



ATTENDING THE CALL OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT?

A case study of the ways a labor market program is legitimated and its organizational consequences

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Abstract

Problematization: There is outdated research of current labor market programs (LMPs), especially in the Swedish context. Thus, there is a need to explore the current organizational interest for the question of youth unemployment from an organizational level. Particularly the Volvo Step program because it is one of the first introductory employment contracts in Sweden. Consequently, it could serve as an illustrative example of a current LMP in the Swedish context.

Purpose: This study aims to identify the underlying reasons for organizations to participate in LMPs for young adults and can explain the way organizations legitimate such initiatives, as well as to identify and to explore the potential consequences of such an involvement at the organizational level through the Strategy-as-Practice approach.

Methodology The research was performed using a qualitative methodology through a case study, departing from an abductive stand.

Results: The LMP Volvo Step program has been legitimated by internal and external acknowledgement, by responding to coercive forces, and mimetic and modeling actions. This type of LMP has received much attention and it has been perceived as a good initiative to help the young unemployed. Engaging in LMPs can contribute by responding to society, attracting young people, scrutinizing the hires and improving selection strategies, having a talent pool, supporting diversity work in terms of age and gender, favoring a positive work climate, and improving external and internal reputation. It can also produce some internal tensions and discontent. The Volvo Step program has become an updated illustrative example of a LMP in the Swedish context.

Key words: labor market programs, youth unemployment, Strategy-as-Practice approach, Isomorphism Institutional Theory.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
1. Introduction.....	- 1 -
1.1 Why Study Youth Unemployment?	- 1 -
1.2 The European Context: Evidence of Youth Labor Market Programs	- 2 -
1.3 The Swedish Context: A Recent Appearance of Youth Labor Market Programs	- 4 -
1.4 Problematization.....	- 5 -
1.5 Purpose	- 7 -
1.6 Research Questions.....	- 7 -
1.7 Thesis Disposition	- 7 -
2. Previous Research.....	- 9 -
2.1 Labor Market Programs (LMPs)	- 9 -
3. Frame of Reference.....	- 13 -
3.1 Strategy-as-Practice (S-as-P)	- 13 -
3.2 Institutional Isomorphism Theory	- 16 -
4. Methodology	- 20 -
4.1 Research Design	- 20 -
4.2 The Case	- 20 -
4.3 The Setting: the Volvo Group	- 21 -
4.4 Data Collection	- 21 -
4.5 Data Analysis.....	- 23 -
4.6 Delimitations	- 24 -
4.7 Validity and Reliability	- 25 -
4.8 Ethical Considerations.....	- 26 -
5. Results and Analysis	- 28 -

5.1 Morphology of the case	28 -
5.1.1 The Volvo Step 2012	28 -
5.1.2 Admission to the Program/the Employment	29 -
5.1.3 Turn-out	29 -
5.2 Strategy-as-Practice (S-as-P) Perspectives	30 -
5.2.1 Practitioners	30 -
5.2.2 Practices	38 -
5.2.3 Praxis.....	43 -
6. Discussion	46 -
6.1 How Can Labor Market Programs Be Understood and Legitimated within the Organization from the Lenses of Practitioners, Practices, and Praxis?	46 -
6.1.1 Understanding a LMP	46 -
6.1.2 Ways to legitimate a LMP	48 -
6.2 What Are the Organizational Consequences for Having Labor Market Programs? ..	50 -
6.3 Discussion Summary	52 -
7. Conclusions.....	53 -
7.1 Main Remarks.....	53 -
7.2 Contributions	53 -
7.2.1 Contributions to the research field.....	53 -
7.2.2 Contributions to HRM practitioners	54 -
7.3 Suggestions for Future Research	54 -
8. References.....	56 -
9. APPENDIX.....	62 -
Appendix 1: Sample of the Interview Guide	62 -
Appendix 2: Practices.....	64 -

1. Introduction

The Volvo Group needs the youth and the youth need jobs - that simple correlation is the background of our investment in the Volvo Step, which we consider to be an investment for the future. (The Volvo Group, 2012a)

The above mentioned quote was stated by the former CEO of the Volvo Group, Olof Persson in connection to the startup of the Volvo Step; a labor market program targeting young adults initiated by the Group in 2012. The quote states the official slogan of the Volvo Step and has worked as an official motivational statement in the media for the Volvo Group. However, the quote raises questions. One can inquire that if a company engages in helping the young unemployed, could this really be just for contributing to society and the future generation as stated by the CEO? Are there other underlying strategically forces like the company's economic growth or publicity that has legitimated the investment? For example, according to the project manager of the Volvo Step (Personal communication 2015-01-09), the project has led to a great amount of positive publicity.

Wider organizations have striven to encourage companies to offer more alternatives to provide additional skills for the youth because “[...] it is also good for economic growth, social cohesion and widespread well-being” (OECD, 2015a). So, perhaps is this engagement due to an international, national or local request? Thus, what are the consequences associated to the investment in unemployed youth? The active mobilization of many companies towards the implementation of labor market initiatives has evoked several questions, such as the aforementioned ones. They can be summarized in questioning the way organizations legitimate labor market activities, which has been the main focus for this study.

1.1 Why Study Youth Unemployment?

The 2008 financial crisis strongly impacted the unemployment rates, since the economic struggles give no choice for many companies but to close, downsize, lay-off, and apply other mechanisms that result in higher unemployment rates (Wolbers, 2013) especially among youth (Eurostat, 2014a). Despite how the youth unemployment rate is understood; whether it only includes those who have worked or those Not in Education, Training or Employment (NEET) (OECD, 2015b; Statistics Sweden, 2014a), the statistics have produced a general concern and search for measures that can help tackle the problem. Thus, for the matter of this study, it has not been relevant to choose a particular definition since either way the numbers

are rather high (e.g., Swedish youth unemployment rate 24.7% for the first definition and 16.9% for the NEET) (Statistics Sweden, 2015).

As part of the solutions and options to help the young unemployed, one tendency has been about the institution of Labor Market Programs (LMPs), a part of the initiatives of the Active Labor Market Policies (ALMPs); a strategy established in order to help the unemployed enter or re-enter into the labor market (OECD, n/d; Sianesi, 2008). Such a measure has been recommended from wider organizations like the European Commission, so it is expected to be done and developed (OECD, 2015a; OECD, n/d; Sianesi, 2008). These programs can be targeted to young unemployed, offering temporary contracts in combination with some type of education (SOU 2012:80). This implies theoretical education at schools with work-based learning at a relevant company (Akum, 1991; Cappelli, 1996; Carling & Richardson, 2004; Casey, 1986; Finegold & Wagner, 2002; Kluge, 2010; Larsson, 2003; Sianesi, 2004; Sianesi, 2008; Steedman, 1993; Soskice, 1994). One example of this measure is Germany, which has long tradition with LMPs (Belot & Ours, 2004; Cappelli, 1996; Kriechel, Muehlemann, Pfeifer & Schütte, 2014).

1.2 The European Context: Evidence of Youth Labor Market Programs

As late as 2013, some countries like Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain still have had difficulty managing the crises and stabilizing their high youth unemployment rates, while other countries which have quite escaped the crisis have not managed to solve the youth unemployment issue either (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, and Sweden) (OECD, 2015a; Eurostat, 2014b). Some of the strategies to attend the situation are built upon the idea of offering the youth better alternatives for a successful school-to-work transition by providing skills and helping them to enter into the labor market and start growing professionally (OECD, 2015a). Thus, attending to the problem might not just be a regional, national or societal call; it can be also seen as a global request.

Many countries have striven to find solutions and legitimate their practices (Belot & Ours, 2004). Countries like Switzerland, Austria, and Germany seem to be achieving success and maintaining low rates (Eurostat, 2014a; Eurostat, 2014b). For other countries it can be something new to deal with leading to, for example, institutional reforms (Belot & Ours, 2004). Thus, there are perceived pressures that are forcing countries and their organizations to find solutions (OECD, 2015a; Eurostat, 2014a; Eurostat, 2014b), and one way to do that can

be by imitating already successful examples (Belot & Ours, 2004). However, theoretically speaking there is no guarantee that the success can be completely reproducible (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In that sense, the way every organization legitimates its own practices can differ and be due to different reasons (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) since the institutional setting that will guide the establishment of such practices can also vary (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Germany was one of the first countries to institute a law concerning apprenticeship programs with paid participation; however, it has only been applied in some countries (Casey, 1986; Kluge, 2010; Steedman, 1993; Soskice, 1994). Notoriously, Germany has one of the lowest youth unemployment rates (i.e., 7.8%) (Eurostat, 2014b). This has been attributed to institutional policies and regulations that encourage apprenticeship programs (Belot & Ours, 2004; Cappelli, 1996; Kriechel et. al., 2014). A well-known successful example is the “Siemens & Halske Factory School for Apprentices” that started in 1906. Currently, a work-based education program that combines theory and company practice that gives the students an opportunity not only to work at Siemens but also to gain personal and social skills (Dittler, n/d). Thanks to the German success example it has been tried to be extended to other European countries.

Some of the labor market initiatives can be seen as a way of obtaining legitimacy (e.g., acting as a result of influential forces, rules and mandates or responding to uncertainty by imitating successful practices already tested by counterparts; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), gaining public acknowledgment, improving reputation, improving the internal economy (low wages, lower taxes, support from the state, etc.), refining selection systems of human capital or recruitment strategies, better diversity practices and integration, and not necessarily responding to society per se (Cooke, 2011).

Particularly Sweden, France, and Britain were characterized as lacking a tradition of youth training and for employers being unwilling to take responsibility for that matter (Steedman, 1993). Nevertheless, this has changed and, for example, in the Swedish context more organizations try to be engaged in labor market initiatives targeting unemployed young adults.

1.3 The Swedish Context: A Recent Appearance of Youth Labor Market Programs

The youth unemployment rate in Sweden is rather high (i.e., 22% for November 2014), and even though the rate seemed to decrease from 2009, it was only about two percent (i.e., 24.1% for January 2009, to 22% for November 2014) (Statistics Sweden, 2014b). Many voices have actually argued that the unemployment levels among Swedish young adults, between 16 and 25 years old, have never been as high as they are now (Helgesson, Johnsson, Nordqvist, Lundberg & Vingård, 2014; Larsson, 2003; SOU 2012:80), and for the Swedish Labor Force Survey of February 2015, the numbers reach 24.7% (Statistics Sweden, 2015). What it is also interesting about Sweden is that the political parties have begun to encourage the industrial sector to develop activities that incentivize and offer opportunities to young adults while contributing to Swedish economic growth (Lind, 2015). Some organizations, with the cooperation of The Swedish Public Employment Agency (*Arbetsförmedlingen*), offer, among others: internships, trainee programs and introductory employment (SOU 2012:80). In fact, as a part of this tendency, the Swedish government in 2011 delegated an investigation into the possibility of creating a new type of employment contract combining a temporary employment with some type of education or theoretical learning, the so-called "*lärlings/provanställning*". In 2012, the investigation was finished and the report suggested the creation of a new employment contract "*Utbildningsanställning*", which would offer organizations the possibility of a new way to easily employ young adults between the ages of 18-23 on temporary contracts in combination with some type of education (SOU 2012:80).

Today The Swedish Public Employment Agency offers Swedish organizations two alternative subventions for hiring unemployed young adults: *Nystartsjobb* (New start job) or *Yrkesintroduktion* (Professional introduction). *Nystartsjobb* provides the employer the possibility to hire a young adult, between the ages of 21 and 26, for at least six months on a temporary or permanent contract with a compensation of maximum 63% of the employer costs (The Swedish Public Employment Agency 2014a; SFS 2006:1481). *Yrkesintroduktion* gives the employer a chance to hire young adults (15-25 years old), with no relevant experience, for at least three months with a subvention of up to 55% of the employer costs on a specific temporary employment contract called *Yrkesintroduktionsanställning* (Introductory employment contract) (The Swedish Public Employment Agency, 2014b; SFS 2013:1157).

This has now led to an increase of organizations starting LMPs targeting young adults in Sweden (Personal communication, 2015-01-09). However, not all organizations engage in such activities as a response of institutional pressures or incentives (Cooke, 2011; Soskice, 1994). In that sense, it becomes interesting when despite of the support alternatives, a company decides to be part of the trend but by self-financing as one of its organizational strategies (The Volvo Group 2012b; 2013). One example of this active mobilization is the Volvo Step program, a labor market initiative targeting young adults initiated by the Volvo Group in which young adults, through an ‘introductory employment contract’ (*yrkesintroduktionsanställning*), combine a one year employment at the Volvo Group factories with a theoretical education, all financed by Volvo Group alone. It is a pilot project for three years (Personal communication, 2015-01-09). This initiative could also be seen as a response to society beyond just economic interest, since organizations have ethical and social obligations (Bowen, 1953; Campbell, 2007; Casey, 1986). However, even though organizations can receive support for conducting such activities they are not legally obligated to do so (The Swedish Public Employment Agency, 2014a; 2014b; Soskice, 1994).

According to the project manager of Volvo Step, one of the main objectives of the program is to make a societal contribution by helping to reduce youth unemployment rates (Personal communication 2015-01-09). Nonetheless, the CEO of Volvo Group Olof Persson (2013) stated that besides contributing to society, there is also an organizational strategy for increasing and attracting the young population because the factory needs this resource and the organization needs to decrease the high average age in the factories. Consequently, more voices should be heard in order to understand such an organizational engagement in LMPs.

1.4 Problematization

Despite of the existence of social and institutional pressures (The Swedish Public Employment Agency, 2015; Casey, 1986; Ekonomifakta, 2015; Spector, 2015; Soskice, 1994; Statistics Sweden, 2013), there is no obligation to be part of or to offer LMPs in Sweden (The Swedish Public Employment Agency, 2014a; 2014b). Thus, regardless of governmental subventions (The Swedish Public Employment Agency, 2014a; SFS 2006:1481; The Swedish Public Employment Agency, 2014b; SFS 2013:1157), still some organizations, like the Volvo Group, decide to engage in labor market initiatives with their own financing. This creates curiosity to explore the current organizational interest for the question of youth unemployment. Particularly the Volvo Step program because it is one of the first introductory

employment contract in Sweden. Thus, it could serve as an illustrative example of a current LMP in the Swedish context. Furthermore, it has worked as a model ever since the Swedish governmental agreement of *yrkesintroduktionsavtalet* was formed.

In several studies it has been found that LMPs can serve as a bridge in the school-to-work transitions; thus, LMPs have been supported and assumed as an ideal way of action (OECD, 2015a; OECD, n/d), mainly because some of the countries with long tradition of LMPs (e.g., Germany and Austria) have managed to maintain lower youth unemployment rates (Eurostat, 2014a). However, the institutional settings vary from place to place and even though previous research can represent similar situations, it is relevant to include an updated version of how an organization legitimates its labor market initiatives and the internal consequences of it, because the context also changes. Thus, since there is a tendency to include such programs in more companies in the Swedish context it is necessary to explore how such a program is understood, legitimated, and which consequences it carries.

The research's emphasis in previous studies mostly resides on either the social or individual level, leaving out the organizational dimension that could complement the understanding of LMPs and most of these studies present a positivist umbrella which implies a restrictive perspective, generalizations, and statistical measurements (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Therefore it is important to introduce research with a reflective and interpretative view (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009), which is also needed to reach a better understanding of the present-day situation. Additionally, to complement the current research field focus from an organizational level is by comprehending the LMP as an organizational strategy, since despite social obligations it is up to the companies to decide whether or not to be involved in such activities, which is the product of an internal organizational decision in order to meet a particular goal (i.e., a strategy) (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). This offers the opportunity to look at LMP implementation and understand it within the organization (i.e., how is it done, include different actors and their actions and not just study the program itself) (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

The aforementioned statements and reflections have motivated the intentions of the following study, leading to the purpose described below.

1.5 Purpose

In this study, the aim was to identify the underlying reasons for organizations to participate in LMPs for young adults, which can explain how the organizations legitimate such initiatives, as well as to identify and explore the potential consequences of such an involvement at the organizational level through a pluralistic umbrella, with the guide of the Strategy-as-Practice approach. In that sense, this study is expected to contribute to the research field by offering an understanding of the way labor market activities become legitimated and an updated research within the field of LMP. Moreover, it is expected that this research can serve as an inspiration and illustrative example for other organizations to participate in LMPs.

1.6 Research Questions

The above-mentioned problematization has resulted in the following research questions:

- How can labor market programs be understood and legitimated within the organization from the lenses of practitioners, practices, and praxis?
 - What are the organizational consequences for having labor market programs?

1.7 Thesis Disposition

The second section of the report presents a review of previous research that investigates labor market programs, their main topics and findings. It is also presented how those researches contribute with this study.

Section three describes the inspirational theoretical frame of reference, such as Strategy-as-Practice approach and the Isomorphism Institutional Theory. The section discusses its contribution to this study.

Section four presents the methodological approach of the study and describes how the study was conducted. The selected case and process criteria, data and actors selection, analytic process, validity, limitations, and ethical considerations are described and discussed.

The fifth section contains the empirical findings according with the code themes and theoretical guidance as well as a theoretical analysis of the findings.

Section six presents a discussion of the empirical findings and includes answers to the research questions, presentation of relationships with the theoretical approaches, previous research, and critical reasoning.

Finally, section seven presents the concluding remarks, contributions, and suggestions for future research.

2. Previous Research

As the previous focus lied on the background and setting of labor market programs the following section presents a review of previous research investigating such a topic and discuss their findings and methodological approach.

2.1 Labor Market Programs (LMPs)

LMPs are considered to be a part of the initiatives of the Active Labor Market Policies (ALMPs), a strategy established in order to help the unemployed enter or re-enter the labor market (Kluve, 2010; OECD, n/d; Sianesi, 2008). They have been also seen as a way to create social stability by trying to maintain low unemployment rates (Ackum, 1991; Casey, 1986; Steedman, 1993). Some LMPs target the unemployed in general and others specifically aim to address the issue of youth unemployment. These programs have been referred to in several studies as ‘dual apprenticeship program’ (Casey, 1986), ‘training and apprenticeship’ (Steedman, 1993), ‘the apprenticeship system’ (Soskice, 1994), ‘the youth apprenticeship program’ (Cappelli, 1996), ‘the German youth apprenticeship model’ (Finegold & Wagner, 2002), the ‘youth practice and labor market training’ (Larsson, 2003), ‘the skill-building activities’ (Sianesi, 2008), and more. Despite the variety of names, all refer to programs and activities that provide expertise in the management of certain skills by combining classroom or theoretical elements at schools with work-based learning that take place at the relevant company (Ackum, 1991; Cappelli, 1996; Carling & Richardson, 2004; Casey, 1986; Finegold & Wagner, 2002; Kluve, 2010; Larsson, 2003; Muehlemann & Wolter, 2014; Sianesi, 2004; Sianesi, 2008; Steedman, 1993; Soskice, 1994).

Some of the aforementioned studies on LMPs are not strictly comparable to one another in terms of content, policy, settings, and more. However, all of them coincide in that they are a form of intervening in the school-to-work transition and a bridge for young people to enter into the labor market. In this sense, most of the research has focused on the studies have been of quantitative character, looking for the implications of LMP on social and individual level. It has used a positivistic view and methodology, trying to identify the impact of LMPs in society from a micro- and macroeconomic perspective (viz., to which extent they contribute to the unemployment rate or cost-benefit evaluations). Only few explorative studies focused on the success depending on the type of LMP or evaluating the quality and structure of the

program. For example, previous studies involve the reasons of the apparent success of LMPs in Germany (Casey, 1986), the effects of Swedish LMPs on subsequent hourly earnings (Ackum, 1991; Larsson, 2003), the origins and history of German youth training and the implications to reproduce it in Britain (Steedman, 1993), explanations of how the system works from an institutional perspective and how this influences cost and benefits for employers (Soskice, 1994), and the estimation of threat effects to active LMPs (Rosholm & Svarer, 2008).

The results and real contributions of such programs have been quite heterogeneous. The different contexts and institutional settings, the specifications of the programs, and the socio-economic reality when the study was created influence the outcome, success, survival, and effectiveness of the LMPs (Cappelli, 1996; Belot and Ours, 2004; Kluge, 2010; Sianesi, 2004; Steedman, 1993; Soskice, 1994). Notwithstanding, it is still interesting to understand LMPs, how they can be improved, how they really can contribute to diminish the youth unemployment rates, and consequently how successful examples could be transferable (e.g., the study about the lessons the US could learn from Britain to introduce LMPs; Cappelli, 1996). Looking more specifically at the Swedish context, some of the research in the new century focuses on the evaluation of LMPs created in the '90s, when they were crucial due to the economic crisis during that time (Carling & Richardson, 2004; Sianesi, 2004). Apart from that decade, the research has been oriented to study the effects of the LMPs (Kluge, 2010; Muehleemann & Wolter, 2014; Rosholm & Svarer, 2008; Sianesi, 2008).

As noted above, the research's emphasis mostly resides on either the social or individual level, leaving out the organizational dimension that could complement the understanding of LMPs. However, when the organizational dimension is investigated, they are usually related to cost-benefits (Muehleemann & Wolter, 2014) or selection strategies (Cappelli, 1996; Sianesi, 2008). Nonetheless, Finegold and Wagner (2002) in particular performed a qualitative study (focused on managers' responses) in which they analyzed why employers in the 21st century still continue to implement apprenticeship programs in German banks. Interestingly, there is an omission of any kind of relationship with youth unemployment. Instead, the focus lies on companies needing to increase the quality and quantity of skills in order to improve or maintain standards. Additionally, the authors also found some other justifications related to internal benefits, like: enhancing workplace flexibility, reducing recruitment costs, and reducing training costs for new employees recruited from the

apprenticeship program. This reinforces the idea of studying a particular LMP not only as an unemployment intervention and an individual aid but also as an organizational contributor.

Nowadays, the intentions of helping unemployed youth through LMPs have been made public due to the continued increase of the unemployment rate. Even though the contribution of LMPs seems to be quite heterogeneous, it is still assumed as one way to help solve the problem (OECD, 2015a). However, when a program starts with almost total absence of the governmental motivators (viz., subvention to train and hire young people), it is natural to inquire about the underlying reasons for participating in such activities and to identify the consequences of such an involvement. Hence, any kind of reciprocal benefits that inspire more companies to be part of these initiatives would be identified, while simultaneously contributing to a reduction of the youth unemployment rate. For that, it was interesting to give attention specifically to the organizational level, in contrast to other previous research. For example it is expected to include more perspectives (i.e., experiences from the LMPs previous and current participants, creators, supporters, mentors, supervisors, etc., observations of some of their activities, and check-up of texts in which the program is presented) and not look only at managers as in Finegold and Wagner (2002). In this way, different voices and experiences can be heard, offering a more pluralistic and broader picture of a current LMP in the Swedish context. By including a reflective and interpretative approach, there is a chance to include data variations and offer the liberty for other readers to also have their own interpretation of the subject (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

A way to complement the current research field focus from an organizational level is by comprehending the LMP as an organizational strategy, since despite social obligations it is up to the companies to decide whether or not to be involved in such activities, which is the product of an internal organizational decision in order to meet a particular goal (i.e., a strategy) (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). This offers the opportunity to look at LMP implementation and understand it within the organization (i.e., how is it done, include different actors and their actions and not just study the program itself) (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Thus, it can reveal underlying reasons for organizations to participate in LMPs and to explore the possible consequences of it. In other words, it could be achieved by using the Strategy-as-Practice (S-as-P) approach (Whittington, 1996), as it helps to broaden the scope in organizational studies (Vaara & Whittington, 2012) by offering the opportunity to look into different perspectives and levels and to include several actors, activities, and actions to reach

a more complete understanding of how a LMP is practiced. Particularly, the use of such an approach, in combination with a theoretical base, has helped several studies obtain explanations about how the strategy is practiced, the involvement of different actors, gaps between words and actions, and more (e.g., Hardy, Palmer & Phillips, 2000; Hendry, Kiel & Nicholson, 2010; Regnér, 2008).

Consequently, the review of previous research has resulted in the selection of the theoretical approaches that has led to the following frame of reference for conducting the study.

3. Frame of Reference

This section describes the main features of the selected theoretical approaches and argues how they contribute with the development and analysis of the case study.

3.1 Strategy-as-Practice (S-as-P)

Strategies have commonly been regarded as action plans implemented to achieve certain goals. However, they are not static or analytic processes followed by simple implementation, but are instead formed and evolved differently (e.g., they can be deliberate or emergent) (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). In addition, the understanding of strategy goes beyond its formation and outcomes. It is also about ‘who does it, what the actors do, how they do it, what they use, and what implications all these have in shaping the strategy’ (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). In other words, how it is practiced.

On one hand, strategy research has been usually based on looking (quantitatively) at the economic performance without including the array of organizational practices that might influence both the strategy processes and outcomes; thus a qualitative and more social perspective has been claimed (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). On the other hand, to understand strategies, some authors have studied the strategy documents and their significance in the strategy process and execution (e.g., Giraudeau, 2008; Vaara, Sorsa & Pälli, 2010). Others have looked at strategy-making episodes, how the strategy is performed (e.g., Salvato, 2003) or how it is translated from texts into practice (e.g., Aggerholm, Asmuß & Thomsen, 2012). Additionally, as the texts and their translations are done by particular actors, some researches have explored the roles and dynamics of such performers as determinant catalyzers, participants or obstacles to strategies as well (e.g., Laine & Vaara, 2007; Paroutis & Pettigrew, 2007). However, strategies are not just isolated written decisions and goals. They are neither actions achieving objectives nor simple actors performing specific activities. They are about how those different elements are intertwined. Thus, in focusing on only one of them, there is a risk of missing potential explanations of the strategy in reality (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 1996; Whittington, 2006).

Following these ideas, it is important to take into account the variety of aspects that play a role in ‘doing’ strategy. This means that in order to achieve a better picture of how the

strategy is practiced, it is important to identify and analyze relationships and discrepancies between what is intended to be done, what is actually done, and who does it (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Whittington, 1996; Whittington, 2006). With the intention of achieving that, the Strategy-as-Practice approach (Whittington, 1996) was chosen as an appropriate guide for this study, since it aims to identify the underlying reasons for organizations to participate in LMPs and to explore the possible consequences of such an involvement at the organizational level.

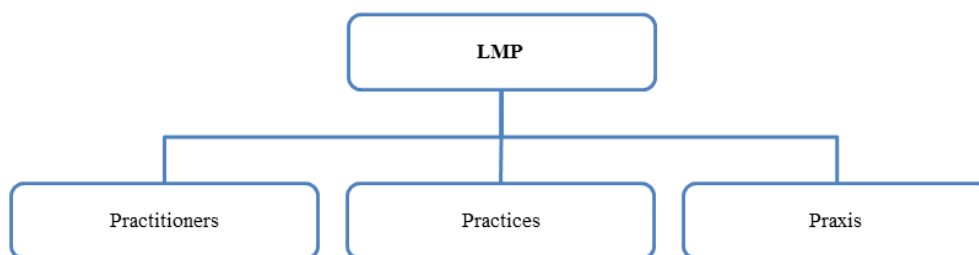
The term Strategy-as-Practice was presented by Richard Whittington in 1996, when he studied strategy as a social practice and the actions of the strategy practitioners. He argued for paradigm shift from focus on the core competence of the organization to the practical competence of managers as strategists, in order to identify how managers ‘do strategy’. He declared that practice deals with the strategizing work in the organization (i.e., actions where strategy becomes formulated and implemented). In other words, when analyzing a strategy, it was usually missing the ‘human’ factor as the actor, developer, shaper or receptor of the strategy through specific ‘actions’ (the latter had been also disregarded) (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). In this way, Whittington (2006) proposed a new framework for strategy research which integrates the strategy as something an organization *has* and people *do* in the organizational or institutional context. Thus, in order to get a better understanding of a strategy, it is necessary to explore it from all the angles and not just see it as an isolated set of activities, by “bringing human actors and their actions and interactions to the center stage of strategy research” (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009, p.70).

In order to do that, three concepts are presented: strategy practices, strategy praxis, and strategy practitioners. *Practices* are shared routines or behaviors, discourses, concepts, and social, symbolic and material tools such as the activities, policies, and rules that define the strategy. *Praxis* refers to what is actually done; the flow of activities to successfully complete the strategy. *Practitioners* refer to the internal and external actors (individual or aggregate) who perform the strategy activity and directly or indirectly influence the shape of practices and praxis. (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Whittington, 2006).

By studying a strategy that looks at and combines these three elements, it is possible to have a broader and more complete overview of how the strategy is actually working (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 1996; Whittington, 2006). Thus, this approach can provide a better explanation of how and why a

strategy is understood and shaped, and it helps to interpret specific episodes of strategy-making. Consequently, since the participation in a particular LMP can be perceived as an organizational strategy, it could be studied through the practices, praxis, and practitioners involved (Figure 1). Hence, this framework offers the possibility of being used as a reference to identify why and how organizations engage in these labor market initiatives from the three aforementioned perspectives, compare them, discover any eventual gaps between those three levels, and elucidate eventual consequences of such an engagement.

Figure 1: A LMP seen from S-as-P perspective (Adapted from the S-as-P approach by Whittington, 1996)



As mentioned before, the S-as-P approach offers the opportunity to broaden the scope to explore and identify diverse understanding of LMPs, how they are legitimated, and the consequences they carried. However, as a framework it serves as a guide for data collection, though its interpretation and analysis require a theoretical foundation, as noticed in previous research. Thus, the S-as-P cannot be used to explain the empirical findings alone because the approach will show a variety of responses from different perspectives and gaps between them but it not necessarily will explain the meaning of such findings. Therefore the Institutional Isomorphism Theory was selected as theoretical complement for data interpretation. This theory helps in understanding the wider context in which the study is embedded by offering explanation of diverse influencing forces that determine the creation and structure of decision-making and understand practices and procedures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Additionally, previous research demonstrates that the institutional settings influence the creation, performance, and development of LMPs (Cappelli, 1996; Belot and Ours, 2004; Kluge, 2010; Sianesi, 2004; Steedman, 1993; Soskice, 1994); thus, such elements are expected to be found within the data. Hence, S-as-P will elucidate the different understandings from the three perspectives while the complemented theory will support the interpretation. Subsequently, the complementing Institutional Isomorphism Theory is presented below.

3.2 Institutional Isomorphism Theory

How things are done, the entire societal modus operandi, and the majority of rationalized structures are product of a social interpretation of the social reality, which makes the organizational behavior a social construct and expression of such a reality (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In other words:

Many of the positions, policies, programs, and procedures of modern organizations are enforced by public opinion, by the views of important constituents, by knowledge legitimated through the educational system, by social prestige, by the laws, and by the definitions of negligence and prudence used by the courts. Such elements of formal structure are manifestations of powerful institutional rules which function as highly rationalized myths that are binding on particular organizations. (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p.343)

Following these ideas, the *practitioners* responses can be seen as expressions of their social reality, *practices* are such programs and procedures product of social and organizational interpretation of the same reality, and *praxis* is the clear manifestation (in actions) of such rationalized myths.

The institutional settings in which an organization is embedded are expected to coordinate and control the organizational activities by defining practices and procedures as reciprocated typifications, interpretations, and rule-like concepts that guide social thought and actions (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Organizations are not single entities that operate decontextualized and separated from society, but instead they are situated in specific environments; thus they have to obtain legitimacy, work, and cooperate with other units and bodies otherwise their actions and growth might be restricted (Brewster & Mayrhofer, 2011; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). As a result, the institutional rules may create the proper conditions for organizations for “gaining legitimacy, resources, stability, and enhance survival prospects” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p.340). Consequently, organizations progressively try to match such rules and behaviors, becoming more homogenous with the structured environment after they are well-established (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). However, at the beginning many organizations can differ in structure and form, this makes interesting the recurrent organizational shift to a more standardized practices and procedures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

The homogenization process, in the organizational context, has been called as isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Such a word comes from the Greek: *Iso* means equal and

morphism refers to form; resulting in something with ‘equal form’. Hawley (1968) described it as a process in which one population starts to resemble another when both of them are subject to the same environmental conditions. This opened the door for the *Institutional Isomorphism Theory* (also called neo- institutional theory), a theory that tries to explain the underlying driving forces of why organizations can become more similar and/or take similar actions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), since it has been observed that “institutional isomorphism promotes the success and survival of organizations” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p.349). Such forces or mechanisms that influence organizational changes in different levels are known as coercive, mimetic, and normative (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). They can help to understand the different actions that one company is taken, if it is because of wider organizational mandates or a societal request, because it is something good and successful that other companies are doing, because the need of more trained and skilled young adults or it just comes from the organizational core. These influential mechanisms can offer a better understanding of the underlying reasons for legitimate LMPs.

Coercive isomorphism involves regulatory influential forces like culture, political and governmental mandates that affect directly the legitimization issue (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Some examples can include: European directives, ILO, labor laws including equal rights and diversity management, trade unions, work councils and the government in general (Paauwe & Boselie, 2003). In other words, pressures that come from other wider organizations that mold the adequate organizational behavior and legal environment based on cultural expectations and the societal reality in which the organization aims to operate (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Such regulations make organizations become more homogenous according to their specific environment, both when comparing locally or even internationally.

Mimetic isomorphism can be understood as a response to uncertainty, a force that encourage imitation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The fear of great loss or failure can motivate organizations in try to reproduce practices that have already been done like benchmarking, successful strategies and practices already ‘tested’ by the competitors, organizational programs, policies, theoretical approaches, management strategies (e.g. diversity management, working climate strategies, career development, and project management mechanisms) and many other activities that become models (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003). Such an uncertainty makes organizations follow patterns and frameworks because they can increase success possibilities. Furthermore, when a company

tests new practices and succeed it becomes a sort of convenient model to be borrowed by other organization, then the latter can even improve such practices and become itself the ‘new model’, thus the imitation process, by others, begins again (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983)

Normative isomorphism is associated to professionalization, this means that it is related with the structure and definition of every occupation, its methods, requirements, and conditions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983); what the organization needs in relation with academic programs, employees educational background and experience, networks and professional identification (Paauwe & Boselie, 2003). The professional norms and values create rationalize behaviors that legitimate particular individual-professional and organizational activities and practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003).

To become isomorphic with the legal environment; imitate successful practices, programs, or activities; and/or follow the professional norm, do not assure success and survival but, according to the theory, the possibilities certainly increase (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). As noticed before, the specific context can highly influence companies to engage, for instance, in LMPs by the existence of legal requirements, fiscal incentives, and diverse pressures, to provide training (Soskice, 1994). Consequently, such institutional settings will determine the LMPs structure and even effectiveness (see Cappelli, 1996; Kluve, 2010; Sianesi, 2004; Steedman, 1993; Soskice, 1994). In other words, there are coercive forces that can help companies in the decision-making of training offers for young people. There are also cases of organizations trying to follow the steps of their successful counterparts (see Cappelli, 1996; Steedman, 1993), showing signs of mimetic behaviors. Alternatively, the need of skilled young people in specific careers (see Finegold & Wagner, 2002; Soskice, 1994) can be associated with normative isomorphism. In that sense, the institutional isomorphism theory has been used as a reference to analyze the results, providing a possible explanation for the underlying reasons behind the engagement in labor market initiatives by the studied organization.

Taking into consideration the theoretical choices that are based on having a broader overview of the studied case, by including several perspectives, and searching for legitimation patterns from a wider picture, the following section presents a description of the methodological approach grounded in an interpretative perspective that look for variety of data and pluralism, for using more than one theoretical view as inspiration and not as a restrictive guide. Thus, it

has been achieved by the shown frame of reference. Consequently, the methodology process is presented below.

4. Methodology

Based upon the aforementioned frame of reference the following methodological process was followed in order to gather and analyze the data. Moreover, the reliability and validity, delimitations and ethical considerations are discussed.

4.1 Research Design

The research was inspired by an interpretative approach (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009) and performed using a qualitative methodology since this study focuses on exploring the understanding and legitimate process of an LMP through a case study (Hakim, 2000). The investigation focuses on one case, because it is suitable for studies of explorative character (Collis & Hurley, 2009), and has a pluralistic method of reasoning (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). In that sense, this research has its main focus on different actors' descriptions and interpretations, aiming to form descriptive reports of how an organization understand, legitimate and shape a labor market program (LMP) targeting young adults and its organizational consequences. (Bryman, 2008; Hakim, 2000; Collis & Hussey, 2009).

As previously stated, sufficient prior research has not been found that focuses on internal organizational ways to legitimate participations in LMPs or the consequences of them; especially in the Swedish context, due to the recent institution of LMPs in Sweden. Therefore, an explorative research design has been adopted thus it is appropriate when only few or no previous studies are conducted on the particular topic and since it has searched for new patterns and propositions rather than testing existing ones. (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Collis & Hurley, 2009).

4.2 The Case

The case has worked as a strategically example, which has been able to provide the clearest illustration of a LMP in the Swedish context (Hakim, 2000). The study has parted from an abductive way of reasoning by drawing conclusions from one single observation and not several samples (Aliseda, 2006). This also means that a background theory or frame of reference has served as inspiration to guide, the observations, categorizations, and analysis in order to reach a better understanding of the reality (Alvensson & Sköldberg 2009). In other words, data has been collected from the case through observation, interviews, and internal documents. (Aliseda, 2006; Charmaz, 2006; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

4.3 The Setting: the Volvo Group

The chosen representative case is the LMP initiated by the world's leading manufacturer of trucks, busses and other heavy vehicles: the Volvo Group. The organization has about 115 000 employees across 19 countries and is headquartered in Gothenburg, Sweden. It was founded in 1927 in Gothenburg by Assar Gabrielsson and Gustaf Larson, being one of Sweden's largest employers. In 2013, the turnover was 237 billion SEK and Volvo Group was one of the world's largest manufacturers of heavy duty trucks (The Volvo Group, 2015a; The Volvo Group, 2015b).

4.4 Data Collection

All the reasoning was inspired by a pluralistic view which strives for multiplicity, looks for variations and provides the possibility of multiple interpretations (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009) to ensure that the data material came through in a multifaceted way (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009) the LMP was studied from a strategy scope, the data variations were achieved by following a frame of reference of Strategy-as-practice (S-as-P) by collecting information from three different perspectives: the practitioners, practices and praxis (Whittington, 1996). In consequence, the participants, documents, and settings selection have been organized following such perspectives. The practitioners and praxis element correspond to the collection of primary data since they include mainly interviews, observations, and first-hand experiences. The practice element correspond to secondary data since it includes documents, printed media, and previous reports

The *Practitioner Element* (Whittington, 2006) and the practitioners' experiences of the motivations and organizational consequences were explored through semi-structured interviews because they offer the respondents freedom to steer the conversation and consequently reveal their experiences and beliefs. At the same time, the interviewers keep an overall structure through the use of an interview guide (Bryman, 2008) (See Appendix 1). Since the outline of the interviews was adapted to the individual respondents, the length of the interviews did vary in time and lasted between 20 and - 90 minutes. All interviews were performed in March 2015. The majority of the interviews took place in separate conference rooms in the respondents' work- place. In two cases, where the respondents preferred another location, one interview was held via an online video program and the other in a separate group room at the University of Gothenburg. The interviews were held in Swedish, and then

transcribed and translated to English. The English translation process and the transcription were seen as a part of the empirical analysis. The respondents were chosen through targeted sampling, mainly by Volvo, which Bryman (2008) recommends for qualitative research, and always aimed for plurality, multiplicity, and power variations (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). In accordance with the pluralistic paradigm, the aim of the interviews was to include as many perspectives as possible. This leads to interviews with 22 respondents of different titles, roles, and backgrounds (Table 1). The interviews have explored what the practitioners believe are the underlying reasons for the employer to participate in a LMP and the consequences they experienced as a result of such participation.

Table 1: The Practitioners

Category	No. of respondents	Interview average duration (minutes)	Transcriptions (No. of pages)
Former Volvo Step participant	4	180	15
Current Volvo Step participants	5	190	10
The Volvo Step communication manager	1	91	7
HR director, production plant	1	20	3
The national Volvo Step recruitment manager	1	49	5
Production leaders	2	50	12
IF metall union Volvo Step representative	1	52	7
The Volvo Step Tutors	2	60	11
The project manager for the theoretical education of the Volvo Step, GTC	1	45	6
Teacher, GTC	1	26	4
The senior advisor to the CEO and one of the initiators for the Volvo Step	1	45	6
The Volvo Step project manager	1	90	8
Combined Mentor and local project manager production plant	1	32	4
TOTAL	22	930	98

The Practice element (Whittington 2006) was examined through analysis of documents and other printed media thus a document analysis is often used in qualitative research and case studies (Bryman 2008; Hakim 2000). The analysis had its main focus on how the LMP is presented and argued for in both corporate specific documents and the media. Documents of interest for the study were documents mentioning the Volvo Step, descriptive and performance data, corporation- policies, internal documents, Swedish newspaper articles,

internal and external press releases and media statements from 2012, 2013, and 2014. (See Appendix 2)

The Praxis Element (Whittington, 2006) was explored through two non-participative observations (Bryman, 2008; Collis & Hussey, 2009) of the activities connected to the LMP; thus, observations can be used as a data gathering method in case studies (Hakim 2000). Specifically, two tours were conducted in one of the factories connected to the LMP. The observations were unstructured (Bryman 2008) and did not incorporate observation plans. Instead, the observations focused on the behaviors of the LMP participants and specifically their work tasks and collaboration with their tutors and colleagues. By not participating and only observing the sessions, it was possible to discover underlying patterns in how the actors interact; to explore what is really done. More specifically, it could be used to identify actions that could increase the understanding of how the LMP is understood and legitimated and discover organizational consequences the participation in LMPs can create. Thus, differences or gaps between what it is said, written and actually done in the organization could be elucidated.

4.5 Data Analysis

In accordance with Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009), it has been important to strive for multiplicity, hear several voices, identify variations and inconsistencies, and to be open to various interpretations. The S-as-P approach has contributed to the achievement of plurality, mapping and organizing data. Additionally, the respondents' authority level has been taken into consideration since it influences the responses validity and reliability. This means that even though a theme has been discovered in one single interview, it can still be of great importance for the study due to the authority level of the respondent. Different theories were selected because by avoiding a definitive and unequivocal theoretical viewpoint it is possible to reach a better interpretative and reflexive position. (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009). The empirical data was analyzed through a thematic analysis, which aim to reveal underlying patterns in the respondents' stories and draw conclusions of the respondents perception (Bryman, 2008; Rosenthal, 2004), which has been the aim of this study.

In the first step of the data analysis, the empirical data was transcribed and coded into categories (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Such categories helped in the selection of the complemented theory in order to interpret the results as part of the abductive process. The

categories were: understanding a LMP, ways to legitimate a LMP, and organizational consequences. They were found in repetitions of themes that occurred more than once, local expressions typical of the particular group or the organization, metaphors used to represent the respondents' thoughts, similarities and differences between the respondents, connecting words such as 'due to' and a lack of answers (Bryman, 2008). The responses were interpreted through the Institutional Isomorphism Theory as theoretical reference offering theoretical explanations to understand the underlying reasons to legitimate LMPs from a wider scope. Since the interviews were conducted in Swedish, they were first coded in Swedish, and then selected codes and representative expressions were translated into English. The translation process was considered a step of the analysis. Secondly, the codes have been sorted into central themes and sub- themes, which were presented in a framework (Bryman, 2008; Payne & Payne, 2004). From this framework and from data triangulating, it was possible to discover differences and similarities between the three elements of the S-as-P framework, indicating how the program is understood and legitimated, and its organizational consequences.

4.6 Delimitations

This study only focused on one specific case within a particular context, and it is of importance that the case is considered from the specific context to which it belongs. More specifically, the context was; a Swedish institutional setting and an organization within the industry business. Furthermore, Volvo Step has only been active for three years; therefore, the data and the results only are connected to this limited period of time.

When using coding as part of the data analysis, there is always a risk that the narrative flow might be spoiled, that the context of what is said could be damaged, and that some underlying meanings are omitted. This is because the data could be fragmented and filtered, leaving aside sections not suitable for coding or relevant for the study (Rosenthal, 2004). However, by coding the data, it decreases the risk of missing any important statement or detail in the material that could be considered essential. Lastly, the fact that the representatives at Volvo selected all of the respondents for this study might have influenced the reliability of the interviews. However, it has been of interest to both the organization and to the researchers to gain multiplicity and hear all perspectives about Volvo Step so the variations of respondents contributed to diminished bias.

4.7 Validity and Reliability

According to Bryman (2008), external validity represents the degree to which the study can be generalized. Since the study has been inspired by a pluralistic perspective through qualitative methodology (Bryman, 2008; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009), this case needs to be considered to be unique and therefore not possible to generalize to other cases (i.e., nothing is permanent and all social environments change) (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). However, though the results of this study might not be perfectly replicable in other contexts, (the same environment can incorporate different events depending on time). Even though the results of this study might not be perfectly replicable in other contexts, the same environment can incorporate different events depending on time. Thus, the conclusions might be adapted to other similar cases. However, adjustments might be considered for further studies.

When more than one researcher conducts research, there is a risk that the researchers will interpret the empirical material in a different way, which risks influencing the internal reliability of the study (Bryman, 2008). However, in this study the background theory assures that the interpretations were situated within the same context. Moreover, the differences in view- points and interpretations have enriched the analysis as part of the data triangulation.

To avoid reliability and influence issues in the document analysis, the four criteria used by Scott (1990) have been considered to assess the document quality. The authenticity and credibility of the document analysis have been assured by ensuring that all material has been brought from reliable sources such as the Volvo Group and reputable magazines. Moreover, the representativeness and meaning have been secured by considering that the documents represent the category they are part of and that they are understandable.

In due to restrictions from the case organization it was only possible to conduct two observations, which might influence the reliability of the study. However, since the study also builds on both a document analysis and 22 interviews it was still possible to get a nuances picture of the particular case.

By conducting a secrecy agreement in which the accessibility to the organization is regulated, the risk that the organization would not provide accessibility to necessary documents has been avoided.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Firstly, this study took a universalistic ethical stand, which means that all participants were respected for their different interests, and the welfare of the participants was protected in all stages of the study (Bryman, 2008; Gewirth, 1988). Additionally, as the study required access to internal documents and dealt with other sensitive corporate- specific information, a high degree of confidentiality was required. The interests of the organization and the employees were respected and the accessible information was handled with care. Furthermore, all organization specific information, and all other internal- or personal information were excluded from the report.

Secondly, since the study was based upon interviews and observations, The Ethical Principles for Social Science from the Swedish Research Council (2011) and UNESCO's Code of Conduct for Social Science Research (2014) were adopted. This mean the anonymity and voluntariness of the participants were taken into consideration. This also implies that the respondents were respected in all stages of the study and were given the opportunity to choose whether to answer the questions or not.

Due to the fact that the respondents were selected by Volvo based upon their working role, it was easier for their colleagues and the Volvo representatives to disclose their identity. However, all interviews were performed in separate rooms in order to secure the respondent's anonymity and freedom of speech. Moreover, since discussed topic during the interviews was mainly connected to the respondents working roles, it was not necessary to assume the highest degree of confidentiality and secrecy during the interviews.

According to Hakim (2000) there is a lot of potential for ethical issues to arise in observations of work teams. Since the conducted observations were open, it was possible for all employees and actors in the work teams to detect who had been observed and to discover when the observations were taking place. Nevertheless, since the studied topic was not of a sensitive character and the purpose of the study was shared with all participants in advance, it is not likely that the low anonymity of the observations influenced the result. Additionally, due to the high level of activity in the factory caused by work, reorganization, construction work and visitor tours, the observations were most likely not noticed.

Following the aforementioned methodological process, data was collected and analyzed which it is presented in the next chapter.

5. Results and Analysis

The information presented in this section includes the empirical data obtained from the interviews, observations and document analysis described in the Methodological section and a theoretical analysis of the material. It starts with a morphological description of the program and continues with the results following the structure of the Strategy-as-Practice (S-as-P) approach.

5.1 Morphology of the case

5.1.1 The Volvo Step 2012

From January 2011 to April 2015, the organization was led by Swedish CEO and President Olof Persson. During his time as CEO, one of Olof Persson's main missions was to focus the Volvo Group business on increasing the organizations operating margins by three percentage points through a cost cutting program. The program was initiated in 2012 and measures taken included selling unrelated businesses, restructuring production and the reduction of 4000 employees. Olof Persson also initiated the LMP Volvo Step in 2011.

In 2012, the CEO of Volvo Group, Olof Persson, initiated the Volvo Step Program, a LMP which targets unemployed young adults from the ages of 18 to -22. The program extends over one year and combines theoretical education about production work with practical production work in one of the 13 Volvo Group factories in Sweden. The party responsible for the theoretical education is Gothenburg Technical College (GTC), a combined high school and after-high school institution; 50 percent owned jointly by the Volvo Cars cooperation and the Volvo Group, and 50 percent is owned by the municipality of Gothenburg. In total, the program lasts 46 weeks, divided into 34 weeks of practical work and 12 weeks of theoretical education. Every participant is assigned a mentor, who functions as an individual supporter of the individual's learning curve, and a tutor responsible for their practical training at the factory.

During the program, the youth is employed by Volvo Group on a one- year fixed- term contract and earns a salary negotiated by the main labor union at Volvo Group, IF Metall. The salary is around 17, 000 SEK and it is just slightly higher than the salary level recommended in the *Yrkesintroduktions* agreement. The employment contract also includes a five-week paid

vacation and the Volvo health care grant. In total, Volvo Group has invested 450 million SEK in the program and has not received any contribution or subsidy from the Swedish government.

In the spring of 2015, the Board of the Volvo Group dismissed Olof Persson and appointed Swede Martin Lundstedt, former CEO of the truck manufacturer the Scania group, as the new president and CEO of the Volvo Group (The Volvo Group, 2015c; the wall street journal 2015).

5.1.2 Admission to the Program/the Employment

The entry requirements include diploma from a Swedish high school and being registered as unemployed at the Swedish Public Employment Agency (Arbetsförmedlingen). Youth can apply to the program by sending their applications to the employment agency, which is then responsible for the entry requirement. Additionally, due to the low percentage of women in the Volvo Group factories and the low female interest for work in the industrial sector, females are prioritized during the recruitment process. For the 2014-2015 period, Volvo Group received about 2000 applications. Of the applicants, 30 percent were female whereas 45 percent of the program participants were female. The selection process incorporates three steps: a comparison to general requirements, a video interview, and one on-site interview.

5.1.3 Turn-out

For the Volvo Step program in 2014, 400 young adults were recruited. In total, 1200 unemployed young adults have been trained since the start of the first program. Ninety percent of the participants make it through the program and earn a diploma. If the performance has been satisfactory, the participant also receives an achievement certificate from Volvo Group. Every year approximately 350 certificates are given.

According to a follow-up survey conducted by the Volvo Group, 68 percent of the former Volvo Step participants are now employed and 52 percent of them work in the industry sector. After finishing the program, 90 percent of the participants are interested in future employment at Volvo Group, and five to ten percent of them become employed at there.

5.2 Strategy-as-Practice (S-as-P) Perspectives

The empirical results and the analysis have been divided into practitioners, practices, and praxis, and following the research questions to create a pluralistic view of the case. They present findings from interviews, texts and observations; representing different perspectives inside the organization using code themes. The results show how a LMP is understood and legitimated from the view of S-as-P perspectives (Whittingtons, 1996) and what the internal organizational consequences of such participation can be according to them. The results are continuously analyzed through the inspiration of the Institutional Isomorphism Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

5.2.1 Practitioners

This section presents the results obtained from the practitioners' perspective.

5.2.1.1 Understanding a LMP

This part contains the actors' personal opinions and experiences concerning the Volvo Step LMP. According to Whittington (2006), the practitioners influence directly and indirectly how the strategy is performed. Thus, these responses reflect how the LMP is understood by the actors who actively perform it which is important as part of the legitimization process (Brewster & Mayrhofer, 2011; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

All of the interviewed ones perceived the program as positive and a valuable Volvo initiative; thus, there was a general acceptance of it. The project leader for the theoretical education of the Volvo Step believed that he had noticed positive attitudes and engagement among the employees towards the program. The former and present participants perceived the Volvo Group as strategic, clever and generous, for offering a LMP to those in need of employment and with fair employment conditions. The youth expressed a great gratitude towards the opportunity of being fulltime employed for a whole year, since this provided them with security and a social context. Such an acceptance can be understood in line with coercive forces since it is seen as an 'adequate organization behavior' and correspond to social expectations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

It has been a fun journey full of engagement from various factories and overall a great 'go' in the organization. It has been easily managed and was not too hard to find people who want to participate (Project Leader for Theoretical Education).

Many indicated that it might not have been the best time to implement the LMP. Several respondents also mentioned that the company had not been taking advantage of the Volvo Step participants, that they had not been given the proper responsibility level and space for giving/having feedback and inputs. A majority of the participants wished that they could have been offered more feedback mainly about their individual performance, in order to improve and learn. However, several mentioned that in some cases the Volvo Step participants had been left alone with work tasks and forced to act as substitutes when the sick absence was high. It also seemed like the tutors and the production leaders had different understandings on how much responsibility the Volvo Step participants should have. The responsibility level depended on how many Volvo Step participants every tutor was in charge of. These respondents were afraid that the participants did not understand their rights, facilitating for other employees to take advantage of them. Particularly, the union was concerned of this situation and pointed out how this could lead participants getting injured. Furthermore, the union argued that the Volvo Step participants were not paid for taking such a responsibility and that using them in the workforce planning was a breakage against the employment relations agreement. One respondent also mentioned how refraining to follow managers orders could lead to negative consequences for the future career at Volvo, something that might frighten the Volvo Step participants. The disagreements and misunderstandings found can be product of the preconceptions constructed from their social reality (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). For example, one participant described how she, due to a high level of sick absence, had been ordered to work independently as a substitute employee and even train other substitute employees herself.

Some might feel that they were exploited. My boss had me on one single "balance" the entire time due to lack of staff. I also had to train three other people. That is wrong because we are not supposed to have any responsibility (Former Participant 3).

Some participants complained about the factory group climate which they described as sexist and tough at times. Both female and male participants mentioned the presence of sexist jokes making them feel uneasy. Several female participants described how they felt forced to show and prove their capability and competences to their male colleagues.

The guys give you respect if you claim your space, but if you don't do so you can easily be suppressed by them. In here, men are the majority so you, as a woman, need to be strong and powerful to be able to work here. It is a pretty tough working environment with jokes below the belt and so on (Current Participant 1).

A majority of the respondents described how the work ethic and engagement varied between the participants and how they had met both engaged and interested participants as well as unreliable or disengaged ones. The respondents questioned the outline of the recruitment process and were critical of the selection criteria.

Well, I don't know if this group in particular has a somewhat odd work ethic. But that could also vary among different individuals [...]. The guys in the group have been having pretty bad attitudes (Tutor 2).

The respondents discussed the relevance of a high school diploma to perform the work tasks and argued that not necessarily those with such an accomplishment are the most suitable for the job; meaning that the attitudes and willingness to learn is more important. However, the detailed requirements can be understood as part of the normative isomorphism, since it is related to occupations' descriptions, its methods, requirements, and conditions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The respondents also pointed out how many current Volvo Step participants were uninterested of Volvo and industrial work and only seemed to have applied to the program for the money. Furthermore, the respondents complained how some participants were allowed to finish the program in advance (because they got accepted at the university) but still obtaining a Volvo certificate. They argued how these participants were not serious about industrial work and Volvo and how they had taken the place from others who possibly were more serious about working in the industry sector.

Thinking about some of the Volvo Step participants, one could feel that they [the Volvo Group] have selected the wrong person. When so many have applied for the program, they have accepted some who don't give a damn about the program and who just do it for the money. [...] Although, they actually have responsibilities and many of them have never had that before. So one notices a difference between who has worked before and who hasn't. It's a shame when people are accepted and spoil things for you and who are not passionate about the job. Sometimes, it feels like I am the only one who has a passion for this (Current Participant 1).

However, the project manager and other participants of the management team were more positive to the diversity of the Volvo Step students and most of the participants also felt that their individual profile matched the program specifications and the majority expressed a positive attitude for industrial work and a future career in the industry sector. This is an indication of the presence of normative mechanisms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) that match the fact of following employees educational background and professional identification according to what the organization needs (Paauwe & Boselie, 2003). Through these responses it was evident a variety in descriptions and interpretations, elucidating the human factor as the

activity shaper and receptor (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Whittington, 2006). Thus, it was noticed that the respondents did not have the same understanding of the LMP according to their own experiences.

During the recruitment process, we don't look for specific merits. We are proud to have so many florists, media people, and more that want to be part of Volvo Step (The Project Manager of the Volvo Step).

5.2.1.2 Ways to Legitimate a LMP

According to the Institutional Isomorphism Theory, organizations are not single entities that operate decontextualized and separated from society; they are situated in specific environments thus their actions have to be accepted in order to succeed otherwise their growth might be restricted (Brewster & Mayrhofer, 2011; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). However, the organizational intentions might not be the same perceived and understood by the practitioners who experience and influence the daily-basis flow of activities. In that sense, the practitioners had different beliefs about the Volvo Step reasons.

Most of the respondents' answers expressed either coercive characteristics or mimetic and modeling features (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The participation in LMPs has been perceived as product of official mandates to help the unemployed youth, to increase the interest for industrial work, and to offer an opportunity to test the working life, more specifically in the industry sector.

Several respondents pointed out how they believe that the original intention of the Volvo Step was to recruit and attract new personnel. However, they questioned this approach since only few participants were hired afterwards. Some of the tutors and project managers also added how they were critical to Volvo's real intentions about the program since they believed that Volvo did not put any effort in retaining the Volvo Step participants. On the other hand, the project manager of the program argued how the Volvo Step served as a long aptitude test by which it was possible to examine how well the participants did fit into the organization.

The entire Volvo Step program is a large aptitude test to see if the participants fit in, for instance socially (Project Manager of the Volvo Step).

Some respondents said that they suspected that Volvo's intentions were based upon need for publicity, attention or improved reputation, which can be associated with search of more stability and acceptance (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Some indicated that they thought that the

Volvo Step came in a time where the positive publicity about the Volvo Group was low. Representatives from the project management group argued for how much positive publicity the Volvo Step had led to. So according to the theory it can be a signal of showing and searching for recognition of that the organizational activities are in accordance with the societal expectations (Brewster & Mayhofer, 2011; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Maybe, "The Professional introduction employments" hasn't gone all that well, but it has at least given us a lot of attention. It provides a positive image of the Volvo Group, which we somehow have gotten for free (The Senior Advisor to the CEO).

It has been very successful for us. We have drawn so much attention from the government, media and politicians, and industry associations (Project Manager of the Volvo Step).

More specifically, several believed that the Volvo Step was an effort to increase Volvo's attractiveness as an employer by changing the common perception of the organization and the industry.

This is an important investment to promote the industry (Production leader 1)

Some respondents meant that the underlying intentions with the LMP were financial and economic reasons. The HR Director pointed out how the Volvo Step has been a great financial investment with high returns. Many of the Volvo Step participants mentioned how they suspected that Volvo has achieved large amounts of governmental grants for each Volvo Step participant.

More coercive forces (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) are in line with a respond to society and within the Volvo social responsibility work. Some respondents expressed that Volvo Step came up because of the company size and great power status or because of pressures from the industrial sector at large. The CEO advisor mentioned how he believed that the Volvo Group needed to contribute to society for being such a big societal player. Some respondents also added how international industrial organizations already worked with LMPs and how it therefore was necessary for Volvo to do the same. This reflects not only national or local pressures, but even international (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003).

If you are the largest company in Sweden you cannot step aside and watch [...] high youth unemployment exists throughout society (Senior Advisor to the CEO).

Additionally, few respondents also mentioned how the Volvo Step has increased the diversity in the factory and actually girls have been prioritized during the selection process. This can be also assumed as part of the social responsibility work (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003).

There are not many women in here; I only work with old men. I believe that women are somewhat underestimated. However, I think that's the reason why they have created Volvo Step. It gives both men and women great opportunities to start working in the industry (Current Participant 2).

Some mimetic and modeling mechanisms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) were also identified in the responses. The senior advisor to the CEO described how the Volvo Group CEO had been inspired by large industrial organizations like Siemens and their successful work with LMPs in Germany. Both the senior advisor and the CEO had been studying the outline of the programs before starting up the Volvo Step and the senior advisor mentioned that the German LMP had been an inspiration for the Volvo Step layout. This is understood as a mimetic mechanism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) since organizations imitate successful practices in order to increase their success possibilities. Furthermore, several respondents mentioned how they wished that other Swedish organizations would follow the Volvo's example and use the Volvo Step as a model to start up similar initiatives. Thus, apart from follow an existent model, the new testing organization (in this case the Volvo Group) can become the model for other organizations in the same context (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

In Germany they have apprenticeship programs. I have had the opportunity to visit some of them. The standing impression was how proud the youth were of being part of the company. The youth were proud of and happy about the challenge. [...]. So then Olof suggested that we should have such an apprenticeship program ourselves. Olof wanted a large-scale project that would make a difference (Senior Advisor to the CEO)

Hopefully, this [Volvo Step] will produce a chain effect like, "if they can do it ,so can we." One ought to repackage this and many might be able to flip the concept (Project Manager for Theoretical Education of the Volvo step, GTC).

Non indications of normative mechanism were found.

5.2.1.3 Consequences for Having a LMP

This part includes the practitioners' opinions and experiences about the organizational and career consequences as a result of having a LMP.

The managers, co-workers, tutors and mentor all described how the Volvo Step had contributed positively to the internal group climate as shown in previous research (Finegold & Wagner, 2002). Some mentioned how the youths brought new refreshing and interesting discussion topics to the lunch table. Many also mentioned how the youth increased the internal diversity which led to more dynamic work teams. Especially, the increase of young women in the factory was considered positive and a contribution with a change of the sometimes masculine internal climate. In previous research, such aspects were not found as means for having LMPs. However, striving for diversity and working climate can products of coercive forces and ways of (Cooke, 2011; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003)

For some respondents the Volvo Step had caused tension in the factory because the agency workers competed out with the Volvo Step participants, so the few job offers have to be given either to the Volvo Step participants or to the agency workers. Furthermore, all participants acknowledged that they had no future as employees at the Volvo Group at the moment. The respondents interested in a future career at the Volvo Group pointed out that their only opportunity for work at the Volvo Group was through work agencies or to have a temporary contract, after the program, only extended for a few months. The use of temporary agencies can be due to coercive forces or even mimetic ones (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) since Volvo is not the only one using such strategies.

The most recently hires are contractors from temporary work agencies. That, in combination with all the reorganizations, has affected the internal climate. One hears how the atmosphere is really bad in the entire factory (Tutor 2).

I can see myself working for Volvo Group, but probably the only way to get in will be through temporary work agencies or maybe just by getting an employment contract extension. Aside from that, I guess there is no chance (Current Participant 1).

The employees and the tutors were overall quite critical about their employer's general decisions and talked about a negative climate in the factory site mainly caused by lack of information, reorganizations, and the use of contractors. The reorganization had caused extra stress, increased work load, and difficulty, sometimes, to take proper care of and supervise the Volvo Step participants. This was something they believe might influence the program negatively. The union especially criticized the use of contractors and argued that such temporary employments had started to substitute the ordinary staff. Such misunderstandings

can be result of different expectations of how the procedures should be (Meyer & Rowan, 1997).

[...] It [the Volvo Step] could have turned out really well if we had not had so many reorganizations. We don't even know to which department we belong (IF Metall Union representative)

Moreover, the participants who were interested in pursuing a future career at the Volvo Group were all unsure of how they were supposed to proceed and who they were supposed to contact. Some mentioned the mentor and others their managers or the Volvo Group website. Several mentioned how they wished that Volvo would have made some effort in retaining them. Here can be noticed a difference in understandings and interpretation of the same reality (Meyer & Rowan, 1997)

However, despite the negativity and difficulties expressed, a majority of the participants were satisfied with their work teams and described a good and special climate. Furthermore, many mentioned how the Volvo Step had produced positive external reactions. They expressed how national and local politicians, the Swedish Public Employment Agency, and other social actors were positive about the LMP. Such an achievement can be a response to coercive forces and external expectations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) for the means of gaining better reputation (Cooke, 2011; Finegold & Wagner, 2002).

Most of the participants had a good knowledge about the Volvo Group core values, vision, and mission. The general opinion among the participants was that their view of the industry had changed to the better. The participants described that they now knew that industrial work was more fun, cleaner, and high technical than they had imagined. This is in line with normative isomorphism in which the company molds its methods and conditions according to the organizational needs (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003).

To work in the industry is social and fun and not as dirty as I thought. I could absolutely go back to that job and I believe it has contributed to my career (Former Participant 3).

A majority of the participants believed that their view of the Volvo Group as an employer had changed and become more nuanced. Many described how their knowledge before was just about the brand, but how they now had learned the magnitude of the corporation. They also described how Volvo was an employer with good employment conditions but a somewhat tuff

and tense working climate. These opinions are expression of such rationalized preconceptions that give the idea of how things should be (Meyer & Rowan, 1997).

It felt very good that I was going to work for the Volvo Group because it is an established company and I believe it is a fair employer. [...] Now after the program, my image of Volvo has become more nuanced. It is not just a brand but also a workplace (Former Participant 1).

Many believe that besides acquiring production skills, the Volvo Step participants have learnt about the working life, employees interaction, and to be responsible; competences that will help them in any working scenario. Some described that the participants brought new ideas and questioned the old work strategies; attitudes that were very appreciated among many employees. All participants believe that the Volvo Step had contributed to their professional growth and future career and argued for how the program was a great experience and a nice career reference which is in line with the professionalization process of the normative isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

I think it is great that you get that certificate. It shows that you are capable (Current Participant 3).

I think that this is super! [...] They are complete technicians with a great attitude and many are better than the ones we have here. I believe that Volvo Step has helped the youth. They have learned how to cooperate and about respect for others. [...] I think it's a good period in life to, in a pedagogical way, be introduced to working life (Production leader 2).

5.2.2 Practices

This section includes the results obtained from the representative texts.

5.2.2.1 Understanding a LMP

The shared routines, discourses, concepts, social symbolic and material tools can represent expected outcomes which can differ from the practitioners' real experiences and perspective (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Whittington, 2006). Thus, it is following described what has been found in several texts.

In general it has been expressed, by the sources selected for this study, that the Volvo Step is a positive initiative since it can contribute in different levels; economical, societal, and individual. It has been understood as a good way of giving an alternative, for the young

adults, to enter into the labor market and increase the interest for the industrial work, which is in line with coercive forces (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

So far the Volvo Step has been very successful. A survey showed that 99 percent of the participants are satisfied with the entire program (Sverigesradio, June 2013).

In the TNS Sifo previous surveys (2012-2013; 2013; 2014) it has been also shown the increased interest for working at Volvo and particularly a positive change towards the industry stereotype. The majority is thankful for the opportunity and can picture themselves returning to or continuing in the industrial sector. Even from the union side and several political parties, the program has been well-accepted as an ideal strategy to increment industrial competences. This is also in line with coercive forces about acting socially (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and signs of reputational aspects (Cooke, 2011; Finegold & Wagner, 2002)

In the requirements specifications it was found that it is not mandatory to have previous professional experience neither in the industry sector nor in any other branch. But it has been essential that the young adults have completed high schools studies since it has been established as a general requirement for all Volvo employees to have at least high school studies; thus, even potential Volvo Step participants must meet that. In that sense, the presence of normative isomorphism is clear since such professional norms and values are necessary to build organizational activities and practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003).

The program participants' profiles showed that they have different educational backgrounds, but many of them who had no previous industrial experience, expressed interest for working with their hands. The TSN Sifo survey showed that the Volvo Step has served as an inspiration for some to continue their education in similar subjects (e.g., engineering, technology, production, etc.) or to switch to a different area. This is also in line with the professionalization process of the normative mechanism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Evelina took the music program and Maria the economy one. Both are part of the program in Skövde, they did not have industrial experience and they are examples of the young people we want to recruit for Volvo Step (Sverigesradio, June 2013.)

5.2.2.2 Ways to Legitimate a LMP

Since organizations are expected to follow rule-like concepts that guide their thought and actions and consequently obtain resources, stability, and enhance survival prospects (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Many of their reasons to participate in LMPs can be expressed in texts differently as the practitioners experience it in reality. In that way, the texts used for this study showed the ways to legitimate LMPs as follow:

Some of the reasons for participation in LMPs, presented in texts in which Volvo Step is mentioned, include mainly coercive characteristics and some indications of modeling (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The coercive features include the LMP as a way to respond to society due to the increased youth unemployment rate, thus organizations should respond in other to help the young adults.

The Volvo Step is a long-term investment for Volvo Group and it has three main aims: to secure the long-term availability of competence, attract young people to jobs in industry, and do something positive about youth unemployment. [...] We hope to see many of our Volvo Step participants working in industry in the future, and the fact that several have already been hired by our company is naturally a great source of satisfaction (Olof Persson 2013).

The high youth unemployment requires efforts and intervention from several societal actors, and we within the Volvo Group can play a big role (Mikael Sällström, Chairman of the Verkstadsklubben of Volvo 2012).

In that way, it has been posited in the Sustainability reports that Volvo Step has been part of the social responsibility strategies as part of Volvo's social engagement. Additionally, it has been shown in the press and internal documents a need to return to industrialization, to encourage the youth to study and be involved in more technical work; thus the program could give the chance of experiencing the industrial work. In that way, it is expected that industries can be promoted as an attractive workplace, even though many jobs cannot be offered at the time, a good experience in the branch might make possible for some to return during better prospects. So it is expected that through the program long-term competences could be guaranteed, not just for Volvo but for other organization as well. Consequently, by offering good competences through LMPs it can be a good way to be stable despite global competition.

This is a way of promoting the industrial job and assure competences in the long run (Regeringskansliet, 2013).

It has been also argued that by doing such activities the organization can also benefit itself, not just increasing competencies. For example, it has been also expressed that beside attract young people it is also about the increment of women in the industrial sector; thus, the program has served as an incentive to attract more women (viz., they have been prioritized during the selection process). Consequently, the Volvo Step is also seen as a way of Volvo to work with their equality and diversity strategies.

The industry is dominated by men with only about eight percent women. So maybe with this the future can be a little different. 44 percent of the 400 that got certification in 2013 were girls (Regeringskansliet, 2013).

We have a growing middle age average among our employees, so a program like this can offer great possibilities to have the rejuvenation we need (Mikael Sällström, Chairman of the Verkstadsklubben of Volvo 2012).

The other isomorphic mechanism found is related to modeling features, in which a company becomes a model for other organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The CEO has stated that with this program it has been shown that this type of initiatives does not need to be neither difficult nor complicated. Actually, the Volvo Step has being considered as a good example by the *Yrkersintriduktionsavtalet* in order to show what can be done to promote industrial work while helping the young unemployed. Also the union considered that the company's size and tradition can be taken as an example for others to follow the same step, since for smaller companies it can be more difficult to be the first and show how it can be done.

I decided to listen to the recommendations the youth of the Volvo Step has told us. The Volvo Group is going to do what it is in our hands to show them future possibilities and the exciting development that exist within Swedish industries. But for Sweden to succeed in the global competition it is required that more actors take responsibility. This includes politicians, union representatives and especially other industries. With the Volvo Step it has been shown that it does not have to be either difficult or complicated (Olof Persson 2013).

As well as in the interviews, it was not found any relationship with normative isomorphism in the analyzed texts.

5.2.2.3 Consequences for Having a LMP

This part describes the organizational and career consequences that are expected to happen and that have been already published.

One of the main organizational consequences found in previous surveys, interview texts, press releases, and reports is related to a shift in the industrial work image. Thus, the young adults have a positive picture and understanding of what it means to work at industries. Consequently, this has created an increased interest to return or continue in the production field both working and/or studying, which the organization sees as a way of assuring right competences in the long term. As these information was found in different internal and public texts, it is a representation of response to coercive forces (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). It has been also expressed that, since the interest among girls have increased considerably, it has contributed with the diversity strategy work as well as refreshing the working climate. Moreover, in the newspapers and sustainability reports it is shown a positive view and acceptance of the program, acknowledging it not only as a way of guaranteeing future competences but as a sample of Volvo social engagement. These findings regarding diversity, work climate, and social engagement can be seen as responses to coercive forces and even mimetic ones since there are pressures of including such organizational practices and many companies work in that way (Cooke, 2011; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003).

They have grown so much. From not knowing anything about industry to wanting to work in industries all their lives, says Saif Aziz, mentor (SVT, August 2013)

It is very gratifying that so many girls want to take part in the Volvo Step, especially bearing in mind our aim of increasing the number of women working in manufacturing industries (Kerstin Renard, Corporate Human Resources of the Volvo Group 2012; Olof Persson, President and CEO of the Volvo Group. 2013).

According to what it is expressed in the texts, the most important contribution to the Volvo Step participants is having acquired more competences, experiences, and skills that can open the door not just at Volvo industries but in the entire production sector, broadening their career opportunities as found in previous research (Ackum, 1991; Cappelli, 1996; Carling & Richardson, 2004; Casey, 1986; Finegold & Wagner, 2002; Kluve, 2010; Larsson, 2003; Muehlemann & Wolter, 2014; Sianesi, 2004; Sianesi, 2008; Steedman, 1993; Soskice, 1994); even though the participants have been informed from the beginning that the Volvo Group does not guarantee jobs. Actually, in the Sustainability report of 2014 it was shown that nearly 70% of Volvo Step participants have gotten jobs within six months after the program completion. However, few have had the opportunity to continue growing within the Volvo Group.

How do you see your future?

– That’s a difficult question... But the idea of being hired here is not bad. This education has given me more possibilities, says Maria Jonsson.

– I try to take one day at the time and I hope to stay. If I cannot I’m grateful either way for having experience this. Says Evelina Landesund. (Sverigesradio, June 2013).

5.2.3 Praxis

This section presents the results obtained through observations and connection between practitioners and practices.

5.2.3.1 Observations

The observations offered a picture of activities in which Volvo Step participants, tutors, mentors, and production leaders were involved. Thus, some other interactions were observed.

It was noticed that all employees worked in teams with two up to ten participants. The workers interacted, talked and cooperated together. Noticeable was also the sporadic yelling between the employees. However, no one seemed to take special notice of the schemes but reacted to it as something ordinary. Such behaviors can be assumed as part of the organizational norm (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

The majority of workers were male. However, it was noticed at least one woman in each group. So, gender variation was acknowledged. The observed Volvo Step participants were accompanied by some supervisor although some Volvo Step participants were observed driving forklifts by themselves. The majority of the workers were in the age between 40 and 50 years of age although there were at least one individual younger than 40 in each team. However, it was noticed that the younger workers were not employed by Volvo thus they either wore the Volvo Steps’ or a temporary agency firms’ uniforms. Thus, diversity in terms of age and gender was observed. This can be seen as a response to coercive forces or even as a way to build up a new industrial norm (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

In general, the climate looked good and positive, although the work seemed tiring, repetitive, and heavy for the observed. Most positive and energetic the Volvo Step participants seem to be and most of them were smiling and seemed enjoying what they were doing. Which can be understood as a fulfilled expectation of the organizational behavior (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

5.2.3.2 Practitioners vs. Practices

This part presents a summary of the main features of ‘practitioners’ in contrast with the ‘practices’ resulting in the ‘real flow of activities’ (i.e. praxis). Those three elements offer a more complete overlook of how the LMP is working and eventual discrepancies between the three perspectives (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 1996; Whittington, 2006).

The main similitudes found between the strategy performers and the shared routines and activities regarding the understanding of a LMP involved the view of the program as a positive initiative with great acceptance among different actors and gratitude among the participants. This response corresponds to gaining legitimacy since organizational activities have to be accepted in order to become stable and enhance survival prospects and as part of the coercive forces outcomes (Brewster & Mayrhofer, 2011; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The program is seen as an alternative to enter into the labor market. Thus, no previous experience is required. Additionally, it was also noticed a discrepancy between the interest in industrial work, that not all participants matched the expected profile, and the relevance of the high school requirement. However, such requirements follow normative stipulations necessary to rationalize organizational practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003). Nonetheless, it was found a discrepancy between the understanding of the LMP as a way to increment industrial competences vs. hesitation about the real intentions, inconsistency levels, and the presence of tensioned climate.

Regarding the ways to legitimate LMPs the coincidence in both cases englobes the idea of the program as a Swedish example (i.e., modeling mechanism; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), an organizational response to youth unemployment, a contribution to society, include more women, secure competences, and promote industrial work (i.e., coercive forces; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). It was not found in all the data aspects such as the inspiration coming from the German model (i.e., mimetic isomorphism; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and that the program can be seen as a great financial investment with high returns.

In reference to organizational and career consequences, it was noticed similitudes of responses attributing the program the acquirement of positive work climate, increment of gender and age variation, increased interest for industrial work, and a contribution to

participants' professional growth as found in the literature (Cooke, 2011; Finegold & Wagner, 2002). Some of these consequences might be expected because of coercive influences (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). However, some differences in the data involved lack of job assurance while continuing with the will of maintain gender and age variation and lack of knowledge among the participants about how to apply and return to the Volvo Group.

After having presenting an analysis of the main results, the following section includes an analytic discussion of the findings by answering the research questions.

6. Discussion

While the previous section focused on the results and direct connection with the theoretical approaches, the following segment presents a discussion based on such results with an analytic theoretical explanations and support from previous research. In that way, the research questions are answered.

6.1 How Can Labor Market Programs Be Understood and Legitimated within the Organization from the Lenses of Practitioners, Practices, and Praxis?

As stated in the theory, organizations are not single entities operating in a manner that is decontextualized from society. Thus, in order to grow, perform specific activities, gain stability and resources, and enhance survival prospects, it is necessary to achieve approval and acknowledgement from the environment in which it is embedded (Brewster & Mayrhofer, 2011; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). However, since this study focuses on the organizational level, such an environment is narrowed to those directly related to the LMP. Offering LMPs highly influences a company's reputation, both internally and externally (Finegold & Wagner, 2002), thus a positive acceptance within the organization is crucial for its success and continuity. In order to identify how an organization legitimates its participation in a LMP targeting young adults, it was necessary to first explore its acceptance and acknowledgement to be able to appreciate how it is understood and then to explore how to engage in such activities. This was reached in line with the S-as-P approach by elucidating the contrast between practitioners and practices to offer a picture of the real praxis (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Whittington, 2006).

6.1.1 Understanding a LMP

In previous research, the LMPs have been understood as activities that can create social stability, help maintain low unemployment rates, and serve as a bridge in the school-to-work transition by providing expertise in the management of certain skills. This is done by combining classroom or theoretical elements at schools with work-based learning that takes place at the relevant company (Ackum, 1991; Cappelli, 1996; Carling & Richardson, 2004; Casey, 1986; Finegold & Wagner, 2002; Kluve, 2010; Larsson, 2003; Muehlemann & Wolter, 2014; Sianesi, 2004; Sianesi, 2008; Steedman, 1993; Soskice, 1994). Thus, Volvo Step meets the same characteristics

In the results it was found that some of the practitioners' perceptions differ from the pre-established concepts of what the particular LMP is looking for. Nevertheless, previous research showed that the LMPs' outcomes and contributions can be quite heterogeneous and that the different contexts and institutional settings, the specifications of the programs, and the socio-economic reality when the studies were created influenced the outcome, success, survival, and effectiveness of the LMPs (Cappelli, 1996; Belot and Ours, 2004; Kluve, 2010; Sianesi, 2004; Steedman, 1993; Soskice, 1994). In that sense, since the study has been done in a time with few job opportunities at the Volvo Group, it is expected to have such a reaction (i.e., different perceptions). However, as it is also seen as a way of assuring competences in the long-run, the same study in the future years might produce different results and more consistent praxis.

Previous research showed that LMPs are not always solely focused on unemployment issues but instead on improving skills' quality and quantity, (Finegold & Wagner, 2002) and the learned abilities can help in finding jobs at other places (Ackum, 1991; Cappelli, 1996; Carling & Richardson, 2004; Casey, 1986; Finegold & Wagner, 2002; Kluve, 2010; Larsson, 2003; Muehlemann & Wolter, 2014; Sianesi, 2004; Sianesi, 2008; Steedman, 1993; Soskice, 1994). In this way, LMPs can be assumed as a means of contributing with the unemployment rate and actually building a bridge to enter into the labor market. Nevertheless, such actions are sometimes questioned since they can be seen as a skills-escape to favor competence (Finegold & Wagner, 2002), but Muehlemann and Wolter (2014) stated that low apprentice pay is attractive to young people as long as it provides national certified general skills that are also valuable in other firms. Additionally, programs like the one Siemens offers has the goal of not only providing technical skills but also personal and social ones (Dittler, n/d). Thus, LMPs can benefit all parties in different ways.

The differences in supervision and responsibility levels produced some perceptions of flexible practices for the Volvo Step students. However, this is not always seen as an indicator of apprentice exploitation (Muehlemann & Wolter, 2014). Furthermore, it was evident in the interviews that Volvo did not have any particular retention strategy for the Volvo Step participants. Consequently, there is a clear discrepancy between the practitioners' perspective and the practice perspective. One of the official goals of Volvo Step was to positively influence the image of the industry and Volvo among youth and in particular the participants. The question is how the participants' view of Volvo is influenced when very few of them are hired afterwards, and there are almost no opportunities for them at Volvo.

The recruitment strategies for the program were questioned since some participants apparently did not match the required profile. Thus, how well are the goals of Volvo Step met when this practitioners-practices discrepancy exists? How does this influence Volvo, the Volvo image and the Volvo Step program? These participants could be considered to have ‘stolen’ the place from someone else who desperately wanted to be part of Volvo Step. This might influence the Volvo image in a negative way. Nonetheless, it is natural to obtain such perceptions since at the end not all participants might enjoy the experience and it may not meet their own expectations. There was also doubt about the strict requirement of a high school degree. However, this has become an institutional norm (i.e., all industrial workers must have accomplished at least high school education). Nevertheless, those with a high school education might not be the most disadvantaged group that needs help entering the labor market.

Despite some disagreement in the responses, overall a great acceptance and understanding of the program was noticed. It was seen as a good way of helping youth enter into the labor market, combining theoretical and practical learning.

6.1.2 Ways to legitimate a LMP

As previously presented in the background, there is an increased interest in encouraging organizations to be engaged and participate in LMPs in order to promote better unemployment rates, economic growth, and social stability (Eurostat, 2014a; Eurostat, 2014b; Lind, 2015; OECD, 2015a; OECD, n/d; Sianesi 2008). It has also been stated that to be successful in a globalized world, it is necessary to secure the right competencies and specialized expertise (Finegold & Wagner, 2002). Consequently, there is presence of international and national pressures to be engaged in industrial LMPs, which act as coercive forces. Moreover, it has also been mentioned that similar programs have long tradition in other European countries (Casey, 1986; Kluve, 2010; Steedman, 1993; Soskice, 1994) but that Volvo Step is the first of its kind in the Swedish context (Volvo Step webpage; SOU 2012:80). Thus, we can assume its mimetic and modeling actions. According to the Institutional Isomorphism Theory, the method and reasons a company has for implementing a LMP can vary. Hence, in order to succeed, grow, survive, and be accepted, the organization has to be in line with the institutional settings in which the company is embedded (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). It was found in previous research that such mechanisms influence the structure and effectiveness of the programs (Cappelli, 1996; Kluve, 2010; Sianesi, 2004;

Steedman, 1993; Soskice, 1994). Consequently, the results showed a combination of coercive and mimetic isomorphism.

It was noted that the Volvo Group experiences social pressure to take responsibility for social issues. There were also signs of publicity and recognition, but this is in line with the search for acceptance and legitimacy (Brewster & Mayrhofer, 2011; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Companies need to gain recognition both internally and externally (Finegold & Wagner, 2002). A great acceptance and understanding of the LMP in line with its original goals contribute with the program's survival. Moreover, wider institutions use reputational effect to put pressure on firms to participate in LMPs; so, if one succeed and gets public acknowledgement, it can encourage others to follow it (Finegold & Wagner, 2002). According to the theory, this is part of the modeling process (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). However, has the need for positive publicity and attention from the Swedish government been a reason for engagement in LMPs? Some respondents expressed that they did not consider this the best time to implement a LMP. However, the need for publicity might have encouraged such a decision. Consequently, it seems that coercive forces have strongly influenced the Volvo Step initiative.

One aspect of such pressures seems to be related to being a test case that can be used as an example for other organizations, which then can imitate the already successful strategies (Belot & Ours, 2004). The theory called this modeling as part of the mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Nonetheless, it was previously stated that Volvo Step was initiated by the former CEO and President Olof Persson and was inspired by the German dual apprenticeship system and German industries that work with LMPs, a characteristic that is a clear illustration of mimetic mechanisms. Thus, organizations increase their probability of success by trying to reproduce already tested practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Paauwe & Boseli, 2003); behaviors that have been observed in previous research (Cappelli, 1996; Steedman, 1993). In that sense, Volvo Step could be considered a mimetic effort in which the Volvo Group tried to copy a strategy already adopted by several competitors or other organizations. This can be assumed as an inconsistency in the praxis perspective, since many of the interviewees did not know about the existence of similar programs and it is not directly expressed in texts and other activities. However, the background, source, and program characteristics corroborate the presence of mimetic isomorphism in the creation of the Volvo Step. Thus, this is one main element of the real praxis of such a LMP. Moreover, the theory

states that when a company tests new practices and succeeds, it becomes a convenient model to be borrowed by other organizations. Then the latter can even improve such practices and become themselves the 'new model', and the imitation process, by others, begins again (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This means that Volvo Step is a sort of imitation of the German model, but at the same time the Volvo Group is the testing company model in the Swedish context, which serves as an illustrative example of engagement in this type of LMPs. This is in line with some of the program aspirations, mentioned several times, of becoming a new Swedish model.

Olof Persson was, during his time as a CEO, determined with the idea of Volvo as one of the first organizations in Sweden to adopt and develop a LMP similar to the ones in Germany. He built his ideas upon his own experiences with German organizations. The question is: what happens now that the CEO has left his position and will be replaced? Will it be possible for the new CEO to continue the mimetic process started by Olof Persson? One can wonder if it is necessary to have experienced it to be able to mimic others. It might not even be in the interest of the incoming CEO to focus on such issues. Consequently, the CEO change might affect the future of the Volvo Step.

The Volvo Step program is legitimated through internal and external acknowledgement, acts in response of coercive forces (international and national pressures), through imitation of already successful practices, and by means of becoming a good illustrative example in the Swedish context. Since the Volvo Group is the first Swedish organization running this type of program, Volvo Step has demonstrated, for example, how a LMP works and how Swedish institutions cooperate. Although it is not always easy to imitate practices from another country due to different institutional settings (i.e., best practice vs. best fit) now other companies can more easily follow the same strategy guided by Volvo Step's illustrative example.

6.2 What Are the Organizational Consequences for Having Labor Market Programs?

Previous research has shown that some of the organizational consequences associated with LMPs include, among others, that it can be a good selection strategy, help with scrutinizing new hires and recruitment in the future (Cappelli, 1996; Sianesi, 2008), and reduce recruitment costs and training costs for new employees (Finegold & Wagner, 2002). However, the results indicated that few Volvo Step participants have had the chance to be

hired afterward, and the participants do not know how or where to apply or what their possibilities could be outside of being in the labor pool of a temporary work agency.

Something positive that Volvo Group has achieved is the changed industrial picture. More young adults are interested in working in industry, study similar subjects, or return to production work in the future. Many also expressed that they have learned the company core values and feel proud of working at Volvo. So, it can be assumed that Volvo Step has really helped in promoting industrial work, which is in line with what it has been found in previous research - LMPs contribute in identifying people who can fit the company, who has learned and experienced the core values, and who will be a reliable member of the labor pool (Finegold & Wagner, 2002). For that to happen, it is very important to have follow-up and maintain a close relationship at least with the top apprentices, even if they have chosen to go to university, in order to guarantee their return after graduation or when appropriate (Finegold & Wagner, 2002). Nonetheless, if the program can be viewed as an aptitude test, what happens with those who match the industrial work and cannot return because there are no job openings, they do not know how to apply or where to go, and there is no follow-up? In that sense, there is a discrepancy between practitioners and practices. Nevertheless, Volvo Step has helped the participants in broadening their career growth and possibilities, which can open new doors. But is it really economically smart to give the Volvo Step participants away to other organizations? How does it affect Volvo if their competitors take the staff? If they want the participants to return, why is it so unclear how they should do that? Volvo Step has served as one good way to attract new young people, but more strategies should be developed in order to not lose this resource in future years, since one of the goals is to secure competencies in the long run.

Having the LMP has favored the internal working climate by increasing diversity and variation, refreshing discussions, feeling part of a good cause, and improving working teams. Additionally, another aspect that Volvo Step has contributed with, besides age variation, is in its gender diversity work, since more than 40 percent of the admitted participants were female. Yet such diversity is of temporary character due to the fact that not all apprentices are hired afterwards and there is no official follow-up. One can wonder if Volvo Step really provides diversity as it is only short-term. Thus, such benefits should be strategically continued in order to actually maintain age and gender variation.

Large firms know that having LMPs can improve their external reputation (Finegold & Wagner, 2002). Thus, one more aspect that the company has gained is an increasing positive view of its social engagement. However, having the LMP has created internal tension among some employees. In that sense, it can be assumed that maybe the information/communication within the company has not been enough. Otherwise, why do some employees feel threatened if there are no job openings? Are the employees really prepared to be part of this, or should they be better informed and instructed? These are issues that should be taken in consideration, otherwise such tensions and internal acceptance concerns can jeopardize the picture of the industrial work and maintain a negative view of it.

In summary, engaging in LMPs can contribute in a great scale with internal and external image and reputation, internal working climate, and Human Resource Management (HRM) practices (e.g., diversity management, recruitment and selection, training and development, and retention). However, if not managed properly it can also create tension in the organization.

6.3 Discussion Summary

The Volvo Group is the first Swedish organization running this program and has therefore worked as an illustrative case. It has been tested to see how it worked and how Volvo Group's cooperation with, for instance, the Swedish Public Employment Agency and the government functioned. It has been legitimated by internal and external acknowledgement, by responding to coercive forces, and mimetic and modeling actions. The program has also demonstrated that many people are interested in industrial work and that Volvo Step has even increased such an interest. This type of LMP has received much attention and it has been perceived as a good initiative to help the young unemployed. Thus, it has been well-accepted by external actors and internal ones, both the participants and many employees. From the studied case it can be said that engaging in LMPs can contribute to responding to society, attracting young people, scrutinizing the hires and improving selection strategies, having a talent pool, supporting diversity in terms of age and gender, favoring a positive and refreshing climate, and improving external and internal reputations. Nevertheless, it can also produce some internal tensions and discontent, which is evidence of how important it is to have proper follow-up measures of such organizational programs. Consequently, it has become an updated illustrative example of a LMP in the Swedish context.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Main Remarks

This Master's Thesis has been an equal co-authorship and collaboration between two Master's students. Through an open and constant dialogue, it has been possible to broaden the perspectives and complements each other's ideas, ending up with a broader view of the case.

This case study has identified the underlying reasons for organizations to participate in LMPs for young adults, which can explain how the organizations legitimate such initiatives. It has also identified and explored the potential consequences of such an involvement at the organizational level. Consequently, this study has shown that there can be several cooperating reasons for an organization to engage in a LMP for young adults and the ways the organization legitimates it. The results present a heterogeneous understanding of LMPs. It is noticeable that there are mainly positive attitudes towards the LMP and that it can be a discrepancy between the practitioners and practice perspective when it comes to how the program purposes are understood which might affect the program success. This shows the importance of a connection between the practitioners, practice, and praxis when introducing such a LMP strategy in the organization. Additionally, the ways an organization legitimates its LMP can be explained by coercive and mimetic/modeling mechanisms which can be related to industrial norms, reputation, competition, acceptance and employer attractiveness. The study also shows how such an engagement can have several consequences mainly intervening in internal and external image and reputation, working climate, and HRM practices.

7.2 Contributions

7.2.1 Contributions to the research field

The study contributes to academia by offering an understanding of the way labor market activities are legitimated at the organizational level and presenting an updated version of such a case in Scandinavian countries, by combining two theoretical perspectives: the Strategy-as-Practice approach coupled with the Isomorphism Institutional Theory. Thus, it is a contribution to both theoretical fields. Moreover, it is expected that this research can serve as an inspiration and illustrative example for other organizations to participate in LMPs since the findings showed that LMPs offer an alternative for young adults to enter the labor market and

that many positive results can be achieved. Furthermore, it can work as an inspiration for the management and performance of the LMPs.

This study is unique in that it is explorative and investigates the organizational level, in contrast to previous research which has kept a more restrictive methodological approach; focusing mainly on central European countries and on an individual or societal level. Additionally, this topic has never been explored before since the Volvo Step is the first LMP of its kind in Sweden and it has worked as a governmental model. Another aspect that makes the study unique is that the objectives were reached through a combination of the Strategy-as-Practice approach and the Isomorphism Institutional Theory; thus creating a pluralistic view and enriching the results analysis and interpretation. Hence, the study indicates the importance of hear and include difference voices gaining a broader perspective of all the actors involved.

7.2.2 Contributions to HRM practitioners

This study can be of use to the HRM practitioners since LMPs seem to influence diverse HRM practices. The empirical findings show that engaging in LMPs can contribute to responding to society, attracting young people, scrutinizing the recruitments and improving selection strategies, having a talent pool, supporting diversity in terms of age and gender, favoring a positive and refreshing climate, and the presence of some internal tensions. More specifically, the study indicates how the engagement in a LMP can increase both internal and external image. Furthermore, it points out the importance of a specific recruitment process also for the LMP, thus the attitudes of the participants can both influence the attractiveness of the program, the organizational image, and the workplace climate.

The study also shows the importance of avoiding discrepancies between the three aspects of S-as-P (practitioners, practice, and praxis) when implementing a LMP strategy, by securing that what is communicated also is preformed throughout the process.

Finally, the study indicates how HR strategically can use an LMP to improve HRM practices.

7.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Some of the benefits of engaging in LMPs can be temporary and merging those practices into the overall organization might have other implications. Because of this, the implications of having a temporary LMP should be investigated. Additionally, a quantitative survey can offer

a complementary picture of the internal acceptance and/or discontent in relationship to the program. Moreover, a longitudinal study can show if the goal of having secured competences in the long run has been met or if the organization should develop a model to measure the program's internal impact. Finally, since having LMPs is seen as a recruitment strategy, it could be also explored if there are performance variations between those who enter through the LMP and those who do not could be also expected.

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9. APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Sample of the Interview Guide

General:

- Why have you chosen this program?
- How did you learn about it?
- Why do you believe that Volvo implemented such a program?

Expectations before starting the program:

- What are your thoughts about production work?
- What did you do? How long were you unemployed?

Experiences:

- How has your experience been?
- Did Volvo Step help you in any way?
- Do you think it contributes to your professional career? How?
- Did you learn something? Did you feel that there was room to make mistakes?
- Was there time for you to focus on your personal learning?
- How did you feel about the workload and the level of difficulty of the tasks?
- Do you think that the knowledge learned could be applied at another company? Was the knowledge you gained useful?
- How do you feel about the theoretical education? How is the level of difficulty?
- How did you feel about the relationship between the Volvo employees and the participants?
- How did you feel about the collaboration between you and your mentor, and you and your tutor?
- Did you feel that there was an opportunity/room for you to suggest improvements?
- Do you believe that there was room for you to give input during the process?
- Did you get sufficient input and feedback during the process?
- Did you understand what your tasks and objectives were?
- What do you think about programs like this? Do you believe they make a difference?

Perception of Volvo as employer:

- What do you think about Volvo?
- Have your perception of Volvo changed since you started the program? Do you think it will change if you don't get hired? Would you recommend it? Even if you don't get hired?
- Do you believe that you gained an increased knowledge of Volvo and its business during this time?
- Do you know about Volvo's core values and Volvo's mission and vision?
- Do you know what the 'Volvo way' is?
- After the program, what do you think about production work? How has your interest in the industry changed?

Career

- What do you do now? What is your occupation? Why? What do you want to do?
- After the program, do you want to work at Volvo? Do you like Volvo as an employer? If so, do you believe you had the opportunity to apply for a job? Did you know who to turn to get such information?
- Do you know what your opportunities at Volvo are?
- Do you know how to use your skills from the program?
- What would your suggestions be for future improvement both to Volvo and for employers who want to help unemployed youth?

Appendix 2: Practices

Documents
Previous interviews found in the Volvo Step blog
The Volvo Step website
The Volvo Group website
Sustainability report 2012
Sustainability report 2013
Sustainability report 2014
Press releases from 2012, 2013, 2014
Previous TSN Sifo survey 2012-2013
Previous TSN Sifo survey 2013
Previous TSN Sifo survey 2014
Flyer Volvo Step
Flyer 'fokus' (Regeringskansliet, 2013)
Volvo Step official presentation
IF metall report (Matching pa arbetsmarknaden 2014)
Swedish newspaper articles and media: Dagens arbete, GP, SVT, DN, DI, Sverigesradio.