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Maintaining Flat

A qualitative study of how institutional actors maintain a flat organizational structure

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A qualitative study on how institutional actors maintain a flat organization

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Abstract

This paper investigates how institutional actors in the flat organization Tech AB, maintains their organizational structure. The paper builds upon a qualitative method and consists of 27 interviews, with both employees and managers. Drawing upon the notion of Institutional Work, this paper focuses on the work of maintaining institutions. This study has identified sixteen forms of work, aimed at both maintaining and creating institutions. In this paper, the different types of work builds upon the study presented by Currie, Lockett, Finn, Martin and Waring (2012), which implies that the work of creating institutions also could be seen as maintaining institutions. However, out of sixteen types of work, six forms of work in order to maintain institutions have been selected in order to fulfil the aim of this paper. All of the six form of work have been related to the work of maintaining institutions. Additionally, this paper shows that all institutional actors continuously engage in five of the types of work in order to maintain the organizational structure. However, this study also demonstrates that one work of maintenance did not maintain the structure directly, but instead pressured the flat organizational structure. Hence, this paper contributes with the idea that the distinction between the work of creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions might be simplified. This since, this study indicates that the concepts are more intertwined to each other, compared to what has been shown in previous research.

Keywords

Flat organization, Institutional Work, Maintaining institutions, Institutional actors, Employee, Manager.

Introduction

Flat organizational structures have during the past decades gained popularity in management theories and are viewed as an increasing trend among organizations (Craig, 2018). An increasing number of organizations are starting to embrace the flat organizational structure by replacing the traditional hierarchical structure (Rishipal, 2014). This mainly since delayering unnecessary hierarchy between the employees and the management is argued to increase the productivity and decrease the costs by removing unnecessary middle management. Many industries also view hierarchical organizations as outdated (Lee & Edmondson, 2017; Rishipal, 2014). A hierarchical organization, in opposite to a flat organization, consists of numerous layers of authority and is said to be top-down managed. In practice, this implies that the first level of employees usually need to go through multiple layers of management, before reaching the top management (Rishipal, 2014). A flat organizational structure could be defined as a structure that consists of no or a few layers of managerial supervision. This means that the authority is delegated down, from the managers to the employees.

The phenomenon of flat organizations flattening their organizational structure is not new. In fact flat organizations were already discussed in the 1980s, by Carlzon and Lagerström (2018). The researcher presents several arguments for why an organization should flatten their structure. More specifically, Carlzon and Lagerström (2018) argue that the authority and responsibility should be delegated down to the employees since they usually are the ones that have direct contact with external stakeholders. This is something that is consistent with the advocated view of flat organizations presented by Ghiselli and Sigel (1972), which emphasize the importance of having independent employees that are able to take own decisions and drive the organizational work forward. Thus, the top management should let the employees work self-managing and instead work with i.e. objectives and strategic planning (Carlzon and Lagerström, 2018).

Recent research further show that the delayering of organizations streamlines the ability for the employees to quickly respond to the dynamic environment, faster than what the managerial layers of authority might permit them to do (Lee & Edmondson, 2017; Rishipal, 2014). Magpili and Pazos (2018) additionally claim that delayering organizations and delegating the authority to the employees contribute to the creation of self-managing teams. Self-managing teams could be referred to as diversified groups of people, where each group possesses a variety of knowledge and skills. By delegating down the authority, the team members collectively receive the full responsibility for the work, which is considered to be beneficial for achieving organizational outcomes (Magpili & Pazos, 2018). However, there is also research related to cases where flattening organizational structures were considered as unsuccessful and not beneficial. The Management Systems Laboratories of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in the U.S. changed the organizational structure from a matrix structure to a flat organiza-

tional structure. The shift was however not seen as beneficial for the organization since flattening the structure created confusion among the organizational actors. This due to the undefined boundaries between the management and the employees when the flat structure was implemented. The structure was changed one year later, from flat to a hierarchy, which resulted in that most of the negative effects on the organization and the goals was overcome (Kurstedt, Gardner & Hindman, 1991).

Drawing upon the presented previous research, it could be stated that research regarding flat organizations has gained much attention by organizations and by management scholars during the past decades. The main focus within the previous research has been on how the flat structure e.g. is implemented, how the authority is distributed within the flat structure and what advantages or disadvantages the structure implies in practice. However, it could be argued that existing research on flat organizations fails to present how these organizations are maintained. Additionally, previous studies have usually focused on how the managers maintain the organizational structures, through e.g. control or routines, meaning that the research often portrays the managers as the main actor in order to maintain institutions (TheTelegraph, 2017; Llopis, 2014). Therefore, it could be stated that research regarding how institutional actors work in order to maintain a flat organization is lacking. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), argue that it is essential to consider all institutional actors when maintaining an institution, and that all actors continuously need to work and put effort into maintaining institutions, thus not taking the work of maintenance for granted. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the rather unexplored relation between the concepts of maintenance and flat organization. This by investigating how institutional actors within a given, flat organization maintain their organizational structure. This will be done by drawing upon the theory of Institutional Work, presented by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), that explain how institutional actors are able to affect institutions through their actions. The focus within this paper will be on institutional maintenance, but the work of creating and disrupting institutions will be also be implemented in this study in order create a deeper understanding regarding the relationship between flat organizations and the work of maintenance. Consequently, the research question is,

How do institutional actors maintain a flat organizational structure?

In order to address the stated research question, this paper is based on a qualitative case study of an organization with a flat organizational structure. The chosen organization operates in the technology and logistics industry, and will in this paper be referred to as Tech AB. The chosen company is argued to be relevant for this study, since the organization already from the first established, has maintained a flat organizational structure. Therefore, the chosen organization together with its institutional actors, are seen as being suitable for the aim and research question of this study. Moreover in order to clarify, the chosen flat organization will in this paper be treated as an institution. The concept “institution” refers to the more or less permanent element of social life. These elements affect the beliefs and behaviour of the institutional actors, since the elements create templates and patterns for action (Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca, 2011). Thus, it could be argued that a flat organization consists of several elements that affect the beliefs

and behaviour of the actors, at the same time as the actors affect the institution through their actions.

Furthermore, it is essential to mention the delimitation that has been done within this study. This paper have presented sixteen forms of work within the work of creating and maintaining institutions, presented by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). All of the sixteen types of work have been explained in the theoretical framework. However, six of these have received prior focus and are in this paper viewed as work aimed at maintaining institutions, this in line with the study presented by Currie, Lockett, Finn, Martin, Waring (2012). The delimitation occurred after the data was collected. This since all forms of work were not considered to be relevant when studying how institutional actors maintain a flat organizational structure. It could therefore be argued, that the six chosen forms of work were seen to be the most suitable in order to fulfil the aim of this paper.

Theoretical framework

Introducing Institutional Work

Organizational institutionalism has become one of the most discussed subjects among organizational researchers, ever since the 1970s when the Neo-Institutional theory emerged (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Neo-institutionalism seeks to explain organizational isomorphism and how institutions shape and affect the behaviour of actors, at the same time as it describes institutions as taken for granted (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Drawing upon this institutional perspective, the actors become legitimized when their practices, values and norms are aligned with the existing institution (Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca, 2009; Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009). Therefore, the institutional perspective of institutions assumes that the work of maintaining institutions is done by institutionalized routines and practices, thus by following the institutional structure (Micelotta & Washington, 2013).

The concept of Institutional Work is argued to be an extension of the institutional theory, which has allowed researchers to keep fostering their institutional studies. The new direction implies a view where actors no longer are seen as unreflective followers, belonging and adjusting their practices to a certain institutional framework (Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca, 2009). Instead, actors are viewed as highly knowledgeable and rational, in the sense that they are able to affect institutions in various intense and dynamic organizational fields (Giddens, 1984). This implies that the notion of Institutional Work is based on an increased awareness of how actors affect the institution since it views institutions as outcomes of human action and interaction. However, it is essential to consider that there is recursive relationship between institutions and the actions taken by institutional actors. This relationship implies that the institutions create patterns and templates for individual actions, at the same time as the actions of individuals and collectives affect these patterns and templates. The actions that are taken by actors within the institutions, could be either vastly visible or close to being invisible. Thus, these actions usually imply various kind of day-to-day activities, adaptations and adjustments made by actors in

order to maintain institutions (Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca, 2009; Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca, 2011). Moreover, the concept of Institutional Work has received a broad variety of definitions. Although the most common description of the concept is the intentional actions taken by either individual or collective actors in order to *Maintain*, *Create* or *Disrupt* a given institution (Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca, 2009). These forms of Institutional Work will in the following sections be presented separately. However, the work of maintaining an institution within the concept of Institutional Work will receive prior focus in this paper.

The work of Maintaining institutions

The work of maintaining an institution could, within the concept of Institutional Work, be described as practices taken by actors, in order to support, repair or re-create institutions. Although, previous literature of institutional studies has been given the work of maintaining institutions little theoretical and empirical attention. The researchers imply that the concept of maintaining an institution often becomes neglected and taken for granted, since institutions are seen as self-producing mechanisms (Lawrence et al., 2009). Researchers further claim that almost every institution requires some kind of ongoing maintenance in order to achieve institutional survival (Lawrence et al., 2009; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The work of continuously maintaining institutions is also essential in order to handle the dynamic and fast-changing environment, where fields develop into new or unexpected directions, as well as changes in demographics or the use of new technologies. Therefore, researchers argue that it is crucial to separate the concept of maintaining institutions from the concepts of stability and absence of change. In addition, in order to maintain institutions it is essential to understand that actors are involved in the work of maintaining an institution. In practice this implies that the actors are required to establish means for engagement and socialization of new actors into the field, as well as understanding how to cope with new demographic patterns, norms and external changes (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) have come up with several forms of work that are associated with institutional maintenance; *Policing*, *Deterring*, *Mythologizing*, *Enabling Work*, *Embedding and Routinizing*, and *Valourizing*. The first mentioned work of maintenance, *Policing*, is found in institutions with high level of institutional compliance and enforcement, which in practice implies that the institutional actors carefully becomes monitored and audited. *Deterring*, could be described as the way of maintaining institutions through implementing coercive rules and barriers in order to prevent institutional change. The third type of work in order to maintain institutions, *Mythologizing*, could be described as practices taken by institutional actors in order to maintain the foundation of the institution. Something that could be done by either creating or sustaining various historical organizational myths (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Furthermore, the following section will present the remaining three types of work, aimed at maintaining institutions. These will in this paper receive prior focus.

Enabling Work includes work of routines or rules that are needed within an institution, in order to facilitate and support its survival and internal stability. This type of maintenance may include the restructuration of resources, organizational structures or the creation of new actor roles and

authorizations. Enabling Work in the form of an accurate distribution of authority and responsibility is of the essence, especially when institutions have a geographical distance (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). One demonstration of Enabling Work could be found in the research done by Guler, Guillen and MacPhersoun (2002) who examines how ISO 9000 is transferred. The study shows how different kind of organizations, e.g. government laboratories, accounting firms and industry trade groups, were given the mandate to act as “registrators” of the ISO 9000. This was done in order to carry on the institutional routines and by that, maintain the institution.

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) additionally present another form of maintaining institutions namely *Valourizing*, which could be explained as the work of maintenance that is done in order to highlight the foundation of the institution. These actions could be said to clarify the foundation of the institution by demonstrating how things are and should be like within the institutions. Angus (1993) further exemplifies the work of Valourizing by presenting a study of the Australian Christian Brothers College (CBC), an all boy college associated with a macho culture and norms such as a high level of competition and violence. The author present that the work of Valourizing within the college occurred during public athletic competitions where the students needed to prove their masculinity in form of athletic gestures. Students managing to live up to the school culture and its norms were identified as being true CBC boys, whilst those who failed became ridiculed. These kinds of actions are therefore seen as one way for the college to further maintain its particular institutional foundation by valourizing it (Angus, 1993).

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) additionally present the work of maintaining institutions in form of *Embedding and Routinizing*. This type of work could be described as work of maintaining and reproducing a certain institution through e.g. recruiting new actors, educating new or existing actors, or through celebrations and routines. Zilber (2002) chose to exemplify the work of Embedding and Routinizing by referring to the work of maintaining a woman crisis centre. By only recruiting female employees with strong feminist norms and beliefs to the crisis centre, the centre was able to maintain its foundation and values, as well as strengthen the stability (Zilber, 2002).

As for now, several types of maintenance work within the concept of Institutional Work has been presented. Following section will however present various types of work related to creating institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Although, before introducing the work of creating institutions it essential to emphasize that the work that is presented by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) regarding creating institutions, will be extended with the contribution to the field of Institutional Work made by Currie, Lockett, Finn, Martin and Waring (2012). More specifically, Currie et al., (2012) criticize the distinction between the concept of creating and maintaining institutions. The authors argue that practices that originally have been linked to creating institutions can be associated with maintaining institutions. In their study, the researchers investigate the Institutional Work made by elite medical professionals, and their work in order to maintain their professional status during situations when their professional power was threatened. The researchers claim that institutional maintenance does not only consist of prac-

tices that are connected to the notion of maintaining institutions that originally has been described by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). Instead, Currie et al. (2012) show that several types within Institutional Work influence and interact with each other. Furthermore, in the context of maintaining the elite professional's status in the study by Currie et al. (2012), the researchers claim that the work of maintaining the status includes a large variety of both creating and maintaining than previously shown by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). With this stated, this paper will draw upon the research presented by Currie et al., (2012), which implies that the work related to creating institutions will be seen as instead maintaining institutions.

Drawing upon Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca (2009) the work of creating institutions could be described as actions taken by actors in order to reconstruct an organization's given rules, rights and frameworks. It also involves practices aimed at reconstructing meaning, values and beliefs. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) present several forms of work aimed at creating institutions, i.e. *Advocacy*, *Defining*, *Vesting*, *Changing Normative Associations*, *Mimicry*, *Theorizing*, *Educating*, *Constructing Normative Network*, and lastly, *Constructing Identities*. The first work of creating institutions, *Advocacy*, implies various forms of rules and laws aimed at guiding institutions into acting in the best interest of the social economy. *Defining*, could be described as the creation of new institutional rules or systems, in order to create membership roles and status hierarchies. The third type of work, *Vesting*, also includes creation of new rules, but instead focuses on how these rules can deal with various forms of rights of property. *Changing Normative Associations*, is another form of work that tend to create new institutions, by re-making an already existing one due to a new questioned actor followership. Furthermore, when creating new institutions there is a risk that the new institution implement the old way of working, which implies that old practices and rules could be used. Something that could be related to the work of creating institutions through *Mimicry*. Additionally, *Theorizing*, occur when internal practices becomes theorized, in order to become part of the institution. The three remaining practices within the concept of creating institution will in this paper receive prior focus. These will be further discussed in the following section.

Educating implies educating institutional actors in order to enhance their skills and knowledge, required for the institution. Lounsbury (2001) present one example of this by explaining the institutionalization of recycling programs in universities in the US. This process required that a larger population obtained new skills and knowledge in order for the recycle programs to work. In order to achieve this, one actor became more of an educator, who facilitated the institutionalization by providing the other actors with new information and insights (Lounsbury, 2001).

The second type of work, *Constructing Normative Networks*, refers to how institutions are created through the associations between different organizational actors. Thus, the actors do not always need to have the same way of doing things, nor the same interests and motivations in every question. However, by belonging to the same institution, it is crucial that the actors share the same perceptions, which in turn facilitates their ways of achieving the organizational outcomes (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Lawrence, Hardy and Phillips (2002) exemplify this by

explaining how different actors in the University of Oslo, the Australian Embassy and a government agency, created an institution through their collective practices in order to reduce the malnutrition among Palestinian children. Thus, the actors managed to form an institution although they had different interests and motivations regarding the subject (Lawrence et al, 2002).

The third type of work, *Constructing Identities*, refers to the construction of identities which describes the relation between a specific actor and the field that he or she operates in. The creation of identities appears as a result of collective actions, aimed at enhancing the work of both existing actors within the field and new entrants. Moreover, the identities could be affected by internal actors as well as external actors in the organizational field (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The work of constructing identities is exemplified by Oakes, Townley and Cooper (1998) that examines an institutional change within the field of a historical museum. The authors explain how the implemented institutional change resulted in that the organizational employees were encouraged to see the museum as an actual business and themselves as employees of a business, not as employees at a museum. This meant that a new identity was constructed, due to the institutional change that was implemented (Oakes et al., 1998; p. 223)

As presented by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) and Lawrence et al., (2009) institutions are not seen as self-reproducing entities, in fact, institutions require continuous work in order to be maintained. However, the work that is done in order to maintain institutions can in some cases deviate from the taken for granted practices that are taken in order to maintain the institution. This implies that the practices can depart from the institutional structure, which in turn gives rise to institutional disruptions. Therefore, in line with the concept of Institutional Work, the researchers argue the work of disrupting institutions is crucial to notice, and that it would be ignorant to neglect the fact that institutions do not have practices of disruption (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2009). The institutional disruptions could further be connected to the study presented by Lok and De Rond, (2013) which refers to institutional disruptions in the form of breakdowns. Breakdowns occur when the institutional structure departs from the actual practices and can be defined as “*disruptions of the normal, taken-for-granted flow of practice when things don’t go as expected*” (Lok & de Rond, 2013, p.186). *Minor breakdowns* are one form of breakdown, which originates from the occurrence of different personalities and expectations each person might have within an institution. These breakdowns are seen as the result of tensions between institutionalized expectations and the work practices that are performed and could be seen as small tears in the organizational structure (Lok & De Rond, 201, p.186).

To summarize the presented theoretical framework, several types of work within the concepts of creating and maintaining have been identified. As previously mentioned in this paper, six of these types of work will receive prior focus for this study; *Enabling work, Valourizing, Embedding and Routinizing, Educating, Constructing Normative Networks and Constructing Identities*. In line with the study presented by Currie et al (2013), the six types of work will be seen as maintaining institutions which further will help to fulfil the aim of this paper. Additionally, the concept of disruptions will be taken into consideration when analyzing the collected data.

Methodology

Introducing Tech AB

For this paper, the name of the studied organization has been changed to Tech AB. This is done due to the organization's internal policies, in order to protect and preserve the organization's anonymity. With more than 200 employees, the company is described as an innovator of cloud services for managing deliveries within different industries. Tech AB has received attention for its unique organizational structure. The organizational structure is described as flat, which implies a few layers of management. In practice, this means that the employees at Tech AB face one layer of managers before reaching the top management, consisting of the CEO. The layer of managers, which in this paper are referred to as Sector Managers, are not defined as traditional managers controlling their subordinates. Instead the Sector Managers have delegated their authority down to their employees and instead act as supportive tools. Furthermore, each Sector Manager is responsible for a business area, where each area consists of up to five self-managing teams. Each team includes approximately eight team members. Each team member has equal responsibility and authority within the team and should in collaboration with the fellow team members plan, create and accomplish the desired outcomes based on the interest of the customer.

Research design and data collection

The study is based on a qualitative design, which was found to be the most appropriate design in order to fulfil the purpose of this study regarding how institutional actors maintain a flat organizational structure. The chosen research method created the opportunity to get inside the heads of the interviewees (Silverman, 2013), and thereby understand the activities and behaviours within the company. This goes in line with Bryman and Bell (2015), that emphasize the qualitative design as a suitable process for collecting data that depict and describe activities taken by actors. The qualitative design also contributes to a deeper understanding and broader perspectives of a certain phenomenon (Silverman, 2013). The study is further based on a case study approach of a chosen organization, Tech AB, which was considered to be beneficial in the sense that it provides the paper with depth and real-life examples (Flyvberg, 2006).

This paper is based on 27 semi-structured interviews, with a total of 25 respondents. Thus, two additional interviews have been conducted with two different respondents, since it was considered that further interviews with these respondents would facilitate the understanding of the collected data. Each of the interviews was held for approximately 45 minutes. The semi-structured interviews contributed to open-ended questions, which allow the respondents to freely discuss and share their perceptions and understandings in order to give a greater understanding of the subject (Silverman, 2013; Bryman & Bell, 2015). The method also created the opportunity for new questions to arise, creating open and relaxed interviews with the respondents. Kvale (2006) highlights the importance of having open interviews in order to provide the interviewer with narratives and more detailed insights, which otherwise could be difficult to obtain.

All interviews held with the respondents were recorded, in order to facilitate the collection of the data and ensure accuracy when analyzing the answers. At the beginning of each interview, all respondents were informed about the ethical considerations that are taken in this study. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and that all collected answers will be anonymized, meaning that the answers will not be traceable and that no real name will be used during the paper. In order to distinguish the interviewees from each other, pseudonyms in the form of numbers have been used. This means that the names of the employees and managers have been changed to numbers, in order to preserve the anonymity, as well as to safeguard the confidentiality (Silverman, 2013). The respondents were also informed regarding the fact that they, whenever during the interview, could choose to skip any questions if they felt uncomfortable. Furthermore, the respondents also received the question whether they approved to be recorded or not, with the understanding that the interviewed recordings only were going to be used in order to facilitate the transcription of the material

Bryman and Bell (2015) also emphasize the benefits of recording interviews, which enables the interviewer to focus on the respondents and pay attention to body language and facial expressions. The recordings also help to avoid misunderstandings and incorrect interpretations of the collected material, which in turn increases the reliability of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The study is based on interviews with both employees and managers, in order to create a broader understanding of the research question. The interviews have been held face to face with the employees and managers. The majority of the interviews have been held face-to-face. However, some of the interviews have been held through Skype. Since some of the respondents were not able to be interviewed face-to-face. Moreover, the employees and managers have been chosen through the use of a targeted selection, which implies that the respondents have been chosen selectively and matched with criteria's that fulfil the aim for this study.

The overall data collection process lasted for approximately 8 weeks, and were divided into three phases. The first phase of interviews was held with 5 randomly selected respondents in order to gain a pre-understanding of the organization and its structure. During the second phase of interviews, we had an initial understanding and knowledge about the company, which facilitated the ability to follow up with more detailed questions. The second phase included 11 interviews, held both face-to-face and virtually. Lastly, the third phase of interviews was held with the rest of the 11 respondents, in order to complement and enhance the data collection with deeper examples and understandings. A total of 27 interviews were considered to be sufficient for this study, since any additional interviews were perceived to not contribute with new or relevant information in order to fulfil the aim of this paper (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)

It is crucial to consider the limitations that were encountered during the process. One of the limitations that were encountered already in the first phases of data collection was some of the interviews were held virtually. In some cases, a virtual conversation could make it more difficult for the interviewee to gain trust towards the respondent (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In order to minimize these complexities, it was essential that the respondent was well informed regarding the ethical aspects and confidentiality of the study. Additionally, it was also important to be aware of the fact that technical disturbances could occur during virtually held interviews. In

order to ensure this, it was crucial that these interviews were given a little more time than the interviews that were held face-to-face.

Data analysis

The collected data for this paper has been analyzed through the use of a Grounded Theory approach (Martin & Turner, 1986; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The reason for the chosen approach is that it was considered to be suitable for the qualitative approach, with 27 semi-structured interviews. This due to the fact that the approach ensures the accuracy and details in the data since it does not simplify or neglect the complexities in the contexts (Martin & Turner, 1986). The data analysis has been divided into different steps, where the first step was to transcribe the recorded material. The next step was to code the transcribed material, which implies that the transcribed data has been read through, and smaller notes have been added in order to understand the material. Examples of codes that were used during this step were: *trust*, *diversity* and *team-constellation*. Further, categories that represent a broader set of codes were conducted. This was done in order to structure and enhance the understanding of the coded material. Thus, codes were placed into different categories based on keywords and concepts that shared the same attributes and that could be related to each other. The categorization facilitated the understanding and allowed for emphasis on the most relevant data in order to fulfil the purpose of this study (Martin & Turner, 1986; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Examples of categories that were used during the third step was: *Role of the Sector Manager*, *Self-managing teams* and *Informal Leader*. The categories were then collected under two main perspectives; *Employee- and Sector Manager perspective*.

The five first interviews were aimed at creating an initial understanding of the organizational structure and their way of working. The interviews were later on coded and categorized in order to grasp an overview of the collected data and developed further questions for the upcoming phases of interviews. During the second phase, the already existing codes and categorizations were further enhanced at the same time as new categories were created. The first and second phase of interviews were not linked to any theoretical framework. In fact, the theoretical framework started to emerge after the second phase of interviews. This, in turn, meant that the third phase of interviews was designed with a theoretical consideration in mind, in order to answer the research question. Moreover, during the data analysis several limitations were encountered. One limitation of the study was the translation of the material since some of the respondents have been interviewed in Swedish and some in English. The reason why some of the interviews were held in Swedish was due to the fact that the respondents had Swedish as their native language, and therefore it was perceived to be more comfortable to discuss in Swedish. Although, when transcribing the Swedish interviews, only the chosen quotes that were used in the paper have been translated. This in order to remain as much of the meaning and content of the collected material and to avoid misunderstandings in the translation. Moreover, the translation of the quotations could be seen as a limitation, since the content of the meanings could be slightly changed

Empirical section

The Role of Employees and Sector Managers in a flat organization

Employee perspective

The majority of the employees claim that it is important to accept the organizational beliefs, meanings and structure. Most of the employees argue that it is important that new employees accept and believe in the existing flat organizational structure when entering Tech AB. Otherwise, some of the respondents argue that it might become hard to work in the best interest of the company. This since the structure of the organization is the main aspect that permeates the whole organization and its activities. One respondent argued that it becomes clear when someone does not work in line with the ideas of a flat structure, e.g. when centralizing its authority, since it eventually will affect the teamwork negatively. Moreover, one of the employees chose to explain this by the following statement,

When the organization hires new employees, the employees try to discuss the organizational structure with the new employee as much as possible. We try to explain how things work here. I believe that it is important that all new employees have understood and accepted our organizational structure beforehand, otherwise, they might become shocked when starting here. (Employee 3)

The employees at Tech AB are divided within multiple self-managing teams. Each team is constellated in the best interest of the customer and its requirements. Even though the teams might include various employee professions, each team member has equal authority and carry a collective responsibility for their working projects. In practice, this implies that the authority is delegated down to each team, where the teams independently set up goals, plan strategies and take decisions within the projects on behalf of the organization and its customers. One of the respondents exemplifies this by the following statement,

I believe we have huge respect for each other within the teams, especially since we do not have any hierarchy controlling us. Otherwise, organizations usually have a boss that tells the employees how they should work. But here, we all have the same value and the right to make decisions, meaning that we all have equal authority. We do not try to push each other down, instead, we try to bring the best from each other, regardless of previous experiences. (Employee 2)

The interviewed employees collectively argue that the high level of trust received by the organization and its managers is crucial for them in order to be self-managing in a flat structure. One of the respondents also argues that it is important to have trust amongst the team members, since the majority of the decisions are made collectively in the team. Another respondent argues

that the reduced control the teams have due to the level of trust increases the ability to think broader, more versatile and creatively. More specifically the respondent argues as follows,

It feels like we are able to think broader due to the fact that we work in teams and are self-managing. We think differently, and have different competencies [...]. Every decision does not need to go through a manager, instead, we are our own leaders, something I believe is positive. (Employee 2)

One respondent believes that the lack of formal leaders within the teams is beneficial since it increases the team members' freedom of speech and the team's overall efficiency. Moreover, the respondent also explains that the freedom of speech could be minimized if the teams instead had one formal leader taking charge. Additionally, another respondent argues that the flat organizational structure enhances the ability to be seen as an employee, something that could be harder to achieve in larger and more hierarchical organizations. The respondent exemplifies this by the following statement,

Working in a larger, more hierarchical organization it's like being in an ocean, you are just a drop in that ocean. Working at Tech AB, it's just like a glass of water which you are a part of. At Tech AB everyone is aware of you and sees you, what you are doing and what tasks and responsibilities you have. (Employee 1)

There were also discussions regarding possible difficulties with the flat organizational structure. Some of the respondents argue that one main difficulty when working together in teams is to collaborate with many different personalities, i.e. since some team members might have stronger voices than others. However, several respondents also express the importance of having heterogeneity and different personalities within the teams, in order to learn from each other. More specifically, the respondent contributes with the following statement,

I believe that it is important to have a reasonable amount of conflicts within the groups. It would be pleasant to have a homogenous group, but I do not believe that it would create good outcomes. It is important to emphasize diversity and heterogeneity in order to achieve great outcomes and results. Then I believe that conflicts are important. (Employee 10)

Another respondent also explains that it is important to be aware of the fact that the new entrants within the organization, regardless whether they come directly from the university or if they have previous work experience, always contribute with something to the organization. The new entrants usually get a mentor in order to facilitate their learning process. The respondent also explains that the seniors at the company have a lot to learn from the new entrants as well, mainly because knowledge becomes obsolete. The respondent further specifies that it is crucial that the seniors and new entrants mutually learn from each other.

Analysis - How employees work in order to maintain a flat organization

The majority of the respondents seem to have a common agreement regarding the importance of accepting the organizational structure when entering the organization. This mainly since the acceptance of the foundation is said to be a precondition for achieving the desired organizational outcomes. Drawing upon this, it seems to be important to recruit new entrants that share the same perceptions and beliefs as the already existing employees at Tech AB. Something that in turn could be connected to the notion of *Constructing Normative Network* presented by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). In line with the work of *Constructing Normative Network*, the teams do not need to share the same interests or working procedures in order to achieve the wanted outcomes. This could be related to the importance of diversity that is presented in the empirical material, namely that heterogeneous groups are more beneficial compared to less diversified groups. Additionally, this implies that the employees might have different ways of working, with different interests in certain questions. However, the main aspect that facilitates their way of reaching the organizational outcomes is their shared perceptions of the organizational structure. With this stated, it seems that Tech AB succeeds to maintain the flat organizational structure, by recruiting employees that believe in the flat structure at the same time as they emphasize diversity. Therefore, the work of *Constructing Normative Network*, could be seen as a way of maintaining the structure.

When entering Tech AB, the new entrants are introduced to the way of working within the organization. This is primarily done by the appointment of a mentor for each of the new entrants, as well as the help of other colleagues that explain how things work within the organization. These kinds of activities could be related to the literature regarding *Educating* (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), since the organization emphasizes the education of the institutional actor in order to enhance the skills and knowledge that is needed for the institution. Moreover, it could be analyzed that educating is a crucial aspect since it facilitates the new actors' possibility of becoming a part of the institution and thereby maintaining it. It could be argued that new actors continuously enter institutions, which implies that educating always will be relevant for the work of maintaining institutions and essential in order to facilitate the adaptation of newcomers. Additionally, drawing upon the presented empirical material, the work of educating could be seen as a two-way process in Tech AB, since the seniors and new entrants educate each other, in order to maintain the institution. Thus, this implies that the work of maintaining an institution is not only associated with one part of educating the other part. Instead, the simultaneous educating could be seen as a way of reproducing a given organization, since knowledge easily becomes obsolete. This could, in turn, be connected to the concept of *Embedding and Routinizing* (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). In line with the crisis centre that is described by Zilber (2002), the newcomers are selected and educated in line with the beliefs of a flat organization, in order to reproduce and maintain the institution.

Sector Manager perspective

The managers within Tech AB are referred to as Sector Managers (SM). The ultimate responsibility of the Sector Managers is to have a coaching and supportive role towards the team members. Thus, this implies that the Sector Managers should not be seen as “traditional managers” that give orders and control their “subordinates”. In fact, the Sector Managers are not involved in any decision-making on an operative level and should instead take a step back if they see that the team works self-managing. Additionally, one of the interviewed Sector Manager explained that the employees set common goals within their teams, in order to facilitate the employee’s understanding of what is expected from them. The employees are then free to plan, create strategies and divide their work based on the interest of the customer. Another Sector Manager explains that the managers have high confidence and trust towards their employees and that this is the main reason why the Sector Manager does not need to act as controlling managers. The Sector Manager exemplifies this by the following statement,

I believe it is all about the confidence and trust you give people. If you trust your employees, you are able to act more as a leader instead of a boss. A boss usually wants to control others, or in some cases, see himself as better than his subordinates. However, a leader makes sure that people are able to grow. [...] I don’t want to see myself as a boss, I want to be there for my employees whenever they need it, I want them to have that confidence in themselves, and in me. (Sector Manager 1)

Furthermore, almost all of the Sector Managers explains that another crucial aspect of their role as a Sector Manager is to be present, supportive and act whenever the employees feel that there is a need for it. It could, for instance, be cases when things do not go as expected or when projects do not go in the expected direction. One of the Sector Manager explains that even in these cases, the role of the Sector Manager is not to give any direct orders regarding how the team should solve the problem. Instead, the Sector Manager try to support and discuss possible problems in order to help the team members to find a solution by their own and understand what is missing. Moreover, it is essential that the Sector Manager has an open conversation with the employees through for instance workshops that facilitate the understanding about what is missing or what needs to be improved. Sector Manager 2 explains this by the following quote,

I listen and hear about the things that are happening so that I also can act upon that if the teams feel a need for it. Although, they are very good at asking for help if they feel a need for it. During a meeting, I try to be clear about what I want to contribute with. Often it is to create engagement and coach, and not to come up with direct answers or decisions, but to help the team to succeed and develop further. (Sector Manager 2).

Each Sector Manager has the responsibility for setting the team constellations, which means that the Sector Managers have to make sure that the teams are diversified and consist of sufficient competencies and experience. More specifically, the Sector Managers have to recruit a mix of different people with different background, competency and personality for each team. In order to achieve the right team constellation, the manager argues that it is crucial to get to know the employees on a personal level, otherwise, it could be difficult for the employees to find the optimal team dynamic within the team. Therefore, several managers argue that heterogeneous teams are essential when constellating teams, however too heterogeneous teams could be difficult. This since the overall perceptions among the team members have to be consistent in order to facilitate the team-work. The following statement exemplify this,

It is essential to understand the importance of diversity in order to constellate the teams. I need to understand my employees, and get to know them. Because, if I know them as people, that will help me create better teams. (Sector Manager 4).

Most of the Sector Managers argue that another precondition in order to become a high performing team is that the employees understand the organizational structure and what is expected from them before they start at the company. This implies that the members need to have the same perception regarding the organizational structure, and the way of working. Therefore, Tech AB usually has several stages in the recruiting process and a six months' probationary period. The manager further explains that they seldom have to end a probationary period, but that there are cases where they have recruited a person that is used to a completely different organizational structure and work activities. Sector Manager 6 explains that it becomes clear when a certain team constellation does not work efficiently. During these situations, the Sector Manager describes that the managers carry the responsibility of adjusting the team constellation if the teams do not manage to fully achieve the desired outcomes. Otherwise, a less efficient team could risk harming the overall organizational productivity.

Several managers argue that they expect that the employees are able to manage critical situations and handle the customer contact themselves. However, Sector Manager 4 believes that their managerial role becomes more evident during critical situations since the customers in some cases might require to discuss with a manager when situations escalate and dissatisfaction occurs. During these situations, the manager explains that the customer in some cases expect that the managers act upon the situations, and help them solve what went wrong like a more traditional manager would do. Therefore, Sector Manager 4 argues that the managerial role and activities could be seen as more essential for external stakeholders during critical situations. The high level of trust that is given to the employees is also discussed by Sector Manager 5, who emphasizes the employee's ability to drive their own decisions. The manager further argues that all decisions should be taken within the team and that no decisions or questions from the employee should be labelled as "Sector Manager-questions". The manager explained that the teams in some cases choose to label certain matters as Sector Manager-questions, even though they have the capability to solve these situations themselves, but that the employees in some cases might be afraid to take action. Therefore, the manager explains that it is important

to keep all decisions within the teams, where the role of the manager instead is to act as a supportive tool when needed. This could further be demonstrated by the following statement,

I have been in situations where employees argue that “this is a SM-matter”. That does not exist in my world. I don’t believe that a SM-matter or questions exist. Instead, I believe that the employees expressing these thoughts, in fact don’t dare to take these particular decisions. [...] I try to analyze why this person believes that this is a matter for the SM. [...] In 9 out of 10 times it is not a matter concerning me as a SM, usually they are able to solve these situations themselves but are afraid to handle it. (Sector Manager 5)

Analysis - How managers work in order to maintain a flat organization

The managers at Tech AB manage to maintain their role as managers without controlling the teams. This is done by consciously keeping a distance when it comes to the team members and their everyday work tasks, and instead let the employees take their own decisions and set their own common goals. By not acting in line with a traditional manager, it seems that the managers are able to strengthen and maintain the foundation of the flat organizational structure and the importance of creating a feeling of trust among the employees. This could additionally be connected to the work of maintaining an institution through *Valourizing* (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). When the Sector Managers act as supportive tools instead of acting in line with a more traditional manager role, they are able to heighten the foundation of the organization by demonstrating how their role is supposed to be like. Another example of an activity that could be related to the work of *Valourizing*, is when the managers chose to not see certain concerns as “SM-matters”, as stated in the empirical section. The managers instead argue that the employees are the experts and therefore believe in their ability to solve the majority of all situations themselves.

It could be analyzed that the managers manage to maintain the flat organizational structure by only interfering in the employee’s everyday work when the employees express a need for it. If the managers instead, continuously, interfered in the work executed by the teams, the work of maintaining the flat organization with self-managing teams would be more difficult since the organization would be seen as top-down managed. By instead acting as a supportive tool, the managers are able to fulfil and maintain the idea of having a flat organization with self-going teams and therefore strengthen the organizational structure and its internal maintenance. This implies that the work executed by the Sector Managers, in order to maintain self-managing teams, could be associated with *Enabling Work* (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Furthermore, it could be assumed that the identity of the manager further has been enhanced by the employees. This since the employees view the managers as a supportive tool they can rely on when things do not go as expected, an identity that permeates the whole organization. These form of emergence could be connected to the concept of *Constructing Identities* (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

Sector Manager 4 express that their role and their activities as managers become highlighted when customers require to speak to a manager due to dissatisfaction, which could be related to *Constructing Identities* (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Their role as managers become crucial for the customer, in cases when the customer expects the manager to make decisions, and find a solution for the occurred problem. An expectation in which the managers argue goes more in line with the traditional managerial role. By this stated, the customers could be viewed as constructing and enhancing the manager's identity, by telling the managers what kind of activities they expect from a person with a managerial role. The customers in these situations seem to rely on the managers and their ability that they know what to do best. Therefore, it could be analyzed that the identity of a more traditional manger becomes created by the customer since they might shift their reliance to the manager instead of the actual experts of the projects, the employees. This role of the managers, in turn, is something that Tech AB strives to reject, in order to maintain their organizational foundation. Therefore, the customers could be said to create the role of the managers that do not go in line with Tech AB organizational idea.

Furthermore, the Sector Managers have the responsibility of recruiting people with a mix of different competencies and experience, in order to create high performing and self-managing teams. The heterogeneity within the teams seems to be an important aspect in order to work efficiently according to the managers. However, the managers further discuss that too heterogeneous teams could make it difficult for the team members. Therefore, the managers also emphasize the importance of constellating teams with members that share the same perceptions. These activities taken by the manager could be connected to the work of *Constructing Normative Networks* (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). This since the managers emphasized the importance of constructing heterogeneous teams while still taking the perceptions of the team members into consideration. It seems crucial that the employees have fairly similar perceptions within the team in order to maintain a high performing team as argued by the managers. Therefore, it could be stated that the work of Constructing Normative Network is one way for the manager to maintain the team performance in Tech AB.

Several managers claim that the employees need to understand the organizational structure and what is expected from them, in order to become a high performing team. In order to ensure this, the company usually has several stages in the recruitment process, as well as a six-month probationary period. This could be seen as a type of maintenance work, namely in the form of *Embedding and Routinizing* (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In practice, the managers within Tech AB manage to perform this work of maintenance by recruiting new employees that hopefully understand and accept the organizational structure. However, if the manager does not manage to recruit these preferred employees, disruptions in form of minor breakdowns could occur. This since the recruitment of new employees could cause small tears within the institutional structure, if these people do not accept or understand the institutional structure. A further thought regarding the minor breakdowns is that the six months probationary periods could be seen as a way of smoothing out or avoiding the tears in the institutional structure, since the managers are able to replace employees that do not work in line with the organizational framework.

The emergence of Informal leaders

Employee perspective

The majority of the respondents agree upon the fact that some people drive more decisions than others within the team. As a result of the lack of formal leaders, several respondents argue that these situations give rise to informal leaders. Other respondents instead explain that the emergence of informal leaders arises as a consequence of the unequal distribution of experience and expertise that exists within the teams. For example, one of the respondents explain that experience and connections create informal leaders and that this could be the reason for why a specific employee is viewed as an informal leader. Additionally, other respondents argue that the employees own personal interests in taking an informal leadership role also could be the reason. This could be exemplified by the following statement,

I believe that some team members take this role out of interest. I would say that I'm a rather communicative person, therefore I believe that it comes naturally for me to take on an informal leader role. Although, it is not something official, we still discuss all decisions together. That's the foundation of being a good team, we are all on the same level. (Employee 4)

Employee 10 argues that the emergence of informal leaders within different situations in each team is the most optimal condition since it helps the team to maintain and go forward with their projects. Several employees claim that informal leaders facilitate the decision making within the teams since decisions are able to be made quicker. This could be demonstrated by the following statement,

Since we are many people in one group, with many differences, it could take a longer time to make a decision, which could affect our projects. However, sometimes taking decisions together could be beneficial. (Employee 3).

Of course, there are situations when there is no one who dares to make a decision. That is probably why I have the role I have, I make the decision in my team, and then it is either make it or break it. Some teams do not have this person, that's for sure. In these teams, they usually go back and forth until the situation needs immediate action. If we cannot make a decision, then the customers will suffer. [...] Instead, I usually go with the style 'should we do it like this?'. Usually, no one says no. And then, we decide to do it in that way. (Employee 1)

Employee 4 highlights the importance of having someone in the team that has responsibility for the customer contact. Therefore, it is essential to divide this kind of responsibility, since all team members cannot have contact with one specific customer. This could be exemplified by the following statement,

It would not be possible to have, for example, seven people communicating externally. Instead, we need to have one person communicating outwards, to our Sector Managers, customers or stakeholders. Personally, I'm interested in these questions, and therefore I become the one taking responsibility for the external contacts, for example with the customers. (Employee 4)

However, some of the employees also emphasized some possible downsides with the emergence of informal leaders. Employee 11 for example highlight that there is a risk that the members in a team become too dependent upon the informal leader within the team. This since the informal leader in the team in some cases acts as an engine driving the team forward. The dependence of the informal leader becomes evident when the informal leader quits or changes team, and therefore could cause confusion for the remaining team members due to the fact that the team engine no longer exists. Besides the confusion that arises within the team, Employee 11 also argues that when an informal leader quits, knowledge might get lost. Therefore, the employee believes that it is important that the knowledge is distributed among the team members, in order to avoid these situations and to become less dependent on one single person.

Analysis Informal leaders - Employee perspective

The respondents explain several reasons why informal leaders actually emerge within the organization. Some argue that the emergence of informal leaders occur due to unequal distribution of experience and expertise within the teams. Whilst others instead believe that informal leaders emerge due to own personal interests, or the need for dividing the responsibility within the team. Regardless of the reason for why certain team members become informal leaders, it could be argued that a new informal identity role is created within the teams. Something that could be related to the concept of *Constructing Identities* (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Building on this concept, it could be argued that informal leaders are crucial, in order for the teams to maintain their work. This since informal leaders within the teams are seen as an optimal condition that facilitate the day-to-day activities within the teams. Therefore, the construction of identities within Tech AB could be seen to facilitate the possibility of maintaining the institution. Additionally, the work of distributing the responsibility within the teams, e.g. deciding who will get responsible for the customer contact, is another way of maintaining the work within the teams. Something that could be related to the work of *Enabling Work* (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

As previously mentioned, the majority of the employees argue that informal leaders within the team are the most optimal condition. However, one of the employees also emphasized the possible downsides with the emergence of informal leaders, especially in situations when informal leaders quit or get re-structured. Drawing upon the fact, that some teams might become too dependent an informal leader. It could be argued that these situations enhance the risk of disruption to occur, this in form of minor breakdowns. This since it might become more difficult to work self-managing since the team "engine" gets lost. To work self-managing is part of the

institutional structure, and when this becomes harder to work in line with, minor breakdowns could be said to arise.

Sector Manager perspective

The majority of the Sector Managers believes that it is crucial to have an “engine” within each team, namely someone that often becomes more of an informal leader. More specifically, Sector Manager 2 expresses that there will always be some people that take more responsibility and engage in more questions than others, mainly because of personal interest. The manager also claimed that most team constellations have this person. In fact, informal leaders will always emerge and it should not be something that should be neglected. Therefore, the manager argue that it could be difficult to maintain a completely flat organizational structure, with no informal leaders. This is something that could be exemplified by the following statement,

I would absolutely say that we have informal leaders, and this is more evident in some teams compared to others, and that's okay because everyone doesn't want to become one. Therefore, it is important to have the right team constellation, because you cannot have 5 persons within one team, where all see themselves as leaders in every single situation [...] However, one team does not need to have one specific informal leader, there could be many. (Sector Manager 1)

Sector Manager 5 further explains that it is important to set the team constellations in a way that utilizes informal leaders. The manager exemplifies this by explaining how different situations might need a different type of informal leaders, with different competencies and experiences. For instance, it might be necessary to have a person that is outgoing and socially confident during situations that require a lot of customer contact. Furthermore, Sector Manager 3 explains that it could be situations where the team members expect that a certain person within the team should take on an informal leadership role, because he or she might have the right competency or experience. The manager also argues that one precondition of becoming an informal leader is that the person has an interest in the area. However, if this person does not have an interest in taking an informal leadership role it can create confusion among the rest of the team members and inhibit the team's further work. The manager explains that it is important that the team gets a chance to solve these problems themselves. However, if the team does not manage to solve these kinds of problems, it is essential that the Sector Manager has an open conversation with the person concerned, in order to understand what this person instead desires. This could, in turn, lead to situations where the Sector Manager has to restructure the team and move that specific person from one team to another, in order to find a team that matches the team member's interests in a better way, as well as enhancing the team dynamics of the previous team.

Sector Manager 5 describes another case where a single informal leader took too much responsibility and got too much authority within the team. Something that inhibited the collective

teamwork, such as their decision making and freedom of speech. In this case, the Sector Manager explains that action was needed to be taken. Therefore, in consultation with the concerned informal leader, the manager chose to restructure the team by moving the currently informal leader. This resulted in that the previous team enhanced their team dynamics by instead developing several informal leaders within the team. The manager explains this as follows,

I had a situation where a person was inhibiting the group performance. Therefore, I needed to move this person to another group. I knew that this person was ready for new challenges in another team. By removing this person, the former team was able to grow and increase their performances. (Sector Manager 5).

Analysis Informal leader - Sector Manager Perspective

As presented in the empirical section, there seems to be a common agreement among the Sector Managers regarding the emergence and the existence of informal leaders. In fact, one of the managers argues that informal leaders always will emerge within groups, since it is claimed to be an optimal condition. Drawing upon this, it could be stated that the informal leaders emerge since it seems to be a collective need to have informal leaders within the teams, in order to maintain the institution. This in turn, could be related to the work of *Constructing Identities* (Lawrence & Suddaby 2006). It could be assumed that the managers collectively make it possible for the informal leaders to emerge. This by, setting and adjusting the team constellations in various ways by taking different characteristics and competencies into consideration.

Drawing upon this, it seems that the right team constellation is one precondition for informal leaders to emerge. Therefore, the manager's role of setting the right team constellation could be said to be one kind of activities in order to facilitate the work done within the team, with the help of informal leaders. The activities of the managers could be related to the concept of *Enabling work* (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). It could be analyzed, that the managers within Tech AB manage to maintain the institution and its structure by first carefully setting the team constellations, where characteristics and competencies are distributed within the groups. This is done by all the interviewed Sector Managers and could be seen as a routine in their work in order to maintain and support the organizational structure. It is, however, important to be aware of the fact that the team constellations are not set in stone, but continuously restructured if the team does not manage to achieve the desired organizational outcomes. Therefore, this work executed by the Sector Managers, could be seen as a way of both maintaining and supporting the structure of Tech AB, but also a way that facilitates the emergence of informal leaders.

By drawing upon the case presented by Sector Manager 3 in the empirical section, it could be argued that the team members tried to construct the role of an informal leader within the group, even though the person in regard did not want this role. Something that could be related to the literature presented by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) regarding *Constructing Identities*. This

since the informal leadership identity was seen as being essential for the group and its maintenance, but when the person did not want to take on a role of an informal leader it led to confusion among the rest of the team members. This situation could, in turn, be seen as a *Minor Breakdown*, a concept that is discussed by Lok and De Rond (2013). The activity of not wanting to follow what seems to be the most optimal condition for the team caused a minor breakdown in the overall teamwork. This minor breakdown within the team, namely the confusion of not being able to construct an informal leader, was handled by the Sector Manager. This by restructuring the team and the team member in concern, to another team where the member's preferences could be matched better. These activities that are done by the manager, could be seen as crucial in the sense that it managed to solve the tensions within the team and maintaining the overall team and organizational structure. This since the team was able to maintain and enhance their work by replacing a team member. These activities taken by the manager could moreover be seen as a work of maintaining the teams and their stability through *Enabling Work* (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Additionally, the work of Enabling could also be found in the other case presented by Sector Manager 5 as well. The manager needed to restructure the team since one team member created a role that implied a higher authority than the rest of the team members. This restructuration by the manager was seen as a necessary since the informal leader within the team prevented the other team members to step forward. By restructuring the team through relocating the person in concern, the team was able to enhance their teamwork and abilities.

Discussion

The five types of work aimed at maintaining Tech AB’s organizational structure

As previously mentioned, this study has identified several forms of work in order to maintain institutions. However, for this study six of the forms of work have been selected in order to fulfil the aim of this paper. After the data collection, it became evident that some forms of work were more of relevance than others, which therefore ended with the decision of only choosing to focus on six types of work in order to maintain institutions. These chosen types of work are demonstrated in Figure 1.

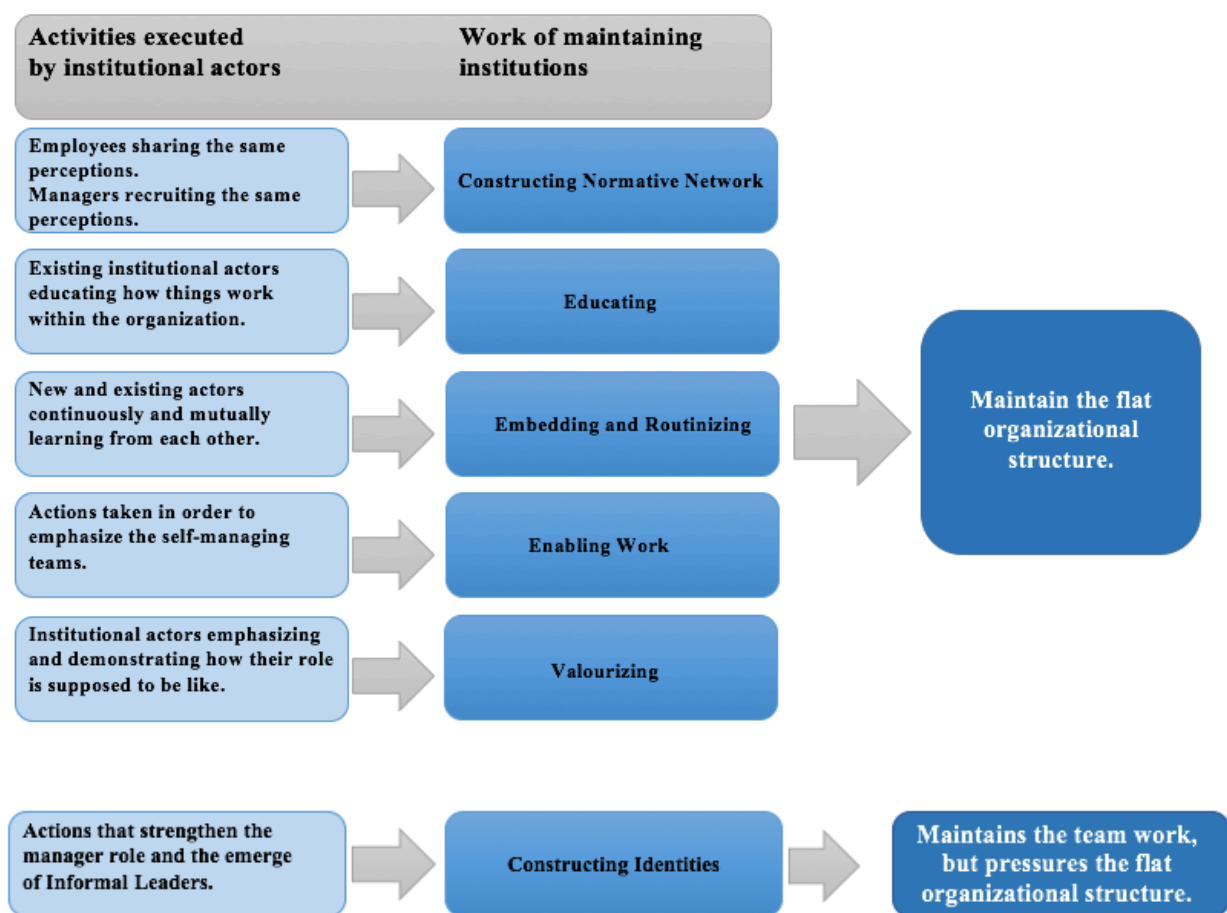


Figure 1: How the institutional actors maintain Tech AB’s flat organizational structure

The figure above summarizes the four analysis parts in the empirical section by highlighting the activities taken by the institutional actors that were most prominent and relevant for the aim of this study. The first column shows different types of activities that were executed by institutional actors within Tech AB. These six types of activities have in turn been related to six types of work aimed at maintaining the institution. Eventually, this study shows that five of the six types of work contribute to the maintenance of Tech AB’s flat organizational structure;

Constructing Normative Networks, Educating, Embedding and Routinizing, Enabling Work and Valourizing. The last form of work aimed at maintaining the institution, *Constructing Identities* was not shown to contribute to the actual maintenance of the organizational structure. Instead this type of work was identified as a way of maintaining and facilitating the work within the teams as previously stated in the analysis section. In fact, the work of *Constructing Identities* have shown to rather pressure Tech AB organizational structure, something that further will be discussed below.

When it comes to the recruitment of new employees, it seems crucial for the managers that the new entrants accept the flat structure and its way of working. This since it was argued that employee's that share the same perception contribute and facilitate the overall teamwork, something that is taken into consideration when the managers set the team constellations. The employees also argue that structural acceptance and common perceptions are beneficial for the various teams. Therefore, it could be argued that one way for the managers to maintain the organizational structure is to recruit employees that accept the flat structure and share the same perceptions of the organization as the existing employees. By living up to this and believing in the idea of sharing the same perceptions, the employees are also able to maintain and support the flat structure. In turn, this has been connected to the work of *Constructing Normative Network*. Furthermore, educating new actors in order to understand the way of working, seems to be another way of maintaining the institution. This since a common understanding regarding how things work within the institutions are said to streamline and maintain the work within the teams. It could therefore be argued that the work of *Educating* is done by employees when new entrants enter the organization, in order to maintain the institution. Although, it seems essential that both new and existing employees continuously and mutually learn from each other, especially since knowledge easily becomes obsolete. Therefore, it could be stated that the work of educating is continuous and contributes to the maintenance and reproduction of the flat institution. This has additionally been connected to the work of maintaining an institution through *Embedding and Routinizing*.

One main aspect that permeates the flat structure in Tech AB is that the teams should work independently and self-managing. Therefore, the Sector Managers chose to not interfere in the employee's everyday work and instead only act as a supportive tool when needed. This implies that the managers manage to maintain independent and self-managing teams, which in turn contributes to the maintenance of the flat organizational structure. Furthermore, it could be argued that these activities are essential in order to maintain the flat organizational structure. Especially, since an increased managerial interference would go more in line with a traditional managed top-down organization. This discussion has been related to the work of maintaining an institution through *Enabling Work*. Moreover, these kinds of activities taken by the manager demonstrates the role of how the managers are supposed to act like within Tech AB's flat organizational structure. Something that has been connected to the work of *Valourizing*. Hence, it could be argued that the managers are able to maintain and enhance the flat organizational structure, by clearly emphasizing their role as managers in a flat organization, and dismiss situations where employees might want a more top-managed leadership.

To sum, it could be argued that many of the activities that were identified among the institutional actors, in order to maintain Tech AB, are unique for a flat organizational structure. As previously mentioned, the employees within Tech AB work self-managing, which implies that they interdependently set up goals, strategies and take decisions. The employees also receive a higher level of authority and responsibility towards e.g. the external stakeholders, in opposite to what employees in top-down managed organizations might have. It could also be argued that the role of the managers in Tech AB clearly is related to the flat organizational structure. This since the managers delegate their authority to the employees, which goes against a top-down managed structure. In practice, this means that the managers take a step back and do not interfere in the team's everyday work. Instead, the managers only act as a supportive tool when the employees express a need for it. Therefore, this paper states that the identified activities found in Tech AB, contributes to maintaining the foundation of the flat organizational structure. Additionally, drawing upon previous studies these activities and actor roles could be seen as unique for a flat organizational structure since it could be assumed that these could not be found in taller organizational structures. It could, therefore, be assumed that the employees at Tech AB are empowered to take responsibility and act in a way that could be seen as more in line with managerial roles within a taller organization, this since the authority is delegated down to the employees. Thus, drawing upon the presented discussion, it could be stated that maintaining a flat organization is done differently compared to a taller organization.

The Construction of Identities

The managers constellate the teams in a way that contributes to the work of Constructing Identities, this through the emergence of the informal leaders within the teams. Both managers and employees argued that the existence of informal leaders within the teams is the most optimal condition in order to streamline the different teams. However, it could be discussed whether the emergence of informal leaders maintains the flat organizational structure or pressures it. Drawing upon the empirical section, it becomes clear that the informal leaders maintain and drive the team forward by i.e. facilitating the team's decision making, acting as an engine, and taking certain responsibilities if needed. Therefore, it could in one perspective be argued that the informal leaders are able to maintain the flat organizational structure in the sense that they help the team to work independently and self-managing. However, it could also be analyzed that these kinds of activities also puts pressure on the flat organizational structure. Especially, in situations where the informal leader might obtain too much authority within the team, and pressure the idea of equal authority and responsibility amongst the team members. Another aspect that could pressure the structure, is when the teams might become too dependent on one informal leader, which in turn could hinder the ability of acting and maintaining the self-managing teams. Therefore, from a broader perspective, this could pressure the overall organizational structure and the aim of driven and independent teams. Therefore, it seems like the informal leaders in a way both maintain the organization in the sense that they streamline the work executed by the employees. At the same time as the informal leaders, in some cases, could also be seen as putting pressure on the work of maintaining a flat organizational structure.

The work of *Constructing Identities* has during the presented empirical section been presented several times in different contexts. For example, this paper shows that during critical situations the employees enhance the role of their Sector Manager, by e.g. expecting that the managers should take on a role that does not go in line with the manager's role in a flat structure. Namely, that the managers should solve certain critical situations that the employees, in fact, have the capacity to solve by themselves without the help from managers. The empirical data also shows how the Sector Managers role gets enhanced by external stakeholder when dissatisfaction occurs. This implies that the external stakeholders could be viewed as constructing and strengthening the manager's identity in a way that goes more in line with the traditional role of the managers. Drawing upon this, it could be analyzed that the work of maintaining a flat organizational structure, where the managers are not seen as having a higher authority and power than the employees, gets challenged. This since both the employees and the external stakeholders expect the manager to live up to their managerial role and take charge when required, thus enhancing the manager's position and role. As presented in the empirical section, the managers emphasize that the employees are the actual experts within the Tech AB and that no matter should be labelled as a "Sector Manager-question". Therefore, it could be stated that the work of constructing identities in this case does not contribute to maintaining Tech AB flat organizational structure, but rather challenges its view on managerial authority.

For further discussion, it could be argued that the emergence of informal leaders within Tech AB most probably could arise in both flat and hierarchical organizational structures. Although, the emergence of informal leaders would most probably affect the two structures differently. As previous studies mention, taller organizations are seen as the traditional and standardized way of structuring organizations. Whilst, flat organizational structures could be referred to as the deviation. Due to the already existing layers of authority and management included in a hierarchical organization, it could be argued that an additional emergence of informal leaders would not pressure or challenge the organizational structure in the same way as in a flat organization. This since leaders in these structures already exists, and are seen as being part of the organizational structure. However, a flat organization instead emphasizes a structure where the managerial authority is delegated down to the employees. Therefore, when informal leaders emerge in flat organizations, informal leaders might be seen as a deviation due to the flat organizational structure, this since they in theory goes against the flat structure. This paper also demonstrates how the managerial role within Tech AB in some cases becomes enhanced, both by employees and external stakeholders. These activities would most probably in a tall organizational structure be normalized since employees and external stakeholders in taller organizations rely on the managers to take charge when needed and in these situations consciously embrace the manager's role and authority. However, these activities could be as well be seen as pressuring organizations with flatter structures. This since these organizations usually try to delegate their managerial authority down to the employees instead, by amongst others embracing their independence.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to investigate how institutional actors within Tech AB maintain a flat organizational structure. Six types of activities executed by the institutional actors have been identified and further related to the various forms of work within the concept of Institutional Work. Five of the types of work have been argued to maintain Tech AB flat organizational structure, and therefore contributing to the aim of the paper. The types of work that were seen as maintaining Tech AB's flat organizational structure were; *Constructing Normative Network*, *Educating*, *Embedding and Routinizing*, *Enabling Work* and lastly *Valourizing*. However, the activities related to the last form of work, *Constructing Identities*, was not seen as maintaining the structure directly. Instead, this types of work was seen as pressuring the organizational structure at the same time as facilitating the overall teamwork. Thus, this paper shows that the institutional actors within Tech AB, continuously maintain the flat organizational structure. This by performing various forms of activities in which have been related to several types of work within the concept of Institutional Work.

This paper shows that the work of creating institutions, in many cases could be seen as also maintaining it. Thus, this study amongst other, questions the distinction between the work of creating and maintaining institutions, since the study shows that these two forms of work goes more in line with each other than previous studies by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) have argued. Therefore, this paper confirms the study presented by Currie et al., (2012). This paper additionally shows that the work of maintaining institutions, in some cases also could cause disruptions in the organizational structure. Therefore, this study contributes with the idea that the work of creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions is more complex and less divided than previous studies have shown. This since the work of creating institutions, in some cases could be seen as also maintaining it. At the same time as, the work of maintaining in some cases also could be seen as disrupting the institution. This means that several types of Institutional work interact and influence with each other. In sum, this paper argues that distinction between creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions might have been simplified, and that the actual complexity should be highlighted by researchers in order to fully understand these concepts within Institutional Work.

It could be argued that one limitation to this study, is that it is based on one type of flat organizational structure, namely an organization with one layer of managers. It could be argued that the work of maintaining a flat organizational structure would differ if this would have been studied in an even flatter and less flat organization. Hence, for future research it would be of interest to investigate how organizations without any layers of managers, or more than one layer of managers, maintain their flat organizational structure. This in order to examine whether the identified types of work in this study fits other types of flat organizations.

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