

DISCURSIVE DEFLECTIONS

**A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF HOW DIVERSITY MANAGERS IN
SWEDISH COMPANIES TALK ABOUT DIVERSITY PURSUITS.**

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Discursive Deflections

Abstract:

While proclaiming to be passionate pursuers of diversity, Swedish organizations are facing increased pressure to improve not just in terms of gender diversity, but increasingly in regards to ethnicity. By studying discourse on diversity, and thus what is meant by ‘pursuing diversity’ among organizations in Sweden today, we wish to gain insight into why Swedish organizations seem to be ramping up their diversity *talk*, yet achieving all the less. We conduct semi-structured interviews with 13 diversity managers from 7 Swedish organizations, and apply critical discourse analysis to understand how their talk in turn conditions the ability of these organizations to reduce workplace inequalities. Our findings indicate that diversity pursuits are constructed as ‘having the right focus’ (i.e. a focus on promoting *inclusion*), and as being ‘legitimate and uncriticizable’ and ‘capable of successfully improving diversity in the future’ despite a lack of reference to actual diversity results or progress. These constructions effectively decrease the ability of these pursuits to successfully reduce inequalities within these organisations, by concealing and legitimizing structures of inequality. We argue that these findings contribute to an understanding of why organizations in Sweden seem to have stagnated in their diversity progress.

Keywords:

Diversity, Discourse, Diversity Practitioners, Swedish Organizations

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1. Introduction

The *raison d'être* of this thesis springs from two management-related phenomena that we, the authors, found ourselves puzzled by as we advanced through our studies at SSE. The first relates to an increased tendency among Swedish companies to broadcast themselves as passionate pursuers of diversity. It seemed that everywhere we looked, in job advertisements, on web pages and at career fairs, companies were doing their best to display this image of themselves. All the while it remained unclear what these companies actually *meant* by these statements, and what was being *done* to promote diversity. Secondly, Swedish companies were paradoxically reported to show stagnating progress in achieving diversity. We found ourselves wondering whether these phenomena may be interrelated.

1.1 Background

In January, 2021 it was announced in Dagens Industri that Blackrock, the world's largest asset manager, would be ramping up pressure on Swedish companies to display improved diversity (Stiernstedt, 2021). In Stiernstedt's article, European Director Amra Balic explained that despite a historical focus on *gender* diversity, Blackrock had recently come to emphasize the importance of ethnic diversity, and made clear that unless Swedish companies take action in leading the pursuit of not just gender but *ethnic* diversity, they would consider voting against their suggested boards of directors. Similar increased pressure was recently expressed in a report from Allbright declaring that the Swedish labor market is highly segregated. The report argued that diversity work cannot stop at gender diversity and that data on other areas such as ethnicity and skin color must be included by organizations (Allbright, 2021). Paradoxically, even though critics have tended to blame the lack of Swedish ethnic diversity on the tendency to over-prioritize gender equality¹, recently Swedish companies are underperforming even on *gender*. In the last five years the share of women in Swedish large cap boardrooms have remained at 25%. If this trend continues, within two years they will have the lowest boardroom gender diversity in the Nordics according to Allbright (2021).

In the midst of this pressure on Swedish companies to improve diversity, organizations worldwide seem to ramp up their *talk* about diversity. In the U.S., most companies include either 'diversity' or 'inclusion' in their value statements (Kahn, 2013). However, "practitioners, researchers, and business leaders appear to be using different definitions to describe diversity work." (Kahn, 2013, p.174). Similarly in Europe, uncertainty seems to remain not just as to who is addressed by the term diversity (see for example Ahmed, 2007a), but as to what the *purpose* of diversity work actually is (Vertovec, 2012). It is evident that Swedish companies are struggling to "walk the talk" regarding their diversity pursuits, and that it may be difficult to pinpoint what specific meaning organizations place behind their use of the term 'diversity'. We argue, therefore, that in order to understand this stagnation in gender diversity and insufficient commitment to ethnic diversity among Swedish organisations, despite proclamations of commitments to diversity pursuits, we must explore how 'diversity pursuits' are actively negotiated and relayed by those in charge of formulating and realizing these pursuits.

¹ See for example:

<https://www.aktuellhallbarhet.se/socialt-ansvar/mangfald/vi-behover-fakta-for-att-motverka-diskriminering/>

1.2 Problem Area and Research Gap

Research on diversity management has shown that the way diversity work is navigated and negotiated by practitioners conditions the outcomes of this work (Caidor and Coreen, 2018; Hofhuis et al., 2016). Research on diversity practitioners' talk, and sensemaking practices still remains under-examined in this literature however (Mease, 2016). We suggest that this must be further explored. As scholars have pointed out, there is no unitary set of definitions, reference groups or goals of 'diversity' (Vertovec, 2012). We therefore argue that it becomes critical to study how diversity pursuits are constructed by *pursuers of diversity* within organizations, and what underlying meaning is conveyed in these constructions. This allows us to explore what emerges as important and not to prioritize, direct efforts towards, and to achieve in pursuing diversity for these practitioners. As diversity practitioners' descriptions of their work can to some extent both reflect and *determine* their practice (Kahn, 2013), we propose that exploring this will be useful for understanding the described current situation with lack of diversity in Swedish organizations.

1.3 Purpose and Research Questions

This thesis thus aims to explore how 'diversity pursuits' are constructed by diversity managers in Swedish organizations. By identifying underlying ideas about what 'drives' diversity, what constitutes 'progress' in this context, and what is deemed possible to achieve (and not), embedded in this discourse, we further wish to explore how this may be conditioning actual diversity pursuits within these organizations. The purpose of this thesis is to gain an improved understanding of why Swedish organizations are currently displaying a lack of diversity progress, while increasingly declaring their commitments to diversity. As such we are essentially studying processes of maintaining non-diversity within organizations. Thus by exploring how relations of power and privilege are discursively negotiated and maintained by diversity managers in Swedish organizations, we wish to add to a critical and emancipatory diversity management research project. Our research questions can be formulated as follows:

- i) *How are 'diversity pursuits' constructed by diversity managers in Swedish organizations?*
- ii) *How can this be said to condition these pursuits' ability to reduce internal inequalities?*

Scholars have tended to use the term 'diversity practitioners' (Bouten-Pinto 2016; Kahn 2013) to denote professionals involved in an organization's diversity practice. With the term 'diversity managers' (DMs hereafter) we wish to draw attention to the agency and influence that the individuals participating in our study have in shaping not just diversity *practices*, but entire *pursuits*. We thus see 'DMs' as individuals actively translating wider societal discourse on diversity into meaning as well as action, within their respective organizations.

1.4 Scope

This thesis explores constructions of diversity pursuits by DMs in Swedish organizations. We aim to understand how diversity pursuits are talked about by the individuals whose roles involve formulating and realizing these pursuits, and are thus deliberately turning away from "organizational talk" in for

instance policy documents produced by the organization. By co-producing our material in conversations with DMs, and asking for clarifications on aspects that appear interesting or perhaps contradictory, we argue that we are able to dig deeper into the underlying ideas and discourses that underpin constructions of diversity pursuits in Swedish organizations. Our study is thus deliberately limited to the Swedish market (though some of the organizations are active on a global scale), as this is where the phenomena related to organizational diversity that we wish to study is unfolding. Similarly, we have chosen to only interview DMs within organizations in the private sector, as it is specifically in this sector that organizations are experiencing increased pressure to improve reportedly declining diversity rates (Allbright, 2021; Stiernstedt, 2021).

2. Literature Review

This review of existing and relevant literature is guided by a focus on the diversity-related areas of research that intersect at the heart of this thesis. As we are attempting to provide insight into why diversity progress in Swedish organizations is stagnating, by exploring how DMs shape organizational diversity pursuits through discursive practice, these areas are as follows; i) the Emergence of Diversity, ii), Diversity Discourse, iii) Diversity in Sweden and iv) Diversity Practitioners.

2.1 The Emergence of Diversity

‘Diversity’ emerged in the US as a response to the Civil Rights Movement and political policies such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Executive Order (on affirmative action) of 1965 which mandated equal treatment (Mensi-Klarbach, 2019). In response, diversity consultants and professionals emerged to help with organizations’ compliance efforts. Later, in the 80s, when the Reagan administration significantly limited the reach of these non-discrimination policies, these diversity professionals were forced to rearticulate the need for their practices (Kelly and Dobbin, 1998). Thus, in the late 80s and early 90s, the term ‘diversity’ re-emerged in organizations, linking human difference to improved business performance, a claim now known as the “business case” for diversity (Mease, 2012). Scholars of diversity management have examined the implications of this turn (Prasad et al., 2011), critical scholars viewing it as a “capitalist appropriation of civil rights” (Kirton and Greene, 2019, p.64) and suggesting it may have regressive implications for efforts to make work more fair (Tatli, 2011). Tensions and ambiguities adhering to these discourses have been identified as constraining the agency of diversity practitioners (Kirton et al., 2007; Swan and Fox, 2010). Other research however, has suggested that the repositioning of equality work as a business strategy has *increased* the change agency of diversity practitioners by allowing for this business-related discourse to be leveraged to obtain change objectives (see Ahmed, 2007a; Mease, 2016; Tatli, 2011).

2.2 Diversity Discourse

As Tatli (2011) observes, the role of discourse not only involves the construction of the diversity management field, but the professional legitimacy of diversity practitioners. Critical diversity scholars therefore caution that if ‘diversity’ is defined so as to refer to everything, it may ultimately end up

meaning nothing (Holvino and Kamp, 2009). Modan (2008) who studied uses of the term diversity in Washington DC argues that it has been emptied of content and is now used to promote “some unspecified social good” (p.210). Similarly in the UK, Ahmed (2007a) observed how diversity practitioners defined diversity in conflicting and indefinite ways. It seems that “Enabled by its multivalency and optimistic orientation, “diversity” has become an omnipresent emblem of openness and fairness.” (Vertovec 2012, p.302). Recent turns in diversity discourse have been argued by critical scholars to conceal inequalities and maintain an unequal status quo (Kalonaityte, Prasad and Tedros 2010). Concerns about the “happy talk” of diversity as downplaying problems related to structural inequalities have been raised (Ahmed, 2012; Bell and Hartman, 2007). More recent research suggests a transition in diversity discourse towards a focus on ‘inclusion’ (Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014; Oswick and Noon, 2014). Indeed, ‘inclusion’ is gaining prominence by both practitioners and scholars (Brewis, 2019; Roberson, 2006), and has either come to replace or accompany diversity discourse (Risberg et al., 2019). There seems to be diverse views however, as to how inclusion is defined and how it relates to diversity. Brewis (2019) suggests that while diversity is “an existing or desired state of heterogeneity, inclusion indicates a process through which it can be achieved, managed and maintained”, (p. 94). Following this view, diversity and inclusion are co-dependent and organizations need first to establish a diversity policy, and then commit to inclusion, to bring about the advantages of differences (Oswick and Noon, 2014). This relates to current rhetoric among practitioners that diversity “does not stick without inclusion” (Brewis, 2019, p. 214; Riordan, 2014; Sherbin and Rashid, 2017).

Critical explorations of inclusion are asking what organizations actually seek to achieve with their practices (Dobusch, 2014; Ortlieb & Sieben, 2014; Priola et al., 2018; Shore et al., 2011; Tyler, 2019). Scholars have suggested that organizations can present themselves as inclusive employers, have a variety of practices aimed at inclusion, yet still be insufficiently tackling hierarchies within the organization (Dobusch, 2014; Ortlieb & Sieben, 2014). As Podsiadlowski and Hofbauer (2014) point out, inclusion is often articulated as a “strategic goal” of diversity, which appears problematic due to difficulties in defining what the “ultimate” or “complete” inclusion may be (Adamson, 2021, p.214).

2.3 Diversity in Sweden

As research has shown how cultural discourses impact perceptions of, and interventions on diversity (Jack & Lorbiecki, 2007), it is useful to explore how diversity as a concept has developed in Sweden. The concept of DM started to appear in Swedish organizations’ talk and practice towards the end of the 90s (Fägerlind, 2012), often transferred through US-based companies with subsidiaries in Sweden (Mensi-Klarbach, 2019). It came to be associated mainly with ethnical diversity however, and less with other dimensions such as age or gender (de los Reyes 2001; Kalonaityte, Prasad & Tedros 2010). The fact that Sweden, like many other European countries, already had a strong tradition of protecting women’s rights (Heres and Benschop, 2010), meant that ‘diversity work’ and especially other diversity parameters such as ethnicity, came to be seen (and handled) as separate from gender equality, often ascribed a lower prioritization (Kalonaityte, Prasad & Tedros, 2010). By the end of the 90s, Sweden saw a surge in use of the term ‘diversity’ among organization, education and in the media, and a shift in migration policy through which integration increasingly came to be viewed as dependent on *mutual* adjustment (Fägerlind 1999). The ambition was that even without changes in legislation this would come to permeate Swedish workplaces (Mlekov and Widell 2013), thus in contrast to

compulsory integration programs in other EU-countries, Swedish integration came to base itself on voluntarism (Wiesbrock, 2011).

2.4 Diversity Practitioners

A significant number of scholars before us have explored organizational shortcomings in achieving diversity (e.g. Castilla, 2011; Zanoni and Janssens, 2015; Dobbin et al., 2015). Many have attributed failures to a tendency to do “business as usual” (Dobbin and Kalev, 2016). In her study of diversity practitioners within education, Ahmed (2007b) observed how “doing documents” on diversity, rather than action or outcome, was taken as a measure of good diversity performance. Other scholars have shown how structural dimensions of power, privilege and domination among diversity practitioners may become sources of diversity initiatives failures (Janssens and Zanoni, 2014). Diversity practitioners (albeit perhaps unknowingly) seemingly play a role in shaping, legitimizing and maintaining fads and discursive fashions in diversity management, which may work to undermine change and lead to the re-marginalisation of disadvantaged groups (Kirton and Greene, 2019; Oswick and Noon, 2014, Zanoni and Janssens, 2004, 2015). Zanoni and Janssen (2015) argue that the dominant diversity management discourse provides managers with the power and freedom to create their own preferred version of diversity, customized to fit a preferred productive logic.

Works aimed at critically exploring discourse on diversity (e.g. Ahmed, 2012; Bell and Hartman, 2007; Boxenbaum, 2006; Mease, 2016; Ostendorp and Steyaert, 2009; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004), tend to focus on how ‘differences’ between people are constructed within organizations (Fernando, 2020). Literature on Swedish organizations has provided insight into how social hierarchies are maintained through discourses which construct Swedes as ‘privileged’ and immigrants as “disadvantaged” (Kalonaityte, Prasad and Tedros 2010), and shown how implementers of diversity agendas construct employee recipients of these agendas as ‘inferior’ (Romani et al., 2019). Indeed, this research has the potential to reveal how identities constructed through diversity discourse shape the way difference is represented and understood in organizations (Swan, 2009). What remains to be studied however, is how entire *diversity pursuits* are constructed by diversity practitioners, and how this conditions to what extent internal inequalities become possible to address through these pursuits. This thesis positions itself within existing critical literature on diversity management by aiming to study this.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Theory Usage

To be able to do so, we will employ a theoretical framework which combines a critical approach to analyzing discourse, with a theoretical conceptualization of how inequality is maintained within organizations. The first allows us to analyze *how* DMs construct diversity pursuits in their talk, by identifying what prevailing discourses are drawn upon and what ideas and expectations can be identified as underpinning this talk. The latter allows us to understand how actual pursuits of diversity can be said to be conditioned through this discursive process, by identifying how relations of power

and privilege are negotiated or maintained. An in-depth account of how this theoretical framework has been applied and used in empirical analysis will be presented in section “4.5 Data Analysis”.

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is commonly considered both a methodology and a theoretical concept useful for investigating the construction of the social world, as well as “the social production of organizational and inter-organizational phenomena” (Phillips et al., 2004, pp.636; Alvesson and Kärreman 2000; Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000). Critical discourse analysis (hereafter CDA) is an approach to discourse analysis aimed at “critically describing, interpreting and explaining the ways in which discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities” (Mullet, 2018, p.1). It is critical, as its objective is to uncover how discursive practices produce and maintain unequal power relations and its purpose is to ultimately emancipate the social world from this inequality (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000). This thesis builds upon both the theoretical and methodological foundations of CDA. Analyzing diversity in Swedish organizations through CDA allows us to reveal “sets of values, attitudes and norms” embedded in DMs’ talk about diversity pursuits (de los Reyes, 2000, p.255), as well as insight into what actions and behaviors are made possible by it.

CDA has no unitary set of theories or methods but encompasses a collection of techniques for studying language as a social practice. A commonly used framework however is Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of discourse which we have found to be useful for our research purpose (Fairclough 2001; Van Dijk, 1993). According to this framework, analysis of text should pass through three dimensions; text, discursive practice and sociocultural practice. The text dimension describes and examines the content, structure and meaning of the text (Grant et al., 2004), while the discursive practice dimension, involves interpretation of data corpus and identification of interdiscursivity within the discourse, i.e., what other existing discourses they are building on (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000). Finally, the social practice dimension studies the relation between the discursive event and its social context (Grant et al., 2004), and it is by analysing the relation between the discursive- and social practice conclusions can be drawn of whether the discursive practice is contributing to maintaining the status quo in the social practice, or whether it is transforming it and thus creating social change (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000). Here we will use Acker’s concept of organizational inequalities to guide our analysis of whether the discursive practices of the DMs contribute to hiding and strengthening certain power inequalities, or to negotiate and increase their visibility. Fairclough’s three-dimensional model is presented visually in “Figure 1”.

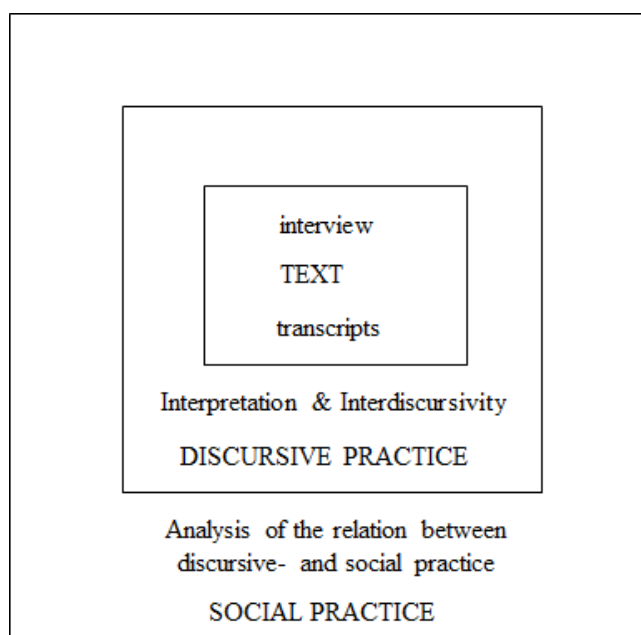


Figure 1: Adaptation of Fairclough's (1992) three dimensional framework

3.3 Processes of Maintaining Inequality

As Ahonen et al. (2014) point out, power is not fixed but continuously negotiated and reproduced when people engage with each other. These practices of preserving and reproducing unequal social structures within organizations are left unproblematized by a focus on diversity as a management strategy, according to de los Reyes (2001). In Acker's influential article from 2006, structural barriers to equality within organizations are conceptualized as 'inequality regimes' and defined as "loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations" (Acker, 2006, p.443). These practices produce, often invisible, patterns of complex inequalities that vary across organizations as they are partly shaped by the local processes which organize work.

For Acker, the *visibility* and *legitimacy* of inequality works to condition as well as maintain inequality regimes in a given organization. Visibility refers to the degree of awareness of inequalities present, the lack of which may be either intentional or unintentional. Here Acker exemplifies by drawing on her own study of Swedish banks in the 1980s, where she found that managers intentionally hid evidence of inequality by telling workers not to disclose information about their wages to coworkers. Legitimacy refers instead to the degree to which an inequality is deemed to be legitimate or not, in a given organization. Legitimacy varies greatly with political and economic contexts, as well as the basis of inequality. Inequality based on gender and race is seen as less legitimate than class; anti-discriminatory laws with the aim of limiting practices that generate these types of inequalities have been in place for decades, while class practices such as hierarchical wage setting are seen as an inevitable part of organizing work. The visibility in organizations also varies with the basis of the inequality, as inequality based on gender or class tends to be invisible, while racial inequality is usually more evident, yet systematically denied and avoided. Lastly, both visibility and legitimacy of inequality also varies with the situation of the observer. In terms of visibility, as Acker points out, "People in dominant groups generally see inequality as existing somewhere else, not where they are."

(Acker, 2006, p.452). The same goes for legitimacy, where the advantaged, as Acker points out, are often inclined to view their advantage as highly deserved, and visible inequalities as highly legitimate.

3.4 Theory Discussion

Our choice of theory evidently conditions what we are able to capture and not, in our material. Notions of power, what is considered legitimate, superior or inferior in a given context, is exercised through discourse on diversity (Ahonen et al., 2014). Thus by critically analyzing discourse on diversity, we are able to see processes of maintaining and negotiating power in our material. However, as we are focusing on language, and thus *how* the DMs in our material talk about diversity pursuits rather than *what* they are saying, we are less able to recognize how power and privilege may be maintained through actions. Similarly, with the chosen theoretical framework we are not able to recognize more formal exercise of power as emergent through for instance organizations of wage, decision power and other hierarchical structures within the organizations we study.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Stance

Our thesis takes a critical interpretivist approach. We wish to explore constructions of organizational diversity pursuits among DMs, and examine how these pursuits are in turn conditioned in achieving their objectives. The ontology of this study thus rests on social constructionism and its emphasis on the idea that *versions of social reality* are produced by individuals through interactions and interpretations in a given social setting (Cunliffe, 2008). This stands at the center of this thesis and implies a recognition that discourse entails a selection from many possible versions of reality, which actively contributes to the shaping and re-shaping of that reality (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

4.2 Research Methodology

Due to the applied research stance and the difficulty in capturing social construction by quantitative methods, this study takes a qualitative approach (Bryman och Bell, 2015, p.476). The methodology of discourse analysis has the potential to reveal “processes of social construction that constitute social and organizational life” (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). While other qualitative approaches assume a social world and aim to understand how actors in this world are affected by it, our study goes beyond understanding how professionals are affected by diversity pursuits, and aims to identify processes through which certain ideas about diversity pursuits are produced and maintained. We have applied CDA as our research methodology, which views discourse not as a neutral device for imparting meaning, but as an instrument to accomplish things. It is thus, unlike methodologies such as conversation analysis, interested in linguistic manifestations of *power* (Wodak & Meyer, 2009), and oriented towards *action* and the strategies which actors employ when trying to create specific effects (Bryman and Bell, 2015, p.526). This is central to our thesis as it aims to explore how positions of power and inequality are produced and maintained through these constructions of diversity pursuits.

We have applied an iterative process where theory and empirical findings have been developed in parallel and “successively reinterpreted in the light of each other” (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009, p.4), throughout the process. As the theory applied in this thesis had the ability to capture a wide range of areas to explore, the empirics was used to guide the authors towards appropriate focal points. We argue that this increased flexibility to continuously adapt our research process as new insights emerged required an abductive rather than deductive or inductive approach (Czarniawska-Joerges 1999, p.81-85).

4.3 Research Design

As Bryman and Bell (2015, p.476) argue, semi-structured interviews allow for respondents to prioritize which answers or areas of reflection they find most central. We found this feature central to this study, as we are looking to capture *how* DMs talk about and construct their diversity pursuits, why it becomes central to allow for appropriate freedom to associate and reflect on these pursuits. The reduced degree of comparability between respondents that this implied, was considered to be a relatively small problem outweighed by this strong advantage of the method. Moreover, on the basis of our formulated purpose and research questions, we chose to conduct a cross-sectional study rather than a case study at a single company. The reason for this was mainly that it allowed us to gain a wider, more holistic picture of the phenomenon common among companies across Swedish industries, that we are aiming to study. We thus want to be able to see recurring patterns of how diversity pursuits are constructed by DMs in Sweden, rather than gain an in-depth understanding of how pursuits are constructed in a particular company.

4.4 Data Collection

4.4.1 Interview Sample

As we wanted to allow for potential variation across industries in our material, we have conducted research with companies adhering to several different industries, e.g. Engineering, Financial Services, Health and Social Care Services (see appendix 1). The organizations were selected based on Financial Times’ annual European Diversity Leader ranking, which is based upon employees’ perceptions of inclusiveness and efforts to promote diversity (Kelly, 2020). Our final sample consists of 7 of the highest ranked Swedish organizations. In order to fulfil our research purpose of exploring how DMs in a Swedish context talk about the diversity pursuits they are driving, our interview sample consists of DMs who are responsible for shaping and realizing diversity pursuit at their companies. Prospective participants were identified based on their title (e.g. Diversity/Inclusion Manager), and contacted via email (see appendix 2). In our sample 10 out of 13 participants (i.e. 77 percent) were women. According to SCB, 66 percent of all HR managers were women in 2018 (2020). We thereby argue for a nuanced sample with regards to gender, due to our purpose of interviewing DMs, a position currently dominated by women.

4.4.2 Interview Design

The interview guide is semi-structured and covers key topics but allows for probes and follow-up questions. This was a central feature, as a key requirement in qualitative interviewing is flexibility (King et al., 2019). Throughout the interviews we have used probing questions both as a way of

digging deeper into a specific issue, and to critically examine some of the answers provided by our interviewees. In designing the interview guide for this study, questions that potentially could be perceived as leading in a certain direction were excluded. The structure of the interview guide has been considered; we have used broad questions in the beginning and more narrow questions towards the end of the interview.

4.4.3 Interview Setting

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic we have held all interviews remotely through Microsoft Teams, with the exception of one interview which was conducted over the phone. We have upon initial contact with prospective interviewees provided the option of using phone, Microsoft Teams, or other virtual services as they prefer. All interviews were conducted with both authors present, one posing the questions and the other taking notes, with the exception of two interviews which in the end had to be scheduled simultaneously in order to accommodate our interviewees' busy schedules.

4.4.4 Interview Transcription

The interviews were recorded and transcribed on an ongoing basis as they were carried out. The authors took turns transcribing, and used a software allowing us to pause and slow down the recordings. In the two cases where only one author was interviewing, the other author transcribed it in order to get a richer understanding of it. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, i.e. for every word used originally, as studies focusing on the linguistic dimension of a specific text require detailed transcriptions (King et al., 2019). The interviews were transcribed in the language spoken (most often Swedish) and statements were translated into English for the purpose of the thesis. There are a few quality considerations necessary to address when it comes to transcribing; recording quality, missing context and "tidying up" transcribed talk (King et al., 2019, pp.196-200). We accounted for this by typing non-verbal and paralinguistic aspects (e.g. laughter and pauses) to the extent possible, not correcting mispronunciations or incorrect grammar use, and by taking notes during the interviews so as to be able to trace context in the event that something was missed due to internet connection, or recording, failure.

4.5 Data Analysis

4.5.1 Data analysis method

Based on our theoretical framework presented in section 3, we have formulated a number of key questions relevant for our research purpose and research questions that guide the analysis on each three dimensions. We have used these questions as tools for finding, highlighting and problematizing themes in our data corpus and the answers to these questions are thus embedded in the empirics, analysis and discussion sections.

- 1) Text (*What*): What are the DMs saying in their talk about their diversity pursuits?
- 2) Discursive practice (*How*): How are diversity pursuits constructed in this talk? What ideas related to diversity are used to construct the pursuits in this way? What existing discourses are drawn upon in these processes?

- 3) Social practice (*Why*): What functions do the discursive practices perform? Are they maintaining the status quo or evoking social change? Are they increasing or decreasing the visibility of inequalities within these organizations? Are they legitimizing and maintaining or questioning and re-negotiating inequalities within these organizations?

4.5.2 Data analysis process

Since analysis within CDA is conducted from written form (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000), all interviews were transcribed upon completion. The transcriptions were then printed in order to have a visual overview during the analysis. The first and second read-throughs of the empirical material were carried out individually, so as to not accidentally influence each others' initial readings and risk overlooking important aspects of the material. The examination of empirics started in the text dimension of Fairclough's framework, assisted by the first question in 4.5.1, which involved identifying common themes among the interviews. In the next step the empirical themes were analysed on the dimension of the discursive practice. This analysis was continuously guided by the second group of questions in 4.5.1, and focused on how the DMs' talk could be interpreted and where interdiscursivity could be identified. The last step involved analysing the relation between the discursive- and social practices, incorporating the third set of questions in 4.5.1.

4.6 Research Quality

4.6.1 Rigor

Limited specified criteria for qualitative rigor exists within CDA. Two criteria that have been agreed upon for most DA approaches however, is *completeness* and *accessibility* (Mullet, 2018; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). 'Completeness' refers to empirical saturation, meaning that additional data would be unlikely to reveal any new findings. The authors conducted an amount of interviews which ensured that this criteria was considered fulfilled. The criterion of 'accessibility' was fulfilled by providing the respondents with a finalized version of the thesis which they could read in its entirety. Finally, due to the lack of a unitary set of methods within CDA, *transparency* is crucial to ensure reliability (Mullet 2018). The transparency of this thesis was considered throughout its creation by using a clearly articulated analytical framework and method of data analysis, both of which were based on Fairclough's three-dimensional framework and adapted for this thesis. A common critique against DA is that it is non-falsifiable, meaning as a researcher you can typically "find what you are looking for". This fact has been considered by using open questions throughout the interviews so as to avoid leading participants in specific directions. We have also presented our initial analysis to a supervisory group consisting of six fellow students and one supervisor, in order to assess whether or not the analysis made, and conclusions drawn, were deemed reasonable and unbiased by this group.

4.6.2 Reflexivity

Within social constructionism and critical discourse analysis, reflexivity is a central concept (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000). Scientific knowledge within this ontology is seen as *productive*, and discourses are thereby considered to be producing knowledge, social relations and identities. As social constructivists and discourse analysts we thus view our own work as a discursive construction representing one version of reality. As we have been involved in designing, structuring and conducting the interviews in this thesis, we are ourselves inevitably involved in creating the discourse

we intend to deconstruct and are thus co-producers of our material. Similarly, we want to stress that this thesis is written in dialogue with previous research. Countless scholars have contributed to this thesis by guiding and informing our understanding, not just of the related field but the very methods and theories used in this thesis, and thereby also its empirical material. In a way, these scholars are thus our co-authors.

Within DA, reflexivity is expressed through considerations of the power relationship between the researchers and the informants (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000, p. 111). When we approach the interviewees in this study we do so as students at SSE writing a thesis about diversity. As such, we represent a) potential future employees that the interviewees may want to present a positive employer image to, b) individuals who are, if not knowledgeable, then at least interested and invested in, the concept of diversity and diversity progress, and c) members of a minority and/or discriminated group in this context. This has been identified as the most significant determinants of power in the relationship between us as researchers and our interviewees, and thus issues that likely condition the knowledge production of this thesis.

4.6.3 Ethics

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations have been made by considering Diener and Crandall's (1978) areas of ethical principle; minimizing harm to participants, ensuring informed consent, privacy, and preventing deception. As this study *critically* examines DMs' talk about their diversity pursuits we saw a potential risk of harm to their professional reputations and therefore made sure that both interviewees and organizations remained completely anonymous. We further addressed this issue by maintaining confidentiality of records, keeping our recordings and interview transcriptions on non-cloud backed storage and deleting them immediately upon completion of this thesis. To ensure informed consent and prevent deception, information of what the involvement was likely to entail was provided to the participants prior to their participation (e.g. research topic, purpose, research type, interview format, expected duration). Based on this, consent to participation and recording was obtained, we further complied with GDPR regulations by only gathering necessary and non-sensitive data (e.g. excluding ethnicity and age). Furthermore, by highlighting how discursive practices relate to text and social practices, Fairclough argues that researchers performing CDA face a risk of facilitating peoples' use of discursive practices, for manipulating others (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000). We accepted this as a necessary evil as our results will simultaneously provide DMs with important insights into their talk about diversity and how this may be conditioning their diversity pursuits to maintain non-diversity.

The most prominent ethical consideration of this thesis we argue relates to its critical objective. In line with Strumińska-Kutra (2016) we acknowledge that as critical scholars we run the risk of "knowing better" than our respondents. To some extent we come in as outsiders with the aim of criticizing how diversity is managed within the organizations we study, free of the responsibility of ever having to propose any practical actions to improve these situations. This issue is worsened as we, by not informing the participants of the critical aspects of this study prior to their participation, which would entirely defeat this objective, are essentially consciously misleading them.

5. Empirical Results: The *What* of Discourse

This section presents the empirical material in accordance with the text dimension of Fairclough's framework, divided into five themes which are continually recurrent in the material.

Table of transcription symbols

.	Full stop: completed intonation
,	Comma: continued intonation
[...]	Ellipsis in brackets: exclusion of word(s)
[text]	Text in brackets: our addition
?	Question mark: indicates question

Figure 2: Table of transcription symbols

5.1 Inclusion - The new Focal Point

When asked about ongoing diversity initiatives and pursuits, many DMs shift focus from diversity towards emphasizing the importance of building inclusion. A common view that is presented is that inclusion is necessary in order to achieve diversity, and that a focus on building an inclusive company will attract a diverse workforce in the future. This is exemplified in Helena's account below. Here another prominent view is visible that diversity without inclusion can "backfire" and actually "make things worse".

Diversity in itself [...]is not a guarantee that you will be successful. But it is the inclusiveness. [...] we are not calling it diversity and inclusion anymore we are calling it inclusion and diversity. That is because we think that an inclusive workplace will actually attract a lot of different diversity in that sense.[...] You can have as much diversity as you like, but if you're not inclusive and using this diversity [...] to be better and to have better business results, it doesn't help you, it can actually make it worse. [Helena]

On the topic of what is important to focus on in the future to promote diversity, Göran argues that it is important that "no matter how diverse a group you are, that you invest in working with how inclusive you are in the group". It is claimed that even though a team may currently be highly non-diverse, it is important to work towards establishing an inclusive internal climate in the group. In turn they will influence others to be more inclusive. This is seen in the quote by Göran:

[...]even if you do not have a single woman or someone who grew up outside Europe[in your group] you can work with your inclusion and with your differences. [...] Because if you train for inclusion in your team,[...] when your colleagues go out and work with others then they can also become more inclusive. [Göran]

5.2 Difficult to Navigate a Focus

There is a tendency among interviewees to describe their organization's definitions of diversity as wide and containing many different parameters (such as educational background, race, gender, functionality, etc), but once they start talking about the diversity work within their organizations diversity tends to be reduced to one parameter: gender. In many of the interviews this focus is understood as based on either i) the idea that if you look at too many parameters you lose focus and will not be able to effectively pursue one parameter, or ii) that the organization wants to actively work with more parameters but that this, due to legislation, is not possible. The DMs report it difficult to navigate what parameters to focus on in diversity pursuits, due to this.

In the following extract from Agneta's interview, the idea that if you look at too many parameters you might lose focus, is visible. She further makes a parable to how one would act when handling business related issues, and says that incorporating too many parameters, might not lead to any results.

It's a bit of a difficult balance for us [...] We want to broaden and become better in many areas, so there we have a balance right now not to lose focus on gender versus to also simply keep up and take in more perspectives. [...] I think that is the case, in many questions, if you take in too much, in the end we risk that it will not be anything. [Agneta]

The second type of explanation, how legislation is restricting the organization from actively working and communicating around diversity, is especially apparent in Daniella's and Carina's quotes below:

It is very difficult to navigate, I think, in these questions, also actually for reporting purposes as well, if you look at e.g. how American companies do [...], they can write in their diversity policies very explicitly what they want for background or that they do not discriminate against anyone. [...] according to Swedish law, we are not allowed to express ourselves about that at all. [Daniella]

Gender is something you can measure and ask about. But all other diversity parameters - and age, we can measure age - but nothing else. [Carina]

5.3 Diversity Takes Time

Many interviewees talk about the process of achieving diversity as slow, and express that it will take a long time until one will be able to see substantial improvements. Quick results are stated as impossible to achieve due to an unwillingness of laying off current employees, and many interviewees state that they would prefer to accomplish diversity "naturally" through future turnover and recruitment. Some DMs argue that having clear *ambitions* regarding diversity is enough to cause a change. Others argue for specified targets on an overall organizational level, but not on a level that is

“too far down” in the organization. This is expressed as counterproductive and a bad idea as this would hinder the DMs from hiring the most talented candidates.

It is a slow process. It takes a long time. I mean we have a goal of 30 percent by 2030, the proportion of women. On the other hand, [...] we can not just get rid of all men, and all competence. [Göran]

Because we are not [...] gonna throw out 30 percent of our male, or 50-year old, or whatever to fix this, but we are gonna fix this in the natural way with our natural turnover and our new recruits. [...] we are not firing up our employees to get the result”. [Helena]

[...]“Ehm, so, but we don’t want to put targets too low down in the organization because then it becomes [...] something that you have to do, you just take somebody to fix it and that’s not what we’re aiming for. We still want to have the best people who have the motivation to work with us, to have the best competences and all that[...]. [Helena]

5.4 Contrasting Comparisons

When asked how the company is doing in terms of diversity, many respondents choose to contrast their current situation with a historical perspective on how the organization (or overall industry) has been doing in previous decades. Daniella presents her organization's investments in diversity as related to the fact that the sector has faced challenges with being traditionally male dominated:

In recent years, a great deal has been invested in these issues.[...] If you look at it, like the sector we are in, it has not had such great diversity, it has been both quite dominated by men, but also men with similar Swedish/European backgrounds[...]We might be in an industry that actually has, and may have had, some major challenges with these issues. [Daniella]

Karolina also works within the financial services sector. She talks about a recent major evolvement in diversity at her organization and claims that her organization is doing better than others, without specifying if referring to organizations in the same industry or not. In this claim she refers to certain “standards” in place at her organization:

I think throughout the past 10 years we have evolved so much. I think we are really doing good, I think there is a standard for leadership, for conduct, for non-discrimination in all our processes that I think is totally above average level in companies. [Karolina]

5.5 Wanting to be the Best

Responding to the question regarding how the company “is doing” in terms of diversity, the majority of interviewees state that they are doing better than their competitors and that they are committed to becoming “the best”. Many express pride and often mention how good the company is at talking about these issues, building awareness and communicating that they are involved in diversity pursuits. Both Bengt and Erika talk about their organizations as having ambitions of becoming the best.

[...] it should be obvious to everyone who hears something about [Company B] that oh, they are so inclusive and work with diversity, and are very open minded. So, that it is also a goal to be, uh, best in class when people are looking for a job. [That] it is to us you want to come. [Bengt]

I think you need to, ehm, create competence in the area and, ehm as well as, through it find out how, how we will be the best. Because, I mean, if you do not set the goal that you will be the best, you will be like, maybe not so good. [Erika]

6. Analysis: The *How* and *Why* of Discourse

Analysis of the above presented empirical themes reveals three distinct patterns of discursive practice; *Inclusion as a Diversity Blindfold*, *Cementing a Gender Focus*, and *Success Narrative that Conceal the Present*. In the following section each tendency is presented separately and analyzed on the *How* (discursive practice) and *Why* (social practices) levels of discourse. The analysis is guided by the framework of analytical inquiry developed in section 4.5.1.

6.1 ‘Inclusion’ as a Diversity Blindfold

6.1.1 The *How*

In the first theme; *Inclusion - The new focal point*, the idea is presented that inclusion *drives* diversity, and that it is thus important to promote inclusion in order to achieve diversity. Here the DMs draw upon existing discourses which see inclusion as an antecedent of diversity, and diversity as not being able to ‘stick’ without inclusion (Brewis, 2019, p. 214; Riordan, 2014; Sherbin & Rashid, 2017). In Göran’s quote, we see how this idea works to justify a focus on improving inclusion, rather than diversity, even as organizations face an apparent lack of diversity. Together with the notion of diversity as potentially “harmful” for organizations in the absence of inclusion, this idea works to construct diversity pursuits within these organizations as being *focused on exactly the right thing* by being oriented towards promoting inclusion, in order to achieve diversity.

6.1.2 The *Why*

This discursive practice works to broaden the idea of what “counts” as a diversity effort and as diversity progress, to the point where it seemingly leaves the criteria of relating to actual demographic diversity. In Göran’s quote, a completely diversity-devoid group sitting and talking about inclusion is used as an example of a diversity measure, and a way to signal progress. Looking at diversity pursuits through this inclusion-fixating lense enables the DMs to blindfold themselves to issues regarding lack of diversity and the under-representation of certain demographics in their organizations. The degree of visibility of inequalities within organizations varies with the position of the beholder, as “one privilege of the privileged is not to see their privilege” (Acker, 2006, p.452). Using Acker (2006), this discursive practice thus works to effectively decrease the visibility of current inequalities.

6.2 Cementing a Gender Focus

6.2.1 The *How*

In theme two; *Difficult to Navigate a Focus*, gender is cemented as the seemingly only viable focus of the organizations’ diversity pursuits. Here two interrelated ideas are presented; that diversity pursuits run the risk of being unsuccessful if attempting to improve more than one parameter at a time, and that legislation indirectly prevents organizations from pursuing parameters other than gender and age. As it is evident that virtually all DMs are focusing on (merely) improving gender diversity, gender is constructed as the only viable parameter of diversity to pursue, which is in line with historical tendencies in Swedish organizations to prioritize gender (Kalonaityte, Prasad & Tedros, 2010). In theme three; *Diversity Takes Time*, the notion of specifically gender diversity as being something inherently slow and difficult to “push” is presented. This is based on the idea that organizations should achieve gender diversity in “a natural way”, by waiting for the currently male-dominated body of employees to retire and then replace them with women, so as to avoid “wasting” competence. By leveraging these ideas about a focus on (only) gender diversity as legitimate, and gender diversity as inherently slow and difficult to achieve, in tandem, the DMs are able to construct their diversity pursuits as *legitimate and uncriticizable in their apparent lack of diversity progress*.

6.2.2 The *Why*

The advantaged group(s) in an organization, are often inclined to view their advantages as legitimate and deserved (Acker, 2006). We can see this inclination in the discursive practice described above. Pressures to improve diversity (gender or otherwise) are effectively subdued by the construction of diversity pursuits as legitimate in their lack of progress. Through this process, the inequalities related to the current disproportion of male employees in the organizations are legitimized and subsequently maintained. It is clear that there has been a shift from the tendency to mainly associate ‘diversity’ with *ethnic* diversity and separate this from *gender* equality (de los Reyes 2001), to the DMs now using ‘diversity’ to denote pursuits more or less entirely aimed at gender. This shift in discourse effectively downgrades any pursuits of diversity not related to gender, by quite literally putting inequalities related to non-gender discursively out of sight. ‘Gender diversity’ thus seems to have completely swallowed and absorbed the term ‘diversity’.

6.3 Success Narratives that Conceal the Present

6.3.1 The *How*

In theme four; *Contrasting Comparisons*, an image of the organizations as having come far and made significant progress with diversity, is conveyed. This is done through advantageous comparisons with scenarios decades ago when the company or industry was doing much “worse”. In theme five; *Wanting to be best*, the DMs emphasize commitments to becoming “the best at diversity”. In doing so, diversity is presented as being one of their organizations' top priorities for the future. This works to convey an image of the organization as caring, perhaps more than others, about diversity, and as allocating resources to achieve these high ambitions. In these themes, two distinct narratives; one retrospective, and one prospective narrative, are thus used to construct the diversity pursuits as *capable of successfully improving diversity in the future*. This is achieved without reference to actual diversity efforts or results but instead by leveraging vague historical comparisons and ambitions for the future. It seems that, possibly due to the vague and even banal character of the term ‘diversity’, and the lack of unitary definitions or goals of diversity (Vertovec, 2012), the DMs are able to construct themselves as champions of diversity seemingly without having to reference neither evidence of doing comparatively well in this area, nor actual concrete measures taken in order to practically follow through on their high ambitions.

6.3.2 The *Why*

In order to understand *why* the DMs are using these narratives to construct their current diversity pursuits as successful, we refer again to Vertovec (2012) who suggests that diversity has become an essential *requirement* of modern organizations. In light of this, it becomes evident that organizations today must to some extent display an image of themselves as being successful in pursuing diversity, in order to be competitive. As we see in Göran's quote from theme five, the ambition to become “the best at diversity” relates to a wish to brand the company as diverse and inclusive. It seems that this current state of vagueness of diversity discourse may thus be favourable and worth preserving for organizations, as it enables them to “stay legitimate” by talking about diversity, all the while avoiding having to actually improve or develop their pursuits of achieving diversity to successfully produce results. Thus, with this discourse in place, organizations are able to relieve pressure to improve diversity, and thereby maintain an unequal status quo.

7. Discussion

7.1 Revisiting Our Research Questions

The research questions we have attempted to answer in this thesis were stated as follows:

- i) *How are ‘diversity pursuits’ constructed by diversity managers in Swedish organizations?*
- ii) *How can this be said to condition these pursuits’ ability to reduce internal inequalities?*

The analysis revealed that the DMs construct the diversity pursuits at their respective organizations in three distinct ways which can all be said to condition the ability of these pursuits to not be able to

reduce internal inequalities. First; diversity pursuits were constructed as *having the right focus in order to achieve diversity* (i.e. a focus on promoting inclusion). This was shown to effectively decrease the visibility of inequalities related to a lack of diversity, and thus reduce the possibility of the diversity pursuits being able to successfully improve these issues. Second; diversity pursuits were constructed as *being legitimate and uncriticizable despite a lack of objective diversity progress*. This process was shown to a) legitimize inequalities related to gender, and b) essentially put any pursuits of improving inequalities not related to gender out of sight and out of mind, thus effectively limiting their ability to reduce workplace inequalities. Third; diversity pursuits were constructed as *being capable of successfully improving diversity in the future*. This process was shown to be legitimizing the maintaining of an unequal status quo, thus once again decreasing the ability of diversity pursuits to successfully reduce internal inequalities. We argue that these findings considerably contribute to understanding why organizations in Sweden today seem to stagnate in achieving gender diversity, and lack sufficient commitments to improve ethnic diversity, despite more than ever communicating commitments to diversity pursuits.

7.2 Contributions to Existing Literature

Our findings resonate with existing literature showing how diversity practitioners play part in shaping and legitimizing discursive fashions and fads within diversity management, which work to undermine change (see Kirton and Greene, 2019; Oswick and Noon, 2014, Zanoni and Janssens, 2004, 2015). This research has often shown how members of the privileged majority within organizations are able to define and construct ‘differences’ underpinning diversity in a way which preserves their power and privilege. This study contributes to the diversity management field by showing how *ideas about diversity* are used to construct entire ‘diversity pursuits’ in ways which work to legitimize a continued lack of diversity progress, and maintain a seemingly unequal status quo. Our findings thus reinforce Acker’s (2006) theory of organizational behaviour as striving towards maintaining the status quo of power and privilege. An overarching and central question of this study is that of what becomes talked about *and not*, and thus what is made discursively visible and not, when DM’s talk about their diversity pursuits. Previous research has argued that the concept of ‘diversity’ has become all-encompassing to the point where it does not seem to carry any meaning at all (e.g. Ahmed, 2007a, Vertovec, 2012). This study shows that DMs are able to leverage this vague discourse on diversity to produce an image of their own diversity pursuits as successful and sufficient, despite an apparent lack of change and progress.

This study reveals a tendency among diversity managers to use notions of “high ambitions”, rather than references to actual efforts or results, to construct diversity pursuits as successful. We thus find a tendency similar to that among diversity practitioners to “do documentation” and use rhetorical diversity commitments rather than action to produce an image of pursuing diversity work, which Ahmed (2007b) identified in her research on academic institutions in Australia. Thus our findings indicate that this phenomenon is present also among practitioners in Sweden.

Our findings follow a well-documented pattern among practitioners to emphasize the importance of ‘inclusion’ in driving diversity (Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014; Oswick and Noon, 2014). These findings suggest that raised concerns about ‘inclusion’ as being even more difficult to define, and thus objectively assess, than ‘diversity’ is (e.g. Adamson, 2021; Dobusch, 2014), are justified. This study echoes research suggesting that organizations can present themselves as inclusive, promote inclusion, yet still not be able to tackle internal inequalities (Dobusch, 2014). It contributes to this discussion by

suggesting that a strong focus on inclusionary, rather than diversity practices, may result in organizations quite literally, and perhaps consciously, “missing the point” regarding lack of diversity. Finally, this thesis contributes to management and organization studies specifically though focusing on the relatively under-researched area of diversity discourse within Swedish organizations. It makes a critical contribution by showing that there has been a shift in discourse on diversity among Swedish organizations. Our findings show how Swedish diversity professionals use ‘diversity pursuits’ to denote pursuits more or less entirely aimed at achieving *gender* diversity, effectively putting diversity related to non-gender “out of sight”.

7.3 Implications for Practice

Diversity management is constantly influenced by social and organisational discourses that diversity practitioners interact with and act upon (Kirton and Greene, 2019, p.679). For this reason we argue that a critical role of diversity scholars involves regularly examining diversity discourse within organizations. By doing so in a Swedish organizational context we have provided practitioners with insights into how their *talk* about diversity pursuits, and the drawing upon certain existing discourses on diversity, works to undermine important change objectives and ultimately results in underperforming in terms of managing diversity. More specifically we have provided insight into *why*, despite a perhaps self-experienced *increase* in commitments to diversity pursuits, organizations in Sweden are now facing increased pressure to improve in terms of diversity. We argue that these insights can *and must* be used by practitioners in order to provide conditions for achieving real and lasting diversity results.

7.4 Limitations

Due to the critical interpretivist approach of this thesis and its conforming to social constructionism, the selection and presentation of empirical material is formed by the authors’ interpretation. This can be said to limit this study’s ability to successfully reveal how ‘diversity pursuits’ are discursively constructed within Swedish organizations. Similarly, as the thesis is centered around diversity managers’ constructions of diversity pursuits, the way in which we structured and led the interview possibly affected what the participants chose to respond. A possible explanation for why our findings indicated that diversity managers tended to allow ‘diversity’ to be reduced to specifically ‘gender diversity’, is that we, by not wanting to influence the participant’s answers, did not ask “tough” enough questions aimed at provoking critical reflection of this tendency. In this sense a substantial limitation of this thesis is made up by the fact that we as researchers ended up contributing to the reproduction of the very discursive practice which we sought out to critically examine in this thesis.

Finally, the scope of this study was limited to companies within the Swedish private sector. Conducting a similar study on organizations within the public sector or in another country which may have other locally competing discourses on diversity, may render entirely different conclusions and provide contradicting insights. Moreover, as only three out of the thirteen participating diversity managers were men, there was a strong overrepresentation among women which may have affected the analysis and consultation of this thesis.

7.5 Implications for Further Research

We suggest that further research continues to critically examine inclusionary practices within organizations, and explores ways of ensuring that inclusion does not become a concept for organizations to hide behind in their lack of achieving diversity. Whereas we have explored possible reasons behind discursive tendencies among diversity practitioners on an organizational level, we encourage future research to explore these tendencies on the level of the individual, perhaps with the use of theories on processes through which social identity is produced. Lastly, in order to further add to the understanding of why organizations today (within as well as outside of Sweden) seem to be articulating stronger commitments than ever to diversity pursuits without necessarily making any real progress, we suggest longitudinal research on a single case company that may be able to compare more closely the development of organizational diversity discourse, to that of accompanied diversity progress, or perhaps lack thereof.

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9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1: Interview Sample

Alias	Company	Industry	Title	Date	Length of interview	Interview form
Agneta	A	Manufacturing	Talent Manager	2021-03-08	58 min	Teams
Bengt	B	Health and Social Care Services	Deputy HR manager	2021-03-08	42 min	Teams
Carina	B	Health and Social Care Services	HR Director	2021-03-09	56 min	Teams
Daniella	C	Financial services	Head of Sustainability Management	2021-03-10	51 min	Teams
Erika	C	Financial services	Process Manager Sustainable Sourcing	2021-03-10	49 min	Teams
Fredrik	D	Transportation	HR Partner	2021-03-10	45 min	Teams
Göran	E	Engineering	Head of Tightening Technique	2021-03-11	44 min	Teams
Helena	F	Manufacturing, engineering & service	VP of Talent Management	2021-03-11	47 min	Teams
Irina	F	Manufacturing, engineering & service	Global Performance & Talent Manager	2021-03-11	47 min	Teams
Janice	E	Engineering	VP Human Resources	2021-03-12	45 min	Teams
Karolina	C	Financial services	Engagement Manager for Leaders	2021-03-22	53 min	Teams
Laura	G	Industrial Products and Services	Talent and Development Specialist	2021-03-23	49 min	Telephone
Malin	G	Industrial Products and Services	VP for Talent Acquisition & Talent Management	2021-03-26	45 min	Teams

9.2 Appendix 2: Email to prospective respondents

Hello [First name],

We are two third-year Business and Economics students at Stockholm School of Economics. This semester we are writing our bachelor thesis on diversity management, where we are looking at how Swedish companies are working with diversity.

We are interested in including [Organization name] in our study, as we have seen that you are working actively with these issues, and were mentioned in the 2020 Financial Times report of inclusive companies in Europe. We are reaching out to you as it would be highly valuable for us to be able to conduct two or three interviews with someone who is/has been responsible for driving diversity initiatives at [Organization name].

The interviews are estimated to take between 30-60 minutes, and can be conducted either through phone calls, Zoom/Teams, or physically in a Corona-friendly environment. They will be anonymous (i.e. no personal nor company names will be revealed) and we are flexible with dates and time, but would prefer to “meet” before the start of April.

For further questions you can reach us through email or at [Telephone number].

Thank you in advance!

Best regards,

Louise and Matilda

9.3 Appendix 3: Interview Guide English

Basic Information

- Alias
- Role
- Seniority

Introductory question

- How do you view diversity, what is diversity for you?

Diversity work at XX

- Could you tell us about the diversity work at XX, what are you doing at the moment?
- How is the diversity agenda set at XX, from where in the company? How are the initiatives generated and developed?
- Could you tell us about the challenges you face when it comes to your diversity work?
- Why is it important for XX to work with diversity?
 - And what is the goal or aim of this work?

Diversity for you

- What is the strength of diverse groups do you think?
- What do you need in order to succeed with diversity initiatives do you think?
- What are your thoughts concerning each individual employee's role when it comes to pursuing diversity?

Diversity in your organization

- How is diversity measured at XX?
 - Do you have any ideas about what might be, in your opinion, an even more effective way of measuring diversity or diversity progress?
- How do you view the responsibility of XX, as a major employer, to pursue diversity?
- How do you think XX is doing when it comes to diversity?
- What would you say is important in order to make XX more diverse in the future?

Concluding questions

- Is there anything else you would like to share concerning this issue, that we haven't asked you about already?

9.3 Appendix 3: Interview Guide Swedish

Information om intervjudeltagaren

- Alias
- Roll
- Senioritet

Inledande fråga

- Hur ser du på mångfald, vad är mångfald för dig?

Mångfaldsarbetet på XX

- Berätta om mångfaldsarbetet på XX, vad gör ni, hur arbetar ni med det?
- Hur sätts agendan för mångfaldsarbetet på XX? Vart kommer de flesta initiativen ifrån? HR?
- Hur ser du på de utmaningar ni möter i ert mångfaldsarbete? (företag, bransch)
- Varför, enligt dig, är det viktigt för företag XX att jobba med diversity?
 - Och vad är målsättningen med ert mångfaldsarbete?

Mångfald för dig

- Vad är det som gör mångfaldiga/diverse grupper så "bra" tänker du?
- Vad krävs för att man ska lyckas med mångfald tror du?

- Hur ser du på varje enskild medarbetares ansvar när det kommer till att främja mångfald?

Mångfald i er organisation

- Hur mäter ni mångfald på XX?
 - Har du några tankar om vad som skulle kunna vara ett bättre sätt att mäta mångfald hos er? Varför tror du att ni ännu inte mäter XX?
- Hur ser du på XXs ansvar när det kommer till mångfald, som en större arbetsgivare?
- Hur tänker du att företag XX ligger till när det kommer till mångfald? Hur “bra” är ni på mångfald i dagsläget?
- Vad tror du är viktigt för att XX ska bli mer diverse i framtiden?

Avslutande frågor

- Finns det något mer som du skulle vilja dela med dig av när det kommer till mångfaldsarbetet på XX som vi inte har frågat om?