



# **SENSE-MAKING OF IMMIGRANT'S EMPLOYABILITY IN THE CLEANING SECTOR**

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Program:	Master Program in Strategic HRM and labour relations
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Supervisor:	María José Zapata Campos
Examiner:	Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist
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# Abstract

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Purpose: The purpose of this research is to study immigrant labour integration, particularly in the cleaning business sector.

Theory: The theoretical framework is based on Karl Weick sensemaking concept combined with the employability concept, as tools to analyse the process, interactions and results of identity construction of immigrants to search and get job particularly in the cleaning sector. As an attempt to understand this from a micro to a macro level, Dual labour market theory from Doeringer and Pierre is also used as an analytical tool.

Method: This is a qualitative inductive research.

Result: The results suggest that the personnel practices in cleaning companies is influenced by the size and the recruitment of the organization. Two types of recruitment practices were found a purposively recruitment based on ethnical background and standard open recruitment. These two types of recruitment lead to a homogeneous and heterogeneous organizational model based on ethnical diversity.  
Regarding immigrant's employability the search for job is a process that entails to visualise themselves into an occupation within their abilities and limitations of the new context. The cleaning sector is an easy entrance to the labour market, but in a long run this career path limits their transition to primary sectors occupations. As immigrant employees in this sector do not develop or improve any skill in this occupation and end with the same skills as they entered to work.

# Foreword

This is a Master thesis within the frame of the Master Programme in Strategic HRM and Labour Relations. This study is an attempt to provide a deeper insight on immigrant labour integration, particularly in one of the sectors that is considered low skilled, but at the same time provides essential functionality to the society, the cleaning sector.

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## Introduction

The aim of this research is to explore the occupational immigrant integration in the cleaning sector. In order to do so, it examines how immigrants make sense of their employability and end up in that particular sector, and what are personnel manager's practices in cleaning companies where immigrant employees work.

The unemployment rate among people born outside Sweden, is higher than for Swedish born people. For foreign born it was 32.2% while for people born in Sweden it was 16.9% (SBC, 2014). In 2015 16% of the Swedish population was born outside Sweden. Simultaneously, low skilled occupations such as pizza bakers and other home personal services or the cleaning sector (SCB, 2015) offer an easy entrance for immigrants to the Swedish labour market. Particularly, the cleaning sector in Sweden happen to have in their labour force more than 50% people with foreign background, and more than 75% are women (Almega Branschrapport, 2016).

However, despite allowing immigrants getting a first contact with the labour market, the labour mobility towards other sectors for foreign born employees appears to be lower or even non-existent. Occupations such a cleaning, rarely offers full-time employment and the entry wages are low. This cause limited opportunities to develop professionally, as well as result in occupational segregation for foreign born people.

To get a job it is one important condition to survive and be part of the host society. Yet, how this integration shapes the employability of immigrants in a larger scale is a key aspect to understand the labour integrational process in the long run. This situation also opens the question to explore the conditions in which this sector works and employs people.

The study of immigration has become an extremely significant issue for policy makers and scholars, especially when the last decades have been characterized by an intensive flow of people due to the several refugee crises and the free movement of people within the European Union. Particularly, immigration starts to become an issue when people remain unemployed and have difficulties to integrate in the labour market, and thus is economically limited and socially isolated from the host society.

The migration among Nordic countries has been a historical constant variable. Particularly in Sweden before the 60's, a shortage in the industry sector ended with the recruitment of foreign labour force, from Nordic countries but mainly east European countries (Bevelander, P.,1999; Rooth, D., 1999; Knocke,2000; Lemaître, G.,2007; Dahlstedt, I., & Bevelander, P.,2010). Decades later the economy was gradually restructured and a new business model was emerging requiring specific and higher skills. The immigrants brought previously found challenging to transit into the labour market, simultaneously, in the 90's numerous of people came to Sweden as refugees and political asylum seekers. This increased the need to transform the previous migration policy to an integration policy (Lemaître, G.,2007; Wiesbrock, A. ,2011).

Previous literature that has focused on immigrant labour integration, has used a human capital approach to describe and measure foreign born population in terms of investments on education, age, civil status, or language skills (Bevelander, P., 1999,2001; Höglund,1998). This type of research provides through description of the different factors that affect the foreign-born population. Yet do not cover a further explanation of *how* these factors collude to situate immigrant's difficulties to transit to higher skilled jobs. The existing literature, has undermined deeper understandings on the experiences and perceptions that immigrant's employees in the cleaning sector develop and enact in terms of employability.

Regarding the cleaning occupation, previous studies have revealed how cleaning, is an occupation that traditionally has been stereotyped as a woman's job, low skilled or immigrant job (Duffy, 2007; Bradley and Healey, 2008). The cleaning branch in Sweden at least statistically follows the same pattern.

This qualitative and exploratory study, comes to bridge the gap in the literature. It is carried out in the city of Gothenburg, the second largest city in Sweden, to understand the occupational integration from the experiences of immigrants working in the cleaning sector. The study is based on semi-structured interviews with immigrant employees, as well as personnel managers and CEOs in cleaning companies, to examine employee's perceptions and experiences of their employability in the Swedish labour market and particularly in the cleaning sector.

The focus in this research are immigrant employees in cleaning companies. The inclusion of managers in cleaning companies, has the intention to complement the study in order to achieve a



more holistic overview of the immigrants' working conditions. As considering the personnel management practices as the organisational setting where they work takes place. The study's underlying assumption is that employees are affected by the organizations in which they work, as also the managers' concerns shape the employees.

The analytical tool used in this research, consists of Weick's (1995) sensemaking concept, based on how persons construct reality and attach meanings to their actions; and the employability concept in a broader approach that goes beyond the individual's skills to get a job, but also the society context and the labour market (McQuaid, R., Green, A., & Danson, M., 2005). Finally, Dual Labour market theory from Doeringer and Pierre (1970) also has been used to discuss at a macro level perspective the role of the cleaning business in the Labour Market.

### 1.1 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this research is to study immigrant labour integration, particularly in the cleaning business sector. Guided by the following research question:

*How do immigrants make-sense of their labour integration in the cleaning business?*

The main question is subdivided in two sub-research questions:

1. *What are the personnel management practices in cleaning companies where immigrant employees work?*
2. *How do immigrants working in cleaning companies make sense of their employability?*

### 1.2 The cleaning sector in Sweden

The cleaning sector in Sweden from 2000 until 2010 has grown by 20%, and from 2005 to 2014 with 16%. Just in 2010 it corresponded to 1.5% of the service sector in Sweden (SCB, 2012), which at that time the total service sector was 74% (Almega AB). This sector has around 2638 companies, 55000 employees and reported sales around 29 billion Swedish crowns (SEK) in 2015/2016 (Almega Branschrappport, 2016). A growing business services, that depends on their human capital that mostly consists of women with foreign background immigrants.

### 1.3 Disposition

The first section of the thesis will focus on the links to previous research in cleaning as an occupation and immigration in Sweden. A following section will describe the theoretical framework based on the concepts of employability, dual market theory and make sense theory as tools to understand the different aspects involved in the immigrant labour integration. A third

section explains the methodology used in this research; the fourth the empirical findings of the personnel management as a form to introduce the cleaning branch current position in Gothenburg and the employee's empirical findings are presented as a testimony of how people make sense of their employability in Sweden. Thereafter, the findings are discussed under the prism of the theoretical framework. Finally, the conclusions are presented.

## 2 Literature Review: Immigration and labour market

This section presents previous research about the immigrant situation and the development of the cleaning business internationally, and more particularly in Sweden. Then, the situation of the labour integration of immigrants in Sweden as a context, which is necessary to understand the migration phenomenon in Sweden.

### 2.1 Cleaning as Occupation

The background for cleaning as an occupation, has a historical connection to the development of the domestic work concept (or also called “reproductive labour”), which refers to house work as cleaning or cooking, but also to the care of family members, primarily done by women (Harris, J., & White, V. 2013). It has been a debate since the last century among feminist schools and economists, first to acknowledge that the traditional household chores and family members care, is *work*, and from a capitalist perspective produce a service in form of functionality and well-being, and that it is based on a class hierarchy (Duffy, 2007).

Otherwise as Anderson (2000) argue, the depreciation of the domestic work will neglect the social and economic contribution to preserve our societies and homes as part of it. The debate follows a division of domestic work, between *unpaid* domestic work and *paid* domestic work. The academic significance of unpaid domestic work, has been used to highlight the existence of gender labour division, and women's downgraded role (Duffy, 2007; Lutz, 2008). On the other hand, paid domestic labour has been studied from the intersectionality perspective to expose, that besides gender, there are other characteristics, such as ethnical group belonging, used as detriment for certain social groups (Bradley and Healey, 2008).

Regarding paid domestic labour, scholars has developed research based on the narratives of people working within the informal market. Informal markets are subject to low wages, difficult working conditions, as living in the work place, and most of the job is done by illegal immigrants, in the case of United States (Parreñas, R., 2001; Aguiar, et al., 2006; Lutz, 2008) and some European

countries as Spain, Italy, Germany and the UK (Andersson B, 2000, 2010, 2015; Cox, Rosie., 2006; Lutz, 2008).

In the Swedish context, Thörnquist has studied informal organizations using temporary immigrant workers mainly from Poland and the Baltic states in cleaning, but also in the construction sector (2011; 2015; 2015a) in which temporary workers are not under the Swedish collective agreements, and this has as consequence lower wages and working conditions that also affect other regulated competitors.

In the formal market, Bowman & Cole (2014), have criticized the stigmatized situation of the cleaning business, and claiming in the Swedish context that cleaning is a decent job and with fair working conditions, this study also departs from a traditional organization perspective taking in consideration the structure of organization. Despite the relevance of these previous studies in the Swedish context, a perspective from the employees' perceptions is missing in the literature, since most research has focused on the macro and organizational levels of occupational segregation and integration

## 2.2 Immigration and occupational integration in Sweden

The phenomenon of migration in Sweden, has had different phases. Before the 70's, it responded to a shortage in the industrial sector. After the 70's, a new type of migration started coming to Sweden; refugees and asylum seekers. In the 90's, an economic crisis affected immigrants in Sweden but also, caused changes to the economic structure; from an industrial economy to a knowledge-based economy; from producing products to produce services (Scott, K., 1999; Rooth, D. 1999; Knocke, 2000). It is important to highlight that most of the immigrant labour force was concentrated in the industry sector, henceforth their position in the labour market was affected.

There is an extensive literature that describes immigrant's position in the Swedish labour market, especially after the 90's due to lower employment rate in comparison to native Swedish people. The most prevalent approaches are based on quantitative studies using variables such educational level, income, age, gender, job applications forms and recruitments (Scott, K., 1999; Bevelander, P., 2001; Andersson Jona., 2011; Svanberg, J., 2011). The results of these research point out the immigrant's problem in finding a job because of lower skills or skills that are not transferable between countries (Bevelander, P., 2001).

From human capital theory, certain conditions, such as low skill qualifications do not allow immigrants to get into the labour market or in better jobs. As lack of knowledge in the Swedish language and how labour market works; low or non-existent social contacts, are triggers for immigrants to take jobs classified as low skilled, and have difficulties to mobilize to better skilled and paid jobs (Bevelander, P., 1999). The last condition of low or non-existent social contacts has been seen among scholars as a type of discrimination for certain ethnical groups (Höglund, 1998 on Bevelander, P., 2001). Other studies also highlight the difficulty of immigrants for revalidate their studies in the Swedish system and the need of having a Swedish education (Andersson, Per & Osman, Ali, 2008; Joyce, P., 2015).

In this sense, through the job search theory, it is explained that immigrants are in the same condition as a native Swedish person that is entering to the labour market for the first time or re-entering to the Swedish labour market (Bevelander, P., 2001). However, a native Swede that is entering the labour market for the first time, counts probably with a higher social connection, and thus the social connection is related to an informal, but common recruitment process. This is a characteristic that immigrants do not possess or is negligible (Behtoui, A., 2008). In other words, immigrants are not completely in the same position as Swedes in the process of entering to the labour market for the first time.

As the highlighted approaches put the responsibility of entering the labour market on the individual, other studies focus on the migration as a social phenomenon and question the one side approach (Piore, 1979). In the literature, there is limited research that focuses on a more comprehensive approach that studies the experiences of migrants in Sweden. There is a case in the municipality of Strömsund about integration of immigrants by Cvetkovic (2009) and another study case from Svanberg (2011) about recruitment of Yugoslav workers to Svenska Fläktfabriken in 1969-1970. These studies described past processes of immigrant's recruitment and experimental integration policies.

Finally, in the case of the cleaning business, it is still open to discussion and insight of the immigrant experience in this sector through their own experiences, and the setting in which they work.

### 3 Theoretical framework

The understanding of immigrant integration in the local labour market, requires an approach that comes back and forth the societal and the individual level of analysis. On one hand the sense making concept provides a useful framework to study organizations from an inside human experience, understanding perceptions and meaning creation that together with the employability concept is later used to explain the process of choosing career path and the conditions of the cleaning sector. The dual market theory provides a tool to differentiate the setting in the Swedish domestic labour.

#### 3.1 Employability

The literature around the concept employability is diverse and with a large trajectory among the scholars. Efforts to define the concept of employability and understand its historical development are found in the works of Gazier (2001) and McQuaid, R. W., and Lindsay, C (2005), which offer an overview from the first decades of the last century until what it has become and has used in the present literature. Therefore, context is one variable that modifies the employability concept (McQuaid 2005).

During industrialism organizations produce goods a to certain market, which implies a one side direction relationship (Norman, 2001), in that sense organizations need people to work and people was classified either as available or not available to work, which was one of the first assumptions of employability (Gazier, 2001). As in the following decades, the relationship changed in favour of a customer based management, in which customer becomes an active actor in the relationship (Norman 2001), creates a need for more qualified and skill personal, hence employability has a focus on individuals and their capabilities.

In a contemporary time, a new change in the value creation by organization arises; a knowledge-based economy in which customers also become co-creators (Norman 2001) and personnel becomes an asset for organizations (Boxal and Purcell, 2011). At this point, employability still has focus on the individual and it capabilities, but also on the ability to adapt and be flexible in relation to organizations' needs and circumstances (Gazier on McQuaid 2005; Sanders, J., & De Grip, A. 2004).

There are some questions that changed the approach to the employability concept: first; Who is responsible for people employability? As certain groups, cannot get access to the demands of the

labour market as older generations, immigrants or different social groups have a disadvantage (McQuaid, R., Green, A., & Danson, M.2005). But also, the question about the end of lifetime employment and a new flexibility era for employees and employers (Forrier, A. and Sels, L.,2003; Sanders, J., & De Grip, A.,2004) therefore, the study of employability took two approaches as theory and as policy making.

As policy making employability has been directed to combat unemployment and to measure employability. Some authors suggest that the policy definition focuses on readiness of people to work and keep employed (McQuaid, R., Green, A., & Danson, M.2005). The Canadian board of education for example, defines it as “*the skills to enter, stay in, and progress in the world of work*” (The conference Board of Canada, 2017), while the European Strategy *Europe 2020* also sees employability as a key aspect to increase people rate of employment, and defines it as “*combination of soft skills or job-specific skills that enables individuals to process of enter into employment, stay in employment and progress during their careers*” (Cedefop, 2008). In this perspective employability is the responsibility of the individuals and their ability to get the necessary skills to get a job, keep a job or transfer their skills.

The theoretical perspective brings a broader concept of employability that considers the individual’s skills, but also their social context and the local labour market (Hillage, J., & Pollard, E., 1998; Houston, D., 2005; McQuaid, R., 2006; Thijssen, J. G., Van der Heijden, B. I., & Rocco, T. S., 2008). One main characteristic from the theoretical perspective is that employability does not only depend on the individuals, but other factors that interact and form a system. The position in the system of each person, determines the possibility of people for getting a job or transfer their abilities.

There are three main components in this broader employability concept. First the individual, which comprehend the series of skills and qualifications that possess, the ability to search relevant work and how to introduce or present itself to the alternatives (Hillage, J., & Pollard, E., 1998; McQuaid, R., 2006; Thijssen, J. G., Van der Heijden, B. I., & Rocco, T. S., 2008). These characteristics are not exclusively to people unemployed but people in general (Forrier, A. and Sels, L., 2003). The second component is society, the implications for a local or an immigrant might be different in each country or region, same as socioeconomically status or the belonging to a segregated group. The third component involves the demands of the labour market, as organizations can be in a

situation to accomplished temporary shortages, specific recruitment procedures, preferential policies or different training and retention practices (Mcquaid, R., Green, A., & Danson, M., 2005; Houston, D, 2005; Berntson, E., Sverke, M., & Marklund, S., 2006).

Employability through this theoretical approach will be used in order to have an inclusive perspective of the immigrant's integration in the Swedish labour market, particularly within the cleaning sector. First, as individuals how they perceive their employability and what motivates them to work in the cleaning sector. Secondly, from the society, if they count with a social network and their socioeconomical needs. And finally, from the labour market, represented in this case for the personnel managers in charge of practices as recruitment, training and retention what are their personnel needs and challenges. These three aspects together can show which the position of immigrants is, in the Swedish labour market to get a job, keep it and their chances of labour mobility.

### 3.2 Sensemaking

The sensemaking concept was born as an attempt in the 80's, to understand organizations as live organisms, that are transformed by their people's world views in two different ways: as *individuals* able to take decisions (leaders) and as *societal group* under determined values and beliefs that affect the direction and the subsist of the organization in a specific, interactive and reciprocal context (Gephardt, R., 1992; Weick, K., 1995; Maitlis, S. & Lawrence, T. B., 2007, 2005; Gioia, D., & Chittipeddi, K., 1991; Weick, K., & Roberts, K., 1993; Hecker, A., 2012). Sensemaking provides an approach that goes beyond structures and behaviour regarding to rules, goals and functions. (Mintzberg, 1983; Meyer, 1993; Miles, 2003).

#### 3.2.1 Weick's Sensemaking framework

Among scholars of Sensemaking, the work of Weick highlights sensemaking as a social process to justify action through literally meaning creation (Weick, K., 1995, Czarniawska, B., 2005; Maitlis, S., 2005). Also, it emphasizes the difference between interpretation and making sense, which lies on what people produce or invent after having interpreted certain behaviour or context, and the developed knowledge from unconscious to conscious state of mind. Weick (1995) identified among the scholars of sensemaking, seven common properties, used to understand and recognized the sensemaking in organizations. These properties are, identity construction, retrospective, enactive, social, ongoing, extracted cues and plausibility (Weick, K., 1995 p. 16). As they are elaborated below.

**The identity construction** according Weick, is about recognizing the sense maker, no meaning focus on the individual but the process of interaction which surrounded him (Weick, 1995). As all type of interaction shape constantly the identity of the self. Sensemaking is an intentional re-start of identity by a confrontation of what was considered the self, the believes and the actions. People learn about the self when projecting themselves in a different environment.

**Retrospective** refers to meaning creation through selective moments that already happened (Ibid, 1995). There is a subjective interpretation based on specific moments that have a significance.

**Enactment** is part of a cognition process in which the process of reflecting on itself, together with the meaning creation process to past experiences produce action in the environment that seems to be different to what in the past has chafed the identity. Enactment is a form to explain that people co-produce their own environment (Ibid, 1995).

**Social** aspect is to remind that individuals as sense makers, cannot act by themselves, their identity is part of a social construction. “Human thinking and social functioning are part of each other” (Resnik, Levine & Teasley, 1991;3 in ibid, 1995;38). Socialization puts the focus on the setting where this takes place and how people interpret and express in this setting.

**Ongoing** process in sensemaking means that there is not start line, as humans constantly are in endless process of interaction. It is the interruption on the standard status of the environment that cause emotional reaction on people. These reactions may have implications on their identity and consciously formulates a sense-making process, as recalling past events that cause same feelings or sensations in the past (Ibid, 1995).

**Focused on and by extracted cues** refers in terms of Weick (1995) how sensemaking as continuing process, people constantly extract elements from the social interaction that use as alerts for future decisions. In this sense, it points out the importance of keep focus when analysing sensemaking on the outcomes to follow the meaning construction process of individuals.

**Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy**, as sensemaking involves perception, follows a logic not base on be precise or correct. Interpretation of events is guided by selective moments and emotions(Weick,1995).

These properties as Weick described them, are used to discuss the findings of the research.



### 3.3 Dual Market Theory

The debate about dual market theory comes from the work of Doeringer Peter and Michael Pierre (1970), as a critic to the classical economic theories that not comprehend rationing of certain jobs and a linear work mobility (Dickens, W. T., & Lang, K., 1985; John C. Cross Bruce D. Johnson, 2000). The local labour market is found heterogeneous and among scholars of dual market theory work in local labour markets, can be classified as primary and secondary.

The primary sector concerns mainly high wages and high skill jobs, with possibility to have labour mobility and get promoted while secondary jobs are those in sectors with low wages, and no need of high skills, difficult labour conditions and limited possibilities of labour mobility (Dickens, W. T., & Lang, K. 1985; Reich, M., Gordon, D. M., & Edwards, R. C., 1973; Bulow, J. I., & Summers, L. H., 1986).

Doeringer and Pierre focused on the secondary sector, and argue that employability is sensitive to three factors, specific organization's skills which cannot be transferred to other sectors; second, informal training to transmit skills to accomplish the job but is not a certificate type of training that can be used outside the organization by the employee; and third custom that refers to the stability of employment and repeated practices (1970).

One of the main ambitions of the dual market theory is to highlight labour segmentation and how certain social groups usually work in the secondary sector and have less possibilities to change to primary sector. The main critics to this theory contemplate that it is not impossible to transit among sectors (Bradley Schiller, 1977 on Dickens, W. T., & Lang, K., 1985). However, another study also shows that segregated groups have higher tendency to prevail in secondary sector than white people for example in an American context (Rosenberg, 1976 on Dickens, W. T., & Lang, K., 1985) a finding that supports dual market theory.

In this research, I use Dual market theory connect the findings related to the processes of sensemaking based at the micro-level of individuals (analysed with the help of sensemaking theory) to the setting where these processes take place: the labour market represented by cleaning business sector in Sweden, and the stage in which migrants firstly integrate in the labour market. By combining the employability concept, the research will provide an overview not just from an organizational level but to the employability situation, in which immigrants are in the local labour market in Sweden.

## 4 Methodology and research method

In this section, the approach and the chosen method, as well as the data collection and how the results were analysed is described. Also, ethical consideration of the research.

### 4.1 Methodology

This research is intended to find explanations through the immigrant's perception of their employability in the cleaning business. This study is based on people's experiences so, there were no clear ideas of the outcome at the beginning of this research. This project has followed an inductive approach (Seidel, S., & Urquhart, C, 2013) that gradually after the first interviews' results were constructing and guiding the investigation process and the theoretical framework.

Previous studies of employability perception as the work of Berglund, T., & Wallinder, Y. (2015), and Eerntson, E., Sverke, M., & Marklund, S (2006) have highlighted the correlation between individual's characteristics as educational level and labour market policies and his structure as factor that combined affect employability perception. However, have not offered the causes of this correlations and the lack of mobility. Hence, this was a motive to realize a qualitative study to find explanations.

### 4.2 Method

Therefore, as this research, examines people's perceptions, a qualitative method has been applied. In qualitative research, the main concern is individuals and their own attitudes, motivations and behaviours in relation to the interpretation of events and things (Hakim 2000). Secondary data in form of statistics has been used as instrument to problematize and contextualize this research, as well as to describe the characteristics of the cleaning sector at a macro level. The main source of primary data has been semi-structured interviews with immigrant employees and managers in cleaning businesses.

Purposely employees with foreign background in cleaning companies had been selected as well as personnel managers in cleaning companies for semi-structured interviews. As analytic tool, grounded theory was used as inspiration to guide the use of theory from the results of the interviews. Grounded theory brings different matters to the conversation including life experiences and point of view of the individuals (Hakim 2000), and these are subjects of categories and common themes in the findings. However, it is worth mentioning that the research is not strictly based on grounded theory.

### 4.3 Data collection

The empirical data was collected by the researcher through face to face interviews, and one telephone interview. In total 12 interviews were conducted, with the prior permission of the participants and under the compromise of kept confidentiality of their identity. The average interview length was between 30-100 mins. For some interviewees, the interview process was a new experience, so many of them after the recorder was turn off, shared more details. The researcher created memos of this information out of the record, and these were taken into consideration for the analysis section.

The sample, was a purposely random sampling. Meaning that the only requirement for participation was to be an employee with a foreign background (meaning born outside Sweden regardless how many years they had been living in the country) or manager of a cleaning company in the Gothenburg region. In the case of the managers it was not necessary to have a foreign background. The objective with this sample was to have a sample where the result could not be anticipated (Cohen D, Crabtree B, 2006). However, limitations as the size of the employee's sample was small, cannot be generalized to the whole population in the cleaning sector. But certainly, gives an insight of the immigrants' perception of their work situation and their working conditions.

In this research storytelling, has been used to collect fact-experiences from employees and employers in the cleaning sector, which will be the way to understand the sensemaking of immigrants in the cleaning business as their integration strategy in the Swedish labour market. Storytelling in the academic research has taken a new role in organizational studies, in which stories became testimonies of an own constructed reality. Because even they might not be described as pure facts, create actions and behaviours, affecting organizations (Gabriel, 2000).

Further information about the themes of the interview guides will be explained in the following sub-sections.

#### 4.3.1 Personal management

The personnel managers in cleaning companies were contacted through email, from an online web search of cleaning companies in Gothenburg. At list of fifty were contacted and only three agreed to an interview and two more were contacted via social connections of the researcher. All the interviews took place at the work places of the respondents except for one that was conducted by telephone. No names have been used in order to respect their anonymity.

*Table 1 Personnel managers sample*

Name	Age	Position	Birth place
P1	30-40	Personnel manager/Owner/CEO	Sweden
P2	30-40	HR-Specialist	Sweden
P3	40-50	Personnel manager/CEO	Croatia/Canada
P4	40-50	Personnel manager/Owner/CEO	Macedonia
P5	40-50	Finance manager*	Portugal

\*In this case the HR manager could not be available to the interview, however, the Finance manager proved to have depth knowledge about the staff and knew every person working in the company.

Three of the respondents were from medium sized companies and the other two from large companies. As small companies usually implicate that the owner is the one doing the cleaning services as well, no one in this category could participate in the study. This will be further explained in the results section.

**The themes** in the interview guide for personnel managers were based on the description of their companies and work tasks; how they got in contact in their professional live with the cleaning sector, their perceived challenges regarding personnel and the sector. (See Interview Guide Appendix)

Of the interviews, four were conducted in Swedish and one interview was conducted in English.

#### 4.3.2 Employees

In total six interviews with immigrant employees were realized. One of them was contacted through one of the larger companies. The rest of the respondents were contacted through social contacts by the researcher. Among the interviews, one was conducted in Swedish, two in English and three in Spanish. The interviews were conducted in locations different to their work places or theirs homes, where the interviewees could feel a comfortable environment. Just one interview was realized at the work offices of the employee.

*Table 2 Sample of foreign born employees in the cleaning sector*

Name*	Age	Home context	Children	Birth place
Katarina	20-30	Single	1	Poland
Elena	20-30	Married	0	Greece
Erika	30-40	Married	1	Honduras
Andreea	30-40	Married	2	Romania
Ana	30-40	Married	1	Peru
Octavio	40-50	Single	0	El Salvador

\*The names have been changed to protect the identity of the participants

**The themes** of the interview guide were about the time before coming to Sweden, their first contact with the Swedish labour market, perception of the cleaning work and future occupation perspectives (See Appendix for interview guide).

#### 4.3.3 Trade Union

From some of the results of the interviews, regarding questions about trade Unions, that suggested a low-level unionism, the researcher contacted the Trade Union in charge of occupations as cleaning or caretaking (Fastighetsanställdas förbund) in the city of Gothenburg, to get a deeper insight in the phenomenon. One interview with the local ombudsman and negotiator took place in their offices. As this was just one interview, it could not be generalized to the whole cleaning sector in Sweden. The results of the interview are described as information for further research.

#### 4.4 Data analysis

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and anonymized. The transcripts were coded, through coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to make sense (Charmaz 2014;113). Coding represents finding meanings and actions in the statements and observations gathered during the interviews (Creswell 2014). The use of grounded theory as inspiration for the analytical approach, was to develop the theoretical framework from the empirical results of the interviews as part of constructivism perspective.

The analytic procedure in this research was a content analysis, where secondary data and interviews were examined. A content analysis is based on the systematic identification of patterns, context, process and senses (Berg& latin,2008; Leedy &Ormrod,2005; Neuendorf,2002 on Berg, 2009). The analysis content of the data obtained the from interviews followed an initial coding based on the content, identifying emotions, actions and process (Charmaz, 2014). Then different categories were developed according the data, for example the status of the cleaning occupation appear to be a common concern for personnel managers. Later the data from the coding were reviewed with the purpose of the research and the previous literature. As part of the content analysis for do not lose the focus of the research and keep in mind unanticipated information (Berg, 2009). An example of this is the information gathered regarding Trade Unions and low unionism among immigrants, which is considered interesting, however is not a direct information that explains labour integration of immigrants.

However, as humans there are meaning and associations that guides also the researcher ideas and design of the research. This does not mean bias of the researcher in this project, but the awareness of preconceive meaning in the research design of the project.

#### 4.5 Ethical Considerations

This research is about people perceptions, and this meaning getting the data from their stories. This includes as well trust on the researcher for the use of the information. Ethical considerations include personal disclosure, authenticity, and credibility of the report (Cresswell, 2014;92). At the beginning of the research, when asking for the participation, the purposes of the research were shared with the participants. However, as this include not just their experiences from the cleaning sector but also their personal stories. A verbal agreement between the researcher and the participants was done where the researcher compromised to provide confidentiality.

A revision of the Code of Ethics, of the American Sociological Association (1997) was realized to follow ethical and professional standards of the research. This include principles of professional competence, integrity, professional and scientific responsibility, respect for people's rights, dignity and diversity; and social responsibility.

#### 4.6 The researcher

Being this a research study about immigrant integration in the Swedish labour market context, it is worth mentioning that the researcher has a foreign background and has lived in Sweden for around 7 years. In a certain way, empathy can be found for the researcher with the testimonies of the immigrant employees. However, the researcher has not previous experience or has worked with the cleaning sector before, and the findings and the analysis have been managed as objectively as possible. The researcher has Spanish as a mother tongue, and have language skills in English and Swedish.

### 5 Empirical findings

The empirical findings are divided in two sections, the first subsection, the characteristics of the cleaning business, based both on statistical data and the interviews with personnel managers. In the second section, findings stemming from the interviews with employees are presented.

## 5.1 The cleaning business branch

### 5.1.1 Characteristics of the cleaning companies

The cleaning branch companies in this research include, home cleaning, windows cleaning, moving cleaning, and cleaning services to organizations. The organizational structure of the cleaning business in Sweden can be understood through different categories. First, the size of the company per number of employees, small companies 1-9 employees which occupied 78.4% from the whole branch, medium size companies 10-49 employees with a 17.6% respectively to the branch; large companies with 50-and more than 250 employees that represents 4% in the cleaning sector.

Even that small companies are dominant in the cleaning sector, hardly offer full time jobs, small companies offer about 65% to their employees a part time job or less; while 55.2% of the employees working in medium sized companies have full time employment and in large companies around 70% of their employees have full-time employment. As it was mentioned before in the whole cleaning business more than 50% of the employees have a foreign background and more than 70% are women (Almega, 2016). In the following table are shown some of the main particularities from the cleaning branch in Sweden.

*Table 3 Main characteristics of the cleaning companies in Sweden*

<b>Company Size (by number of employees)</b>	<b>Employment type Full-time/part time or less</b>	<b>Employees origin region</b>	
Small 1-9 78.4%	Small companies less 35% have full time job	- Sweden	49%
		- Europe except Nordic countries	20.89%
Medium 10-49 17.6%	Medium sized 55.2% have full time employment	- Asia	15.38%
		- Africa	6.82%
		- South America	4.36%
		- North and central America	0.80%
Large 50-more than 250 4%	Large companies 70% full time employment	- Unknown	0.03%
		-Oceania	0.02%

Source: Data from Almega Branch Report 2016

Regarding salaries, a monthly salary wage for a full-time position (40hrs) is 21.700 SEK for employees older than 22 years, younger employees from 18 – 21 years receive 90% from the minimum wage and 80% for young people between 16 – 17 years of age (Kollektivavtal, Serviceentreprenad, 2016-2017).

### 5.1.2 The people driving the cleaning business: their roles and their companies

The people driving the cleaning business have their own story to tell, their values and previous experiences and have an impact in their role as managers (Bansal and Roth, 2000). In the following section I present shortly the story of each manager and the characteristics of their companies.

**P1** is a Swedish young entrepreneur that founded a cleaning company 5 years ago. For him, it was an easy alternative to his unemployment and unfinished studies. He started cleaning by himself and he did not have previous experience in cleaning. He tells that he soon discovered that the low payment and the toughness of the job forced him to think that the business needed to be bigger in order to generate profit. A year after he started, he said was lucky and got a “big client” and that was one the main drivers that made the company grow and now has 20 employees. Almost all the employees have different ethnical backgrounds.

**P2** is a Swedish HR specialist that has worked for 6 years in a cleaning company that has existed for 35 years. This person is responsible for all the staff in the company, works mainly strategically and all related to HR practices. At the time, he started at the company, it had around 350 employees and now they have 500 employees. Most of the employees working on the field have a different ethnical background and the white-collar work force is mostly Swedish. The company do all type of cleaning services but also offer other services such as stationery material among others.

**P3** is a half Canadian and half Croatian manager in a cleaning company that offers also other maintenance services such as carpentry etc. He started in this business branch because a friend asked him to try it and if he liked, an office in Gothenburg was about to open and he could take care of this business. He started working in Gothenburg by himself, he had no previous experience in cleaning and after a while he realized that he could not do it alone and he started to recruit people. The company have now 3 years since it was opened and have 14 employees, all the employees have been purposely recruited and they are from the Balkans.

**P4** with a Macedonian background, moved to Sweden with her family in the 60's. She founded the cleaning company 12 years ago. The motives for her to open her own company was that, she knew about the demand of the services, she had experience from cleaning and sales and she wanted to be independent. Also, the good social network from her parents was another motive to open her own business. The employees in this organization are purposely recruited and they are from the Balkans.



**P5** with a Portuguese background but more than 20 years of living in Sweden, has work for more than 6 years as Financial manager at a cleaning company; and did not have previous experience in the cleaning branch. The company started more than 20 years ago. The owner of the company started by himself working with a machine to polish floors and the company grew, and now they have 130 employees. The employees have diverse ethnical backgrounds.

*Table 4 Personnel manager's at the cleaning business*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Type of company</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Other characteristics</b>
P1	Medium size (20 employees) The company has existed for 5 years	Owner and manager, does all administrative tasks.	The company offers all type of cleaning, private homes, mainly offices, window cleaning
		Male, Born in Sweden, middle age	
P2	Large company (around 500 employees) The company has existed for 30 years.	Personnel Manager that works with Strategic HR, from recruitment to training and support to other management areas.	Cleaning as background but also other services as coffee machines, copy machines, all different complementary needs for companies.
		Female, born in Sweden	
P3	Medium Size (14 employees) The company has existed for 3 years	Manager All type of administrative tasks from sales, recruitment, training.	The company do different type of works, besides cleaning, windows, also carpentry and painting.
		Male, half Canadian and half Croatian	
P4	Medium Size The company has existed for 12 years	Owner and Manager sells, client contact, administrative.	Cleaning companies private and public, home cleaning, apartments.
		Female, comes from ex-Yugoslavian. Second generation in the business	
P5	Large company (130 employees) The company has existed for 23 years old company	Financial manager working there 6 and half years. Economical responsibilities but also a little bit of personal.	Most company services, but also home cleaning specially after the root-avdrag (discount Swedish tax.
		Female, from Portugal that has live in Sweden for more than 20 years.	

### 5.1.3 Large and medium sized companies

The studied companies were large and medium sized companies. Medium sized companies usually have one manager that is in charge to do all administrative related tasks including HR

practices, sales and client attention while employees provide the cleaning services. Large companies have a bigger organizational structure with diverse and specialized departments in HR, economy, sales and make use of middle-level managers.

Both large and medium sized companies offer additional services in different scales besides to cleaning, for example P3 as a medium sized company offered also carpentry and painting, while large companies were selling different products and maintenance to these. Some of the main arguments to their need for expand their business was their concern about low payments for cleaning services and the growing competition.

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*We believe that we found a good variant with our concept that we have many services to our customers (...) For those who do not do that in our industry, I think it might be tougher too. That you only work with cleaning for example. It may be a bit more difficult because you require quite a lot of the suppliers today. Purchasers push prices and are very professional, more and more, so it's about having margins somewhere to get it together and make money. P2*

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The size of the company, affects the organizational structure and the strategies to manage their human and economical capital, as it happens in other branches. Among the employees, it is common to find young people that work as cleaners as their first job, students with a need of an extra income, unemployed people for more than a year and immigrants in their majority.

#### 5.1.4 Cleaning as a low status occupation

The status of the cleaning occupation appears to be a common concern. The managers perceived this as one of the causes of keeping low rates for the services, as customers were not interested in paying more than what they considered enough for cleaning services. Linked to this, is the reproduction of traditional work gender division. As women do the cleaning in houses and offices while men working in this sector do window cleaning or other activities considered tough for women. In general, the stereotype of cleaning as low skilled persist, as gendered occupation and done by immigrants.

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*It is a challenge to get paid, and it also depends on the fact that the status of the occupation is very low, the status of being cleaner is about "nothing", I would think. Or I have experienced that myself when I started the company. Then it's very easy as white man to say that "I've experienced injustice, I've experienced how people look at one, but when I started, there were many friends who asked" What are you doing now?*

*" -" I've started A cleaning company ", and the first reaction was then" Do you have employees then? "because you don't clean by yourself, do you?" And it was like that. "Yes, I clean myself. I have no employees ". And then I felt like it's low status, nobody is impressed, not if you say that you are working in cleaning... P1*

*(...) because if you have a higher status, you can get more payment. Then, I realized the difference, for cleaning, the customer thinks it's a woman, surely immigrant, she can certainly do nothing but clean, and then they want to pay a little. But if they are going to buy a polishing window service, then the customer thinks it's a man, and a man can do something, he can polish windows. Not everyone can do it, it's what they think". But everyone can polish windows, it takes 10 minutes to learn. Then it can take several years to get fast. So, it's easy to charge for window polish, but not for cleaning... And it is cleaning what most companies do, and there we have a challenge.*

P1

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The status, seems to be an aspect where clearly how different actors seen each other affect their actions and perceptions. From the demands of the customer, to the way the managers present their services and managed their employees.

#### 5.1.5 The recruitment process of cleaning companies

Regarding to communication channels to attract and recruit employees, two tendencies were observed. Those companies that use standard methods as ads on their web pages, employment agency (Arbetsförmedlingen), job fairs, consultants and snowballing through employees, and those companies that use exclusively personal contacts or snowballing through employees, making use of their ethnical background and social network. Those companies that use standard recruitment practices, have an ethnical heterogenous labour force, while the other companies using personal contacts have a homogeneous labour force.

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*"So it's hand-picked staff. We know from many years the people so that we can feel safe, so that we know what we send out to our customers. It's about safety and cleaning quality combined" P4*

*"One of the criteria for why I dared to start a company. It was our good contacts that are from my parents who are first generation, among those who helped to build up here in the 60's in Gothenburg when the industry flourished. Thanks to the group of immigrants from the former Yugoslavia, thanks to the good contact network, we can deliver and perform so well as we do today. And the good network of contacts continues. And new generations are coming". P4*

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The companies with a heterogeneous labour force perceived recruitment as challenging, due to the low status of the occupation that makes it difficult to get the right employees. There is a clear demand of the service, but they express the difference between the desired employee profile which might include at least a basic level of the Swedish language, middle level education, driving license and service minded person. As the needs of their labour force are not fulfilled, the requirements are lowered.

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*“...find good staff, and good staff, it is the most difficult problem we have...” “As it is today, we have so difficult to find staff that we take almost anything. So, we cannot choose”. P5*

*It may sound a little strange, but we like it best when there is a recession. Here in Gothenburg, that's fine now, and then it is difficult for us to find staff. So, that when the economy goes bad, it is better for us. For then it is easier for people to think, "I can take a cleaning job and give it a try". P2*

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Another aspect linked to the recruitment in the heterogeneous model companies, is the status, as people do not seem to apply for this kind of occupations unless there are no other alternatives, as expressed by interviews P1 and P2. On the other hand, from the interviews with P3 and P4, it was mentioned that so far they have not experienced any difficulty regarding recruitment and personnel management. For companies with a homogeneous labour force, the recruitment was not as challenging as in heterogeneous companies and according to interviews P3 and P4, the difficulties they found in the branch focus on marketing and sales.

#### 5.1.6 Training

The recruitment process as it was observed did not require many skills to enter to the business. In this sense, training seemed to be a key practice for the employers to get ready unexperienced personnel. However, this practice was quite unclear in medium companies as the introduction included a brief theoretical introduction and was mostly based on the new employees following a former employee for a couple of days until the routines were learned. In large companies the training included besides this, introduction courses to the company's values, and formal courses in cleaning or other services that the company offers.

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*“Everybody who comes here, they go one week to work with other people and we show them and teach them about cleaning methods, products, what to use, what is dangerous what is not dangerous, how you should use them and measures, they learn everything in one week”. P3*

*“We introduce all staff who start, and it does not matter if you work with housework or here at the office or what you do, then you go to our introductory courses... They are about introduction to ----- and our values, our quality and environmental work, and so on”. P2*

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The size of the company seemed to affect the potential training of the employees.

#### 5.1.7 Managing diversity

The cleaning companies with an ethnical heterogeneous background presented, a tacit challenge regarding personnel management. Cultural differences, religion and gender, were common struggles within these companies. A common practice in these companies to avoid conflicts and encourage the employees to speak Swedish, is to mix people from different regions. However, this is just the case when they have people that work in teams, still the majority works mostly individually. Employees socialization is limited since they work alone and work schedules are early morning or late afternoon on times where customers are not in place which keep the employees anonymous. Regarding integration practices, the best-case scenarios there are, are companies that organize language support groups, but according to the interviewees this was not popular among the employees. Other companies stick to the regular events as Christmas celebration and Swedish holidays.

The relationship between employees-manager was closer for medium sized companies and company P5. This relationship involved from the manager’s perception a more personal approach besides the professional. As the employers realized the employees were struggling with different issues not related to work, such as economic difficulties, family problems among others. And just listening to them even that were aspects in which they could not help, was a way to show that they cared. This also was used as retention practice as it creates a trust in the relation.

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*“Sometimes we get trouble, because not when the best sides of different cultures meet, but it's when the slightly worse sides meet. Foreign men, not everyone, but from some parts of the world, they have a lot of problems working with a young woman, especially when she has a driver's license and he cannot drive a car. And, if she is the*

*one who's going to say what to do. Then it works, but sometimes it gets a bit of friction". P1*

*"We get people here who say, "We do not want to clean in the churches," for example. Others who say, "We do not want to listen" when a woman says "I'm your boss." They think that they cannot take orders from a woman". P5*

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The case of homogeneous companies, diversity was not that representative, even they mention that people had different backgrounds, the employees where from the same region (ex-Yugoslavia). And having the language as a link between the manager and the employees seems to provide them with a common understanding and no cultural barriers as on the other cases.

*"I realized quite recently how much advantage I have for knowing these languages from ex-Yugoslavia. It is not just Macedonian that I have with my childhood, but there are, for example, Serbo-Croatian, now it is divided into Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian. I have understood that for me to work successfully, it's a great ingredient that I domain those languages". P4*

*"I speak all Balkan languages because my mom is from Croatia so I can speak with them and they are good workers, they come here to make money because all those families are down there so they send money, they give 110% on their work". P3*

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The difficulties regarding personnel management in homogeneous companies, were more in concern of setting routines and push the employees in finish the job on time.

#### 5.1.8 Occupational ladder

The job promotion of employees, it is a realistic possibility in large companies, in which there is career ladder. However, in medium sized and small companies, it is usually the owner or one manager that takes care of the administrative tasks and the rest of the employees that do the service.

*"We want people to grow internally with us. You may have worked on cleaning, and if you like the coffee machines, you may have the opportunity to work at our coffee department, or take responsibility and become a manager, for example. So almost all our middle managers have worked as a cleaner and wanted to take more responsibility". P2*

*“We would like to have someone who spoke better Swedish, and understood that cleaning - that's something you can develop yourself - cleaning is not just to come here and throwing some water and then go, but you can educate yourself and go from cleaner to team leader and from team leader to group leader, and then you can go to operations manager. Our operations manager started himself as a cleaner, but I think there are many here who do not understand it - that one can. And to clean it, you must be able to do a lot of things”. P5*

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Job promotion as training, both had better possibilities within large companies, than in medium sized, regarding the activities of the organization.

#### 5.1.9 Gender work occupation

Cleaning is one clear example of gender work occupation. First as a predominant female occupation because cleaning is traditionally seen as a woman's task. Furthermore, the division of the work task inside the organization, also follows the stereotype where men do the “heavy work”, in this case meaning cleaning stairs and polishing windows, and women the cleaning of offices and houses.

*“We have about 50/50 women and men. Within home cleaning, it's almost just women, and within stairs almost only men, cleaners in hotels - most women, our special department where they go and do decontamination ... you know what decontamination is? You get into an apartment where someone has ...(this mean clean after damages from fire, burglary, odour, etc.) you know when you clean and you'll see everything. Then there are boys who are strong and capable”. P5*

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Besides the cleaning occupation is already classified traditionally as woman's job, the internal organization also divides the work according to technical abilities and physical strength.

#### 5.1.10 The physical weariness

An additional challenge concerning personnel, is the physical weariness of the employees. Most of the companies are aware of the physical demand of the occupation, and in some cases, they provide the employees with a wellness card or implementing more ergonomic technical equipment, however this is not general.

*“I see that when you approach to 50 or 60 years old and have been working for a long time, it has taken on the body. It's hard to avoid it. Such a challenge we always have -*

*to make a practical work an entire professional life. I think it's hard for everyone in our industry for example". P2*

*We offer health care to anyone who wants to. They may have training cards, go swimming or something, and they will receive some compensation from us. And, if they get sick, we have occupational healthcare. But many end up before, because they feel that they won't be able to work when they are 60. We have some ... we have one who is 62 who works full time, but not more. Before that, you have become so ill that you cannot work. The body is worn, when you have worked all your life with it, unfortunately. P5*

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Most of the companies are aware of the physical demand of the occupation and that it is not realistic to work for a life time. Even in the case of organizations that provide the necessary equipment and offer ergonomic courses, still some employees experienced work under time pressure. According, an interview with a representative of the trade union one of the problems in the cleaning sector is that there are not measures of how much work someone can handle in certain of time, as in other sectors as construction where people should not be rush in the same way. People do not work in their own time.

#### 5.1.11 Collective agreements

Most of the companies seem to have collective agreements and regarding to the relationship between trade unions, these organizations keep just the necessary contact with them. The unionization level is very low among the employees, which ends as a one side relationship because there is no representation for a negotiation party. As the Swedish labour market is deregulated and is based on collective bargaining, this means that employees need to be a member of a trade union to be able to negotiate or be represented in a labour court in case of it to be necessary.

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*"Outside competition, from other EU countries, offering their services at a very low price and we that have collective agreements cannot get close to... we receive offers from companies in Estonia who offer staff where we pay 100 SEK/h, nothing more, our employees earn 129 SEK/h, and we pay employer fees, holidays and everything - this is 100 SEK per hour, nothing else. And then we have the black industry, we hear people coming here telling that they have cleaned and got 40-50 SEK/h. So, then they go to our customers and offer prices that are half as cheap". P5*

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Another aspect related to collective agreements is the concern of many companies for the competition with other countries in the European Union and the black market that are not obligated



to have collective agreements and offer lower wages and therefore lower prices than companies in Sweden can offer.

## 5.2 Immigrants in the cleaning sector: Making sense of a new life

Part of our human being nature is to question ourselves and our environment, and the need to know who we are. It is about understanding our present and plan our future. This section first describes briefly the persons that were interviewed, followed by an analysis about how they make sense of their life as immigrants and as professionals in the cleaning sector in Sweden. Particularly this section, is structured following the sense-making process, and the focus is on decisions taken by these individuals during their new occupational careers in Sweden.

### 5.2.1 The characters

**Katarina** is a young, Polish woman, who came to Sweden around 6 years ago. She came on vacation to visit her mother who works in Sweden in a cleaning company. She found love and decided to stay in the country. Through her mother, she got a job in cleaning and since then she has worked in three different companies. She has a son, lives alone with him and is still working in a cleaning company.

**Elena** is a young woman from Greece. She came to Sweden with her Armenian boyfriend one year ago. She was studying Computer science in her home country, but due to the economic crisis in 2008 her family could not continue to support her education. She could not find paid job in Greece and decided to start a new life in Sweden. She found jobs both in a restaurant and in a cleaning company through a recommendation. She recently left her job in the cleaning business and works almost fulltime at the restaurant.

**Erika** is from Honduras and she has been living in Sweden for 17 years. She came temporarily to help her cousin as a nanny for his kids. She found love and decided to move here. In Honduras, she was working as a secretary for a bank at the main office. In Sweden, she has worked in 8 different cleaning companies. Last year she stopped working in cleaning, due to a surgery in her wrists and the deteriorating of her health. She started to study to become a personal assistant.

**Andreea** is from Romania and came to Sweden with her daughter in 2009, following her husband who came to Sweden two years before them. In Romania, she was working as store clerk. When she moved to Sweden she started studying the language, and later took a technical education to

become a professional cleaner. She did an internship during her education, and she was later hired to work in the same cleaning company where she now works as a team leader.

**Ana** comes from Peru, after she finished her high school studies she moved to Spain with her family and there she worked as nanny, at coffee shops and clothes store. She met her husband in Spain and since he was Swedish and had small children from a previous relation, they decided to move to Sweden. She studied Swedish and then worked in a food truck. After the food truck was closed, she found job in a cleaning company where she still works.

**Octavio** is from El Salvador, moved to Sweden more than 20 years ago. He had a graduate degree and was working for some different organizations, for the defence of Human Rights and as a teacher in a high school. He got a scholarship to study in the UK for a year and because he had a brother living in Sweden, he took the opportunity to visit him. He was amazed with the country, and found love with a Swedish person and decided to stay in Sweden. He started studying Swedish and in addition to the language studies, he worked part time in cleaning at that time, and also as a Spanish teacher. He completed his studies and now he works as a teacher at a high school.

## 5.2.2 Choice of career path

### 5.2.2.1 Making priorities and using social bounding

Moving to another country requires more than will to start a new life. The decisions they made were related to perceptions and priorities. One pattern shows that persons that had someone already established in the host country gave priority to learn the language and then to try to find an occupation. A second pattern showed that getting an income was a priority which lead to take any possible job.

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*“When you come to this country you realized of the importance of the language... You realize that is an economic income what can take you ahead so I think that the mistake that all foreigners do is work in cleaning because they require almost nothing to start working. And quickly you will have a wage as the rest of the people, you pay taxes and enter to the society as a worker”. Erika*

*“When I came here, I started to study Swedish, then I took cleaning training and then I got an Internship and then I got job in the same company and after a year I got promoted as team leader”. Katarina*

*“My idea when I arrived here, was to study the language, that was the first”. Ana*

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There are two pathways in how people got introduced to the cleaning business. The majority had some friend or family that had already worked in the branch and recommended this, as an option to get an income. While in other cases the persons applies and searches consciously to this occupation without having previous contact.

Working in cleaning implies generating different expectations. First as a temporary occupation that provides an income and flexibility. Second as the option for getting a job in a long term avoiding the language barrier; but also, even it was not many cases as a chosen occupation with previous education in the area.

#### *5.2.2.2 Consideration of their work opportunities*

The chances of getting “any job” in Sweden meaning the ones offered in the service sector at restaurants and cleaning companies, was not perceived as a *difficult*, but as *easy* to find. However, the chances to get what they called a “real job” regarding to specific occupations according to previous experience or education was considered difficult to achieve, first in regard to language skills and validation of previous professional experiences and studies.

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*“In Sweden, I don’t think it is difficult to find a job, because there are many opportunities, and if you go door by door, you will find something, I mean something like cleaning, or kitchen something like that. No more than this. Because I found two jobs in one month”. Elena*

*“It was hard in the beginning when I came here, but for my part, if you want to live in this country you must accept: In this country, we are going to live, so that’s it. And after that moment everything is better. I have some friends that have problems to integrate in Sweden, but it has gone good for me... it is difficult if you don’t know the language. That is why I think that school was a good way to find job. First try to learn some Swedish, basic Swedish (SFI) to communicate and then find some courses, and then you can find a job if you want to”. Katarina*

*“Outside the cleaning occupation there are others jobs, but sometimes we don’t find them because, we are cowards. To me, the fact of having problems, shook me and made me realize that I had to take a decision and overcome myself, because no one would do it for me...Now that I’m working in something different to cleaning, I think Why did I decided so late? There are others things that I can do”. Erika*

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As a first experience when coming to the country and evaluating working opportunities, seems to be clear for immigrants that they are aware of professional boundaries and limited options. However, what people decided as a career path will shape their professional future.

### 5.2.3 Cleaning as a temporary versus long-term occupation

The people who work in cleaning as a temporary option, perceive this occupation not as an opening door to the labour market, but as provisional income source while they found a suitable alternative for their professional ambitions in the labour market. The major challenge, that they face is the accreditation of their previous skills and experience. People expect to continue working in the same field as in their home country or something similar. As they perceived that this may not be a possibility, they start an adaptation process changing expectations to what they can find in the labour market.

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*“I realized that here in Sweden, they tell you there are opportunities, and yes there are, but when you go and try to find where to start they close the door. And they just open the door where they need it. So, if they need nurses or cleaners is just there where you are going to find an open door (...) When I came here, I tried to find opportunities according to my studies and my experience. But you always must study something and I understand that (...) So, when I wanted to see a possibility of studying what I liked, I found out that I had to start from scratch, and if I have studied so much and I have experience and I must start from scratch don't fuck me. Now I realized that was a mistake but no one explained me that”. Octavio*

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For temporary employees in cleaning companies that have other professional ambitions, the language can be understood as a challenge but not a barrier. However, later in the search for other skills jobs, they found other types of barriers imposed by the need of the current labour market.

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*“To me the language limited me, I know that I must put myself out otherwise I won't learn. I must force myself to leave this job, get another one, maybe cry the first month but I know I can do it. But now is just the language that limits me”. Ana*

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Long term employees in cleaning organizations construct their barriers around the language and cultural limitation. But also, many persist in the business with the hope that will be granted later with full time position.

#### 5.2.4 Finding comfort in the cleaning occupation

For the employees, getting a job and income was very significant experience. It became a link to their new context in which they live. Besides to be a purchasing power, it is experienced as social inclusion.

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*“In Romania, we had a terrible situation because it was difficult to find a job and if you found a job, you do not earn much money or you earn no money at all”. Andreea*

*“I have stability, I work from Monday to Friday, I have holidays, the days I don't work – I do not work. I'm lucky because since I started, the first one that was my boss, I told her that I could just work in the mornings, because those that have the same contract as me, I have 50% right now, let's say if there is no customer available in the morning, they go in the afternoon, something that I don't do, because they know that I am available until two in the afternoon. I have my vacations 5 weeks a year, if I get sick I get paid, it's safe”. Ana*

*“Here one think in the economic and that what you do it is not important, because you are not discriminated by working in cleaning as you could be in our home countries”.  
Erika*

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For instance, this job offered flexibility regarding schedule and they met people from different countries. Several employees, mentioned that even though they were not completely satisfied with their work, if they compared the cleaning occupation here and what it could be in their home countries, in Sweden they got much better working conditions. Other compared in general the working conditions in other low skilled occupation in their home counties and their current job, and in general they would not go back to what they had before. This comparison included a general overview of their living conditions, not just the cleaning occupation but the standard life quality in the country.

#### 5.2.5 Training, equipment and employees' trial.

Training for most of the interviewees consisted of working the first days with someone more experienced. In some cases, occasionally the training was complemented with ergonomic courses and in the sample cases there was no complains about the work equipment.

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*“For the first 3 times, I think I was with other people that were there for many years in the business and they showed me how to do it and how I could be better at my job and then I was working alone”. Elena*

*“They check me you know. It is very important to check somebody because I can say I can clean. Everybody can clean, but really it is not so easy because you must know how to do it and have planning in your head and like that (...). I had experience so I was one day and they looked ‘She is good you know’”. Katarina*

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Training for some employees did not have that formal character and was perceived as a way to prove that they could cope with the job according the organization’s expectations. In other words; training was also an employee’s trial.

#### 5.2.6 Perceived challenges working in cleaning

Once employees have been working in the sector for a while, they perceive several challenges in relation to their work.

##### 5.2.6.1 Full time position and schedules

The chances of getting a full-time job was experienced as low, particularly in medium and small sized companies. Time schedules were considered difficult in different ways. Employees with fixed schedules had to start to work very early in the morning or very late. Employees with flexible timetable, found it difficult to plan their activities, as they never could be sure when they would be called to work.

##### 5.2.6.2 Limited career ladder possibilities

In medium sized companies, the chances for employees to grow in their role were limited unless the company also grows. In larger sized companies, there were a few possibilities to gain more responsibilities, for instance as a team leader. However, due to the numerous employees, this was experienced by the employees as difficult.

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*“When you are working in cleaning you can become team leader and you can get better wage, but I mean we were 120 employees and 4 team leaders, so it is very difficult to get there, although not impossible”. Erika*

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In some cases, as Ana’s, she was offered to have a team leader position, but she turned it down because she had no interest in getting more responsibility, but wanted to change branch. In general, it seems not to be

impossible to get into the career ladder organization in the case of larger sized companies, but either was considered an easy position to achieve in some cases.

#### *5.2.6.3 Formation of ethnical subcultures and team work collaboration*

In larger sized companies with a very diverse ethnical work force, some employees perceived different treatment according their ethnical background. Organizational conflicts were observed in the field, and with the team leaders taking advantage of their power, for instance benefitting fellow expats.

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*“I have had different experiences with the managers... it was difficult to trust them, if I can tell my problems to them. Because I realized that other employees knew private things about me and how they knew? Because my boss told them. If I told something to her, she spoke to the other managers and then to other employees (...) there was a time that there were many employees from country X and two of the managers as well and they could talk in their language but we were not allowed... Once we had a manager from Country Y (Spanish-speaking country) and I thought that we could have a different relationship with her and maybe speak Spanish with her but no, she did not accept that we spoke Spanish at work. Many of us feared her, she intimidated other employees. For example, if someone was sitting, she came and said: ‘Move to work, your time is over’, she passed the fingers and said: ‘Look! Here it is dirty! How you can say this is clean? For how long have you been doing this? And you are still doing the same’. But this kind of treatment wasn’t the same for all of us”. Erika*

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In some cases, were employees work in teams for example, doing moving cleaning, this was experienced as difficult as they share responsibility for the job delivery and perceived that not all the employees worked equally hard. Other cases in which the employees had a similar ethnical background as the manager, they expected a fair treatment and some persons experienced abuse of power as for example having “random wages”.

#### *5.2.6.4 Perceived discrimination with customers and invisibility*

People working in private homes perceived discrimination in form of feeling ignored or seen as less in some cases where they interacted with the customers. Employees expected at least some small interaction when meeting a customer, as any other occupation in another branch.

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*“They don’t have respect you. I’m only a cleaner. So what? I’m just cleaning his house so it’s nothing more. Yeah, seriously they don’t ask about water or something*

*you know... nothing... They see, but they don't look at you. If you are the cleaner is like that". Kataryna*

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In most cases the cleaning occupation is performed alone, the low social interaction of the employees is experienced as making them invisible. Social isolation, even that it is expected in a long term it is difficult for some employees.

### 5.2.7 Health condition as a turning point on long term employees in cleaning companies

The deterioration of physical and mental health is some of the main motives why people working long-term in the business, finish or intent to change work. The worsening of their health is the turning point, physically the back, knees, hands and shoulders are some of the main body parts that are injured as consequence of the job. Regarding mental health, some of them, perceived themselves as not able to do something different. However, working alone, doing repetitive tasks and work under pressure are some other factors that have consequences on the mental health of the employees.

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*"When I had surgery on my hands because of the work, I start thinking in myself and I took the decision of take a course to change job". Erika*

*"I have planned to work with this maybe 1 or 2 years you know, because yeah it's difficult, it's hard for the body, but I think I don't know exactly, but I was thinking if I can open a cleaning company also, or I don't know. For this moment, I will stay in this company for 1 or two years more, but I don't see a big future in this because it's difficult". Katarina*

*"I want another job, the people is very nice and they have improved the treatment to the employees, however my body cannot take more. Seriously I'm tired... Is a physical and mental weariness, because I feel that I just can do this, and my husband says to me "no you are not just made to do this". So, I have to change to feel that I worth more". Ana*

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There are two controversial aspects regarding physical and mental health. First, female employees are typically stereotyped working in the cleaning business because it is considered a *soft* occupation. However, they can have permanent injuries as consequence of the physical strength. Second, many employees chose to work in cleaning to evade the language limitation, however, the



job performance is in many cases asocial and repetitive which also have repercussion on the mental health of the employees.

#### 5.2.8 Low unionism

Except for one person, most of the people were not members of a trade union. Their perspective on this subject was very different. For some people, it was just not relevant, others perceived that the union did not work properly; other perceived as this was just useful in case of conflicts.

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*“I heard about that not at the time I was working at the cleaning company, I haven’t been in contact with them for any problem yet because I had no problem to bring on to them”. Elena*

*“There are very few people in the union because it is not profitable, why I am going to be a member of the union, if I work only 4 hours, the union costs me more than 500 SEK and the unemployment insurance fund too. Then I do not agree to pay the union because at the time of making the counts, it is not profitable. Then one hopes that they give you 8 hours to be able to pay the union and that is what the union game is, that sometimes it helps and sometimes it does not have the answer that one needs”. Erika*

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Besides the diverse perception around the trade unions and their role in the work place, the fee that employees had to pay to become a member was not reasonable to their wages, particularly as they do not have much knowledge of their functionality and the relevance for them,

## 6 Discussion

Low qualified occupations constitute one of the main entries into the labour market for many immigrants. This research examines how immigrants make sense of their employability in the cleaning sector, informed by the case of employee’s and personnel managers. This section discusses the findings within the theoretical framework, including sensemaking theory, employability and dual market theory and is structured by the two sub research questions and the main research question.

### 6.1 Two models of Personnel management practices in the cleaning business

This section has the objective of answering the sub-question *What are the personnel management practices in cleaning companies where immigrant employees work?* The management of employees in the cleaning sector, as in others branches is affected by the organizational structure

of the company. Starting by the size of the companies, that will also shape the managing practices. Two models were observed, heterogeneous and homogeneous companies. These models are based on the ethnical diversity at the organizations. Regarding size, the heterogeneous model was found in large and medium companies while homogeneous companies were mostly found in medium sized companies.

The cleaning sector is some of the few so called *low skilled* branches that has not changed for a long time. Their fees depend on the market demand; the services are still mainly done by humans and it is a sector that no many want to work in, due to the perceived low status of the occupation. The managers or owners deal with a labour force formed by students, immigrants and people in disadvantageous situations, for example people that has been unemployed for more than a year.

In this sense, the companies that provide cleaning services, to some extent respond to situational context. this can be understood under the assumption that organization are open systems shaped by contextual factors (Duncan, 1972; Miles & Snow, 1978). However, it is also true that these organizations in response to the low margins for cleaning, has influenced them to create other services besides cleaning to get a desired profit to continue and grow the business. There is a cognitive process between managers or owners and the environment (Weick, K., & Roberts, K. 1993). In this sense leaders or managers are not just limited by the environment, but they can create a relation.

The homogeneous companies in the cleaning sector were characterized for a manager or owner with a foreign background. Organizations usually are medium sized companies with a centralized organization and one level hierarchy in which the manager takes decisions and give instructions to the rest of the employees following a line organization.

They used purposive recruitment, hiring just people with similar or same cultural background, which means that at least they shared a language. In this sense this type of organization became a gatekeeper for the people with the same cultural background. It offers a communication comfort to the employees they hired, that allows them to keep their domestic culture at work, saving the need for the employees to adapt, even though they are living in a foreign country.

The Homogeneous organizations used their social capital to satisfy their labour needs and assure loyalty from their employees in exchange for an opportunity in the labour market. An example of

this is the Balkan communities established in Sweden, that in the findings of this research has shown how they draw upon their social network to get employees. In general, this type of organization did not show any concern about recruitment or other to personnel practices.

On the other hand, companies with a heterogeneous ethnical work force, usually with a Swedish owner or manager, have a diverse labour force. This diversity was reflected in form of different ethnicities, ages, religions and gender. This type of organization was found in large and medium sized companies. Therefore, the organizational structure presented certain differences in specific practices. Both had a centralized organization and line management.

Regarding recruitment, these companies used standard procedures, open to everyone by advertisements, or using the Swedish work agency (Arbetsförmedlingen). Having a diverse labour force is not a purposive strategy from these organizations. Rather it is, the reflection of an organization with a high demand of personnel and a population sector limited to these secondary sector occupations.

Training in large companies had a more formal character, meaning an introduction to the company values and objectives. There is a larger organization and more levels of hierarchy, and employees doing the cleaning services have a line manager to report to. The relationship is impersonal and the leadership relies on the line managers. Line or middle managers, have a dual duty, achieve company's goals and follow decisions through managing the employees.

For medium sized companies, training was a simple introduction that hardly could become an asset for the employees. The relationship employer-employee in medium sized companies, were closer than in large companies, and because of the number of the employees, the contact is more flexible. The leadership and decision making relies on the manager/owner. But the closer relationship among employer-employees allowed them to get to know the difficulties and concerns of the employees better. In many cases, managers expressed that many of the needs and problems of the employees had nothing to do with work related aspects. Moral support was an aspect that in these medium heterogeneous companies were evaluated to earn the loyalty of the employees and their commitment.

Common challenges to personnel management in heterogeneous companies in both large and medium-sized organizations, were related to diversity and cultural differences. Some examples of

these conflicts are about men having difficulties following women's instructions; regarding religion as people objecting to work in churches, for having people around eating certain products; explaining to employees that be on time and schedule their vacations with anticipation.

Another challenge, especially perceived in large companies, was the grouping of employees based on ethnical similarities. According the ethnographers Stephen Barley and John Van Maanen this is understood as the formation subcultures, were members identified as a different unit within the organization, based on share similarities as ethnical background (on Hatch, M., & Cunliffe, A.,2013, p159). This fact was perceived by both employees and managers.

For managers, the focus on these subcultures had the purpose of integrating the employees and controlling the efficiency of their work. In practice, they tried to mix them so they do not have the same ethnical background, this also had the intention to encourage employees to practice Swedish. On the employee perspective, these subcultures had another angle, as these groups also meant a difficult power relation. In larger sized companies with more levels of hierarchy, some employees experienced that certain groups based on ethnicity were treated different depending on the ethnical belonging. The employees outside the predominant groups, experienced intimidation and fear if the personal manager or team leader was from the opposite group. They perceived they would not be considered.

Further external aspects linked to the cleaning sector is the demand and fees depending on the external market. This is linked to the local competition, as prices are kept as low as possible, which affects the employee's income conditions. Also, informal competitors meaning companies in the black market or that do not have collective agreements affect the practices and working conditions on regulated organizations. The studies of Thörnquist (2011; 2015; 2015a) are an example of how temporary immigrant workers in the cleaning sector and in the construction, as are not registered in the Swedish system. They not pay taxes and because the companies do not have collective agreements offer much lower salaries than the formal organizations with collective agreements

Another aspect related to wages in the formal cleaning sector is that there is not a real increase in the wages. For example, in the case of a wage increase, the employee through more efficient work should earn the increased income, meaning that the more the wage increase, the more squares metres they should clean in the same amount of time. People are paid per hour and there are not

measures about how much a person should be able to do in a certain amount of time and employees usually work under pressure time.

It is worth to mention, that besides the current challenging working conditions within cleaning companies, they are still given in a legal framework, were employees follow certain standards and they usually do not have any negotiation with the customer. This is a contrast to what previous literature has shown on informal cleaning occupation, for example, the studies of Anderson (2000) on illegal cleaning employees that live in some cases in the same place as they work and there are no limits in de demand of the employer customer as well.

Finally, the dual market approach of Doeringer Peter and Michael Pierre, (1970), that divided the market into primary and secondary sectors. The primary sectors refer to high skilled occupations with high possibilities of ladder occupation and experienced valued and transferable. While the secondary sector is not just characterized as low skilled, but on a basis of informal training that does not build transferable assets, but low wages and constant and repeated practices.

In this sense, the cleaning sector clearly can be identified as a secondary sector, as it does not require many skills to enter to work; the training at the beginning is a basic introduction by a former employee. The wages are controlled by the market and are low, and there is a low possibility to get promoted or move to more qualified sectors.

## 6.2 Sensemaking of immigrant's employability in the cleaning sector

Regarding the sub-question, how do immigrants make sense of their employability? Immigrants' employability depends on the reflection of their identity, their priorities, and the chosen career path. The chosen career path is shaped by they perceived own limitation and by the factual limitations of the local labour market and the society. This discussion puts the focus on following the process that immigrants have in choosing a career path and what influences the decision making in that process.

“Immigrant” literally means “someone coming from a different place”, and as such, they are naturally, the sense makers of the new place and context. One of the properties of the sensemaking is the identity construction which refers to how individuals use as self-reference to interpret the environment, and think how to see itself and what can become (Weick,1995;24). Regarding

employability of immigrants, to find a job is a process that requires from them to project in an occupation within their abilities and possibilities.

Simultaneously this self-reference in which immigrants do an assessment of their abilities for searching job, entails a retrospective process as well. Putting in perspective their past experiences and knowledge in comparing their options in the current context (Weick, 1995). In this sense, the limitation of the Swedish language as a challenge makes people either chose finding an occupation that does not require this skill or start studying the language and try later to find an occupation related to their last occupation.

This identity construction based on a retrospective process is part of the “sense” process of immigrants and the making involves concrete action. Choosing a career path involves what Weick called enactment, putting in practice the cognition process. People start working in the cleaning sector with different goals. For some people, it represents a temporary option while they pursue specific occupations related to their last work or experience, and for others as the only alternative to avoid the Swedish language learning.

As working in cleaning does not require many skills to enter to work, besides the will to learn quickly the routines and deliver certain standards. This offer to many immigrants an option and the majority approach this sector through a recommendation from a friend, or have family working in the branch or someone they get to know with the same ethnical background.

The use of social bonding among immigrants, in previous research somehow has been neglected. Previous studies from Höglund (1998) and Bevelander, P (2001) highlight that social connections are important to get an employment, which in case of immigrants in these studies has pointed out as discrimination cause for immigrants due to the lack of social connections for getting a job. However, as the findings suggested many people had someone that referred them to the cleaning sector.

This reaffirms as well that social bonding is important in the search of a job, but in the case of many immigrants, as their social connection is limited as well to secondary occupations, it is there where they draw on. Humans are naturally socials, the social interaction in the sensemaking process implicates the connection through language, discourses, binding to actions and projects (Weick,

1985 on Ibid, 1995). In this sense, if the cleaning sector is recommended by others as an alternative for immigrants, it is not a surprise that people approach this sector.

This sensemaking process upon immigrants does not end by entering to work in the cleaning sector. The chosen career has implications not just for individuals, but for the organizations for which they work. Even though, employees experienced a pleasant or comforting feeling when getting a job, it is later affected not by the occupation of cleaning itself, but by the condition in which this occupation takes place.

There are periods of stability and uncertainty for anyone. The feelings and emotions emerge from social interaction and these guides decision-making. From the moment that an individual perceives and select certain signs that stand out from a stability period, the sensemaking process is awakened. In terms of Weick (1995), these are also properties of the sensemaking, and is what is called ongoing process and extracted cues. In the case, for example of long term immigrant employees in cleaning companies, the physical and mental weariness was an extracted cue in Weick terms, as it was a turning point to re-value their occupation, but mostly their identity.

Other challenges regarding the type of company and the working conditions, that included for example work under pressure, part-time job, difficult schedules as working in the early morning or very late, made some employees perceived themselves as anonymous objects. In a long term, this was a sign for the employees to re-value their occupational identity. The feelings produced by this working conditions give an insight of what their future can look like and react. A concrete example is the case of an employee that needed a surgery because of some work injurie, that made her realize that she could not work anymore as a cleaner and decided to change occupation.

However, other cases where the employees were aware of the difficult situation and the possible consequences for their occupational future and their well-being, mentioned that they found it hard to change occupation. They compared their current occupation to what they could get in similar occupations in their home countries. In their home countries, they perceived cleaning as a low skilled occupation, social degraded and with the worst working conditions, and in that way, they convinced themselves as this is not that bad, even though they felt trapped sometimes.

To a certain extent, for some people this could not make sense, as it can be interpreted as people limit and shape their occupational opportunities in that way. However, in terms of Weick this is

also another characteristic or property of the sensemaking, as decisions are guided by plausibility rather than accuracy, it is about following their own reasoning process (1995). Immigrants are connecting constantly their past as reference with their current context and the everyday socialization at work.

One of the reasons to closer examine the immigrant employability in the cleaning sector, was to understand why that many people worked for such a long time in an occupation that unfortunately is not valued high in terms of social status and level of wage, and offers difficult working conditions. Theories of economical rationality can therefore not explain satisfactorily why people persistently continue working in these occupations. Instead, by adopting a sensemaking approach we are able to uncover the process under which people generate these difficult career path choices and the environment in which they work.

The analysis of the occupational integration of immigrants particularly in the cleaning sector through sensemaking, brings to the discussion a multilevel approach of the employability concept. From previous literature, employability in a broader sense have highlighted that this relies not just on individuals' skills, but the social context and local labour demands and how different factors interact (Hillage, J., & Pollard, E. 1998; Houston, D., 2005; McQuaid, R., 2006; Thijssen, J. G., Van der Heijden, B. I. & Rocco, T. S., 2008). This employability is not specific to immigrants but people in general.

In this sense, this approach of employability suggests three actors involved, the individual, the society and the labour market. The individual of sense maker in this case are immigrants, what the literature suggests is that the individual is responsible for their skills, the job search and how to address the job and present itself (McQuaid, R., 2006). In the case of immigrants working in cleaning companies, their previous skills are diminished by the lack of language, the job search is also limited to occupations where the language limitation can be avoided such cleaning, and the job search is influenced as well by social orientation as the findings showed and the application. And concerning how to get the job, cleaning does not require more than that the person show it is available to work.

A second factor that takes place is the society and this refers to their social bonding and their economic situation (Mcquaid, R., Green, A., & Danson, M., 2005; Houston, D, 2005; Berntson, E., Sverke, M., & Marklund, S., 2006). As mentioned before, many of the immigrant employees in



cleaning business got in contact to this sector through recommendation or advice from someone in their social network, that usually have worked or works in the same sector. Also, getting an income was a primary need, not just for survival, but for people to feel as part of the new society and being able to contribute, as many employees expressed in the findings.

A third factor is the labour market, understood as the needs and practices of the organizations, regarding shortages periods, ways to recruit among others (Mcquaid, R., Green, A., & Danson, M., 2005; Houston, D, 2005; Berntson, E., Sverke, M., & Marklund, S., 2006). Certainly, the cleaning sector has a work force demand and not ask for much to enter to the business. But what sensemaking shows in the analysis of immigrants in the cleaning sector is that it goes beyond to be a contextual situation.

Once the person is employed there is an interaction that shapes not just the individual but the organization as well. Some examples observed in the cleaning sector that has an impact on employee's future employability are, low possibilities to advance in the occupation, the training they get is not an asset that can be used in other occupations and problems with physical and mental health. In other words, employees in the cleaning sector do not get more than an income.

Immigrant employees in the cleaning sector, clearly prove they can compromise in an organization, however, the stereotypes under the cleaning occupation together with the working conditions, have implications on their perceived employability.

## 7 Conclusion

The research question guiding this research was *How do immigrants, make-sense of their labour integration in the cleaning business?* Two main sub questions were raised: *What are the personnel management practices in cleaning companies where immigrant employees work?* and *How do immigrants working in cleaning companies make sense of their employability?*

First the two sub-questions will be answered and later the research question.

The answer to *What are the personnel management practices in cleaning companies where immigrant employees work?* The personnel management practices in cleaning companies are an interactive setting that differs depending on the size and the recruitment practices. The size of the organizations as in other branches have implication on how the work is organized and how the strategies of personnel managers take place. Regarding recruitment, two types of practices were

found: a purposively recruitment based on ethnical background and a standard open recruitment (meaning, based on advertisements, public work agency etc.) These two types of recruitment lead to a homogeneous and heterogeneous organizational model based on ethnical diversity.

The training and career ladder in general are two weak practices for further development of the employees in the cleaning sector. In this sense, immigrant employees in the cleaning sector, end up with the same skills as they entered to work.

Particularly in heterogeneous organizations there are higher challenges regarding to managing diversity. This research, has highlighted how people informally can create subcultures or subgroups based on ethnical identification inside organizations (John Van Maanen and Stephen Barley on Hatch, M., & Cunliffe, A.,2013, p159). Others researchers as Caren Siehl and Johanne Marin (ibid, 2013) suggest that subcultures can be analysed through understanding the power relation between them in order to see the predominance of certain group and the implications for smaller groups. In this sense on larger organizations the risk for the emergence of subcultures and possible abuse of power.

The answer to the second sub-question *How do immigrants working in cleaning companies make sense of their employability?* Is that for immigrants, the search for a job is a process that entails to envision themselves into an occupation within their abilities and possibilities in the new context. Following Karl Weick's sensemaking theory (1995), this is a process based on the analysis of individual choices but that cannot be separated by their social interactions. Immigrants get in contact with the cleaning branch through recommendations or as advice of their social bonding, meaning friends, family, or someone they meet with the same ethnical background.

The cleaning occupation offers not just an easy entrance to the labour market and an income, but the possibility to avoid the language barrier through an occupation that usually is carried out individually. Paradoxically at the same time immigrants perceived a satisfactory feeling after getting the job, particularly because it creates a closer connection to the host country, in a long run this career path limits their transition to primary sector occupations and their social interaction to mostly foreign communities.

The question *How do immigrants, make-sense of their labour integration in the cleaning business?* Immigrants make-sense of their labour integration in the cleaning business based on their identity

construction as immigrant or foreigners and the limited occupation opportunities that this implicate in the social context in which live. Their perceived employability is not different from the population in general. However, is in a disadvantaged position, as the connections draw on usually to secondary sectors as cleaning. The cleaning sector offers an entrance to the labour market and an income, but cannot provide with more than this, as the same sector is subject to stereotypes and marginalization from the society.

Working in cleaning companies is not just a result of people's skills, it is a reaction from the host society as well, by allowing work opportunities just in sectors they cannot fill with native labour force. The cleaning business branch is not just using instrumentally the immigrant employability. The cleaning branch itself is also instrumentalized by the host society as a mode to provide cheap labour and simultaneously consent or unconsciously as a segregation field.

Finally, the employability of an individual is a key aspect to understand labour integration, particularly of immigrants. Labour integration goes beyond an income; it creates a social link and the social interaction between the organization and the individual shape both. In the case of the individual, shapes present and future occupational identity. And regarding the organizations it shapes their management practices.

## 7.1 Contributions

This section presents the contributions of this research to the theoretical field, some recommendations to personal management and to people coming from other countries that find a way into the cleaning business.

### 7.1.1 Theoretical contribution

The sensemaking framework contributes to the concept of employability a closer approach to how their components (meaning the individual, the society and labour market context) are not just conditional to each other, but how they interact and relate to each other. The employability is not just an individual attribution, but the result of social interaction.

### 7.1.2 Recommendations to practitioners

The models of ethnical heterogeneous and homogeneous organizations, has highlighted the existence of more challenging situations with diverse ethnical personnel. However, as far to understand diversity as something problematic, the intention is to point out that should be awareness of the differences. Larger sized companies due to their size and their heterogeneity face

major challenges to detect and manage diversity than medium companies. There are two main recommendations to heterogeneous companies.

- Embrace diversity instead to expect to keep the status quo, no taking for granted communication process.

-A way to improve the status and conditions of the cleaning sector, which usually responds to the external market, could be through improving employees working conditions and a more active collaboration with Trade Unions and work agencies to lobby for enforced collective agreements.

Regarding homogeneous companies the recommendations are.

- Avoid abuse of their position as gate keeper of the labour market for their cultural group.
- Consider the risk of auto segregation, as they promote a closed culture inside the organization.

### 7.1.3 Recommendations to employees in the cleaning system

The cleaning business is without a doubt a source of employment that is essential to our society. And should be more valued. However, it is important to make sure that essential rights are respected and in the case of notice irregular process or action approach to a work agency, trade union and report it or leave the companies. People should not wait until they have physical or mental weariness to take initiative and find another occupation. Working in cleaning companies provide an easy entrance to the Swedish labour market, however as a long-term career path can also close doors for other occupations.

## 7.2 Limitations

This section highlight some aspects that may have some implications in the research.

- The sample of this research, presented people from different contexts, but still there were ethnical groups difficult to access due to low interest of lack of common language with the researcher. The sample limit the generalizations of the results in a larger scale.
- The access, to small companies was not accomplished. Many of them that were contacted, they were not interested in the project and mentioned that their work was very stressful. It is necessary to mention that small companies refer to a company with 1 person to 9 employees.

- The researcher did interviews in 3 different languages Spanish, Swedish and English, but in some cases the language used was neither the informant or the researcher mother tongue, which there is always the risk of miss interpretation.

### 7.3 Knowledge transfer

The presented divergences in ethnical heterogeneous organizations, should be a phenomenon to consider in other occupations that also include an ethnical diverse labour force. In order to create awareness and create open collaboration systems were conflicts and disagreements can be managed constructively.

Even this research had a small sample, it still describes the possible conflicts that immigrants are subjects too, regarding their entrance to labour market in low skill occupations. Sense making theory can significantly contributes to the understanding of the challenges for immigrant integration in the labour market in other sectors.

The formation of subcultures inside the organizations, it is a factor that can be consider in other occupations with predominant ethnical groups and be studied in further research.

### 7.4 Future research

The phenomenon of migration is a key aspect in the policy making but also an important study object in the academia. Some other questions that can be raised from this research are regarding the study of the establishment of ethnical groups in Sweden and their influence in the entrance in the labour market to low skilled occupations.

During this study, an interview with a representative of a Trade Union was realized in the city of Gothenburg. This Trade Union works with the cleaning branch and other branch as maintenance and caretaking, but as this was just one interview the interview could not be used to draw general results. However, it gave an insight of the problems that low unionism among immigrant population in Sweden represent. But also, it shows the low effort from the union to be active in recruiting members with immigrant background. There is a historical tradition of collaboration in Sweden between the trade unions and the employers, and negotiations to better working conditions, but in a sector where mostly immigrants work, as not many are members there is no a contra negotiation part. The consequences of this low unionism should be raised in further research.

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## Appendix

### Interview guide personnel managers

#### Introduction

First thank you for giving this time with you, I'm enrolled in a Master Programme in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations of the University of Gothenburg. I'm conducting interviews as part of my research project for my thesis in regard of integration to the Swedish labour market in cleaning companies. As this is the beginning of my project I just want to know your experiences and impressions of the branch.

Can I have your permission to record our conversation? This interview will be transcribed and shared with my tutor and I can ensure you that the information will be anonymous.

#### Questionnaire

1. Can you tell me about yourself? Your position and role at this company? Your main task or job description? How long the company had been operating?
2. Which are the main services that the company offers? Do you know how the business started?
3. What is the role of people for your business?
4. How do you describe the employee profile of your company?
5. Could you describe how is conformed the employee population in terms of gender, number of employees and ethnicity?

6. Is there any reason of why the employees have that characterization?
7. What abilities do you need to work in this business? Do you offer training or preparation?
8. In your experience, so far what are the main challenges of managing people the cleaning business?
9. Is it easy to find people to work? Which are your communication channels to attract employees? Do you have a special department to hire people as HR? Do they have specific procedures? What type of contracts do you offer?
10. What are the positive aspects to work in this branch?
11. Have you experienced a negative or problematic situation
12. Does the company have some activities to promote communication among the personnel?
13. How is the relationship with other companies in the same branch?
14. What about other organizations as trade unions and Arbetsförmedlingen? What is your experience with them? Is there a high representation from the unions?
15. In general, nowadays what are the main challenges for the cleaning business?
16. How do you see the business in 5 years?
17. In which ways, the business has changed since you started?
18. Is there anything that you liked to add?

### Interview guide employees in cleaning companies

#### Questionnaire employees

1. Could you tell me about yourself? Where are you from? When did you come to Sweden? Why do you come to Sweden? How was your life before to move to Sweden? What was your profession in your home country?
3. Was it difficult to find a job in Sweden? What was your first job? How did you get this job?
3. Now thinking of your current job, how long have you been working there? how did you get this job? what are your main tasks? Do you have a fixed contract?

4. Tell me about the process, that you have gone through to get the job? Could you tell me if you had some network connection that recommended you for the position? Was it through friends or relatives?

5. Do you think it was easy to get the job? Did you get any kind of training to do your job once you got hired?

6. What are the positive things about your job? In other words, what do you like about your job? And what things could be improved?

6. From your experience, how would you characterize your working environment regarding other co-workers? Is a multicultural environment? Mostly Swedish people? And in gender? Is there particular predominance of women or men?

7. From your experience, what is your perception of working with people with different cultural backgrounds? How is your relationship with other employees? Do you fraternize outside the job?

8. how would you characterize your working environment regarding the company managers? Do you like working there? Do you feel that yours points of view are taken in consideration in the company?

9.. Regarding social security? How many days of the week do you work? Do you have paid vacations?

10. Is there any chance at your Company that you get promoted?

11. Do you have the necessary equipment to do your job

12. How tough is it to work in the cleaning sector? The workload is doable? What about security conditions? The use of chemicals? Do you interact with customers? How is that?

13. Do you have some time to rest in between when you are working? 10 min pause?

12. The physical work you do, has ever affected you in your health? Have you been in the need of take sick leave because injuries at your workplace?

13. Could you tell me If you have ever experience discrimination in your current job? Do you know some stories about other colleague that had problem with managers?

14. What is your perception of trade unions? Are you a member of a Trade Union?

15. How do you see your working life in 5 years? If you could change work to another branch would you, do it? how tough is it to work in the cleaning sector? Can you see yourself working permanently?

16.How perceive your chances or opportunities to find another job in Sweden?

16. Is there something else that you would like to add?

Thank you so much for your time and participation!