The Search
for Executives

A qualitative study exploring the reasonings of an executive search consultant

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore executive search consultants' reasonings for a candidate's suitability of a given position, and whether or not these align with the industry's ideal of an objective mission. In total, three research consultants and six recruitment consultants have been interviewed at one executive search firm (ESF). A rhetorical discourse analysis is applied to the collected empirical data to analyze the persuasive arguments (logos, ethos and pathos) the consultants employed. Ultimately, disclosing the level of subjectivity or/and objectivity that permeates their assessments. It has been found that the consultants' reasonings for the suitability of a candidate in the assignments showing low exigence (i.e. state of urgency), contained all three persuasive arguments, but to different degrees. In the assignments showing a high level of exigence, it was found that the consultants excluded at least one persuasive argument. Overall, the degree of and mix of inventions used, depended on what arguments the consultant deemed most effective in the given context of an assignment. Nevertheless, the results confirm that both objective and subjective forces influence the hiring practices at the studied ESF. This outcome is, according to scholars from the rhetorical field of study, "correct", since a rhetorician (i.e. consultant) must employ all three modes of persuasion to fully convey his/her message. This line of reasoning suggests that the consultants' reasonings will always exhibit some level of subjectivity, which in turn implies that the common mission of ESFs to have completely objective practices, is not plausible. This thesis helps to inform and alert ESFs about their biased practices, and why subjective assessments arise. In this way, they can use this information to improve their processes to come closer to their ideal of an objective mission.

Key words: *Executive search, Biased recruitment practices, Ideal of an objective mission, Candidate suitability, Modes of persuasion.*

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Dictionary

TERM(S)	DEFINITION
Good fit/Qualified/Suitable	Are used interchangeably and refer to that the candidate meets the set qualifications.
Biased	Infers the existence of subjectivity.
Unbiased	Infers the existence of objectivity.
Headhunting	Another name for the search process.
Ideal of an objective mission	Refers to ESFs goal of having biased-free recruitment practices.
Writers	Refers to the authors of this thesis.
Reasonings	Refers to the types of arguments a consultant employs.
Modes of persuasion/Persuasive arguments	Are used interchangeably and refer to logos, ethos and pathos.

Acknowledgements

"It was just like that. I want him. I want him to take this job, I want him to be the one."

- *Dorothea Carlén, Executive Search consultant.*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Powerful forces are shaping the future of the global economy. Exponential advances in technology are placing increasing demands on rapid adaptation and companies' ability to innovate. Combine this with shifting workforce skills and growing political uncertainty, the complexity almost seems impossible to tackle for business leaders (Desjardins 2018). Amidst this uncertainty and growing complexity, more organizations are partnering with executive search firms (henceforth: ESFs) to minimize the risks associated with an unsuccessful hire (Dreher, Lee et al. 2011). These specialized consultancies assist in identifying, attracting and assessing top talents at executive-level, meanwhile the final hiring decision still lies with the client company.

The goal of employing an ESF is to secure the most qualified candidate for a given position. To do this, ESFs aim to make objective assessments by employing different competency-based measurement tools such as in-depth personal interviews (AESC 2018). However, previous studies have shown that the practices of ESFs contribute to the observed labour market discrimination at the pinnacles of organizational hierarchies (e.g, Coverdill, Finlay 1998, Faulconbridge, Beaverstock et al. 2009, Hamori 2010, Manfredi, Clayton-Hathway et al. 2019, Tienari, Meriläinen et al. 2013). Although scholars have acknowledged that the practices of ESFs are biased, there has not been a sufficient empirical verification of this possibility through qualitative measurements. This is particularly interesting given the importance of contextual understanding when analyzing social behaviour, (Bell, Bryman et al. 2019).

The outlined facts above imply that, even though the goal of ESFs is to find the most qualified candidate, preferably through objective means, prior research has found that ESFs practices are biased. Given this, is the ideal of an objective mission plausible, or merely an *ideal*?

1.2 Purpose & Research Question

This thesis aims to explore executive search consultants' perspectives through in-depth interviews. More specifically, how the consultants' interpretation of the context in an assignment affects their reasonings when persuading the client of a candidate's suitability, and how this aligns with their quest to make objective matchmakings. Naturally, the research question is as follows:

How do the executive search consultants' reasonings for a candidate's suitability for a position align with their ideal of an objective mission?

1.3 Scope

This study mainly concentrates on hiring practices within the context of ESFs. More specifically, on the perspectives of *only* the research- and recruitment consultants at *one* ESF in Stockholm. The study is hence limited to their subjective views.

Also, the study focuses on "retained" executive search, i.e. an ESF that receives an up-front fee no matter the success of the recruitment assignment, and searches candidates for permanent positions.

Furthermore, the studied phenomenon is only explored through a qualitative inquiry by conducting in-depth interviews with the concerned consultants. No further data from the studied company was used to support this thesis.

1.4 Expected Contributions

Since ESFs search for candidates to hold executive positions, they have a direct impact on who gets to sit at the pinnacles of an organization. For this reason, the influence of ESFs is important to understand in the field of management as these candidates are set to hold a management position.

This study applies a new approach to understanding the ESFs involvement in the observed labour market discrimination by using qualitative means, compared to

previous quantitative studies. By holding in-depth interviews with the consultants and then applying a rhetorical discourse analysis to the collected empirical material, deeper explanatory variables will be illuminated and thus add to the existing field of study. This in-depth understanding will in turn help ESFs and other hiring agencies improve their processes and thus come closer to their ideal of an objective mission.

2. Theoretical Background

As this thesis seeks to examine the reasonings employed by the consultants during an executive search process, the theoretical background contains a literature review of both the field of executive search, and the analysis tools employed. The literature review will be used to (1) compare the thesis' results with the result of prior research and (2) to create a framework for the analysis.

2.1 Literature Review Executive Search

Executive search firms (ESFs) are third-party agencies acting as a labor market intermediary between an employee-seeking organization (i.e. the client) and prospective candidates (Bonet, Cappelli et al. 2013). The ESF's role is not to do hiring of any kind, that decision lies with the client, but to help identify, attract and assess suitable candidates, mainly for senior, executive or other highly specialised positions (Meriläinen, Tienari et al. 2013). The success of ESFs lies in their ability to secure the most qualified candidate for the client company (Skokic, Coh 2017). The candidates who are headhunted are often already in employment and are not actively seeking a job themselves (Khurana 2002). The formal process of executive search has become fairly standardized over the years (Peltonen 2013) and it can be found in appendix 7.1.

The existing sparse academic literature on executive search shows that the field has received little attention in organizational research (Clerkin, Lee 2010). However, the handful of studies which exist within this field can be divided into the following three distinct areas:

2.1.1 The vital role of reputation

Although the literature on executive search is scarce, there exists a great deal of research on management consulting. Because executive search is considered to be a specialized form of a consultancy service, this body of research can hence be applied analogously (Tienari, Meriläinen et al. 2013). The fundamental role of consultants is to transfer ideas and knowledge between otherwise unconnected actors (Hargadon, Sutton 2000). This type of service is recognized to be of an intangible nature and co-created with the client company (Rohrmeier, Egan et al. 2019). Since the service can

neither be observed, touched or sampled before purchase, it remains difficult for clients to verify its quality (Britton, Clark et al. 1992). Because of the uncertainty, clients assess the quality by relying on the reputation of ESFs (Britton, Clark et al. 1992). Maintaining a good reputation is therefore crucial for ESFs.

Reputation is maintained by building trustworthy relationships with clients, but also through repeated business with previous clients and client recommendations (Britton, Wright et al. 2000). The commonly shared traits clients primarily value when choosing an ESF, are: *market intelligence*, *confidentiality*, *professionalism* and *objectivity* (AESC 2020). These factors overlap each other to some extent. Market intelligence refers to the functional expertise in finding the most suitable candidate in a highly competitive environment (Harvey, Beaverstock et al. 2019). Confidentiality refers to the discretion of the identity of all parties involved, the clients do not want to disclose to their competitors that they are looking for new talent, at the same time the candidates do not want to risk their current employment by revealing that they might be interested in changing their job setting (Tienari, Meriläinen et al. 2013). These two factors also relate to professionalism, which is signaled by showing a track record of previous successful placements (Harvey, Beaverstock et al. 2019).

Objectivity refers to ESFs ideal of having objective practices, as to make sure that the most qualified candidate is found. In practice, this is done through continuous detailed discussions with the client about the sought candidate profile. Once prospective executives have been headhunted, the search consultants then meticulously inspect and evaluate them against the candidate profile by employing different competency-based tools (AESC 2018). These tools include in-depth personal interviews, credential verification, psychometric testing and other techniques that avoid unconscious bias (AESC 2018). Along the process, there is also a continuous dialogue with the representatives of the client company, in which the consultants determine the fate of a specific candidate by arguing for or against his/her continued participation. Gradually, the pool of candidates is reduced, after which only the candidates that best match the candidate profile are presented to the client (AESC 2018). After the presentation of the candidates, the client chooses the most suitable candidate out of the presented candidates.

2.1.2 ESFs' role as an elite labour market intermediary

Scholars have suggested that the service of ESFs is derived from the knowledge economy. Additionally, the source of competitiveness in such an economy relies heavily on the supply of "talented individuals" (Manfredi, Clayton-Hathway et al. 2019). "Talented individuals" refers to those who are good at utilizing the opportunities that exist in the knowledge economy by driving innovation and thereby increasing profits. ESFs, particularly, have played an important role in the "war for talent", by matching talented individuals to executive job opportunities (Enright 2013).

However, it has long been argued that the typical characteristics shared by the pool of highly specialized headhunted candidates, contribute to the formation of elite labour markets (Enright 2013). The elite labour market refers to those workers holding positions at the pinnacles of organisational hierarchies. ESFs influence the elite labour market in two main ways. One, by playing an important role in defining who does and does not classify as 'talented' and two, by shaping the process in such a way that being known to the search consultants becomes critical in finding an executive position on the market (Faulconbridge, Beaverstock et al. 2009).

2.1.3 Biased practices

Additional studies within the ESF field suggest that the practices of ESFs are biased (Meriläinen, Tienari et al. 2013). A study by Dreher, Lee et al. (2011) showed that the candidates in the databases of large ESFs were 89% male, 88% white and 71% from middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds. In a similar vein, Faulconbridge et al. (2009) have suggested that markers of diversity such as gender, race, ethnicity and age play a crucial role in the decision about who gets headhunted. Coverdill and Finlay (1998) did likewise hint that gender and race generally influence what is defined as a good candidate "fit". Contrary to received wisdom, Fernandez-Mateo and Fernández (2016) found that once women are considered for a position, they are no less likely to be hired compared to men, however, women are still less likely to be interviewed by ESFs in the first place.

2.2 Theoretical Background of Analysis Tools

2.2.1 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is used to gain a better understanding of the aspect of communication (Schiffrin, Hamilton et al. 2015). There exists no established single definition of 'discourse analysis' instead, the definitions that exist can be divided into three categories, namely: (1); anything beyond the sentence, (2); language in use, and (3); a broader range of social practice that includes nonlinguistic and nonspecific instances of language (Schiffrin, Hamilton et al. 2015). Hodges et al., (2008) reason that discourse analysis is important when one aims to study and analyze the uses of language.

2.2.2 Rhetorical Analysis

This study focuses on a rhetorical discourse analysis. A rhetorical analysis is a valuable tool for analyzing the persuasive arguments a rhetoric employs to convince an audience of his/her stance (Winton 2013). As with discourse analysis, the meaning of 'rhetoric' has been discussed for centuries (Covino, Jolliffe 1995). One of the most noteworthy definitions of rhetoric is that of the greek philosopher, Aristotle. He described it as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Barrett 1991). Meaning that it is used for the art of persuasive speaking or writing. Aristotle stated that the three modes of persuasion are *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* (Barrett 1991). Different situations may require the rhetorician to use different levels of emphasis of the three arguments, however, anyone seeking to fundamentally persuade an audience must incorporate all three arguments into his/her message (Covino, Jolliffe 1995).

Furthermore, when conducting a rhetorical analysis, there are several other dimensions (above the modes of persuasion, also referred to the "canon of invention") such as exigence, audience and stasis theory that should be considered as a way of analyzing the structure of a particular discourse (Bauer, Gaskell 2000). These dimensions will be further discussed in section 3.4.2.

2.3 Research Gap

As previously mentioned, the goal of ESFs is to find the candidate that best meets the client's needs, preferably through objective means. However, past researchers have

outlined the contributing role of ESFs to the observed labour market discrimination. Although previous studies have suggested that the practices of ESFs are biased, this phenomenon has mostly been explored through quantitative means. This is particularly interesting given the importance of the contextual understanding when analyzing social behaviour, which is possible through a qualitative inquiry (Bryman, 2019).

Additionally, the literature on executive search has, primarily been described from the perspective of ESFs, meanwhile the consultant's perspective remains comparatively unexplored. This fact is also interesting since the consultants play a crucial advicing role in deciding both who are headhunted, and later presented to the client.

To supplement existing research, this study will explore the practices of ESFs through qualitative measurements. This will be done by studying the nature of how executive search consultants reason when deciding a candidate's fate. Central to the study is thus to interpret the consultant's statements from their perspective and in their context to get an understanding of how these individuals make decisions about prospective candidates. An analysis of what types of arguments the consultants employ in order to convince the client of the accuracy of their assessment, will in turn give indications about the objective or subjective nature of the hiring practices from the perspective of the consultants.

Put briefly, this thesis will contribute to the existing field of study by employing qualitative means, while examining the executive search practices from the perspective of the consultant.

3. Methodology

As the literature on executive search is relatively scarce, the theoretical background contained both prior research and the background of used analysis tools. To complement the absence of a theoretical framework, the methodology will operate as a template for the analysis- and discussion parts of the thesis.

3.1 Choice of Method

3.1.1 Research paradigm

The *epistemology* of this study is *interpretive* in nature since the study intends to gain a deeper understanding of the consultants' perception by interpreting their reasonings for the suitability of a candidate. Additionally, the overall executive search process is based on the social interactions between the consultants and the client company. As the candidate profile is socially constructed and continuously revised together by these two parties, this implies a *constructionist ontological* position (Bell, Bryman et al. 2019)

3.1.2 Abductive process

The abductive process was chosen to mitigate some of the limitations a deductive or an inductive process infers. For instance, since the writers were not guided by a hypothesis through the abductive approach, as in a deductive approach, the iterative process allowed for discoveries of new knowledge (i.e. explanations, topics) to emerge (Schurz 2002, Wheeldon 2010). Additionally, the abductive process helped the writers to adapt, for instance, the study design in accordance with emerging lenses of analysis, which created a line of coherence and minimized the flooding of data. The flooding of data was minimized because the abductive process inferred some boundaries that an inductive process would not have created (Wheeldon 2010).

During the process of interviewing the consultants at an ESF, preliminary areas and methods of analysis were constantly reviewed and altered when necessary. Additionally, the writers continuously rewrote the theoretical framework and adapted it in relation to the gathered data, which according to Bell, Bryman et al. (2019) is a description of an *abductive process.*

3.1.3 Qualitative study

A *qualitative approach* was considered appropriate because the study aims to understand how the consultants reasoned for a particular candidate and how these reasonings affect the executive search firm's ideal of objective practices. As the candidate profile is socially constructed and based upon the situational context, the thesis writers wanted to understand the consultant's perception of the recruitment assignment, which indicated the need for a qualitative study. Additionally, the epistemology and research paradigm of the thesis are typical characteristics of a qualitative study, which further confirms the line of fit (Bell, Bryman et al. 2019).

The empirical material was gathered through *semi-structured, in-depth interviews* as it was deemed necessary to understand the consultant's perspective. The writers wanted the freedom to explore different pathways and according to Bell, Bryman et. al. (2019, p. 369), the "low structure enables the authors to reveal, at a deeper level, the perspectives of the people studied". However, an interview guide (found in Appendix 7.2) was created to ensure comparable empirical material by addressing certain elements during all of the interviews. The interview guide contained open-ended questions that were only to be used if the interviewees themselves did not touch upon specific matters. A semi-structured interview approach was therefore applied. For more details on the interview guide see section 3.3.2.

3.2 Choice of Sample

3.2.1 Research company

To examine the research question, several consultants from the chosen case organization were interviewed. The case organization is considered to be one of the leading Nordic firms within executive search and completes approximately 250 executive searches yearly. This particular ESF was chosen due to its expertise within executive search, and because of convenience, as the thesis writers had access to their contact details through a prior teacher.

Primarily two roles work with recruitment at the case organization: the research consultant and the recruitment consultant. Every recruitment assignment is carried out in pairs of two, that is, with a research- and a recruitment consultant. However, in more complex assignments additional consultants might be added.

3.2.2 Purposive sampling and sample size

Because the writers were interested in the executive search process, consultants with expert knowledge in the field were sought. A so-called *purposive sampling technique* was employed. Since there are several companies working with executive search processes in Stockholm, it was assumed that they are bound to have different cultural environments, even though the processes themselves might be similar. The different cultures at the companies would presumably impact their behaviour and social interactions. As to not have to take account of this factor, the writers chose to only interview executive search consultants from a *single* company. In this way, the consultants were a part of the same culture, which encompasses a homogeneous and purposeful sampling (Etikan, Musa et al. 2016).

Furthermore, the purposive sampling was fixed given the fixed number of consultants available at the Stockholm headquarters, in addition to the writers' preference of meeting the participants in person. There are four research consultants and seven recruitment consultants at the Stockholm office and of these, three research consultants and six recruitment consultants participated in the study. Accordingly, there was an imbalanced participation between the two types of consultants. However, the writers still argue for a *varying sample*, within the *fixed sample*, since there was an imbalance of consultants at the Stockholm headquarters.

Also, the *fixed sample* was assumed to be sufficient as *saturation* was achieved. During the last three interviews no new areas of analysis or additional information was found which exemplifies that saturation was achieved. Additionally, although it was not needed for this thesis, the writers were prepared to add additional participants from the Malmö and Gothenburg office if it was needed to reach *saturation*.

Moreover, the writers aimed for a *nunced* sample with regards to gender. Seven of the participants were women which equals a share of 78%. According to SCB (2020), 66% of all HR directors and personnel managers were women in Sweden 2018, suggesting an

imbalance between men and women within the HR occupation. Similarly, there was also an imbalance between the participants of this study, however, the authors acknowledged that this was a greater imbalance than what is present on the market. Nevertheless, because the market data only measures HR directors and not HR employees, it is therefore argued that the share of women would increase if all HR employees were to be included. Again, the writers argue for a *nuanced* sample as a similar imbalance can be found on the market.

Put briefly, the writers argue for a *varying* and *nuanced* sample.

3.3 Interview Process

3.3.1 *Pilot interviews*

Before interviewing the search consultants at the chosen case organization (ESF), a pilot interview was conducted with another recruiter, who had previous experience of the executive search process. The purpose of the pilot interview was to ensure the relevance and correctness of the formulated preliminary interview guide, which was intended to be used during the upcoming interviews with the chosen ESF.

In connection with the pilot interview, revisions were made to the interview guide as new, relevant and interesting dimensions emerged. But given that the first pilot interview was not conducted on the studied homogenous sample, an additional pilot interview was held with a consultant at the chosen case organization. After completing all of the interviews, it was noted that the content of the second pilot interview was very homogenous to the subsequent interviews. Therefore, the pilot interview at the chosen ESF was included in the empirical material of this thesis.

3.3.2 *Interview guide*

The interview guide (see Appendix 7.2), went through some changes throughout the thesis' progression. Initially, the guide was question-heavy as to firmly guide the interviewees through their recruitment assignments. After conducting the pilot interviews, a different approach was employed in which questions were only asked if needed. In the latter format, by opening the interview with a broad question, it was

noticed that the consultants guided the thesis writers through the process themselves, without any assistance. Examples of open-ended questions used, such as *"How did the circumstance surrounding this recruitment assignment look like?"*, can be found in Appendix 7.2. The revised interview guide was later used merely as a checklist to validate that all the concerned areas had been touched upon by all consultants.

Content wise, only minor changes were made to the interview guide. As previously mentioned, called-for revisions were made given the emergence of new areas of analysis after the first pilot interview was held. Additionally, after the first four interviews (including the second pilot interview) were conducted, the writers discussed the gathered data which led to a revision of the interview guide where additional areas of interest were added. This last revision was done to ensure that the same type of emerged areas were discussed during the subsequent interviews. No further changes were made to the interview guide after this point.

3.3.3 Interviews

In total nine interviews were conducted with an interview time of approximately 44 minutes. The interviews were conducted within a time interval of 37 and 54 minutes. The consultants were each instructed to prepare their two latest recruitment assignments, as to ensure that the facts were still fresh in their memory. Depending on the richness of the two assignments, each consultant had the time to present an additional number of assignments. Hence, the number of assignments per interview differed between 1-3 assignments.

To reduce the influence of the interviewers, they only provided assistance when necessary. Additionally, all close-ended questions that could give any indication of what the thesis was about were saved for the very end of the interview. Also worth noting is the fact that the interviewed consultants did not know the purpose of the thesis prior or during the interview.

3.3.4 Interview participants

Below is a table of the interviewees whose names have been changed for anonymity reasons. However, the pseudonyms are "typical" female and male names to depict the participant's gender. Three research consultants and six recruitment consultants

participated. The table also depicts the number of recruitment assignments each person presented, and a fictitious company name for each.

Given that the protocol at the studied ESF is to work in pairs of two in every assignment, the same company might be mentioned twice in the table. Furthermore, one of the consultants (Ben) spoke very generally about his assignment and thus no arguments for a candidate's suitability were expressed. However, this interview was used as a reference regarding the process itself throughout the thesis' work.

Research Consultants	Anna	Company A	Company B	Company C
	Beata	Company D	Company E	
	Cindy	Company F	Company G	
Recruitment Consultants	Dorothea	Company H	Company I	
	Ella	Company A	Company J	
	Felicia	Company D		
	Greta	Company B		
	Arvid	Company K	Company L	
	Ben	General process		

Figure 1: Table showing relations between the executive search consultants and their respective client compan(ies)y

3.3.5 Interview transcription

All interview participants consented to an audio recording of the interview and all interviews were transcribed. The process was structured so that one thesis writer conducted the interview while the other writer transcribed it. If any concerns arose during the transcription, they were brought to light to ensure similarity between all interviews in accordance with the interview guide.

In addition, the writer who attended the interview also read through the transcriptions, to ensure its correctness. This division of work was applied to ensure that the generated results were not tweaked or edited to fit the purpose of the thesis, or implicate bigger findings than were actually found. Also, in order to not oversee any potential areas of analysis, the material was reviewed and analyzed individually by each writer, and similarities were later discussed together.

3.4 Lenses of Data Analysis

As no notes were taken during the interviews, the chosen lenses of data analysis were applied to the transcribed material. Each interview was analyzed as an entity as to not lose important information which was given by the situational context. Lastly, the original transcripts were in Swedish but the statements have been translated into English for the purpose of the thesis.

3.4.1 Discourse analysis

Since it was central to the study to interpret the consultants' statements from their perspective, an *interpretative* analytical tool was needed. *Discourse analysis*, which concerns the analysis of communication processes (Bell, Bryman et al. 2019, Reiner 2012, Schiffrin, Hamilton et al. 2015), seemed fitting because the idea was precisely to analyze the consultants' verbal language while they reasoned *for* a particular candidate's suitability. Additionally, the analysis tool is in itself *constructionist* as it builds on the notion that members of a social setting create their own version of reality (Bell, Bryman et al. 2019). As discourse analysis is constructionist in itself, it is therefore in line with the study's *ontology*. However, the writers wanted a more precise analysation tool when examining the consultants' reasonings. A rhetorical discourse analysis was therefore employed as it focuses on the importance of rhetorics as a means of persuasion (Bell, Bryman et al. 2019).

3.4.2 Rhetorical analysis

As this study sought to examine the consultants' reasonings for a certain candidate, and the reasonings' alignment with the consultant's ideal of an objective mission, a rhetorical discourse analysis was deemed to be insightful. To understand the consultant's reasonings through a rhetorical standpoint, four different dimensions of the rhetorical analysis were applied to the transcribed data. The first three dimensions will impact the rhetorics at play and the circumstances of the rhetorics, namely: (1); *stasis theory*, (2); *audience* and (3); *exigence* (Bauer, Gaskell 2000). The fourth dimension is the creation of the rhetorical argument, the so-called *canon of invention*, and it includes the three modes of persuasion: *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* (Bauer, Gaskell 2000). This dimension is used to disclose the overall objective and/or subjective nature of the consultants

statements and to what extent this nature is aligned with the ideal of an objective mission.

Dimension 1: Stasis theory

Stasis theory creates the boundaries of the analysis and describes what type of discourse has been employed. Since the interviews were conducted in such a way that the search consultants recounted their experiences from previous assignments, the persuasive state is *forensic* (e.g. information about the role or client). Also, since the consultants recounted their speculations of the best-fitted future employee, the study also encompasses the *deliberative* stasis theory (e.g. desired attributes of the candidate)(Bauer, Gaskell 2000).

Dimension 2: Audience

The notion of *audience* implies that the rhetorician (i.e. the consultant) will change the tone of the message depending on the audience as to convey a more persuasive message (Bauer, Gaskell 2000). The audience within the studied context is the *thesis writers* since they were present during the interviews and thereby direct recipients of the executive consultant's reasonings. Furthermore, since the consultants knew that they participated in a study for a bachelor's thesis, which would eventually be published, the audience also includes every reader of this thesis.

Given that every interviewee was exposed to the same audience, the dimension of audience is considered to be a constant factor, and it will hence not affect the rhetorical reasonings of the consultants (i.e. what type of invention the consultant would use). However, in the event that this study is compared to other studies, it is assumed that the audience influenced the rhetorics at play and the circumstances of the rhetorics.

Dimension 3: Exigence

Exigence indicates the degree of urgency or difficulty of a given recruitment assignment, and this can vary between assignments. For instance, when an assignment infers a more pressing schedule, the exigence is classified as *high*, and this will presumably affect what rhetorical arguments (i.e. invention) a consultant chooses to employ.

Given that the level of exigence might vary between different recruitment assignments, all of the assignments were categorized as having either low *or* high exigence. The evaluation of the degree of exigence was only based on the *consultants perceived* moexigency of the assignment and can be found in Appendix 7.3.

Dimension 4: The canon of invention

The canon of invention includes the three modes of persuasion: *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* and it will be used to evaluate the objectiveness of the consultants statements. Logos arguments appeal to logic by pressing on evidence, data or universal truths, hence making them objective in nature. On the other hand, pathos arguments are subjective in nature since they are used to invoke feelings, prejudices or motivations to make the audience more receptive to the message. Lastly, ethos arguments can encompass both objectivity and subjectivity depending on what information they are based upon, and are used to showcase the speaker's intelligence, trustworthiness or morals.

3.5 Ethical Concerns

It was of utmost importance to the writers that the study was conducted with ethical care. Firstly, the writers highlighted the notion that all disclosed information was only for scientific use. Secondly, the name of the company and the participants were anonymized to ensure both the company's and the participants' confidentiality. Additionally, the anonymity helps mitigate the risk that sensible information, which could possibly harm the company's reputation, can be traced back to the organization. Thirdly, participation in the study was completely voluntary, and the consultants could at any time choose to withdraw. The participants were also given the chance to skip certain interview questions they found uncomfortable during the interviews. The mentioned disclosures above were clearly stated at the beginning of every interview.

Furthermore, all participating consultants had the option to either approve or reject a recording of the interview. This study also incorporated *respondent validation*, which means that the consultants were given the opportunity to review their statements to confirm that the thesis writers had understood them correctly (Bell, Bryman et. al., p.396). Changes were made accordingly in case it was needed.

The outlined measures exemplify that the study adheres to the four main ethical principles, namely: avoidance of harm, obtaining informed consent, protection of privacy through confidentiality and preventing deception (Bell, Bryman et al. 2019). The thesis writers therefore conclude that the study has been conducted *ethically*.

3.6 Methodology Discussion

This study sought to examine the consultants' reasonings within the creation and discussion of a candidate profile, which is constructed through the social interactions between the consultant and the client. However, the writers were not part of this social context, which implies a possibility of misinterpretation of the recounted circumstances. However, to ensure that the thesis writers analyzed and interpreted the recounted reality the same way as the interviewees, *respondent validation* was employed. Given that credibility is measured as the notion of good practice and the submittance of research findings to studied interviewees (Bell Emma, Bryman Alan et al. 2019), the writers deem this thesis as *credible*.

Due to the general smaller sample of qualitative studies, *transferability* may be hard to achieve (Clifton, Ronald 2011). However, because the boundaries surrounding this thesis have been clearly stated, a comparison with other theses within this field is possible. This fact, in addition to the meticulously written methodology, should make a future researcher able to discern if this thesis is relevant for his/her research. This line of reasoning implies a certain level of transferability (Clifton, Ronald 2011, Bell, Bryman et al. 2019). For this reason, the thesis writers argue that enough measures were taken to ensure a certain level of *transferability*.

Moreover, given that the candidate profiles are socially constructed by the consultants and the client company, studies in a similar context might produce different results, which implies that the results generated in this report may not be *replicable* (Clifton, Ronald 2011). However, the thesis writers still argue that the results are *dependable*, given the detailed depiction of the methodological process, which enables future researchers to conduct a similar study and thus present similar results (Clifton, Ronald 2011). Another supporting argument is that the division of work (e.g. where one writer attended the interview and the other transcribed the interview) allowed the writers to constantly audit each other, whereby the risk of implicit biased perceptions was

minimized. Similarly, to mitigate the risk of a potential *information cascade*, the writers analyzed the empirical material individually before comparing everything together. These measures formed an auditing trail to both hold the writers accountable, but also to make it easier for future researchers to conduct a similar study, thus making the results *dependable*.

Overall, the purpose of the detailed study design was to achieve as high transparency as possible. This was done by having *reflexivity* in mind, both when deciding the study design and when analyzing the empirical material accordingly. In this way, it prevented the writers to get locked into a specific track too early. However, the writers acknowledge the fact that it is nearly impossible to achieve a flawless thesis given the prevailing subjectivity in qualitative studies (Bell, Bryman et.al. 2019, p.30). But, the writers took all possible steps to ensure that a full picture of the situation was presented. These measures, in addition to the carefully written study design, lead the writers to argue for the *confirmability* of the generated results (Clifton, Ronald 2011).

4. Empirical Results & Analysis

The empirical results and analysis will be presented simultaneously as both parts are closely related. Additionally, the empirical results and analysis will be classified as either low or high 'exigence', since exigence will impact the consultants choice of rhetorical arguments. Finally, each recruitment assignment will be analyzed as a complete entity as to not lose any circumstantial factors. However, as described earlier, the interview with Ben will not be analyzed since he did not reason for his specific candidate.

4.1 General Assumptions

As stated in section 3.4.2:

(1) Logos arguments are *objective* in nature and are based upon evidence, data or universal truths.

(2) Ethos arguments are either *objective* or *subjective* in nature and are supposed to showcase the speaker's intelligence, trustworthiness or morals.

(3) Pathos arguments are *subjective* in nature and are supposed to invoke feelings, prejudices or motivations as to make the audience more receptive to the message.

4.2 Low Exigence

In all interviews, each interviewee (i.e. executive search consultant) recounted the circumstances of their respective assignment. In eight of the fifteen assignments, the exigence (i.e. the urgency of the recruitment) was considered to be low. The classification of exigence is based upon the *consultants'* perceived experience of the recruitment process in a given assignment. In the case of low exigence, the consultant expressed it by explaining either that the process was easy or that the sought candidate was self-evident. Dorothea was the only consultant to explicitly express this, and she did it in both of her assignments. For Company I, she expressed it as: "*It was just like that. I want him. I want him to take this job, I want him to be the one*". And for Company H, she expressed it as: "*It was **completely** the right decision that they [the client] made*".

However, aside from Dorothea, the other consultants never explicitly expressed a level of exigence, instead they described the process in a manner of "flow", without

expressing any concerns or notions of obstacles. For an overview of the classification of exigence see Appendix 7.3.

4.2.1 General findings

Each consultant started off the interview by presenting the candidate profile. When they later started to reason for the most suitable candidate (i.e. the final candidate), it was found that all the consultants employed all modes of persuasion (i.e. logos, ethos and pathos arguments), but to different degrees. For instance, some consultants used primarily logos reasonings, while others used primarily pathos reasonings. For an overview of the different degrees of inventions see Appendix 7.4.

As all the consultants in the low exigence assignments employed all three modes of persuasion they all used logos reasonings. Common for logos arguments is that they are based upon evidence, data or universal truths. Cindy expressed it as the candidate had: *"Experience of consolidated account statements and experience from an international company"*. In a similar fashion, Ella stated that her candidate: *"Had been working at an auditing firm"*. Lastly, Anna stated that her candidate: *"Had led big teams previously"*. As all of these statements are based upon the information found in the candidates resume, they are based upon evidence and data and are thus considered to be logos arguments. Additionally, some consultants stated information in regard to the candidate as universal truths, which also implies a logos statement. As previously mentioned, logos arguments are perceived to be objective in nature. The most relevant analyzed statements and their respective classification can be found in appendix 7.5.

Moreover, all the consultants also used ethos reasonings to convey the intelligence, trustworthiness or morals of the candidate. Dorothea conveyed this by expressing that the candidate: *"Is an extremely good journalist and that he had really proven himself within the journalistic world"*, she then continued with stating that the candidate is: *"Very good and instills trust"*. Ella conveyed the candidate's trustworthiness by explaining that the candidate: *"Has worked at a big auditing firm, one of the biggest in Sweden"*. Finally, Arvid expressed that the candidate: *"Had a lot of experience when dealing with tough groups and with tough groups, I [the consultant] mean groups with a strong connection to the workers' union"*. The primary aim of using ethos is to convey the candidate's trustworthiness, which Dorothea did by firstly pointing out the candidate qualities and that he had proven those qualities, and secondly, by explicitly stating that

the candidate instills trust. In a similar fashion, Ella conveyed the candidate's trustworthiness by showcasing that he had previously worked at one of the biggest auditing firms, which shows the candidate's capabilities, intelligence and trustworthiness within the field of subject. Arvid also conveyed the candidate's trustworthiness when exemplifying the candidate's leadership abilities, and explaining that the candidate had been a leader of "*tough groups*". As stated in section 4.1, ethos statements have an ambiguous nature, since they can be based upon objective grounds (evidence, data and universal truths) or subjective grounds (feelings, prejudices and motivations). For instance, Ella's statement when she indicated her candidate's trustworthiness by explaining that he had worked in one of the biggest auditing firms, was based on a fact found in the candidate's resume. Thus, it is considered to be an objective ethos argument. In contrast, other consultants, similar to Dorothea, conveyed statements about the candidate's trustworthiness, based on a perception they got from the candidate. Accordingly, such statements are classified as subjective ethos arguments.

Furthermore, all consultants also employed pathos reasonings. The goal with such statements is to persuade someone by impacting their feelings, prejudices or morals. Anna expressed her pathos reasoning by saying that the candidate: "*Was very down to earth and prestigeless, which is typical for this company's culture*". Similarly to Anna, Cindy expressed it as the candidate was: "*Very organized and had very good communication skills*". Lastly, Arvid explained that his candidate had: "*A high degree of confidence and emotional stability*". What all the employed pathos arguments have in common, is that they are based upon the consultants' perceptions and feelings about the candidate. For instance, when Anna stated that her candidate was very down to earth, it was based on Anna's individual perception of the candidate. Thus, another person might have gotten a different perception and feeling about this candidate, which showcases the subjectiveness of pathos statements.

4.2.2 Sub-conclusion & further analysis

Half of the assignments showed low exigence, either because the consultants explicitly stated so, or due to a lack of statements that touched upon potential disturbances during the assignment process. All of the consultants in the low exigence assignments reasoned for the most suitable candidate (i.e. final candidate) by using all of the inventions (i.e. ethos, logos and pathos). Since all of these consultants partly used pathos

arguments to convey their message, the assignments therefore contained different levels of subjectivity as pathos arguments are subjective in nature. Consequently, they did not fulfill the ideal of an objective mission.

Since all the consultants interpret their surroundings and situations differently, in addition to the socially constructed candidate profile, all assignments are bound to be different. The consultants individual interpretations of the occurring situation, along with the constructed candidate profile, will hence impact the consultants reasoning to some extent. Although there were differences between all the assignments in terms of the degree of inventions used, and thus different levels of objectivism and subjectivism shown, no indications that certain circumstances implied a specific invention were observed. Because such patterns were never found, the thesis writers argue that the consultants acted in accordance with their individual situational assessment. In line with this reasoning, the varying degrees of inventions employed was therefore dependent on what invention the consultant deemed as most effective in a given situation. For instance, as shown in Appendix 7.4, the consultants did indicate that they thought that a particular invention was more effective in a given assignment, because that particular invention always dominated their reasoning in that assignment.

The outlined facts above imply that the consultants used their interpretation of the situation to guide the degree of different inventions to use, instead of using purely objective inventions, which would be in line with the ideal of an objective mission. However, another possible explanation as to why the consultants chose to employ more subjective reasonings could stem from the relation the consultants have with the client. For instance, a good relationship might invoke more personal and subjective advice, whereas a lacking relationship might demand more objective and fact-based arguments.

Conclusively, all of the consultants in the eight low exigence assignments showed some level of subjectivity when reasoning for the most suitable candidate. As implied above, there might be several possible reasons as to why subjectivity is observed within the practices of ESF, however, all of them seem to stem from a situational assessment in which the individual consultants deem certain inventions as preferable.

4.3 High Exigence

In the remaining seven assignments, the exigence was considered to be high. For an overview of the classification of exigence, see Appendix 7.3. As stated earlier, the classification of exigence is based on the *consultants*' perceived experience of the recruitment process. After analyzing these seven assignments, the thesis writers observed that a high exigence assignment could encompass several of the following three indicators:

(1) An urgency in terms of a strict time frame for a given recruitment assignment.
(2) Pressing demands from the client company for the ESF to prove its competence.
(3) Pressure stemming from the client company's political dynamics or the occurrence of unexpected events during the recruitment assignment.

An analysis of how these three indicators materialized among the seven assignments of high exigence is presented below.

In terms of the first indicator, some consultants expressed high exigence whenever the client company quickly wanted to fill the available position. For instance, in the recruitment assignment for Company A, Anna expressed that: "*The client company wanted to hire someone relatively quickly*", and that she and her colleague had to: "*Speed up the process as one candidate was part of other recruitment processes*". Similarly, in the recruitment for Company D, Felicia described the time frame as: "*Impossible to achieve*".

The second indicator of exigence, in which the client demanded that the ESF proved its expertise, put a lot of pressure on the consultants which consequently increased the level of exigence. For instance, before Anna was assigned the recruitment mission for Company A, she explained that: "*The client company wanted to see examples of candidate profiles we had thought of, to know if we had understood the recruitment correctly and thus could find the right candidate*". Additionally, a level of complexity was expressed to surround this assignment due to the client demands. This was expressed by Ella, who also participated in the recruitment for company A. Ella stated that: "*It was a very complicated recruitment, or one of those recruitment that we were a bit frightened to be assigned to*". Because both Ella and Anna had to prove their expertise to the client company *before* conducting the actual recruitment assignment, in addition to the

assignment's complexity, a lot was on stake. These two factors led them to bring in an additional research – and recruitment consultant, which implies that a high level of exigence permeated this recruitment assignment.

Finally, the level of exigence was in some assignments also explained through the last indicator of exigence, whereby the client company's political dynamics or the occurrence of unexpected events aggravated the process. For instance, when working on the recruitment assignment for Company D, Beata portrayed the turbulent dynamics of the client as an obstacle: "*Apparently, the company did not have a good reputation and it had previously been pretty messy internally*". Similarly, Arvid had a recruitment assignment for Company L, where the political dynamics at the client company once again increased the exigence of the assignment. Arvid indicated it by explaining that: "*The client company was led by two organisations who had completely different objectives*", which required one to have: "A *high degree of diplomacy to be able to configure within this environment*". On the other hand, Greta participated in a recruitment assignment (i.e. for Company E), where unexpected events instead increased the level of exigence. More specifically, the preferred candidate withdrew from the recruitment process, which ultimately led to a restart of the process and thus increased the stakes in terms of delivering a good result to the client.

4.3.1 General findings

Similar to the low exigence assignments, each consultant in the high exigence assignments started off the interview by presenting the candidate profile. When they started reasoning for the most suitable candidate (i.e. the final candidate), it was found that the consultants assigned to high exigence assignments only employed one to two inventions. The consultants did use different combinations of the inventions, but all excluded at least one invention completely. For an overview of the different degrees of inventions see Appendix 7.4.

Although the degree of exigence changed, no changes were found in terms of the type of inventions used. As such, the different arguments and their respective classification is thus the same as in the low exigence assignments, which is shown in Appendix 7.5. As implied above, the main difference between the high exigence and the low exigence assignments, was the amount of inventions used by the consultants. More specifically, in the low exigence assignments, the consultants used all three inventions when reasoning

for a candidate's suitability, which suggested that they all used a degree of subjectivity in their assessments. Conversely, in the case of high exigence, three different outcomes were observed, each of which will be discussed in turn below.

The first outcome is the outcome where both objective and subjective reasonings were employed. This outcome could be reached in three possible combinations of inventions. The first combination is that of logos-pathos, which some consultants used, suggesting that their overall reasoning contained both a level of objectivity and subjectivity. The second combination is that of ethos-pathos, where the consultants employed pathos arguments, but also ethos arguments with an objective tone. The third combination is that of logos-ethos, where the consultants employed logos arguments but also ethos arguments with a subjective tone. Taken altogether, all three combinations led to an overall reasoning containing both objective and subjective arguments. This outcome is therefore the same as the one for the low exigence assignments (i.e. the consultants did not fulfill the ideal of an objective mission), as they always contained a pathos argument which in turn is subjective.

The second outcome is the outcome in which solely subjective arguments were employed by the consultants. This outcome materialized when the consultants employed ethos-pathos reasonings. The consultants who used this combination always showed a level of subjectivity because their reasonings' always contained a pathos argument. Additionally, they employed ethos arguments that were based on feelings, prejudices or motivations and as such were subjective. Considering the completely subjective nature of the reasonings of the consultants in this outcome, they did not complete the ideal of an objective mission.

The third outcome is the outcome where solely objective arguments were employed; this outcome materialized when the consultants either used logos-ethos arguments, or solely logos arguments. The overall reasoning of the consultants who used this combination was always objective, because their reasonings' either contained solely logos arguments or a combination of logos and ethos arguments with an objective tone. This suggests that these consultants succeeded in fulfilling the ideal of an objective mission.

4.3.2 Sub-conclusion & further analysis

The remaining seven recruitment assignments exhibited high exigence. These assignments were deemed to be of high exigence, either when the consultant explicitly stated so during the interview by expressing one or several of the three indicators (i.e. urgency of time, the need to prove their expertise, and political dynamics/unexpected events). Each of these consultants reasoned for the most suitable candidate by employing different combinations of the three inventions (i.e. logos, ethos and pathos). Contrary to the low exigence assignments, these consultants excluded at least one of the inventions in their reasonings. This exclusion therefore led to three different outcomes: (1) the outcome of objective and subjective reasonings, (2) the outcome of solely subjective reasonings and (3) the outcome of solely objective reasonings. The consultants in the first two outcomes did not fulfill the ideal of an objective mission, whereas the consultants in the third outcome did succeed because their reasonings were purely objective in nature.

Since the first outcome mirrors the outcome of the low exigence assignments, the same analysis and implications hold i.e. that the inventions employed are based upon the consultant's individual situational assessment of the situation and what invention is the most effective one. However, as high exigence assignments could also contain completely objective and completely subjective reasonings, additional analysis is needed to explain and understand this behavior.

During high exigence, the complexity of the recruitment assignments was higher than in the low exigence assignments. As such, the consultants had to navigate among this complex landscape to be able to find the most suitable candidate. The fact that the consultants excluded at least one invention during the high exigence assignments, demonstrates a change in their behaviour from the low exigence assignments. As the consultants primary goal is to complete their assignment, it is important that the client receives all of the relevant information. By excluding at least one invention, the consultant actively decreased the number of dimensions the client needed to consider, thus decreasing the perceived complexity of the assignment.

Conclusively, each consultant made a situational assessment that their recruitment assignment was of high exigence. As to mitigate the complexity of the high exigence

assignments, they adapted the number of inventions to fit the more pressured and urgent situation. Consequently, they did not consider all inventions, but instead considered only the inventions they assumed to be most effective and persuasive given the situation within their high exigence assignment.

5. Discussion & Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

The study examined executive search consultants' reasonings in relation to the ideal of an objective mission that is present within the recruitment industry.

Considering the intangible nature of the service of executive search firms, researchers such as Britton, Clark et. al. (1992) found that a good reputation is crucial for the longevity of an ESF. To foster their reputation and to even be considered as an option by the client, ESFs have to display *market intelligence*, *confidentiality* and *professionalism* according to AESC (2020). It is likewise crucial for ESFs survival, to signal the objectivity of their assessments (AESC 2020). However, among others, Tienari, Meriläinen et al. (2013) found that the practices of ESFs are biased, which counteracts the industry ideal of an objective mission. Additionally, Faulconbridge, Beaverstock et al. (2009) found that ESFs contribute to the observed labour market discrimination by acting as gatekeepers by defining who classifies as a talented individual enough to hold an executive position. These facts suggest that, although ESFs have an ideal of an objective mission, subjectivity (i.e. bias) has been found in their hiring practices.

Contrary to prior research, this study sought to examine the executive search process from the individual consultants' perspective by studying their reasonings for a given candidate's suitability in a recounted recruitment assignment. Thereby disclosing the level of objectivity or subjectivity that permeates the process. It was found that, when the urgency of an assignment was low (i.e. low exigence), the consultants employed all three modes of persuasion (i.e. logos, ethos and pathos), suggesting that their overall reasoning contained both objective and subjective influences. However, as implied above, according to AESC (2020) it is crucial for the ESFs survival to have objective assessments. The findings of this study are therefore surprising when analyzed from the field of executive search considering the crucial role of having objectivity practices. Although these findings are surprising when analyzed from the field of executive search, the findings can be explained from the perspective of the rhetorical field of study. For instance, Covino and Jolliffe (1995) argue that all three persuasive arguments should be used by the rhetorician (i.e. consultant) in order to fully persuade someone. From this

line of reasoning, the use of both subjective and objective statements is important in order for the consultant to completely convey a persuasive message, and thus complete a recruitment assignment. More specifically, this implies that subjectivity is needed to some degree in the executive search process, thereby explaining why subjectivity has been found both in this thesis, and in prior research.

Nevertheless, when the urgency of an assignment was high (i.e. high exigence), the consultants did not employ all three modes of persuasion, at least one persuasive argument was always dropped. Consequently, the different combinations of inventions led to three different outcomes. The first outcome is the same as in the low exigence assignments, while the second and third outcome is the outcome of solely subjective or solely objective reasonings respectively. The outcome of either solely subjective or solely objective reasonings implies that the consultants made a situational assessment in the given context of their recruitment assignments. However, because the consultants dropped one mode of persuasion, they did not completely convey their respective message forward to the client, as explained by Covino and Jolliffe (1995).

It is believed that the consultants chose to exclude at least one invention in the high exigence assignments in order to decrease the client's perceived complexity of the assignment. The complexity was moderated in that the number of factors the client had to consider decreased. This tactic of exclusion, allowed the consultants to employ completely objective arguments, which indicates the fulfillment of the ideal of an objective mission. However, as some consultants instead chose to use completely subjective arguments, the chosen inventions presumably stem from the consultants situational assessment and goal to complete their assignment. That is, the behavior does not stem from the consultants' desire to fulfill the objective mission as only objective arguments would have been found if that was the case.

Put briefly, the ideal of an objective mission and the notion of persuasive messages in accordance with the rhetorical field are in conflict with each other. If the consultant fulfills the ideal of an objective mission they have not been fully persuasive and vice versa. In the low exigence assignments, the findings imply that the consultants value a robust persuasive strategy above the ideal of an objective mission. In the high exigence assignments, the findings imply that the consultants value a completed assignment above the ideal of an objective mission.

5.2 Answer to the research question

This thesis set out to answer the research question of: "*How do the executive search consultants' reasonings for a candidate's suitability for a position align with their ideal of an objective mission?* "

As implied earlier, the writers found that the consultants' overall reasoning normally contained logos, ethos and pathos arguments, but to different degrees, depending on what argument the consultants deemed most effective in the context of their assignment. This suggests that both objective and subjective forces influence the hiring practices at the studied ESF. From the rhetorical field of study, this is "correct", as all inventions are needed to completely persuade someone, in this case, of a candidate's suitability for a position. As subjectiveness is needed in accordance with the rhetorical field, the common quest of ESFs to have completely objective practices is therefore not plausible. However, in some assignments (when exigence was high), the consultants employed completely objective arguments if the circumstances deemed it right, and thus fulfilled the ideal by chance and not through active action.

5.3 Contributions, Implications and Further Research

This study will indirectly contribute to the field of management as it highlights the process of hiring executives. Executive positions normally concern different degrees of management (e.g. operations management and employee satisfaction). By understanding the hiring process in depth, through the eyes of the consultants, hiring companies will get an insight into how ESFs practices impact the produced candidate. As prior research has found that the executive process is biased, this study contributes to this field of study, through its exploration as to how and why the observed subjectivity prevails, and how this reality makes the ideal of an objective mission improbable.

Since this study only sought to examine the reasonings of consultants at a *single* ESF, it would be interesting for further researchers to replicate this study and see if the same findings can be found within other ESFs as well. It would also be interesting if in-action observations were made, both between consultant-consultant, consultant-candidate

and/or consultant-client. Although this possibility is presumably limited due to the high confidentiality that surrounds executive search processes, it would bring deeper insights into where subjectivity materializes, how and why. Likewise, a mixture of a quantitative and qualitative study, where the researcher for instance studies the company's statistics, consultants' notes and interviews the consultants would give deeper explanatory variables to the observed phenomenon.

Conclusively, as proven by other researchers, subjectivity occurs in the search process. However, it does so because it is necessary for the consultants to be able to completely convince the client of a candidate's suitability, thereby completing their assignment. More specifically, according to the rhetorical field of study, all inventions (objective and subjective) are needed. According to this line of reasoning, the ideal of an objective mission is hence not fully achievable.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Executive Search Process

Step 1: ANALYSIS	Step 2: SEARCH	Step 3: SELECTION	Step 4: PRESENTATION	Step 5: ENDING
Candidate profile	Mapping	Skill-based interviews	Assessment report	Meeting w/ client
Position	Validation	Competence -tests	Meeting with candidates	Candidate due diligence
Client company			Assignment report	

7.2 Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

(Kom ihåg att guiden endast ska användas om det behövs och för att kontrollera att alla områden har blivit adresserade. I största möjlig mån försök få konsulten att prata så mycket som möjligt)

Innan intervjun
- Förklara vad svaren kommer användas till
- Instruera om etiska frågor
    - anonymitet
- Fråga om att få spela in
- Berätta om intervjuns upplägg.
    - Berätta att vi kommer vara ifrågasättande men ej dömande utan att vi enbart försöker få fram nyanserade svar och förstå sammanhanget
    - Fråga om de har förberett sig!
- Berätta att inget kommer lämna rummet och ju ärligare dem är desto bättre resultat får vi, återigen tryck på anonymiteten.

Korta personliga frågor
- Fråga om roll i företaget (research eller rekryteringskonsult)
- Berätta lite om vad ni gör och vad rollen innebär

Genomgång av rekryterings uppdraget
- Be konsulten att börja från början i processen, alltså från ögonblicket hen trädde in i fallet
- Hur var rekryterande chef samt personen som hade tjänsten innan
- Vilken typ av profil ville kunden ha? Sett till kompetenser och personliga egenskaper.
- Vilken typ av profil kom dem slutligen fram till i detta första skede? Sett till kompetenser och personliga egenskaper
- Ta reda på hur dem gick tillväga i själva searchen, vart började dem leda och specifikt på vilka egenskaper började dem titta på
    - Frågor om dem behöver hjälp:
        - Hur många ringde ni upp
        - Hur många kom på intervju
- Ta reda på hur många som kom på intervju, vad deras egenskaper var, hur dem homogena eller inte emot varandra
- Se om de hade något wildcard i processen
- Dubbelkolla om någon ny egenskap/personlighetsdrag lades till i profilen efter intervjuerna
- Ta reda på vem som fick jobbet tillslut, fråga mer om den här personens egenskaper/personlighetsdrag och hur processen fram till anställning för den här personen gick till.

Avlsutande generella frågor som kan påverka intervjuobjektet
- Har du någon gång upplevt att du låtit magkänslan spela mer roll än den eftersträvade kompetensen? (Om ja, i vilken situation, förklara det mer ingående)
- Upplever du att samarbetet påverkar uppkommandet av stereotyper? Att nya samarbetsföretag inte vågar vara helt ärliga (förtrycker stereotyper) men blir ärligare med tiden.

7.3 Table over the Classification of Exigence

Role	Consultant	Client	Exigence	Cause of Exigence
Research Consultants	Anna	Company A	High	Urgency, Test of Competence
		Company B	Low	No Mentions
		Company C	Low	No Mentions
	Beata	Company D	High	Urgency, Turbulent Events
		Company E	High	Turbulent Events
	Cindy	Company F	Low	No Mentions
		Company G	Low	No Mentions
Recruitment Consultants	Dorothea	Company H	Low	Self-evident Candidate
		Company I	Low	Self-evident Candidate
	Ella	Company A	High	Urgency, Test of Competence
		Company J	Low	No Mentions
	Felicia	Company D	High	Urgency
	Greta	Company B	High	Turbulent Events
	Arvid	Company K	Low	No Mentions
		Company L	High	Turbulent Events
	Ben	General process		

7.4 Table over the Amount of Arguments Used

Consutant	No of arguments			Dominant Argument
	Logos	Ethos	Pathos	
Anna	2	1	0	Logos
Anna	2	1	4	Pathos
Anna	1	1	2	Pathos
Beata	0	4	3	Ethos
Beata	2	0	3	Pathos
Cindy	3	1	2	Logos
Cindy	1	1	1	Equal
Dorothea	2	7	2	Ethos
Dorothea	2	3	1	Ethos
Ella	2	0	0	Logos
Ella	2	2	2	Equal
Felicia	1	4	0	Ethos
Greta	0	2	3	Pathos
Arvid	1	1	2	Pathos
Arvid	2	1	0	Logos
Ben	General process			

7.5 Tables over extracted quotes and their classification

7.5.1 Anna

Quote	Invention	Objective/ Subjective
"He was available, and the client company wanted to fill this position relatively quickly"	Logos	Objective
"Had led big teams previously"	Logos	Objective
"Came from a very big industrial company and had been working with their global logistics	Ethos	Objective

Quote	Invention	Objective/ Subjective
"He had previously been within rapid growing companies, which the other candidates had not been"	Ethos	Objective
"The candidate was sympathetic and, kind of humble, and that was what our client needed in this type of role, therefore, it was a good match"	Pathos	Subjective
"He was also very down to earth and prestigeless, which is typical for this company's culture"	Pathos	Subjective

7.5.2 Beata

Quote	Invention	Objective/ Subjective
"The candidate was internal and therefore easier to employ"	Logos	Objective
"The candidate had done a similar journey previously which she had enjoyed"	Ethos	Objective
"They [the client] needed exactly someone like her, they needed someone who was senior enough to prioritize what to do"	Ethos	Objective
"Was right on target and had all the right qualities	Pathos	Subjective
"She [the candidate] was a very warm hearted person, welcoming person and stuff always happens right around her, which the company needed"	Pathos	Subjective
"As I am a part of this corporate group, I know what cultural fit they were looking for and that was something that a lot of candidates were missing, they [the candidates] were good people with a lot of good qualities but it would not work, it would not"	Pathos	Subjective
"They [the candidates] were all enthusiastic and motivated and it is a balance to find someone who is not completely the same to everyone else, while also being similar enough to thrive in that environment, and one knew it would work with this internal candidate, and it has worked"	Pathos	Subjective

7.5.3 Cindy

Quote	Invention	Objective/Subjective
"Experience from consolidated account statements....and from working within both big and small companies"	Logos	Objective
"The candidate had previously built an economic department....so she did have that experience of entering a company without any clear processes"	Ethos	Objective
"The candidate had drive and communications skills"	Pathos	Subjective

7.5.4 Dorothea

Quote	Invention	Objective/Subjective
"He will be up and running from the first minute and there is a value in that"	Logos	Objective
"I have an enormous amount of respect for him [the candidate]"	Ethos	Subjective
"He is an extremely good journalist and he has really proven himself within the journalistic world"	Ethos	Subjective
"Very good and instills trust"	Ethos	Subjective
"He was brave and had an enormous amount of emotional stability"	Pathos	Subjective
The candidate had great potential"	Pathos	Subjective

7.5.5 Ella

Quote	Invention	Objective/Subjective

Quote	Invention	Objective/Subjective
"Had been working on an auditing firm"	Logos	Objective
"Had no problems with moving to northern Sweden"	Logos	Objective
"The candidate was available immediately"	Logos	Objective
"Has worked at a big auditing firm, one of the biggest in Sweden"	Ethos	Objective
"Motivated well why he wanted to change industry even though he did not have any experience of the welfare sector"	Ethos	Subjective
"The candidate gave an active impression and you could see that e had a very clear internal drive"	Pathos	Subjective

7.5.6 Felicia

Quote	Invention	Objective/Subjective
"Candidate was available"	Logos	Objective
"This candidate achieved high values on the tests, he was smart, which he sowed in the business case, and that is the way it was"	Logos	Objective
"The candidate delivered high values and that shone through during the business case presentation he did"	Ethos	Ambiguous
"He was not super charismatic. He was initially a lot more sealed off but there is a big advantage of that as well, because he can build trust from his integrity"	Ethos	Subjective

7.5.7 Greta

Quote	Invention	Objective/Subjective
"Can trust this candidate"	Ethos	Subjective

Quote		
"What you [the client company] need to consider is that this is a decision that he took for his private life as a private person. This does **not** mean that he would take decisions in this manner in a professional situation"	Ethos	Subjective
"This candidate will be completely different from everybody who works here but he will fit right in"	Pathos	Subjective
"He would come in with totally different perspectives compared to everyone else, but he will fit right in and no one will feel, like, who is this person coming in with these opinions"	Pathos	Subjective

7.5.8 Arvid

Quote	Invention	Objective/ Subjective
"The candidate had previously been in charge of an organization and had been responsible for personnel"	Logos	Objective
"The candidate knew the schoolworld very very well"	Logos	Objective
"The client company's industry is lacking in manpower and the candidate came from another industry with a lack of manpower, so she had worked, and excelled at the schools she had worked in, with increasing the interest in these types of educations, ultimately increasing the amount of people entering this industry"	Ethos	Objective
"The candidate had a high degree of confidence and emotional stability"	Pathos	Subjective