



LUND UNIVERSITY

The New Trade Union Model:

A Strategic Action Field Approach to the Trade Union
Organization of Umbrella Company Workers in Sweden

By

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Master's Thesis, SOCM04, 30 Credits

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Spring Semester 2023

Word Count: 22192

Abstract

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This thesis analyses a new trade union model for umbrella company workers and the changes in the field of trade unions in Sweden. By conceptualizing trade unions as collective actors within strategic action fields I describe and explain how a small independent trade union and challenger in the field, Säljarnas Riksförbund, has managed to construct a new trade union model for umbrella company workers that differs from the traditional model used by the incumbent Unionen, the largest trade union in Sweden. Säljarnas Riksförbund challenges what a trade union club is and Unionen's position in the field. Through two iterations of interviews with key representatives and document analysis of central documents, this case study provides empirical findings of how the new trade union model differs from the traditional model and how it poses a challenge for Unionen. There are three main findings, 1) The new trade union model has a divided organizational structure and works both as a part of the employer organization and the trade union and acts for both organizations, 2) The new trade union model operates primarily toward the state, unemployment insurance funds, and umbrella company workers. 3) The new trade union model organizes its members based on the constructed form of work, umbrella company work which challenges the traditional principle of organizing based on industrial or occupational belonging. The study finds that the incumbent and challenger did not perceive the stakes in the field similarly, the internal governance units have not hindered the emerging challenge, and a change in a related field has not only destabilized the field in question but also invaded it. An episode of contention is emerging and the rules in the field are in flux.

Keywords: Trade unions, Solo self-employment, Umbrella companies, Strategic action fields, Collective actors, Industrial relations, Umbrella Company Workers

Popular Science Summary

This study explores how trade unions organize umbrella company workers in Sweden. It focuses on a new trade union club that has been created by Säljarnas Riksförbund together with the umbrella company Frilans Finans. These two labor market parties established the first collective agreement and the first trade union club for umbrella company workers in Sweden. This is studied in relation to Unionen, the largest trade union in Sweden, which previously decided not to conclude a collective with the same umbrella company. The question is how and why did Säljarnas Riksförbund chose to conclude a collective agreement whereas Unionen did not? Säljarnas Riksförbund has taken the initiative from Unionen to become the trade union for umbrella company workers. Against this background, I pose three questions with the aim of understanding and exploring how this new trade union club is organized, how it works, and how it changes the field of trade unions. By designing this thesis as a case study and conducting two rounds of interviews with key representatives of each organization and analyzing the central documents of these organizations this thesis provides answers. The analysis shows that the new trade union club in fact is a new trade union model, a new way of organizing members, and a new way of acting as a trade union. This new model is an alternative model to the traditional one and thus challenges what a trade union is and what it does.

The analysis shows that Säljarnas Riksförbund, through their alternative union model poses a challenge to the traditional trade union model of organizing employees and to Unionen's position in the field. The new union club is both a member of the employer's company and the trade union. The new union club maintains a dialogue with the employer through processes within the company itself and works for both organizations toward the state, unemployment insurance funds, and umbrella company workers. The new trade union model organizes umbrella company workers based on their form of employment and because umbrella company workers can work in many different industries and in different occupations it challenges the traditional partition of possible union members.

The thesis also provides some theoretical insights. The organization's apprehensions of what is going on in the labor market diverge. The confederation TCO has not actively interfered with the development as the theory predicts, and the umbrella company Frilans Finans has not only posed a change but also a destabilization among trade unions. This can be the beginning of a contestation between trade unions in Sweden.

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Abbreviations

EAFB	Egenanställningsföretagen
IAF	Swedish Unemployment Insurance Inspectorate
IGU	Internal governance unit
LO	The Swedish Trade Union Confederation
REA	Rådet för egenanställda
SACO	Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations
SAF	Strategic action field
TCO	The Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees

Acknowledgments

Writing this thesis in the master's program at Lund University has been a very interesting and rewarding experience. This thesis could never be written without the contributions of other people. In this section, I want to convey my appreciation and gratitude to all of you. I want to thank Katarina Strandberg, Jan Zetterström, Stephen Schad, Patrik Pedersen, and Nina Lundqvist for participating in this study and sharing your experience and knowledge with me. Without you, this study would not have been possible. I want to thank my supervisor Charalambos Demetriou for your support and advice during the whole process of writing the thesis. Your advice has kept me on track, and I have learned a lot from you. I want to thank Anders Kjellberg for sharing your knowledge about trade unions with me and keeping me updated on your work. I want to thank Daniel Karlsson for the interesting discussion about the thesis. I want to thank Rasmus Ahlstrand for the discussion about this thesis and for inviting me to present my ongoing work in the research environment for sociology and professions in the Department of Sociology at Lund University. Thank you, all researchers that participated in this group that created many interesting presentations and discussions. I want to thank Alison Gerber for inviting me to her research group and to all researchers that are a part of the group for having me and letting me sharpen my sociological skills together with you. Finally, I want to give my loving thanks to my partner Maria Tilly Karlsson who supported me all the time.

Alexander Moser Uppström
Lund 2023-08-15

1 Introduction

In 2021 the first-ever collective agreement for umbrella company workers¹ in Sweden was concluded by the independent trade union Säljarnas Riksförbund and the umbrella company Frilans Finans. Shortly thereafter Säljarnas Riksförbund also established the first-ever trade union club for umbrella company workers in Sweden named Rådet för egenanställda, or in short, REA. Umbrella companies and umbrella company workers has been an element in the Swedish labor market since the 1990s, but it was first around 2012 when the industry association for umbrella companies, Egenställningsföretagen (EAFB), was established when the idea of establishing a collective agreement became a viable option. Unionen, the largest trade union in Sweden was quick to initiate discussions with Frilans Finans about a possible collective agreement. However, the discussion stopped in 2017-2018 and in response, Frilans Finans created *Frilans Finans Råd*, a council within Frilans Finans with the objective of working for better conditions for umbrella company workers. This council was criticized for being a “yellow union”, a trade union governed by the employer, which was denied by the CEO Stephen Schad (Björk 2018a; Björk 2018b). This perception of the council eventually led to one member leaving his position in the council (Markusson 2018). Eventually, in 2021 when Säljarnas Riksförbund and Frilans Finans reached an agreement and concluded the new collective agreement the same council was transformed into a trade union club of Säljarnas Riksförbund, named Rådet för egenanställda (REA). The trade union club was constructed by Säljarnas Riksförbund and Frilans Finans and it is the first attempt in Sweden to organize umbrella company workers in a trade union club in an umbrella company. There is yet no research on trade union organizations for umbrella company workers in the Swedish labor market. This development is intriguing, how, and why did Säljarnas Riksförbund establish a collective agreement and a trade union club for umbrella company workers and why did Unionen, decide not to?

This is important to study because the Swedish model of industrial relations, characterized by self-regulation rather than state regulation, implies that the labor market parties such as trade unions and employer associations regulate the labor market. Collective bargaining between trade unions and employers about collective agreements and other

¹ Solo self-employment can be used as an alternative term, the term has a similar meaning as umbrella company work. However, solo self-employment is more widely used and sometimes includes other groups of workers than intended here. Umbrella company work is a more delimited term discussed in section 2.2. However, other researchers have used solo self-employment to describe the same or similar groups which is why solo self-employment sometimes is used interchangeably in this thesis.

workplace-related questions is the foundation of the Swedish model of industrial relations. The outcomes of collective bargaining have effects on the livelihood of most workers through its effect on wage increases for example. Therefore, Swedish trade unions have the very important task to organize workers and represent them. However, Säljarnas Riksförbund and Unionen diverge from each other in their handling of umbrella companies and umbrella company workers. The small independent trade union has taken the initiative from the largest trade union in Sweden. Because of the central role trade unions have in ensuring workers' rights and fair wages, it is important to understand how they act in relation to each other, to umbrella companies, and to umbrella company workers. Moreover, the trade union club REA is also of utmost interest because it is the first union club for umbrella company workers in Sweden. It is important to study how it functions and how it affects workers' ability to influence their workplace and by extension, their livelihood. Trade union clubs have an essential role in the Swedish model of industrial relations because of the model's centralized and decentralized character. Trade union clubs are the platform members use to formulate demands and negotiate with employers (Kjellberg 2021, p.11). The collective agreement and trade union organization was created for umbrella company workers which is a special group of workers. Umbrella company workers are individuals who work for a client with an assignment they or the client have initiated, through a relationship with an umbrella company. They do not have companies of their own or employees. They vary between being temporarily employed and unemployed by the umbrella company while carrying out client assignments. This group is exposed to the same risks as many other non-standard workers and finds themselves in a precarious situation (Ilsøe & Larsen 2021, p.37ff). For this reason, it is important to study how their new trade union is organized and operates.

This thesis takes a strategic action field approach to analyze the new trade union club for umbrella company workers and the changes in the field of trade unions in Sweden. By conceptualizing the trade unions as collective actors within strategic action fields I describe and explain how the small independent trade union and challenger, Säljarnas Riksförbund, has constructed a new collective agreement, and a new trade union model that challenges the incumbent Unionen and its traditional model, and their position in the field.

1.1 Aim & Research Questions

The first aim of this study is to expand the knowledge about the new trade union club for umbrella company workers in Sweden. By exploring how it is organized, how it operates, and

its functions this thesis will elucidate its strengths and weaknesses. The second aim is to explicate the ongoing transformation in the trade union field. Säljarnas Riksförbund and Unionen have chosen different approaches to handling both umbrella companies and umbrella company workers. The large and highly influential Unionen has taken a passive stance whereas the small independent Säljarnas Riksförbund has advanced and taken the role as the trade union for umbrella company workers. By explicating this process this thesis can illuminate how the field of trade unions that organize umbrella company workers is changing. The third aim is to contribute theoretical insights to the theory of strategic action fields. By conceptualizing trade unions as collective actors and adopting a theoretical framework based on Neil Fligstein and Dough McAdam's theory of strategic action fields in this empirical case. Through analysis and by building explanations through this theory the result can contribute to theoretical development. Furthermore, this study will also contribute to what is yet not an established area of research. Hopefully, this thesis can spark further research.

To achieve the aims I will pose three research questions. The first research question addresses the trade union club, how it is organized, how it operates, and functions. By answering this question, it will be possible to provide a description and compare it with Unionen's model, and to elucidate its strengths and weaknesses. The second question elaborates on the answer to the first question by transcending descriptions and providing explanations of underlying processes that resulted in the creation of a new trade union model instead of adopting an already established model. This will be the first step toward an explanation of what is going on in the field. The third question addresses the contestation between Säljarnas Riksförbund and Unionen in the process of establishing the collective agreement with Frilans Finans. By asking this question I will elucidate how these unions apprehend each other as collective actors in the field of trade unions, and how they act in response to umbrella companies such as Frilans Finans. Therefore, I suggest three related research questions:

How is Säljarnas Riksförbund's local trade union club *Rådet för egenanställda*, organized and how does it operate?

How and why did Rådet för egenanställda develop into its current organization?

How did Unionen and Säljarnas Riksförbund contend with each other and Frilans Finans about establishing a collective agreement?

1.2 Delimitations

This study is delimited by several decisions. Firstly, this study focuses on trade union organizations in Sweden. The Swedish labor market constitutes the context of the study which implies that the Swedish model of industrial relations, the Swedish type of umbrella companies, and Swedish law and regulations need to be taken into consideration. Secondly, the case is demarcated by a time frame from approximately 2012 to 2023 because in 2012 the industry association for umbrella companies Egenanställningsföretagen was created, and this is when Frilans Finans started work to establish a collective agreement. Unionen and Frilans Finans discontinued their discussions about an eventual collective agreement in 2017-2018 while the unionization and development of REA still is an ongoing process in 2023. Thirdly, umbrella company workers are understood as workers that have an A-tax and some kind of affiliation to the umbrella companies. This means that self-employed, workers with their own companies with F-tax and FA-tax are not included in the concept of umbrella company work. Lastly, the study is demarcated by its focus on three organizations, Säljarnas Riksförbund, Unionen, and Frilans Finans.

1.3 Disposition

The thesis is dispositioned with an introductory chapter that will introduce the background to the study, the aim of the study, and the research questions. It also contains general delimitations and a section on previous research that works as a road map to previous studies that are in some way related to this study. The second chapter presents the background, that is previous research that provides necessary information about the context of the study, such as descriptions of umbrella company work and Nordic industrial relations. Chapter three provides the thesis with a theoretical framework based on Fligstein & McAdam's theory of fields. The fourth chapter presents the methodological considerations, from data production to the quality of the study. Chapter Five is the first part of the analysis and aims at addressing the first research question; it contains a rich description of the details and workings of the new trade union model compared to the traditional model. Chapter Six expands the analysis by explaining the models as a part of its field and aims at addressing the second and third research questions. Chapter seven is the concluding chapter; it summarizes the key findings from the study, discusses the study, and suggests how this research may be continued.

1.4 Previous Research

This study is positioned at the intersection between the study of Swedish industrial relations, trade union organization, and field studies. There is a lot of various literature in these fields. Although this will not be an exhaustive literature review, I will introduce some of the previous research that is relevant to this study. It is important to notice that the exact definition of umbrella company work or solo self-employment in previous research varies a lot, and there is no universal definition. Previous research that is closely connected to the research questions will be elaborated in the next section and will provide context to the case, while this section serves as a guide through the literature.

There is currently no previous research about the trade union organization of umbrella company workers in Sweden. However, there is a lot of research about the labor market, the Nordic model of industrial relations, and the platform economy. Previous research focuses on juridical aspects of gig work such as labor protection (Westregård 2021; De Stefano 2016), and examples of innovative cooperation between trade unions and platform companies in, for example, Australia (Minter 2017). Trade unions are also the subject of many studies and there is a growing literature about trade unions and collective bargaining within the platform economy (Hadwiger 2022; Jesnes & Oppegaard 2020). Trade unions have been much researched from the perspective of industrial relations which includes studies on the Swedish model of industrial relations, union density, collective agreement coverage, etc., which constitutes a pediment in research about the Swedish labor market and union organization. Kjellberg & Bender (2023) have published a report about the Swedish model of industrial relations from a Nordic perspective that presents and discusses the Nordic labor market models, levels of union organization, levels of union memberships, and the new Swedish basic agreement, etc. The Swedish labor market model will be discussed further in the next section because of its importance to this study. However, the report includes interesting findings such as divergence in levels of unionization between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers where the white-collar unions in Sweden are uniquely strong and Unionen is one of them. Others have studied trade unions in relation to the gig economy.

There is research that examines the emergence of unorganized and weakly organized segments on the labor market by studying the relationship between the increase of precarious forms of employment and declining levels of union organization in Sweden and in Western countries (Palm 2018, p.8). Palm finds that the labor market in Sweden and the West, have become more segmented because of the increasing non-standard employment and solo

self-employment. These segments of precarious employment are also less unionized than stable segments within the labor market (Palm 2018, p.68). Sweden is also affected by this segmentation but due to the relatively high levels of unionization, the effects are milder. Palm discusses alternative ways of organizing trade union clubs such as Italian trade unions that try to create territorial unions rather than industry unions, or as in France where they have union clubs that span over different workplaces, concluding that it is important to find new ways of organizing trade union members (Palm 2018, p.73).

In 2019, Johanna Palm authored a literature review with a focus on research about employment conditions, work environment, and influence over the own work in the gig economy. The review consists of international scientific literature between 2014 and 2018 in Western Europe, Sweden, the Nordics, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Palm 2019, p.15). The study shows that there is limited research on collective organizing and labor market parties in the gig economy in Sweden. Furthermore, Palm concludes and recommends that more research on the labor market parties needs to be done because it is important to ensure the rights and protection of gig workers (Palm 2019, p.43). In line with this recommendation and the identified research gap, this thesis focuses on examining the trade union organization of umbrella company workers which also can be understood as a type of gig worker.

There is also research about solo self-employment, which includes umbrella company work, in the literature on non-standard work in the Nordic context which includes research about the character of solo self-employment, statistics about its extent, and about umbrella companies, what they are, and how they work in Sweden (Ilsøe & Larsen 2021). Other research focuses on how solo self-employment affects the Swedish labor market. Bjerke and Palmberg (2014) discuss umbrella company work as an innovative form of employment that could create more entrepreneurship and a more flexible labor market. Based on this discussion they conclude with three policy suggestions that could increase the flexibility of the labor market. One of their conclusions is that umbrella company work can be a good way of increasing the level of employment and innovation. At the same time, they emphasize that the labor market parties are key in the creation of a new institutional framework that is needed to realize the potential of umbrella company work (Bjerke & Palmberg 2014, p.132).

A study made by Mats Wingborg in 2017 for Futurion, the research institute of the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO), examines what umbrella company work is and how it will affect the future labor market. It discusses, among other

things, the unionization of umbrella company workers in comparison with temporary work agencies. Wingborg finds that the Swedish trade unions were hesitant to temporary work agencies at first, during the 1990s but later in the early 2000s changed their strategies to conclude collective agreements with these companies. Wingborg concludes that from a trade union perspective, the collective agreements with umbrella companies are at risk of being worse than the agreements with temporary work agencies. He also concludes that it will be difficult to organize umbrella company workers even though trade unions, such as Unionen, make efforts to do this and that an increase in umbrella company work will have a negative effect on the levels of unionization (Wingborg 2017, p.23-24)

To summarize this section. A lot of this research focuses on umbrella company work, solo self-employment or trade union organizations separate from each other. Oftentimes previous research focuses on gig workers and platform companies and not specifically on umbrella company workers or umbrella companies, which have specific Swedish variations. The research on trade unions is mostly done in relation to these platform companies rather than umbrella companies. Umbrella company work, solo self-employment, umbrella companies, and trade unions in Sweden have been studied from different perspectives but the trade union for umbrella company workers is currently not researched at all.

2 Background

The background provides the context of the case and consists of information from previous research that is necessary to know about to understand the case. The first part discusses previous research on Nordic industrial relations and provides this study with some of its main characteristics which also is part of the context of this case. The second part discusses what umbrella company work is, what umbrella companies are, and how they emerged in Sweden. This is an important component of the case and there is currently no consensus as to what these things are exactly and how they should be understood. Lastly, the third part briefly introduces the organizations that will be studied and analyzed and provides some key facts about them.

2.1 Nordic Industrial Relations

It can be helpful to understand some main characteristics and recent trends in Swedish and Nordic industrial relations to understand the trade union organization of umbrella company workers and the environment this organization exists within. Säljarnas Riksförbund, Unionen, and Frilans Finans are labor market parties and exist in relation to the Swedish model of industrial relations. Firstly, the Swedish model of industrial relations is characterized by self-regulation rather than state regulation, which means that the labor market parties such as trade unions and employer associations regulate the market, and collective agreements have a more prominent position in doing so than state regulations. This is often referred to as *partsmodellen* and self-regulation refers to *partsreglering* (Kjellberg 2023, p.3).

However, tripartite solutions, that include the state, have been more common recently due to changes in the law of employment protection (Kjellberg 2023, p.3). Sweden has a relatively high degree of self-regulation but there are both historical and present examples of deviations. Some examples are the series of labor laws that were created during the 1970s such as the 1976 Co-Determination Act (1976:580) and the 1977 Work Environment Act (1977:1160). Moreover, in 2022 the labor market parties concluded a new basic agreement in which they take steps toward a more flexible labor market (Kjellberg 2023, p.7)

Secondly, Nordic industrial relations are both more *centralized* and *decentralized* than their international counterparts. In Sweden, both trade unions and employers are organized in different confederations and associations. This is required for central bargaining. The central confederations and associations strengthen the collective and

have power over the affiliated organizations that are part of these organizations (Kjellberg 2023, p.10). The decentralization on the other hand refers to the many local trade union clubs. These often constitute the local representation and are the connection between the central parts of the union and its member. It is an important arena for members to formulate demands and negotiate with the employer. Trade union clubs are usually based on one of two organizational principles 1. The industry principle implies that the union organizes all workers at one workplace or, 2. The occupational principle implies that the union organizes all workers within the same occupation (Kjellberg 2023, p.11). Thus, both trade union confederations and local union clubs are important for the individual workers and for the Swedish model of industrial relations.

Thirdly, the Ghent system in Sweden, Finland, and Denmark has been impaired by institutional changes. The Ghent system means that the unemployment insurance funds are subsidized by the state and regulated by law while being union-led. This is also an example of the combination of state regulation and self-regulation. The impairment of the Ghent system in Sweden consists of a combination of measurements by a center-right government, such as increasing fees for unemployment funds between 2007-2013, the abolishment of tax reduction for union fees by 25 %, and for unemployment funds by 40 %. The effect was immediate and between 2007-2008 Swedish trade unions lost 245 000 members, all unemployment insurance funds together lost more than 460 000 members of which approximately 400 000 members were lost from union funds (Kjellberg 2023, p.9). The union density in Sweden has changed from 81 % in 1990 to 70 % in 2021 (Kjellberg 2023, p.8-9).

It is not the intention of this thesis to do an international comparison of either industrial relations, trade unions, or umbrella company work but in this instance, it can be helpful to look at the institutional changes in the Danish system which have been compared before by Kjellberg and Ibsen (2016) in which they compared the changes in the Danish and Swedish Ghent system and its consequences arguing that the traditional trade union movement has been weakened by these changes. In Denmark cross-occupational unemployment funds were introduced in 2002 by their center-right government which led to the development of *yellow unions* which are characterized by low membership fees and in general do not participate in collective bargaining and do not have representatives in the workplace. Instead, they offer individual services such as juridical assistance and membership in their unemployment fund (Kjellberg 2023, p.8). This comparison is interesting for this study because as the analysis will show, Säljarnas Riksförbund's new trade union model REA can be characterized as an alternative trade union club, and it is the first of its kind in Sweden. It

is not the same as Danish yellow unions but have in common that they have weaker connections between the central organization and the workplace representatives and are more focused on individual services. The membership development of these alternative or *yellow* unions in Denmark has changed from comprising 2 % (34 700) of the total members in 1990 to 18% (350 305) in 2021 (Kjellberg 2022, p.17).

2.2 What is Umbrella Company Work?

In this thesis, umbrella company workers are understood as individuals who work for a client with an assignment they or the client have initiated, through a relationship with an umbrella company. Umbrella company workers are workers with A-tax and must therefore use an umbrella company to invoice their client. These umbrella companies are defined differently and could sometimes be more like invoicing services, in other cases, they are employers. In this case, Säljarnas Riksförbund and Frilans Finans have concluded a collective agreement that stipulates that these umbrella company workers should be affiliated with the umbrella company before entering agreements with clients on behalf of the company and thus become temporarily employed by the umbrella company for the duration of the assignment. However, sometimes umbrella company workers initiate and carry out assignments for clients and afterward contact their umbrella company of choice to send the invoice and complete the administration (Wingborg 2017, p.14ff; Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet 2017, p.166). This indicates that the actual procedures for working as an umbrella company worker may vary. If the work is organized as Frilans Finans and Säljarnas Riksförbund have stipulated, workers invariably shift between being enrolled in an employee-employer relationship with the umbrella company for fixed periods with being unemployed.

Previous research has shown that solo self-employment, which includes umbrella company work, is not widespread in the Nordic countries and has a certain character. Less than one in ten employed are solo self-employed in all five Nordic countries (Ilsøe & Larsen 2021, p.19f). In 2019, 6 percent of all employed in Sweden were solo self-employed (Ilsøe & Larsen 2021, p.26f). The three sectors with the largest share of solo self-employees in Sweden are 1. Agriculture, forestry, and fishing (Almost 40%), 2. Other services (one in five), and 3. Creative sector (17%). In Sweden, it is most common for solo self-employees to opt for such a career voluntary, 20% have chosen it to have more flexibility, one in five saw it as a “suitable opportunity”, and 11% have accepted solo self-employment involuntary (Ilsøe & Larsen 2021, p.29f). Solo self-employment and umbrella

company work is also associated with similar risks as other types of non-standard work in Nordic countries. There is a higher risk of income insecurity through underemployment for all non-standard workers, including umbrella company workers, in comparison to workers with full-time open-ended positions in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. There is also a higher risk for job insecurity which is defined as instability in the individual's present job. Solo self-employees and thus umbrella company workers, like all non-standard workers, are at higher risk than workers in full-time open-ended positions (Ilsøe & Larsen 2021, p.37ff).

2.3 Development of Umbrella Companies and Umbrella Company Work

According to a report from Tillväxtverket, which published a report on umbrella company work in 2012, umbrella companies have existed since the early 1990s through companies such as Vascaia AB, Frilans Finans in 1998, and Bolagsbolaget in 1999 (Arvas, 2012, p. 23f). The concept of umbrella company work, or closely related concepts started to emerge during the 1990s as well. In 1999 Bo Persson, lecturer at the Stockholm School of Economics, proposed a new form of employment called “självanställning” or solo self-employment (my translation) which was supposed to be a combination of self-employment and employment. (Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet, 2017, p. 162). Umbrella company workers' rights to compensation from unemployment insurance funds has been discussed frequently over the years in different governmental reports such as *Trygghetssystem för företagare* (Klimat- och näringslivsdepartementet, 2008), *Uppdragstagare i arbetslöshetsförsäkringen* (Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet, 2011) and in the report *Ett arbetsliv i förändring – hur påverkas ansvaret för arbetsmiljön* from 2017 there is a large section dedicated to umbrella company work (Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet, 2017).

Swedish umbrella companies or *egenanställningsföretag* are a variety of umbrella companies that do not exist in other any other Nordic country. There are international examples of similar companies. In France, the equivalent of Swedish Umbrella companies is called *Portage salarial* but they are different from the Swedish (Westregård 2021, p.205). Westregård has analyzed the prerequisites in Swedish labor legislation that made the development of Swedish umbrella companies' business model possible and found that statutory regulation of fixed-termed employment, which is not allowed to the same extent in the other Nordic countries, is of central importance to the expansion of umbrella companies in Sweden (Westregård 2021, p.211). Westregård also makes two conclusions that are of special importance to this study. Firstly, there is no legal contradiction in that umbrella

company workers are regarded as employees in labor law while being considered self-employees in social security regulations and unemployment insurance. This leaves umbrella company workers in a disadvantaged position from a social security perspective and in a more economically vulnerable position. Secondly, umbrella companies are commercial organizations, and they seek to take on the role of employers with full employer responsibilities to differentiate them from accounting firms and allow them to create an industry of their own. Furthermore, their responsibilities as employers will be limited to the short durations of assignments making it a profitable business model (Westregård 2021, p.225). Today there are many umbrella companies, The Swedish Unemployment Insurance Inspectorate (IAF) has identified approximately 60 different umbrella companies in Sweden (Inspektionen för arbetslöshetsförsäkringen 2020, p.28). In 2012 the trade association for umbrella companies, Egenanställningsföretagen (EAFB), was established to work in favor of umbrella company work and to influence the formation of a new labor market (Egenanställningsföretagen n.d. A).

2.4 The organizations

Säljarnas Riksförbund was founded in 1884 and is one of the oldest and smallest trade unions in Sweden with approximately 4200 members and they organize those who work with sales and marketing. They are not connected to any political party or to any trade union confederation. They offer education, legal aid, income insurance, benefits, discounts, personal insurance, and banking services to their member. They also offer their knowledge of vacant jobs and their network to their members (Säljarnas Riksförbund n.d. A). Säljarnas concluded the first collective agreement with an umbrella company in Sweden and created the first union club for umbrella company workers. They are now organizing umbrella company workers.

Unionen is the largest trade union in Sweden, they organize white-collar workers in the private sector and are the largest member of the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO). They have approximately 690 000 members in approximately 88 000 workplaces and of these are around 27 000 elected officials who are active in around 15 000 workplaces. Membership is not conditioned by education, position, or wages and therefore they also have a lot of managers as members. Unionen also organizes self-employees and students. The organization uses a system of representative democracy and members choose their officials such as the boards of their clubs, regions, or congress for example (Unionen n.d. A).

The umbrella company Frilans Finans was established in 1998 and today has a local presence in Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Great Britain, and France. It is a part of the incorporated company Invoicery Int (Frilans Finans n.d. A). In January 2023, Invoicery Int was acquired by the acquisition company SPACtvå AB and changed its name to Invoicery Group AB (SPAC2 n.d.). Frilans Finans business model is to employ workers for the duration of their assignments and to invoice their clients and take care of all administration such as paying taxes. For their services, they charge 6 % of the invoice amount. They also have a loyalty program which could reduce the cost to 4 %. From the invoiced income they pay taxes and employer fees of 43 % in total and they deposit 4,5 % of the gross salary for the occupational pension (Frilans Finans n.d. B).

3 Theoretical Framework

By conceptualizing trade unions as collective actors within strategic action fields it is possible to explain the empirical findings and provide theoretical insights through the empirical data. I have made several decisions that led me to adopt Neil Fligstein's and Doug McAdam's theory of fields, as a theoretical framework. The research questions are focused on a meso-sociological issue between organizations that interact with each other in the Swedish labor market. The theory focuses on stability and change in the field, which also is central to this study. There are other theoretical perspectives that can be of use such as Bourdieusian field theory or institutional theory. I have chosen to work with this framework because it consists of concepts that explain social action and change while also accounting for context which in this case is very important because of the Swedish industrial relations for example. The framework provides multiple concepts that can be useful to explicate the empirical findings and answers to the research questions. But not all the concepts presented here can be used to their full potential, still it is necessary to have some understanding of them. The broader field environment is necessary to understand while it is not within the scope of this study to examine the environment in any detail. Governance units could be identified using this framework, but the empirical data will not cover all that may exist.

Fligstein & McAdam suggest that social life is dominated by a complex of strategic action fields. The theory explains stability and change in society as based on these strategic action fields. The theory contains seven central elements: 1. Strategic action fields, 2. Incumbents, Challengers, and governance units, 3. Social skills, 4. The broader field environment, 5. Exogenous shocks, field ruptures, and the onset of contention, 6. Episodes of contentions, and 7. Settlement. (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.2). The most central concepts in this thesis analysis are incumbent and challengers, stakes in the field, and the mobilization process. It will also briefly discuss internal governance units and the broader field environment.

Strategic action fields (SAFs) are the fundamental units for collective action in society, and it is a Meso-level social order in which the actors vie for advantages over each other. Actors, both individual and collective, interact with knowledge about each other under common understandings of the purpose of the field, the relationships in the field, and the rules of the field. There are four aspects of meaning that make up a SAF. Firstly, to some extent, there is a common understanding between actors of what they are struggling over and what is at stake in the field. Secondly, actors in fields have different positions with different amounts

of power, and there is an understanding of which positions different actors occupy and which power they have. This means that actors understand who their competitors or allies are. Thirdly, there is a shared understanding of the rules in the fields, that is what are viable options in terms of tactics and actions. Fourthly, all collective actors interpret what other actors in the field are doing. This interpretation reflects the actor's position in the field and will therefore change depending on whether the actor is an incumbent or challenger for example (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.3). What I find central to this theory is that there is not only one reality about what fields are and that actors have agency. Fields are areas of contestation and actors make different interpretations and take different actions in response to this. This means that there is a contingency in the theory as well, it cannot predict everything about the fields or actors. Furthermore, all collective actors are made up of strategic action fields themselves, and when collective actors interact in new arenas, social, political, or economic, these arenas become SAFs as well (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.3). At its core, it is a process of struggle between actors about resources. SAFs are socially constructed on a situational basis, their boundaries are not fixed, and they change depending on the definition of the situation and issues. Different collective actors may define different issues as important or unimportant which can lead to different constructions of fields (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.3-4).

Incumbents, challengers, and governance units are the types of actor positions that compose the strategic action fields. Incumbents are the actors in the field that has the most power and their interest are reflected in the dominant organizations in a SAF. The great power wielded by the incumbents influences the field, shaping it to their interests. The rules of the field are shaped in their favor, and the available positions are influenced by this because the incumbents claim the field's resources (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.5). In opposition to the incumbents stand the challengers. They are actors with less power and with little influence over the field. They usually understand the nature of the field and acknowledge the greater power of the incumbents, but they have alternative visions of the field and their position in it. While being subordinated the challengers often accept the order of the field as they wait for opportunities to change it.

The internal governance units (IGUs) make sure that the rules of the field are respected and that the field works properly. These units are internal to the field and not external like the state. In the labor market, such units could be trade union confederations or trade associations. The governance units are not neutral but work in favor of the incumbents to reinforce their logic and protect their interests (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.6). IGUs

defend the stability of the field by working with external relations of the field and by lobbying for field interests in state fields. Examples of such actions could be lobbying for legislation or policies. IGUs does also have internal functions. The five major functions are administrative services to field members, spreading information to members and external actors, regulating the field members, enforcing the field rules, and controlling access to the field by certifying membership in the field (Fligstein & McAdam 2012, p.78). Finally, SAFs are not always highly unequal. Sometimes the field is comprised of actors of the same strength and size which can lead to coalitions between incumbents and between incumbents and challengers for example (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.6).

Social skill is the cultural part of *strategic action* which is defined as the way actors try to control other actors within the field by ensuring their cooperation through the creation of identities, political cooperation, and interests. Social skill is the ability to create these agreements and to engage other actors. The definition of social skills is the cognitive capacity to understand people and their surroundings possessed by individuals and collective actors, to mobilize people into working with them as they want. Social skills are used to construct action frames which in turn are composed of both rational and emotional understandings. These understandings are subjective and can offer actors identities (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.7). Finally, social skill requires actors to transcend their own interests and perspectives to find common ground with other groups within the field to mobilize them (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.7).

The broader field environment refers to the notion that SAFs exist in relation to other SAFs and there are three sets of distinctions that can explain the relationship between them. The first set is distant and proximate fields. The distant field has no connection and no influence on a given SAF while the proximate field has a close connection and often influences it. The second distinction is between vertical and horizontal fields, where the former denotes a hierarchical relationship between fields where one exercises authority over the other. The latter, horizontal fields denote a relationship between fields where there is no hierarchy. The third distinction is between state and nonstate fields. State fields refer to fields within the state which is an actor that has the power the make legislation and authority over most other non-state fields. The state, in this perspective, also consists of multiple fields itself (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.8). *Exogenous shocks, field ruptures, and contention* refer to the instability and changes in society. Some of these changes come as external shocks from surrounding fields and will rupture whole fields. The subprime mortgage crisis is one example

(Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p. 9). It is possible that other types of crises such as war, revolutions, and pandemics also could be examples of shocks that may cause ruptures.

The last and most common type of change is a contention which is contingent on a process between incumbents and challengers. This process consists of three mechanisms. The first is *the collective construction of a threat or opportunity* which implies that at least one of the field's collective actors starts to define a change in the field or in the broader field environment as a threat or an opportunity. The second is *organizational appropriation* which is when a change in the field, defined as a threat or opportunity is accepted by an organization that mobilizes resources to act. The third part of this process is *innovative action* which implies that actors act and violate field rules in innovative ways. They are innovative because even if they are violating the rules, they are still acting in acceptable ways (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.9). If all these parts are active it will lead to an episode of contention.

An episode of contention is a period of emerging and sustained contestation between actors in a SAF. During this period actors use innovative forms of action to gain advantages. These episodes include a shared feeling of uncertainty regarding the rules and power relations in the field, and mobilization by incumbents and challengers. It is the feeling of uncertainty that drives the episode of contentions because it is why collective actors perceive threats and opportunities which further lead them to act. Again, incumbents and challengers might act differently. Incumbents will try to keep their position and avoid changes in the field whereas challengers want to impose a new order in the field. It may also be the case that state actors, powerful as they are, might impose a settlement on the field. (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.9-10). *Field settlement* is another of the fundamental elements and refers to the rules and cultural norms of the field. These rules are set by either the incumbents that reassert the status quo or succeeding oppositional mobilization from challengers. When there is no order to the field the field finds itself in crisis and when the order is restored through a field settlement, the field is no longer in crisis (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.10). The way these rules are established is part of the process when fields emerge. Finally, proximate fields can also provide a model for stabilization. Actors in the SAF, which is in crisis, might seek solutions and ideas from proximate fields and proximate fields can thus influence the SAF in question (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.10).

3.1 Stability and change

Settlements are often established in favor of the incumbents and if it works properly, it will be resistant to challenges and preserve the order of the field. The settlement is reproduced by incumbents, who are not only favored by it but also constrained by it, they are dependent on it and cannot easily change perspectives and find alternative actions. But it is normally also reproduced by potential challengers, they will only challenge the field settlement if there are real opportunities to advance their interests available. It is not only incumbents and challengers that reproduce the field, but also internal governance units and state fields can work to stabilize the field settlement in favor of the incumbents (Fligstein & McAdam 2012, p.96-97). While SAFs are areas of contestation there are also elements of stability. However, these are also a part of the contestation because incumbents are oftentimes favored by keeping the settled order. Preserving the settlement is also a strategic action. Challengers on the other hand need to act strategically to survive in the field due to their precarious situation and lack of resources. There are three common tactics for challengers to enhance their position. The first is to form alliances with incumbent groups within the field to get more resources. The second is to form alliances with groups in other fields to get a better position within their own field. The third is to specialize and create a niche within the field that differentiates them from incumbents and that the incumbents do not care for (Fligstein & McAdam 2012, p.98-99).

Fligstein and McAdam have also identified three external sources that can cause a field to become destabilized: 1. Invasion by outside groups, 2. Changes in related fields, and 3. Macro events. The first source is the occasions when powerful actors from outside of the field invade the field with the goal of changing the settlement in their own favor interests. They bring new definitions and actions to the field and their success is dependent on the power of incumbents if the challengers join them, how the state actors react, etc. Because of the interconnection between SAFs, changes in a related field are also a common source of destabilization. If a field has a crisis, it is likely that related fields also will experience a crisis. The third source of destabilization is macro events which encompass larger societal crises such as war or economic collapse. These kinds of crises will have large effects on many, fields and possibly across states (Fligstein & McAdam 2012, p.99ff).

4 Methods

This study focuses on describing and explaining the contention between Säljarnas Riksförbund and Unionen about unionizing umbrella company workers connected to Frilans Finans. Following the twofold definition of a case study presented by Robert K. Yin, I constructed this study as a case study because it requires an in-depth analysis to answer the research questions, especially since the case is likely to be embedded in a broader context. This is a good way to fully grasp all the details relevant to the case (Yin 2018, p.15). There are several clarifications about the case that need to be made. Firstly, the case is the creation of the trade union club *Rådet för egenanställda* and the process of establishing the collective agreement, which constitutes concrete manifestations of the contentions. The study attempts to use this case to explicate how Säljarnas Riksförbund and Unionen contended to organize umbrella company workers within Frilans Finans. The case was chosen because it is unusual and revelatory. It is the first time trade unions have attempted to unionize this group of workers in Sweden and it is a contemporary process, which not yet has been studied (Yin 2018, p.50). The units of analysis embedded within this case are the four organizations involved in this process, Säljarnas Riksförbund, Unionen, and Frilans Finans, and the trade union club REA. (Yin 2018, p.51) These are not to be confused with the data sources which are the individual representatives of each organization that has been interviewed to produce data about the units of analysis (Yin 2018, p.102). The boundaries of the case study should also be clearly stated. There is a boundary in temporality because this case takes its point of departure in the discontinued collective agreement discussions between Unionen and Frilans Finans in 2017-2018. It focuses primarily on the establishment of the collective agreement between Säljarnas Riksförbund and Frilans Finans in 2021 and the subsequent creation of REA. The formulation of the research questions is focused on the contention about the collective agreement and the union club which also constitutes boundaries as it directs the study toward 1. Discussion and negotiations of the agreement, 2. Inter-organizational relations, and 3. Practices and rules for local representations. It is also bounded by the fact that it focuses on umbrella company workers and umbrella companies which makes the distinction of those groups of workers important to the study. These kinds of boundaries give guidance as to whether information should be treated as case data or contextual data (Yin 2018, p.31).

4.1 Data production

The interviews in this study were used to produce necessary data rather than just collecting it. Interviews are often referred to as an interaction-based research method that produces data through the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. Interviews are attempts to grasp the meaning and understanding from the perspective of the interviewee (Creswell & Poth 2017, p.163f). At the same time the information that the interview yields is also a product of all the decisions made by the researcher such as which questions are asked, how they are asked, and in which context they are asked. Therefore, this process is best described as the production of data.

4.2 Selection of Informants and Documents

The main source of data in this thesis was produced through two rounds of interviews with key representatives from the organizations. The informants were selected in a strategic way because of their relevance to the study. This is commonly referred to as *purposive sampling* and it differs both from the quantitative probability sampling methods and from convenience sampling (Bryman 2016, p.408). However, not all informants that I wanted to interview were able to participate and instead referred me to their colleagues who had the necessary experience and were thus equally relevant to the study. This is commonly referred to as *Snowball sampling* which also is a purposive sampling method. Through this technique, it was possible to get access to individuals that otherwise would have been very difficult to identify because of the criteria of relevance (Bryman 2016, p.415). The representatives were selected as informants because they met one or several of the following criteria: 1. they are representatives in key positions in their organization with, 2. expert knowledge about their organization's work with umbrella company workers, 3. they have insight into their organization's values, operations, and structures, 4. they have first-hand experience of the discussions, negotiations about a collective agreement between the studied organizations.

In the first round, I contacted Jan Zetterström, chairperson of Säljarnas; Katarina Strandberg, chairperson of Rådet för Egenanställda; Stephen Schad, CEO of Frilans Finans; and Patrik Pedersen, agreement expert at Unionen. Together, all informants represent all the different organizations and by interviewing them I could access information of different perspectives, events, and complexities of this case. After the first round of interviews, I found descriptions and explanations that were both similar and contradicting. This prompted me to initiate a second round of interviews with the informants but with some alterations. First, I excluded

Frilans Finans from the second round because the study focused on the trade unions, and I assessed that it is not necessary to include them in the next phase because they could not provide more information about the trade unions. Secondly, I did not have a second interview with Pedersen from Unionen but with a colleague of his instead. The reason for this was that Pedersen is an agreement expert and the questions about the organizational aspects of the trade union are not his expertise. Instead, I had an interview with Nina Lundqvist who is a central developer in the same unit as Pedersen, and a second interview with Strandberg about REA. I tried to reach Zetterström for a second interview, but after several failed attempts I realized that this would not be possible. It is likely that there are other people within the organizations with knowledge about these things as well. That could imply that there are different perspectives on the questions within each organization. However, I have managed to interview the top representatives of these organizations, who not only meet the above-stated criteria but many of them are also the main representatives of their organizations as chairpersons. Because of this and the organizational focus of the study, I argue that this study has captured the most relevant data.

4.3 Documents

After the first round of interviews, I selected documentation to triangulate the data from the interviews. The documents studied are the collective agreement between Säljarnas Riksförbund and Frilans Finans, the statutes of Säljarnas Riksförbund, the statutes of Unionen, and the constitution of Frilans Finans (Invoicery Int Group). This documentation was purposely selected because it composes the rules for each organization, they are fundamental to the organization and are not interchangeable with any other document. They were also chosen because they are official documents for each organization that are publicly available on their websites. There may exist other types of internal documents such as guidelines, but they do not have the same status within the organizations as its statutes. There can also be issues with the accuracy of the documentation, and I have tried to verify that this documentation is updated but still used it carefully. Furthermore, only selected parts of these documents were examined in detail since the focus has been on understanding trade union clubs rather than whole trade union organizations. This information is useful to compare and complement the information from the interviews which is an important usage in case studies (Yin 2018, p.115). The process of document analysis will be further elaborated in the section about the analytical approach.

4.4 Limitations of the Methods

It is also necessary to acknowledge the limitations of the methods because there are always limitations. Many are connected to the interviews since there are limited numbers of individuals who met the criteria for being selected and limited numbers of individuals who were selected for the interviews. There are also limitations of the interviews connected to the number of interviews with the same interviewee. It is simply not possible to demand more and more interviews with the same person, especially not within the time frame of this thesis. There are also limitations to the time constraints because all interviewees have jobs and other things to attend to. All interviews were between 30 and 60 minutes. Another limitation was the fact that all interviewees were experts in their area and their answers reflected that because their answers had certain perspectives. At the same time, this is also why they were selected, and it is also a strength to get insight into these perspectives. Some interviewees are used to represent their organization I perceived these interviews as ones that tended to be shorter because they gave shorter answers that were more refined.

The documents used also have their limitations because they only provide information about the rules. They do not give any context to the rules, and they do not say anything about how these rules are applied in the organization. On their own, their usage is very limited, but I found them to be helpful in triangulating the rest of the data. There are also limitations to the single case study as a research design. It is not possible to corroborate the result with the result from other cases. During this study, at least one similar case has emerged. If it would have been possible to extend the case study for a longer period, it would have been very interesting to analyze and compare cases.

4.5 Interview guides

The interview guides were semi-structured with open questions that allowed me to follow my line of inquiry while giving space for the interviewees to speak freely and develop their thoughts. Essentially all first-round interviews were composed of questions in five themes regarding the organization in question: 1. Organizational structures, 2. Values, 3. Experiences, 4. Relations, 5. Practices. Interview questions were posed to get information about the organization's background, opinions about umbrella company work, their apprehension of the establishment of the collective agreement, how they work, and relationships with other organizations. These themes and exact research questions were developed by operationalizing the theory into interview questions. The guides consisted of six to seven questions and started

with an open introductory question, asking the interviewees to introduce their organization and themselves to understand the organization's position in the field. The theory suggests that there are incumbents and challengers in the strategic actions field that vie for advantages. I, therefore, asked about the relationships between the organizations. The theory also suggests that these organizations are collective actors that act in the field and that stability and change are important aspects of strategic action fields. These presuppositions were operationalized into questions about how the organizations operate, and how they acted about the collective agreement for example. In this way, it was possible to examine the field and its changes as well as the collective actors and their actions.

The first round of interviews was done with one representative from each organization. In this phase, the questions were open-ended and explorative such as “Can you tell me about your organization and its operations?” or “What is your opinion about the unionization of umbrella company workers?”. The differences between each interview guide were minor with only small adoptions of the question to each organization. However, the result from the first round of interviews included detailed information from each organization that was posing new questions in relation to each other which needed to be examined further to get complete and comparable answers to all research questions. For example, the first-round interview with REA resulted in detailed information about their organization and practices whereas the first-round interview with Unionen did not contain as much information about that, but more information on values and experiences.

The second-round interviews were therefore more specifically adapted to each organization with the aim of filling in the gaps and obtaining comparable information. But the second round of interviews was also used to follow up on reasoning and arguments in the first-round interviews. They were also used to ask for explanations of what I perceived as contradictions between different interviews and different materials. For example, in the first-round interviews with REA, it was explained that REA is a part of Säljarnas Riksförbund but there were no statutes that explained this relationship. Therefore, I asked, in the second-round interview, for clarification on this matter. Finally, the second-round interviews functioned to expand and nuance the information from the first interviews but did not introduce a whole new set of themes.

4.6 Conducting the interviews.

I contacted the informants via email, explaining the study, and its context, and asking if they were willing to participate in the study. I got replies from all organizations and everyone agreed to participate, and we decided the time for the interviews. Before the interviews, I sent everyone a letter of information about the study, their rights as participants, and other ethical considerations. This will be discussed further in the section on ethics in this chapter. I have chosen to conduct the interviews one-on-one via video calls online via Zoom. Not only for practical reasons but also to create good contact with the interviewees, to make them feel comfortable, and to have a good flow in our conversation which I believe is crucial when doing in-depth interviews. This allows me to both follow my own questions for the interviewee but also to respond to what they are telling me and pose new questions (Yin 2018, p.118f). A real-life interview could have been even more advantageous, but it was not possible due to practical reasons such as a short time frame and distance. The interviewees also had the option to turn off the camera if they were more comfortable with that, which one chose to. It was also necessary to establish a good relationship with the interviewees because I knew early on that it could become valuable to conduct several interviews with these people. This study utilized both shorter interviews and prolonged interviews because the interviewees have important positions within their organization and their experiences are not interchangeable. Therefore, it can be necessary to prolong interviews, thus transforming interviewees into case study informants (Yin 2018, p.119). In the finishing process, one of the interviewees reviewed my result to confirm its validity. Unfortunately, this could not be done by all interviewees due to various reasons. However, this process resulted in important clarifications of the result such as exactly how the membership in REA works.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is about considerations of the possible implications the study can have on the organizations that are being studied, but also, and perhaps more importantly, how the study can affect the informants that participate in the study. I have been taking as many ethical questions as possible into consideration when conducting the interviews, following the ethical guidelines presented by Kvale & Brinkmann (2009, p.68-69). Initially, I presented myself, my position at Lund University, the study, and its intent while asking for people to participate. To those who were interested in participating, I sent a letter of information in good time before the interview to gain their informed consent (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, p.70-71). The

letter informed them about why I conducted this study and its aim, how the interview was going to be carried out, practical information about the interview, and how the study was supposed to be conducted. The letter also informed them about possible risks and beneficial consequences for themselves, how the information will be handled, that they will not be anonymous, and lastly, that they always are in control of their participation.

Confidentiality was especially important to consider, the informants are not anonymized since they are official representatives of their organizations, and it is important to the study to show that the data sources are the experts in the field. It was important to communicate this clearly. At the beginning of every interview, the informants were asked if they had read the letter if they had questions if they understood that they would not be anonymized, and if they still consent to be interviewed. After every interview, they were reassured that they could contact me at any time with questions.

4.8 Analytical Approach

The analytical process started already when the interviews were transcribed. The interviews were transcribed fully and verbatim to be able to work carefully with the detailed information provided. Laughter, sighs, and other non-words were not written out in the transcripts as I completed the transcripts and coding with memos, that is notes about repetitions, similarities, differences, what is emphasized, and missing explanations. It is a kind of assessment of the information in which I analyze how the interviewees answered questions, and it can be very helpful to develop concepts and categories (Bryman 2016, p.577f).

The analytical technique I have used is what may be referred to as *explanation building* or *process tracing* (Yin 2018, p.179). The analytical process has been an iterative process. The explanations for the research questions were built in this way. The data from the interviews were coded, taken apart, and sorted, by their appearance of significance in answering the different research questions. The data was then compared to the theoretical framework and examined for correspondence and discrepancies. The theoretical propositions were then revised, and data were re-coded, categorized, and put together in a more meaningful way. By doing this it was possible to build an explanation and rich description of the case and to see if the explanation matches the theoretical propositions in the framework which also created insights about the theory (Yin 2018, p.179-180). I have dedicated a lot of time to reading and re-reading the transcripts and documents, carefully interpreting them, and coding them in a descriptive way. These codes were grouped into categories based on what they

described. The categories, codes, and memos were organized into explanations that could be compared with the theoretical framework which generated coherent and credible explanations to the research questions.

4.9 The quality of the study

There are many examples of quality criteria that can be considered in qualitative research. I have taken some common criteria of research quality into consideration when designing and conducting this case study. Following Yin (2018, p.43ff) the following tests of quality have been considered: *Construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability.*

Firstly, construct validity has been considered by using multiple sources of evidence to triangulate the data and by having key informants review the result. Internal validity is about the problem of making inferences from the data. To strengthen the explanatory power of this study I have applied a theoretical framework and examined whether the empirical data correspond with the theoretical framework or not (Yin 2018, p.45). External validity is about the problem of generalization from a case study. This thesis uses a single case and there is no realistic way of generalizing the findings in any statistical way. However, it is possible to do analytical generalizations. This can be done by either corroborating already existing concepts or by forming new concepts that emerge during the study (Yin 2018, p.38). The last test, reliability concerns the possibility of replicating the case study. While it is not likely that it will be possible to replicate a study of this kind there are still measurements taken to work towards a reliable study. This is done through this very chapter, by explicating how the research was done, how the data was produced, and how the data was analyzed. By doing these things I have tried to ensure the quality of the study.

5 The new trade union model compared.

The aim of this chapter is to answer the first research question and describe and explain in detail how the new trade union club is organized, how it operates, and compare it with Unionen's traditional model. The chapter will show that the new trade union model focuses its operations on the state and unemployment insurance funds trying to affect them in favor of their members whereas the Unionen is focused on representing their members toward the employer. Both unions characterize their relationship with employers as collaborative rather than antagonistic and they do collaborate through a dialogue. This chapter will show the details of how this dialogue works and differs between them, and how the new model may affect workers' ability to influence their workplace. The chapter will also describe the various operations and undertakings of the unions. It will show how the models are different regarding membership in each organization and their organizational principles. Finally, the chapter will discuss the underlying organizational narrative and individual reasons for constructing a new trade union model.

5.1 Introducing Rådet för Egenanställda

When the initial discussions with Unionen about a possible collective agreement were discontinued, Frilans Finans established a group called Frilans Finans Råd which was intended as a council working for umbrella company workers' rights within Frilans Finans. Frilans Finans has a constitution which is the fundamental order of how the organization is governed and stipulates rights and obligations for everyone active in the organization (Schad 2019, p.4). This document was approved in 2019 and paragraph 11.8 describes Rådet för egenanställda before it was transformed into a union club of Säljarnas Riksförbund.

Accordingly, Frilans Finans Råd was originally established by Frilans Finans as a council of five to seven umbrella company workers who would work with questions about working conditions, matchmaking in the labor market, education, insurance, freedom, safety, etc. This was a part-time assignment, and the council members would receive remuneration for the loss of income (Schad 2019, p.13). The council was early on criticized for being a "yellow trade union" which implies that it is led by the employer and one of the members left as a result (Markusson 2018). When Säljarnas Riksförbund and Frilans Finans eventually concluded their collective agreement in 2021 Frilans Finans Råd was transformed into a trade union *club* of Säljarnas Riksförbund called Frilans Finans Fackklubb, which meant that they became Säljarnas local trade union club for employees in Frilans Finans. Due to the wide array of

operations of the club, they later decided to change their name to Rådet för egenanställda (REA) which is their current name. The name is supposed to reflect that they work as a trade union and with umbrella company workers' rights in general. This shift represents not only what the name stands for but also how they are organized. Rådet för egenanställda is more than just a trade union. Säljarnas Riksförbund's union club REA is today a part of their organization and is structurally organized independently of their 10 sections which all represent a geographical area, while REA represents the members working for Frilans Finans. As such REA has the right to represent Säljarnas Riksförbund towards Frilans Finans in negotiations and has direct access to Säljarnas Riksförbund resources, such as lawyers. Säljarnas Riksförbund's federal organization also educates REA's board and has continuous contact with their chairperson Katarina Strandberg. When their members have issues, they will be handled by REA in the first instance and secondly by the central organization.

REA consists of a board and has no other members. If you are an umbrella company worker, working with Frilans Finans it is possible to become a member of Säljarnas Riksförbund, but this does not imply that you are a member of REA even though they are recognized as Säljarnas Riksförbund's local union club. Strandberg explains that membership in Säljarnas Riksförbund gives you full access to REA, its operations, and representation. If an umbrella company worker is not a member, they will only have limited access to their open events. To become a member of Säljarnas Riksförbund one must pay the membership fee in Säljarnas Riksförbund of 349 Swedish kronor per month. This will give you access to their membership benefits such as career coaching, income insurance, and support from their lawyers (Säljarnas Riksförbund n.d. B). The membership is regulated through the statutes and stipulates admissions, fees, a safety fund, and the expiration of the membership (Säljarnas Riksförbund 2017, p.4-5). There are some uncertainties regarding the rules and guidelines for REA as a part of Säljarnas Riksförbund. The statutes are the rules for the organization and while there are statutes about the central parts of the organization such as their congress and the federal board there are few statutes about the individual membership, and only two sentences about local trade union clubs:

“Employed members can, together with membership colleagues in their company form a local trade union club. The trade union will thereby transfer the central right to negotiate, equal to the law to the local union club” (Säljarnas Riksförbund 2017, p.12, my translation)

A comparison with the statutes of their sections can provide a better understanding of what such statutes could consist of. There are eight statutes about the sections of the organization, §22 its purpose, §23 the area for operations, §24 elections to the section board and to the congress, §25 meetings, §26 agenda for the annual meeting, §27 the board, and §28 its tasks, and §29 special terms. (Säljarnas Riksförbund 2017, p.10-11).

These statutes show what is missing from the statutes about local trade union clubs. All the above-mentioned statutes describe purposes, operations, contents, rights, obligations, positions, etc. But nothing of this is described about local clubs and it is uncertain what their purpose is, what rights they have, and what obligations they have. Strandberg explains that REA was invited to the congress as spectators but not as elected delegates. The lack of statutes indicates that local representation is not a developed practice in Säljarnas Riksförbund and the lack of representation in higher decision-making processes indicates that they have limited possibilities to influence their own trade union. REA's organization only consists of its board members and has no other members while still representing Säljarnas Riksförbund and its members as their local union club. This is a complex relationship that raises important questions. For example, how are the representatives elected? How does the leadership of the union club know the needs of the members they represent?

5.2 REA: A Part of Frilans Finans

REA does not only represent Säljarnas Riksförbund towards Frilans Finans but is a part of Frilans Finans as well. This trade union club is recognized as a part of the company and the board of REA is one of the nine *teams* in Frilans Finans organization. If you are a member of Säljarnas Riksförbund you will not be a member of this team just like you are not a member of REA but you have access to this team in the same way as you have access to the rest of the union club. Each team consists of eight to fifteen persons. They are a part of the company's highest decision-making body *House of Europe* where the most important company-related decisions are made and their second highest decision-making body *House of Sweden*. As a team, they have their own budget, and their representatives receive remuneration for their undertakings, that is the board members. Further, they can also request money for special events which are reviewed and decided on. Because they are a part of the decision-making in the organization, they are also representatives of Frilans Finans. This is also reflected in how the chairmanship is organized. The chairperson of REA is not only an umbrella company worker within Frilans Finans and a representative of Säljarnas Riksförbund but is also

employed by Frilans Finans to work with sustainability and ensure the continuation of the trade union club. The reason for this is that REA is a small union club with few members and to keep the club active they employed the chairperson according to Strandberg. There are benefits such as the extended amount of work that can be put in but there are also difficulties. According to the chairperson Strandberg, there are many obstacles that hinder her work of contacting and recruiting members to REA. She describes a situation where a combination of laws such as GDPR, and her dual position makes it difficult to contact people within either organization. Because she is employed by Frilans Finans, she cannot access information about which umbrella company workers are members of Säljarnas Riksförbund and because she is the chairperson for Säljarnas local union club REA she cannot access information about who the umbrella company workers in Frilans Finans are. According to Strandberg, this creates a situation where she together with others needs to check what is okay and not okay for her to do. This shows there is a contradiction between the positions of being a representative of the employer organization and the trade union. The combination of representing both organizations leads to a situation where a certain amount of control over her work is exerted by both organizations.

Like the chairperson, the union club board of REA is a part of Frilans Finans and Säljarnas Riksförbund. As a part of the former, they have the same mandate as all other teams in the organization to discuss, make suggestions, and vote in accordance with Frilans Finans constitution. They must also follow their rules and principles. This is viewed as something very positive by Strandberg. Her description of Frilans Finans organization model, the TEAL model, is that it is an organization that allows her and other employees to be viewed as competent coworkers with the capacity to take responsibility for their work. They work in self-governing teams, interact with each other in a fruitful way, and make independent decisions without interception from managers. They have the possibility to participate in different meetings about the organization such as House of Europe to discuss questions about their work and make decisions that concern the company. The counseling principle gives the representatives from REA the ability to speak and vote for the union club within the organization. According to Strandberg, this process almost makes regular negotiations in accordance with the co-determination act redundant, because the TEAL principles used by the company are so effective, although it is possible to use.

When Strandberg, as chairperson for REA, attends the House of Europe meeting as one of the team leaders in Frilans Finans, she and all other team leaders have equal rights to vote, argue, and participate in the decision-making process. Sometime before the meeting,

she will receive documents with suggestions for decisions to read and prepare. If she believes it is necessary, she will bring the documents to REA and discuss the content with them before attending the meeting. At the meeting, there are procedures for decision-making in which all participants have the possibility to discuss, ask questions, and possibly stop decisions.

According to Strandberg, this process and organizational model gives the union club so great insight and capacity to affect Frilans Finans operations that is almost unnecessary to have negotiations. For the same reason, she trusts that, if a conflict arises it will be possible to solve it within the organization itself.

Frilans Finans is organized according to what they call the TEAL principles which are defined in their constitution in three concepts: 1. Self-governance, 2. Entirety, and 3. Evolutionary. Self-governance means that all teams and stationary members are equal and have the mandate to make decisions separately or in accordance with the counseling principle if the question affects other teams' responsibility areas. Entirety implies that the organization should adapt to the needs of the people working in it rather than the other way around. Evolutionary means that they believe that the world is changing, and the organization must respond to these changes by reshaping the world (Schad, 2019, p.9). In the constitution, it is stated that all teams and stationary personnel are equal and self-governed with one exception. When a decision affects any other team than itself, they must practice the counseling principle and that is what is being used in House of Europe for example. It is also stated that if the TEAL principles are abandoned the CEO has the option to withdraw the decision-making right. (Schad 2019, p.9). The stationary personnel, that is individual employees in the company office that works serving the umbrella company workers, has the right to make decisions themselves with the option to start a counseling process if the decision will affect other persons or other teams. The teams, such as REA, on the other hand, must always make decisions according to the counseling principle which means that the team must have the approval of a majority of the stationary members of the team to conclude a decision. If the suggested decision is blocked the team must solve it together and a suggested way to do this is to invite senior coworkers to the process. If the decision affects other teams as well, the decision must be made in House of Europe for example (Schad 2019, p.11). The counseling principle is defined as *consent-based decision-making*. In this context, consent means there are no “motivated essential objections”, also called *blocking*. This cannot be done for just any reason, it should only be done if it serves “the purpose of the organization” (Schad 2019, p.10).

The descriptions and definitions in the counseling principle are vague and possible to interpret in different ways making it difficult to assess what an approved objection is, which possibilities REA has to object in House of Europe, and which possibility individual umbrella company workers have to make objections in REA. The mandate and right of decision-making clause stipulate that a majority of the stationary members of a team must give their approval for a decision to be made which denotes a difference between the stationary members i.e., the in-office employees and non-in-office employees, that is the umbrella company workers and REA's team consists of both. This raises the question of if and how individual umbrella company workers can affect their own representation in Frilans Finans for example. The fact that CEO also has the power to revoke the decision-making right if the TEAL principles are abandoned also constitutes a major power advantage for the CEO over stationary personnel, the teams, and the umbrella company workers. It is not clearly stated in the constitution how the organization assesses whether the principles have been abandoned or not. This is important to examine further to fully understand how this works and what the effects are. While the ambition might be to create a non-hierarchical organization where everyone is equal there are still power imbalances built into the constitution of the organization.

5.3 Operations and Activities

The operation and activities of REA can be categorized into two categories 1. Sustainability work and 2. Trade union work. The first category of work consists of two larger projects, 1. The unemployment insurance fund project, and 2. The pay formation project. The first project aims, together with lawyers at Frilans Finans, to develop knowledge about unemployment insurance funds. REA has initiated a meeting with the organization *Sveriges A-kassor*, which is an organization that works with service to all the unemployment insurance funds in Sweden, to influence them to accept umbrella company workers. They have also been working with the umbrella company trade association *Egenanställningsföretagen* (EAFB) in their initiative to create a new unemployment insurance fund where umbrella company workers can access this insurance since they cannot in the other funds.

The pay formation project aims at mobilizing umbrella company workers to be better at charging their clients, supporting each other as a group of workers, and creating a feeling among these workers that they are worth getting good payment for their work. This is done through different events where people can meet, discuss, and participate in seminars

about getting paid and identifying work time as umbrella company workers. They want to inspire them according to Strandberg. One such event was held during the fall of 2022 when a mingling event was organized at Frilans Finans Visiting Center, which was developed by the company as a place for umbrella company workers to meet each other. They work in close cooperation with the sustainability strategist of the company who is the contact person for the union club and together with an event coordinator who works with the same things as REA to a large extent. They also cooperate with the client support group. This group is responsible for Frilans Finans contact and support to all umbrella company workers of the company and REA works with them to ensure that the working hours act is followed, for example. REA has also been working with Frilans Finans to change and adapt the company to the collective agreement. These activities are more general and aim at supporting umbrella company workers and are similar to the operations of Frilans Finans and Egenanställningsföretagen.

The second category of operations denotes the work REA does which is referred to as union work by Strandberg. This work entails producing statements for the migration agency and working with Frilans Finans to adapt their organization to the collective agreement. REA has contact with the chairman of Säljarnas Riksförbund, with their lawyers and receives education for example. They also have contact with the marketing team to spread information. Most of the activities and operations of REA are conducted within or in close cooperation with Frilans Finans and can be understood as a part of the company's sustainability work. Stephen Schad describes Frilans Finans sustainability work as consisting of social sustainability, work-life balance, work environment, competence development, and breaking isolation for umbrella company workers. Their social sustainability idea refers to having sustainable wage formation without discrepancies and they do this by having their umbrella company workers working together against market forces in a trade union club.

The operations and their organizations are merged to create a new trade union model and an alliance. These operations are strategic actions because these projects that REA works with aim at influencing other actors, both collective and individual, to mobilize them into their line of action by holding these events where they strengthen individual umbrella company workers to view themselves as employees. This is important because umbrella company work does not exist as a concept in labor law or social security regulation. Umbrella company workers are regarded as employees in labor law and self-employees in social security regulations and by the unemployment insurance funds. By initiating meetings with the organization that works for the unemployment insurance funds, Sverige A-kassor, they act to persuade them to accept umbrella company workers as employees and not self-employed.

Therefore, it is also necessary to construct an identity for umbrella company workers as being employees.

5.4 The Trade Union Model of Unionen - The Traditional Model

Unionen is the largest trade union in Sweden and its organizational model represents the already established and more traditional trade union model that adheres to the traditional industry principle when organizing its members (Kjellberg 2023, p.11). Unionen is a democratic trade union consisting of members. All white-collar workers within the private sector can become members of Unionen and the standard fee is 235 Swedish kronor per month, if the income is lower than 25 0000 kronor per month the fee is lower. If there is a union club at the member's workplace the member will automatically and mandatory belong to that club (Unionen n.d. B). The membership in Unionen is also regulated through their statutes that stipulate who can become a member, the expiration of the membership, democratic rights, and obligations of the membership (Unionen 2019, p.5-7). Some of these members are elected as representatives such as board members or members of an election committee, for example. The elected representatives are what powers the trade union, by representing the members, having dialogs with employers, and negotiating with the employer. Alongside the representatives, there is an organization for the employees within the organization which consists of offices such as the federal office and different regional offices that in turn consist of employed agents, developers, regional managers, and other personnel. These work to serve the elected representatives and assist them in negotiations, etc. There are different levels of the organization with boards and elected representatives. These are the national organization with a federal board, regions with regional boards and there is local trade union representation which oftentimes is a trade union club but can also be elected workplace agents. These different instances are focused on different issues at their respective level but there is a hierarchy to it as well. For example, Congress is the highest decision-making instance in Unionen and is held every fourth year. It makes the largest decisions that affect the whole organization. Changing the statutes is one example, and these are the rules of the whole organization. Unionen is also part of the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO), which is an association of trade unions. What is distinctive of TCO according to Lundqvist, is that all trade unions within it are *vertical organizations*. This means they organize all workers in one workplace, one workplace equals one trade union which creates unity. Unionen organizes white-collar workers in the private sector. Visionen is

another large union in TCO, that organizes white-collar workers in municipalities, regions, churches, and companies connected to welfare. The trade union ST organizes both white- and blue-collar workers in the state sector. It can also be contrasted with other central trade union associations such as the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (SACO) which consist of trade unions that organize by occupation. Lawyers have one union and engineers have another one. Unionen also cooperates with other unions outside of their association TCO. For example, when they negotiate the mark, or *Märket* in Swedish, which is the most influential agreement between unions and employers that sets the baseline for further negotiations between other trade unions and employers in the Swedish labor market.

The trade union clubs of Unionen are the local representation at the workplace and these clubs can be constructed in different ways depending on the number of members, how the company is organized, the organization of work, etc. In the general model, members elect their representatives to form a board of the union club. This club must consist of a minimum of five positions, one chairperson, and two fellows that constitute the board. But also, one electoral officer and an accountant. The trade union club is not a member of the company it is connected only to Unionen. This model can also be upscaled if needed and there could be additional positions in it as well. These clubs have their own annual meetings with elections and decisions about mandates of negotiation and how they want to work in their club. Furthermore, the club receives economic support from Unionen to use as they want and need. Lundqvist emphasizes that the most important function of a union club is to have a dialogue and negotiate with the employer about everything that concerns the members. This could be smaller issues that arise in everyday life at work or larger questions of re-organization of the workplace or dismissals. There are also periodic negotiations such as wage revisions. It is the elected representatives that uphold this dialogue and participate in negotiations, representing the members. This dialogue is an informal negotiation or discussion about the conditions at the workplace. It is a process based on cooperation between the union and employer to develop the workplace, the conditions, and the operations. The formal version of this dialogue is the negotiations. When either the union or the employer calls for negotiations the other party is obliged to participate. In that case, both parties discuss issues formally, its pros and cons, etc. They can choose to adjourn the negotiation to gather more information about the issue before the issue is decided on and a protocol is established. It is important to note that the employer makes the decisions, but the union must be informed and a part of the discussion. Lundqvist also points out that negotiations do not necessarily mean the union and the employer are in opposition to each other. The point is rather to establish

matters with both parties, not whether there is an agreement or disagreement. While it is possible for conflicts to arise between a union and an employer this is not what Lundqvist deems usual since both the union and the employer want the same thing. The union wants the company to perform well and the jobs to remain and the employers care for their employees because they want to keep their competencies and have their loyalty. But there might be diverging perspectives on how to reach their common goal and if the negotiations become difficult for the local club to handle, they can ask the regional office for support or pass over the negotiations entirely. When asked specifically about the union clubs' possibility to utilize strikes to push their agenda Lundqvist describes that this is regulated on an overarching level through collective agreements and that they have an obligation to maintain peace. Breaching this would be a serious violation and is referred to as a refusal to work which is very serious according to Lundqvist. Strikes can be utilized by trade unions when there are no established collective agreements, or they have become invalid. However, Lundqvist emphasizes that this is unusual and that there are regulations on how strikes can be used.

There are also a lot of alternative ways to have dialogue and representation in the workplace. Instead of a club, there could be elected workplace agents who are individuals that function as a club board would do otherwise or with a more restricted mandate if that is decided. It can also be the case that the regional office handles negotiations with the employer, either partly or fully. But the most central task for the local representation, usually the club, is to have a dialogue and negotiations with the employer. Beyond that, the club can also be engaged in other types of social activities or leisure activities of their choosing. Clubs are also offered different types of services by Unionen's organization. This could be lectures, career services, or help with LinkedIn, etc. These are provided to be helpful for the members to help them develop in the labor market.

This description is to a large extent corroborated by the statutes of Unionen. Paragraph §3, in the statutes, treats the questions of local representations. It is divided into 8 subsections with associated moments. The subsections are 3.1 Representation at the Workplace, 3.2 Workplace Representatives, 3.3 Club, 3.4 Election Committee, 3.5 Club Meetings, 3.6 Club Board, 3.7 Audit, and 3.8 Disbandment. I will elaborate on some of this content to provide a comparable description with Säljarnas Riksförbund statutes to advance the understanding of the trade union model that was developed with the creation of REA.

According to §3.1 Representation at the Workplace, Unionen has two types of local representation, workplace representatives and clubs (Unionen 2019, p.9). This comparison focuses on clubs and therefore, §3.2 workplace representative, is not of much

interest at this point. Paragraph §3.3 treats the trade union club and stipulates that there must be at least five members to constitute a local club, the area for operations is normally all Unionen's members at a specific workplace. If the workplace spans multiple regions and the club has members in at least two regions, the region board can create another type of local club such as a *riksklubb* or a club for managers. (Unionen 2019, p.9). The members belong to the club where the workplace is situated and there are rules about the members shifting between clubs. Further, the regions must contribute economically to clubs through a certain allowance (Unionen 2019, p.10). Paragraph §3.6 describes board work. The club board leads the operations of the club and negotiates with the employer. The board is the highest decision-making instance between club meetings and is responsible for the operations of the club and responsible for all med decisions to be carried out (Unionen 2019, p.13). While this is only a small selection of the statutes that are briefly elaborated here, it is meaningful to compare all these statutes regarding local representation established by Unionen with the lack of statutes by Säljarnas Riksförbund which only have one paragraph as described above.

5.5 Discussion of the model

The analysis of the structures and operations of Säljarnas Riksförbund and Unionen shows that Säljarnas Riksförbund has constructed a new trade union model with which they challenge Unionen's model. This is not to say that there are no similarities between Unionen and Säljarnas Riksförbund. I would like to point out that what is missing from this chapter is a comparison of central collective bargaining in both trade unions. It is relevant to compare how this is done but this study has been more focused on the local organization than the central one and lacks data in this regard. It would be interesting to study this further.

Both unions provide their members with insurance, career tips, and juridical help for example. Both models focus on cooperation with the employers rather than competition and they both have the belief that their union and the employer share a common goal. Both types of union clubs are engaged in a sort of dialogue with the employer, but the form of this dialogue differs. The new model is more focused on representing umbrella company workers toward third parties such as the state or unemployment insurance funds rather than towards the employer while the traditional model is focused on representation toward the employer. Membership is also different in the different models. In Unionen's traditional model members automatically become a part of the existing union club in their workplace and the statutes stipulate that the membership has certain rights and obligations. In

Säljarnas Riksförbund the membership is not as regulated through its statutes, and it is not possible for their members to also become members in the union club REA or in its team within Frilans Finans which both only are constituted by the board. Instead, they have access to REA's operations, activities, and support in trade union matters. Unionen's clubs are the local representation of the trade union in the workplace and its organization is independent of the employer. This organizational structure has two implications, firstly, the union cannot make any decisions about the workplace, only the company has that right. Secondly, the company cannot make any decisions for the union organization. However, both organizations are obliged to participate in a dialogue. This dialogue between the company and the trade union (both informal and formal) is how this model functions. In comparison, the organizational structures of REA implicate that this new type of union club has the right to vote and make decisions together with the company. However, this also works in reverse. The company has voting rights about the union's team in the company which also is the board of the union club. This implies that the club board can affect and is affected by the company through their role as a team. The new trade union club are therefore partly governed by the company and partly governing it. Furthermore, by operating as a team in the company much of the need for traditional dialogue is decreased. Säljarnas Riksförbund has in this way, together with Frilans Finans, constructed an alternative trade union model with a fundamentally different structure and functions.

The operations in each of the models provide an understanding of their respective functions and constitute one of the main differences between the two. The main task for Unionen's clubs is to maintain a dialogue and to have negotiations with the employer about everything that concerns their members, this is the function of this type of union club. It is a very distinctive and narrow function. The main task for Säljarnas Riksförbund's club, REA, is directed at the state, the unemployment insurance funds, and the umbrella company workers. The main functions of this new model are to participate in the decision-making process in the company and mobilize umbrella company workers around their identities as umbrella company workers and their material interests. Another function is to impinge the Swedish unemployment insurance funds and to lobby for umbrella company workers' access to these benefits. In this way, the new model challenges what kind of operations a trade union is and should be concerned with.

A fundamental difference between Säljarnas Riksförbund and Unionen is the groups of workers they organize in their union club. Unionen organizes all white-collar workers in the private sector. Following the industry principle that implies that all workers in

the same workplace are organized by the same trade union. The other principle is the occupational principle which implies that all workers with the same occupation should be organized by one trade union (Kjellberg 2023, p.11). Säljarnas Riksförbund has previously organized those who work in sales and marketing, but now with this new organizational model, they expand their organizational area and organize through a new principle which is the type of work, umbrella company work, even though this is not an established employment form in labor law. Säljarnas Riksförbund's new organizational principle and expansion of their organizational area challenge the settlement established in the field regarding the division of organizational areas between the other trade unions. Because the principle of organizing based on employment form does not take education, profession, industry, or occupation into consideration and thus possibly encroaches on Unionen and other trade unions' organizational space.

5.6 The reasons to construct a new trade union model.

The trade union club REA has an alternative organizational model to Unionen. The model consists of new innovative elements that challenge Unionen's more established and traditional model, and this is something that is pointed out by Strandberg, the chairperson of REA who says the following when being asked about the relation between REA and Säljarnas Riksförbund.

“As mentioned, this is very special because there is, as you know, we are first with this, so everything is new. There is nothing. [...]. No one has anything to lean on, how it used to be, how it's been done earlier. So, we are creating something new, and that also means that it takes some time. [...].” (Strandberg 2023, my translation)

The quote illustrates the intention to innovate the trade union model because everything is new and the previously existing trade union models are viewed as inadequate in this setting. The purpose of doing this is that Säljarnas Riksförbund, Frilans Finans, and REA want to legitimate umbrella company workers as employees and give them access to unemployment benefits. This is a common narrative used by all three organizations to explain what and why they established the collective agreement and created a new trade union model and their operations. Strandberg explains the fundamental purpose:

“[...] But, but the like, fundamental purpose with what we do, that is that we want umbrella company workers to be accepted as employees. Because that is such a problem, and umbrella company workers are so badly treated so is. We want that one who should be, like respected as employees in this country simply. That one actually should have the same right to, to the security systems that are in the welfare. [...]”
(Strandberg 2023, my translation)

Strandberg also explains that REA, Säljarnas Riksförbund, and Frilans Finans all share this vision. This perspective is also shared by Frilans Finans CEO, Stephen Schad who describes Frilans Finans as an organization driven by its mission to give workers power over their own work. Their view of well-being in work life is not equated to permanent employment or income. Instead, well-being encompasses good work-life balance, being able to plan your work time, and personal satisfaction, and they estimate their umbrella company workers as more satisfied and well-being than others. Schad opposes what he calls the “industrial norm”, for example, 40 hours work week, and argues that is necessary to change the perspective on working hours because there are types of work that do not fit in the working hour system, such as musicians. Säljarnas Riksförbund wants to create order in the labor market for umbrella company workers and to distinguish them from other types of gig work. Distinguishing umbrella company workers from other types of workers such as temporary workers or gig workers is also recurring in the organization's narratives and it is emphasized by REA, Säljarnas Riksförbund, and Frilans Finans. This, however, is not discussed by Unionen. In contrast to these three organizations, Unionen is not at all sure if they accept this definition of umbrella company work and questions the differences between umbrella companies and temporary work agencies.

Another reason why this alternative trade union model has been constructed the way it is lies in the views of the workers that constitute the organization, REA. It is a small organization with only five active members. Katarina Strandberg who is the chairperson of the club describes her background and the reasons why she joined REA. She could not work in her ordinary job anymore, during this time the Swedish Social Insurance Agency stopped their payments to her, and she found herself in a position without income and no possibility to start working again. She was unemployed for a while before she started to study and enrolled in the Swedish Public Employment Service during this period. According to Strandberg, this marks the beginning of what she termed “humiliations in Swedish welfare” because she had to conduct very simple tasks which she deemed to be humiliating. When she eventually

started to work with Frilans Finans as an umbrella company worker the unemployment insurance fund retracted their payouts to her as they deem umbrella company workers as self-employed, and this was the final event that made her decide to work to change the system. The system intended is the unemployment insurance funds. Strandberg emphasizes that umbrella company workers should not be considered self-employees and that she does not want to own a company but simply work and be safe in that position. Furthermore, Strandberg explains that she feels like the labor movement has forgotten temporary workers because of the lack of access to unemployment benefits. This is why REA has cooperated with the trade association for umbrella companies *Egenanställningsföretagen*, to create an unemployment insurance fund of their own. This story of this individual actor within REA shows that both identity and material interests have influenced her actions to become active in REA and the actions of the organization to pursue a new type of insurance fund, thus challenging already existing funds that do not give umbrella company workers access to unemployment benefits.

These reasons can also be understood as motives that instigate the strategic action of the new trade union club exercise through its operations. As the empirical data indicate these motives are both rational because it is rational to want economic security, and emotional as there are feelings of humiliation from the state and abandonment from the labor movement. I suggest that these understandings are the basis for the action frame of REA and compose a credible explanation, in line with the theoretical framework, as to why the new trade union model operates more toward the state, the unemployment insurance funds, and the umbrella company workers rather than toward the employer as the traditional union clubs does.

6 The Field of Trade Unions

This is the second part of the analysis, and it aims to answer the second and third research questions. This chapter will show that Unionen is the incumbent of the field while Säljarnas Riksförbund is the challenger and how they interpret and act in relation to each other. It will also explain how the trade unions have perceived Frilans Finans attempts to establish the collective agreement. Contrary to what is suggested by the theory the incumbent and challenger have different understandings of what is at stake in the field. Moreover, this chapter will discuss how the challenger has mobilized resources and acted strategically to advance their position in the field. It will also identify some of the internal governance units in the field, explaining why they are failing. Lastly, this chapter will briefly discuss the broader field environment and how this field may be related to other state- and non-state fields. The chapter will provide insights into what is going on in the field right now and why, but also insights about the theory by comparing it with the empirical data in this case.

6.1 Säljarnas Riksförbund & Unionen: Challenger and Incumbent

In the field of trade union organizations, Unionen is an incumbent and Säljarnas Riksförbund is a challenger. Unionen is the largest trade union in Sweden with approximately 690 000 members, and approximately 27 000 elected officials, and is the largest member of the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO). Since the establishment of the industry agreement (Industriavtalet) in 1997, Unionen is one of five trade unions that, together with employers within the industry sector sets the norm for wage increases in the entire Swedish labor market (Kjellberg 2023, p.17ff). In contrast, Säljarnas Riksförbund is one of the smaller unions with approximately 4200 members. They are not members of any trade union confederation and are not one of the five unions that negotiate normative wage increases. Unionen, the incumbent, has an enormous organization with a lot of resources such as full-time employees (lawyers, ombudsmen, etc.), elected officials, and income from the membership fees. They have great influence over the entire labor market, and this affects Säljarnas Riksförbund encroaching on their operations and position in the field. Säljarnas has lesser resources and is very aware of its position in relation to Unionen. Zetterström describes that Säljarnas Riksförbund have been having approximately the same number of members during the last 10 years and that they fight with Unionen which he refers to as “a large dragon that absorbs everything”. He argues that Säljarnas Riksförbund and Unionen are competitors.

“We, if we would compare business-wise, we are competitors entirely so that is like. It is no, no secret so, but it is. We do fight over the same, same union supply so to speak [...]”
(Zetterström 2023, my translation).

Zetterström also explains that trade unions organize members at the same companies and that is nothing unusual. But it happens that Unionen’s negotiations with the employers obstruct salespersons' wage increases because they already have good wages thanks to their provisions, making Unionen’s local representatives less willing to negotiate higher wages for them. Furthermore, he explains that specialist trade unions, such as Säljarnas Riksförbund are disappearing more and more, they merge into larger unions instead which he finds unfortunate. In contrast, Pedersen very briefly explains that Unionen has nothing to do with Säljarnas Riksförbund’s collective agreement and that they never have had any discussions with them either. Today, Unionen does not have any dialogue with any actors regarding umbrella company workers, but they have a group that works following the development of umbrella company work and the development of the collective agreement, if there are any legal cases, media reports, etc. The interviews show that Säljarnas Riksförbund is aware of Unionen’s position and power in the field. Unionen on the other hand does not mention anything about Säljarnas Riksförbund, other than that they are aware of them, and their actions and they follow the development of the collective agreement. In other words, they are interpreting each other's actions, to some extent. Zetterström argues that Unionen is ideologically opposed to variable salaries such as provisions, opposed to the gig economy and that they are an organization that has a slow decision-making process. This may or may not be true, but it is a type of interpretation of Unionen, how they operate, and their opinions. Säljarnas Riksförbund has in the past and in the present acted upon these interpretations and taken them into account when positioning themselves in the field.

Incumbents and challengers are predicted to both reproduce the order of the field and while incumbents are favored by it, challengers need to act strategically to survive in the field. Fligstein & McAdam predict three tactics that challengers use to sustain themselves and, in this case, Säljarnas Riksförbund utilizes at least two of them. The first tactic they use is the one just mentioned, to have a niche and specialize in variable pay such as provision, fast decision-making within the organization, and juridical support to their members within 24 hours. This niche fits well with the interpretations of Unionen as it positions them in opposition to what they apprehend Unionen to be. The second tactic is to create an alliance with an actor from another field to enhance their position in their own field. In this case,

Säljarnas Riksförbund has created an alliance with Frilans Finans, and the establishment of the collective agreement and the formation of REA is the fundament of this alliance. As the previous chapter has shown, REA, the new model Säljarnas Riksförbund has created together with Frilans Finans, is partly governed by both organizations, and operates in both organizations' interests, implying that the new trade union model is a manifestation of this alliance. But it is not simply a manifestation of a new alliance, it is a manifestation of the challenger that confronts the incumbent.

6.2 The stakes in the field

The theory suggests that there is a common understanding among actors within a strategic action field of what they are struggling over and while this may be true on a basic level, they might know that they need more members, conclude collective agreements, and the like. The issue in this field is that Unionen and Säljarnas do not have the same understanding of what is at stake. As shown in the background of this case, umbrella company work, and umbrella companies have been present in the Swedish labor market since the 1990s. The trade association for umbrella companies was established in 2012 and Stephen Schad, CEO of Frilans Finans and chairman of Egenanställningsföretagen, explains that the idea of establishing a collective agreement has existed since then. Initially, they contacted Unionen, but it became clear that these organizations stood far from each other, and their discussion ended around 2017-2018. Both Unionen and Frilans Finans have argued in newspaper articles about what they perceive as central issues between them such as forms of employment and ideology (Björk 2018a; Björk 2018b). Patrik Pedersen explained that Unionen did not perceive this initial contact as negotiations but as discussions to explore options and increase knowledge about each other. Unionen perceived umbrella company work, and umbrella companies as organized on unclear grounds and were uncertain about this type of work and employers. This uncertainty and skepticism consist of several aspects. Firstly, they were uncertain about the definition of what exactly umbrella company work is. For Unionen umbrella companies are similar to temporary work agencies and even if they understand how Frilans Finans defines umbrella company work, the relationship could be of the same sort as temporary work staffing. Secondly, Pedersen describes that umbrella companies may turn out to be what he calls an “employer goalkeeper” to platform companies, which refers to a situation when umbrella companies pose as employers rather than being one. This would mean that there is nothing to negotiate about on the employee's behalf because the prices

might be decided on other platforms. Secondly, there was, and still is, a lack of statistics about the extent to which people are working as umbrella company workers and the extent to which people have this as their main occupation. If umbrella company work is not the main occupation but instead some sort of extra job, they will not be registered as having an umbrella company as an employer in the registers at Unionen but as working for whatever employer they have in their main employment. Therefore, it could be difficult to estimate the worker's need for protection. In contrast, Jan Zetterström emphasizes that Säljarnas Riksförbund initially was skeptical about umbrella company work and about how to respond to Frilans Finans about it because they recognize it is problematic in relation to the Swedish model. However, they also found this group in need of union support, why they decided to engage in discussions with Frilans Finans. The establishment of the collective agreement and creation of REA is an attempt from Säljarnas to establish some order in this type of business. While recognizing that many umbrella company workers often combine that employment with other forms of employment, Zetterström points out that it looks like umbrella company work and umbrella companies will continue to increase in the future, and that it is important to take control of the situation now. Furthermore, Zetterström stresses that there is a difference between umbrella company work and other types of gig work, and Säljarnas Riksförbund intends to work to distinguish umbrella company work from other forms of gig work. Unionen and Säljarnas Riksförbund share some understanding of what is going on in the field, but they have estimated the stakes differently. It contradicts the theory that suggests that both actors know what is at stake. The attempts from Frilans Finans to establish a collective agreement posed a change to the field but Unionen perceived umbrella company work and umbrella companies with uncertainty and skepticism and assumed a wait-and-see approach in contrast to Säljarnas Riksförbund which instead saw an opportunity and risk and mobilized their resources in order to act on this change.

6.3 Mobilization for a new model

Unionen and Säljarnas Riksförbund have different understandings of what was at stake in the field. The discontinuation of discussions between Unionen and Frilans Finans meant that there was no cooperation between these actors, no collective agreement, and no unionization. Unionen assumed a wait-and-see approach and maintained the status quo, which also is an action. Säljarnas on the other hand perceived both risks with umbrella company work for workers and an opportunity for themselves to act and take control of the situation. This is

what Fligstein and McAdam termed as *the collective construction of a threat or opportunity*, meaning that at least one actor in the field has defined a change in the field as either an opportunity or a threat. However, in contradiction to the theory, the empirical data suggests that umbrella companies and umbrella company work are defined as both a threat (for workers) and an opportunity (for the organization) instead of being either one or the other. This led to an *organizational appropriation* in which Säljarnas Riksförbund accepted the invitation from Frilans Finans to discuss a possible collective agreement, mobilized their resources, and engaged in long discussions and negotiations that lasted about a year according to Zetterström. They put forward their demands, such as pension provisions and minimum wages, and bargained with Frilans Finans during this year. After the establishment, Säljarnas Riksförbund was called to the labor market committee in the Swedish Parliament to explain what they have done, which they did while also arguing about the differences between different types of gig companies such as platform companies and umbrella companies.

The establishment of the collective agreement and the creation of REA can be referred to as *innovative action*, which implies that Säljarnas Riksförbund violates the rules of the field in innovative ways, that is, violations to the rules in ways that are acceptable to the field actors (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.9). The trade union club REA has been described in detail above and its innovative features as well. Collective agreements are the accepted practice to establish working conditions, rights, and obligations in the field. However, the innovation is in the agreement's details because it contains writings specifically written for umbrella company workers and umbrella companies. The section about the scope of the agreement §1, it stipulates a specific definition of umbrella company work which they have agreed upon together with Frilans Finans:

“The agreement is valid from 1 March 2022 and applies to all umbrella company workers with the employer. With “umbrella company worker” intends an employee who owns a regulated right to initiate an assignment with a client on behalf of the employer’s (the umbrella company) account. Normally, it is the umbrella company worker who is employed to perform the assignment. The umbrella company worker initiates the assignment, but then it is the umbrella company that is responsible for accomplishing the task in relation to the client. The agreement does not apply to employees with an employer that is not an umbrella company worker.” (Säljarnas 2021, p.3, My translation)

This definition stipulates that the employee has the regulated right to initiate an assignment with a client on behalf of the umbrella company, in this case, Frilans Finans. It also describes that normally it is the umbrella company worker who is employed to carry out the assignment. The umbrella company worker is the one who initiates the assignment but after that, it is the umbrella company that is responsible for the fulfillment of the assignment towards the client (Säljarnas Riksförbund 2021, p.3). This indicates that the umbrella company worker first must connect with Frilans Finans and then find and negotiate the wage and conditions for the assignment with the client on behalf of Frilans Finans. However, the agreement also remarks that it is normally the case that an umbrella company worker receives a business proposal from a client and then contacts the umbrella company for an examination and to see if he or she can be approved for employment during the time needed to carry out the assignment. These descriptions are contradicting because it is not clear if a person should be connected to the umbrella company before or after the assignment is concluded with the client. However, after making an agreement, the umbrella company worker will, in normal circumstances, be employed to carry out the assignment. In §2 *Employment*, it is stated that the principal rule is that the employment form should be general fixed-term employment, during the agreed period of time, but it is possible to agree on other forms of temporary employment mentioned in §5 *Employment Protection Act (1982:80)*. Furthermore, it is also possible to make an agreement about having permanent employment but the rules about converting temporary employment into permanent employment in the *Employment Protection Act (1982:80)* are taken out of the agreement (Säljarnas Riksförbund 2021, p.3). These descriptions show that umbrella company work is an employment relationship where the worker shifts between being unemployed in general and in between assignments, to being employed in accordance with the *Employment Protection Act (1982:80)* for the duration of the assignment. As such they are temporarily engaged in a subordinated employee-employer relationship. Furthermore, the definition emphasizes that the worker owns the right to initiate assignments by herself which is aimed at distinguishing the umbrella company worker from platform workers such as food delivery workers because they do not themselves own the right to initiate assignments with clients, which is done by the platform company. Unionen's stance towards this new collective agreement is that they recognize that some writings in the agreement differ from a traditional agreement. Pedersen, the agreement expert in Unionen, poses several questions about the agreement. According to him, it is difficult to comprehend exactly who is included in the agreement, and what the regulations on compensation for overtime are, and it lacks calculation formulas. Pedersen argues that these questions normally should be answered in a

collective agreement. Some of the writings are more clearly stated, such as the principal rule of fixed-term employment Pedersen compared with Unionen's collective agreement for temporary employees which states that the principal rule is permanent employment with salary between assignments. This differentiates umbrella companies from temporary employment agencies. Säljarnas Riksförbund (i.e., the challenger) has taken the initiative from Unionen (i.e., the incumbent) and concluded a collective agreement to establish and maintain the concept of umbrella company work as they define it through its application in the collective agreement and thus, establishing the first set of rules for those working as umbrella company workers. This type of agreement and the new union model could only be created with an umbrella company that previously did not have any agreement, indicating how important the field environment is.

6.4 Failing Internal Governance Units

One question that arises as this challenge becomes more evident is this. Are there no internal governance units that guarantee stability in the field in favor of the incumbent groups that hinder this kind of challenge? I suggest that trade union confederations, such as the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO), the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (SACO), and the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) constitute such IGUs. These large organizations are fields themselves and are comprised of groups of trade unions that collaborate to push their common agendas but also to organize their respective members in peace. These IGUs or confederations are also important parts of the Nordic industrial relations as shown in previous research by Kjellberg (2023, p.11).

Unionen is the largest member of TCO, and Lundqvist argues that the most important principle of TCO is that the trade unions in the confederation are *vertical* trade unions. Meaning that they organize everyone in the workplace, no matter what education or employment you have. This can be compared to SACO which has decided that the organizational principle is occupation, meaning if you are a psychologist, you should be organized by one union, and if you are an engineer, you should be organized by another union. LO trade unions also organize by occupation but blue-collar workers from all sectors instead of white-collar workers. These are examples of the rules that IGUs maintain, which workers the trade unions should organize. It is a settlement in the field.

As a member of TCO, Unionen organizes vertically while Säljarnas Riksförbund now organizes based on occupation or the type of work, that is umbrella company work. This

organizational model opposes the agreement these IGUs work to maintain and the reason why this is possible could be because Säljarnas Riksförbund is not a member of any of these confederations and thus not governed by them. Jan Zetterström attributes their successful establishment of the collective agreement in part to this fact. To the question to why they were able to conclude the agreement Zetterström emphasizes the fact that Säljarnas are not members of any confederation, not connected to any political party, and that they are a small organization:

“But, why we could accept this is because we are independent so we, we can enter these discussions and we can take it directly in our board we have. Because we also are a quite small organization and have short decision-making processes it was quite easy for us”. (Zetterström 2023, my translation)

Furthermore, Nina Lundqvist also describes that TCO works with larger questions on the labor market and with opinion formation and lobbying in favor of the trade unions that comprise the confederation. These two functions, opinion formation and regulating the field members are two typical features of an IGU (Fligstein & McAdam 2012, p.78). The IGU in this case, TCO, has initiated discussions and reports about umbrella company work (see Wingborg 2017 for example) and is working on these questions through opinion formation.

6.5 The broader field environment and the state

To fully understand the development of the new trade union model it is important to understand that this SAF is connected to other fields in a broader field environment, one of the most influential is the state. This thesis does not examine the broader environment, but the analysis shows that the SAF Säljarnas Riksförbund and Unionen belong to are connected to other fields. The most important indication of this is that the umbrella companies, actors that do not belong to this field, are essential to understanding the new trade union model. Without umbrella companies, there would be no destabilization and change to this SAF which is an important factor that made it possible for Säljarnas Riksförbund to create this model because it constitutes an opportunity to transform the field relations.

The Swedish state, which itself contains a myriad of fields, is the most powerful field in the field environment. This is the intricate web of strategic action fields that Fligstein and McAdam describe (2011, p.8). The state, which has a great impact on this field was quick

to intervene in this case. Zetterström described once the government labor market committee learned that Säljarnas Riksförbund had created a new collective agreement they called them to explain their actions, indicating that the state is attentive to the developments in the field. Previous research has also shown that Swedish industrial relations are based on self-regulation rather than state regulation, but also that tripartite solutions have been more common recently (Kjellberg 2023, p.3). This would imply that the state is actively affecting this field as is suggested by the theory. The state fields have power over non-state fields, such as this, and can impose rules and settlements (Fligstein & McAdam 2011, p.9). For example, in November 2022 when the Swedish Labor Court made the ruling no. 45/22 in case no. A 154/21 between the trade union Transport and the platform company Foodora regarding who was the employer of a food delivery worker. The Labor Court ruled that the platform company Foodora was not the employer but instead the company, PaySalary, which was considered a temporary work agency. This ruling was followed by debates between Transport and Frilans Finans about umbrella companies and if they really are something else than temporary work agencies. Stephen Schad argued that it is different, while a representative of Transport argued that it is not (Antonsson 2022; Schad 2022a; Andersson 2022; Schad 2022b). If the state decides that umbrella companies in fact are temporary work agencies, that will impact the trade unions as well because the new model is based on umbrella company work, and umbrella companies are something else than other types of gig work.

7 The future: Crisis or Stability

The previous sections of the analysis have provided detailed answers to the research questions. The following section will provide an organized answer. This section will clearly state the empirical findings and the theoretical insights. The section will be completed with a reflection on the work with the thesis in its entirety and an outlook for future research.

7.1 The New Trade Union Model and its Challenge

Säljarnas Riksförbund, the challenger in its field, has created a new trade union model that challenges the already-established model used by the incumbent, Unionen. Both Säljarnas Riksförbund and Union base their activity on the assumption that both the union and the employer need each other mutually and therefore cooperation rather than conflict constitutes the foundation for the relationship. However, Säljarnas Riksförbund together with Frilans Finans has through innovative ways created a new model that is different from the traditional model in several ways and constitutes an alternative trade union. In the traditional model, the trade union and the company are two different organizations that engage in a dialogue about the work and workplace, but they cannot make any decisions for each other's organizations. The first challenge is that the new union club REA is not only a part of the trade union but also a part of the employer's company. The effect is that the trade union club has more influence on the company, but the company has also more influence over the trade union club. The governing of the union club is divided between the employer and the trade union.

The second challenge the new model poses is what operations and focus the trade union club should have. In the traditional model, the trade union's main activity is to represent their members' interests towards the employer by having a dialogue with the company, and other activities, such as social activities, are peripheral. In the new model, the trade union club instead focuses its operation and works as a lobbying organization toward the state, and the unemployment insurance funds, and acts to organize umbrella company workers to identify themselves as employees and charge their clients properly. The traditional dialogue between union and employer is mainly performed within the decision-making system in Frilans Finans rather than in a dialogue between two separate organizations. The new union club offers an alternative organizational model that is organized differently and operates very differently from other types of trade union clubs.

The third challenge is the new organizational principle that Säljarnas Riksförbund has innovated with this new union model. Traditionally, trade unions organize their members based on either industrial or occupational belonging, but the new model implies that members are organized based on their constructed status as umbrella company workers. This organizational principle can interfere with the principle Unionen works by as well as many other trade unions.

The reason why and how this new model could be created is a change in the broader field environment, which is the emergence and growth of umbrella companies in the Swedish labor market. The umbrella company Frilans Finans attempted to expand and establish a new profitable industry of its own, as described by Westregård (2021, p.225). By initiating discussions of a collective agreement, they destabilized Säljarnas Riksförbund's and Unionen's strategic action field. Unionen, the incumbent of the field quickly responded to the change and started discussions with Frilans Finans which later were stopped by both Unionen and Frilans Finans, as they could not reach an agreement. Frilans Finans responded by creating a trade union-like council, Frilans Finans Råd that worked for the company with questions about rights for umbrella company workers. At this point, the outside actor invaded the field with their own trade union-like council. Säljarnas Riksförbund perceived the umbrella company and umbrella company work as both a threat to workers but also as an opportunity for the organization to establish order in the field and advance their position. This council was transformed into Säljarnas Riksförbund's union club, first named Frilans Finans Fackklubb, and later to its current name, Rådet för egenanställda, when Säljarnas Riksförbund and Frilans Finans established the collective agreement. This union club composes a new trade union model that differs from the already existing club model that Unionen uses within their organization and thus rivals it. The new trade union model differs in both its organization and its operations. It is a model that implies that the union club is a member of both the trade union and the employer organization, and the club is concerned with other types of operations and activities than the traditional union model. These operations are strategic actions directed toward the state, the unemployment insurance funds, and the umbrella company workers rather than toward the employer. I argue that these strategic actions are rooted in the specific rational and emotional motives of individual and collective actors as they stand to gain advantages in the field if they can establish umbrella company work as an industry.

7.2 Theoretical Insights of the Strategic Action Field

The establishment of the new trade union model has not yet led to any struggle between the incumbent and the challenger because, in contrast to what the theory suggests, the incumbent and the challenger did not interpret what was at stake in the field similarly when Frilans Finans initiated attempts to conclude a collective agreement with the trade unions. Unionen did not estimate that umbrella companies and umbrella company work would pose a threat to or possibility for the organization but more so as a risk for workers. Säljarnas Riksförbund identified both risks for workers and opportunities for the organization. They are the challengers in the field and as such they are likely to take certain actions, such as specializing in sales, marketing, and umbrella company work. They are also likely to establish alliances with collective actors from nearby strategic action fields which this study has shown to be true. While the theory predicts these actions it also suggests that there would be a consensus as to what is at stake in the field if the field was settled, but the empirical evidence shows that there is no consensus in the field. It rather suggests that the field is unsettled and in flux right now, there are no consensuses over what umbrella company work is, what umbrella companies are, and how they should respond to it. The theory also suggests that the internal governance units would stop the kind of challenge that Säljarnas Riksförbund now poses through their creation of a new trade union model and defend the stability in the field in favor of the incumbents. However, the IGU, TCO in this case, has not succeeded in this regard. Because a new trade union model has been created it must be concluded that the IGUs have failed to defend the stability of the field so far. But it must be mentioned that they are not unaware of the development and have initiated discussions and reports about umbrella company work for a while now. The question for the future is now, does this precipitate an episode of contention? Will the flux and perceived sense of uncertainty escalate? I argue that an episode of contention is emerging right now and there is a sense of uncertainty regarding the rules in the field. The incumbent, Unionen, is still passive in their response to umbrella company workers, and umbrella companies. The challenger, Säljarnas Riksförbund, tries to mobilize and act strategically to enhance their position in the field by consolidating the definition of umbrella company work and rules through their collective agreement, and by challenging the incumbent organization's model by creating an alternative union for umbrella company workers that are concerned with other types of operations than Unionen's union clubs. If the challenger sustains this line of action, it is likely that the incumbent will respond by actions to preserve the status quo. It is also likely that the incumbent will use their power

and relations through TCO to influence the state and the state may in the future impose a settlement on the field.

7.3 Concluding Reflections

This thesis has described and explained how and why Säljarnas Riksförbund developed a new trade union model for umbrella company workers together with Frilans Finans that challenges Unionen's established model. This was done through a case study where I interviewed key informants combined with document analysis. I maintain that this was the best way to study this field and its organizations but there are many things that could have been improved. There are other people that could have been interviewed. I believe that the interviewees in this study were the most important, but more interviews could have nuanced or strengthened the study even more. It would also have been interesting to study the broader field environment in-depth as it has a great impact on the studied field. The internal governance units could also have been studied closer to enhance the study. During the study, Säljarnas Riksförbund established their collective agreement with another umbrella company, Cool Company, which would have been interesting to study and turn this case into a multiple case study (Säljarnas Riksförbund 2022). However, in May 2023 EAFB decided to expel Cool Company from their association due to a violation of this agreement (Egenanställningsföretagen 2023).

As I am finishing this thesis it has become a quite long text. I have chosen to write this much because of the necessity of details. The analysis has shown that the unique details of the new trade union model and the collective agreement are characteristic and distinguish them. The detailed descriptions and analysis made it possible to give good answers to the research questions and to make credible conclusions. The richness of the data is what makes the study meaningful. What has become clear throughout this study is the need for further research. There is ongoing contestation in the field of trade unions connected to the group of umbrella company workers and the field is destabilized. Therefore, it would be interesting to continue the research on the field of trade unions, its broader field environment, and the IGUs. But there is also a need to continue the research on the umbrella company workers, the group of people that seemingly seek out this precarious position. The thesis also indicates that umbrella companies are evolving collective actors in the Swedish labor market with a big impact on the trade union field studied and possibly other parts of the labor market as well. In the future, I hope all of this will be further researched because the trade union field is changing, and alternative union organization is now a fact in the Swedish labor market.

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