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MASTER THESIS

**Diversity in Focus: Exploring Employee Perceptions
in Swedish Higher Education**

By

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Abstract

Title	Diversity in Focus: Exploring Employee Perceptions in Swedish Higher Education
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Course	BUSN49, Degree Project in Master's Programme Managing People, Knowledge and Change, Business Administration, 15 ECTs
Purpose of the study	The aim of this research is to investigate how employees of a Higher Education Institution in Sweden make sense of the concept of diversity.
Research Question	<i>How do employees of a Higher Education Institution in Sweden perceive diversity?</i>
Methodology	This study is a single case study of a qualitative character that follows a research approach based on symbolic interactionism, data collection through documents and interviews, and their analysis using an abductive approach. We recognize three limitations: the limited sample size and generalizability, potential social desirability bias, and our limited understanding of Scandinavian culture as international students.
Theoretical Perspective	The theoretical perspective consists of three main concepts: diversity, diversity management in Sweden and inclusion.
Contribution	Our study contributes to the literature of diversity by delving into the concept from the perspective of the employees of a Higher Education Institution in Sweden. Furthermore, we enhance the understanding of how diversity management has been implemented and practiced in the Swedish context and how this has affected the way employees make sense of diversity.
Key words	Diversity, diversity management, Sweden, inclusion

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Sílvia Casals Bosch and Adriana Dechina

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1. Introduction

The introductory chapter of this thesis presents to the reader the conducted research. Firstly, we provide the motivation that justifies the choice of the research topic area - diversity, as well as the background information to put our study into context. Secondly, we frame the research direction by illustrating the research problem, the purpose of the study and the research question. Lastly, we outline a deposition of the following chapters.

1.1 Background

Motivation

When we chose to pursue Higher Education in Sweden, we were indirectly presented with the opportunity to continue our professional career in the host country. Prior to our arrival, Sweden was perceived from an outsider's perspective as a multicultural society, and based on stereotypes of Scandinavian working culture, we expected the Swedish workforce to be open to diversity, with organizations embracing professionals from various genders, ethnicities, and backgrounds without discrimination. This perception was not to us alone; Sweden is commonly and widely recognized as a country, as well as a nation, with a prominent welfare state and a strong emphasis on equality, particularly in terms of gender (Romani *et al.*, 2017).

However, our perspective changed when we started hearing stories from international acquaintances, who had been living in Sweden for a longer period of time. They shared their struggles as immigrants when it came to finding employment, and soon enough, we personally experienced these difficulties as well. It is undeniably true that Sweden has welcomed a significant number of migrants relative to its population in recent decades. While the workplace has indeed become more culturally diverse, there persists an unrelenting issue of higher unemployment rates among individuals born outside of Sweden (Farashah and Blomquist, 2021). The country's proclaimed positive multicultural attitude brings about complex implications in practice (Hoppe and Trulsson, 2008), and the labour market, as we personally experienced, is not an exception.

Therefore, with the aim of better understanding the thoughts of Swedish organizations regarding diversity, we decided to frame the present study analyzing an institution that had expressed a positive attitude towards the idea of diversity.

Case organization facts

In this section, we present information regarding the chosen case organization while highlighting its significance for our research. To ensure anonymity, the specific details provided in this section are not explicitly referenced and we purposely refrain from using any specific name to refer to the organization. The case details are sourced from the organization's publicly available website.

Our study is centred on a single department of a Higher Education Institution in Sweden. We chose a Higher Education Institution in Sweden as our research setting due to these organizations acting as agents of social, institutional, and individual change (Taylor and Fransman, 2004). Therefore, these institutions have a significant influence on society, towards other organizations, individuals, and institutions. Accordingly, we found it particularly interesting to study diversity in this specific context. Furthermore, the Higher Education Institution not only embraces diversity as one of its fundamental values, making it a suitable fit for our research, but it also incorporates diversity and associated concepts as pivotal elements in its Strategic Plans, believing that these components play a crucial role in unlocking the institutional goals for the future.

The case organization is a well-established Higher Education Institution in Sweden, comprising multiple faculties, departments, research groups, and individual researchers. As a public institution, it operates under the authority of the Swedish government. It possesses a robust global presence, establishing partnerships with universities in more than seventy countries, making it an international institution. Another key distinguishing aspect of the institution is its emphasis on collegial relationships for horizontal coordination, meritocracy, and equality.

The department we have chosen as the focal point of our study for gaining deeper insights is relatively new compared to the overall institution. However, it has been shaped by the distinctive characteristics of the Higher Education Institution and the cultural context of its host country. The department promotes a culture based on collegiality and meritocracy and has around 200 employees. It offers undergraduate and master's degrees, the latter being more

international than the former. In addition, it is noteworthy that the department's faculty holds a recognized standing within its practice field, nationally, as well as internationally.

The specific disjunctive of the department offers a valuable opportunity to focus our research on employees' perspective. They work in an institution that manages diversity in terms of students, but at the same time, their workplace is more homogeneous. Their perceptions, views and understandings might be shaped by this very context, which can offer an interesting angle for our research.

As diversity in the organizational management field is a relatively new term, we clarify its rise as a concept in organizational studies and we briefly contextualize it in Sweden.

Conceptualizing diversity in Sweden

From a broad point of view, diversity can be defined as the assortment of individual dissimilarities and qualities that give rise to a sense of uniqueness and differentiation among individuals (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998). Since the mid-1990s, there has been a noticeable rise in the level of interest in this concept within Sweden (Boxenbaum, 2006). However, Sweden is not an isolated case. In this current century, there has been a heightened emphasis on diversity within organizations. This shift can be attributed to several key factors, including the greater inclusion of women in the workforce, the involvement of individuals from diverse backgrounds, and the presence of multiple generations in the workplace (Garg and Sangwan, 2021). The field of diversity research is gaining significant recognition due to the current era of increasing globalization, which is causing changes in societal and cultural dynamics, economic shifts, and the movement of individuals seeking better opportunities (Mazur, 2010; Roberson, 2019). Even though, from a critical point of view, this salient recognition of diversity in organizations and management practices could be explained by the pressure of the discourse of fashion (Prasad, Prasad and Mir, 2011).

In Sweden, the last years of the previous century witnessed a significant rise in the prominence of diversity, leading to the implementation of efficient diversity management practices as a means of support and protection against discrimination. This shift can be attributed to Sweden's

long-standing acceptance of migrants, not only since 2014 when it ranked among the top three European countries receiving the highest number of asylum applications, but also on a substantial scale since the 1970s (Shen *et al.*, 2009; Irastorza and Bevelander, 2017). However, it is argued in the literature that the local translation of diversity management in Sweden extends beyond migration and encompasses two other significant themes: gender equality and moral principles (Romani *et al.*, 2017).

The latter serves as a crucial foundation for our research, as we aim to explore the understanding, perceptions, and interpretations of diversity among employees within a Swedish Higher Education Institution.

1.2 Research Problem

The background about diversity has shown that it is gaining growing prominence as societal and cultural norms evolve, economic dynamics shift, and individuals migrate in search of better opportunities (Roberson, 2019). Specifically, in Sweden, in the latter part of the preceding century, there has been a notable surge in the recognition of diversity, resulting in the adoption of effective diversity management practices as a means to provide support and prevent discrimination (Omanović, 2009; Shen *et al.*, 2009). Nevertheless, in the Swedish context, the concept of diversity management has not been as deeply entrenched in politics and business, as it has been in the United States, because it emerged later in time. As a result, the formalization and establishment of diversity as a field of practice have not reached the same level of development (Boxenbaum, 2006).

Recognizing the significance of this issue, we aim to further investigate and enhance the understanding of diversity in Sweden. In this specific direction, Shore et al. (2018) affirm that in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of diversity, further research is necessary to explore contexts beyond the United States, as diversity can manifest differently in various countries due to variations in legislation, social dynamics, and historical factors. In that sense, Boxenbaum (2006) acknowledges that “much work remains to be done on translation processes” (p.947). Konrad, Prasad and Pringle (2006) identified a laguna in the existing diversity research literature in establishing a connection between the workplace and the historical or socio-political context of different countries. They attribute it to assumptions that

organizations worldwide are similar, which is influenced by the discourse of globalization, and a lack of awareness regarding the importance of local contexts.

Despite the enduring and growing interest in diversity, as evidenced by extensive studies conducted in the field (Oswick and Noon, 2014), there are still significant gaps that warrant further empirical analysis. Roberson (2019) highlights that one of the three main future directions for diversity research should tap into the complexity of diversity. She emphasizes that it is crucial to go beyond conventional perspectives of diversity to comprehensively grasp the intricacies of cultural identity and its subsequent impacts. Similarly, Omanović (2009), who specializes in diversity research in Sweden, suggests investigating workplace contradictions and conflicts that are frequently ignored or concealed in the decision-making process. These aspects can provide valuable insights for further research as it has not been substantially analyzed. Furthermore, the author argues there is scarce literature in appraising diversity practices from the employees' perspective, indicating a need for more exploration in this area. In accordance with this, Konrad, Prasad and Pringle (2006) state that there is a noticeable lack of attention in the research literature when it comes to adequately considering the perspectives and experiences of employees regarding diversity. They argue that managers' reluctance to grant researchers access to study employees' experiences stems from their fear that such studies may reveal the presence of hostile environments.

Following all the above, it is evident that there is a significant need for further empirical investigation of how diversity is understood in Sweden from the employees' perspective.

1.3 Purpose of Study and Research Question

Our conceptual study is driven by a desire to advance and challenge existing concepts and assumptions (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011). While our primary goal is not to address specific research gaps, we are motivated by the research problem that aligns with our initial motivation to pursue research in that direction. Hence, the case organization we have chosen offers an intriguing context for investigating the research problems from the perspective of its employees.

Purpose Statement

Following the research problem, our study aims to understand how employees from a Swedish Higher Education Institution understand diversity. This purpose follows our belief that it is vital to consider employees' voices and the particularities of a specific context. We thus conduct an empirical investigation of diversity, taking an interpretative approach (Prasad, 2018) to explore the significance and interpretation attributed to diversity by employees.

Our research aims to contribute on three levels. In a theoretical manner, a qualitative empirical study enables us to a) enhance the understanding of diversity, unpacking the complexity of the concept. As our case is framed in a specific context and country, we intend to b) empirically explore how diversity is translated and understood in Sweden. This has been largely missed in the literature and thereby sheds light on the complexity of the concept of diversity. Moreover, we also aim to c) study the perspectives and experiences of employees regarding diversity due to lack of adequate focus on their perspective.

Research Question

Based on the research problem and aligned with the purpose of our study, we have formulated the following research question to guide our research:

How do employees of a Higher Education Institution in Sweden perceive diversity?

1.4 Outline of the thesis

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

Chapter 1 has introduced the reader to this thesis by providing background information on the motivation, the context of the study and outlining the research problems. *Chapter 2* establishes the theoretical framework upon which the subsequent discussions in *Chapter 5* are built. *Chapter 3* delves into the methodology, offering a transparent overview of the research approach, design, and analysis of empirical data to provide readers with a thorough

understanding of the research process. *Chapter 4* presents our empirical material and findings in narrative form to provide the reader with an overview of what is understood by diversity and what is influencing the views of the employees. *Chapter 5* engages in further interpretation and contextualization of the findings by connecting them to the literature presented in *Chapter 2*. This allows for a comprehensive discussion of the findings within a broader theoretical framework. *Chapter 6* is the final chapter of the thesis, which serves as a conclusion that summarizes the main empirical and theoretical findings and contributions. It also offers practical recommendations and suggests potential areas for future research. Following Chapter 6, the **Appendices** and **References** sections are presented.

2. Literature review

The present chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework that pertains to the context of our investigation. Due to the extensive body of literature related to the research problem, we have chosen a collection of literature that is not meant to be all-encompassing but rather focused on specific concepts relevant to our case company.

The chapter starts with the term of diversity and a review of the different definitions, outlining its attributes and dimensions. Subsequently, thereafter, we provide an overview of diversity management, exploring the sameness and difference perspective and related concepts before touching upon the link between organizational culture and diversity management. After that, we review literature that revolves around the question if diversity management could be considered a trend. Later, we explore how diversity has been translated in the Swedish concept before digging into the topic of inclusion and its relation to diversity. The chapter closes with a summary.

2.1 Diversity

The study of diversity is becoming increasingly prominent due to shifts in social and cultural norms, economic changes and the migration of individuals seeking improved prospects (Roberson, 2019). In a broad sense, diversity refers to the various individual differences and attributes that create a sense of distinctiveness from one person to another (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998).

From a narrower perspective, diversity in the context of organizations denotes any variances in the composition of individuals within a workgroup (Roberson, Ryan and Ragins, 2017). In the same direction, Thomas and Ely (1996) argue that diversity must be comprehended as methodologies and perspectives to work that individuals from different identity groups offer. Accordingly, diversity in the workplace pertains to how work groups are structured regarding cultural or demographic attributes that hold importance in the relationships between group members (DiTomaso, Post and Parks-Yancy, 2007). Even though the way diversity was translated into the Swedish context is explored later in this chapter, a small advancement is that

diversity tends to be first related to heterogeneity in terms of citizenship or national origin and immigrant integration (De los Reyes, 2000; Omanović and Leijon, 2001).

Unfortunately, despite scholars' efforts to establish a clear definition of the term, there remains a lack of consensus regarding the meaning of diversity, as highlighted by Yadav and Lenka (2020) after thoroughly reviewing the literature from 1991 onwards. This complexity of the concept is illustrated with the existence of different dimensions of diversity and classifications.

Dimensions of Diversity

Diversity encompasses various dimensions including gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, physical disability, education, functional and tenure diversity, skills, knowledge, and attitude (Yadav and Lenka, 2020). Different researchers have suggested their own bifurcated categorization of diversity regarding observable and non-observable characteristics. The observable features —race, gender, age— are believed to be mainly made up of innate or inherent qualities, while the second group, the less noticeable traits —education, skills, organizational seniority, professional experience, etc.— comprise characteristics that have been learned or cultivated over time (Roberson, 2006).

Pelled (1996) differentiates among diversity attributes such as high visibility and low visibility; what Harrison et al. (1998) call surface-level diversity and deep-level diversity. Milliken and Martins (1996) distinguish between observable attributes and underlying attributes, whilst Webber and Donahue (2001) categorized diversity between relations-oriented and task-oriented. One of the most recent categorizations is from Yadav and Lenka (2020). They draw it upon Jehn et al.'s (1999) three groups of workgroup diversity —social category diversity, informational diversity and value diversity— and specifically, the classification of Williams and O'Reilly (1998) after the review of 40 years of literature in diversity performance and research. Yadav and Lenka (2020) divide diversity between the social categorization perspective — focused on relational aspects such age, gender and race — and informational diversity —more task-oriented. These authors state that several of these dimensions have been faced in organizations yet integrating them effectively into the workplace remains a significant

challenge. Notwithstanding the literature review discloses that informational diversity has received less consideration (Yadav and Lenka, 2020).

Nevertheless, recent research has suggested that diversity is a complex term, and it extends beyond a way of classifying and analyzing groups of individuals, it embodies the unique experiences of employees, shaped by historical, political, and environmental contexts (Roberson, 2019). This author holds that it is crucial for researchers to overcome the conventional views of diversity to comprehensively capture the intricacies of cultural identity and their resultant impacts. From her point of view, individuals experience diverse social environments and their perception of others and how they categorize themselves may change based on cues and experiences from diverse group belonging (Roberson, 2019).

Despite the intricacies involved in defining diversity, organizations prioritize the implementation of various strategies to cultivate a workforce that acknowledges it. In the subsequent section, we will delve into diversity management.

2.2 Diversity management

Diversity management is a strategic approach to human resource management (Boxenbaum, 2006). It involves efforts to establish and maintain a workplace culture that recognizes and appreciates the similarities and differences among individuals, allowing everyone to reach their full potential and make meaningful contributions to the organization's goals and objectives. Diversity management involves recruitment, growth, and effective supervision of individuals in a manner that achieves both favourable financial outcomes for companies and personal advancement for employees (Boxenbaum, 2006). The objective of diversity management is to improve the productivity of a diverse workforce and foster the inclusive growth and development of individuals from various gender, ethnic, national, cultural, and educational backgrounds, among others (Yadav and Lenka, 2020).

Numerous scholars assert that diversity as a topic in organizational studies emerged for the first time in the U.S with the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Yet, it became a significant societal and political concern, as well as a subject of study within the field of management in 1987

(Omanović, 2009). Since then, scholars and professionals have made efforts to grasp the notion, its impacts within and outside organizations, and approaches to handling those impacts (Roberson, 2019). Diversity management has not been present in politics and business in Sweden for as long as in the U.S, hence diversity has not been established to the same extent as a formalized field of practice (Omanović, 2009), a matter that we explore later in this chapter.

In parallel to the rise of diversity management as a practice, in the 1980's, the concept of the business case for diversity —treating employees fairly, ultimately benefiting the business— emerged (Beardwell and Claydon, 2017). As a result, diversity management has focused on it, making significant progress in understanding the benefits beyond its philosophical aspects. Studies on diversity confirm the main objective of managing diversity is to ensure inclusiveness and prevent discrimination against different groups based on their identity. However, current research also challenges the idea that promoting diversity is simply good for business, due to its failure to address imbalances of power and diversity management approaches may only be effective in some situations (Beardwell and Claydon, 2017).

The current state of diversity research could be explained in two major areas. On the one hand, there are research studies on the implementation of the business case for diversity — drawing on neo-institutional theory and critical discourse analysis. On the other hand, there is diversity research that investigates workplace diversity beyond the business case, known as the social justice case —with social identity theory-based research and the premise that it is an ethical responsibility to treat all employees justly (Beardwell and Claydon, 2017).

In parallel, there are two perspectives that organizations consider when formulating their diversity management practices. These opposed approaches are presented in continuation.

Sameness and difference perspectives

It has commonly been assumed that two domain perspectives are guiding how diversity initiatives are implemented. Aiming for equal treatment there is the sameness perspective, whose main foundation is treating employees equally regardless of the sex, ethnic group, age,

etc. In contrast, diversity practices aiming for fairness belong to the difference perspective, whose fundamental norm is a special treatment to employees because it acknowledges crucial differences exist between people and others for fairness (Beardwell and Thompson, 2017). Thomas & Ely (1996) name them as the discrimination-and-fairness paradigm, referring to the sameness perspective, and the access-and-legitimacy paradigm, referring to the different perspective.

Approaching diversity management with the discrimination-and-fairness paradigm is the prevailing route for diversity in organizations. It has the focus on equal opportunity, fair treatment, and recruitment with equal employment opportunity standards (Thomas and Ely, 1996). This perspective acknowledges differences but views the attributes that are related to intelligence, value, and other cognitive characteristics. One of the main limitations of this approach is that it assumes that disadvantages can happen because of unequal treatment. While this sometimes can be the case, disadvantages can also arise from treating people the same when their unique differences should be considered (Beardwell and Thompson, 2017).

The access-and-legitimacy paradigm, based on the difference perspective, draws upon the acceptance and honouring differences (Thomas and Ely, 1996). It is believed that neglecting distinctions can create further disadvantages for marginalized groups because the starting point is different, and they lack the same circumstances as their colleagues to achieve comparable performance. (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Some of the problems of this approach of diverse management are that it has the tendency to predominantly view the effectiveness of it in relation to generating profits for the business and some employees can feel exploited. Organizations under this paradigm tend to prioritize the significance of the differences without analyzing properly them or disclosing how they really affect the work that is done (Thomas and Ely, 1996; Beardwell and Thompson, 2017).

Scholars state that to overcome the limitations of the sameness (discrimination-and-fairness) and the difference (access-and-legitimacy paradigm) perspectives, organizations can use a fusion of both to plan their diversity management approach and human resources practices (Ghorashi and Sabelis, 2013). Beardwell and Thompson (2017) name it as “mixed policy” and argue it can lead to equality, but they state it also has its own difficulties when it comes to

discerning in which cases is better to use the difference or the sameness perspective. In consonance, Konrad & Linnehan (1995) coined a new term, the learning-and-effectiveness paradigm, which encompasses the other two types of practices. It promotes equal treatment and opportunity for everybody, and it recognizes the existence of differences among individuals and acknowledges the value of those different attributes. The authors summarize well the essence of it with the following statement “we are all on the same team, with our differences—not despite them” (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995 p. 7).

Aligned with the paradigms mentioned earlier, human resource management practitioners have devised various frameworks to enhance the employment prospects of protected groups, including both organizations that explicitly and officially consider demographic group identity and those that do not. Identity-blind structures are constructed around the premise to guarantee uniformity in the human resource decision-making process for each applicant to suppress discrimination and only judge based on achievements. These kinds of human resource management practices are designed with the main objective of ensuring the accurate measurement of individual merit according to the specific criteria established by the organization and distributing rewards according to them (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995). Even though these human resources practices are developed with the aim of raising the employment of protected groups, according to Glasser (1988) more robust interventions might be necessary to achieve the change pursued. Research has shown that despite blind-identity efforts, human resource decisions are susceptible to human decision-makers' biases. The systems of organizational rewards are culturally biased because different demographic groups offer different sets of assets to the organizations. In trying to overcome these limitations, within human resource management there are identity-conscious structures, which aim to incorporate the identity of the demographic within the process of decision-making in conjunction with individual merit (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995).

Synergy of diversity management and organizational culture

The existing body of literature on diversity management has emphasized on organizational culture and its impact on diversity openness (Patrick and Kumar, 2012). Thus, this study

considers organizational culture as it is recognized as one of the primary contextual elements influencing diversity (Farashah and Blomquist, 2021).

Grounding on Sinding and Waldstrom (2014), organizational culture refers to a collection of shared, underlying assumptions within a group that shape how individuals perceive, think, and respond to different environments. Due to its role as a social control system that influences individual behaviour (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998), organizational culture is expected to exert a significant impact on the functioning of diverse groups. Shared values play a vital role in the operation of an organization as they keep the organization as a defined unit and provide it with its own identity (Chuang, Church and Zikic, 2004). In consonance, Bakhri (2018) argues that the management of diversity and organizational culture are intertwined and cannot be separated. When diversity is effectively managed, it results in the complete support of organization members, indicating the acceptance of diversity as an integral part of the organizational culture. Effective management of diversity, in turn, fosters a strong organizational culture (Bakhri, 2018).

Chuang, Church and Zikic's (2004) analysis between organizational culture and group diversity suggests that the influence of demographic diversity on conflicts within a group is dependent on factors such as the organization's culture, the level of congruence in cultural values, and the extent to which group members share cultural content. Furthermore, their results indicate that a diverse group that is integrated into an organization where there is strong alignment in cultural values is more likely to take advantage of diversity. The functioning of diverse work groups can be influenced by both the intensity — significance of the culture within the organization—and content of organizational culture — specific values, norms, and beliefs embedded in that culture. Therefore, the impact of organizational culture on diverse work groups is contingent upon the level of intensity and the extent to which members embrace and align with the cultural aspects present in the workplace (Chuang, Church and Zikic, 2004).

Additionally, Lee and Kramer (2016) discuss the influence of national culture on organizational culture, suggesting that organizations operating in tight national cultures are more likely to develop a distinct organizational culture with greater uniqueness and specificity. On the other hand, organizations in loose national cultures may exhibit a moderate deviation from the

national culture while still enjoying institutional support. Furthermore, the authors suggest that organizations that purposefully adopt diversity strategies are more inclined to foster unique organizational cultures, highlighting that diversity strategies implemented within tight cultural contexts are more likely to facilitate the emergence of distinct organizational cultures, in contrast to those implemented within loose cultural contexts (Lee and Kramer, 2016).

Diversity management, a trend

From a critical point of view, diversity management practices can be seen as a discursive act, triggered by the pressure that the discourse of fashion puts on organizations to invest in diversity management programs (Prasad, Prasad and Mir, 2011). Indeed, Oswick and Noon (2014) in their bibliometric analysis of diversity conclude that the discourse of diversity has followed the same pattern as other management fashions. Prasad, Prasad & Mir (2011) explain that this is because if an institution does not engage with diversity matters, it may be perceived as an organization being behind the times. In addition, they suggest that pursuing current fashion trends in human resource management may also have negative effects on an organization's performance since they are often not tailored to the institution's specific needs and influenced by external tendencies. Accordingly, organizations by following a management trend of presenting diversity management as a vital practice might enhance the firm's legitimacy in the eyes of its multi-stakeholders. However, the internal legitimacy may decline over time due to the lack of relevance to its specific needs (Prasad, Prasad and Mir, 2011). In relation to only having short internal legitimacy, Dobbin & Kalev (2016) affirm that it is not a surprise most diversity programs fail and simultaneously, do not increase diversity. One negative consequence of the fashion-oriented discourse surrounding diversity management initiatives is the potential for organizations to engage in meaningless imitation, leading to superficiality and organizational cynicism (Prasad, Prasad and Mir, 2011). These authors suggest that for organizations to foster meaningful organizational change through their initiatives, they must recognize the institutional field and actively engage with it, ensuring that their actions are locally relevant.

Notwithstanding, Kieser (1997) wonders if organizations should follow management fashions or not, if management fads are good or bad. In his literature review about management fashions asserts that trends inspire individuals to constantly explore new solutions, and occasionally,

these trends leave behind valuable ideas and techniques that are retained, even if they are not extensively discussed anymore. In this manner, trends contribute to move forward organizations, not necessarily through drastic revolutions, but through a gradual accumulation of small steps. This evolutionary process can even transform something derived from trends into a lasting and meaningful contribution (Kieser, 1997).

2.3 Diversity in Sweden

Translating diversity management in the Swedish context

Diversity management, as mentioned, emerged as a strategic human resource management practice at the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century in the United States (Boxenbaum, 2006). Europe experienced the impact of diversity management some years after. First, it hit the UK and the Netherlands, countries with colonial pasts with significant proportions of the population with ethnic minority heritage. Later it landed in Scandinavia, between the end and the beginning of the new millennium (Jedwab, 2009). Discussions about diversity management encountered socio-cultural contexts with a distinct perspective on equality, diversity, and justice when they moved across the Atlantic, leading to varying understandings of the notions of diversity management. Indeed, when managerial practices diffuse across the globe, they are translated to fit the receiving society (Boxenbaum, 2006). In that sense, Omanović (2009) asserts that when certain original concepts regarding diversity and its management arrived in Sweden were partially reconceptualized, giving rise to new perspectives on diversity. He states that the idea of managing diversity of the U.S was built around the interest of boosting economic performance in a globalized market characterized by diversity, whereas it arrived in Sweden as social diversity with the aim of combating discrimination and segregation, promoting the integration of minority groups, and enhancing welfare.

There are discrepancies between scholars about how diversity management was translated in Sweden. Omanović (2009) advocates that the notion of social diversity emerged in connection with the objectives of Swedish immigration policy in the 1990's, due to the high unemployment rate among immigrants and workplace discrimination. He states that the Swedish Immigration Board actively wanted to promote immigrant integration within Swedish society, cultivating a

more equitable and inclusive multicultural nation. Likewise, Holvino & Kamp (2009) argue that in the Scandinavian context, diversity management was first introduced as a practice to foster the inclusion and integration of ethnic minority communities within the labour market. These authors believe that it gained traction during a specific socio-historical period, as Sweden, with limited prior exposure to immigration suddenly confronted the possibility of evolving into a multicultural society.

By contrast, Romani et al. (2017) state that when the concept first arrived in Sweden, it was confronted with discussions and actions centred around gender equality, which were promoted by a political agenda advocating equality for all individuals. They explained that it was later in time when laws prohibiting workplace discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, physical ability, and sexuality were established. These authors claim that currently companies commonly use the term "mangfoldighed" (diversity in Swedish) to describe their commitment to gender equality in the workplace and the inclusion of individuals with a migrant background. There appears to be a trend in Sweden where diversity is often associated with ethnicity when discussing lower-level positions, but it becomes primarily focused on gender when addressing top management roles. They explain, for instance, when diversity managers aim to enhance diversity in the board of directors, they frequently emphasize gender diversity rather than ethnicity (Romani *et al.*, 2017). From the same point of view, Konrad et al. (2006) indicate that in Scandinavia there is a significant correlation between feminist research and politics, particularly concerning the issue of gender equality, which is often driven by labour shortages and this political tradition appears to be followed by ethnicity and race.

Balancing Scandinavian Values and Diversity Management

The Scandinavian welfare model is characterized by an active state, a significant public sector, and a recognized obligation to uphold the social welfare of citizens within a market economy (Kautto, 2010). In Sweden, the welfare state concept is associated with *Folkhemmet*, which means "the people's home". It highlights the importance of a national community that provides a favorable living environment for all citizens, based on notions of equality and mutual respect (Romani *et al.*, 2017). As these values of equality and mutual respect are fundamental in Sweden (Pierson and Leimgruber, 2010), human resource management in the country is done

through collaborative practices, known as “collaborative diversity practices”, which provide a voice to all members of organizations, regardless of their tenure, role or position. The system of collaborative diversity has a double objective since it aims to harmoniously meet both the organizational and employee needs. It is supposed to foster employee commitment and engagement via a consensus-oriented approach that coordinates at the same time the organization's goal's expectations (Romani *et al.*, 2017).

The collaborative model relies on similar ethical values as diversity, including fostering fairness, enriching job experiences, and encouraging employee participation to fulfil the sense of belongingness for individuals based on the principles of inclusive organizations (Shore *et al.*, 2011). However, the emphasis on consensus and equality in the Scandinavian model can pose challenges for diversity work. The values of homogeneity, fairness, and equal treatment, inherent in Swedish culture, may conflict with the principles of diversity management, which recognize and value differences among individuals (Romani *et al.*, 2017).

This brings to light that the dominant Scandinavian value of homogeneity, comprising democratic principles and values of equality, can potentially clash with the principles of Diversity Management (Boxenbaum, 2006). This author analyzed this potential conflict in the Danish context, which despite being a different country, shares a lot of resemblances with Sweden. He stated that in Denmark the prevailing homogeneous society discourages acknowledging and treating people differently, as there is a cultural inclination towards equalizing treatment. According to the latter, Romani *et al.* (2017) suggest that the welfare state of Sweden draws on a firm commitment to universal benefits, equality and promotion of social welfare for all members of society, which contrasts with the diversity management's emphasis on diversity and individual differentiation.

Some other scholars might object the argument that the Swedish model can pose challenges for diversity work. For instance, Marklund (2009) states that the Swedish model —characterized by a specific approach to organizing modern society through, among other things, mixed economy, collective bargaining and social policy, manifesting a set of progressive social-liberal values— does not exist anymore. He states that it was in the late 1960's and 1970's, moment when the Swedish model was common referred, that Swedish society was homogeneous as an

intended result of a modernizing and rationalizing standardization policy. For more some years, the cultural homogeneity continued to be a main characteristic of Sweden but understood in terms of social equality. Nevertheless, this author asserts that Sweden is not anymore exceptionally homogeneous and that is not true that currently it is marked by remarkable social equality. Therefore, this author would contradict Romani et al. (2017) who build their argument with the premise that nowadays the intrinsic values of the Swedish society are still homogeneity and equal treatment.

2.4 Inclusion

Exploring the significance of inclusion in relation to diversity management

Closely related to diversity and diversity management is the concept of inclusion. Since 2010, the focus of discussions around diversity transitioned toward inclusion (Biggs, 2017).

Despite the existence of various reasons for the emergence of inclusion in diversity management, this transition was crucial. Diversity primarily focuses on recognizing and leveraging the unique qualities and attributes of employees for competitive advantages. On the other hand, inclusion centres around organizational aspects such as culture and atmosphere, aiming to guarantee equitable treatment and acceptance of all individuals, irrespective of their backgrounds.

Despite there are different rationales behind the rise of inclusion in diversity management, this shift was necessary, as diversity primarily concerns the value of individual characteristics of employees, whilst inclusion centres on organizational attributes — such as culture and atmosphere — that ensure fair treatment and acceptance of all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds. Inclusion aims to create an environment that promotes diversity and fosters equitable treatment for all, integrating these differences into business practices to unlock their full value (Oswick and Noon, 2014; Garg and Sangwan, 2021).

On the one hand, numerous authors have stated that current failed efforts to promote diversity in the workplace have resulted in the development of the idea of inclusion (Sabharwal, 2015). In the same direction, Oswick & Noon (2014) acknowledge a growing recognition that diversity has not met its expectations in terms of organizational survival and advantage, raising

doubts about the effectiveness of diversity management. They affirm that the focus has shifted towards highlighting the missed opportunities of diversity rather than viewing it as a vital business requirement. The practitioner literature suggests that "inclusion" is seen as a more advanced approach that should replace the traditional emphasis on diversity (Oswick and Noon, 2014).

On the other hand, other authors hold a slightly different view regarding the rise of the term inclusion and its relationship with diversity. They do not see inclusion as a substitute for diversity. For instance, Ferdman (2017) claims that in recent times, inclusion has gained significant attention as a framework for understanding and addressing diversity and promoting social equality across various aspects of identity. Oswick & Noon (2014) discuss that some observers perceive diversity and inclusion as co-dependent. From this perspective, diversity is seen as a fundamental prerequisite for inclusion, while inclusion is considered an essential prerequisite for diversity. In essence, an organization must first establish a diversity policy to acknowledge the significance of embracing differences, and then demonstrate a dedication to inclusion to fully realize the advantages of diversity. Chavez and Weisinger (2008) view diversity and inclusion as overlapping concepts and propose that inclusion redirects the focus from simply managing diversity to actively managing for diversity. The latter approach involves a proactive and continuous strategy that fosters a culture where individuals appreciate and have the ability to utilize their distinct variations, regardless of changing legal, demographic, and economic conditions (Chavez and Weisinger, 2008).

In order to facilitate the distinction between diversity and inclusion literature, Roberson (2006) explains that diversity definitions have centred on heterogeneity and demographic breakdown of groups or organizations, while inclusion studies concentrate on engaging employees to enhance their involvement and integrating diversity into organizational systems and processes. Both practitioners and scholars have put inclusion in the spotlight as a key factor for ensuring the long-term competitive advantage for businesses and organizations and the well-being and health of the employees (Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022). Although Roberson's research indicates a clear conceptual differentiation between diversity and inclusion, she also acknowledges a caveat regarding their operational aspects. She suggests that in practical terms, there is likely to be some overlap between the two, and for certain organizations, a shift from diversity to

inclusion may merely involve a change in terminology without significant alterations in diversity management practices (Oswick and Noon, 2014).

Furthermore, Roberson (2006) raises the question of whether inclusion could be considered a response to diversity initiatives aimed at specific social groups. In this argument, she draws upon the categorization presented by Konrad and Linnehan (1995), distinguishing between identity-blind structures that prioritize equal treatment for all individuals regardless of group identity, and identity-conscious structures that take into account both demographic group identity and individual qualifications. Roberson says that inclusion, with its emphasis on individual engagement and participation in decision-making, may align more closely with an identity-blind approach.

Tensions in Inclusion - Understanding the Paradox of Self-Expression and Identity

Drawing on Ferdman's (2017) understanding of inclusion as a point of departure, inclusion is a "process and practice that involves working with diversity as a resource" (p.235). The author states that inclusion has emerged as a prominent framework for understanding and addressing diversity, aiming to promote social equality across various aspects of identity in a systematic manner. However, despite growing consensus about the necessity for greater equality; tensions, controversies and dilemmas persist regarding the methods to achieve this objective. We acknowledge his view of inclusion, which argues that inclusion has inherent contradictions itself (Ferdman, 2017).

The author points out that inclusive system values and acknowledges both the differences and similarities among individuals, fostering their full participation and contributions without requiring them to sacrifice their unique identities (Ferdman, 2017). Inclusion encompasses various aspects like presence, participation, safety, voice, authenticity, equity, and equality, catering to individuals from diverse identity groups. However, despite its apparent simplicity, inclusion is a multifaceted and intricate concept, and it can be perceived and experienced differently based on context, individuals, and purpose, leading to varying emphasis on its elements (Ferdman, 2017).

In a group setting, inclusion entails establishing a safe environment, promoting open dialogue, and actively seeking and incorporating diverse perspectives. It involves treating others with

fairness, respecting their preferences, and fostering a sense of belonging. Additionally, inclusion requires creating a space that acknowledges both similarities and differences, allowing members to bring their authentic selves without sacrificing important aspects of their identity. At the same time, it aims to maintain appropriate boundaries that ensure stability and foster a sense of connection among members towards shared objectives (Ferdman, 2017).

The process and implementation of inclusion entail tensions that can be effectively understood and analyzed using the concept of a paradox, as this perspective explores in which way organizations can address conflicting demands simultaneously (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Ferdman, 2017). Inclusion, at its essence, embraces the coexistence of seemingly contradictory elements in a state of paradoxical tension. One of the most prominent tensions that arise in the context of inclusion is the paradox of Self-expression & Identity. This tension involves contrasting perspectives on inclusion: one that emphasizes complete acceptance, belonging, and assimilation into a larger social unit; and another that values the ability to retain one's distinctiveness and uniqueness within the collective without sacrificing the benefits and rights enjoyed by other members. These divergent forces are illustrated in Figure 1.

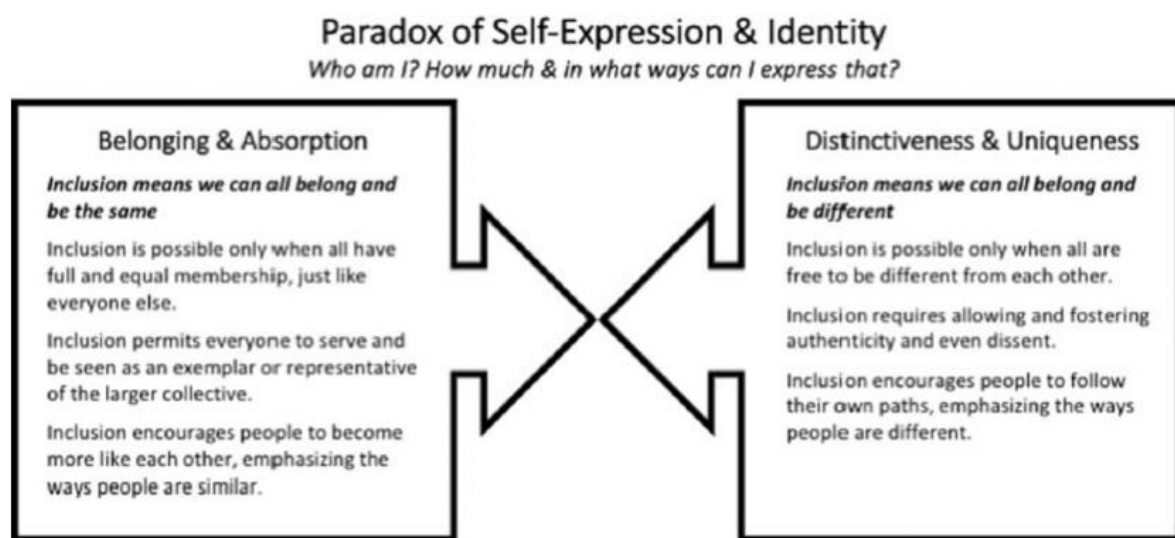


Figure 1: Paradox of Inclusion of Self-Expression & Identity: Belonging/Absorption versus Distinctiveness/Uniqueness

One the one side, highlighting shared traits and participating in mutual adaptation to enhance similarities. One is included when it can be absorbed into the group and has complete

membership and voice in the large unit, and the voice is valuable and equal to the voice of any other member.

On the other side, Distinctiveness & Uniqueness is crucial for inclusion as well. Inclusion also encompasses the ability to distinguish oneself from others within the larger collective, without sacrificing one's cherished identities, perspectives, styles, or cultural attributes. From this perspective, being included implies embracing and accepting one's own and others' differences, without any pressure or inclination to assimilate or conform. According to Berg (2011), in a workgroup, one is likely to feel more included if it is permitted and even encouraged to dissent from others to bring unique and sometimes divergent perspectives.

The paradox manifests when these two competing needs and desires clash in the form of frustration, conflict, or a sense that inclusion can never be accomplished. Figure 2 serves as an illustration of the polarizing reactions frequently observed in response to the apparently conflicting viewpoints, which should be understood as paradoxically interconnected.

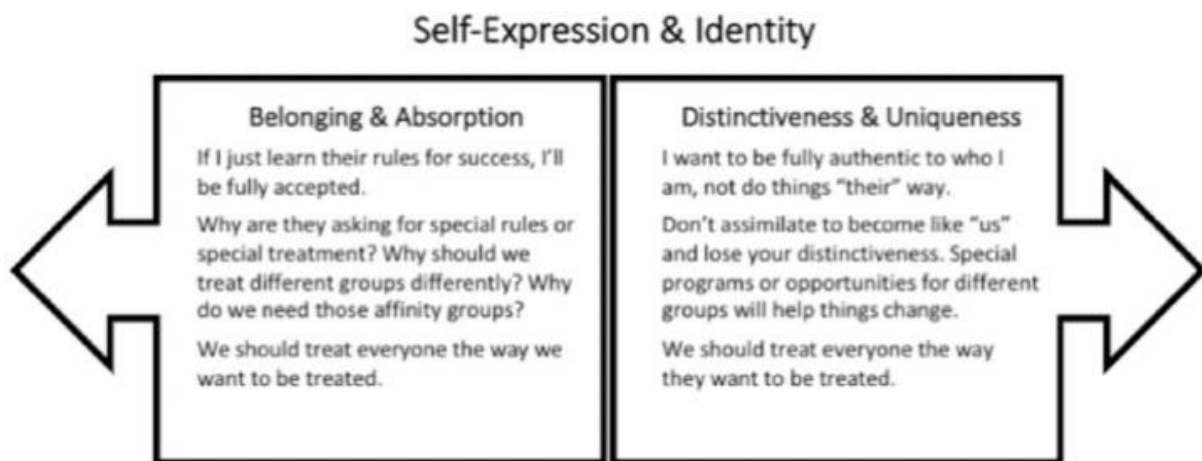


Figure 2: Paradox of Inclusion of Self-Expression & Identity: Polarizing reactions

Ferdman (2017) explains that in its extreme form, an excessive emphasis on belonging and assimilation can result in prioritizing collective identity and uniformity, disregarding any subgroup or individual distinctions within the group. Conversely, an extreme emphasis on distinctiveness can hinder the formation of a shared collective identity and hinder the development of common goals or points of connection and unity.

To effectively navigate the paradox of self-expression and identity, it is crucial to recognize and embrace the close relationship between these two aspects. In order to experience a complete sense of belonging, it is essential to retain a separate and distinct identity. By allowing the identity to hold significance and contribute to the collective, one is able to fully belong. Therefore, in essence, the paradox has to be accepted and integrated, steering clear of polarizing between the two alternatives. Expressed in other words, by fully embracing and acknowledging one's identity within the larger group, one can paradoxically embrace and express their individual distinctiveness from the rest of the group. Simultaneously, affirming and expressing one's uniqueness or differences from others can enhance one's sense of genuine belonging to the larger group. In this perspective, belonging and uniqueness (Shore *et al.*, 2011) are intertwined rather than distinct from each other (Ferdman, 2017).

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on the topics of diversity, diversity management, diversity in Sweden and inclusion.

First, we introduced different views on diversity, as well as all-encompassing dimensions and their classifications. We emphasize the inherent complexity of the concept and the importance of managing it in modern organizations. Subsequently, the chapter focuses on managing diversity and we explore its emergence as a concept and its impact on organizations. We clearly distinguished between the business case of diversity and the social justice case. In addition, we also present two contrasting visions of how to execute diversity management practices, following the difference perspective or the sameness perspective and we also depict related concepts. We also drew attention to organizational culture and its relation to diversity management and we explored the idea that diversity management practices can be viewed as a response to the pressure exerted by the fashion discourse. Thirdly, the chapter investigates how diversity was translated in the Swedish context and the implications it has for diversity management in relation to the Scandinavian values and principles as a society. Lastly, this chapter ends with an overview of inclusion, its different understandings and its relation to diversity and diversity management. Finally, we draw upon the paradox of Self-Expression and

Identity from Ferdman (2017) to analyse one of the most salient tensions within inclusion, related with the trade-off of belongingness and uniqueness.

3. Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed description of the methods and approaches that were used to conduct our research, as well as the manner in which we derived our findings, discussion, and conclusions. The first part of this chapter discusses the philosophical grounding of our study, which influenced our overall approach. Followed by a discussion on the qualitative and abductive research approach we took, as well as a detailed account of our research design, including data collection and analysis. Thirdly, we explain how we developed the primary topics and narrative presented in Chapter 4 (Empirical findings and analysis). Finally, the chapter concludes with an examination of the credibility and limitations of our approach and a summary of the chapter's main points.

3.1 Philosophical Grounding

Given the nature of our research, our aim was to gain insights into how employees of a Higher Education Institution in Sweden understand and make sense of diversity. Therefore, we adopted an interpretive approach, which focuses on comprehending how individuals interpret and subsequently respond to the world around them. Additionally, interpretive traditions advocate the notion that each individual's reality is socially constructed, which is made possible through their capacity to assign significance to objects, experiences, and interactions (Prasad, 2018). By examining the significance and meaning that employees assign to diversity, we will gain an understanding of the importance individuals place on this organizational value. Thus, we chose an interpretivism standpoint for conducting our thesis.

Furthermore, our research is concretely drawing inspiration from the framework of symbolic interactionism outlined by Prasad (2018). By adopting an interpretive approach, we recognize the significance of individual interpretations and responses to the social world they inhabit. This perspective acknowledges that reality is not fixed but rather socially constructed, with individuals actively assigning meaning to their interactions, experiences, and the objects they encounter. Symbolic interactionism, as exemplified by Prasad (2018), focuses on the interplay between individuals and their social environment, emphasizing the role of symbols, language, and shared meanings in shaping human behavior and perception in various contexts. Based on this, symbolic interactionism is valuable for our research in understanding the role of the Swedish academic institution in shaping employees' meanings of diversity. Furthermore, this

tradition provides us with a robust theoretical foundation to delve into the nuanced complexities of employees' understanding and meaning-making processes related to diversity.

Organizations often develop numerous strategies to promote diversity as part of their mission and goals, however, we assert that it is also crucial to consider individuals' perceptions of diversity. Thus, symbolic interactionism can help us recognize if employees' perceptions of diversity are essential in comprehending the value they ascribe to such organizational efforts. To guide our research within this framework, we have conducted a comprehensive analysis of a single department of a Higher Education Institution in Sweden from multiple perspectives. In the subsequent chapters, we will provide a detailed account of these analytical processes.

3.2 Research Approach

3.2.1 Qualitative Research

Our research aims to investigate the understanding of employees in a Higher Education context in Sweden. Thus, the most appropriate approach for investigating topics of this nature is the qualitative research method, given its alignment with the underlying philosophical framework (Rennstam and Wästerfors, 2018). Qualitative research involves collection of in-depth, subjective data through methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, in order to comprehend the context-specific significance and nature of social phenomena and interactions (Rennstam and Wästerfors, 2018). Therefore, our goal is to understand how people derive significance from their environment and to examine any potential conflicts that may emerge in these interpersonal exchanges.

3.2.2 Abductive Approach

The objective of our research is to foster theoretical and conceptual advancement by critically engaging with the prevailing literature through the lens of our empirical findings (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011; Alvehus, 2020). Therefore, our study takes on a conceptual stance, as we reflect upon theoretical assumptions considering the empirical data (induction) we have gathered (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022), instead of identifying gaps in the literature to test specific hypotheses derived from existing theory (deduction) (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011; Alvehus, 2020). To achieve this, we have carefully semi-structured our interviews and formulated questions, centered around the topic of diversity. By adopting a methodology that

combines deductive and inductive reasoning, our study can be thus considered as an abductive approach.

The abductive approach introduces an additional layer of comprehension to the research, which means the empirical analysis and existing theory are interdependently improved and further elaborated on (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018). This allows the researchers to remain receptive to emerging topics from the subjective realities of the interviewees (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2016). Furthermore, in order to avoid excessive preconceptions imposed by theory during the data collection, we refrained from reading foundational theoretical knowledge and remained solely with a research direction (Swedberg, 2012). However, we soon recognized the impossibility of completely detaching from pre-existing knowledge, as foundational theory served as inspiration to further build on in relation to unknown concepts (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018).

3.3 Research Design and Process

3.3.1 Case Study

As mentioned in the introduction, we focused our study on a single department of a Higher Education Institution in Sweden. By focusing our research on a specific department, we aimed to dive deeper into the intricacies and nuances of the organizational context, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the research question. This approach enabled us to examine closely the dynamics, perceptions and sensemaking within this particular department, offering valuable insights into the topic of diversity. In addition, by concentrating on a single department, we believe to have captured the unique characteristics, challenges, and experiences specific to this organizational unit, enhancing the richness and applicability of our findings.

3.3.2 Data Collection

Sampling

The main empirical data for this study is derived from conducting nine semi-structured interviews with employees at a selected Higher Education Institution in Sweden. Our goal was to have a holistic view of the organizational dynamics by compiling as diverse a sample of

employees as possible. Therefore, our interviewees consist of different age groups, genders, hierarchical positions, and organizational groups within the chosen department (Table 1), to ensure various perspectives and mitigating the likelihood of homogeneous responses. In addition, each interviewee was pre-selected from the website of the institution. Despite our sample being nine employees, we believe the interpretation of the interviews to be of higher value than the quantity of interviewees (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018).

Interviewees' changed names	Organizational Level	Region of Origin	Gender	Group Age
Ingrid	Manager - Administration	Sweden	Female	55-64
Alva	Administration	Sweden	Female	45-54
Jesper	Manager - Administration	Sweden	Male	45-54
Henrik	Manager - Teacher	Sweden	Male	55-64
Abel	Teacher	Outside Sweden	Male	25-34
Ulrika	Teacher	Sweden	Female	45-54
Emma	Teacher - Manager	Outside Sweden	Female	45-54
Pernille	Teacher	Sweden	Female	35-44
Mikael	Teacher	Sweden	Male	45-54

Table 1: Interviewees' classification with demographics

Documents

First, we began our analysis by examining the Strategic Plans of both the Higher Education Institution, as well as the faculty of our researched department. During this investigation, we came across the significance of diversity and gender equality within both organizations. However, despite the alignment in values between the Institution and the faculty, there is an evident misalignment in both strategic plans regarding the emphasis on diversity.

In addition, an Equal Opportunities Plan for the institution further supported the findings from the strategic plans, implying that the Higher Education Institution has taken steps to promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination in recruitment and career progression. However, there is a lack of specific practices within the department and faculty to foster diversity and gender equality, despite these values being recognized at the core.

These inputs, therefore, served as the basis of the pre-determined topics and questions for the interviews (Appendix 1).

Semi-structured interviews

For the aim of this research, nine in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with pre-selected participants to gather insights on diversity in higher education context in Sweden. Semi-structured interviews include pre-determined topics and questions to be covered in a specific order. However, the interviewer is able to deviate and include additional ones during the interviews, as long as they are in line with the topic (Flick, Steinke and von Kardorff, 2004).

Choosing semi-structured interviews as a source of data collection corresponds to the abductive approach taken for the research. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe, a semi-structured interview is “an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena”. Such a format was chosen due to the freedom to include follow-up questions that can differ in each conversation and are tailored to the responses of the interviewees. Moreover, the interview allows extra room for expression and encourages participants to share and explain their ideas, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of each employee's perception of diversity (Rennstam and Wästerfors, 2018).

Eight of the interviews were conducted in person, while one was online via Google Meets, over the course of two weeks in April. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and the general topic of diversity was intentionally kept without providing any further information, in order to elicit authentic responses. Despite the lack of prior knowledge regarding the aim of our research, the interviewees exhibited a friendly and approachable demeanor, by willingly sharing their perspectives on diversity. Interestingly, all interviewees expressed curiosity about the final thesis and inquired about the possibility of obtaining a copy. Based on the derived information, we aspired to understand how the employees' meaning-making of diversity relates to the context of a Higher Education Institution in Sweden.

3.3.3 Data Analysis

This chapter exhibits how we analyzed the empirical data. According to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), the qualitative data analysis does not follow a linear path. However, given the complexity and intricacies of the collected inputs, a structured analytical framework was essential, in order to navigate effectively through the pool of information. Therefore, to decipher the empirical data, ‘sorting, reducing, arguing’ approach by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) was used, which aims to translate the answers of the participants into insightful findings.

To begin with, for sorting, the audio recordings of each interview were transcribed with the help of the transcription option of Microsoft Word. Followed by a split of the interviews amongst each other, we thoroughly read through and edited the transcriptions, while listening to the recordings, in order to ensure accuracy. This process proved beneficial, as it allowed us to do a preliminary interpretation of the data and notice common beliefs and understandings amongst employees. For example, we noted that some of the interviewees perceived diversity through various activities, such as inclusion practices and recruitment. Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) highlight the significance of incorporating diverse materials to address the "problem of chaos". In our study, these materials encompassed the varied experiences shared by individuals, both directly and tangentially related to the focus of our research. Nevertheless, after we finished transcribing, we conducted another comprehensive review of the interviews to ensure that no important details were overlooked (Rennstam and Wästerfors, 2018).

Following the transcription process, we utilized a systematic approach to organize and analyze the interviews, in order to have a better and clear overview of the process. To facilitate sorting and reducing, we used a color-coding system to distinguish between themes, opinions and key concepts, which allowed us to visually identify patterns and connections across the data. By clustering related content together, we were able to identify central themes and create meaningful categories that captured the essence of the participants' perspectives and highlight the meaningful aspects for further analysis (Rennstam and Wästerfors, 2018). Additionally, the method “condensation of meanings” was applied to simplify the transcriptions and leave out the irrelevant for this research data, making the analysis more efficient (Melnikovas, 2018). This approach further helped us identify ‘mysteries’, meaning we found concepts in the empirical data that have the possibility to add on to the existing literature (Alvesson and

Sandberg, 2011). One such ‘mystery’ we stumbled upon was the need for some employees to have transparency and better communication across the department. However, most of them shared that they are happily part of a small organizational group within the department and do not interact much with the rest of their colleagues outside of this group. As Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) believe, embracing and exploring the mysteries encountered during data analysis can be highly valuable for generating new insights, as it can help researchers dive deeper into the complexities of the research phenomenon and reflect critically on assumptions.

After the sorting and reducing of the data, the arguing stage of the analysis involved deciphering the information by exploring relationships, connections, and contradictions, in order to develop arguments and theoretical insights. Finally, the selected data was interpreted in light of existing theories and frameworks with the aim to answer and elaborate on the research question. With the help of Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) thoughts on interpretation, we intended to uncover the underlying meanings and structures within the interviews. For example, when asking interviewees to be more specific when discussing diversity, most of them delved into the topics of gender and nationality, recruitment, and inclusion. Interestingly, by clarifying the link between inclusion and diversity, transparency and belongingness emerged as recurring concepts.

Furthermore, the arguing phase of the data analysis includes a reflexive component as well, meaning we critically reflected on our own assumptions, biases, and positioning within the research process. By doing this, we are ensuring that our interpretations and arguments are based on a thorough understanding of the data (Rennstam and Wästerfors, 2018).

3.3.4 Limitations of the Data Collection and Analysis

In this section, we will address and examine several limitations and potential biases that could have affected the quality of our empirical material. We acknowledge the presence of these constraints and their potential influence on both our data collection method, as well as the process of analyzing the data.

To begin with, an obvious limitation in our study is the sample size. As we focused our research on a specific Higher Education Institution in Sweden, the findings may not be generalizable to

other institutions or different contexts. Moreover, the limited sample size of nine interviews might not capture the full diversity of experiences and perspectives within the organizational department. To address this, we made efforts to ensure diversity in our participant selection, including employees from various positions and demographic backgrounds. However, we believe it is important to acknowledge that the extent to which our findings can be applied to a broader population may be limited.

Another potential limitation of our study is the potential influence of social desirability bias. Based on the importance of diversity in the organization, it is likely that the employees may feel a social pressure to provide responses that portray a positive image of the organization and their own sense-making experiences. This bias could potentially lead to an underrepresentation of negative or critical perspectives, limiting the depth and accuracy of our data. Therefore, in order to encourage participants to express their honest and diverse viewpoints, we assured full anonymity and confidentiality by changing their names and refraining from disclosing their positions.

Furthermore, considering that cultural context plays a significant role in diversity management, a constraint of our study is our limited understanding of certain aspects of Scandinavian culture, given that we are both international students. Thus, there is a possibility that we may not fully grasp certain cultural practices in Sweden, which could potentially impact our analysis and interpretation of the interviewees' experiences.

3.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology employed in our study. We began by discussing our research approach, which draws on symbolic interactionism (Prasad, 2018), emphasizing the exploration of self and meaning. Next, we outlined the data collection process, which centred around a specific department within a Higher Education Institution in Sweden. The data collection phase consisted of two distinct stages. Firstly, we analyzed the Strategic Plans of the Institution and faculty of our researched department, in order to gain insights into the core values. Secondly, we utilized this information to design a targeted questionnaire for conducting interviews, ultimately selecting nine participants for in-depth discussions.

Secondly, we conducted an analysis of the empirical data using an abductive approach (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007). Following a structured analytical framework, the data was sorted, reduced, and analyzed using the approach of Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018). The interviews were transcribed and thoroughly reviewed, allowing for preliminary interpretations and identification of common themes. Then, a color-coding system was employed to visually identify patterns and connections in the data, leading to the identification of central themes and meaningful categories. The data was further interpreted in relation to existing theories and frameworks, exploring relationships and developing arguments.

Lastly, we acknowledged that our study may be subject to three limitations that could potentially affect the reliability and validity of our empirical data. First, the limited sample size of our study, focused on a specific Higher Education Institution in Sweden, may restrict the generalizability of our findings to other contexts. Second, social desirability bias could have influenced participants to provide responses that align with a positive organizational image, potentially limiting the depth and accuracy of our data. Third, our limited understanding of certain aspects of Scandinavian culture as international students may impact our analysis and interpretation of the interviewees' experiences.

4. Empirical findings and analysis

In this chapter we introduce and analyse our empirical material to provide a comprehensive understanding of the problem area and address our research question. Our empirical data consists of interviews where participants shared their perspectives, thoughts, understandings, and experiences around diversity in their workplace. In the form of a narrative, we aim to provide the reader with an illustration of the way employees make sense of diversity in the context of a higher Education Institution in Sweden.

Our analysis is grounded on the combination of organizational documents and excerpts from our conversations with interviewees. We have substituted the real names of interviewees with pseudonyms and have modified the examples and personal experiences that contained personal information with a generic concept to avoid disclosing the individual identity. It is important to mention that some statements may be grammatically incorrect due to our decision to preserve the original explanation to convey their authentic way of expressing and their genuine thoughts. Finally, to facilitate the reader's understanding, we use square brackets to specify content omitted or address inconsistencies.

The chapter is presented in three different sections. We start with "*Setting the Context*", where we present the analysis of the case organization and the documents. Thereafter, we analyse the interviews.

The second part, "*Diversity, a core concept*" delves into the different meanings attributed to the term diversity by employees and how each concept is experienced inside our researched department. We present the themes under the titles: "*Multitude of meanings*" and "*Delving Deeper into the nuances of diversity*".

In the third part, called "*Invisible Forces, Visible Impact: Unraveling the Underlying Factors of Diversity*" we present two different factors that shape the way employees make sense of the term diversity. These two distinct variables by which employees comprehend the concepts of diversity are "*Academia*" and "*Swedishness*".

The themes are closely interrelated and consist of sub-themes supported by a rich collection of empirical material. Figure 3 presents the reader with a visualization of the reasoning behind the narrative.

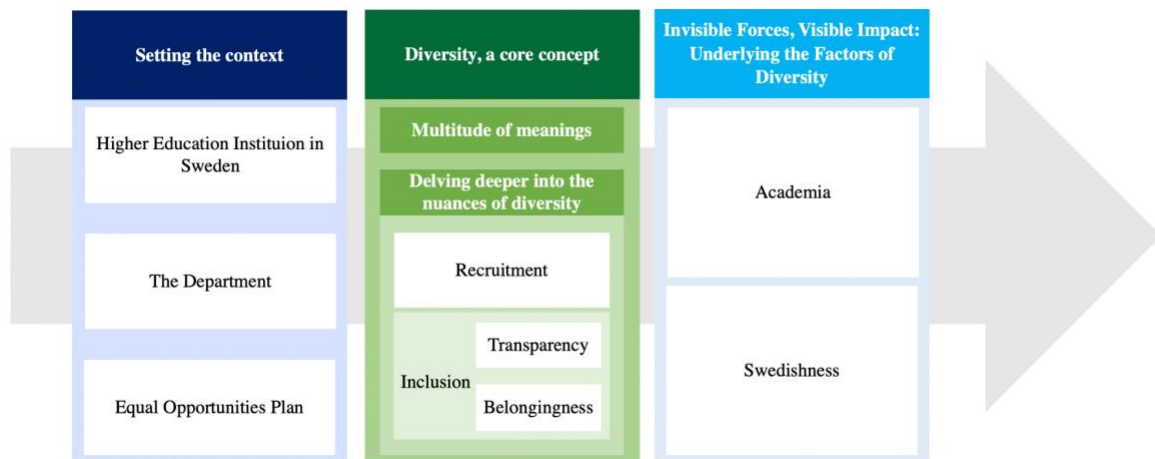


Figure 3: Key themes underpinning the narrative of the Chapter 4

4.1 Setting the context

Higher Education Institution in Sweden

Our research focus begins in the context of a traditional and long-established Higher Education Institution in Sweden, which consists of a wide range of faculties, departments, research groups and individual researchers. As a public institution, it is subordinated to the Swedish government. One of the most noteworthy features of the institution is its strong emphasis on horizontal coordination through collegial relationships, as opposed to vertical coordination characterized by managerial hierarchy. This historical fragmentation and a high degree of independence among the various parts of the organization, means that its employees are more prone to bottom-up and consensus decisions rather than a top-down approach.

The Department

In order to gain a more in-depth and specific analysis of the factors that shape diversity within a particular academic context, we decided to concentrate our research on solely one of the faculties of the Higher Education Institution in Sweden, and more specifically on a single department within this faculty. By focusing on just one department, we can thus examine the unique challenges, opportunities and dynamics that exist within that department, and how they may be influenced by the broader context of the institution and society. This approach has provided us with more nuanced insights into the complex factors that contribute to diversity in academia. The department itself, while younger than the institution, has been influenced by its particularities and by the country where it is located. Corresponding to the values of the main institution and universities in Scandinavia, the department supports a culture of collegiality and meritocracy. Moreover, as the department is subordinated to its faculty, the Faculty Management Board is the one responsible for its strategic aspects such as mission, vision, strategy, funding, allocation of resources, recruitment, staffing, educational portfolio, quality of teaching, and research issues.

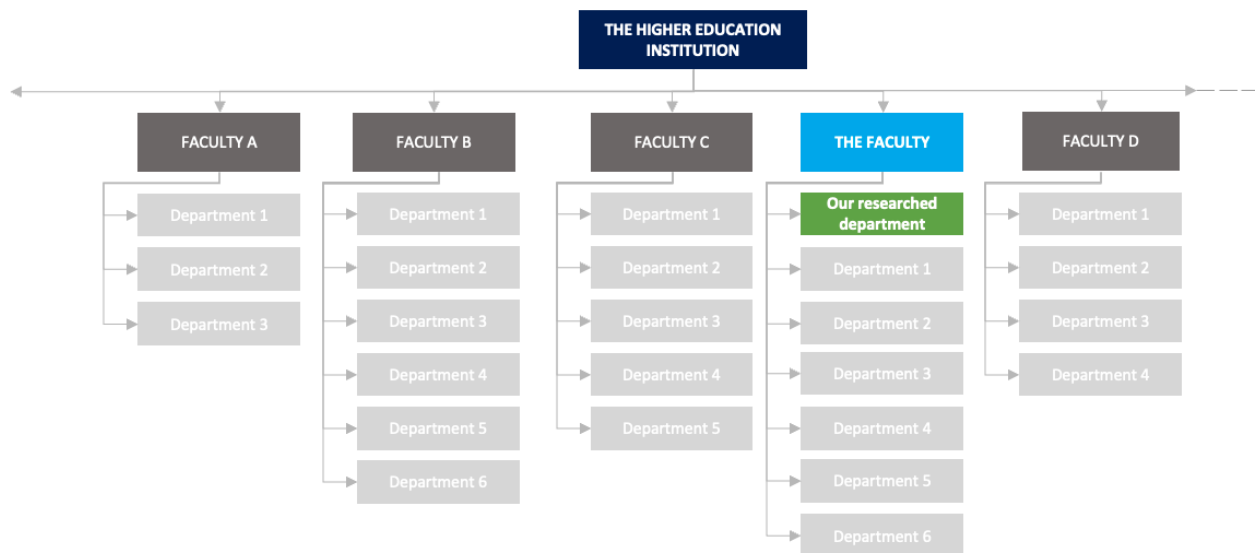


Figure 4: Approximate organizational chart of the Higher Education Institution in Sweden to situate the Researched Department.

Strategic plans

At the end of the past decade the higher educational institution mapped out the trajectory that the organization should pursue in the upcoming decade through the formulation of a new Strategic Plan. In the prologue of the document, one of the highest authorities within the institution states that the Strategic Plan emphasizes the areas for growth and improvement that would be crucial to success in the next decade. Notably, gender equality and diversity are presented as fundamental principles in every part of the organization, as can be seen in its core values. Moreover, in four of the six priority areas diversity and related concepts are highlighted as key components to unlocking the institutional goals for the future. These 6 areas consist of *the integration of education and research; enhancement of the university international status; fostering leadership and collegiality for success; creation of an appealing environment for students, employees and visitors; and leveraging the existing pioneer institutions.*

Herein, the first area where diversity plays a key role is about promoting it in *education and research*. The second area recognizes *attracting international students and staff*, and the third emphasizes the importance of *fostering a culture of collegiality* that recognizes staff diversity while maintaining unity. Finally, the importance of a *work environment characterized by gender equality and equal opportunities for professionals and students*. Therefore, it is evident that the university accentuates diversity as a key element for the flourishing of the organisation.

Few years later, in turn, the faculty of our researched department, published its own Strategic Plan, which is rather short-term and with the ideas of the main Strategic Plan adjusted to the faculty. The core values, based on the laws that a Swedish public authority has to follow, declare that the faculty embodies the principles of the Institution, one of these being diversity and gender equality. Furthermore, in the mission of the faculty, it is articulated that in order to succeed, “we look back to our Scandinavian roots and global perspective”. However, in contrast to the Strategic Plan of the Higher Education Institution, diversity does not appear in any of the three focus areas of the faculty’s plan. In fact, the only diversity-related information is about creating a long-lasting international environment and promoting the diversification of student recruitment.

This is surprisingly odd, since almost 10 years ago, after the Higher Education Institution reported that the respective faculty had challenges in terms of gender equality, an external investigation was carried out to determine the reasons and provide recommendations. The outcome for the faculty, and indirectly for our researched department, aimed to enhance performance in relation to the statistics concerning the representation of female professors.

The Faculty's Strategic Plan ends by stressing out the importance of ensuring that everyone in the faculty (from students to any kind of professional) is committed to its goals. In addition, it urges them to take proactive steps in effecting the necessary changes to achieve the established objectives. This implies that by embracing the collegial culture, the faculty is effectively transferring the responsibility to the departments, encouraging them to take actionable steps in achieving the goals outlined in the strategic plan.

Equal Opportunities Plan

Going back to the institutional level, an Equal Opportunities Plan was released last year with the same time horizon ending as its Strategic Plan, to ground it on specific initiatives. Four major objectives conform to it that can be explained in two major areas:

On the one hand, the organization is committed to promoting gender equality and ensuring that recruitment processes and career paths are free from discrimination. To achieve this, the Higher Education Institution is ensuring its recruitment and promotion processes are devoid of any form of discrimination and all evaluations and assessments are conducted solely based on the applicant's merits and skills. On the other hand, the organization aims to conduct systematic preventive work against discrimination and maintain professional management of victimization, harassment, and sexual harassment. In alignment with this last group of initiatives, the faculty of our researched department created and published their own Guide to dealing with discrimination, harassment, and victimisation. One for students and one for employees. However, despite diversity and gender equality being core values of the department, faculty, and institution, neither have developed any practices for fostering these values. This suggests that there is still work to be done in the area of diversity and gender equality, and both the department and its faculty have a responsibility to address these issues.

4.2 Diversity, a core concept

Following the context setting and having illustrated the scope of the strategic plans of the Institution and the faculty of our researched department, results demonstrate that diversity is one of the core principles. Hereby, we further dive into the concept of diversity, exploring how the employees of the department make sense of it. From conducting the interviews, two different levels were identified to approach the term. The interviewees defined it differently when they were making sense of it for themselves and for the department.

4.2.1 Multitude of meanings

When the interviewees were asked about the meaning of diversity for themselves, the overall impression is that the employees are familiarised with the concept. Nevertheless, all interviewees stated, implicitly or explicitly, about the existing difficulty in defining the term, it is perceived as complex, ambiguous, and vague. Interviewees approached different ways to transmit what they perceive about diversity, and as a result, the concept is understood as not self-evident and integrated, there is a lack of coherence among definitions.

Some employees talk about the different attributes and layers of diversity, and the existence of intersections among them. A statement by Pernille, who is directly involved in the topic for her research, shares how she comprehends diversity, summarizing well the perception of the rest of the employees towards the term.

“Well, there are so many levels to answer that question. There is a diversity in terms of research interest to try and curate so everyone gets a chance to go with their interest, speak their mind, and embrace a diversity of ideas and competences in work. [...] That can be on all different levels, so diversity can be both in terms of a broader level like race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, or ability and sexual orientation. It can be in many different forms, and often it's my experience that if there are two or more social identities that intersect, then they often have unique challenges to take into consideration.” – Pernille

The excerpt emphasizes that Pernille acknowledges the complexity of the term of diversity and the various angles at which it can be approached. She starts by emphasizing the importance of allowing diverse research interests, ideas, and competencies in the workplace. Pernille notes that while fostering diversity, intersecting social identities can bring particular difficulties that must be taken into account.

Emma also brought up the term intersection in her definition of diversity:

“I think one thing when we talk about diversity, there are many intersections here. So are we talking about people of different international backgrounds or different religions or different gender or different sexual orientation? I think sometimes you cannot treat everything the same and I think that is something that we're struggling with”. - Emma

Emma in her definition of diversity explains the challenges associated with addressing it in the workplace, particularly when there are several intersections to take into account. She wonders whether diversity pertains to international backgrounds, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or other factors. Stating that *“sometimes you cannot treat everything the same”* concedes that it might not be feasible or effective to handle all aspects of diversity equally and observes that addressing these problems is challenging.

Among interviewees, there is a broad range of perspectives and interpretations regarding the definition of diversity and there are opposing views. Whereas Emma says it as challenging, Abel and Jesper have different opinions, which, in turn, do not coincide. Jesper has a more optimistic outlook on the term diversity:

“For me, it [diversity]'s been in most organizations a potential. Some might find it challenging, but sometimes it's an unused potential. I am always attracted to the idea of creating teams with as many components as possible. I believe such diversity enhances both efficiency and the ability to critically analyze various things with different perspectives, backgrounds...”. – Jesper

Jesper sees the potential of diversity in organizations and institutions. He makes an argument that while some people might regard diversity as a challenge, others see it as an underutilized asset that can have a positive impact on a team or business. In addition, he expresses his personal interest in creating teams that have a variety of members since he sees diversity as a way to increase efficiency and incorporate critical perspectives from individuals with different experiences and backgrounds.

On the other hand, Abel expresses skepticism towards the concept of diversity and how it is used in some institutions for superficial reasons:

“Let's be honest. I don't buy into the concept of diversity. I mean, the way it's been superficially used for kind of political correctness or for driving some kind of symbolic capital [...]” – Abel

The interviewee draws attention to the shallow level at which diversity has been utilized in some situations. The remark underlines his concern about the need to discern between sincere initiatives to support diversity and those that are merely designed to uphold a particular image or position. He also emphasizes how crucial it is to comprehend the underlying goals of diversity initiatives in order to make sure that they are genuine and meaningful.

What we can conclude is that diversity proves to be a complex concept with multiple interpretations, as employee's understandings of diversity vary greatly due to their unique perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds.

4.2.2 Delving deeper into the nuances of diversity

The multitude of understandings of the concept of diversity results in a fragmented view, from which two components emerged when employees were asked to be more specific in their sensemaking. Gender and ethnicity were repeatedly mentioned by interviewees as the primary attributes of diversity, regardless of their role in the department or seniority, giving more substance to the concept.

Ulrika's excerpt perfectly summarizes the tone of the respondents:

“This is my very personal opinion. I think my impression is that we think of gender and nationality quite a lot”. - Ulrika

Ulrika encompasses nationalities and gender as the two main attributes of diversity for the department. Mikael, points out that diversity is understood in terms of gender, expressing certain criticism:

“I think it has been very much focused on gender or sex in the sense of men and women because that's what they count. How many women lecturers do we have? How many female and male students?”. – Mikael

The excerpt suggests that from his point of view, the approach mainly taken for diversity could result in a disregard for other types of diversity that are equally significant, including diversity in terms of ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, among others.

The next excerpt from Pernille exemplifies clearly how gender and ethnicity are the two main attributes of diversity that the employees acknowledge when they are making sense of the term diversity.

“And I think we have diversity, especially in relation to nationalities. We also have lots of international colleagues here. [...] Then there is the gender aspect between the ratio of men and women or other genders. [...] I think those two are perhaps the most important. Then we also have different religions, of course, and ethnicities because we are an international workplace.– Pernille

The excerpts clearly convey that the employees of the department, regardless of their role, gender or tenure in the Institution, understand diversity in quite many different ways. From their own understanding, it is a vague concept, complex and all over the place. Nevertheless, two attributes stand out, ethnicity and gender.

Digging deeper into the concept of diversity in relation to ethnicity and gender, two dominant themes emerged throughout the interviews that exemplify the interviewee's shared perceptions of diversity within the department.

4.2.2.1 Recruitment

From the interviews, it is evident that some interviewees link diversity with the hiring process at the department. For example, Jesper focuses on minimizing biases by looking beyond obvious qualifications and prioritizing an individual's personality, talent, and skill set:

"We look into the applicants, we look at where we are biased [...] I think with my employees, the personality, their talent, their skill set is more important than the experience." - Jesper

This indicates that he values diversity of thought and perspective in his team. However, he acknowledges that bias is difficult to completely eliminate from the recruitment process.

Abel, who also recurs to the recruitment process of the department to illustrate how diversity is understood for it, explains how the recruitment should be:

"I believe that people need to be recruited based on their merits and what they can contribute. [...] Diversity is that you're given an equal chance, an equal opportunity to compete and that you are selected only because of your merits and credentials, not because you can add some kind of symbolic value to the institution." – Abel

This excerpt from Abel highlights the importance of equal opportunity selection regardless of ethnicity or gender, selecting the most qualified person based on meritocracy and equal opportunity.

Pernille further mentions the importance of diversity in the recruitment process, interpreting and standing for another approach opposite to Abel. She states that there is a continued attempt to include women in the process of evaluating candidates and to maintain gender balance in interview panels:

"There's a continued attempt to include women as well, both in the actual process of evaluating, but also when we invite people to come and do the interviews, we try to keep a gender balance there." - Pernille

However, she notes that finding a diverse candidate who is also an internationally recognized researcher and able to teach in Swedish is a difficult task, which indicates that there may be limitations to the department's recruitment pool that could impact the diversity of the workforce.

"[...] finding that in one person and also one that is diverse, it's super difficult. It really is." - Pernille

Nevertheless, Emma highlights the benefits of diversity in terms of human talent and productivity, indicating that a more diverse workforce can bring a range of perspectives and ideas to the department:

"I think we lose some needs, human talent, human productivity, and I think we can get that if we open up to recruit people from a more diverse background." - Emma

Overall, there are clear similarities in the opinion of the three interviewees in terms of the importance placed on diversity in recruitment. Each interviewee acknowledges the value of a diverse workforce in terms of its impact on productivity, innovation, and teaching. However, there are also differences in their viewpoints, particularly in terms of the challenges they face when attempting to recruit diverse candidates. While Jesper emphasizes personality and skill set over experience, Abel stands for meritocracy, Pernille struggles to find a candidate who is both internationally recognized and able to teach in Swedish, and Emma sees diversity as a means to bring in more human talent and increase productivity. They all seem to value diversity but have slightly different approaches and reasons for doing so.

4.2.2.2 Inclusion

During the interviews, when we further questioned diversity within the department, some interviewees moved into the concept of inclusion. In turn, they specifically characterized inclusion as encompassing transparency and belongingness. Notably, even when initially asked

about the department's culture and the work environment, certain individuals emphasized these very concepts. This excerpt from Pernille exemplifies how they relate diversity to inclusion:

“An overarching view of diversity, which is closely related to inclusion” - Pernille

To understand the reasoning behind this relation, we dived deeper into the topic of inclusion. When addressing it, the employees' replies revealed that regardless of their position in the organization, they have a shared perception of inclusion, as only two key related themes emerged: “transparency” and “belongingness”.

Transparency

"Transparency" was the first theme that surfaced. According to their perception, inclusion entails being transparent and truthful about the institution's procedures and being aware of any kind of information, regardless they are decision-makers of the matter, only affected by it or merely passive spectators. Participants stressed the importance of openness for including everyone in the decision-making process, not taking anybody for granted. For example, Ulrika comes up with transparency as the first word when she thinks about diversity at the department:

“Transparency, I think. Even if you're not, perhaps the one to decide on a certain issue, you're supposed to know about it. [...] Actually, even if I don't feel included when someone says “Oh, yeah, we've already done that” and “that's kind of part of what you have to do”, I should somehow be informed about it. So I think include the other person and then you will decide if you want to join or not.” - Ulrika

When she is asked whether she feels there is transparency in the department, she states:

“I think this is an issue that we have at least that the management is kind of criticised for because they don't know much. The other members of the department don't share and I think the management also feels that the department does stuff, but they don't know that well.” - Ulrika

The first excerpt shows how transparency is understood as a key element to foster a sense of inclusiveness. Having access to information or at least knowing the mechanisms and channels to be informed are sensed as crucial, as well as being acknowledged of the decisions taken regardless of not having an active role in them. The second excerpt, opposing the management with the rest of the employees, not only decreases evidence that transparency is not present at the department, but also, that it is hindered by having different groups within it, as Ulrika's statement hints that there are at least two different groups and the ones feeling part of one, do not feel included in the other.

The reality of inclusion efforts at the department is well framed with an episode mentioned by various employees. A new guide to provide tips and direction about how to handle harassment, discrimination and victimization was published. The guide was released in English, however the event to present it was held in Swedish. This situation, among other statements made by the interviewees, illustrates that the efforts of the department to foster a sense of belonging and transparency are not well executed. Pernille narrates the situation adding her personal view about it:

“There was a new discrimination guide or protocol released, which was in English, but the whole ceremony around it was in Swedish, sort of preventing the international staff from joining. And it seems sometimes it is forgotten that there are people here that don't speak Swedish. But on the other hand, we are by law requested to provide teaching in Swedish, so it is a Swedish university. So I think the national identity should also be clear. It's a continuous balance”. – Pernille

The excerpt touches on a trade-off that organisations with a diverse workforce frequently encounter. Despite publishing the guideline in English, making the information available and understandable for all employees, the seminar for it was undoubtedly discriminatory, as Pernille states. The challenge of establishing an inclusive workplace that accommodates everyone is not limited to public events within the department, where language barriers hinder transparency of information. This challenge is also evident in the day-to-day experiences of the employees, resulting in a fragmented workforce divided into smaller groups.

On the other hand, the following excerpts from Emma suggest how the employees of the department make sense of inclusion with the help of transparency, as she understands inclusion in terms of openness and sharing information and sees both as key to promoting inclusion in the workplace. Questioning how to organize research groups and using the word “*my friends*” unveils the unclear state of the department:

“It’s transparency, being more open and sending out information, making sure people get the information, inviting people in. For example, when it comes to applying for research money, shall we include everyone and say who wants to join me on a project about inclusion ? Or shall I just go and talk to those I normally have lunch with, my friends?” - Emma

She highlights the importance of a good work environment and effective communication, as she links these aspects to the concept of inclusion. Moreover, Emma expresses a concern about the existence of “inner circles” and emphasizes the need for equal chances and information sharing among employees. Her remarks reflect a belief in the value of creating a fair and inclusive work environment, where everyone has equal access to opportunities and resources:

It’s also about having a good work environment. How can we communicate better? [...]. I think that is inclusion and there’s a natural inclusion when people are getting the same chances to go to conferences, to get to travel, to be part of, to get information, there shouldn’t be any inner circles [...] ” - Emma

Combining the wishful thinking of Emma with Pernille’s view on the fragmented workforce, suggests that the department has no clear organizational culture for its employees to identify with. Furthermore, Ingrid mentions the forming of what could be described as a culture within fragmented smaller groups of the department. This implies that each group has its own unique ways of operating and interacting:

“Within the different groups, which consist of teachers and researchers, there are quite different habits that have developed into what you may describe as culture” - Ingrid

Alva further supports this notion by highlighting the variation in norms among different groups within the department. This suggests that different subgroups within the department have different cultures they identify with:

“The department has diverse subjects. I think it can also be very different between those subjects. Like organization groups, I think each has some kind of norms guiding them” - Alva

Overall, these findings suggest that while there may be diverse cultures within smaller groups, there is a lack of a cohesive and shared organizational culture for the department, intrinsically resulting in a lack of belonging.

Belongingness

The sense of belongingness is another theme that emerged when talking about diversity and zooming further into inclusion. According to this, the employee’s perception of inclusion entails developing an environment in which every person can feel respected and welcomed as a member of a greater community, and where everyone may freely share their know-how, experiences, and opinions. Looking into the way different individuals view their roles in an organization, their responsibilities, and the importance of inclusion and communication, each interviewee provided unique perspectives on their experiences working in their respective positions. For example, Alva describes that the employees from the same department do not collaborate or know each other:

“But I also think that the other groups can be very different, but I don't work so much with other people, so I don't know. I think we have 200 employees here or something, and most of them, I don't know, I've never met. [...] We have the teachers, lecturers, and administrative staff, which are quite different groups, and we have very different views of things. When we talk, we see different things in the topics, or problems, or solutions” - Alva

Adding on to this point of view, Ingrid comments on the atmosphere of her department and how it has evolved into several small departments under the coordinating umbrella:

"These different groups have tended to develop in different directions, so instead of the department as a whole, it's been more several minute departments under the coordinating umbrella." - Ingrid

Additionally, Emma confirms that the separation is not only amongst employees from the same department, but between different departments as well:

"Many people here don't really meet that many people from other departments. It's like small companies on their own." - Emma

Ingrid further explains how some employees are left out and how this might be a statement or a result of missing out and not being included. She also discusses how doctoral students have been left on their own, and how the grouping of the organization has caused many to fail to see the changes in the PhD program:

"It's not like you start together with 10 out there or so and have a group. And also, when they come they are new, and they have an office or an office space in one of the subgroups, and perhaps the doctoral student that was employed before them belonged to another group." - Ingrid

However, to gain the perspective of a PhD student, we interviewed a representative, who shared his struggles to balance his personal and professional responsibilities, which sometimes makes it challenging to participate in organizational activities:

"They organise a lot of things and meetings, even activities, fun activities like this, tennis for example. And there's so many things going on. And I have a family and PhD and teaching and all kinds of responsibilities. There's a breakfast meeting, sometimes lunch meeting, there's a lot of things. So if I was not part of it, it's part of my own issue that I didn't have time for it." - Abel

This shows the positive changes at the faculty regarding inclusion, which are recognized not only by the employees, who enforce them, but by the ones who the changes are meant for as well. On the other hand, it appears that not every small group shares this opinion, as some fail to see the advantages of collaborating with others. Henrik highlights that some people in

different areas of the department rarely communicate or interact, and are busy with their own tasks. However, he also believes that there is potential for greater interaction and that this could be an advantage. He further suggests that colleagues who have worked together for years could learn from each other if they had more serious conversations, advocating for more collaboration and interaction within the department, suggesting that it could lead to positive outcomes:

“I mean, they know one another, but they rarely communicate or interact. So each and everyone is busy with their own stuff. There's a potential for growing the interaction between people, and I don't think that's necessarily a burden. I think that can sometimes be an advantage. Who knows what you might learn, you have been colleagues for 20 years, but you never had a serious conversation. Why not give it a chance? [...] Each and everyone is kind of tinkering with their own stuff. It's like a suburban area where everyone's “my home is my castle”..” - Henrik

Nevertheless, the sense of belonging to a group is not the same in the different levels of the organisation. The employees overall have a sense of belonging to the group of the department, because there is transparency and openness, but then they have a perception of being in small groups and not interacting with each other:

“The level of inclusion is low. [...] There is inclusion in the sense that there are lots of people who are similar, and I think they basically feel in a way on a group level included, they are part of a shared culture and shared values. But I see surprisingly little interaction between people, so if I may use 2 dimensions here, it's low on the interpersonal level and it's high on the group level.” - Henrik

Henrik suggests that although there is a feeling of belonging to a group and being included, there is a lack of significant interaction and personal relationships among individuals within the department. He hints that inclusion is not only being physically present in a group, pertaining to a workgroup or a department, but it is also about having and cultivating meaningful connections with others.

Nevertheless, Jesper emphasizes the importance of creating an inclusive atmosphere and notes that not all employees are equally social and that it is important to respect their differences:

“We are all different. We have some employees that are communicative, but the most difficult are usually those that are not that social. We don’t want everyone to be the same, but you still want to make sure that it’s not because they feel they can’t be a part of this group or this team.” - Jesper

Jesper also highlights the importance of diversity and encourages more interaction between subgroups within the organization:

“An area to improve is creating more interaction between some of these subgroups and some of the other ones in the corridors. Sometimes it tends to be like small teams. [...] not all of them have a natural way of interaction. So we are trying to promote that with different projects or tasks if those two competences could work together” - Jesper

In comparing the interviews, it is clear that communication, collaboration, and inclusion are essential elements for the employees of the department. While each individual has their own approach to these elements, they all recognize their importance.

4.3 Invisible Forces, Visible Impact: Unraveling the Underlying Factors of Diversity

In the last section we dived deeper into the different meanings of diversity. Hereafter, we explore how the Higher Education Institution has shaped the employees' understanding of the concept. Specifically, we will explore the role of academia and Swedishness in influencing the perception of diversity in the department. Through the experiences and perspectives of employees, we aim to gain an in-depth comprehension of how these factors influence diversity efforts in the academic context.

4.3.1 Academia

Despite selecting the participants based on heterogeneousness, as described in the Methodology, all interviewees appeared to be former students at the university, who are now working for it in various capacities. This shared experience of being both a student and an employee at the university allowed them to offer unique insights into the institution. When looking at what role the academic perspective is playing in the sensemaking of diversity and

inclusion, varying perspectives came forth. For example, Jesper believes that a diverse workforce and mindset are important to achieve the goal of being a top international university, noting that academia tends to prioritize but the department has grown organically and now has diverse perspectives:

“We can’t be a top international university without having, if not a diverse workforce, at least a diverse mindset. Being able to see not all but many perspectives on what’s needed in research and in education and in service to the students or professors or anything. It is important to be diverse to have as many perspectives as possible” - Mikael

Moreover, Mikael acknowledges that he has been respected in academia, despite the existing exclusionary seniority cult, where he experienced being treated like a child by senior colleagues and that it takes a long time to be taken seriously.

“When it comes to some seniors there is a seniority or has been at least seniority cult. So it takes to have two grown children and be at least 50 to feel like an adult.”
- Mikael

On the other hand, Pernille highlights the lack of female role models in academia and the difficulties women face in pursuing success in the field:

“There is still a lack of role models, we don't have any female professors. [...] I think in academia in general, the lack of female role models, the ability to become a success in academia as a woman is less than a man. [...] The journey to becoming a professor requires a lot of dedication and hard work, which may not always be compatible with having a life outside of academia.” - Pernilla

Similarly, Emma points out that academia still has male-dominated areas and a strong hierarchy that can create exclusion and division among different groups:

“We still have certain areas, which are very male dominated, all our heads of departments are male. [...] We have a very strong hierarchy in academia, which is getting better the higher you climb on the ladder, but that's of course not very good.

The hierarchy creates this exclusion where we have certain clear groups of associate professors, professors, postdocs and researchers, and PhD students. And it's very sometimes divided.” - Emma

Nevertheless, several interviewees mentioned how the university has changed since they were students. Ingrid, for example, noted how the university has become more focused on internationalisation and diversity since she was a student:

“It has been a conscious effort to increase diversity. It started, I don't know, 20 years ago perhaps. Because earlier everything here was in Swedish, but the discussions started about perhaps becoming more of an international opportunity. [...] So I think internationalisation has been really an important trend and it's core also as it has been enriching..” - Ingrid

Emma further notes that there has been a positive shift in how work environment and diversity issues are approached in academia over the past 15 years. While these topics were not commonly discussed when she started out, now they are taken very seriously by the university and faculty. The interviewee believes that this change has improved the situation significantly and that society as a whole is also changing in a positive way:

“I think when it comes to the work environment, it has changed. I would say in the 15 years since I started, when I started we didn't really discuss it, it was more like “This is academia. Get used to it.” Now it's extremely serious. The university takes it very seriously. The faculty takes it very seriously. There's no way to continue business as usual. So I think it's improving. A lot, and I think society is also changing.” - Emma

While Henrik highlighted the tension between the university's national identity and its desire to be representative of the world:

“If .. you're naturally thinking and have a kind of market mindset, you don't really understand how things here work. So this is a tension that we will have that we are very, very national in our approach and we at the same time, we try to be representative of the world like it looks today.” - Henrik

These observations suggest that the university is constantly evolving and adapting to new challenges and trends. Despite the changes, however, there is a shared sense of pride in the university among the interviewees, as Ulrika described the university as a "prestigious institution" and Pernille noted that "the national identity should also be clear" given that the university is required by law to provide teaching in Swedish. This pride in the institution could therefore be seen as a positive factor for employee morale and motivation.

The experience of being former students and now employees has given the interviewees a unique perspective on how the Higher Education Institution operates and how it has evolved over time. Their insights into the challenges of navigating the tension between national and international interests, their opinions on Sweden's national identity, and how their experience has influenced their communication styles while working at the university demonstrate the value of having former students as faculty members and staff. This experience enables them to provide unique insights and understandings of the university's mission and goals, as well as its role in Swedish and international education systems.

4.3.2 Swedishness

When reading between the lines of the empirical material, surprisingly, a certain culture and mentality emerged as a recurring topic in each of the interviews. Thus, we chose to further investigate the reasoning behind this phenomenon. Overall, the interviews suggest that Sweden is a country that values gender equality, education, work-life balance, and shared values. However, there are also challenges related to political correctness, multiculturalism, and balancing national identity with global connectivity. The analysis provides a nuanced understanding, with the topic of social inclusion being discussed in the context of the higher educational system in Sweden. The interviewees each have a unique perspective on social inclusion, however, they all seem to agree on the importance of diversity in their organisation.

To begin with, Ingrid discusses the limits of Swedish law when it comes to social inclusion. She acknowledges that laws can only be effective if they are clear-cut and manageable, which makes it difficult to judge what constitutes an offence against the law. Ingrid further argues that it is harder to enforce social inclusion laws because some forms of exclusion, such as those based on language or sexual orientation, are not always discriminatory:

“For a law to be effective, it has to be quite clear cut to be possible in a manageable way to judge what is an offence against the law and what isn’t. When it comes to social inclusion, it’s really hard, as we’ve talked about, you know perhaps it’s not discrimination, it’s something that would happen, no matter which language you speak, no matter what sexual orientation you have, no matter what the colour of your skin...” - Ingrid

However, she notes that her department has a general mindset of tolerance and inclusivity, although it may not always be put into practice:

“I see the general mindset of people employed at this department is quite tolerant, including. I’d say that the organisation or the department is tolerant as a general mindset. As others, it happens that it is not inclusive, that it’s not treating everyone equally, I mean equal opportunities, then there’s a reaction and it’s handled. So it’s rather built on reacting to when someone is breaking the rules rather than making sure that the rules are followed.” - Ingrid

Ingrid believes that the department is more reactive than proactive when it comes to enforcing inclusion and diversity.

Ulrika talks about how the faculty is focused on promoting Scandinavian values, including democracy, equality, openness, and critical debate, adding that *“in that sense there is definitely a diversity agenda”*. She notes that the school involves students in committees and boards, which is an excellent way for them to learn and get involved in the school's operations. Ulrika further highlights the importance of being welcoming and open to critical discussions, indicating that the school values different perspectives and opinions.

Furthermore, Jesper acknowledges that Swedes tend to be private, which makes it difficult to discuss all issues, but he also notes that there is potential for more inclusion and diversity in his organisation. He believes that people in academia are typically individualistic, and collective awareness or goals are not always central. However, he notes that there are many diverse perspectives in his organisation, which makes it interesting. Jesper emphasises the importance of making employees feel included, but notes that people are different and have

different ways of feeling included. He believes that creating more discussion is essential to promote inclusion and eliminate the possibility of prejudice:

“For inclusion, it is important to get the feeling from the employees by talking to them every day, making sure they are fine and they’re active and want to come out. But people are very different. Some really don’t want to be bothered and others are very social and they want to speak about things. Some of them really interact a lot, and some are more private, they don’t contribute so much to the discussion or diversity, including others. If you want to be left alone, it could be interpreted as “I’m not interested in you or your perspective”. I don’t feel like that. I would like to eliminate the possibility of it being interpreted like that by creating more discussion because I know this person doesn’t feel like that. But if two people don’t interact, your perception tends to be based on prejudice.” - Jesper

Abel's interview highlights the challenges that Sweden faces with political correctness and multiculturalism. He notes that Swedes are very concerned about being politically correct, which can make it difficult to have open and honest conversations about issues related to diversity and multiculturalism:

“It’s a very politically correct country. So everything is about being correct in the public space. So people are very much afraid of telling what they feel because you don’t want to be labelled. So Swedish multiculturalism is based on this political correctness. Instead of addressing the problem they tend to change a lot of things and you don’t talk about this kind of issue and people avoid this confrontation, they don’t want to talk about this kind of stuff” - Abel

He also notes that there are people who use accusations of racism as a way to gain advantages. This excerpt suggests that there may be a need for more open and honest conversations about diversity and multiculturalism in Sweden, which could help to create more meaningful change:

“Other people, for example, use racism as a way of getting some kind of advantage because it’s something that nobody wants to have. The repercussions of being

labelled as a racist is very difficult because it's a work society, it might lead you into losing your job, you might lose your reputation, it has a consequence.” - Abel

On another note, Henrik's interview highlights the tension between Sweden's national identity and its desire to be open to the world. He notes that Sweden is proud of its shared values and ideals, but it is also trying to be representative of the world:

“Swedish regulations and politics matter a lot. And if you just fly in from places where you're naturally thinking and have a kind of market mindset, you don't really understand how things work. So this is a tension that we are very national, very, very, very national in our approach and we at the same time, we try to be representative of the world like it looks today.” - Henrik

This is a possible reason why there is *“a focus on supplying the Swedish society with trained people in business”*. The tension between being a nation and being open to the world appears to be an ongoing challenge for Sweden as it tries to balance its national identity with its desire to be globally connected:

“Sweden is now an immigration country. I mean, 1/4 of the population has a background outside Sweden, but it's still extremely run with the ideal when I grew up. This being an enclosed country, a model for the world, shared values, etcetera. So this is something that not only our Higher Education Institution is struggling with but the entire country is struggling with what it means to be both a nation and being open to the world.” - Henrik

Overall, the interviews suggest that Sweden is a country that values gender equality, education, work-life balance, and shared values. However, there are also challenges related to political correctness, multiculturalism, and balancing national identity with global connectivity.

Looking into the tension between national identity and internationalisation, Pernille explains about working in a Swedish institution with laws that operate under Swedish, and being part of an international community:

“ I think there is this tension between, on one hand, being a Swedish institution where we have the laws that we operate under in Swedish and we have to provide teaching in Swedish, and then on the other hand, also having international research and being part of an international community. Globally, it's a constant tension that comes up in different ways. We just recruited a senior lecturer where we wanted, ideally, someone that could speak Swedish and teach in Swedish. On the other hand, we also want an internationally recognized researcher and finding that in one person and also one that is diverse, it's super difficult.” - Pernille

This theme is echoed by other interviewees, with Ingrid stating that there is a *"nationalistic tone"* in Sweden and a need to maintain a sense of *"Swedishness"* while acknowledging the diversity of the student body. Henrik also notes the potential barrier faced by international managers, working in Sweden:

“You need to understand the quirks of the Swedish University system to be an efficient manager” - Henrik

This tension is further evident in terms of language as well, as Pernille notes that the Swedish law requires teaching in Swedish, which can pose challenges for international students and employees:

“It seems sometimes that it is forgotten that there are people here that don't speak Swedish. But on the other hand, we are by law requested to provide teaching in Swedish, so it is a Swedish university.” - Pernille

A final theme that emerges is the importance of equality and diversity. Alva notes that diversity is valued in Swedish society, but there are still issues with discrimination and bias, particularly around gender and race:

“There are gender biases in some way, [...] there was a trans person working here for some weeks and there was nobody saying you were not welcome. Everybody

was very nice to him. So I don't think he felt not welcomed or anything. But of course, you hear them talking "What is it? Is it a male or female?" [...] And sometimes there are jokes that I think they're not maybe racist, but they are pointing someone out as a Black person." - Alva

Similarly, Abel notes that while there is a focus on multiculturalism and diversity in Sweden, it is often based on political correctness rather than meaningful discussion and action. Pernille also mentions that while there are equal opportunities in Sweden, there are still subtle ways that gender minorities and other social identities can experience challenges:

"it is worth keeping in mind that even though we think of Sweden as a very balanced, gender-balanced country, a very inclusive country, that there are lots of smaller, subtle ways. So, for example, placing activities in the school holidays of kids is very common here. Of course, you can't plan everything according to women who also have care responsibilities for kids. But it's just these small things that create some signals, whether this is a place also for working moms, or is it a place for the male academic that has support, which is sort of the traditional academic success story?" - Pernille

The importance of consensus and politeness in Swedish society is another common thread, for which Pernille explains that she can be too direct for Swedes who are *"consensus-driven and politically correct"*. Similarly, Ingrid notes that there is a culture of being *"nice"* and avoiding confrontation in Sweden, which can lead to challenges in discussing and addressing issues related to diversity and equality. This theme is echoed by Abel, who notes that people in Sweden are afraid to speak their minds for fear of being labelled as racist or facing social repercussions. It is thus evident that when we zoom into diversity in the context of Swedishness, the concept reduces its meaning in a homogenous way, creating a diversity paradox.

4.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we conducted an analysis of our empirical data in order to gain a deeper understanding of the way employees make sense of diversity in the context of the Higher Education Institution in Sweden.

To begin with, we analyzed the Strategic Plans of both the institution and faculty, as well as the Equal Opportunities Plan, suggesting that diversity is one of the fundamental principles and seen as a key component to unlock the success of the Higher Education Institution.

Followed by an analysis of the interviews, the multifaceted nature of diversity was examined through the lenses of the employees. By perceiving diversity through gender, ethnicity, recruitment and inclusion, the interviewees indicated a broader understanding of the concept beyond the initial scope outlined in the Strategic Plans. Hence, we dived deeper into how they make sense of diversity through inclusion, identifying transparency and belongingness as key emerging concepts.

Third, the academic environment and Swedishness have played significant roles in further shaping employees' perceptions of diversity, which will be further explored and discussed in the upcoming Chapter 5 (Discussion), where we will situate our findings within a broader theoretical framework.

Lastly, based on the findings from the analysis, we derive the following Figure 5, which provides a clear overview of the interrelation between the invisible forces that have a visible impact in the way diversity is understood in the department of the Higher Education Institution in Sweden.

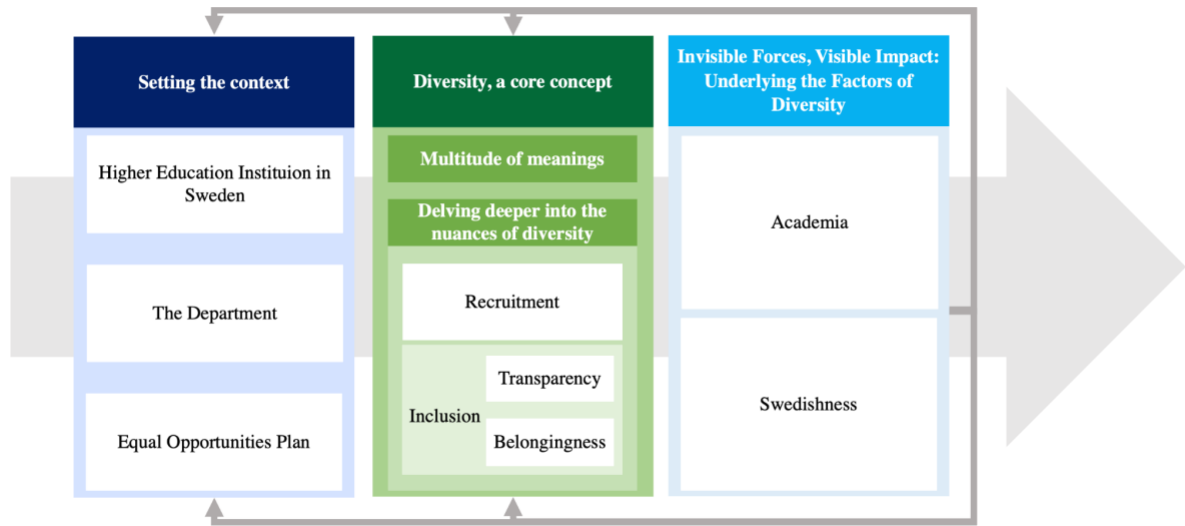


Figure 5: Key themes underpinning the narrative of the Chapter 4 with the interrelation between them.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, we will conduct a more extensive examination and interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter 4 (Empirical Findings and Analysis). We will achieve this by establishing links and correlations between our findings and existing literature. Figure 6 serves as a guideline to understand the findings and the interconnection among them.

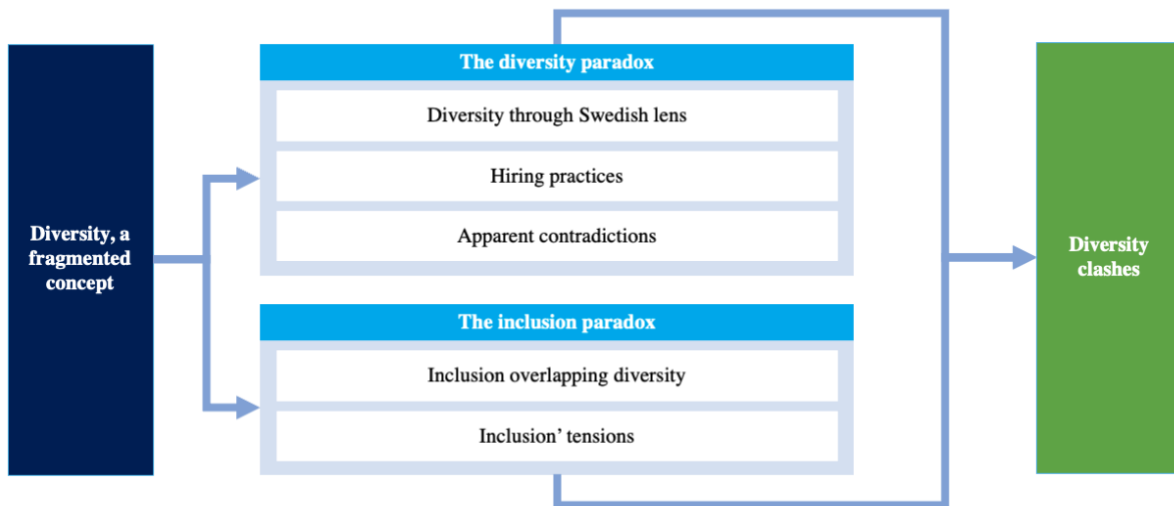


Figure 6: Outline of the main findings from Chapter 5.

5.1 Diversity, a fragmented concept

Employees from the department, regardless of their roles, gender, or tenure within the Institution, possess diverse understandings of diversity. They express various perspectives and dimensions of the term, and implicitly or explicitly, highlight the challenges associated with defining it. Among the interviewees, a broad range of interpretations regarding the definition of diversity emerged, reflecting contrasting views influenced by personal encounters and experiences. Their interpretations of diversity are characterized as multifaceted, vague, and heterogeneous, indicating its presence across multiple dimensions within the workplace. This absence of clarity and integration in the concept from the institutional side results in a lack of consistency among the definitions put forth by the interviewees. Thereby, we can empirically support Yadav and Lenka's (2020) proposition about the dearth of agreement concerning the

interpretation of diversity. Furthermore, the analysis of the interviews makes evident that the concept of diversity comprises a multitude of aspects, encompassing but not limited to gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, skills, attitudes (Yadav and Lenka, 2020). In addition, we find that diversity is a complex concept that goes beyond mere classification, as it involves the distinct experiences of employees, which are influenced by different factors (Roberson, 2019).

5.2 The diversity paradox

5.2.1 Diversity through Swedish lens

Two main dimensions of diversity emerged when the interviewees were asked to be more specific when defining the concept of diversity: gender and ethnicity. Individuals tend to mention only these two concepts due to how diversity management was translated in Sweden when this human resource management practice moved outside of the United States at the beginning of the new millennium (Boxenbaum, 2006). Through the findings of the analysis, we cannot confirm any stream of literature that advocates that diversity management was first translated into ethnicity (Holvino and Kamp, 2009; Omanović, 2009) or gender (Romani *et al.*, 2017). Nevertheless, these results validate Omanović's (2009) argument that when diversity management was first established in Scandinavia, it encountered another socio-cultural context that shaped it, reconceptualizing it to an ad-hoc dimension.

Furthermore, these two dimensions of diversity are consistent with Romani *et. al.*'s (2017) argument that it is common for companies to employ the diversity term in Swedish (*mangfoldighed*) to convey their dedication to promoting gender equality within the workplace and ensuring inclusion for individuals with a migrant background. Therefore, based on the empirical data, it can be concluded that the concept of Swedishness, which represents the national culture prevalent among most employees, significantly influences the employee's perception and interpretation of diversity (Chuang, Church and Zikic, 2004). In addition, the prominence of these two aspects of diversity provides further evidence for Yadav and Lenka's (2020) assertion that the social categorization perspective, which emphasizes attributes such as age, gender, and race; receives more attention compared to informational diversity.

5.2.2 Hiring practices

When delving deeper into the topic of diversity, employees highlighted gender and ethnicity as significant factors, particularly in relation to recruitment. This connection of topics could be seen as one more piece of evidence for Boxenbaum's (2006) theory, that when diversity management enters another country, it is translated to fit the receiving society. In this case, the interconnection between diversity and recruitment has its roots in the Swedish welfare state concept, which is related to the Swedish term of *Folkhemme* ("the people's home") whose main values are equality and mutual respect (Kautto, 2010). When diversity management was established in Sweden, due to the fundamental values of the welfare state, human resource management practices were adapted to be done through a system of collaborative diversity (Romani *et al.*, 2017). In consequence, recruitment was one of the first practices affected by diversity, which is a possible reason why by zooming into the concept, the employees linked gender and diversity with recruitment.

Furthermore, the department's recruitment process aligns closely with the Institution's commitment to promoting gender equality. It adheres to a strong set of non-discriminatory practices, ensuring fair and equal opportunities for all individuals in recruitment and career advancement. There is a clear focus on meritocracy and the Higher Education Institution ensures that all evaluations and assessments are solely based on an applicant's qualifications and abilities, aiming to create a fair and unbiased environment. Therefore, it is evident that the department's recruitment process aligns with the principles of "collaborative diversity practices", commonly found in Swedish resource management practices (Romani *et al.*, 2017). Based on this, we argue that the recruitment performed by the department is following an identity-blind structure (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995). It promotes fairness in human resource decision-making by eliminating discrimination and evaluating individuals based exclusively on their achievements. This fact also entails that diversity initiatives in the department are guided by the sameness perspective, which stands for equal treatment regardless sex, ethnic group, age, among others (Beardwell and Thompson, 2017). Lastly, the recruitment of the department can be a piece of evidence for Thomas & Ely's (1996) argument that the discrimination-and-fairness paradigm is the predominant approach to diversity management in organizations.

5.2.3 Apparent contradictions

According to Boxenbaum (2006), the prevalent Scandinavian value of homogeneity, which encompasses democratic principles and a commitment to equality, can potentially conflict with the principles of diversity management. This contradiction becomes evident in the divergent perspectives of employees regarding recruitment practices, highlighting the tension between Sweden's aspiration for a homogeneous society that treats everyone equally, and the essence of diversity, which involves recognizing and embracing differences among individuals (Romani *et al.*, 2017). Even though employees showed awareness of the department's recruitment approach and did not express disconformity, they expressed diverse opinions about how it is and should be conducted. In the findings we observed employees like Abel, standing for meritocracy and advocating a blind-identity approach corresponding to the department (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995). On the contrary, Pernille expresses her desire to include women in the process of evaluating candidates to maintain gender balance in the interview panels, showing evidence to Glasser's (1988) argument. He claims that despite blind-identity structures being designed to increase the representation of protected groups in employment, more comprehensive interventions may be required to achieve the desired transformation. Therefore, what Pernille suggests is grounded on identity-conscious structures, which in an effort to address these constraints of the blind-identity and sameness perspective, aim to integrate demographic identity into the decision-making process alongside individual merit (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995).

Consequently, we observe that the way diversity is highlighted as a core principle of the Institution and as a driver for change in the Strategic plans, clashes with the actual practices of diversity and its outcomes within the department. The reason is the apparent incompatibility of the welfare state of Sweden, rooted in a strong dedication to universal welfare benefits; and equality, with the essence of diversity management practices, whose emphasis is on diversity and recognizing individual differences (Roberson, 2019). Therefore, this phenomenon we named "the diversity paradox". The homogeneous society that stands for equality and fairness for everybody, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, and background, discourages the recognition and differential treatment of individuals due to the cultural inclination towards equalizing treatment, leading to a conflict with the principles of diversity management (Boxenbaum, 2006; Shore *et al.*, 2011; Romani *et al.*, 2017).

5.3 The inclusion paradox

5.3.1 Inclusion overlapping with diversity

The empirical data collected from the interviews indicated a noticeable connection between diversity and inclusion for some of the employees of the department. When making sense of diversity, interviewees often expanded the discussion to include the concept of inclusion. In addition, Pernille's statement "*An overarching view of diversity, which is closely related to inclusion*" exemplifies this connection, emphasizing the close relationship between diversity and inclusion. This finding corresponds to the existing literature, as Ferdman (2017) suggests that inclusion has gained increasing attention as a framework for understanding and addressing diversity. Furthermore, Oswick and Noon (2014) argue that diversity and inclusion are often considered co-dependent, while Roberson's (2006) perspective supports the likelihood of some overlap between the two concepts in practical terms. This proves the complexity of the concept of diversity and the need for employees to make sense of it by adding concretion in relation to the general talk about diversity.

Herein, the interviewees specifically characterized inclusion as involving transparency and belongingness, supporting their understanding of inclusion as an integral aspect of diversity. According to Roberson (2006), diversity has traditionally focused on the heterogeneity and demographic composition of groups or organizations, while inclusion studies have emphasized employee engagement, increased participation, and the integration of diversity into organizational systems and processes. Thus, the interviewees' emphasis on transparency — participation and decision-making — and belongingness as aspects of inclusion aligns with understanding inclusion as an active effort to engage employees and create an environment where diversity is embraced and integrated (Roberson, 2006). Moreover, this alignment corresponds to the respondents' perception of inclusion encouraging individuals to freely express their expertise, backgrounds, and viewpoints while experiencing respect and a sense of belonging within a larger community (Chavez and Weisinger, 2008).

Simultaneously, the perspectives shared by Henrik and Jesper regarding the need for increased interaction and collaboration within the department confirm Roberson's (2006) argument that

inclusion aligns with the identity-blind structure of Konrad and Linnehan's (1995). The author, based on Konrad and Linnehan's (1995) classification of identity-blind structures and identity-conscious structures, suggests that inclusion may align more closely with an identity-blind approach because the focus is on creating an environment that promotes equal treatment and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their group identity. This observation is highly coherent, as it aligns with the findings presented in the previous section on "The diversity paradox." Therefore, we could say that the manner in which diversity management practices are comprehended and implemented in the department is consistent with blind-identity frameworks (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995).

Finally, the recurring theme of culture and mentality, observed in the empirical material, aligns with the values of equality and mutual respect that are fundamental in Sweden (Pierson and Leimgruber, 2010). The Swedish approach to human resource management is characterized by collaborative diversity practices, which prioritize giving a voice to all members of the organization regardless of their tenure, role, or position. This corresponds to the notion of inclusive organizations that foster fairness, enrich job experiences, and encourage employee participation to create a sense of belongingness (Shore *et al.*, 2011). The interviews indicate that all of the interviewees, except for Abel, share a common understanding of the importance of diversity in their organization, which resonates with the collaborative diversity model's objective of meeting both organizational and employee needs (Romani *et al.*, 2017). The nuanced analysis of social inclusion within the context of the higher educational system in Sweden provides insights into how the values of equality, education, work-life balance, and shared values intersect with challenges related to political correctness, multiculturalism, and national identity in a globalized world.

5.3.2 Inclusion's tensions

In their discussions about inclusion and belongingness, interviewees highlight two distinct levels of connection. On one hand, employees generally experience a sense of belonging to their department, which is fostered by its transparent and open culture (Roberson, 2006). However, they also express a perception of being divided into smaller groups and lacking interaction with one another, which ultimately undermines their sense of belongingness within the organization. We can clearly discern employees' perception of fragmentation within the

department, characterized by the presence of small groups. Ingrid's explanation sheds light on the potential consequences of this fragmentation, leading to feelings of exclusion and a sense of "missing out." The lack of cohesion manifests in various forms, including a lack of transparency resulting from infrequent communication and interaction among different areas of the department. In addition, colleagues who have worked together for years have not communicated with each other, resulting in a lack of significant interaction and personal relationship among individuals within the department.

Thus, we observe that the department of the Higher Education Institution is experiencing the inclusion paradox of Self-Expression and Identity, as outlined by Ferdman (2017). There are two underlying rationales that substantiate our assertion regarding its presence. Firstly, according to Ferdman (2017) inclusion is a "process and practice that involves working with diversity as a resource" (p.235), which our analysis findings demonstrate with employees' understanding of inclusion being closely linked to the concept of diversity. Secondly, inclusion and belongingness incongruencies can be identified, which appoints inherent tensions within the perception of inclusion itself (Ferdman, 2017).

Delving into the intricacies of the paradox, employees express that, on one hand, inclusion for them entails a sense of belongingness and absorption within the larger departmental group. They strive to feel fully integrated and identified with this collective entity. However, based on the findings, it is evident that this sense of complete belonging and having a voice within the larger unit is not universally experienced by all employees. On the other hand, employees express a desire to maintain their uniqueness and distinctiveness, which is part of the inclusion process.

This phenomenon can be observed from multiple perspectives: firstly, employees commonly work in small groups. Secondly, they acknowledge the presence of an exclusionary seniority culture in academia, and thirdly, they recognize that individuals in academia often prioritize privacy and individualism over collective awareness or shared goals. All three entail that employees are seeking their uniqueness and distinctiveness, as inclusion involves the capacity to maintain one's unique identity while being part of a larger group, without having to compromise or give up one's valued identities (Ferdman, 2017). Nevertheless, this desire to be distinguished does not go against inclusion, as Berg (2011) claims that in a workgroup, individuals are more likely to experience a sense of

inclusion when they are encouraged to express dissenting views, bringing forth unique and sometimes differing perspectives.

However, these two polarities —Belonging & Absorption and Distinctiveness & Uniqueness clash by nature and create a feeling of frustration that inclusion can never be accomplished. This paradox can be effectively navigated when employees acknowledge and embrace the interconnected nature of the two aspects. By fully embracing and acknowledging their identity within the larger group, individuals can paradoxically embrace and express their unique qualities that set them apart from the rest of the group (Ferdman, 2017). In conclusion, following Shore et al.'s (2011) argument, employees need to simultaneously affirm and express one's uniqueness or differences from others to be able to genuinely belong to the larger group. In light of that, our findings support this observation, as it is evident that this full acknowledgement and acceptance of both factors of the inclusion paradox has not happened yet among employees, which triggers the feeling that inclusion is not fully achieved in the department (Ferdman, 2017).

5.4 Diversity clashes

Taking into consideration how diversity is portrayed in the Strategic Plans and the perceptions of the employees regarding diversity, misalignments can be detected. We call these misalignments “Diversity clashes” and in the following part we will focus on defining them and providing further elaboration.

On one hand, the analysis of the Strategic Plan of the Higher Education Institution indicates indisputably that gender equality and diversity are the fundamental principles in every part of the organization, as they are included as core values. Furthermore, in four of the six priority areas of the Strategic Plans, diversity and related concepts are highlighted as key components to unlocking the institutional goals for the future, which would imply that the institution ensures such principles are implemented and employees perceive these diversity efforts.

On the other hand, as employees delved into their understanding of diversity and provided detailed explanations, they illustrated a misalignment between their perceptions of diversity and the diversity components of the Strategic Plans. This indicates a lack of coherence in how

diversity is portrayed as a core value in both Strategic Plans and how it is perceived and experienced by the employees in their day-to-day work.

Thus, there are discrepancies between employees' understanding of diversity, influenced by Swedishness and the context of academia; and their actual experiences of diversity, which could be considered diversity clashes, attributing to three primary factors:

First, this discrepancy can be explained by the existence of the diversity paradox and the inclusion paradox. The former entails an incompatibility of Sweden's welfare state with the essence of diversity management practices (Roberson, Ryan and Ragins, 2017). That leads to pursuing diversity ideals that are hindered by the Swedish welfare state and values. Moreover, the paradox of inclusion means there is an ongoing tension to achieve inclusion since individuals want to belong to a group, but at the same time, they want to prevail and highlight their uniqueness (Ferdman, 2017). As the interviewees see diversity as inclusion, and specifically, as transparency and belongingness, which cannot be fully achieved due to the inclusion paradox, we could conclude that this intrinsic tension of inclusion hinders the deployment of diversity as they understand it (Ferdman, 2017).

Second, the critical perspective of diversity management can explain the discrepancy detected from another angle. The diversity management approach of the Higher Education Institution, and respectively, the department's approach, might have been influenced by pressure exerted by management trends. This is because an organization that fails to prioritize diversity and neglects to implement diversity management practices may be perceived as being outdated. Moreover, when institutions adopt management practices due to external pressure, the practices are not adjusted to the institution and tend to fail easier (Prasad, Prasad and Mir, 2011). Therefore, the fact that diversity is present in the Strategic Plan and core values, but it is not truly implemented could be explained through Prasad, Prasad and Mir's (2011) argument, which states that organizations that adopt the management trend of emphasizing diversity management as an essential practice, do it to enhance their legitimacy among various stakeholders. This would explain why the interviewees perceive a misalignment with the actuality, as most diversity programs fail and simultaneously, do not increase diversity due to the lack of local relevance (Prasad, Prasad and Mir, 2011; Dobbin and Kalev, 2016).

Third, the clash between what employees perceive as diversity and how they see it within their workday life could be partially explained by Lee and Kramer's (2016) theory, since organizational culture is acknowledged as a key contextual factor that shapes and influences diversity (Bakhri, 2018). Our findings suggest that the department has no clear organizational culture for its employees to identify with, which entails that the organizational culture is loose (Lee and Kramer, 2016). Therefore, the lack of a tight organizational culture, in combination with a strong national culture (Swedishness), creates challenges in promoting and implementing diversity practices that correspond to the Strategic Plan and further contributes to the observed divergence between employees' perceptions and experiences of diversity in the department.

5.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the findings from Chapter 4 are further analyzed and we provide interpretations. The concept of diversity is explored, and it is found that employees in the department hold diverse understandings of diversity, they have contrasting views influenced by personal experiences which leads to confirm it is a complex concept. The concept of diversity in Sweden is focused primarily on gender and ethnicity. The recruitment practices of the department align with the Swedish commitment to promote fairness and equal opportunities. However, there are apparent contradictions between the Swedish value of homogeneity and the principles of diversity management. We call this the diversity paradox. The findings show evidence that the concept of inclusion is closely linked to diversity, and employees emphasize transparency, belongingness as important aspects of it. A sense of fragmentation is detected within the department, with employees feeling divided into smaller groups and lacking interaction. However, at the same time they express that they have uniqueness and not only want to interact, which somehow is inherent in the academia profile of employees. This can be explained by the inclusion paradox, where employees strive for both a sense of belonging and maintaining their uniqueness. Effectively navigating this paradox requires embracing and acknowledging one's identity while being part of a larger group.

Through the analysis of the findings, we identify a misalignment between the organization's emphasis on diversity in its Strategic Plan and employees' actual perception and experience of diversity. In the last part of the discussion, we suggest that this discrepancy could be attributed to the diversity paradox and inclusion paradox, external pressures to adopt diversity management practices without local relevance, and a lack of a clear organizational culture that hinders diversity promotion.

6. Conclusions

This chapter provides a concise overview of the empirical findings and introduces the theoretical contributions. Additionally, we derive implications for practice from the conducted research and offer suggestions for future research.

In the beginning of this study, our work outlined the research problem which calls for further investigation of diversity in the context of Sweden, more specifically under the perspective of employees. We have shown that there is less research about how diversity has been translated in Scandinavia and the need of tapping into the complexity of the concept.

By conducting our study in the context of a department of a Higher Education Institution in Sweden, the purpose was to further enhance the understanding of how diversity is understood and translated in this particular setup.

We recall the research question which guided our study:

How do employees of a Higher Education Institution in Sweden perceive diversity?

In the subsequent sections, we address the research question by offering a comprehensive overview of the empirical findings and theoretical contributions that have emerged from our conducted study.

6.1 Main Empirical Findings

From the conducted study, we *first* find, as literature suggests, that diversity is perceived as complex concept from the point of view of the employees. The research shows that it encompasses different dimensions and multitude of meanings which are influenced by different factors. Therefore, it is a fragmented concept inside the department.

Second, the study outlines that diversity management in Sweden is influenced by the reconceptualization of the practices to fit the socio-cultural context. The findings show that ethnicity and gender are the primary dimensions of diversity emphasized in the department and that the recruitment practices are based on identity-blind structures within meritocracy. Furthermore, we find a diversity paradox in the department. There is a tension between Sweden's commitment to homogeneity and the principles of diversity management which aim for recognizing and embracing differences among individuals. Hence, the highlighted importance of diversity in the Strategic Plans clashes with the actual practices and outcomes perceived in the department due to this diversity paradox.

Third, digging deeper into the concept of diversity, the employees perceive it as inclusion. Inclusion, on its turn, from employees' perspective is multifaceted, as it entails belongingness and transparency.

Fourth, our findings show that in the department there is a second paradox due to the inherent tensions of inclusion. The inclusion paradox shapes employees' sense of inclusion, and at the same time, modifies how they perceive diversity. Employees need to simultaneously affirm and express their uniqueness or differences from others to be able to belong to the larger group. In light of that, the findings show that this full acknowledgment and acceptance of both factors of the inclusion paradox has not happened yet among employees, which suggests that inclusion is not fully achieved in the department.

Fifth, we identified diversity clashes that could have contributed to the observed divergence between employees' understandings of diversity and their actual experiences. This divergence could be explained by the diversity paradox, the inclusion paradox, the discourse of management fashions and the lack of tight organizational culture.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

Given the study's context and research question, our research makes a substantial contribution by conducting an empirical examination of diversity within a Higher Education Institution context in Sweden from employees' perspective.

Despite the existing meaningful and substantial research on diversity, since it is a topic that has captured attention during the past years in the field of organizational studies and management (Oswick and Noon, 2014), our study is framed within a research problem that called for further empirical analysis (Roberson, 2019). We delved deeper into the intricacies of diversity, tapping into the complexity of the concept. By doing so, a more nuanced understanding of diversity has been achieved from the employees' perspective, enabling a better grasp of its impacts in the workplace.

Our study contributes to expanding the scope of diversity studies and recognizing that a thorough understanding of diversity requires exploring diverse cultural and national contexts (Shore, Cleveland and Sanchez, 2018). Specifically, our research enriches the current literature about diversity in Sweden, since the formalization and establishment of diversity as a field of practice have not achieved a comparable level of advancement as in the United States, where it originated (Boxenbaum, 2006). Our findings contribute to the existing theory on contextualizing diversity management in Sweden by analyzing how diversity takes into account social dynamics, legislation and contextual factors (Konrad, Prasad and Pringle, 2006).

Until the date, research in this field has put insufficient attention to the perspectives and encounters of employees regarding diversity (Konrad, Prasad and Pringle, 2006; Omanović, 2009). One possible explanation, as the former authors propose, is that managers may hesitate to grant researchers access to investigate employees' experiences due to their concerns that such studies could uncover the presence of hostile environments. Therefore, having had access to a Higher Education Institution, examining employees' perceptions and encounters regarding diversity contributes to this field by adopting an interpretivist perspective and considering the perspectives of the ones, who have not yet received adequate research attention.

In light of the aforementioned points, our study makes a valuable contribution by affirming the conclusions drawn by Yadav and Lenka (2020) in their extensive review of diversity literature spanning over two decades. Our findings emphasize that diversity is a multifaceted concept influenced by various factors, extending beyond mere categorization, and embracing the diverse experiences of employees. We validate the argument that diversity adapts and translates with particularities to fit the receiving socio-cultural context (Boxenbaum, 2006; Omanović, 2009). In the case of Sweden, our findings confirm that diversity was influenced by the Swedish welfare state and values, leading to a diversity paradox where Sweden's commitment to homogeneity tensions with the principles of diversity management (Romani *et al.*, 2017). We provide evidence that diversity can overlap with inclusion and that in the Swedish context both are framed under the premise of identity-blind structures (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995; Roberson, 2006). In addition, our findings acknowledge that there is an inherent paradox within inclusion (Ferdman, 2017). Lastly, our study identifies different clashes that could have contributed to a divergence between employees' perceptions of diversity and their actual experiences, and therefore, how they make sense of diversity. Our contribution lies in proposing potential explanations that allow for the further advancement of the field of diversity from the perspective of employees in Sweden.

6.3 Implications for Practice

Our reasoning for choosing diversity as our research topic was driven by its growing importance and inherent complexity (Yadav and Lenka, 2020). As can be seen from the study, the broad nature of the term "diversity" leads to varying definitions and interpretations among individuals. This multitude of meanings has the potential to pose challenges for organizations, such as the department of the Higher Education Institution, aiming to develop effective diversity plans and practices.

Nevertheless, some of the concepts that emerged, when employees were asked to clarify their understanding of diversity, were inclusion, and lack of a clear organizational culture for employees to identify with, resulting in a weakened sense of belongingness. Taking this into consideration, we believe practitioners should consider having a strong organizational culture because it is crucial for fostering a sense of belongingness among employees (Chuang, Church and Zikic, 2004). When employees have a clear understanding of the organization's culture and feel aligned with its principles, they are more likely to develop a sense of belongingness, instead of sticking to their smaller groups. Moreover, having a strong organizational culture also promotes a supportive and inclusive environment, by establishing norms of transparency and open communication, which are essential for fostering a sense of belongingness (Lee and Kramer, 2016).

Additionally, our research highlights the existence of a diversity paradox within the Swedish context, where the commitment to homogeneity and identity-blind structures clashes with the principles of diversity management (Lee and Kramer, 2016). In order to effectively increase diversity, particularly in terms of gender balance and representation of individuals from different backgrounds, human resource practitioners of Swedish organizations should shift towards an identity-conscious approach, which entails recognizing and acknowledging the differences and unique experiences of individuals while still evaluating qualifications and merits in a fair and unbiased manner (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995). By adopting an identity-conscious approach Swedish organizations and institutions with similar characteristics could better navigate the complexity of diversity in the Swedish context.

Furthermore, our findings suggest that practitioners should prioritize implementation of their diversity practices based on the goals of their strategic plans and formal policies. The influence of national culture on organizational culture indicating that organizations operating within tight cultural contexts face stronger constraints from their national culture (Lee and Kramer, 2016), should not deter organizations from actively embracing diversity and inclusivity. By aligning their diversity practices with the goals from their strategic plans and formal policies, practitioners can better navigate the barriers imposed by the strong national culture and create a more inclusive environment. However, the strong national culture should be viewed as an opportunity rather than a hindrance, as it provides a unique context for the institutions to demonstrate their commitment to diversity and challenge existing cultural norms.

Lastly, to achieve success in implementing diversity practices, practitioners should ground and adjust these diversity practices to the specificities of the organization and the local context, in order to ensure relevancy. That would avoid engaging in meaningless imitation influenced by the discourse of fashion (Prasad, Prasad and Mir, 2011). Thus, in the Swedish context, this entails being aware of the existence of the diversity paradox that can trigger diversity clashes between what the organization aims in terms of diversity and what the employees perceive (Romani *et al.*, 2017).

6.4 Suggestions for Future Research

We believe our findings contribute to the existing literature for diversity, however, we also acknowledge the potential for further research on the topic. Hence, based on the limitations of our data collection and analysis, we propose the following suggestions:

First, in order to enhance the generalizability of the findings, future research should consider including a larger and more diverse sample size, consisting of multiple higher education institutions and cultural contexts. This would allow for a broader representation of perspectives within academia, providing a more thorough understanding of how employees make sense of diversity. Therefore, researchers should include universities from various regions of Sweden, enabling comparisons between institutions, capturing a broader range of perspectives, contributing to the development of more effective diversity management strategies.

Second, researchers should include a greater number of international employees as interviewees, which would provide valuable insights into how individuals from different cultural backgrounds perceive diversity within the context of a Swedish Higher Education Institution. By examining the experiences and perspectives of international employees, the study can shed light on the intersection of cultural diversity and organizational practices, further enriching our understanding of diversity management and its implications.

Third, we recommended researchers to include other dimensions of diversity that have received less attention in previous studies. For example, Yadav and Lenka (2020) propose exploring dimensions such as informational diversity, which is more task-oriented, in addition to the social categorization perspective that focuses on relational aspects like age, gender, and race. By incorporating additional dimensions, the research can provide a more thorough understanding of diversity in the workplace and hence, address the challenge of effectively integrating different aspects of diversity. While this current study focuses on social categorization perspective, future research could delve into the complexities and implications of other dimensions of diversity, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of diversity management in organizations.

Appendix

1. Appendix 1 – Semi-structured Interview Guide

Introductory questions

- Could you tell us a little bit about yourself? Who you are, where are you from, and how did you end up working at this Department of this Higher Education Institution?
- What is your job at the department? Could you describe to us your role and main tasks?
- How long have you been working at the department?
- What are the values of the department?

Understanding Diversity

- What does diversity mean to you?
- What does it mean to the department?
- How diverse do you perceive the environment of the department?
 - Why?
- What are you missing?
- What are the attributes of the department that you consider diverse?
- How do you experience diversity in the department?
- Can you mention an example of how this diversity is represented in the department?
- Does the department have any policy about diversity?
 - Could you give us an example of it?
 - How do you perceive it?
- Have you ever received any training about diversity?
- In your opinion, how do you think diversity impacts the overall success of the department?

Open questions

In this part, the questions differed based on what they had perceived as diversity to deep dive into the topics mentioned. Some examples of questions were about inclusion, recruitment, diversity policies, etc.

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