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Barriers to career progression for women in the automotive industry

-A qualitative study of how gendered substructures affect women's opportunities for career advancement in an automotive MNC.

Graduate School

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Spring 2017

Master Thesis

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Abstract

Background

Purpose   The purpose of the study is to identify possible barriers to career progression as perceived by female employees of senior positions in an automotive MNC by using the concept of gendered substructures as a theoretical foundation. The home country organization will be compared with a foreign subsidiary in order to compare the results within the company.

Methodology The study was conducted through a deductive qualitative research approach that is based on in depth interviews with female respondents of senior positions in two different locations, some in the Swedish organization and the others in the Chinese organization. The study is theoretically based on gendered organizational theory, which is used to analyse the gathered data.

Conclusion   The results of the study indicate that gendered substructures do affect women's barriers for career progression, both in the Swedish and Chinese organization. This is most clearly demonstrated by the many themes identified by the respondents during interviews that strongly correlate to the theoretical framework established using existing research in the field.

Contribution The contribution of this study is mainly related to the practical understanding it provides to existing knowledge in the research field. By using gendered organizational theory and the concept of gendered substructures in an international setting new insights are provided.

Acknowledgements

Throughout the process of writing this thesis, many inspiring meetings and discussions have helped me gain new knowledge and broadening the understanding of the current gender debate. With this knowledge, I hope to spread awareness and inspire others to actively promote the agenda of gender equality in organizations.

I would like to extend my appreciation to several people who have played a vital role in the creation of this thesis, without them I would not have been able to complete this task. The first people I would like to thank are the respondents that chose to participate in my study, whom openly and freely shared their personal experiences that laid the foundation for this study. I would also like to thank my two supervisors, Richard Nakamura and Katarina M, whom guided me throughout the entire process with their expertise.

List of abbreviations

HQ- Head Quarter

MNC- Multinational Corporation

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1. Introduction

The introductory chapter will focus on providing a general understanding and background to the topic, giving the necessary contextual information to understand the study. This is followed by an explanation of the study's purpose and delimitations.

1.1 Background

Barriers to career progression for women and the development of different explanations for understanding women's status within organizations have become important issues of debate within the human resource management field over the last decades (Thomas & Davies, 2002). Global statistics show that even though women continue to increase their share of managerial positions, the rate of progress is slow and uneven, with an average increase of less than 5 % (Schein, 2007). International data comparisons of women at the very top of organisations are more difficult to find. However, indications show that progress is even slower at these levels. Barriers to women obtaining senior positions within companies exist globally and the higher the organisational level, the more evident the gender gap (ibid).

The role of women in the work force has undergone significant changes in the later part of the 20th century and in to the 21st century, where women now choose to get educated and pursue careers to a larger extent than ever before (Thomas & Davies, 2002). The majority of women have also managed to move from working in traditionally female occupations such as teachers and nurses to occupations traditionally held by men such as managers and engineers. Furthermore, gender equality is an important issue to discuss as it is a principle for democratic countries, women and men should be able participate as equals in the social, cultural and economic life (ibid).

Even though improvements have been made, gender equality is still not achieved as men and women are not represented equally in the workplace (Schein, 2007). Unfortunately, the increasing number of working women has not brought equal career advancement opportunities to the same degree. One of the roots to gender issues in the workplace lies within the difference in the way men and women are treated in the workplace. When women are not treated by the organizations the same way as men, something holds them back from climbing the career ladder. This can be seen in the fact that women are underrepresented in senior management positions compared to women with lower level management positions. Due to the obstacles for career advancement that women are faced with, well-educated

women with many years of experience are not promoted at the same rate as their male colleagues of the same occupational level (ibid).

1.2 Problem discussion

When looking at gender distribution within the automotive industry at senior levels it becomes clear that the same themes identified previously hold true for this specific industry. According to a study conducted by Deloitte (2015) in collaboration with the Manufacturing institute, only 1 % of respondents named the automotive industry as being the best in the manufacturing sector at attracting and maintaining female talent. 74 % of respondents also stated that they experienced company bias towards men for leadership positions. The study also indicated that the automotive industry may have a harder time than other industries to close the gender gap at senior levels due to its cyclical nature. This is because initiatives that focus on gender equality and closing the gender gap in automotive companies often receive more attention when the economic situation is favourable and significantly less when the situation is more negative in this regard (ibid).

There has been extensive research done on the topic of female leadership, equal gender distribution within senior positions and the benefits it brings to multinational corporations (Harel, Tzafrir & Baruch, 2003; Budhwar, Saini & Bhatnagar, 2005; Davidson & Burke, 2000). Several studies have also investigated the underlying factors of why women are still underrepresented in leading company positions (Chawla & Sharma, 2016; Bartram, 2005; Sagrestano, 1993). Studies to identify such barriers have been made on both national level (Ismail and Ibrahim, 2008) and international level (Linehan, 2002). The studies have not yet reached to cover all areas however, the studies that have been done on an international level have not been confined to one company (ibid), making them less suitable for comparison, and those done on individual companies have not been extended to subsidiaries in other countries (Ismail, Ibrahim, 2008).

Studies that have chosen to focus on this particular topic with a theoretical foundation in the concept of Gendered substructures are even rarer (Dye, 2006). Joan Acker's (1990, 1992b) framework of gendering processes, even though it has been given a good reputation by fellow researchers and is often cited in literature, it has not been applied in many cases (see Brewis, Hampton, & Linstead, 1997; Ferguson, 1984; Fletcher, 1995; Maddock, 2002; Wicks & Bradshaw, 1999), and in the case where it is mentioned only certain parts are (see Britton, 1997; Olsson & Walker, 2003) (Dye, 2006). According to Britton (1997) few empirical efforts have been done to either support or deny the relevance and accuracy of gendered

substructures overall. There has however been a number of studies that have proven the presence and impact of individual processes (see Hultin & Szulkin, 2003; Kuhlmann & Matthies, 2001; Rutherford, 2001; Tienari, Quack, & Theobald, 2002), which can be viewed as support for the credibility of the individual elements of the framework Acker created. There has also been a number of other studies that have examined what could be seen as parts of Acker's gendered substructures, they have just not been labelled as that As a matter of fact, there has been significant studies conducted that focus on gendered substructures and the effect it has on organizations, even though they have not been named accordingly (Bagilhole, 2006; Ashcraft, 2005; Rindfleish & Sheridan 2003). Gender and organizational culture has also been investigated by researcher (see Brewis, Hampton, & Linstead, 1997; Fletcher, 1995; Wicks & Bradshaw, 1999). Despite this, Dye and Helms Mills (2005) indicate that "Relatively few have attempted to address the last three stages of Acker's framework and most efforts have been centred on the first two sets of processes" (p.5). Although Acker "problematizes the processes as distinct and separate catalysts for the 'gendering of organizations'" (Dye & Helms Mills, 2005, p.5), she acknowledges that the processes do interact and are, in practice, parts of the same reality (Acker, 1990, p. 146).

1.3 Purpose and research question

It is in response to the previous problem discussion that the purpose of this thesis was born. The purpose of the study is to identify barriers to career progression for women in an automotive industry MNC, as perceived by female employees of senior positions using gendered organizational theory. In order to provide a deeper understanding of the overall organizational context and to detect possible differences between dispersed parts of the MNC the study included two different geographical areas of the organization to examine.

By doing so the aim is to identify factors that are consistent between the home country location and the subsidiary, as well as identifying those that differ. Thus, the end result will provide useful insights of two natures that can both be found relevant for the research field. Firstly, the overall identification of barriers to career progression for women within a MNC active in the automotive industry can help to provide inputs for companies to adopt policies and practices to facilitate gender equality in leadership by bridging the knowledge gap. Secondly, the structure of the study provides opportunity to compare results within a company, to see how consistently the gender policies and statements are actualized in the home country organization versus a foreign subsidiary. With this background, the following research questions have been constructed:

Main research Question- How do gendered substructures in an automotive MNC organization affect barriers to career progression for women to reach senior positions?

Sub question -How do such barriers differ between women employed in the home country organization and those employed in a foreign subsidiary?
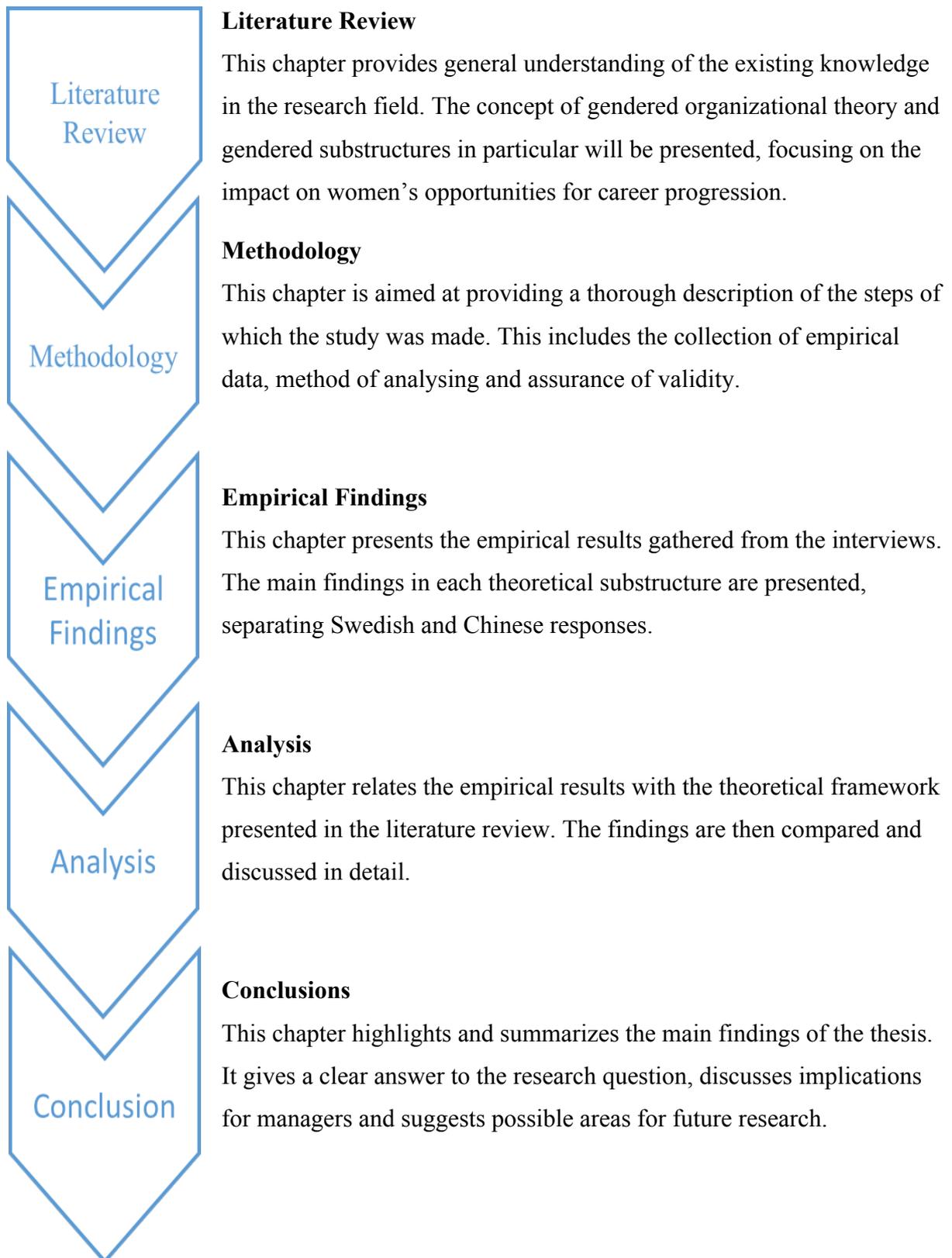
1.4 Study delimitations

This study is industry and company specific, focusing on a single MNC active in the automotive industry. The geographical scope is defined by a European automotive MNC with operations, both in sales and production, active in China. The research focus is on career barriers for women reaching senior positions within a MNC and does not include any other forms of discrimination or any other target groups, such as race, age, sexual orientation etc.

Certain choices were made in order to limit the group of respondents and that meant other groups were excluded. Firstly, the respondents are all women that have successfully reached a senior position within the company and that means that women who have not succeeded were not included. This was a conscious choice made in order to successfully be able to answer the research question and achieve the purpose set out given the restricted resources of this thesis. Since the purpose is to identify obstacles to career progression only women who had successfully climbed the career ladder within the company would have gone through the entire process and therefore be best able to answer that. Secondly, the decision was made to only interview women in senior positions within the company and not men, the reason behind this choice also lies with the nature of the purpose and research question. Since the aim of the study is to identify obstacles that can help us understand why women are still underrepresented in senior positions within companies, women are the only direct source of information to this. However useful the insight of male employees might be for studying issues such as for example stereotypes within management roles, they will not have been personally subjected to the issues that will be discussed in this thesis and were therefore excluded.

An additional factor that is important to highlight is the fact that the study focuses on women in senior positions' *perception* of barriers to career progression for women. There could therefore be additional barriers that have not been perceived by the women but do still exist. Given that women who have successfully climbed the career ladder to a senior position within the company is the only source that have directly been affected by these issues and successfully managed to overcome them however still makes them the most relevant source to use in this study.

1.5 Research Outline

Literature Review

This chapter provides general understanding of the existing knowledge in the research field. The concept of gendered organizational theory and gendered substructures in particular will be presented, focusing on the impact on women's opportunities for career progression.

Methodology

This chapter is aimed at providing a thorough description of the steps of which the study was made. This includes the collection of empirical data, method of analysing and assurance of validity.

Empirical Findings

This chapter presents the empirical results gathered from the interviews. The main findings in each theoretical substructure are presented, separating Swedish and Chinese responses.

Analysis

This chapter relates the empirical results with the theoretical framework presented in the literature review. The findings are then compared and discussed in detail.

Conclusions

This chapter highlights and summarizes the main findings of the thesis. It gives a clear answer to the research question, discusses implications for managers and suggests possible areas for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the theoretical background is presented and discussed. The theoretical base built here will function as a foundation for the interview guide used in the study as well as the analysis presented in the later part of this thesis.

2.1 The concept of gendered organizations

The interest in sex roles and organizations began slowly in the 1970s, when feminist scholars began to criticize organizational theory and research of the day for ignoring women in the work force and causing misinterpretations of research results (Acker, 1999). By the 1980s, research focusing on women and work started to increase significantly, creating more knowledge in the field. Part of this research aimed at highlighting the importance of the organizational context for understanding connections between gender and work (ibid). The term gender began to be redefined by scholars to not only refer to individual relationships but also to collective, organizational and historical processes that differentiate between men and women and where men are accorded more power than women in the majority of times (Acker, 2006).

Such research and conceptualization contributed to the emergence of a new understanding of gender as a fundamental aspect of social processes and structures, going beyond the earlier ideas of gender as social role, personality component, or individual attribute (Acker, 1992a). This understanding of gender was fundamental to arguments that organizations are gendered social constructions and that theories of gender neutral organizations are ideological formulations that obscure organizational realities, including the pervasiveness of male power (Acker, 1999).

It is important to establish a definition of what a gendered organization means in this context in order to correctly frame the content of this study. Several alternative definitions of this term have been presented by researchers, however since the theoretical framework for this study is so extensively based on the founding theorist Joan Acker's work it is her definition that will be used. Her definition is as follows: "To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine." (Acker, 1990, p.146).

The reason the concept of gendered organizations is so crucial in the discussion of barriers for women to progress in their career is clearly explained by Rindfleish and Sheridan (2003)

when they state the following: "The gendered nature of organizations often result in qualitatively different career experiences and outcomes for women and men" (p.299).

2.2 Gendered substructures

Social structure and cultural interpretation was the fundamental base of which gender began to be theorized around (Acker, 1992a). When connecting this to the term gendered institutions or organizations it shows that gender is present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power in the different areas of social life (ibid). Substructures are often explained as the basic foundation that supports its superstructure (Von Eschen et al, 1971). The performance of an organization is therefore highly depending on its substructures (ibid). According to Acker (2012) "Gendered Substructure points to often-invisible processes in the ordinary lives of organizations in which gendered assumptions about women and men, femininity and masculinity, are embedded and reproduced, and gender inequalities perpetuated" (Acker, 2012, p.215). The most common inequalities are the wage gap between women and men and the sex segregation of jobs, occupations, and hierarchical positions. (ibid).

The concept of gendered substructure within organizations can be used as a way to explain why gender equalities exist, including pay gaps between the sexes and the persistent job segregation that still exist today (Acker, 1999). This is in spite of the large women's movement in Europe and North America that not only successfully instated laws that are meant to achieve equality for women in the labour force but also managed to achieve equality in the number of university graduates (ibid).

Acker (1990) argues that a systematic theory of gender and organizations is necessary for several reasons. Firstly, organizational practises are partly the cause of the gender segregation of work, for example the division between paid and unpaid work. Secondly, also related to gender segregation, organizational practises are also the cause of income status differences and inequality between sexes and it is therefore critical to understand these processes in order to understand gender inequality itself. Thirdly, cultural images of gender are invented and reproduced in organizations and thereby play a key role in its development. Fourthly, organizational processes pressures can also sometimes explain certain aspects of gender identify on an individual level (ibid).

The practical relevance of this issue was first clearly proven in the 1970s when a study was conducted to show that gender differences that exist within organizations are due to structural

reasons rather than characteristics of the individuals themselves (Kanter, 1977). The author argued that the problems women have in large organizations are consequences of their structural placement, crowded in dead-end jobs at the bottom and exposed as tokens at the top (ibid). Identifying the central problem of seeming gender neutrality the author stated; "While organizations were being defined as sex-neutral machines, masculine principles were dominating their authority structures" (Kanter, 1977, p.46). As Acker (1999) continued to research this field she realized that some of the strongest efforts to theorize around gender in organizations have been limited by the theoretical definitions surrounding the topic that state organizations to be asexual and gender neutral in nature. As research in the field has continued it has been proven over and again that gender segregation is a repetitive structure that is reproduced in organizations, seen in for example gender identity of jobs and occupations (ibid).

In order to explain how women's secondary status in organizations are repeated one has to look at the organizational processes that are embedded within them (Acker, 1990). These patterns are reproduced around the organization through the ordinary activities of the organization, and since the inequalities are embedded within these seemingly asexual activities they continue on within the organization. "Understanding organizations as gendered entails a shift in perspective from the conventional view of organizations as rational bounded systems to organizing as processes and practices, a perspective with a long history that informs other critical approaches to organizations" (Acker, 1999, p.180.). There are different originating points from which the activities and interactions that constitute an organization come from and they can be used to assess the level of involvement of gender in them (Acker 1990, 1992b). The purpose of these originating points is not to demonstrate analytical levels but rather to be used as tools for analytically managing complex processes (Acker, 1999). These points of entry have been defined by Acker (2012) throughout the last decades and have been discussed to great length. In order to further discuss the theoretical aspects of this issue the concept of gendered organizations need to be defined, they were done so by Acker (2012) in the following way: "An organization with built-in inequalities between men and women as a result of underlying gendered substructures" (Acker, 2012, p.215). These gendered substructures can be found in organizational processes, cultures, interactions between individuals and gendered identities within the organization (Acker, 1992a).

2.2.1 Gendering practices/ structures

The first gendered substructure that Acker (1999) states are the organizational processes that consists of things people do to keep organizations operating, including hiring; promotion; performance evaluation, allocation of work, setting salaries and wages; the actual work process; inventing and enforcing rules about hours, breaks, workplace behaviour, and time off; designing and introducing new technology; and reorganizing or relocating work (Acker, 1999). As these ordinary activities are carried out, they result in organizational gender divisions, such as a gendered hierarchy, gender segregation of jobs and positions, a gendered wage gap, and practices that separate the workplace from the rest of life along gender lines. These activities often involve routine decisions made by employees as well as managers, who may be completely unaware that they are helping to create gender divisions (ibid).

Acker (2012) continues by stating that the gendered substructure is created in the organizing processes in which inequalities are built into job design, wage determination, distribution of decision-making and supervisory power, the physical design of the work place, and rules, both explicit and implicit, for behaviour at work. Gender is not an addition to on-going processes, conceived as gender neutral. Rather, it is part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender (Acker, 1990). Gendered processes include overt decisions and procedures that control, segregate, exclude, and construct hierarchies based on gender Acker, 1992a).

According to Acker (1999) "Managers often use textual tools, such as screening tests, evaluation criteria, job design and evaluation protocols, job classification schemes, or various wage-setting procedures in making routine decisions. The use of such tools tends to objectify the processes, making them appear inevitable and disembodied" (Acker, 1999, p.216). Job evaluation, as used by (Acker, 1989) in a study, is a very good example of the ways in which such tools can embed assumptions about gender. In the studied case, it showed that job evaluations schemes awarded the caring skills that have a traditional majority of women employed in it less credit than typically male occupied skills, such as engineering and other technical occupations, which received higher scores. In addition, this job evaluation scheme also contributed to create gender wage differences by overcounting the value of managerial jobs, making them more well paid and since they were dominated by men it put the women employed in a unfavourable position (ibid). These types of job evaluation documents and policies are part of the abstract, intellectual and textual ruling of power within an

organization (Acker, 1999). As they are used numerous of times throughout the organization they reproduce social relationships with them, creating the same issues and statuses (ibid).

Other researchers have also focused their attention to this specific process and substructure in their work by using Acker's (1990) definitions as a foundation for referencing, dealing mainly with organization structure, wage differences, proportion of women in senior positions, gender patterning of jobs, and discriminatory organizational practices (Dye & Helms Mills, 2005). An example of this is the study conducted by Anderson and Tomaskovic-Devey (1995) that also focused on this level of processes and discussed whether "the degree of gender inequality in workplaces should vary as a function of organizational structure, resources and practices" (p.328). Their results indicate that gender composition is a contributing factor to creating gender inequality. They conclude their study by stating that Acker (1990) is correct when explaining the concept of gendered organizations as being more multifaceted in nature and it therefore being crucial to look at other aspects of it as well, not just the inequality in earnings and job status separation that have been discussed previously. As examples of what should be included in the discussion they name factors such as organizational culture, promotion practices, and variations in the gendered evaluation of jobs to be highly relevant in the discussion and believe it should receive more attention in the future (ibid).

"Reproducing Gendered Hierarchies in Everyday Work: Contradictions in an Employment Office" by Korvajarvi (1998) is another study that also used Acker's concept of gendered substructures as a foundation for research when looking at organizational structure and the impact it has on power and subordination. The researcher finds that the interconnectedness of the processes gives a special explanation to the relationship, as is demonstrated in the following way: "Forms of doing subordination are highlighted by Acker, who distinguishes between the well-known four sets of gendering processes in organizations. In Acker's theory, the core of the processes lies in the making of divisions between women and men. The other sets support the creation of the divisions. Consequently, symbols and metaphors such as efficiency, teams and goals pass through the organizations that have links with the masculine images. Furthermore, interaction between women and men enacts both dominance and subordination and creates alliances and exclusions. In addition, women and men work on their behaviour to comply with the gender expectations of their organization and to create their appropriate gender identity. These sets of processes operate together and interact with each other at the workplaces and usually result in the gendered hierarchies. This means that

the gendering practices leave women in lower positions, and these practices are more advantageous for men in organizations" (p.20).

As the previous discussion clearly illustrates, most of the research done on this substructure follows in line with the concept presented by Acker (1990) regarding organizational structures and hierarchies, how they are gendered just as she has been presenting her concept and later developed the entire idea of a substructure around (Dye, 2006). The fact that organizations are gendered and gender segregation of jobs really do exist seems to be supported by other researchers as well. As they have continued to build around this concept, researchers have been able examine how issues of gender and power, how closely they are linked together and how well they fit in to the framework. Researchers have used consistent application when examining the issue of this substructure, something that cannot be said for the other three substructures, as will be presented and discussed in the following sections (ibid).

2.2.2 Gendered culture

The construction of images, symbols, and ideologies that justify, explain, and give legitimacy to institutions is the second gendered substructure (Acker, 1992a). The gendered substructure is created in the particular organization's culture, including beliefs about gender differences and equality/inequality (Acker, 2012). Ideas regarding gender differences that are not examined and critically analysed can help create bureaucratic processes that are not gender neutral even though they are set out to be. The organizational culture of an organization can be termed as being the sum of particular images, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and values. Some of these traits may follow closely in line with other organizations while others may be rare or even unique. Included in this definition is the concept of gendered behaviours, defining what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. It also includes the issue of defining what is masculine and what is feminine (ibid).

According to Acker (1999) "People in organizations create images, symbols, and forms of consciousness that justify, legitimate, and even glamorize the persistent gender divisions. Images and understandings are vital to the practices that create an organization and its divisions. Images, symbols, and forms of consciousness function ideologically to help to naturalize relations of power" (p.182). Acker (1999) continues by discussing the importance of media for producing and reproducing symbols for gender that often time are intentional, however this is not the type of symbolic production of gender ideas of what she is referring.

Both implicit and explicit ideas of gender are produced within organizations of all sorts. Ideas of what is masculine and what is feminine are generally contained within these images (ibid).

This issue has also been researched in close detail by Kanter (1977). She states that organizations often associate successful and efficient organizations with typically masculine traits, such as being lean, mean and aggressive. It is believed that those are the types of organizations that manage to survive in this world, perceived as competitive and mean. Feminine traits however, such as for example showing and empathy and compassion, are not used to same extent to define a successful organization, with certain exceptions however. Acker (1992a) discusses this same issue by stating that "The leader and the successful organization itself are often portrayed as aggressive, goal oriented, competitive, efficient, but less as supportive, kind, and caring" (p.566).

Several other researchers have also focused their attention to gendered organizational cultures (Gherardi, 1995; Maddock, 1999; Mills, 1992; Mills, 1994b). According to Dye (2006) there has been significant research done in this field to discuss and analyse the issue of organizational culture, thereby studying symbols and rituals often present in organizations. These works include examining organizational norms (Helms Mills, 2002; Mills 1996), and discussing ideologies that exist within them. Many have however chosen to do so without using the terminology and framing of Acker's concept of gendering processes that constitute substructures. Dye (2006) brings the possible explanation for this being the development of organizational culture as a paradigm that has been progressing alongside Acker's work, however not within it.

"Evident in our public and private lives, symbols, images, and forms of consciousness serve to shape societal norms and values" (Dye, 2006, p8). The effects of this can be examined on two different levels, societal and organizational as they are closely linked together (Dye, 2006). She exemplifies this statement by referring to organizational symbols and slogans that emphasize speed or power as contributing factors to creating a society where traits that are typically associated with being male are highly valued. Acker (2012) indicates her agreement to this, acknowledging the strong relationship between societal and organizational images and ideas (ibid).

2.2.3 Internal gender constructions
The third gendered substructure stated by Acker (1992a, 1999) focuses on processes of interaction. "Interaction between individuals and groups is the medium for much institutional

functioning, for decision making and image production. Here, people replicate gender as they do the ordinary work of the institution" (Acker, 1992a, p.567). Internal gender constructions defined as a substructure appear through interaction between employees within an organization, on all hierarchal levels and in different settings (Acker, 2012). These interactions can help reinforce equality, but also inequality. This is where sexism and between individuals occur, through the inevitable interaction between individuals in an organization. The sexism can be obvious in nature but it can also take subtle forms that are hard to detect and prove, for example women being overlooked for promotions and being objectified in a way that limits their perceived ability to perform tasks (ibid).

The practical relevance of this substructure is clearly and concisely described by Acker (1999) in the following quote. "The work of organizing goes on through interactions between people, women and men, women and women, men and men, supervisors and subordinates, co-workers, and between employees and customers, or others from the outside. While doing the work of organizing, people are also "doing gender". These interactions are the everyday contexts within which people experience and create dominance and submission, create alliances and exclusions, put together and implement policies that divide and differentiate between women and men, and produce and confirm gender images (p.185).

When looking at the substructure from a more micro-level perspective, it becomes clear that the emphasize lies on individual level interaction as the main gendering tool. Other researchers have investigated this issue and mainly focused on strategies that discuss the gendered nature of interactions (Dye, 2006). According to these articles the best way to fight inequality in organizations is by focusing on communication between groups and by challenging power distances within them (ibid). The article by Baker (1991) is a good example of this research, promoting the use of reciprocal accommodation, which is a process that promotes women to use strategies that empower their communication. Another good example of this according to Dye (2006), is the work of Zipfel and Kleiner (1998). They argue that "positive interactions with women positively influence men's attitudes toward women as managers" (Dye, 2006, p.10). Reardon and Reardon (1999) promote a similar concept where they demonstrate how leader communication styles can influence Army gender integration. According to Dye and Helms Mills (2005), this is still a part of the research field that has not been extensively examined and much of what has been done does not lie within the framework of Acker.

There is however one article that at least partly touches upon the same notion of gendered interaction as Acker (1990) and that is the work of Lachover (2005). His article focuses on the issue of gendered and sexualized relationship between men and women in the context of journalism, more specifically news sources and journalists. The area of gendered and sexualized relationships within organizations seems to be underdeveloped according to Dye (2006). This is in despite of the importance of the existing works. Dye (2006) continues by stating that the lack of work that has been done in this area requires a clearer understanding of this gendering process that constitutes a substructure in order to fill the gap in the research field.

2.2.4 Gendered identities

The fourth gendered substructure as defined by Acker (1992b) is "the internal processes in which individuals engage as they construct personas that are appropriately gendered for the institutional setting. Gender identity, in the sense of knowing which gender category to place oneself in, is not necessarily an adequate guide" (p.185). Acker (1999), later extends her explanation and applicability of this substructure with the following statement "The fourth point of entry to understanding gendered organizing processes is through the internal mental work of individuals as they come to understand the organization's gendered expectations and opportunities, including the appropriate gendered behaviours and attitudes. Gendered expectations may be ambiguous and contradictory, thus requiring considerable interior mental work to get it right. All workers must first recognize what is appropriate and then try to control and shape their actions and feelings in those directions" (p.183).

As Acker has continued to develop her framework within the concept of gendered organizational theory, this description has continued to be more concretely and vividly presented. Acker (2012) highlights the fact that individual gendered identities are not only constructed within the organization but can also be brought in by individuals that enter into the organization. Questions that she relates to this substructure include the following: What does it mean to be a man or a woman? How does a man or a woman act on the job? She continues by stating that gender identities are created and altered as men and women are active in the work place and creating other parts of gendered substructures. When relating the issue to women that hold senior positions within organizations she mentions the possible pressure of managing like a man. She does also discuss the complex nature that revolves around this topic, of a woman managing like a man, and how it can bring other pressures.

"The woman who is aggressive and competitive, like a stereotypical man, may be seen as too assertive, but if she behaves in a more feminine and cooperative manner she may be seen as soft and ineffective" (Acker, 2012, p.216). The notion that male managing is the best way in all circumstances has however been question more and more, with the argument that a more feminine approach of an empathetic, supportive manager represents a better leader. Overall, the identity of leader or manager is a complex issue that continues to change over time (ibid).

When looking at research that has been done on this topic beside Acker, most of it does not use the terminology of the conceptual model itself (Dye, 2006). This work is mainly focused on individual values, interpretations and beliefs of gender in organizations (Clark & Salaman, 1998; Kondo, 1990; Mills, 1993; Prasad, 2002). Dye (2006) continues by stating there is an element of underdevelopment in this field, as is the case with the previous substructure. This can most clearly be seen in the fact that no one other than Acker has focused on internal gender constructions completely in the same way Acker presents it in here framework.

There are however, some studies that have looked upon the area of identities (gendered or sexual) and have included in their work references to Acker's theory. They have not given any discussion in relation to the framework however, and not given any attempts to include the framework in any extensive way (ibid). One example of this is according to Dye (2006) the work of Bruni (2006), in which she examines the heterosexual biases of organizational practices and the subsequent impact on gendered identities. The particular importance of this work is explained by Dye (2006) in the following statement: "This work provides us with a glimpse of how one might gain some insight into the creation and affirmation of gender identities. Acker's definition of this process set serves as a guide of sorts. That is, we know that we are looking for clues about how individuals construct their own gender identities within organizations and that we may find these clues within commonly held beliefs about what "appropriate" gender might look like. However, it is in the work of others that we can find examples of what this exploration might look like." (p.202).

2.3 Conceptual research Model

Automotive MNC- Organizational Context
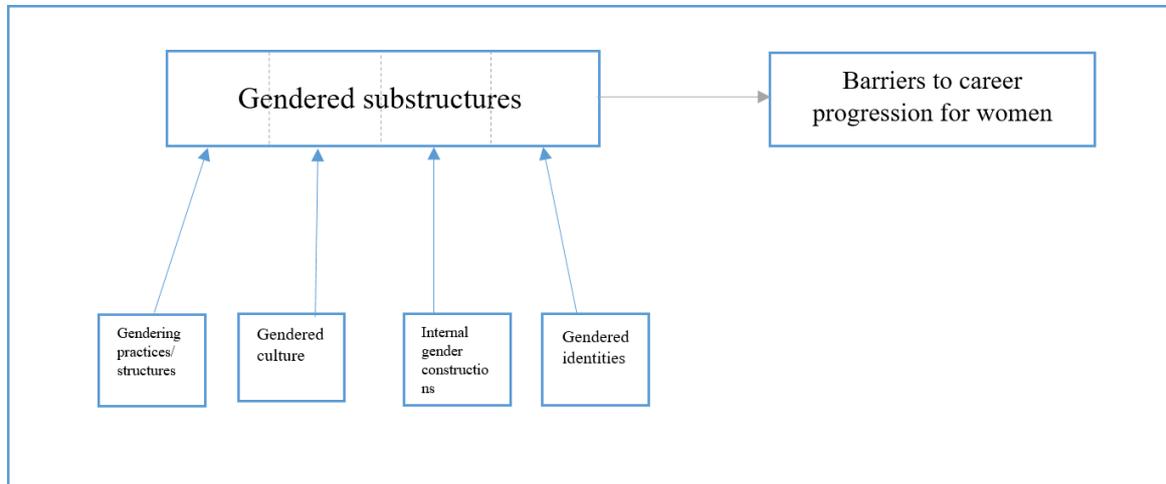
Source: Own compilation, based on Acker (1990)

Given the theoretical framework that has been presented in this chapter, a conceptual research model was created to outline the theoretical concept of this study. The fundamental theory is based on Acker's model of gendered substructures (Acker, 1990), including the four cornerstones that together constitute the base of the interviews conducted in this study. The arrows shown in the model represent assumptions that will be examined in the study. The four arrows pointing to gendered substructures represent the assumption that it is these four categories that captures the main gendered substructures that exist within an organization. The arrow between gendered substructures and barriers to career progression for women symbolizes the assumption that these gendered substructures result in barriers to career progression for women within the organizational context chosen in this study. This is the theoretical foundation that marks the beginning of this study. The purpose of the research model is to clarify the main theoretical understandings necessary to understand the concept of the thesis. It was created by the author to make the fundamental assumptions of the study clear to readers.

3. Methodology

This chapter is aimed at providing a thorough description of the steps of which the study was made. This includes the collection of empirical data, method of analysing and assurance of validity.

3.1 Research Approach

The focus of this study is to examine possible barriers to career advancement for women as a result of underlying gendered substructures. Although the topic has been widely researched since the 1970s there is a distinct lack of hands on studies that have investigated specific multinational corporations and the potential differences that might be present within them (Dye, 2006). Most research has instead focused on looking at national level, mapping out larger trends and therefore conducting more general studies. The detailed studies that have been conducted have mainly focused on one local company/subsidiary and thereby not providing opportunity for international comparisons (ibid). That is where this thesis aims to add new insights and knowledge to the discipline.

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), qualitative research methods are particularly suitable for studies that aim to understand the social environment, based on how actors in the environment interpret it. By focusing on a smaller number of respondents and studying them in a more detailed manner, a qualitative approach can provide data that can in turn be analysed to answer more complex and subtle issues than is possible with a quantitative approach. Therefore, in order to examine information that is less readily available for collection in the organizational structure, a qualitative research methodology is the best applicable (ibid).

Furthermore, qualitative research methods are better suited to answer complex research questions since it gives the researcher the opportunity to focus and capture more detailed features and characteristics of the results, providing explanations between core factors (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004). The research strategy will therefore apply a qualitative approach. In addition to these reasons, the sensitive nature of the topic in this study makes it less suitable for other research methods, such as for example a quantitative survey, since it would be less likely to gain the necessary trust of the respondent in order to receive unfiltered answers (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The research approach chosen in this study closely resembles the approach used by Benschop and Doorewaard, (1998) in their study of gendered subtexts in team-based work, in several ways. The main reason is that very much like this

study it was conducted as a comparative case study project and was carried out on the gender subtext in organizations. The data were collected through an extended case study strategy and it represents an exploratory study since research on gender in organizations that goes beyond the mere description of the theory itself (ibid). As mentioned by Lewis and Morgan (1994) the case study approach is especially suitable for a topic such as gendered substructures in organizations since it better captures the subtle natures and layers of change.

The reasoning of this thesis follows mainly a deductive approach, however with some additional inductive approach layers. A deductive approach is concerned with developing a hypothesis based on existing theory, and then designing a research strategy to test the hypothesis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The theoretical chapter was written in the very beginning of the writing process, this was done in order to provide a deep and general understanding of the research field, which was the foundation for the study moving forward. The gathered data was later critically analysed and where it differed from the theory a window of opportunity opened for critical analysis of the theory itself. This provided interesting comparisons to be made where the theoretical framework could not only be revised and adapted, but also scrutinized and tested for its relevance and accuracy.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Single Case study
According to Vissak (2010) the application of a case study research method can be useful for several reasons, mainly its ability to transcend local boundaries of examined cases, finding and highlighting new dimensions of reality and through that develop new, testable and empirically valid theoretical and practical knowledge. Case studies can be an especially suitable method if the one of the following criteria are present: if the current perspective seems inadequate, if they conflict with each other or if it conflicts with current research (ibid). In the case of gender inequality within leading positions in organization one can find evidence of several of these criteria to justify case study as a suitable method of research. Firstly, as mentioned previously in the problem discussion section of this thesis there is a lack of empirical studies done to investigate the cause of underrepresentation of women in organizations overall, even more so in automotive MNCs headquartered in Europe. Secondly, existing theoretical research seem to have conflicting explanations for the issue, providing different concepts of how the issue should be tackled. The case study approach is specifically suited for these types of research because it can help to discover causal relationships,

understand why and how things occur in a certain way and create new understandings (Yin, 1994).

In order to conduct a case study with the focus explained in the previous section a suitable MNC was selected to be used as a source of data and the choice fell on the Company for several reasons. The Company is a multinational company founded in Sweden, they identify themselves with a strong company culture that in many ways resemble the national culture from which they originate (the Company, 2016). One of the core values of the Company involves gender equality and that is something they promote strongly within their global policies and mission statements. However, when looking at the company statistics it is clear that the Company still has a long way to go in order to reach an even gender distribution within senior/leading company positions, currently the percentage of females only reach 26 % (ibid). The global nature of the industry in which the company operates paired with the outspoken gender equality focus of the company made it especially interesting for a study of this kind, in order to test how prominent gendered substructures are and what impact they have on barriers to career progression for women.

In order to compare perceived barriers to career progression within a global company the study had to include respondents from parts of the organization outside the HQ. This is because the respondents from the HQ location might not be representative of the entire organisation and only when including respondents from other geographical parts of the organization can generalizations be made. Due to the limitations in resources for this study it was not possible to investigate all geographic regions that the company is operating in. Therefore, a second location needed to be selected and the choice fell on China for several reasons. The company's largest growth market is China, both when it comes to market size and production locations (the Company, 2016). The operations are relatively recent, most of which were founded in 2010 or later. The operations are growing rapidly however, employing several thousand people in total today. The global strategies regarding gender distribution that the Company has established from its HQ in Sweden are also meant to apply in the Chinese operations, however far they may be from local practises and culture (ibid).

A single case study can provide important contributions and theory building by confirming, challenging or extending established theory (Soulsby, 2005).

3.2.2 Data collection

Qualitative interviews offer several benefits as method of research, including its ability to provide in-depth understanding of a particular theme and the flexibility it gives to the researcher (Bryman & Bell, 2015). These reasons as well as others have made it popular with researchers conducting feminist research. Feminist research is mainly done by unstructured and semi structured interviews because it offers several characteristics that fit well the type of research conducted within this field. Firstly, it can be done with a high degree of trust and confidence between the researcher and the respondent. Secondly, it provides a high level of interactivity from the researcher's point of view. Thirdly, it takes into account the mind-set of the respondents and lastly, it is non-hierarchical in nature. Qualitative interviews also offer the opportunity to adapt and change the interview so it fits to the individual respondent, making the process of collecting data more flexible. Quantitative interviews however, are conducted with a predetermined agenda, sticking firmly to standardized questions and making them more difficult to adapt. Semi structured interviews were chosen as data collection method in this study and it was done for several reasons. Semi-structured interviews are guided by specific topics or questions while leaving room for flexibility and open interpretations. The main advantage that was brought by this method for this particular study is the fact it gives the interviewer a framework of which to base the interview while also providing large room for the respondent to determine the direction of the conversation, which in itself can provide useful insights for studies of this kind (ibid).

As this is a study with a connection to feminist research, aiming at collecting data that can be analysed to make comparisons and draw conclusions from, just as most research in this it will be conducted through semi-structured interviews. This provides opportunity to steer and adapt the interviews in order to achieve deep discussions and to keep the interview on topic. In addition, the use of interviews is motivated and supported by many feminist researchers who advocate a qualitative research framework since its flexibility entails the opportunity to construct optimal interview conditions; a high level of trust between interviewer and respondent, a visible mutual understanding from the interviewer and finally, a non-hierarchal relation between respondent and interviewer (Dye, 2006).

3.3 Research process

The data collection process began with a list of desired criteria for the respondents that would participate in study. As the focus of this study has been to investigate barriers to career progression by interviewing women who have successfully climbed the career ladder the

women needed to have a senior position within the company. In order to make the selection process of these women as objective and unbiased as possible they were chosen based on three factors. Firstly, the respondents were filtered according to their salary box status as set by the company. The salary boxes chosen were those that included people of senior positions but not directly in the company board as there were not enough of them and since they might be reluctant to answer critical issues honestly.

The second criteria were that they needed to have some type of leadership position in order to qualify. The third criteria were to include respondents from different company departments and this was chosen in order to make a true and fair representation of the company situation overall and to collect experiences from different parts of the organization. The departments that were included ranged from R&D and Manufacturing to purchasing, IT and Legal etc. Employees from the HR department were not included for two reasons, firstly as they were participating and contributing to the writing of this thesis and therefore could not be counted as unbiased. Secondly, they do not have the same gender distribution composition within the department as the rest of the company does, the department overall has a high percentage of women in senior positions and that could skew the results in an undesired way to hide potential issues in the overall company. This process was conducted in two separate groups simultaneously, one with employees in the Swedish organization and one with employees in the Chinese organization. 30 female employees with a matching profile to the above-mentioned criteria were contacted by email (see attached appendix 2), 15 from Sweden and 15 from China. In total 20 respondents said yes to being interviewed and participated in the study, 13 from Sweden and 7 from China. The number of interviews was determined by the time constraints but also by data saturation. As recommended by Anderson and Skaates (2004) the data collection should continue until the same themes are brought up over and over again, a process that also strengthens the validity of the findings.

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), it is important to gather as much knowledge within the research field as necessary in order to create an optimal interview guide. The interview guide was constructed using the theoretical framework presented in the previous chapter and the questions were categorized under the four main themes presented there, which were, organizational processes, gendered culture, interaction between individuals and gendered identities.

Each interview began with a series of questions that were meant to invite the respondent to feel comfortable speaking and opening up. The interviews were all recorded and later transcribed in order to give the interviewer freedom to listen and adopt the interview questions as the interview went on. The purpose of the study was briefly introduced, however most details regarding the theoretical background and purpose was left out in order to not lead the respondent in a certain direction. Since some of the questions were of a private nature the point of anonymity was highlighted clearly and any questions the respondent felt uncomfortable answering would be removed and the interview would follow on.

The interview then contained a total of 21 questions (see Appendix 1). The first 20 were categorized as mentioned previously by the theoretical background from which it was based, and the last question was directed openly to pick up any general reflections from the respondent. After carefully and extensively reading the theoretical material regarding gendered substructures and the effects it has on women trying to progress in their career the questions were stated with the aim of capturing the essence of each category. The first category (Gendering practices/ structures) is considered to be relatively more important when evaluating gendered substructures in an organization (Dye, 2006) and it therefore received most focus in the interview, with a total of 7 questions while the other categories received 4 each.

The interviews were mainly conducted through Skype for Business for several reasons. Firstly, half of the contacted respondents work and live in China and that geographical distance made in person interviews impossible given the resources of this thesis. The respondents in Sweden were given the option to choose interview form themselves, either in person, on Skype for business or over the phone. The majority chose Skype meetings or phone calls due to the complexity in their schedules that come with such senior positions. The Chinese interviews were all conducted in English with the exception of one because that particular respondent was fluent in Swedish. As English is the official company language all respondents speak English, however since Swedish is the native language of both the interviewer and all Swedish respondents those interviews were held in Swedish. The interview guide was translated as directly as possible during the interview in order to keep the questions intact and results comparable.

3.4 Analysis and interpretation of data

The interviews were all recorded since the interviews were conducted by one individual person that was responsible for conducting the interview and did therefore not have the possibility to record at the same time. This also meant the interviews could be listened to several times in order to detect subtle patterns and secure that no details were missed during the transcribing process. The transcribing took place shortly after the interview in order to facilitate the opportunity to analyse the gathered material simultaneously to the data collection process. To do these two things simultaneously strengthened both the data collection and the analysis since it allowed for theories to develop while data is still being collected (Soulsby, 2005).

The data collection process resulted in a total of 150 pages of transcribed interviews. In order to analyse the material and ensure that the results would be a fair and complete representation of the data a qualitative analysis tool Nvivo was used in order to code and categorize the different findings. Coding and categorisation of data facilitates interpretation and relation of data to the research question and the theoretical framework, and using software programs helps make the data analysis more systematic (Soulsby, 2005). To analyze the organizational processes the technique of subtext analysis is considered most suitable (Fairclough 1992). This technique belongs to the method of discourse analysis, which has a long tradition in the study of the role of language, symbols and meaning and in the interpretation of social practices. In this study, a similar analytical procedure was used, but as Fairclough (1992) states it is preferable to label the method subtext analysis because of the explicit reference to underlying processes, assumptions and meanings, that account for specific representations of social practices (ibid).

Potter and Wetherell (1994) provide a useful framework for the practice of subtext analysis. They advocate paying attention to what is said in a text, in what context it is said, whether variation occurs in the text and how something is said (grammar, cohesion and rhetorical presentation). This kind of analysis implies studying social practices where gender is clearly involved (such as allocation practices), but also analyzing social practices that apparently have nothing to do with gender. Examples of the latter are the explicit and implicit rules of work flow design, the organization of work processes and the distribution of tasks and functions over departments (ibid).

3.5 Research Quality

The purpose of validating a study is according to (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004) to ensure that the conducted study actually examines the purpose it is meant to examine. When conducting qualitative research there is always a risk that the researcher in some way interferes with the study and thereby skews the direction of the study, making it biased (ibid). As is discussed by Bryman and Bell (2015) however, it is not possible to keep a study completely free of bias, as it is based on the background of both the researcher and respondents. Since this thesis is written by a woman with a self-interest in this subject it is possible that a subconscious pro-feminine standpoint has had an impact on the study. The issue of neutrality in gender studies is also discussed by Alvesson and Billing (2009) when they state that the most important task for gender research is to expose underlying gendered situations in organizations that claim to be gender neutral. With this approach, there is a risk of gender hypersensitivity arising, as a result of the researcher seeing things as gendered even though gender may not be the central issue in all cases (ibid). However, given that this study was conducted with these issues in mind the process has been constantly analysed and criticised in order to stay within the topic and continuously questioning the level of bias in each step.

External reliability in the context of qualitative research is often referred to as generalizability, the extent to which the findings of a study are generalizable in other settings than the actual study (Yin, 2014). Case studies are traditionally considered to be weak in terms of this, which is a known shortcoming of this thesis. However, according to Tsang (2014), case studies can in several respects be more generalizable than those of quantitative studies, because of the case study's ability to investigate and describe the mechanisms that generate and observed pattern. This holds true when it comes to theoretical generalization, which is concerned with developing explanations the relationships observed between different variables in a study that can be applied to other populations. Theoretical generalization aims at building new, modifying or refining existing theory by focusing on new concrete situations. To ensure this, the findings and analysis chapters thoroughly provide different explanations for the issues discussed. Yin (2014) calls this type of generalizability analytical generalization, and further emphasizes the importance of thoroughly having investigated existing theories at the onset of the study, in order for the analytical generalization to be valid. Thus, the in-depth literature

review presented in chapter 2 was conducted prior to collecting data and is another way of strengthening the analysis in terms of generalizability, to the extent possible.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic of this study it has been of great importance to include a critical examination of all steps in this thesis in order to ensure it does not cause harm to the respondents in any way. According to Bryman and Bell (2015) there is a number of ethical principles that need to be included in order to ensure this. The first regards to information, that the respondents should receive information about the purpose of the study before agreeing to it. In this case, it meant sending out a lengthy email that explained the purpose of the study without over sharing certain details of the theoretical basis that could have caused unwanted bias. The second principle relates to consent, to inform the respondent when they are being observed and to give them the opportunity to refrain from answering when they want to do so. The third principle is focused on confidentiality and anonymity, ensuring that material is kept safe and presented in a way that keeps the identity of the respondent hidden when so is agreed upon. This principle was of great focus throughout the writing of this thesis, keeping all sensitive information regarding identities contained to one computer and not sent through any channels that could risk exposure. The final two principles regard to the use of the information, not using the data for any other purposes and not providing the respondents with false information (ibid). As these factors have been included and examined since the beginning of this process the author has been able to ensure safety for its respondents.

4. Empirical Findings

The empirical findings are structured in accordance with the theoretical themes of which the interviews are based on. Each section thoroughly presents the main findings in every category, separating the results from Swedish and Chinese respondents.

Before presenting the empirical findings, it is important to clarify that all quotes presented of Swedish respondents have been translated with the intent to keep meaning and words as closely resembling to the original language as possible. The quotes presented of Chinese respondents were already in English and did therefore not require translation. It is however important to bear in mind that English was not their first language, and could present some language barriers. Given that the company language is English this should not provide a large obstacle however. It is also important to explain the structure of the following empirical findings, as they do not include markings to describe the individual behind each quote. This

was a conscious decision made in order to maintain absolute anonymity towards respondents, as they hold high positions with large publicity within the organization and even small details can reveal the identity of the respondent. As explained in the methodological chapter, the empirical findings were extracted using Nvivo and the author's own processing of the material to identify categories in each theoretical subtheme and grouping them together in order to form larger themes.

4.1 Gendering practices/ structures

4.1.1 Glass ceiling- Swedish perspective

When discussing the topic of organizational structures with the respondents, a commonly occurring topic during the interviews with respondents from Sweden was the reference to a glass ceiling, some hard to pinpoint live where fewer women successfully reach above. This is demonstrated by one respondent in the following way:

> There is a form of glass ceiling within the company, a certain point that shows you at what level women are held back and there you can identify how high women reach. It is a level where a lot of politics enter the picture and women are deselected for promotions time and again until they finally choose to leave the company. Through this glass ceiling several talented and skilled women have been lost from the company, as a result of not receiving the opportunities they rightly deserved. The political game comes in to play where women who enter that level of seniority work to promote agendas and issues that the existing leadership does not want to address. The women want to unveil truths that the existing board does not want to admit or change and therefore they decide to hold those women back.

It is also discussed by another respondent who says she is experiencing a glass ceiling in her current position:

> I feel that I have been treated equally in my previous managerial positions, however at the level I recently joined I feel something has changed. I do not feel like a full and equal member of the team and I cannot say why. In this team, there is a clear majority of men and I feel that my opinion is disregarded and ignored, as if to say here but no further.

The mention of an exclusion of women at the top is further highlighted by a respondent who claims that the disproportion of women is an issue brought by some managers who see a large population of women in a board group as an undesired situation and gives the following examples to describe what she means.

> Sometime during the third managerial position she held I was the leader of a board group with a majority of women. I received many comments regarding that from my superiors, insinuating that there were too many women in the group. You never hear such comments from superiors regarding boards where there is a majority of men. When a vacancy opened in the board my boss came to me with the demand to hire a man, not another woman.

4.1.2 Head-coaching- Swedish perspective

When the respondents were asked to explain how they had received promotions and career advancement steps they had been given throughout their careers it became clear that most had not done so by applying for open advertisements and following the traditional steps of a recruitment process. The overwhelming majority of respondents stated that personal recommendations from recruiting managers and internal headhunting was the way they had climbed the career ladder within the company. Additionally, they also stated that the advertisements that are posted both internally and externally often have a predetermined candidate that has already been chosen and it is therefore no reason for other employees to even apply. Several respondents explain this in the following ways:

> I have not applied for a single job in my career, I have been head-coached. Many positions are never even posted and if they are you already know not to apply since the choice has already been informally made.

> None of the jobs I have held have been advertised, I have been directly approached through contacts. That is the way it has been throughout my entire professional life. Skilled and ambitious employees are promoted.

> The first job in my career is the only job I ever applied for, the rest were given to me through other methods. Many positions that were given to me had an advertisement out but the recruiting managers contacted my directly and offered me positions

directly if I just sent in an application. Therefore, I always knew that I would be the winning candidate before applying.

A recruiting manager often already knows which employee they would like to fill the vacancy with, so even there is an add out it is largely predetermined. That has been the case in all managerial positions I have received.

Several respondents raise their direct reporting supervisor to be responsible for the success of their career advancements and this gives the conclusion that the manager of an employee is a key player in determining the success of a person's career. The fact that this type of system often works in disfavour of female employees is also discussed by several respondents. They state that many recruiting managers choose to recruit from their informal network of contacts, where women are often not included to the same degree as men.

I have the feeling that recruitment at the level I have reached now is dependent on whom you know and who is your friend. Many positions are given to golf buddies and old university classmates and if you are not part of this internal group you do not really stand a chance.

4.1.3 International mobility- Swedish perspective

When advancing to a senior position at the company several of the respondents recognized that international travel, both short and long term, is a part of the job description and cannot easily be turned down while maintaining success in the position. This is the case for both men and women and does not necessarily relate to the issue of barriers to career progression for women. Several respondents did however highlight that the structural society outside of work is the cause for making travel a larger issue for female employees than male. The issue is clearly explained by one respondent in the following phrase:

International travel on short basis is a basic requirement for people on my level. That makes it very hard to have obligations at home such as young children unless you have someone else who can step in. In my case it was my husband, but that is not usually the case for the women I know.

The issue was also discussed in terms of long-term international assignments, a commonly occurring career step for senior level employees within the company according to several

respondents. The fact that this issue does not directly relate to gender treatment within the organization but the overall structure of our society is discussed by one respondent in the following way:

> I have been abroad on international assignments twice during my career and I definitely think that it is an obstacle holding many women back in their careers. When you go abroad as a man it is usually not a problem for the wife to stay home and manage the project of running the family, however it does not work the same way for women trying to make such a commitment. Usually the man in such relationships is also expected to have a challenging job, not to take care of the family alone. That is often an obstacle for women in my position. You do not receive the same back-up at home as the men typically do.

The long-term effects of being held back by company expectations such as this is brought up by one respondent who says she has very much felt the consequences of it and phrases it in this way.

> There are obstacles in the form of having to turn down offers for international assignments due to my family not being mobile. Those offers do not come again after you turn them down. You also do not receive the same career opportunities when you choose to remain here at home, it definitely holds you back compared to colleagues who go.

4.1.4 Pay gap- Swedish perspective

When interviewing the Swedish respondents regarding practices and structures they felt acted as obstacles in career development for women, all respondents confirmed they experienced a pay gap compared to their male colleagues of similar position. The following phrase summarizes the general response while discussing the point of salary differences between sexes.

> I know the men earn more than me, it's a fact. It has been that way my entire career.

Several respondents also chose to highlight the fact that pay gaps seem to be increasing as you progress higher up on the career ladder and two respondents put it in the following way:

I am 100 % that I am underpaid for the position I currently hold. The differences grow larger the higher within the organization you climb.

I have a strong feeling that salary differences have increased during my career climb within the company, it is however hard for me to say for sure since salary figures on my level are hard to compare. I believe the highest difference is in the job position I have today. Previously, on lower level management I have been able to keep an open dialogue with my colleagues on the same level and thereby I could check and compare how I was doing. That is not possible to the same extent in my position today. I am well aware that my salary is clearly below where it should and it has been for a long time.

A further confirmation that salary differences between men and women do exist within the company at senior levels is the mention of a *Women's salary budget* instated by the company to give female employees the opportunity to receive salary increases in addition to the normal salary negotiation. This is a measure taken with the objective to boost female employees' salary and decrease differences and is mentioned by several Swedish respondents.

The salary definitely varies depending on your sex, working in disfavor of women. I know that I have been underpaid during my entire career. My superiors have used the Women's salary budget to boost my pay and that in itself is a confirmation that I have been underpaid.

4.1.5 Work life balance- Swedish perspective

Being an employee of the seniority as the respondents themselves explained requires a large commitment to one's work, demanding much more than the standard 40 hours per week and requiring almost constant availability. The respondents discussed the issue of work life balance in different ways, with the common denominator being that it seemed to be a struggle faced by all of them, requiring certain sacrifices in the home life. The vast majority of Swedish respondents stated that they found the company to provide flexibility and freedom to organize work yourself. However, they also stated that finding a successful balance between work and home life was not easy and many times impossible. One respondent used the following words:

There is absolutely an understanding and flexibility from the company regarding your work conditions, hours and such, they handle those issues extremely well. But when you reach more senior positions it is a fact that your home life suffers significantly. It starts already on mid-level management positions, the working hours start to reach far above the normal 40, in my current position I hardly ever end up below 60.

The issue of work life balance is however not an issue only directed towards women, men struggle with this issue as well. Just as in the case of certain other themes presented in this chapter however, the issue of work life balance happens to damage career opportunities for women more than men in general, a result of the society structures according to one respondent who gave the following statement.

You get asked during interviews for new positions how old your kids are, knowing that if your kids are young enough to need to be picked up from day care your chances will be severely damaged. Given that women, in my surroundings at least, are usually most responsible for this in families it puts us in a worse position, career advancements need to wait until your children grow up, unless you have husband willing to step up.

Some respondents also discussed the fact that many women face a decision in their careers, to focus on family or career. One respondent spoke of responsibility of children to be a factor holding employees back in their career and attributed her choice to not have children as part of her success.

I have no children. Both men and women with children can use them as an excuse to leave earlier or not participate in certain things. In the end, it's just us without children left in the building, it gives us an edge.

A fellow respondent in the opposite position, with several children, had a different take on the situation but with the same basic understanding of the company attitude.

I have had long considerations in my head over the years, reflecting upon how high within the organization I am willing to move because it is a large commitment in terms of working hours. I have had these reflections because I value time off with my

family highly. As a result, I have not had a fast or straight career path some other employees might. There is an expectation within the company that a certain role requires more working hours than your typical full time job and therefore I have chosen to decline those offers.

The lack of work life balance in positions on senior levels is mainly due to the company culture that pushes people to work many hours above the normal 40-hour work week according to several respondents. One respondent explains that the mentality comes from superiors and often take the form of judgment if you decide to leave work early.

When it comes to freedom to organize your own work schedule and I have always received great flexibility from my managers. However, if you do decide to leave at 17.00 one day for example, you will often receive a judgmental stare from a boss or colleague for doing it. This is in spite of the fact that I already worked 10-12 hours that day. There is just no understanding for private life and time for your family. The mentality is focused on not leaving before your boss does.

The harmful effects working long hours can cause was explained by one respondent who had personal experience in this issue.

It is a shortcoming of this company. You should preferably work around the clock to satisfy everyone. I recently had to take a month-long time out to recover and rest. And I was the third in my board group to do so. It is a really fast pace, but you should not just put the blame on the company. We all have our own responsibility in this.

4.1.6 Work life balance- Chinese perspective

The issue of balancing career with family life was raised by all the Chinese respondents. Just as the case for Swedish respondents the respondents from China recognized that senior positions within the company demanded far more than a 40-hour work week. One respondent explained her situation with the following statement.

Working 12-14 hours is the general for me, rarely less than 12. On my level, there are no other options. If I had a problem with that I would not be on this level. When you

add to this the commuting hours for most of the employees here there is not much time left of your day.

Just as the Swedish respondents, the Chinese respondents found that having the responsibility of small children acted as an obstacle for women trying to advance career wise.

It is up to you, as long as you can fulfil your tasks and not let your performance and attendance be affected it is not a problem. However, if you are for example a single parent it can become an issue. You need to show that being a parent does not affect your work.

I think when you are moving up you have a larger responsibility and you really need to spend more time on your work. It is a definitive disadvantage to have small children then.

As opposed to the Swedish respondents however, none of the Chinese respondents mentioned this as something the company should take responsibility for, instead they recognized other measures to deal with the issue. One Chinese respondent who had Swedish origin and had previously worked in Sweden analysed the differences and came with the following conclusion:

In Sweden, I had a different welfare system protecting me and supporting me as a parent. Here in China I find that most of my colleagues rely upon the help of grandparents etc. to take care of children in order to have successful careers. No one seems to demand time off with their children, work comes first.

In general, the theme of work life balance became evident just as it did for the Swedish respondents. The angle from which the Chinese respondents argued was however largely different, viewing long work hours as something given and not necessarily the problem in itself.

4.1.7 Work inflexibility- Chinese perspective
When discussing organizational structures and practises, flexibility of work was mentioned by most Chinese respondents. In contrast to the Swedish respondents the Chinese did not

recognize flexibility in work distribution as part of the organization, neither did they necessarily recognize it as an issue.

> In China, we follow the general working hours very strictly, that means we start 8.30 and work at least until 17.30. It is very rare that someone will ask to do some work from home. This is very strict and applies to everyone.

> In China working from home and such things is not common at all. It is a policy in China to not be allowed to work from home.

> Things such as working from home is not permitted and the company will not take into consideration what goes on outside work. This is however depending on your manager, some will be more flexible than others.

Most respondents spoke of these regulations as a natural way of working life in China and not something company specific. One respondent did however also discuss the possible limitations that puts on some women trying to have a career and a family.

> If you happen to lack support from home, having a family and career can be very difficult, that is a choice you need to make.

4.1.8 Pay gap- Chinese perspective

Salary differences between female and male workers turned out to be controversial question for the majority of Chinese respondents, several refusing to answer the question completely. Only one respondent answered the question with a clear response and stated the following:

> Salary differences clearly exist, it is however not something we usually discuss in China.

Others chose to answer the question less explicitly but no one answered the question completely open. A typical response follows.

I am not sure, I have no way of knowing what my peers earn. I am not a very materialistic person so I don't really care about these things. What I receive is quite enough so I feel that is all I need to know.

The overall conclusion of salary gaps between men and women could not be as clearly identified as it could for Swedish respondents. There were however some strong indications in several answers to show that there is an underlying issue that the respondents simply did not feel comfortable discussing.

4.1.9 Internal and external Headhunting- Chinese perspective

Given that the Chinese operations for the company are still relatively recent most of the employees had not been with the company for more than a few years. That meant most senior positions had been taken from people outside the organization. The majority of respondents had received such offers through direct headhunting measures, not through advertised positions.

The jobs have come to me through offers and direct headhunting, which is the case for most of my colleagues.

One Chinese respondent recognized this as being favourable in her position since she was in contact with some senior people from the company and thereby received a direct offer. However, for women in general she believed it could be negative.

Women sometimes fall behind in these situations; male managers seem to prefer hiring males.

4.2 Gendered Culture

4.2.1 Adaptiveness (Political game player)- Swedish perspective

When asking the Swedish respondents to state in their own words the most important characteristics of a successful manager within Volvo the most reoccurring theme brought up was political game player. According to a majority of the respondents it was the most crucial factor that decided whether or not an employee could successfully climb the career ladder or not. This was demonstrated by one respondent who gave the following statement:

You need to be hungry for power, a political game player, they do not necessarily promote good leaders, they promote career hungry individuals.

Another respondent described the ideal candidate for career success within the company with the following attributes:

Male, around 50 years old, been within the company forever or a recent external recruitment. Good at playing the political game. Career focused rather than focused on developing himself, result oriented.

When asked to further explain what it means to be a successful political game player within the company, the respondents spoke of the following aspects summarized by one respondent.

You need to be able to read the political climate and understand the game that is constantly being played. You need to understand what drives individuals in order to not be perceived as a hazard by those above you. Push the right agenda and focus your attention on the right questions, even though it might not be what you believe in.

The issue of pursuing the correct agenda was further discussed by one respondent who gave the following explanation.

If your superior has other opinions than you, pursuing a different agenda than the one you see fit, it is vital to restrain yourself and shift your focus to what your superior focuses on. That also means restraining your own personality and keeping a low profile as an individual in certain situations. I myself had to learn that in one of my previous positions, my boss did not consider me or my field as relevant and so I was forced to take as step back and pursue the agenda outside my area.

4.2.2 Male leadership style- Swedish perspective

When the respondents were asked if they had felt the need to adopt their leadership styles and personalities in order to more closely resemble that of a male manager or colleague several respondents confirmed that statement with personal experiences. One commented the topic with the statement cited below.

It depends on who your boss is. Some have told me that I need to be become more aggressive, to push my employees harder, be more in people's face and generally be more masculine.

One respondent had a different reflection on this issue that in itself confirmed a general desire to have an aggressive leadership style from the company's side.

I have never needed to change everything, I have been tough enough from the beginning.

In order to obtain success in her current senior position within the company one respondent reflected over the change in mentality she has perceived as progressing through her career.

In my management positions at a lower level I have always felt that my leadership style has been successful, however at this level I don't feel like it is working anymore. Something has changed and the softer leadership values that I have always focused on are no longer promoted. There is a hard focus on results and less focus on what we call good leadership. I have felt the need to change myself in this regard in order to receive appreciation from the management group I am in. The consequence of me not doing that will be that I get stuck here, no one will continue to promote me.

4.2.3 Male communication style- Swedish perspective

During the interviews, when the respondents were asked if they had felt the need to adopt their leadership style to more closely resemble their male superiors or colleagues, several respondents chose to highlight that they had also felt the need to adopt their communication style in order to be more like their male colleagues.

You need to learn the male communication style. You need to show courage but at the same time not too much so. You have to fit in to the existing hierarchy, taking on your role and responsibility fully, however not the role and responsibility of your boss.

Several respondents said they had recognized problems to be heard within their management groups, feeling ignored and overlooked by their male colleagues.

When I say something regarding new thoughts and ideas there is no one interested, however when my male colleague raises the same issue half an hour later everyone is eager to board the train. Therefore, there is clearly a miss in communication from my side and it is not easy to move away from.

I feel that I have had adapt my way of communicating with colleagues, who are mostly men, because before I could be a bit too fast in making my suggestions for improvements. 40 minutes later when a male colleague repeated the same statement the rest of the room was ready to hear it. That is something I had to learn.

One respondent stated she was currently battling this issue, finding it difficult to be recognized in meetings.

I am in the stage right now where I am battling with being ignored and overlooked. In my previous roles, I have always felt included and heard but since I reached my current level things have changed. I have had to change the way I interact with superiors and colleagues. I see that I am not getting through at board meetings, I don't feel heard. I don't receive the same airtime as my male colleagues do. I'm not taken seriously. This could very well be part of my own insecurity and I might be imagining it, but I don't think so. I get cut off when I try to make a point, my male colleagues finish the topic when I raise an issue, just wanting to move on to something else. However, when a male colleague raises something everyone takes the time and listens.

4.2.4 Political game player– Chinese perspective

Being a skilled political game player was also mentioned by the Chinese respondents in several cases. They spoke about the topic in somewhat different terms however, clearly summarized by one respondent in the following statement.

You have to have a high IQ and more importantly high EQ. In addition to doing a good job you need to think about how your boss perceives you and how your relationship is. This will determine your success.

4.2.5 Communication style– Chinese perspective

The Chinese respondents also highlighted the importance of communication styles and that they had felt the need to alter it during their careers within the company. They did however not link it to the concept of a male communication style, even though the results clearly resemble those of the Swedish. Examples of the Chinese respondents follows:

> From the company's side, I think it differs what level you are at, at the lower level advancements it is mainly up to your personality and your deliverables, knowledge, ability. However, when you advance among the higher management titles it is really depending. It requires more understanding of how to not only manage your subordinates but also your managers. You need to be very politically aware. You make sure to deliver but also to have a good relationship with people. Your communication skills become key.

> I needed to improve my skills on how to manage my communication with managers and other leaders within the company. I already knew how to communicate with my team but to report the job progress to my managers was something I had to improve.

4.2.6 Closed communities– Chinese perspective

An additional factor that was brought up while discussing mentalities and attitudes within the company with the Chinese respondents was the fact that informal communities of contacts seemed to play a large role in the promotion of new employees. One respondent discussed as stated below.

> There is a group at the top who have been around for a long time and that have close knit bond to each other. To enter that group is almost impossible and that means the highest power stays within that group. There are no women in this group, it is a group of guys.

4.3 Internal gender constructions

4.3.1 Sexist comments from colleagues and managers– Swedish perspective

Several examples of gendered comments and treatments from male colleagues and managers surfaced during the interviews with the Swedish respondents. Some respondents gave examples of where the work capacity was questioned due to the fact that they were women, such as the example below:

I have received comments about being a woman and holding the position that I do. Some have questioned how I will perform in this role because I am a woman. I have also unfortunately received sexual implications and comments from colleagues as well, never from a manager though.

Others mentioned being called demeaning nicknames by male colleagues and managers, stated below.

I have experienced it a few times but it has been a few years since the last. People have referred to me as "the girl" in groups, separating me from the rest of the team.

Well, when I began as a manager here I was called "lilla stumpan" a couple of times, not that I let it bother me. But it was the highest manager within my field that that did it.

A fellow respondent also stated that she has felt excluded at some points in her career due to the fact men sometimes felt like certain topics could not be brought up in her presence.

I have felt a number of times during my career that my being a woman makes my male colleagues uncomfortable. I am not included in certain areas. They will point out that a certain discussion can't be held in my presence. So called "bastudiskussioner".

4.3.2 Discrimination due to gender– Swedish perspective

When asking the Swedish respondents if they had ever felt discriminated against as result of their sex the responses were mixed. A number said no, the majority felt they had been subject to some lighter forms that could potentially be defined as discriminating and some said immediately yes. Below, a number of examples are listed in order to provide an overview of the types of discrimination stated by the respondents.

I have felt feelings of discrimination throughout my career. It has mainly been about expectations, feeling the need to outperform one's male colleagues in order to receive the same recognition. I am not allowed to show emotions or be an emotional person

because I am a woman, I need to show that I have tough skin all the time. It is like I have to accept certain things because I am a woman and I am not allowed to be affected by it or I am seen as too week or emotional.

I am not sure I would call it discrimination but I have definitely had issues in my roles because I happen to be a woman. I think us women in this seniority are considered ambitious, and there is tension and competition created between male colleagues and us. I have felt we need to outperform our male colleagues in order to reach the same results, or that might just be something we put on ourselves. Hard to say. Sometimes the women in my group become more male than the males. They do it because they feel the need to constantly prove their worth and place in the group or position. That often results in overachieving male colleagues, preparing and doing more than what is expected for a meeting for examples. The men typically have not, and that creates competition and you are perceived as a threat.

I have felt that certain times, absolutely. As a woman, I have hade certain qualities that have not been seen favorably by the male leaders, I have not been seen as male enough in my leadership for example. That has definitely been a disadvantage in my career.

It can happen as an expat in some situations, as you are usually the only female expat. They would forget to invite you to social events, after work beers and golf trips, thinking of you as a part of the housewife group and not a member of the work team. But that only happened on rare occasions.

Recently, my manager told me and some female colleagues to act as if though we were not women, implying that we were being too nagging and questioning. That was a low point for me.

I heard once in a conversation between my boss and a fellow male colleague that women should not enter out in to work, they should stay between the kitchen and the bedroom. I of course felt very uncomfortable by this comment and felt I had to take action. So I decided to bring it up with him and voice my concern regarding his comment, to which he responded with great embarrassment and regret. After that our relationship improved and he never made such comments again. I chose not to report

it, since these kinds of processes only result in self-harm and rarely punishes the guilty party.

4.3.3 Affirmative action– Swedish perspective

Affirmative action was an issue discussed by a group of respondents when speaking of discrimination and negative comments from colleagues. Even though it was not part of the interview guide it became an important factor discussed in several interviews. The main point being raised was that male colleagues had sometimes questioned the legitimacy of respondents' qualifications to receive a certain promotion, implying they had only received it because they are women, as a way to fill the quota.

> I have heard colleagues say that it was surely because she is a woman that she got the job.

> When you work in a world dominated by men you as a woman become a way to help the leaders fill a gender quota. Women fulfill are role that way. I know that I am where I am because of my credentials and qualifications, but I also know that I am a help to my male superiors in that way. I have never had a female manager. Promoting me gives him the opportunity to say: look here, a female manager that is not in an HR position.

Several women discussed the negative impacts these accusations can have on women trying to progress in their careers to more senior positions.

> Sometimes you have benefitted from a board group needing to bring in more women for the sake of statistics. You are a tick in the box for them. The disadvantage is that if the group already has a woman, some think then we don't need another one.

> I have felt it in a positive way yes, but also in a negative way. People start to question why you got the job and if you are just put there as a way to boost numbers, that puts your entire role into question. Affirmative action is the worst possible measure in my opinion.

4.3.4 Sexist comments from colleagues and managers– Chinese perspective

The respondents from China were very reluctant to share information regarding this topic, most provided a one word answer and made it clear the questions made them feel

uncomfortable. There was only one respondent that gave any indication of an issue and is cited below.

> To her knowledge no, she has not seen it in her department. In the engineering department however, where men are dominating, she has heard things from female colleagues. But not in her department.

4.3.5 Discrimination due to gender– Chinese perspective

Responses from Chinese respondents regarding the issue of discrimination within the company were not as open as the Swedish ones. A few of the respondents gave indications that there might be relevant experiences to discuss on this topic but no one felt comfortable to share however. Below, an example of the type of answer that was given is cited.

> Yes, I have felt discriminated. *Interviewer asks to give an example of when this has occurred.* No never, I believe Volvo has a good policy for this and it works very well. *Respondent asks interviewer to please move on to the next question.*

4.4 Gendered Identities

4.4.1 Affirmative action– Swedish perspective

Affirmative action also became a trending topic when discussing values and symbols with the Swedish respondents. The following quotes represent views and opinions of the respondents on this topic.

> I have experienced this issue both positively and negatively. From the positive perspective, I have felt that I have been offered roles and promotions because I happen to be a woman doing a good job in a field dominated by men. In those cases, however, the recruiting manager has not done so with the success of the team in mind but with the objective to improve his statistics. When that has happened and I have often received comments about affirmative actions and not receiving the promotion as a result of my credentials, which is not the case but it is many peoples' perception. By this you are stripped of your pride and respect. That has been the case for several women in my surroundings here at this company. It feels like you can't avoid questions like that.

I have benefited from this, yes. Sometimes you can get a nasty comment from men, saying that the only reason you got the promotion was because you are a woman, despite my extensive experience and knowledge in my field. It has come from colleagues, never superiors. They have always treated me with more kindness than their male subordinates, probably because I am a woman.

Another woman discusses the topic with a slightly different take on the situation, providing the following explanation:

You can tell some men find it refreshing to have women in their board groups. I am not sure though that it has been the basis of decision. I have never felt that I was promoted as an affirmative action. I don't think I have benefitted in any way by being a woman.

4.4.2 Manage like a man– Swedish perspective

Management styles became a popular topic during the interviews, indicating it is something many respondents have considered during their careers. More specifically they spoke about management style in terms of aggressiveness, the way you push your subordinates and the level of focus on hard target deliveries versus the well being of your staff. One respondent claimed to have dealt with this issue throughout her career within the company and provided the following statement:

No, I have never decided to alter my leadership style to be more male but it has happened multiple times that I have been asked or suggested to do so. I think that is something that has held me back in my career, that I have reached a certain level but not further. I have chosen not to fall in to the general line, that they wish I would. I have applied for the position above my current one and has been turned down both times. When asking why and what it is I need to improve on in order to gain such a position I have never really received any answer, there is nothing concretely I lack. My feeling is that it is because of management style, there is a glass ceiling for us who choose not to change.

4.4.3 Male communication– Swedish perspective

Communication style was a topic that was not stated in the interview guide as pre-decided issue due to lack of focus it received in existing theory regarding this field, however it mentioned by several of the Swedish respondents and therefore requires attention in this study. When respondents were asked about leadership styles the focused shifted to communication style in several cases, stating that the respondents have felt the need to alter the way they communicate in order to be heard by male colleagues.

> I have become more tactical in the way I communicate things in meetings with my male colleagues, because there are no other women in my board group. I have had to make my message and statements shorter and simpler, repeating them often until the message is heard. I think about my timing and I have lowered the tone of my voice, sounding less female and squeaky.

> I work in a field surrounded by almost only men, that is the way it has always been through my career. It may have shaped me as a person, that I act more male than female in some ways. There may not be many women as direct as me, comfortable demanding the presence as I do. It has been a method of survival in this male dominated environment. I have had to elbow my way forward. I don't really know the impact it has had on me. I have been surrounded by men since school, most of my friends are male. I like hanging out with men and I often make better friends with them than I do women. I am so used to being around men, I know how they communicate better than women.

One woman discusses the issue and mentions issues in her current role, struggling to be heard by her male colleagues since she received her last promotion and rising in seniority. Her experience is recorded below.

> I have had to change the direction of my personality, becoming less spontaneous and more correct. I have to make sure I am seen and heard in the board group. It happens often that a male colleague in the group will simply repeat what the boss recently said, just to receive attention and to speak. I don't think that adds anything to the discussion and is frankly quite pointless. Because I have chosen not to do so, some members of

the group have felt that I don't participate enough. That means I am forced to change or I will not be accepted as a member of the group.

A fellow Swedish respondent spoke of a similar experience that she went through a few years back.

I have felt this significantly during the last few years. I have had to enter a role and play that role much more than being myself in the role. I have felt that way in the board group I currently am a member of. When interacting with people on my level or above I have had to become a completely different person, much quieter, more reserved and passive. It has a lot to do with the individuals in your group, I know that, but it still causes large issues. I have had to learn to found my arguments with more information, use more words to explain my point, otherwise no one will even take the time to understand. Men seem to have a harder time paying attention when women speak, therefore I have tried to speak faster and straight to the point. That doesn't work though, I learned that I needed to slow down and take the time anyway.

When discussing this issue, two women discussed the communication style of the women around them, holding similar positions. They gave the following comments.

I have felt that way in the past but not as much anymore. I used to try to highlight my aggressive side, showing how tough and direct I am. My personality is straightforward and pushy by nature and so I didn't really need to.

I think you need to be pretty tough in your communication and overall personality to survive here. You have to be louder. If you look at the women around me that have succeeded in their careers, they are all extremely straight forward and stand up for themselves and their opinions.

### 4.4.4 Manage your manager– Chinese perspective

The issue of management styles was also discussed frequently by the Chinese respondents, however in a slightly different way than the Swedish. The focused mainly lied with the way a female employee of seniority manages the interaction with her superiors, and how to communicate with them. The following quote clearly demonstrates the interaction issues mentioned by some of the Chinese respondents.

If it is one thing that she has thought about during her time it is the how to manage your manager. She says one needs to prioritize time and effort away from your work and your team in order to manage your manager, to keep in good terms with him/her. It would be better for people's career development if this was not the case. That people could instead focus on their work and on their teams."

4.5 Summary of Empirical findings

The following two tables represent the main findings of the empirical findings presented in this chapter, showing both the Swedish perspective and the Chinese. Each substructure, according to Acker's (1990) framework, is followed by a presentation of the main findings in each category.

Summary of findings- Swedish perspective
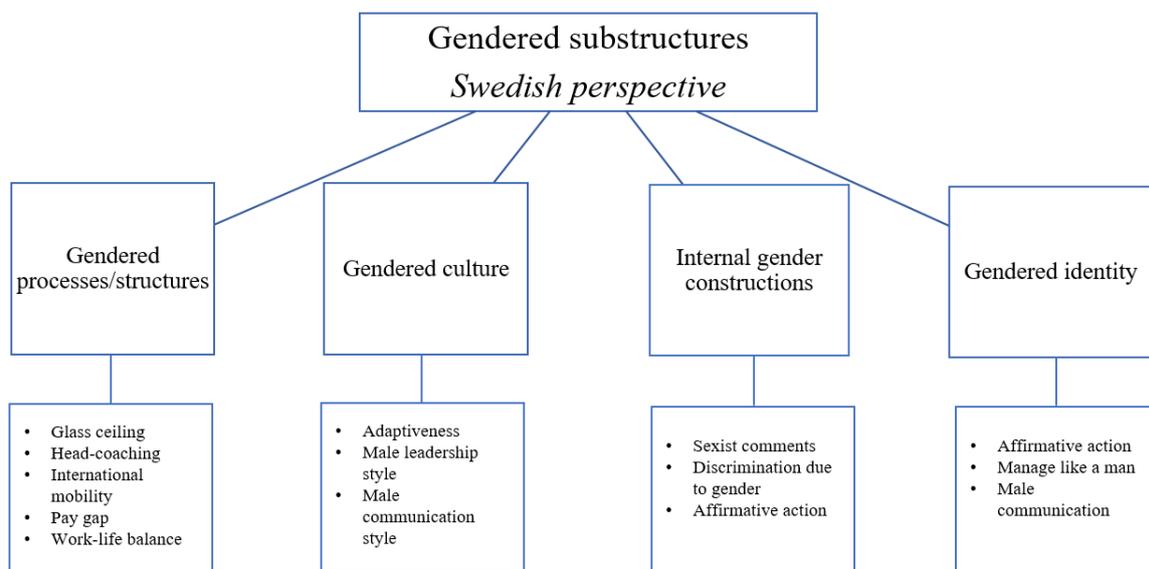
Source: Own compilation, based on Acker (1990) and empirical findings

Summary of findings- Chinese perspective
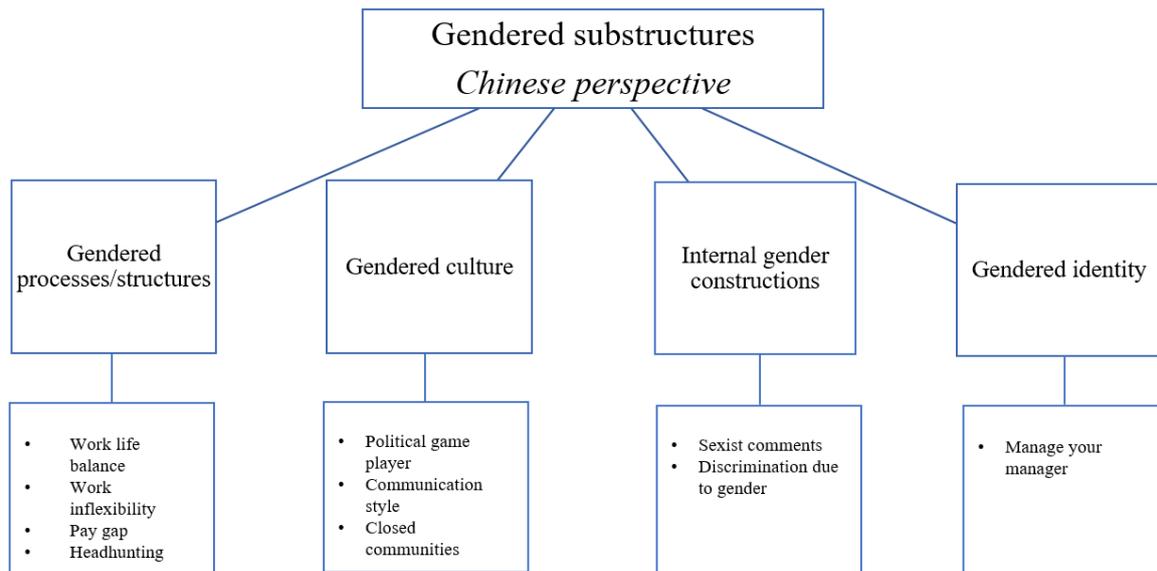
Source: Own compilation, based on Acker (1990) and empirical findings

The content of these figures is the foundation for the following analysis chapter, where each topic will be further discussed and analyzed.

5. Analysis

The analysis chapter is structured in accordance with the empirical findings, presenting further discussion and analysis of each theme identified. This is followed by a critical analysis of the theoretical framework itself, based on the findings of this study.

5.1 Gendered practices/ structures

The findings of this research clearly indicate that gendered practices and structures within the company do exist, both in the Swedish HQ organization and in the Chinese subsidiary organization. The main themes identified within the substructure follow the theoretical framework presented in chapter 3 closely. The topics related to this issue were of relatively neutral nature and the respondents therefore felt little need to filter their answers, something that became evident in the Chinese responses, that received more in depth answers than other topics did. The five identified themes from Swedish respondents will be analyzed, followed

by the four themes identified from the Chinese results and finally the results will be compared to identify possible similarities and differences.

The five themes identified in the Swedish results are the following: Glass ceiling, head coaching, international mobility, pay gap and work life balance. As presented in the previous result chapter, the mention of a glass ceiling emerged while discussing organizational processes and structures with Swedish respondents, stating that some women are held back at a certain point in the organizational hierarchy. The explanation of gendered substructures and gendered practices, specifically by Anderson and Tomaskovic-Devey (1995), follows in line with this finding, stating that promotional practices can work as gendering obstacles for women advancing in their careers. The results indicated that senior women within the organization have felt stuck in their positions, and as a result, some have chosen to leave the company entirely. This can of course be defined as an obstacle in the career progression of women, as that is the definition of a glass ceiling. The issue of a glass ceiling was not mentioned by the Chinese respondents and can therefore not be supported as an obstacle there.

 The second theme identified also related to the topic of promotional processes, in particular the concept of head coaching, which is a combination between the concept of being head hunted by a recruiting manager and being coached by your current manager to actively seek and accept promotions. This category also matches well with the theoretical framework presented for this study, as mentioned by Acker (1990) that recruiting processes and policies can act as gendering reproduction actions. By this, biased policies that are not gender neutral can be reproduced and cause more harm to the gender equality aspirations of the organization. In the case of this study it meant that many feel headhunting and personal promotions from direct managers is the dominant way of getting promoted in the company, something that acts as an obstacle for women more than men according to the respondents. By keeping more processes open for applications, not hiring a pre-decided candidate or skipping the process all together, would help eliminate the risk of finding yourself stuck below a manager that doesn't recognize your talent or push you to apply for positions outside your comfort zone, something the respondents felt women were less likely to do otherwise than men. This theme follows closely with the findings of the Chinese results on this subject, recognizing similar things. The only large difference here is the fact that the organization in China is less than a decade old and therefore most respondents had not been promoted often within the company, instead been headhunted from outside. Overall it shows that the way recruitment and promotions are handled are important aspects to consider when discussing gendered

substructures acting as barriers for career development for women, just as the theoretical framework stated (Acker, 1989).

The third theme that emerged by the Swedish respondents was the availability of international mobility for women. When asked to state any policies or rules set by the company that acted as barriers for women to advance to more senior positions this was the most commonly occurring response. The policy set by the company regarding this issue was according to the respondents mainly about international travel, both short and long term, being a requirement for advancing above a certain level within the company. As stated by researchers in this field, rules or policies that limit the opportunities for women to compete equally with men in an organization are part of the gendering practices that cause gender inequality (Dye, 2006). The Swedish respondents made the statements that women, with families in particular, are less likely to be able to meet the requirements of international travel, whether long or short term, for two reasons. Firstly, they are more likely to be responsible for child care in the home, making it harder to travel overnight on short notice or longer periods according to the respondents. Secondly, it is according to the respondents, less likely that women have spouses who are willing and able to support her in taking on a longer term international assignment and thereby handling the family either by staying at home or joining on the assignment.

The fourth theme that emerged during the interviews with Swedish respondents were the issues of salary gaps between the genders. All 13 Swedish respondents stated that they either had or currently suspect that they are underpaid compared to their male colleagues of comparable position. According to Acker (1999), the setting of salaries and wages are a part of creating gendered substructures within an organization, causing gender inequality and acting as barriers for career progression for women. This theme also emerged during the Chinese interviews, however with less explicit statements. Cultural differences can be the explanation for this, as the issue of pay could be considered private and less appropriate to discuss by some. Overall there were some Chinese respondents giving the indication that they suspect a pay gap and no one directly denied it, giving the conclusion that the possibility of gender inequalities existing in this area.

The fifth theme that was emphasized by both nationalities of respondents is work life balance. This appears to be a universal issue experienced by managers of a certain seniority in both parts of the organization. The main findings of the interviews showed that a senior position, such as those held by the respondents, include working hours that far exceed the regular 40-hour work week. In both groups of respondents, it became clear that working up to 60 hours or even more was a common occurrence in their lives. They also stated that this became an issue when trying to combine work with a family or private life, resulting in many women actively avoiding career advancements in order to maintain a successful home life. There were some differences between the respondents however, the Chinese respondents mainly focused on the issue from the perspective that a supportive network from home was the solution to the issue rather than the company adjusting their expectations. The Swedish respondents were more inclined to suggest that working hours should be shortened, allowing for more time at home with the family. When looking for linkage to this issue in the theoretical framework established it is most explicitly mentioned by Acker (1999) when she mentions the rules and expectations regarding work hours as a part of organizational processes that are gendered and act as an obstacle for women trying to advance in their careers. It is important to clarify that this issue is not necessarily only an issue for women, although it is a larger hurdle for women than men in general. Since societal structures still show that women typically take a larger responsibility for family and home life it becomes more damaging for their careers when it is not compatible with managing the family at the same time.

The sixth and final theme highlighted in this substructure is one only brought up by the Chinese respondents, relating to work inflexibility, however not spoken of by the Chinese respondents as a direct problem, rather something given that they did not even think to criticize. As opposed to the Swedish respondents, the Chinese respondents did not perceive any flexibility from the company regarding work location or working hour distribution. The concept of flexible working hours, working from home seemed to be perceived as given by the Swedish respondents but not at all by the Chinese. They stated it was part of the work culture in the entire society and not something specific to the company and did not see it as a shortcoming of the company. They did however state that it can in certain situations create difficulties of maintaining a successful home life if you lack the outside support, usually in the form of grand parents or other relatives. As Acker (1999) and Dye (2006) clearly state,

the issue of creating rules regarding work conditions that provide equal opportunities for men and women can create inequalities that prevent women from having a successful career.

5.2 Gendered culture

The first theme identified by the data analysis method on this topic was adaptiveness, being a political game player. According to Acker (1992a) the construction of gendered culture within an organization is built upon the perception of a competent successful organization. By this, cultural values are added to expectations of an employee and often they are of stereotypical hegemonic masculinity (Kanter, 1977). When examining the results gathered on this particular topic it becomes clear that the Company's culture is gendered in this way, attributing successful employees with traditionally masculine traits. Traits that were highlighted by the respondents from both China and Sweden include hunger for power, political game playing and being tough in interactions with subordinates. This phenomenon was mainly measured by having the respondents describe their idea of a successful career climber within the company, not their personal opinion of what a person should be like but rather the personal reflections on the characteristics of their colleagues and superiors, those who have been promoted. The issue of being a political game player and having a tough approach was mentioned by both set of respondents, however the Swedish respondents gave a stronger indication, giving more details and a larger proportion of respondents mentioned the topic. Whether this is a fair representation of the situation in China is hard to determine, it could also be contributed to the fact that the Chinese respondents gave less detailed and critical responses overall, making it difficult to determine overall.

The second theme identified on this topic relates to the leadership style of senior employees within the organization. This issue was mainly investigated by the interview question regarding leadership styles as perceived by the employees and if they ever felt the need to become more like their male colleagues and managers in this regard. This is closely connected to the discussion of masculine cultural values within an organization presented by Acker, (1999). While the Chinese respondents did not state necessarily that they connected the leadership style as being male, it closely resembled that of the Swedish responses. Several Swedish respondents stated that they felt pressured by the organization to be more male in their leadership style in order to achieve career success. By male leadership style they meant being result oriented rather than focusing on the overall process, pushing subordinates harder than some might deem appropriate, giving orders rather than discussing in certain situations

etc. Since the Chinese respondents did not connect these values with male leadership the same analysis cannot be made there, even though there are strong similarities.

The third theme identified by the topic of gendered culture relates to communication style, in particular male communication style. This issue is not clearly defined by the theoretical researchers presented in the theoretical framework and will therefore not be analysed until the last section of this analysis, highlighting shortcomings in the theoretical framework based on the findings of this study.

Closed communities acting as barriers for female career progression within the organization is the fourth issue, raised by the Chinese respondents. According to Acker (1999), promotional practices that limit chances for women to advance in their career

5.3 Internal gender constructions

Three themes emerged from the findings of Swedish respondents regarding the third substructure, which relates to internal gender constructions. The two first are also the main findings in the Chinese responses.

Both the Swedish and Chinese respondents discussed sexist comments from colleagues and managers through individual interactions as an issue when trying to develop in their careers. The sensitive nature of this topic and the fact that some might feel hesitant to be completely forthcoming when it comes to their current employer is important to keep in mind when analysing these results. While the Swedish respondents gave more detailed and descriptive results that might not necessarily mean they experience this issue more, it could also be a factor of cultural differences or the linguistic differences between the respondent and interviewer. When connecting this theme with the theoretical framework established it indicates that the previous research have touched upon the right areas according to the findings. As (Acker, 1992a) states, the people replicate gender as they do the ordinary work of the institution, meaning that it is the every day interactions between people in the organization that create gender differences and cause unequal treatment to occur. The Swedish respondents gave concrete examples of sexist comments from colleagues within the organization, a clear and definitive sign of gender differences within the organization. The Chinese respondents also touched upon this subject, however with less vivid descriptions and more vague responses, for example indicating to having heard of these types of issues but not experiencing them herself.

Discrimination due to gender through company interaction also emerged as a theme in both set of respondents, giving accounts of varying severity regarding discrimination. The Swedish respondents gave stronger statements are were more willing to talk about it overall, resulting in more detailed description than the Chinese. Once again it is important to remember that this might not necessarily be a true representation of reality, it could also have other causes, such as cultural differences and fear of speaking negatively regarding one's employer. There were however some definitive indications in the Chinese results that argue there are layers of truth to this issue. When connecting this theme to the theoretical framework established previously it shows strong similarities. Acker (2012) exemplifies this issue by speaking of being overlooked for promotions and being objectified in a way that limits the perceived capacity to do a job. Overall, none of the respondents spoke of direct discrimination coming from the company itself. Instead they spoke of attitudes of certain people and groups, which puts the emphasize on individual interactions. This is also discussed by Dye (2006) and she paints a very similar picture. By focusing on communication between groups and individuals and fighting harmful power distances the issue of gender inequality can best be fought, as that is where the main issue lies.

Affirmative action emerged as a theme in the Swedish responses even though it was not directly included in the interview guide from which the interviews were conducted. Respondents mainly brought it up when they were asked if they had experienced feeling that the fact that they happen to be women as something positive or negative when trying to advance on the career ladder. Several respondents then began explaining their account of affirmative action and their opinion of it. Even though there is no affirmative action currently enforced within the company, diversity initiatives to promote more women and even out the gender distribution in senior positions can be considered a form of action that gives an advantage to female colleagues. The responses given by the Swedish respondents include different experiences but a common theme seemed to be their disapproval of affirmative measures overall, saying that male colleagues sometimes question your credentials and that harms the respect you are given in the group. Therefore, such measures end up harming the credibility of the women in such positions overall. There is no mention of affirmative action within the framework used in the theoretical chapter but it still has close connections to the theory.

5.4 Gendered Identities

Affirmative action also became a well-discussed theme within the substructure of Gendered identities. Since the topic does not have direct links to the theoretical framework the discussion still applies.

The second theme that emerged from this substructure relates to managing styles, and how they relate to traditionally male and female styles more specifically. The Swedish respondents showed indications of experiencing pressure to become more male in leadership style in order to achieve success within a senior position. The term *manage like man* was mentioned several times. Acker (2012) brings up this very term in her discussion of gendered identities in organizations. She speaks of the same issues mentioned by some of the respondents, such as for example feeling pressured to act less sensitive and more assertive in order to be accepted by colleagues. It is important to bear in mind however that ideas of gendered identities are not always a true representation. As several of the respondents mentioned, women do not always display features of female qualities and the same is true for men. This does not however marginalize the importance and relevance of this issue, as expectations regarding behavior and identity can cause inequality between sexes. When women feel forced to act more traditionally male in their leadership roles it excludes all that do not. As presented in the empirical findings on this issue, some Swedish respondents felt that were held back in their career because they have chosen not to change their leadership style to be more aggressive and pushy.

The third theme that emerged from the study on this particular topic with the Swedish respondents relates to male communication. This topic was not intentionally included in the interview guide but still became an important topic in several interviews. The main findings show that there seems to be communication issues that cause women to be less successful in their career climbing than their male colleagues. The respondents spoke of feeling unheard and pushed aside during meetings for example, not necessarily because the male colleagues did not want to listen but rather that the communication style used by the women was unsuccessful. There is little attention put to this issue in theoretical framework by Acker and her fellow researchers on this issue and it is therefore hard to draw analysis outside the empirical findings. The shortcomings of this topic are discussed further down.

The forth theme that emerged in the empirical findings regarding this substructure was the Chinese respondents' discussion of managing your manager. Several Chinese respondents gave personal accounts of how they felt the importance of managing styles when it comes to

superiors on a certain level. They experienced a difference once they reached more senior positions and had to focus more effort on maintaining that relationship rather than just focusing on performing their job tasks. Feeling the pressure to adapt ones managing style is discussed by Acker (1999) in her theoretical framework, highlighting the issue that arises when gendered identities create expectations for how employees of each sex should behave and what is desired by the organization. She does not connect it to communication styles in this regard and it is therefore hard to draw any analysis from the framework.

5.5 Shortcomings of theoretical framework

The main shortcoming of the theoretical framework presented, as perceived when analysing the empirical data, is the lack of focus on communication style when discussing gendering practises within an organization. The topic mainly surfaced when discussing gendered culture with the respondents, both Swedish and Chinese, but it can be connected to other substructures within the field as well. Several respondents stated that they felt hindered by the lack of success while communicating with superiors and colleagues on a very senior level within the organization, mainly men as they dominate this area in numbers. Some respondents also stated that they felt ignored and deprioritized during meetings, mentioning communication difficulties as the main contributing factor for this issue. Overall, this leads to the conclusion that communication, in some cases male communication, should receive more attention in current research on the topic of gendered substructures.

Affirmative action also arose as a relevant topic during interviews but has received little focus in the current research field. As it is a topic frequently discussed in media and politics it is not surprising it was on the mind of several Swedish respondents. The implications of having affirmative measures in place in an organization is something that could be further researched in order to provide a more extensive framework for this issue in the future.

6. Conclusion

This chapter is dedicated towards answering the research question established in chapter 1, followed by an explanation of company implications and finally a recommendation for future research.

6.1 Summary and theoretical contribution

As presented in the beginning of this thesis, the role of women in organizations have undergone significant changes in the past century, redefying the previous gender roles that

hindered women from entering into the labour force on equal terms. Despite these significant changes however, gender discrimination and inequality can still be found in organizations today, many with outspoken and defined gender equality initiatives that should work to address this very issue. In order to change out-dated prejudices and ultimately achieve what is set out in company gender equality initiatives, the first step has to be identifying what the current problems actually are and focusing efforts on those points.

It was with this mind-set in place that the purpose and research question of this thesis was born. The main research question was the following:

> *How do gendered substructures in an automotive MNC organization affect barriers to career progression for women to reach senior positions?*

The chosen company for this single case study was chosen due to several reasons, mainly its size, location and current gender distribution among senior positions. The company is a large multinational corporation, making it suitable for examining gender issues on a larger international scale. The location was the second critical criteria, as it required to have operations in geographically and culturally dispersed areas for comparisons. This topic was the foundation for the research sub question and will therefore be elaborated and discussed further below. The third criteria that needed to be met was the current gender distribution within senior positions, as it needed to be representative of a company with gender distribution differences, or the purpose of this thesis would be reduced to nothing.

As the research model presented in chapter 2.3 shows, the theoretical assumptions that laid the foundation for the study is built upon two pillars. The first pillar is the theoretical basis of gendered organizational theory and the second is barriers to career progression for women in organizations that is supposedly link to this theoretical framework. The goal of the study was therefore to see whether barriers to career progression for women within the chosen organization could be identified and explained using gendered organizational theory. The four fundamental factors that together constitute gendered substructures according to the theoretical framework became important building stones for the entire study, defining the context of which the direction of the study would take. The four substructures were first thoroughly investigated and examined in the theoretical chapter, resulting in the interview guide presented in the methodology chapter. The empirical findings that came out of those interviews could then be analysed using the theoretical framework again, identifying both similarities and differences from the theory.

The outcome of this analysis is the answer to the research question, indicating how gendered substructures as defined in gendered organizational theory really can be used to identify and explain barriers to career progression for women in MNCs. The answer is that it can be used and all the four gendered substructures were recognized as important for this determination, however to a varying degree. As presented in the theoretical chapter, previous research on this topic has identified one gendered substructure as particularly significant when discussing gender issues in organizations. It is the substructure concerning gendering practises and structures and it was the topic that received the richest data from the respondents. The main themes that were identified include mention of a glass ceiling, work-life balance and head-coaching amongst others, following closely in line with the theoretical framework. The other three substructures could all also be supported as factors that create barriers to career progression for women. The themes identified in each substructure helps map out the overall identification of barriers, presented in the empirical summaries of chapter 4. Overall, it draws theoretical conclusions of two kinds, the study provides empirical confirmation to strengthen credibility of gendered organizational theory used in these types of cases and it provides more empirical data to extend knowledge within the framework.

The following sub question used to examine differences between the different parts of the organization is stated below:

> *How do such barriers differ between women employed in the home country organization and those employed in a foreign subsidiary?*

The research sub question has been used to add contextual layers to this study and to thoroughly investigate the representativeness of results in one part of the organization to another. The main conclusion that can be drawn from this study, using the results analysed in the previous chapter, is that results corresponds to a large degree between culturally disperse parts of the organization. There were some interesting differences in results as well, indicating both cultural and company differences, proving that gender equality issues in MNCs need to be addressed with a set of both local and global efforts.

When connecting these results with the knowledge field within International management there are several points that can be worth emphasizing. Firstly, the unique application of the theoretical framework Gendered organizational theory in context chosen in this study provides new practical and concrete evidence of where gender bias in MNCs actually occur. Secondly, by proving that these types of issues are present in a European Automotive MNC

that states to have values that stand for equality between the sexes etc., practical relevance of this issue could help to be proven and in turn be given more focus in company agendas and strategies. Thirdly, by conducting the study in two different parts of a MNC that are geographically and culturally dispersed this study can help provide new knowledge to the gender organizational studies field in an international context. By presenting both similarities and differences between the two parts in the organization the complex nature of this topic being studied in MNCs can be practically demonstrated.

6.2 Company implications

The findings of this study have resulted in numerous insights for the chosen case study company to move forward with in their gender diversity efforts. The four gendered substructures with underlying themes identified through this case study have given them a guiding map into where resources and efforts should be aimed. When looking at the summarized tables of findings on page 53-54 this study has been successful in highlighting specific and concrete issues that MNCs can work on improving in order to achieve higher gender equality within their organization. This is especially valuable as it relates to an issue that can often be described as abstract and hard to put to words.

The second contribution that this study brought for the company in terms of identifying barriers for career progression for women in the MNC relates to the research sub question. The main purpose of the sub question was to gain additional knowledge of the global company situation, while still remaining within the resource constraints of the study. By choosing a location far from the HQ location both culturally and physically, it gave the study an opportunity to test the homogeneity of the issue in the entire company. In order to draw certain conclusions for the company globally in the end, further research in other parts will need to be conducted, however this has given a good starting point and indication of where they are. As the results of the study showed, there are strong similarities between the groups, indicating that many efforts could be generalized outside the HQ location, while some showed cultural aspects that need to be handled on a more local level. Efforts focusing on closing the pay gap between sexes is an example of global efforts that could be applied also in other regions of the MNC, as they showed close connectedness between the culturally and geographically dispersed areas of focus in this study. Work flexibility however, proved to be a more culturally dependent subject, where generalizing measures taken in one country could not be easily transferred to the other. In this case the Chinese organization could easily adapt

to the home country organization´s ideas of working from home and flex time. Overall it gives the conclusion that these efforts need to be addressed with both global and local efforts.

6.3 Limitations

This thesis is limited in certain ways, important clarifications that should be kept in mind while examining the outcome of it. The first limitation is related to language and geographical distance between the respondents and author of this thesis. Since the Chinese portion of the interviews had to be conducted in English, which is not the native language of the respondents, it may have limited the depth of responses that were given. It should also be mentioned that cultural differences could have an impact on the filtering of responses given by the respondents in the interviews. This means that all similarities and differences between the two groups of respondents can perhaps not be completely accredited to the findings of the study in a theoretical way, it could also indicate cultural differences.

The second limitation of this study is the fact that it was conducted using two separate geographical locations for interviews when the company has operations in many more regions. Even though this does not limit the possibilities to fulfil the purpose of the study, it does mean generalizations of the global company overall should be done carefully.

The third limitation of this study relates to the non-selection of male respondents. As is discussed in the delimitations section in the beginning of the thesis, the choice was made for several reasons with the final aim of achieving the purpose of the study. This does however mean that one aspect of this issue was not included, that of male respondents and comparisons between the sexes in this regard.

6.4 Recommendations for future research

As empirical studies regarding gendered organizational theory in international contexts are still very few there are many areas upon which future research could be based. However, when restricting the context to that of this study certain areas stand out as particularly interesting for further examination.

Since this study was conducted in a single case study method, mainly due to limited resources, it would be valuable to extend this methodological approach to multiple case studies, both in the same industry but also in other industries. By looking at MNCs with the looking glasses

of gendered organizational theory, further knowledge could be obtained and gender issues in organizations on a global base could be better addressed.

As previously discussed, the issue of gendered substructures in organizations could be further investigated by also including men in the study. The concept of gendered organizational theory does not only indicate gender bias towards women but also towards men. By altering the selection of respondents to also include men, interesting comparisons between the sexes could be made.

This study was conducted with the focus on gender distribution in *senior positions* for several reasons that were discussed in the beginning of this thesis. This does however mean that gender distribution on mid- and lower levels could not be applied in a similar way. Suggestions for future research do therefore include single case studies that look upon the gender issues on all levels in an organization as well as multiple case studies that investigate certain levels in more than one organizational context.

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Appendix 1

Interview Guide

Introduction

- Thank the respondent for participating.
- Introduce myself and the study.
- Present the purpose of the study without giving away too many details.
- Ask for permission to record.
- Explain expectations from the respondent during the interview as well as rights of the respondent.
- Clarify anonymity and confidentiality for the respondent.
- Ask respondent to state their name and position within the company.

Warm up questions

- How did you begin your career within Volvo Cars?
- In which department do you work?
- How long have you been working there?
- How old are you?

Organizational processes

- How does the organisation inform about openings in senior positions?
- Is the hiring process for a new management position open to all employees within the department?
- Does everyone receive the same information regarding new openings?
- Do you feel you have been treated equally to your male colleagues when advancing in your career to new positions?
- Do you feel family related obligations are considered a disadvantage when advancing to new positions within the company?
- Do you feel that your superiors have been open to adapt your work environment in order for you to successfully manage your career as well as your family obligations?
- Are there any rules (implicit or explicit) set by the company that have worked as obstacles for you or your female colleagues while trying to advance within the company?

Gendered Culture

- What words would you use to describe a successful manager within Volvo Cars?
- What attributes would you say have helped you reach a senior position within the company?
- Have you ever felt that you had to alter your personality/leadership style in order to reach success in your position? If so, what did you change?

Interactions between individuals?

- Have you ever felt discriminated against by a male colleague because of your sex?
- Have you ever experienced negative comments from a colleague regarding your work capacity in relation to your sex?
- Have you ever felt that your superiors have looked upon your sex as a negative aspect when evaluating your fitness for a new position?

Gendered identity

- Have you ever felt that your sex is an advantage/disadvantage when trying to advance to a more senior position?
- Have you ever felt the need to adopt your leadership style to more closely resemble your male colleagues?
- What personal characteristics do you believe are the reason you have succeeded to advance to a senior position within the company?

Personal reflections

- In your opinion, are there any specific areas where you feel the company could improve in order to improve the overall chances for women to reach senior positions?

End

- Thank the respondent for answering the questions and sharing their experience.

Appendix 2

Letter of invitation to respondents

Göteborg 15/3-2017

Swedish version

Hej,

Mitt namn är Johanna Kjellsson och jag är mastersstudent på Handelshögskolan i Göteborg. Jag skriver nu min masteruppsats i samarbete med - centrala HR-avdelning. Som ämne på uppsatsen har jag i samverkan med min handledare -, Sr Expert Culture & Diversity, valt att fokusera på könsfördelningen på högre chefspositioner inom företaget. Målet är att identifiera möjliga orsaker som ligger bakom den relativa underrepresentationen av kvinnor. Studien är uppdelad i två geografiska grupper där den ena består av kvinnor inom den svenska organisationen och den andra av kvinnor inom organisationen i Kina. Förhoppningen är att kunna ge en helhetsbild av de faktorer som bidrar till att kvinnor i lägre utsträckning når högre chefspositioner än män samt att kunna jämföra utfallet mellan olika delar av organisationen.

Jag skriver därför till dig som kvinna inom - som har nått en högre chefsposition och undrar om du skulle vara intresserad av att delta i studien och bidra med dina synpunkter och erfarenheter? Intervjun är självklart helt anonym och kommer inte att användas i ett enskilt avseende utan bara för att skapa en generell förståelse och upplysning kring resan kvinnor inom - gör på vägen till en högre chefsposition.

Intervjuerna uppskattas ta ungefär 30 min och kommer att äga rum under mars månad, på en tid som passar respondenten.

Tack så mycket för din tid och uppmärksamhet. Om du skulle önska mer information kring studien eller har några frågor finns jag tillgänglig på mailadressen -

Vänliga Hälsningar

Johanna Kjellsson

English version

Dear Madame,

My name is Johanna Kjellsson and I am currently a Masters student at the Gothenburg School of Business and Economics. As the final part of my studies I am conducting a master thesis in collaboration with - HR function. The topic of my thesis has been developed in accordance with the advice and wishes of my supervisor -, Sr Expert Culture & Diversity and focuses on the gender distribution of senior positions within -. The aim is to identify underlying factors that contribute to the relative underrepresentation of women in senior positions. The study is divided in two separate geographical groups where one consists of women in senior positions from the Swedish organisation and the other of women from the

organisation in China. By doing so we hope to be able to provide an accurate overview of the factors that in the end leads to less women reaching senior positions within the company as well as comparing the results from different parts of the organisation.

It is with this background I write to you as a woman holding a senior position within - and want to ask if you would be interested in participating in this study? It would be valuable to this research if you would contribute with your insights and experiences and the answers will only be used to provide a general understanding of the journey a woman goes through on her way to a senior position. The interview will of course be held completely anonymously and will not take more than approximately 30 minutes.

The interviews will be held during the month of March, at a time that is convenient to the respondent.

Thank you very much for your time and attention. If you would like to know more about the study or have any questions I am available through my email address -.

Kind Regards

Johanna Kjellsson