management at CGC. We found that individuals built the concept and importance of diversity based on their personal experiences. These insights were crucial to forming a base for the rest of the study, which was to understand individual's different perspectives of diversity and inclusion initiatives.

As we presented in the Literature Review and demonstrated through our study, diversity is a complex topic. The complexity relies on the multiple conceptions that individuals and organizations attributed to the topic and at the same time are influenced by various variables such as context, personal experience, personal beliefs, etc. Our study found that variations of personal experiences were a source of how employees defined the term diversity. The experiences that the employees at CGC associated with the term indicated their perception of the D&I initiatives. The encounter they have with this term formed their view on the D&I programs created by the organization. Hence, the employees connected the extent of relevancy

of these initiatives to how they see diversity and how they have experienced it. This connection brought variations of perceptions that employees had on the D&I initiatives.

After discovering the various understandings of diversity, we spoke with ten interviewees about the different D&I initiatives that CGC has in place. The interviewees expressed different experiences, reflections, and feelings about the D&I initiatives. This interaction allowed us to discover four different findings that we associated with four different perceptions. These approaches are named as follows: reflective perspective, believing perspective, skeptical perspective, and limited perspective.

The reflective perspective groups the individuals' perceptions that consider D&I initiatives as a source of reflexivity. As Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017, p.14), explains, reflexivity requires a "critical view of one's own assumption, idea and favored vocabulary and to consider if alternative ones make sense." The excerpts in this category demonstrate understanding of the purpose of D&I initiatives, which is to learn about different experiences of certain dimensions of diversity and reflect on them. Some interviewees emphasized the importance of reflecting on what they learned and deciding what to take away from the D&I initiatives. For example, Sam is the interviewee that reflected and challenged his mindset on recruiting as a hiring manager. He reflected that he tended to hire young white men. After the unconscious bias training, he considered whether he was unintentionally selecting candidates with specific profiles. This action illustrates how D&I initiatives can be perceived as a source of reflexivity and created a shift in the mindset of the workforce and how employees can perceive them as a beneficial source that encourages reflexivity and learning.

The believing perspective explains the employee's perceptions of D&I practices as a source of pride and inspiration. For these individuals, the D&I programs allowed them to feel empowered and more motivated. We found that this perception was associated with the relevancy of the topics discussed within the D&I initiatives. For example, women at CGC were empowered by the Gender Workshop because they were able to engage with other women leaders in the organization. In this forum, women were able to hear the story of how these leaders got to where they are now. The stories were seen as an inspiration to pursue the same ambition and make it possible to get to a leadership position as a woman. Relevancy was a decisive factor for the employees to perceive the D&I initiatives as something beneficial to them. When the relevancy was not communicated or realized, the employees did not perceive the initiatives as beneficial.

Employees did not have the same outlook that the employees had attended the Gender Workshop.

However, when relevancy was not realized by the employees, they perceived the D&I initiatives with some skepticism. We called this perspective the skeptical perspective. Within this perspective, we found that D&I initiatives were not perceived as a relevant practice, so employees did not prioritize attending and questioned what they could contribute to the practice. The lack of relevance was the driving factor in the not being prioritized. Many employees had other obligations to prioritize, so they did not attend these D&I initiatives. The objective of these initiatives was not clear to him, and he did not participate because he was not clear that he could make a difference by being present. As mentioned before, D&I is a topic that creates awareness of differences and allows employees to see things from different lenses (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). The difficulty arises, however, when D&I is looked at as just another work meeting. This perception highlighted the lack of explanation of why this topic is important in society and why it is relevant.

The last perspective was denominated as the limited perspective, which grouped employees' perceptions that CGC has a strong focus on gender equality. In some cases, this focus can turn into overlooking other dimensions. As diversity has multiple dimensions and they are expanding (Otaya-Ebede & Akobo, 2020), the difficulty for organizations is to ensure that their D&I strategies cover all dimensions present in the workforce. However, as the global strategy is focused on gender, most of the initiatives that CGC employees can participate in are also based on this dimension. This might be the reason why some interviewees perceive that the organization is focused mainly on gender. We suggest that this could be the reason why some interviewees considered that dimensions apart from gender are ignored by CGC. We found that when the initiatives are one dimensional, it tends to overlook the social groups that some employees belong to and the things that they value. For example, the inclusion of family was perceived as important with one of the employees, but because CGC does not touch on that dimension, it is perceived as being overlooked. Moreover, another interviewee experienced microaggression due to the fact that the communication style was culturally formed and was not seen as something to be challenged through the D&I initiatives.

For CGC, the company employs people with 27 different nationalities, which brings various perspectives and experiences. In relation to the variations of definitions of diversity, for CGC, there will be numerous ways that diversity is defined as a result of having multiple nationalities under one organization. Hence the understanding of the relevance of the topics could be misaligned. With this study, we aim to contribute to the importance of understanding where each employee's definition of diversity comes from and highlight their dimensions of diversity that they represent. We emphasize the importance of tailoring the D&I initiatives to the dimensions that are present in the organization. It is equally crucial to tailor the D&I initiatives so that it speaks to the dimensions that are present in the organization that the programs are being created for.

6.2 Practical Implications

Our motivation to study the topic of diversity and inclusion came from the fact that the field is gaining increasing attention. As our study shows, it is also a complex topic because the word diversity is such a broad term in which the definition can vary from country to country, company to company, and even individual to individual. Increasing diversity is a common practice, but inclusion, or the perception of being valued or belonging, is what organizations strive to reach (Mor Barak, 2015; Carr et al., 2019). The variations of definitions of diversity are challenging for managers responsible for forming these initiatives to create something that is the right balance of the business case and the social justice case. As people do not experience diversity in the same way, and there is a wide assumption that employees see work as contractual and usually seek to minimize personal costs and efforts (Quinn & Thakor, 2018).

At CGC, having 27 nationalities creates a very diverse workforce and creates a dynamic environment. All employees that we interviewed perceive it that way as well. Every interviewee was aware of the D&I initiatives, and they perceived them as beneficial for CGC. For example, Anja, Sara, and Daniela perceived the D&I initiatives as inspirational because it was a chance to get exposed to the women leaders, and they got to see how they are in person. However, as mentioned above in the Discussion, some perceived the D&I initiatives more relevant on an individual level than others. Through our findings, we noticed that CGC's diversity and inclusion initiatives are mainly focused on gender equality. These initiatives were highly

impactful as the employees we interviewed perceived them as beneficial and relevant for their careers. The main problem was that there were dimensions that were overlooked.

CGC is part of a global organization, and the office in the focus of this study is located in a Nordic country. In Scandinavia, equal treatment is seen as a norm (Prasad, Pringle & Konrad, 2006). Because there is a firm conviction of equality as being the norm and that it is embedded in society, the difference perspective is not contemplated. The difference perspective is about recognizing differences to avoid discrimination by tailoring programs that reduce disadvantages (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). In other words, we challenge the idea of entirely ignoring differences because some minorities might need a different treatment to reach the same performance as their colleagues.

Having different nationalities implies a challenge for CGC to manage several cultural differences. As mentioned in the Literature Review with the Four Layers of Diversity (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1994), the organizational dimensions, external dimensions, internal dimension, and personality create many topics that need to be raised in these D&I initiatives. In our interviews, diversity was defined differently by our interviewees. Frequently, the definitions were based on their personal experiences. Even though it is challenging for organizations to touch on every dimension of diversity, full inclusion depends on considering all of them. Thus, we suggest that a starting point is understanding how their employees define diversity because this meaning gives excellent insight into their experiences and what they value.

If CGC can consider the difference perspective to leverage the overlooked dimensions, the extent of the relevance of the D&I initiatives could increase (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Furthermore, creating an environment to allow the discourses of how the differences are understood is an important consideration. According to Holvino and Kamp (2019), these discourses will enable the opportunity to challenge the institutionalized stereotypes because it creates the space to talk about them. Thus, by sharing experiences, employees can influence the perceptions of their colleagues and let them know when a judgmental comment or action offended them.

The difficulty, however, is to make sure to have an environment that is psychologically safe. This means that CGC and other organizations would benefit from creating initiatives that focus on creating environments where the employees feel safe to voice their opinions without the fear

of consequences or any negative result associated with the discourses. For example, Ulvi mentioned an instance of microaggression when speaking with a colleague but did not feel that this event was an issue. He even justified the comment by saying that this is the way his colleague was culturally prepared to express their humor. Unfortunately, these incidents could lead to an environment that is not psychologically safe and can cause employees to perceive the D&I initiatives to be ineffective as the practices overlook these incidents.

In addition to promoting a psychologically safe environment, according to Quinn and Thakor (2018), if organizations can center the initiatives on practicing empathy, it can allow for more fruitful conversations that allow for learning and reflection. Lisa mentioned a fruitful discussion during a discussion about International Women's Day, where managers shared their different perspectives about the D&I initiative. Those discussions are critical to learning about each other and directly or indirectly learn about how diversity is experienced by each employee. Promoting equality is as important as considering how each employee sees diversity through their lens, by understanding that it can untangle the dimensions of diversity that exist in a particular context. Then, organizations can think about what types of initiatives would be relevant for them.

6.3 Implications for Future Research

We were aware that there is insufficient information related to employees' views and experiences of diversity (Pringle, Konrad & Prasad, 2006; De Meuse & Hostager, 2001). This encouraged us to contribute to our study of employees' perceptions of diversity and inclusion initiatives. However, we acknowledge that our research has some limitations or is a starting point for future research that provides more knowledge of individuals' perspectives of D&I initiatives. Based on our findings and limitations of the data collection and the analysis process, we will elaborate our implications for future research.

First, we suggest the possibility to base future research on a more heterogeneous sample that covers more dimensions of diversity. As we mentioned in the Methodology in Chapter 3, we selected the ten interviewees based on the demographics of their job positions, nationality, gender, and age. However, this sample is limited as diversity encompasses multiple dimensions such as the organizational dimensions, external dimensions, internal dimensions, and personality (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1994). In addition, we argue in the limitations of our data

collection and its analysis that dimensions such as religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity are missing in our study as CGC does not measure them. Thus, by being able to cover more dimensions and even consider research based on non-visible dimensions, it is possible to provide a more accurate perception of diversity for employees.

Second, based on the limitation that all the interviews were conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 crisis, we could not consider the body language for understanding their perception when they were sharing their experiences. In future research, we suggest that the research is conducted in person. Moreover, the interviews are complemented by observing different practices where individuals that represent different dimensions have to interact together. These observations do not need to be necessary during a D&I initiative, and they can also contemplate regular routines or practices of their daily work. As we found in the believing perspective, D&I practices are a source of pride and inspiration for individuals if they are able to experience the messages in their daily work. Hence, understanding how they interact and experience in their daily work diversity and inclusion might be an important insight to understand employees' perceptions.

Third and last implication for future research, we found that individuals' necessities and expectations related to diversity are not covered by having an equal approach or an indirect focus on gender. As we demonstrated, the interviewees perceive CGC with a particular emphasis on gender, while employees that represent other dimensions that are not covered by any initiative experienced or perceived exclusion. However, it would be interesting to understand how organizations that have a specific focus on one dimension are able to create programs for all their employees that do not necessarily belong to one of these dimensions. Beardwell and Thompson (2017) suggest using the difference perspective to tailor diversity and inclusion programs to reduce the disadvantages for minorities. However, this approach does not clarify how diversity can be successfully managed in an organization with a specific focus on one dimension without excluding the others. This sense of exclusion is usually generated by not covering individuals' own expectations, not necessarily by not having a program specifically for them. So the comparison with other D&I initiatives that primarily receive more attention leads to feeling even more excluded.

6.4 Reflections

We are thankful that CGC gave us the opportunity to conduct our research in their offices. We could experience first-hand how diversity takes place in an organization with several cultures, equal gender representation, and in a society that promotes equal treatment. We can corroborate in an organizational practice how exciting and challenging diversity management can be. Based on our research, we discovered the variations of employee's perceptions of the D&I initiatives and where these views stem from. We were able to gain more knowledge related to diversity management and find contributions that we can make with our findings.

We could explore from this study how broad and variable diversity management can be. This complexity can also be attributed to how complex we are as humans, how we have expectations, how we reflect and identify ourselves, and how important it is to belong to a more extensive community. This is the reason why inclusion is an essential component of diversity management. Without inclusion, individuals are not able to perceive themselves as involved in the organizations.

This topic is highly challenging, as it relies on how individuals perceive the practices that the organization prepared for them. We suggest that to accomplish full inclusion, organizations must cover all the multiple dimensions of diversity. However, is this recommendation realistic for organizations? Will the organizations be able to cover the expectations of all their employees? If organizations are not able to guarantee full inclusion of the workforce, would they be able to benefit from the diverse thinking? Many questions arise from our findings and reflections that are as challenging and fascinating as our topic.

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Appendix A

General Interview Structure & Questions

General Structure

Diversity and inclusion

- Is it something that you think about?
 - When (at work, thinking about your career, when taking a job)
 - Why or why not?
 - Do they feel that this is one of CGC's values?
- What it means to them
 - Diversity
 - Inclusion
 - Belonging
 - Equity

Initiatives

- Ask about the initiatives and how they perceive them.
 - Participation (Why and why not?)
 - Is it interesting to them?
 - What would make it more appealing?
 - Visibility of initiatives (promotion or awareness)
 - Benefits of the initiatives
 - Impact on company as a whole
 - Do they feel that people take it seriously?
 - Impact on them
 - Daily work
 - Daily life

Interview Questions

Personal data, initial question to warm up:

- What is your role in CGC?
- How long have you been working in CGC?
- How many people work with you directly? How many people are in your team?

Understanding Diversity

- Are you familiar with the term diversity? What does diversity mean to you?
- What does it mean to CGC?
- Do you work in a diverse environment in CGC?
- How do you experience diversity? Can you mention an example of how this diversity is represented in CGC?

Understanding Inclusion

- What does Inclusion mean to you?
- How do you experience inclusion in CGC? Can you mention an example from your daily work?

D&I initiatives in CGC

- Does CGC have D&I initiatives? Can you explain some of them?
- Have you ever attended the D&I initiatives?
- Why did you decide to attend or not attend?
- What is the value of D&I for CGC? What is your perception of these initiatives?
- What is the value (as individual) that you perceive for D&I initiatives?
- How do you experience it?
- If he/she has attended, would you recommend it to your colleagues?