

The (Homo)Social Criteria

*A qualitative study of homosociality in the recruitment process to top management teams in
Swedish tech-influenced start-ups*

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Abstract

Purpose – There are several benefits originating from gender diversity, such as improved decision-making and innovation, arguably important for a start-up. Contrastingly, the context of tech-influenced Swedish startups' TMTs are rather male dominated. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to create a better understanding of the current state of gender diversity in start-ups' TMTs by turning to the recruitment process. This understanding will be sought through the lens of Homosociality.

Design/methodology/approach – In this cross-sectional, interpretative and qualitative study, nine interviews with male CEOs of tech-influenced start-ups were conducted and used as a foundation for this paper.

Findings – The authors of this study have found that informal social criteria tend to permeate the recruitment processes for roles included in the TMT. The high use of informal procedures in this male-dominated context tends to cause homogeneity in top positions. These procedures are perceived as risk-reducing and low cost mechanisms, both considered important in this context. Homosocial reproduction in the recruitment process to TMTs in this context is largely understood through;

- 1) The choice of recruitment methods
- 2) The weight put into social characteristics aligning with those of the male CEO
- 3) A distinction between the pro-gender equality discourse and actual practice

Practical implications – The results of this study have laid the foundation for an awareness regarding start-ups' male CEOs' factors affecting their choices in the recruitment process to their TMTs. This awareness allows them to make more informed decisions regarding recruitment of roles included in their TMTs in the future.

Originality/value – As previous studies on homosociality mainly have been conducted on more traditional and larger organizations, this study has turned to organizations with context specific characteristics distinguishing them from these. This has widened the understanding of variables contributing to homosocial activities. This study's value lies in its high relevance due to today's increasing popularity of start-ups. As many start-ups are arguably to become the "new" traditional firms in the future, this study has implications ahead.

Keywords – Gender Diversity; Top Management Team; Recruitment; Homosocial; Start-up

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Definitions

Concept	Definition
Start-up	“Companies with an innovative idea that develops into a fast-growing company.” (Timmons & Spinelli, 1994).
Top Management Team (TMT)	“The relatively small group of most influential executives at the apex of an organization—usually the CEO (or general manager) and those who report directly to him or her” (Finkelstein, Hambrick, & Cannella, 2009).
Qualifications	Qualifications concern the demands required for a task. (Höglund, 2002).
Competence	Competence concerns the individual. The assessment of someone’s competence should be based on qualification requirements. (Höglund, 2002).

Table of Content

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Background	1
1.2. Research Gap	2
1.3. Research Purpose & Question	2
1.4. Delimitations	3
2. Theory	3
2.1. Previous Research	3
2.2. Theoretical Framework	5
2.2.1. The Idea of Homosociality	5
2.2.2. Homosociality in Recruitment Processes Today	6
2.2.3. Theory Discussion	7
3. Method	7
3.1. An Interpretivist Approach	7
3.2. A Qualitative Method using Interviews	8
3.3. A Generic Purposive Sample	8
3.4. The Interview Process	9
3.5. The Data Analysis	10
3.6. Method Discussion	11
3.6.1. Reflexivity	11
3.6.2. Ethical & Moral Considerations	11
3.6.3. Quality of Study	11
4. Empirics & Analysis	12
4.1.1. Empirics: Recruitment method	12
4.1.2. Analysis: Recruitment method	15
4.2.1. Empirics: Personal Characteristics & Social Competence	16
4.2.2. Analysis: Personal Characteristics & Social Competence	18
4.3.1. Empirics: The Gender Diversity Discourse & Practice	18
4.3.2. Analysis: The Gender Diversity Discourse & Practice	20
4.4.1 Summary of Findings	21
5. Discussion	21
5.1. Discussion of Findings	21
5.2. Implications & Contribution	22
5.3. Further Research	23
6. Conclusion	23
7. References	25
8. Appendix	29

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Being the birthplace of global start-ups such as Spotify, Klarna, and Skype, Sweden is considered to be one of the most innovative countries in the world (Silicon Canals, 2019). In particular, the capital Stockholm has been announced as an “Unicorn Factory”, a leading actor on the world’s start-up scene (EU- startups, 2019). Factors that specifically permeates most start-ups are that they are innovative, tech-influenced, fast growing and tend to operate in a homogenous, male-dominated context (Timmons & Spinelli, 1994; Hearn, 2002).

In particular, innovation is one of the benefits of having diversified teams. In short, broader knowledge and perspectives allow for an enhanced ability to generate and evaluate ideas, which benefits problem-solving and decision-making. This in turn is important for improved firm performance (Bassett-Jones, 2005). These benefits can be seen to occur even if just focusing on the variable of gender-diversity alone, as men and women tend to possess different perspectives and knowledge (Miller & Triana, 2009).

Turning to the constellation of top management teams (TMT) specifically, who make out an important part of the firm. TMTs tend to have the role of taking strategic decisions, presenting organizational goals as well as taking decisions related to resource allocation, hence being the link between strategy and operations (Balkin & Swit, 2006). A gender diverse TMT can positively affect the organization in previously mentioned aspects such as decision-making and innovation, allowing for an improved competitive advantage (Bassett-Jones, 2005; Turner, 2009; Dezö & Ross, 2012; Luanglath, Ali & Mohannak, 2019). More specifically, Francoeur et. al., (2008) argue that high risk companies with gender diverse TMTs, tend to have higher economic returns.

Despite benefits of gender-diverse teams and that Sweden is considered one of the most gender-equal countries in the world (World Economic Forum, 2019), Swedish tech-influenced start-ups are heavily male dominated. In 2019, TMTs in listed tech-companies only consisted of 13% women, being one of the least gender-diverse sectors in Sweden (AllBright, 2019). However, tech-influenced start-ups are considered to be even less diverse than this (Dagens Industri, 2018). So how come, despite several benefits of gender-diverse TMTs, Swedish tech-influenced start-ups’ TMTs tend to be highly homogenous?

This study aims to turn to the recruitment process of tech-influenced start-ups’ TMTs to gain a greater understanding of why this is the case. This will be studied by applying the lens of homosociality, which states a preference for people perceived as similar to oneself (Kanter, 1977). As the start-up context tends to be highly male dominated, the study will focus specifically on mens’ preference to work with other men.

1.2. Research Gap

The authors' perception is that previous research regarding homosociality has mainly been conducted on larger organizations, leaving the context of start-ups rather unexplored (Lipman-Blumen, 1976; Holgersson, 2013; Eriksson, Johansson & Langenskiöld, 2017). Furthermore, start-ups tend to possess context-specific characteristics in terms of less established structures and less resources, which distinguishes them from larger organizations (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Start-ups make out an increasing share of businesses in Sweden today and will arguably become the larger firms of tomorrow. As new entities, they have the unique ability to create new gender structures, rather than reinforce or challenge them. Adding to this, Holgersson (2003) argues that homosociality in organizations contributes to reproduce the gender structure in the overall society. Thus the concept becomes important to understand in the context of tomorrow's leaders.

Research regarding women's access to higher positions in organizations is increasing. Most previous research conducted on the area has covered boards and organizational leadership positions in general, whereas focus on positions included in the TMT has been less covered (Dezső, Ross, & Uribe, 2016; Hillman, Cannella, & Harris, 2002; Luanglath, Ali, & Mohannak, 2019). Neither has this research been particularly applied to the context of start-ups. Additionally, the authors of this study deem TMTs to be an interesting focus as they are more involved in firm's management and operations compared to boards. Studies on TMTs in start-ups using a gender perspective could therefore be seen to contribute further to the research on gender in organizations. Furthermore, much research on gender in organizations has focused on women as the central actor. Both Fisher & Kinsey (2014) and Joshi et. al., (2015) believe that there is a need to increase the focus and perspective of men in the discourse. This to get a greater understanding of factors outside women's control. The authors of this study deem that when identifying and understanding barriers to advancement of women, men's roles, responsibilities and perceptions are of interest.

1.3. Research Purpose & Question

Despite several benefits originating from diversification, such as improved decision-making, innovation and creativity, start-ups still tend to be male dominated, not least when it comes to the top positions. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of why the TMTs in start-up tend to lack gender diversity by turning to the recruitment process. Raising awareness of the underlying reasons for the current structures, might allow for more informed decisions to be made ahead. The research question is thus as follow;

How can the current state of gender diversity in start-ups' top management teams be understood through the recruitment process?

1.4. Delimitations

As tech-influenced start-ups make out an important foundation for tomorrow's business context, this study is limited to the start-up-dense area of Stockholm, Sweden. Furthermore, being one of the most gender-equal countries in the world, implies certain societal norms to be prevailing. Contrastingly, Swedish start-ups are at the same time highly male dominated, making the gender variable interesting to study in this specific context.

As few women in general hold top positions in organizations, with the ability to influence, we argue that the recruitment process on this level is important to study. One is thus primarily recruited to a leadership position that might be included in the TMT. Due to this distinction, only the roles included in TMT were chosen as the level of interest. Naturally, the study only includes start-ups having a TMT. Adding to this, the CEOs of start-ups tend to be highly involved in the decision-making regarding the formation of this group (Spinelli & Adams, 2016), why this perspective was deemed to give valuable insights. Lastly, being a male-dominated context, this study is limited to the perspective of male CEOs (GEM, 2018).

Why few women operate within the area of tech can be considered a complex task to understand, and we do not aim to investigate all the reasons for why this is the case. Rather this study focuses on understanding how gender structures in start-ups' TMTs are formed through recruitment. One common argument for why few women operate within the tech area, is the limited supply of women perceived as competent. Acknowledging that fewer women have a tech-background, the authors of this study argue that this specific background may not be relevant for all TMT-positions. Hence, we argue that the limited supply is not the only explanation for why less women are represented in tech-influenced start-ups TMT.

2. Theory

2.1. Previous Research

Previous research presents several risks that are apparent when groups consist of homogeneous individuals, where the concept of 'Groupthink' is perhaps the most famous example. Groupthink includes making decisions without critically analyzing further options, where one of the reasons for this being that groups consist of like-minded individuals. The risk of groupthink can be prevented by enhancing diversity in groups, where one variable contributing to this is gender diversity (Janis, 1982).

For top managers, as they determine the overall strategic decisions of the firm, their ability to make thoughtful decisions improves with gender diversity (Triana et. al., 2019). Smith et. al., (1994) further argue that top managers tend to make decisions based on their cognitive frames.

These frames are based on factors such as values, education and background, implicating that a mix of these tend to lead to different decisions through a widening of perspectives. Furthermore, several scholars argue that men and women tend to possess different values, assessment of risk as well as different information and knowledge bases. An improved gender-diverse constellation tends to enhance better use of these resources (Conyon & He, 2017; Dahlin et. al., 2005). Specifically relevant for start-ups, Dahlin et. al., (2005) argue that diversity in settings like this, can enhance creativity and task reflexivity which in turn can lead to improved innovation. However, diversified teams do not only have to bring benefits. As more opinions are getting represented, there is also a risk of conflicts arising and that decision-making becomes unnecessarily time-consuming (Petrovic, 2008). Jehn et. al., (1999) specifically points towards “surface-level diversity”, which includes visible aspects such as gender, and can lower the sense of cohesion. The rise of conflicts is however also seen as something positive as it can stimulate divergent thinking, needed for tacit problem solving. It can further lead to the avoidance of taking decisions that could lead to the use of unnecessary resources, especially within fast moving firms, such as start-ups (Bourgeois & Eisenhardt, 1988).

Despite that research has identified several benefits of gender diverse TMTs, there are still few women in these positions, not least in the tech-sector. At an organizational level, barriers such as assigning certain managerial positions to a specific gender as well as the lack of structures implied by functions such as HR, can be explanations for this (Lee & James, 2007; Hamel, 2009). Turning to start-ups, having an HR-department is often not a prioritization while having limited resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Specifically looking into recruitment, Bergström (1998) highlights how organizations tend to adjust the recruitment method to match their way of working. Bergström further argues that in contexts where the work description is rather flexible or where a great importance is put on candidates to fit into a team, it creates a greater emphasis on criteria such as social competence, attitudes and establishing a chemistry with the candidate. We argue that these variables are applicable to the start-up context.

Also of importance is that in start-ups, recruiting inadequate people is likely to be relatively more costly than for larger firms as an employee constitutes a larger part of the total workforce (Solomon, 1984). As means to reduce this uncertainty and keep costs down, recruitment through informal methods are preferable, where referral networks are a common method to use (Ekström, 2001). This implies that the potential candidates are included within a network and that the job is mainly advertised verbally, giving more room for the weight put on social criteria (Knocke et. al., 2003). Recruitment through networks tend to be favourable when it comes to deem someone’s productivity, as recommendations often tend to be considered reliable (Ekström, 2001). Similarly, recruiting internally within the organization is another informal recruitment method frequently used. This is also seen as a resource-saving method as the candidates already possess specific organizational knowledge as well as that the person’s productivity is already known (Heraty & Morley, 1998).

At the same time as informal recruitment methods seem to be a resource-saving and convenient way of recruitment in start-ups, it also tends to exclude groups from applying and therefore makes diversification difficult. Several scholars argue how informal recruitment methods tend to disadvantage women (Knocke et. al., 2003; Braddock & McPartland, 1987; Tanova, 2003). Knocke et. al., (2003) means that women are getting excluded already in the initial stage of a recruitment process. This, as there are questions of if and where a role should be advertised, where the outcome tends to be favourable for men. This is especially prominent in male-dominated sectors such as tech-influenced start-ups. Hence, the recruitment methods matter for the gender distribution in organizations.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

2.2.1. The Idea of Homosociality

In 1976 the concept of Homosociality was defined by the sociologist Jean Lipman-Blumen as *“the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex”* (p.16). The definition primarily referred to a social meaning rather than a sexual one, and it is the former that will be considered in this paper. Furthermore, researchers distinguish between male and female homosociality (Lipman-Blumen, 1976; Sedgewick, 1985). Turning to male CEOs, this study will only cover the aspect of male homosociality; men's preference for other men. Lipman-Blumen (1976) used the concept of male homosociality to explain why mostly men possess top positions in organizations. She argues that as men are considered to be valued higher than women, this results in that men possess a greater amount of the power resources. As a consequence, men seek the support and company of other men. This behavior tends to reinforce the male hierarchy and exclude women (Lipman-Blumen, 1976). As start-ups are creating new entities, they can be seen as an arena where new gender structures may be created, rather than reinforced or disrupted, making them interesting to study.

Soon after Lipman-Blumen's definition of the concept, Kanter (1977) introduced the concept of 'Homosocial Reproduction'. In line with Lipman-Blumen, Kanter states that recruitment to top positions can work as a platform for homosocial activities. The concept of homosocial reproduction includes three different factors for why men prefer to recruit men;

- 1) Uncertainty of criteria used in the evaluation
- 2) The importance of communication
- 3) Demand for total commitment

Hence, male managers often, even if unconsciously, reproduce themselves for top positions to prevent uncertainty regarding the candidates' productivity, communication-skills and devotion. These become social criteria for recruitment of a certain position, hence reproducing homosociality. Applying these to start-ups are particularly interesting as they are often said to be subject to large amounts of risk and uncertainty in general.

2.2.2. Homosociality in Recruitment Processes Today

Since Lipman-Blumen's and Kanter's ideas on the concept of homosociality in the 1970's, the concept is still developing and relevant today. A prominent scholar is the Swedish researcher Charlotte Holgersson, who refers to homosocial activities in recruitment for top positions as "doing" gender (2003, 2012). This constitutes a certain way to define competence and potential that favour a specific type of man. This is further supported by van den Brink and Benschop (2012) who argue that men often are viewed to possess the right personality, potential to succeed and the right network, hence these informal social criteria are often masked by meritocracy (Sealy, 2010). Women, on the other hand, are more likely to be perceived as a risk and their competencies are likely to be underestimated (van den Brink, 2009). This preference for recruiting men does not necessarily mean a conscious rejection of women, rather an unconscious preference for men (Wägnerud & Niklasson, 2006).

A common way of reducing risk is through recruitment within social networks. This is often associated with homosociality as the structures in social networks are often reproduced in the labour market, where a broad network often produces more favourable recommendations and job opportunities (Granovetter, 1973; Lin, 2000). Hanson & Blake (2009) exemplifies the importance of social networks for entrepreneurs and how these social relations are important for the success of the new venture. Furthermore, Ibarra (1992) argues that male networks often consist of men with similar characteristics. This, as for a male entrepreneur, gaining these benefits of the network, means engaging in homogeneous environments, thus, reproducing homosociality. Several other scholars share the view that recruitment through networks tends to contain several demographic mechanisms for exclusion (Marsden & Gorman, 2001; Braddock & McPartland, 1987; Fawcett & Pringle, 2000).

Recruitment methods other than social networks also allow for homosocial activities. According to Collinson et. al., (1990) internal recruitment processes within the organization tend to contain informal criteria and thus lead to reproduce the current gender segregation. Formal recruitment on the other hand, such as publicly advertising a role, often generates a broader pool of candidates which earlier research argues to be beneficial as it induces more gender diversity (Tanova, 2003; Carroll et. al., 1999). However, informal procedures such as recommendations are still common within formal recruitment processes (Collinson et. al., 1990). Mavin & Grandy (2012) continue to argue that men are better at promoting other men, than women are at promoting other women. At the same time Wahl et. al., (2018) argue that women in general are in favour of more diversified groups, while men tend to emphasize the importance of competence, a competence that women are often deemed to lack. While benefits tend to be drawn from gender diversity, the marginal gain from this is likely to be larger in a start-up as every new recruit makes out a larger part of the workforce compared to larger organizations (Solomon, 1984).

As mentioned, homosocial activities are most commonly not a conscious exclusion of the other gender. Holgersson (2013) argues that even if men are pro-equality, it is still prominent to have a preference for other men. Hence, it can be understood as an unreflexive practice. Moreover, as the entrepreneurial context is considered to be male-dominated, social criteria are emphasized by masculine norms (Hearn, 2002). Common attributes prevailing in this context are commitment, determination and a tolerance for risk and uncertainty (Spinelli & Adams, 2016). Furthermore, if the male dominance becomes normalized within an organization, it risks becoming a gender-neutral approach where gender inequality becomes invisible (Hearn, 2002). Mathieu (2009) and Knocke et. al., (2003) further emphasize that consciousness regarding gender diversity at a discursive level is not a guarantee for actual changes within the organization.

Homogeneous processes are however not the only ones reproducing homosociality. The term heterosociality is also part of homosociality and it refers to how for example women tend to be an affirmative audience for men's homosocial behaviour. This can be done by supporting certain decisions favouring men or by discouraging other women (Lipman-Blumen, 1976). Hence, the theory of homosociality may act in several ways to produce and reproduce a homogenous context through recruitment.

2.2.3. Theory Discussion

Previous research has been conducted using this theory where organizational structures and invisible norms to a large extent already exist. Here we apply this framework to start-ups, a context where norms might rather be created than reinforced or challenged. This approach may broaden the contributions of the theory.

It should be stated that this framework is just one out of many ways one can seek to understand the research question. For example by turning to HR or entrepreneurial literature, other theories could have been applicable, taking another perspective. A different theoretical framework, would arguably have resulted in a different analysis and also conclusion. However, the lens of homosociality was deemed appropriate as a tool helping to understand the current gender structure through recruitment processes of TMT- positions in start-ups. By applying the theory to a context where it has not been particularly used, the results have the ability to broaden the theoretical knowledge.

3. Method

3.1. An Interpretivist Approach

Aiming to understand the effect of the recruitment process on the current state of gender diversity in start-ups' TMTs, the authors have undertaken a subjectivist approach as we believe the creation of realities to be socially constructed (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Insights were enabled through the CEOs current perceptions of these decisions. This thesis is regulatory in nature, with

the purpose to describe what is going on, why the CEOs may make the recruitment choices that they do. We do not aim to tell them how they should think or how they should act, but rather we aim to raise awareness regarding the unconscious processes affecting the recruitment outcome. Hence, this will allow them to make more informed choices. On these accounts, this thesis takes a stance in the interpretive paradigm in order to answer the research question (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

3.2. A Qualitative Method using Interviews

Aiming to gain an understanding of the study participants' perception of the recruitment process, qualitative interviews were considered fit to purpose. This, in comparison to a survey with prespecified answers, let the CEOs use their own wording and develop reasonings. To be able to gain their perception and as truthful insights as possible, this was considered important (Bryman & Bell, 2019). A cross-sectional research design enabled to find current variations and similarities between the interview subjects, in comparison to studying a single case. By only interviewing the main decision-maker regarding the recruitment processes in start-ups, this allowed the authors to conduct the study at more organizations. This as we tried to understand the perception of the person with the most influence of the decision, why multiple case studies were not chosen.

Through the art of conversation, interviews gave us insights of the subjects' perception and experience of recruitment processes for positions included in the TMT. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were conducted (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This format allowed the authors to shape a structure around the topic of the research question while being open for unexpected findings.

According to Brinkmann & Kvale (2015), interviewing is a skill that is tacit and context-bound. Therefore, before conducting the actual interviews, a pilot interview was held to evaluate the interview questions level of clarity and the execution of the overall interview process. Minor changes were made to increase clarity in both formulation and interview structure. Furthermore, the authors continuously evaluated their performance after each interview, making adjustments if needed.

3.3. A Generic Purposive Sample

The following generic purposive sampling criteria were set;

- Being a small firm (EU-Commission, 2012)
 - $10 < x < 50$ employees
 - $2 < x < 10$ million € in turnover or balance sheet total
- Considered as a start-up with tech-influences
- HQ in Stockholm
- Having a formal TMT and a male CEO

As start-ups may differ in certain aspects, these priori criteria were set with the aim to reach firms at a comparable level. Start-ups not reaching the lower boundaries for being considered a small firm, may not yet have formal structures or an 'TMT' in place. The upper boundary on the other hand is set as increased resources may allow for more resource demanding options regarding the formation of 'TMT's. It is therefore suitable to distinguish these firms from organizations that are no longer within these frames.

Companies fulfilling these criteria were found through searching the internet and contacted through Email or LinkedIn. Many potential respondents were however preoccupied, and in that sense the sampling was opportunistic (Bryman & Bell, 2019). This led to a sample of nine interviews. Their TMTs ranged from having 0%- 33% female representation, with an average of 12% (Appendix 2). The empirical gathering continued to the point where saturation was achieved, i.e. the authors could not find new patterns or emerging variations from the collected data that could affect the outcome of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

3.4. The Interview Process

Through the interview guide, the authors were able to make sure all relevant questions were answered (Appendix 1). The authors used warm-up questions to make the interviewee feel comfortable and establish rapport before moving on to the questions regarding the recruitment. If the interview, when approaching its end, did not yet contribute with relevant knowledge to explain what the authors aimed to understand, more specific and direct doorknob questions were prepared to make sure all relevant information was gathered. To get the answers needed, the interviews lasted on average for a little over 35 minutes. Besides, before ending the interview, all interviewees were asked to add any piece of information they thought was relevant for us to understand how their current TMT-formation came about (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

In order to better capture the subjective understandings, interviewees were encouraged to develop examples of their statements (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interviewers aimed to let the interviewee speak without intervening or asking leading questions, to limit the risk of reconstructing a new reality (Thomsen & Brinkmann, 2009). These examples ensured substance behind statements as well as a deepened understanding of the findings for the authors.

As all respondents agreed to be recorded, this was done by using several sound audio-recorders. This offered insurance to the covered material in case of unforeseen circumstances, which also happened. Furthermore, all interviews got transcribed word by word the same day as the interview. This made out the foundation for conducting as transparent and just analysis as possible. All interviews were conducted and transcribed in Swedish, therefore, quotes were carefully translated into English, to give justice to the meaning of the words used (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

The authors undertook different roles during the interviews. While one had the responsibility of leading the interview, the other assisted with follow-up questions when needed, focusing on any discrepancies as well as soft aspects such as initial reactions of the interviewee. Moreover, directly after each interview the authors evaluated how it went. These cues, which may otherwise be overlooked, could therefore be made conscious and contribute to a better understanding of the findings (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

The authors aimed to conduct all interviews in person, but due to the COVID-19 situation, some had to take place using alternative solutions. Measures were taken to manage the issue of missing signals contained in body-language, as well as to establish rapport. By using video-solutions to capture non-verbal signals this eased the communication. Furthermore, additional warm-up questions were asked to establish trust and rapport, similarly to informal conversations taking place before an interview held in person.

3.5. The Data Analysis

The authors of this study had a fair idea of which theory to apply early on, as it seemed relevant to the puzzling phenomenon identified. Consequently, the study initially had a deductive tendency. Contrastingly, with this study being of an interpretivist qualitative character, hypotheses were not deemed to be useful. Further on, the coding and analyzing of the data were rather conducted inductively, with the data collected as the primary foundation for the emerging empirical themes. However, as already having a theoretical framework in mind, the authors believe that this affected their take on the analysis. Hence, the research strategy has had tendencies of both being inductive and deductive, which is often the case (Bryman & Bell, 2019). By doing so, the authors could use empirics and theory for as long as it contributed with further understanding.

When analyzing the data, the authors individually conducted a coding and analysis before comparing the results, which enabled more perspectives to become present. As there is a risk of losing the data's inherent meaning and context when coding, these separate procedures worked as a way to try to mitigate this. Likewise, by repeatedly going over the data in order to discuss the themes found, we were constantly reminded of its meaning. This process was helpful to stay as true as possible to the data. When searching for themes, we focused on factors such as repetitions, analogies, similarities and differences. This resulted in the categorization of empirical themes that were considered to contribute to the understanding of the research question. Furthermore, clear quotes were used to increase the trustworthiness and reflexivity as the respondents were given a voice without interpretation of the authors (Bryman & Bell, 2019). A table of the empirical themes is presented in Appendix 3. However, note that this table only exemplifies, and is therefore not exhaustive.

3.6. Method Discussion

3.6.1. Reflexivity

This study is conducted by two young western female business-students which may have an impact on how we see the world. Firstly, the authors find gender diversity to be an important topic to raise, which can be seen to have influenced the researched area. Secondly, growing up in a time where gender equality is discussed may further contribute to our values. As being aware of these values allows for reflexivity, stating them allow transparency.

While acknowledging that our values may have influenced the choice of theory and method, efforts were made to stay as objective as possible in the data collection and analysis. As the theory may be considered critical by nature, our own reflexivity was crucial in not starting to judge, but to understand. We actively tried not to make interpretations about the data depending on our perception of the respondent. Efforts made included returning to the empirics often, performing a preliminary coding and analysis separately as well as questioning one another. Although measures were taken, as being constructivist, we are aware that different authors may have found other parts more or less interesting in the empirics and therefore may have had a different outcome in the study. Not the least as our gender may have affected the way the respondents felt that they were able to answer the questions asked.

3.6.2. Ethical & Moral Considerations

The interviewees were informed about the overall purpose of the study, understanding their recruitment processes for roles included in the TMT, as well as how their answers would only be used for this thesis. However, the gender diversity approach was kept out as the authors deemed that knowing this, it may have had an impact on their answers. As the issue of gender diversity may be sensitive, the respondents' anonymity was ensured by changing their names and not including any information that could lead back to a specific respondent. The authors also offered to send the thesis report to all respondents when finalized, to increase the reciprocity.

3.6.3. Quality of Study

Credibility

Qualitative research is often criticized for being too subjective. However, measures were taken to collect and present as reliable responses as possible. Recordings and transcriptions of interviews minimize the impact of memory flaws and prevent the authors own wording and values to come through. The interview subjects' anonymity allowed them to tell their story more freely. The interviewees were not given the option to edit their answers. This, as we did not want them to change their answers to what could be considered the "correct" answers (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

Transferability

The authors have taken measures such as having a representative sample with clear criteria to enable transferability (Bryman & Bell, 2019). By clearly positioning the thesis within the context of Swedish tech-influenced start-ups, enables the reader to judge the transferability.

Dependability

As no auditing has been conducted, the authors deemed the thorough documentation of the process to be enough for enabling others to conduct a similar study. Selection criteria (3.3), interview guide (Appendix 1) and template of the coding (Appendix 3) all contribute to the documentation and to ensure a sound process.

Confirmability

By stating the authors' own values and exercising reflexivity, the authors have taken steps to prevent projecting their own values onto the study to the greatest degree reasonable. These steps include measures mentioned above, such as through the data collection, coding and analysis.

4. Empirics & Analysis

4.1.1. Empirics: Recruitment method

Start-ups tend not to possess large resources when it comes to recruitment, in monetary terms, neither regarding the competence often held by an HR-department. In most of the interviews, it was noted that the HR-function was one of the last positions to be added. As having limited resources, all respondents expressed benefits of recruitment through networks when searching for candidates to include in the TMT. This was seen as a way to reduce the amount of effort, money and time going into the search. Benefits of using networks included getting a greater perception of the potential candidates' qualifications and competence. Gustav indicated this by saying;

“The advantage of knowing everyone since before is that I have extremely great confidence in their abilities and that I also know their strengths.”

The knowledge of how candidates have acted and performed in the past, is perceived by most CEOs as a prediction of how they will act in the future. Due to this prediction, they perceived network-based recruitment as a risk-reducing mechanism. This recruitment method is seen as a preferable way of recruiting even when firms have gained enough financial resources to seek external help from a recruitment firm. Networks are therefore not just a preferred recruitment method due to limited resources. Most perceived this to be the best way of recruiting to find the potential candidates. Brody viewed it like this;

“Also, I can say like this, because it is quite interesting, all of our successful recruits ever, there might be some exceptions of course, have come from personal contacts. Although we have spent a lot of time on structuring a solid process with the help of recruitment companies, they have not been that successful I must say.”

All explained how these networks consist of not just first-hand contacts, but a wider range of contacts. These contacts, the CEOs admitted, are largely made out by men. Most expressed that by knowing someone beforehand, they are likely to have trust in that person’s judgement. Therefore, recommendations made by contacts are seen as trustworthy. Gustav expressed how he uses recommendations from his network as a risk-reducing mechanism when recruiting;

“One of my principles in recruitment is to talk to people I am impressed with, then I ask them ‘can you tell me someone you are impressed with?’ Then I talked to a guy that I’m impressed with and he said ‘this guy is probably the best designer I know’ and that’s how I got in touch with him.”

There is also a fear of getting a high employee turnover. The majority of CEOs expressed how they seek someone who they deem as trustworthy and will stay with the company. This intention was not found to be reliable in candidates coming from recruitment companies. As Carl put it;

I try to stay away from it [recruitment companies], because I don’t think there will be as good commitments from the people who come from recruitment companies. It’s not that they necessarily lack the right competence, but they may lack commitment and are more career-driven, so there is a higher risk of hiring that type of person who will not stay here long term.”

Adding to the suspicion of recruitment companies, is the great emphasis put on the candidate’s formal qualifications. Many CEOs shared the view that qualifications written on a résumé, may not be reliable enough, to reflect someone’s personal abilities or actual performance and achievements. Gustav expressed this well;

“No, paper performances [résumés], I’m pretty scared of that. Then the central question is, did he score a goal or was he just on the winning team? It’s like, if he was on the team bench when they won the World Cup, did he win the World Cup then? That is the central issue.”

Although most CEOs had a scepticism towards recruitment companies, this method was still sometimes used. When this was the case, it happened that CEOs added candidates to the process

that they had found themselves. For example Adam complemented the process with a candidate he found on LinkedIn. He wanted to be able to assess the candidate's abilities in comparison to others. As he received a confirmation of his candidate being the best, the recruitment was completed. Brody on the other hand, after adding his own candidate to the process, disregarded the advice from the recruitment company not to hire the candidate he found;

“The interesting thing was that I went back to this recruitment company, which we had paid a lot of money, to help us with the recruitment and I said we wanted to have Mark in the pipe for formal interviews as well. Their recommendation, their strong recommendation, to emphasize that, was not to recruit Mark and instead take someone else.”

Despite being small organizations, there is also a choice if to recruit to the TMT internally. However, several CEOs implied a tradeoff. On one hand there is a value in that an external candidate may have specific desired experience, not found internally. However, experienced people may be hard to recruit for a start-up. On the other hand, there are benefits of promoting someone with less experience internally, who holds company-specific knowledge, knows the product and the ways of working within the organization. Gustav expressed the trade-off between experience and potential through a football reference;

“Should Zlatan play in the national team, he is almost 40, yes but he has a d*nm lot of experience. At the same time, we have very promising players, but they have no experience. It is the same balance you have to do. What we have chosen to optimize on is; less weight on experience and more weight on more on potential.”

This is also supported by Henry, for whom this trade-off was not as prominent. He argued for recruiting internally as he perceived it to bring positive effects;

“I think it creates a completely different kind of loyalty if you build the people up for a leading position. They will be forever grateful both to you and the company and want to give back as well. [...] So I absolutely think that it puts positive vibes among the employees as that opportunity is there.”

A common concern for the CEOs was not wanting to make the TMT too big in comparison to the overall organization. All respondents further emphasized that roles should be prioritized based on a need of representation when shaping the structure of the TMT. Contrastingly, even when someone holds desired skills and its role is deemed important, a person may still not be brought up. An example of this comes from David's firm, where one role was represented by two men in the TMT, while another needed function held by a woman was missing in the TMT.

Although considered needed, this role was not brought up;

“She is extremely good and extremely mature in all of these questions. I’m considering if I should potentially bring her up, but haven’t really landed in a decision regarding that question and I might not have to stress it. [...] once you have placed someone in the ‘TMT’ it is very hard to remove someone since it’s like a demotion.[...] for example [Function X] is represented by two people, then I might want to reorganize to make it just one person.”

A common perception among the respondents was not being able to find suitable female candidates internally to hold positions in the TMT. For example, Felix remembered that although he had a fair representation of women in the company, he experienced a struggle to find female talent who would suit in the TMT;

“We now have 40% [women in the company], but now when we were to re-build the ‘TMT’ one year ago I realized that there was only two internal [men], who were f*****g good, and all candidates are dudes.”

4.1.2. Analysis: Recruitment method

The empirics describe how the recruitment method of TMTs usually and preferably occurs through the CEOs’ network, by selecting and approaching candidates deemed suitable. This as observing candidates’ skills, personally or have them confirmed by a peer is expressed as a means to reduce the risk of recruiting the wrong person. Therefore, amongst the CEOs, it is a natural and preferable way to select the candidates. Furthermore, the lack of resources, such as an HR-function, risks being unfavorable for women as the CEOs instead tend to turn to their male-dominated networks. Additionally, when not advertising the role it excludes potential candidates from applying, not least women, who are not included in the CEO’s networks (Knocke et. al., 2003). Hence, the social network is an important factor to consider when trying to understand the male dominance in top management positions (Fawcett & Pringle, 2000).

Despite already being a male-dominated context, that men are better at promoting each other than women are, may further explain why most candidates the CEOs found through their networks were male (Mavin & Grandy, 2012; Ibarra, 1992). Women may also be overlooked or seen as more of a risk as the norm rather resembles the idea of masculinity (van den Brink, 2009). The empirics state that the search in networks gave a sense of lowered risk, even if it could not always be pointed out why this feeling arose. By following the intuition, the image of who is suitable for the position is reproduced. Hence, the current gender distribution in start-up’s TMTs can be understood as a means of risk reduction for the CEOs. This as networks

give the perception of increased trust, due to it being easier to connect and trust those alike (Kanter, 1977).

As there is a skepticism towards formal procedures such as using recruitment companies and résumés, most of the CEOs prefer putting more focus on the social criteria. External recruitment, in general, allows a wider pool of potential candidates, which increases the opportunity for women to be recruited (Tanova, 2003; Carroll et. al., 1999). In contrast, the CEOs' addition of informal social criteria tends to reduce this possibility. This, as how an assessment, may shift away from formal qualifications. This explains how even in a supposedly formal process, acts of homosociality occur (van den Brink, 2009; Holgersson, 2013).

Furthermore, once having established structures of TMTs, the CEOs found them hard to change. For example, the empirics show how a CEO did not want to de-promote a male holding an over-represented role in the TMT, while a well-performing woman of a position needed in the TMT was left out due to concerns of swelling the team. Through the lens of homosociality, by de-promoting a man and promoting a woman, several norms would have to be broken. This creates behaviours and beliefs which will further reinforce the existing structures (Kanter, 1977).

4.2.1. Empirics: Personal Characteristics & Social Competence

As mentioned the CEOs emphasized factors beyond qualifications and competence. All respondents expressed the importance of personal characteristics such as drive, positive attitude and intrinsic motivation, much in line with those of the CEO. Sharing these similarities can be more important than possessing the right qualifications as it creates a perception of employees being highly engaged in the start-up. Holding characteristics as such can be seen as an expectation and a perceived key factor of successful candidates. Carl said;

“From my side, I try to permeate with the entrepreneurial, driven, as I have always worked in that way... I probably have some expectations on my colleagues to work in that same way. [...] People whom I've hired, coming in from larger firms, have a tough time in the start finding their role and accepting ambiguity.”

Moreover, the respondents stressed the importance of candidates' commitment to the organization. This commitment is thought of as being prepared to work hard for common goals and having a greater focus on the firm's overall performance, rather than individual goals. Therefore, employees are expected to buy into a culture where one takes ownership of issues observed, even if these issues are not part of one's specific role. For example Felix expressed;

“It's also about ownership. If you see a problem, say you're working with finance and you see that something has to be sorted

out in sales or product, it's not their problem, it's yours. If you see a problem, it's your problem to make sure it is resolved.”

As the CEOs will be working closely with members of the TMT, the social criteria becomes of great importance. In particular, all CEOs implied that they look for someone they feel that the work-process will be smooth with, someone they perceive as socially competent. Apart from sharing the characteristics such as drive and commitment, consequently, all CEOs deemed the more ambiguous requirement of a personal connection to be important. For most of the respondents the connection was just as important as holding relevant experience, competence and drive. In contrast, some, such as Brody, thought that this connection could make up for missing experience and competence;

“I felt that this is a person I want to work with. I'm unable to tell you why, but some characteristics he had convinced me that he would be successful. He did not hold much knowledge about our product, or have much previous experience in the role or industry, but he had the right attitude. Therefore, I felt like he was the one to hire for the job.”

Brody further explains how he bonded with the candidate through an informal conversation, exemplifying the familiar use of informal criteria when recruiting;

“So I met him, and we sat for one hour and actually just talked about his role for ten minutes. We talked about football and other things, and I felt straight away that this person, one can sit and talk to and have a dialogue. He was simply good at steering a dialogue, it doesn't matter about what.”

Hence, being similar in non-work related areas may play into the decision of whom to recruit as it plays into the ability to find common ground. Even if Brody could feel a connection rather instantly with a candidate over football, most CEOs have had more long-going relationships with people they deemed appropriate to hire. This could be contacts from their education, former colleagues or other areas of interaction. For example, this showed when Gustav explained parts of his TMT;

“Both our x-manager and y-manager I have worked with before. One was in the TMT with me at [Firm 1] and the other one was part of my team at [Firm 1]. [...] So I have worked with all members apart from our z-manager beforehand.”

4.2.2. Analysis: Personal Characteristics & Social Competence

As the start-up context tends to be dominated by men, it also contributes to shaping masculine norms. This was supported in the empirics, as no one explicitly expressed an exclusion of women but used words to describe a successful candidate with words associated with a masculine ideal, such as “drive” and “commitment” (Hearn, 2002; Spinelli & Adams, 2016). Due to being reinforced, norms like these can become so strong that they are not even perceived as gendered, hence, they become normalized (Hearn, 2002). A normalization further contributes to the idea of the masculine ideal being the correct one, as it is perceived to work. Likewise, the masculine ideal tends to be inferred through informal criteria which are concealed in words of meritocracy (Sealy, 2010). Consequently, by acknowledging and critically evaluating the current state, it may allow for conscious measures. In line with van den Brink (2009) and Holgersson (2013), we have found that CEOs may lower the formal assessment standards for the benefit of social criteria. By reducing the importance of formal evaluation criteria and instead turning to softer more ambiguous variables such as social bonding or personality, homosociality is reproduced (Kanter, 1977).

Our findings further show that being driven and committed can be seen as requirements, or even hygiene factors, going beyond the expectation of just doing one’s job. This commitment and drive included expectations such as taking ownership of issues observed, even those outside of the individual’s specific role, making the role description rather flexible. This also implies to take on more work and longer working hours. These expectations may however be regarded as a barrier for women as it may be assumed in the assessment that women are not able to commit to this degree (Wahl et al., 2018). Further, as found in the empirics, perceiving someone as socially competent largely consists of the familiar and social bonding, which in this case is made out by male norms and activities. For male CEOs this may make it harder to bond with women. This was supported in the empirics through the relative amount of examples where the CEOs had bonded with other males, in comparison to females, before hiring. This may be viewed as a response to limit the perceived uncertainty (Kanter, 1977). Contrastingly, even if it may lower the CEO’s uncertainty, choosing a person less qualified but who the CEO bonds with, may not allow for the best result for the organization's operation. Hence, the homosocial desire rejects the image of the rational man as emotions thus play a role in the decision-making of recruitment (Holgersson, 2013).

4.3.1. Empirics: The Gender Diversity Discourse & Practice

All respondents were aware of there being benefits of having gender diverse TMTs. As some expressed benefits of gender diversity vaguely as something that they perceived as good, others specifically highlighted the importance of benefits such as widening of perspectives and allowing for better decision-making. Gustav and Felix expressed this view;

“For a company to be able to go far it is important to be open for different perspectives, homogeneity will not help.”

“I think there is a great intrinsic value in a gender diversified TMT - one gets perspective.”

While acknowledging there being useful benefits of gender diversity, the CEOs' own TMT were often not diversified based on gender. Some, such as Brody and David, saw this as something that “just happens”, implying that no actions are needed to improve the diversity in the TMT, despite 0% women;

“It's actually nothing we think about. We think that it's a given and natural part, that is why we don't think about it. We don't have any processes that say we should have X amount of different sexes or X amount from different backgrounds.”

“I guess one could say that the five oldest [in the TMT] just happen to be gentlemen...”

However, most CEOs considered the benefits of gender diversity to bring desirable outcomes and were willing to make changes to achieve this. Therefore, they, exemplified through Henry, were willing to take action for changing the gender structure in the TMT;

“.. different people, different sexes, different ways of thinking. The better mix it is in a TMT, in a board, or in an organization, the better I think the organization will be. So I see it as a problem, or a problem....we have a little to work on, both on the board and TMT level to try to have as good of a mix as possible.”

Many of the CEOs had previously tried to take measures to improve gender diversity. However, when trying to improve it, they identified several obstacles. As often turning to the network for recruitment, it created a perception of a limited supply of competent women. Carl found this to be the main obstacle;

“We are very few females, unfortunately. And there unfortunately, I should say, my own network consists of too few women.”

Difficulties were however also encountered through the use of other recruitment methods. Felix thus shared Carl's experience of the difficulties of finding female candidates. For example, he had tried to find a woman through a recruitment company in an attempt to reach a broader scope of candidates;

“But although I was very clear in the communication with the executive search bureau and the specific recruiter when I said that I would like a female for this position. They could present a guy if they found someone who was very good, but the deal was to prioritize girls, still, I only got one out of 15 profiles presented being a female.”

However, the most emphasized obstacles among the CEOs to find female candidates was the supply of competent women on the overall labour market. Hence, regardless of the respondents efforts to find women, the main barrier was often perceived as only made out by the lack of supply, rather than factors in the recruitment process itself. Gustav expressed;

“Absolutely, I try, we try, actively, to have a balanced team construction. In the end, we are limited by supply.”

4.3.2. Analysis: The Gender Diversity Discourse & Practice

Our findings show that all CEOs were aware of there being benefits from having gender diversified TMTs. These benefits were mainly expressed as improved decision-making due to a widening of perspectives. However, as being organizations with a great need of innovation and creativity, the respondents seemed not to be aware of these benefits, despite being important for most start-ups (Bassett-Jones, 2005). All CEOs were nonetheless aware of the gender imbalance in their TMTs, but their attitude towards this imbalance differed. Some saw the gender imbalance as something that had “just happened” and that the representatives in their TMTs are just the ones with the right competence. It can thus be seen as a way of wanting to point towards external reasons. In line with what Wahl et. al., (2018) argue, those within the norm, which in this case is male, are often unaware of their privileged position. In addition, this gender-neutral approach is a result of turning to the argument that gender does not matter. This view of the current gender distribution can therefore be seen as a result of something that “just happens” (Wahl et. al., 2018; Hearn, 2002).

However, the majority of CEOs considered the lack of women in their TMT to be an issue. As Mathieu (2009) argues, being aware of the gender diversity issue does not necessarily result in changed practices within the organization. As some tried to take measures, the empirics show that little of the CEOs’ active actions led to results. Despite finding it regrettable, most rather identified obstacles to change the prevailing structures such as; having too few women in their own networks or there being too few women possessing the desired skills in the overall labour market. Wahl et. al., (2018) further argue that women are more likely to be seen as incompetent as men often reserve top positions to people they perceive to be similar to themselves, and consequently more competent. This preference for recruiting other men, can be understood as an unreflexive practice, hence unconsciously reproducing the homosocial practices (Holgersson, 2013). By not taking the appropriate actions required to achieve change, the CEOs maintain the

prevailing gender imbalance despite being pro-equality. This does not mean that they are consciously rejecting women, it can rather be understood through an unconscious preference for men (Wägerud & Niklasson, 2006).

4.4.1 Summary of Findings

Recruitment Method

The preferable recruitment method for the CEOs tend to be methods where social criteria are highly prominent, such as through networks. This increases the chances of mutual trust and reduces the perceived risk concerning recruitment. Formal recruitment methods, mainly based on qualifications and competence, are thus perceived as inadequate.

Personal Characteristics & Social Competence

The CEOs search for personal characteristics such as commitment and drive. Due to the male dominated context, these characteristics can be seen as largely gendered. Furthermore, desiring to bond with the candidate, a male CEO is more likely to do this with another man as he is more likely to be perceived as similar.

The Gender Diversity Discourse & Practice

A distinction between the gender discourse and practice is identified. Some argue that the gender structure “just happens” while others found it to be regrettable. However, as the CEOs are aware of there being benefits from gender diversity, they may not have the full knowledge of which they are, or how they are achieved. Further, the CEOs may not fully understand their unconscious categorization of people and their attributes. As the informal social criteria weighs heavily, the CEOs can be seen to reproduce a homogeneous context despite being pro-equal.

5. Discussion

5.1. Discussion of Findings

Our analysis shows that tech-influenced start-ups are, in line with previous research, an arena for homosocial activities. Specifically, in this case, the current gender structure in TMTs, produced through recruitment, in this male-dominated context. However, to which degree this happens seems to be different, compared to previously researched firms. Firstly, start-ups do not tend to prioritize certain roles, for example HR and marketing in their TMT, which are almost always represented in larger and more structured firms. As these are positions often held by women, this may be one explanation for less female representation. Furthermore, as start-ups often lack HR, they also lack the competence to conduct formal recruitment processes. The CEOs are instead highly involved in the recruitment of top positions, making informal criteria more prominent. Moreover, recruitment through networks is perceived as the most preferable method due to the sensation of risk reduction and the low use of resources. Contrastingly, this recruitment method

reduces the pool of potential candidates, which risks missing relevant competence (Tanova, 2003; Carroll et. al., 1999). This may prevail as start-ups are often not scrutinized in the same way as larger firms. They are therefore not, for example, exposed to the same external pressure based on societal norms, including those of those of gender diversity in top positions.

To compile, turning to factors where start-ups distinguish themselves from larger organizations bring further insights to the theory of homosociality. The lack of resources and more formal procedures tend to give increased space for informal recruitment procedures to take place in start-ups. Furthermore, as start-ups are operating at a stage highly defined by risk, these informal procedures may be used as measures to reduce the perceived risk. These circumstances are working as enhancers for homogenous recruiting, being favourable for men. Therefore, start-ups can be argued to be a context where homosocial activities might occur to an even greater extent compared to larger firms. The authors are aware that studying a predetermined male-context makes the homosocial activities more prominent. However, apart from this, the authors argue that start-ups still possess specific characteristics, as mentioned in the sections above, that give more room for homosocial activities to take place. Naturally, in contexts where similar factors are notable, the same may be expected.

As start-ups today, might become the larger organizations of tomorrow, this study gives an enlarged understanding of how homosocial activities are established in the beginning of a new firm's life as well as how it distinguishes from previous studied organizations. Despite that start-ups' CEOs are aware of the unequal gender distribution in their TMTs, focus on other factors, such as the survival of the firm, leaves less resources to be put on recruitment. Although all positions in the TMTs may not require tech-specific competence, the perceived supply of competent women, among the CEOs are in general still low, which may be explained by the CEOs' weight put on informal social criteria. However, as the organization grows, allowing for more resources to be put on recruitment, networks and usage of informal social criteria tends to stay. This indicates that homosocial activities will continue to occur even with more resources and procedures in place. Hence, lack of resources is not the only explanatory variable. The CEOs strong perception of reducing risk and longing for trust, contributes to continuing to perform informal procedures, as they often have been viewed as successful in the past. Start-ups will therefore continue to keep procedures of homosocial reproduction as they grow. Hence, as norms and structures are shaped in an early stage, they may have implications in the long term.

5.2. Implications & Contribution

Through this study, the authors have shown that CEOs of tech-influenced start-ups are not fully aware of the reasons for, or implications of, their choices regarding the recruitment to their TMT. The implications tend to be an increased sense of trust and reduction of risk through the use of methods permeated by informal criteria. This might be on the expense of a wider competence pool and benefits such as better decision making and creativity resulting from gender diversity, leading to improved overall firm performance. Therefore, the authors of this

study have, in a male dominated context, raised awareness of the potential reasons behind these choices. Being aware of these reasons, gives the CEOs a chance to make more informed hiring-decisions. Reducing the extent put on the informal criteria can be achieved by publicly advertising roles, going beyond recruitment through networks as well as looking over the recruitment profile required, that often tends to be gendered.

As start-ups have the chance to grow larger and more powerful, they are working as an important foundation for where homosocial activities start to take place. By applying the theory of homosociality, the authors believe that this study has enlarged the understanding and implications to a context that has previously been little explored through this perspective. Context-specific explanatory variables such as lack of resources and an enhanced longing for trust and risk reduction, contribute to the understanding of current gender structures. Several factors may play into the gender distribution of TMTs, but one thing is for certain, the recruitment process is one explanation and it does not “just happen”.

5.3. Further Research

Choices regarding delimitations and the method used in this interpretative study also necessarily led to limitations, providing a basis for future research. Therefore, we suggest further research that may deepen and broaden the current knowledge pool through a longitudinal study. For example, it would be interesting to follow how a set of start-ups' TMTs gender structures develop with time. Such study could further contribute to the understanding of what impact the start-up's initial TMT gender structure has for the firm's future TMT gender structure. If the structures tend to change, it would be interesting to gain insights of the largest explaining variables. As this study focused on tech-influenced start-ups, we did not pursue comparisons between specific industries. Placing a similar study to a different context may give different results. Future research would benefit from analyzing and comparing different contexts, to gain a greater understanding of where, when and why homosocial tendencies differ.

6. Conclusion

This qualitative study has focused on the recruitment process of tech-influenced start-ups' TMTs. The authors have interviewed the CEOs of start-ups and interpreted their answers through the theory of Homosociality, aiming to answer;

How can the current state of gender diversity in start-ups' top management teams be understood through the recruitment process?

The authors have found that homosocial activities are more present and profound in the recruitment process of TMTs in tech-influenced start-ups in comparison to study objects of previous research. This despite being born in one of the most gender equal countries in the world and in a time where gender equality is highly prominent in social discourse. The high use

of informal procedures in this male-dominated context tends to cause homogeneity in top positions. These procedures are perceived as risk-reducing and low cost mechanisms, both considered important in this context. Homosocial reproduction in the recruitment process to TMTs in this context is hence largely understood through;

- 1) The choice of recruitment methods
- 2) The weight put into social characteristics aligning with those of the male CEO
- 3) A distinction between the pro-gender equality discourse and actual practice

Awareness of these variables, allow for more informed hiring decisions.

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8. Appendix

Appendix 1 - Interview Guide

Ethical considerations

1. Voluntary participation in this interview:
This means that you at any time can choose to end the interview or choose to disregard a question. If you choose to discontinue/disregard, all you need to do is to inform us about this decision, without further motivation.
2. All answers will be anonymized. Only information such as your role (CEO) and the time and place of the interview will be brought up in the thesis, hence no records that may trace back to you as an individual. This means that we will not inform anyone about your participation in this thesis.
3. The material gathered will only be used for the purpose of this thesis:
This means that we will not share the gathered data apart from the anonymized format used in the thesis.
4. For the purpose of retelling and analyzing answers we ask for your permission to record the interview. This to enable transcription later on and therefore minimize the issue caused by a lacking memory. This means no change in what was previously stated, the recorded file will not be shared.
5. Do you have any questions regarding this thesis before we start the interview?

Warm-up questions

- Could you briefly tell us a little bit about yourself and your background?
- Could you tell us a bit about the firm and how it came to be?
- How would you describe the organizational culture?

Topic-related questions

- What does the TMT-constellation look like today?
- Could you describe how these positions were filled?
 - The order they were put into the team
 - Based on which criteria
 - Description for each position
- The TMT-group today
 - Is the work in the TMT usually smooth or do different opinions often contrast each other?
 - What would you say is the strength/weakness of the TMT today that makes

the firm develop?

- Are you thinking about recruiting any additional positions that will be included in the TMT?
- What would you generally say is the most important variable to make the work of the TMT develop?
- Do you consider that any additional variables could/should be considered in the formation of your TMT?

Doorknob questions

- Is the TMT's gender diversity something that you have considered?
- Has the question regarding gender in the TMT ever been on the agenda?
- What do you think is the reason for the formation that you have today?
 - What do you think about this and what do you think could be different?

End Question

- Is there anything that you would like to add or something that you think we should have asked, to gain a greater understanding of the formation/recruitment of your TMT?

Appendix 2 - Interviewee Appendix

Name used in paper	Males in TMT	Females in TMT	Where	When
Adam	71%	29%	Their office	February
Brody	100%	0%	Video conference	February
Carl	100%	0%	Their office	February
David	100%	0%	Their office	February
Elijah	100%	0%	Their office	February
Felix	67%	33%	Their office	February
Gustav	67%	33%	Their office	March
Henry	75%	25%	Video conference	March
Isac	80%	20%	Video conference	April

Appendix 3 - Themes and codes

Coding Scheme		
Quotes Illustrating First order themes	Second order themes	Third order aggregate themes
<p>“Yes but in the start one primarily goes to one's own network since I have worked with this person so I know she is good and then the risk decreases.” (Adam)</p> <p>“ I would say first and second hand (contacts) have been successful recruitments.” (Brody)</p> <p>“He was not my contact, but my contact’s contact through an old colleague.” (Carl)</p> <p>“[...] it's what one has access to, since it is the easiest, since it is the most convenient.” (Felix)</p> <p>“The advantage of knowing everyone since before is that I have extremely great confidence in their abilities and that I also know their strengths.” (Gustav)</p> <p>“We had worked together at a different company [...] and then there were people from the industry that we knew that were working on similar questions.” (Isak)</p>	<p>→</p> <p>Network Recruitment</p> <p>→</p>	Recruitment Method
<p>“As we are a start-up, we are always searching for more great individuals who can grow within the company.” (David)</p> <p>“What we have chosen to optimize on is; less weight on experience and more weight on more potential.” (Gustav)</p> <p>“I think we should find the right people and let them develop within the company.” (Henry)</p> <p>“We think it is important that one comes up instead, then one has an understanding of how the product works and the decision-making with the customer works and we think that is important.” (Brody)</p> <p>“We now have 40% [women in the company], but now when we were to re-build the TMT one year ago I realized that there was only two internal [men], who were f*****g good, an all</p>	<p>→</p> <p>Internal Recruitment</p> <p>→</p>	
	→	

<p>candidates are dudes.” (Felix)</p> <p>“I try to stay away from it [recruitment companies], because I don’t think there will be as good commitments from the people who come from recruitment companies.” (Carl)</p> <p>“We actually activated help from a recruitment consult, a recruitment firm, who came with candidates all the time. But it did not feel good with those candidates.” (Brody)</p> <p>“So what is the profile on this person? So we brought her into that process, but she was still so much better than those that the recruiters had found. But then we still got that validation.” (Gustav)</p>			
	Recruitment firms		
<p>“Yes, and that one really is excited about this...it was for example her greatest strength, she is incredibly passionate....really want this as it is fun, it's not a career move or so...” (Adam)</p> <p>“From my side, I try to permeate with the entrepreneurial, driven, as I have always worked in that way... I probably have some expectations on my colleagues to work in that same way. ” (Carl)</p> <p>“It was the drive. Competence wise there were a few more, but who lacked the drive”. (Elijah)</p> <p>“Energy and will is important.” (David)</p>	→	Drive	→
<p>“One has to be aware that it is different to work in a startup, one commits very hard to its job and work in a different way compared to a regular role in a traditional firm. “(Carl)</p> <p>“It’s also about ownership. If you see a problem, say you're working with finance and you see that something has to be sorted out in sales or product, it’s not their problem, it’s yours. If you see a problem, it's your problem to make sure it is resolved.” (Felix)</p> <p>“If you see a problem - solve it. One goes in and takes ownership.” (Gustav)</p>	→	Commitment	→
<p>“I felt that this is a person I want to work with. I’m unable to tell you why, but some characteristics he had convinced me that he would be successful. He did not hold much knowledge about our product, or have much</p>	→	Bonding	→
			Personal Characteristics and Social Competence

<p>previous experience in the role or industry, but he had the right attitude. Therefore, I felt like he was the one to hire for the job.” (Brody)</p> <p>“I think one tries to find people one can trust, that you know, know how they are and can work together with.” (Carl)</p> <p>“So somewhere that is how it can go wrong, say that you have a culture and bring in people who do not fit that culture then that is not good either.” (Gustav)</p> <p>“Well when you have been working for a while and worked with alot of people, you know who you enjoy working with.” (Isak)</p>	→		→	
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<p>“If a TMT is, and we have been there before, is completely homogenous, then there are large risks that one makes inaccurate decisions just because everyone agrees.” (Brody)</p> <p>“Yes, I first and foremost thought about competence and I have also, absolutely, thought about the gender- aspect.” (Carl)</p> <p>“I think there is a great intrinsic value in a diversified TMT - one gets perspective.” (Felix)</p> <p>“Homogeneity will not help. And that is on all levels - it is gender, it is experience, it is country.” (Gustav)</p>	→	Attitude- Gender Diversity Seen as Important	→	Gender Diversity Discourse and Practice
<p>“It's actually nothing we think about.[...] We don't have any processes that say we should have X amount of different sexes or X amount from different backgrounds.” (Brody)</p> <p>“ I guess one could say that the five oldest also just happen to be gentlemen...but these are the people with the most experience as it appears now.” (David)</p>	→	Attitude - Gender Diversity Not Considered	→	
<p>“[...] you can not take an inferior person just because they have a certain gender. But we have started with [name of software] who makes personality tests. And the idea is that you should be able to be more open-minded, so everyone has to do these tests regardless of background and so on.” (Adam)</p> <p>“Absolutely, I try, we try, actively to have a balanced team construction. In the end, we are limited by supply.” (Gustav)</p>	→	Actions	→	



