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### **The lack of Unity in Diversity recruitment**

*A qualitative study on the adoption of diversity recruitment practices*

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# **The lack of Unity in Diversity recruitment**

*A qualitative study on the adoption of diversity recruitment practices*

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## **Abstract**

The importance of having a diverse workforce has increased in contemporary organizations, which has led to a vast number of organisations adopting diversity recruitment practices. In this article, attention is dedicated to an organisation that is renowned for working with multiple diversity initiatives and has started training managers in diversity recruitment to reach their diversity targets. Data was collected through internal documents and by conducting 31 interviews with respondents in the organisation. The purpose of this paper is to explore how the adoption of diversity recruitment practices is unfolding and how it affects the power positions and relationships in the organisation, as well how the new practices give rise to resistance and unexpected developments through the interactions between different actors in the process. By applying concepts from Institutional work studies, the study reveals that the adoption of new diversity recruitment practices implies an erosion of power and status divide between actors in the process, and that trust based relationships decrease the resistance from actors eager to maintain the pre-existing recruitment practices. The study also highlights how adaptations and ambiguities change the diversity recruitment practices in unexpected ways and contributes to new insights in the research field since previous research has focused less on the adoption of diversity recruitment practices but rather on the outcomes of these practices.

**Keywords:** Diversity recruitment, Power, Resistance, Trust, Institutional Work, Institutional maintenance, Institutional creation, Institutional entrepreneurs, Unintended consequences.

## **Introduction**

The importance of increasing diversity whilst recruiting has been one of the largest trends in businesses worldwide over the past years (Spar et. al., 2018). In companies, this trend has been driven by the adoption of best practices (Tipper, 2004) as well as through legal compliance (Osman & Thunborg, 2019). However, these reasons have not been the only motivator for companies to engage in diversity recruitment practices, as research provides solid commercial advantage from incorporating diversity (Konrad, 2003; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004), i.e. gaining top talents, better representation of customer segments, increasing creativity, innovation, performance and profit share (Tipper, 2004; McKay & Avery, 2005; Kulik & Roberson, 2008; Spar et al., 2018). These motives result in organisational efforts such as designing diversity recruitment programs which present an image to minority applicants that the firm has a positive diversity climate of equally qualified employees

regardless of gender, ethical background and so forth (Kossek & Zonia, 1993; McKay & Avery, 2005).

Diversity recruitment is an initiative which is considered to be effective in improving the number of underrepresented groups in the workforce (Reskin 1998; Edelman & Petterson 1999; Rivera, 2012). It includes strategies that help in increasing the number of a targeted group(s) or broadening the characteristics of applicants (Kulik & Roberson, 2008), and primarily involves Human Resource professionals (HRBPs and recruiters) charged with overseeing diversity recruitment, and managers who are responsible for making hiring decisions (Rivera, 2012). Previous studies show that there often exist different perceptions about implementation of diversity initiatives between HR professionals and managers (Shen et al., 2009), which is attributed to the different social contexts in which the diversity practices are implemented as well as the conflicting ideas about diversity between employees and their varying interest in diversity due to their unequal power positions in relation to each other (Omanović, 2009; Evans, 2012; Rivera, 2012). In the diversity recruitment context, unequal power positions between HR professionals and managers has been stated as one important factor which affected the effectiveness of diversity recruitment efforts (Kalev et al., 2006; Rivera, 2012), where vesting of authority and resources to those charged with diversity recruitment (HR professionals) was argued as one method to ensure the effectiveness (Kalev et al., 2006). In addition to vesting the HR professionals with formal authority for engaging in diversity recruitment, Rivera (2012) suggested them to be vested with hiring decision power so that the paradox that existed between diversity recruitment and actual hiring (Evans, 2012) could be eliminated. For gauging the effectiveness of diversity initiatives, previous studies have predominantly used the indicator of intended consequences, i.e. increased target representation (McKay et al., 2009; Richard et al., 2013). However, through formulating a comprehensive typology of the unintended consequences of diversity initiatives, Leslie (2019) has argued that for the full understanding of diversity initiative effectiveness, the metrics of unintended consequences are also necessary. The increased knowledge of unintended consequences was further argued to increase the likelihood of desirable unintended consequences and reduce the instances of undesirable ones (ibid).

While there is ample research on diversity recruitment, there are several important shortcomings in previous research. Previous research on the adoption of diversity recruitment practices illustrate the difference between interests of HR professionals and managers (Klarsfeld, 2009; Evans, 2012; Rivera, 2012), but fall short in investigating the effects of equalizing power positions on the interests of dominant actors which control the direction of diversity initiatives (Kulik & Roberson, 2008; Omanović, 2013). This is especially evident in the research on diversity recruitment practices by Rivera (2012), where the proposition for the erosion of power and status divide for effective diversity recruitment efforts as well as the associated resistance from this proposition is not investigated empirically. Though previous research have illustrated the significance of fluid and dynamic relationships between HR professionals and managers for change initiatives (McCracken et al., 2017), the dynamic and evolving relationships between HR professionals and managers which could affect the ease of adoption of diversity practices have been neglected (Jackson

et al., 2014; Omanović, 2009). Further, academic literature on diversity practices has de-emphasized negative aspects such as conflicts, problems and dilemmas involved in developing meaningful diversity initiatives (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Kaler, 2001; Kirton & Greene, 2006; Kirton et al., 2007), thereby failing to acknowledge that resistance is also a constituent of organizational change (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). Therefore, studying the resistance and negative aspects may provide useful insights for scholars on the adoption of diversity recruitment practices. Also, previous research on adoption of diversity practices have predominantly focused on the diffusion of practices (Kalev et al., 2006; Klarsfeld, 2009; Rivera, 2012; Evans, 2012) while discounting the shaping of practices through the interactions and negotiations between different actors as well as the ongoing reproduction of practices by them (exception see Omanović, 2009). This shaping of practices as its unfolding affects the initial intentions of the practices as well as which practices become taken for granted. In addition to these shortcomings in diversity initiatives literature, the theorization of unintended consequences of diversity initiatives based on targeted outcomes by Leslie (2019), limits the range of unintended consequences due to its lack of focus on actions which results in adaptations or mutations in diversity practices.

Building on the previous arguments, the purpose of this paper is to study the adoption of diversity recruitment practices by examining the power positions of different recruitment actors and relationships between them at a large firm in Sweden that has a long-standing history of working with diversity initiatives and who prides on a diverse workforce along with being involved in numerous diversity efforts. By drawing on the theory of institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2011), the intentional efforts of HR professionals as well as the managerial adaptations, resistance and unintended consequences that unfold along the way are made visible. The strong bi-directional relation between power and institutions, also makes the institutional work framework apt for addressing the power and status erosion suggested by Rivera (2012). The institutionalist framework has also been suggested to be particularly fitting to understand the social as well as the normative factors affecting the adoption of diversity practices (Yang & Konrad, 2011). Moreover, by adopting a relational dimension of institutional work (Topal, 2015), the evolving and dynamic relationship between the actors in the recruitment process as well as its significance in shaping the diversity recruitment practices becomes visible. The study of a large organization was chosen as the institutional embeddedness of their hiring practices are more prevalent through their significant visibility and high degree of bureaucratization and formalization (Pugh et al., 1969; Blau & Schoenherr, 1971; Dobbin et al., 1993). In line with the above-mentioned arguments, the study intends to answer (1) How the adoption of diversity recruitment practices is unfolding in the organization and its influence on the power positions and relationships of the recruitment actors? (2) What are the resistance and unexpected developments that arise from the interactions between the recruitment actors in the adoption of diversity recruitment practices?

The paper is structured as follows; we first review previous literature on diversity recruitment and institutional work to provide a foundation of their current state. This is followed by the methodology we have used for this case study and our empirical findings.

Finally, we present the discussion of our findings and end with a conclusion including contributions and considerations for future research.

### **Previous research on diversity recruitment**

Previous research on the adoption of diversity recruitment practices have identified differences in interests between HR professionals and managers which was evident in their rhetoric and discourses. For example, Evans (2012) uncovered tensions between the business case discourse of HR professionals and the technical competency discourse of the managers. In another study, Klarsfeld (2009) investigated the diffusion of diversity practices in France and found coercive rules to be most effective for adopting the practices. Through the study, Klarsfeld (2009) raised the question whether managers will hire to diversify their workforce or will only recruit differently to “not get caught” and justify the recruitment decisions that suit them (p. 369). Further, Rivera (2012) identified that the difference in interests between HR professionals and managers stemmed from the structural and status divides between them, which in turn affected the effectiveness of diversity recruitment efforts. For example, the widespread cultural belief among managers that educational prestige was a sign of merit for making hiring decisions, rather than having formal authority to engage in diversity recruitment (Rivera, 2012). Through her empirical findings, Rivera (2012) suggested that HR professionals, in addition to having formal organizational authority to engage in diversity recruitment, needed “sufficient power and status to be influential in decision-making” (p.88). To do this, the strategy suggested was vesting HR professionals with decision making power and eliminating the divide between diversity recruitment and actual hiring. In contrast to the above studies, Omanović (2009) illustrated the linkage between the differences in interests of actors and their unequal power positions and the effects of these on the implementation of a diversity initiative, such as the domination of a particular actor’s interest controlling the direction of the diversity practices.

Further, the importance of managers' support for effective diversity recruitment practices has been discussed in multiple research (Tipper, 2004; Rivera, 2012; Evans, 2012). In previous research, McCracken et al. (2017) have illustrated the significance of fluid and dynamic relationships between HR professionals and managers for implementing change initiatives through mutual credibility as well as through their ability to collaborate, challenge and interact with each other. One of the challenges to this relationship is the resistance of managers to change initiatives, which the HR professionals who drive the change initiative need to overcome through building commitments, addressing the tensions and negotiating with managers (Sinclair, 2000, Kirton et al., 2007; Ulrich et al., 2013). These relational aspects in the implementation of diversity initiatives is especially visible in the research by Omanović (2009) where the different actors in various social contexts with diverse interests are linked in a “complex sub structural network of relations” to each other (p. 358). The complexities of relationships along with the conflicting interests and unequal power positions between actors, could result in resistance during the adoption of diversity practices (Omanović, 2013). However, academic literature on diversity practices have de-emphasized negative aspects such as conflicts, problems and dilemmas involved in developing meaningful diversity initiatives (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Kaler, 2001; Kirton & Greene, 2006; Kirton et al., 2007). For example, in previous research, the adoption of

diversity practices which controlled the autonomy of managers were found to cause resistance and backlash (Dobbin et al., 2015), thereby acknowledging the resistance to change, but did not acknowledge the diversity initiative to be an outcome of the dynamics between power and resistance (Thomas & Hardy, 2011).

Moreover, diversity practices do not always result in increased representation of targeted groups, instead, it could have either no effects or even give rise to unintended consequences of decreased representation (Kalev et al., 2006; Dobbin et al., 2015; Wiener, 2016; Leslie, 2019). The failure to give the intended outcomes could be a result of the disconnect between the diversity training context and the actual work context, which makes it difficult for managers to apply the learnings from the training (Paluck & Green, 2009; Hughes, 2018). Additional reasons for the diversity initiatives not resulting in intended outcomes is the managers' lack of motivation to get involved in HR tasks (Dany et al., 2008; Keegan & Francis, 2010) and the difference in priorities between HR professionals and managers, since managers, when pressured with business objectives, prioritize technical skills over soft skills irrespective of diversity targets (Brandl et al., 2009; Rivera, 2012; Evans, 2012). In recent studies, Leslie (2019) provides a broad and comprehensive theorization of the unintended consequences of diversity initiatives to understand the effects of diversity initiatives as well as for organizing prior and future research on unintended consequences of diversity initiatives. The typology which was formed by combining the existing work on diversity initiatives and the interpretation of these initiatives as signals or root cause for unintended consequences resulted in a classification of unintended consequences into four types: backfire, negative spill over, positive spill over and false progress (Leslie, 2019). While her classification focuses on unintended outcomes, previous research has also found that diversity practices are altered as they are unfolding, through interactions and negotiations between various actors (Omanović, 2009), thereby resulting in practices different from what was initially intended. Thus, the theorization by Leslie (2019) is limited due to its focus on unintended outcomes and a lack of focus on unintended consequences from actions of actors constantly shaping the diversity practices.

To provide explanations to how organisations engage in creating new or transforming existing practices, such as in the adoption of diversity recruitment, institutional work is considered as an appropriate theoretical lens.

### **Introducing institutional work**

Institutional theory represents a dominant approach to study organisations (Lawrence et al., 2011) and offers a powerful theoretical lens for both persistence and continuity as well as changes in organisational processes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). An institution is defined as “a more or less taken for granted, repetitive social behaviour that is underpinned by normative systems and cognitive understandings that give meaning to social exchange and thus enable a self-reproducing social order” (Greenwood et al., 2008, pp.4-5). In institutional theory, institutionalization is a common concept referring to processes through which actors develop, shared, routinized behaviours around an institution and a reciprocal typification of those behaviours through development of shared meanings and understandings (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). In relation to our case on diversity recruitment,

the routinized behaviours of the recruitment actors engaged in the practices of job advertisement creation, competency listing for the job position, screening of Curriculum Vitae (CV) and evaluations through tests and interviews typify the process of recruitment as institutionalized. Further, institutional change is either explained by the notion of institutional pressures which adopts a macro-level perspective of change (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Townley, 2002; Pache & Santos, 2010) or by the agency of organisational actors, which refers to a more micro-level of change (DiMaggio, 1988; Battilana et al., 2009). Thus, on a micro-level, DiMaggio (1988) introduced the concept of institutional entrepreneurs to understand the emergence of new institutions and changes that transform existing ones.

Institutional entrepreneurs are skilled actors who leverage resources and navigate and influence a social construction so that new institutions could be created or existing ones could be transformed (Giddens, 1984; Dorado, 2005; Maguire et al., 2004; Garud et al., 2007; Battilana et al., 2009) These actors initiate divergent changes, i.e. changes that “break status quo in a field of activity and thereby possibly contribute to transforming existing institutions or creating new ones” (Battilana et al., 2009, p.67) and actively participate in its implementation. The activities include *developing a vision* for change and sharing it, *mobilizing actors* through gaining their support and acceptance of the change and *motivating actors* to achieve and sustain the vision (Battilana et al., 2009). Moreover, their actions are also enabled at the individual level by their social position, including formal authority and social capital (Phillips et al., 2000; Battilana et al., 2009), which also will enable them to gain ‘legitimately recognized right’ to create new institutions or make changes to existing ones (Empson et al., 2013, p. 813).

While institutional entrepreneurs are highlighted as important in the creation of new institutions, criticism has been leveraged towards its “heroic” view of entrepreneurs as the only micro-level change agent (Maguire et al. 2004; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007, p.993) neglecting the mundane actions of other actors. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) developed the concept of institutional work, defined as “the purposive actions carried out by individual and collective actors to create, maintain, and disrupt institutions” (p. 52). The authors emphasize the requirement of a wide range of institutional workers who can support or facilitate the entrepreneur’s activities. The concept of institutional work was therefore introduced to bring individuals and their mundane day-to-day, equivocal instances of agency back into institutional theory which was lost due to the neo-institutional theory constraint of institutions on actors agency (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007). Also, divergent change is mostly carried out by individuals who have less at stake in preserving existing institutional arrangements (Battilana, 2006) and by focusing on those individuals at the microlevel provides more understanding of the shaping of institutions (Creed et al., 2010). The importance of institutional workers is exemplified in the previous study of institutionalization of management fashions by Perkmann & Spicer (2008) who based on the concepts of institutional entrepreneurship found out that the institutional creation work was not centralized or designed, but was through the collective, uncoordinated actions of distributed actors (Dorado, 2005).

Drawing on the taxonomy of institutional work forms by Lawrence & Suddaby (2006), institutional creation work involves overtly political work by actors to reconstruct rules, property rights and boundaries (e.g. advocacy), reconfiguration of belief systems (e.g. changing normative associations, constructing identities) and alteration of meaning systems (e.g. educating, mimicry). More explicitly, *advocacy* is defined as “the mobilization of political and regulatory support through direct and deliberate techniques of social suasion” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006 p.221); *Changing normative associations* involves “Re-making the connections between sets of practices and the moral and cultural foundations for those practices” (ibid); *Constructing identities* involves “defining the relationship between an actor and the field in which that actor operates” (ibid); *Educating* which involves “The educating of actors in skills and knowledge necessary to support the new institution” (ibid); *Mimicry* involves “Associating new practices with existing sets of taken-for-granted practices, technologies and rules in order to ease adoption” (ibid) and has been considered a successful form of work due to its juxtaposition of old and new practices simultaneously to make the shortcomings of old practices visible (Townley, 2002). Despite the evidence on institutional work, some scholars have questioned the degree of agency that is attributed to organisational actors, emphasising that they are still embedded within an institutional field, subject to cognitive and normative pressures (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). The ‘paradox of embedded agency’ highlights that while dominant actors within a field may have the power to change, they are often too institutionally embedded and lack the motivation whereas the peripheral actors who may have the motivation, in contrast, lack the necessary power (Garud et al., 2007). The paradox, thus, highlights the causes of the structural inertia which exists within many organizations (ibid).

Moreover, institutional work of changing an institutional order could result in resistance to that change and could further lead to power struggles and conflicts between actors involved in the practices (Vargo & Lusch, 2018). One of the ways in which individual and collective actors resist institutional change is through institutional maintenance work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006), which is an institutional work form that is considered more rarely in comparison to institutional creation work and institutional disruption work (Vargo & Lusch, 2018). The threat of a potential change to existing institutional arrangements may trigger maintenance work which is related to acts of resistance aimed at neutralizing threats, preventing change and ensuring that there is continued loyalty to the routinized procedures which uphold the status quo (Jepperson, 1991; Lawrence & Suddaby 2006). Incumbent actors have been found to engage in institutional maintenance work to minimize the interference to their roles and position (Currie et al., 2012; Lok & de Rond, 2013) as well as to reproduce the stabilizing influence of embedded routines such as in hiring situations (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). This is also seen in previous research that convey multiple institutional maintenance strategies such as *monitoring* of norms, *reinforcement* of foundations of existing institutions (Zilber, 2002, 2009; Currie et al., 2012), and *justification* through moral arguments (Taupin, 2013). Further, Lok & De Rond (2013) proposed that different types of work are needed to maintain institutional arrangements after a break-down of existing institutions depending on the extent of the changes. The authors show how minor changes are addressed through



“containment work” by the actors, e.g. *reinforcing, ignoring, tolerating*, which involves normalizing and smoothing over small divergences so that they will not permanently affect the institutional order, while major changes might require elaborate “restoration work”. (p.197). The containment work also illustrates that maintenance work is not always done to halt changes but could also be used by actors to “shape the change in a preferred way as it unfolds so that certain aspects of an institutional order are maintained.” (Norbäck, 2017, p.4). Other forms of institutional maintenance which have been discussed in previous research are the notions of decoupling and institutionalized myths where differences were envisioned in what organisations claimed to do and what they actually did (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). However, even though decoupling is seen as a method for maintenance of institutions, it could also be used by institutional entrepreneurs in “designing institutional systems” while radical changes are unfolding (Hirsch & Bermiss, 2009, p. 265). This “strategic decoupling”, in turn, helps the entrepreneurs to “creatively navigate” (Oliver, 1991; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) within the organizational field. Institutional maintenance could also take place through an interplay between actors, actions and meanings (Zilber, 2002), where organizational members, through their interpretations, infuse their actions with meanings which result in maintaining different institutions simultaneously. The interpretation of meanings could also influence the motivation of actors to cooperate in institutional work or not (Fligstein, 1997). The change in meanings is significant because institutional processes, instead of diffusing in organizational fields, are translated over time through negotiations between actors and thereby reshape what is institutionalized (Zilber, 2006).

Through taking a relational dimension on institutional work, the understanding of how institutions are shaped by the relationships and relational actions could be broadened (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Institutional relationships are described as “the institutionally creative, reproductive or disruptive relationships between individual actors based in their compatible or incompatible meanings and shaped by their different degrees of power” (Lawrence, 2008; Topal, 2015, p. 496;). Topal (2015) also argued that the type of institutional relationship actors engage in are determined by their relational power positions and meaning frameworks, which in turn shapes the institutional work form they engage in. For instance, in the case of two dominant actors who have divergent frames of meaning, both frames of meanings coexist for operational productivity (e.g. Zilber, 2002; Malsch & Gendron, 2013), thereby leading to maintenance of the status quo (Topal, 2015). Further, depending on the power and autonomy of the actors, one meaning framework could gain dominance over the other, resulting in new institutions with the other meaning frameworks as subordinates (Topal, 2015). The relationship between power and institutional work has been defined by Lawrence (2008) through institutional agency of actors where power is seen as an episodic phenomenon consisting of strategic and political actions which include influence (Garud et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2004) or force resulting in creation, maintenance or disruption of institutions. Therefore, institutions are connected to power through their impact on the beliefs and behaviors of actors and are also connected to power through the strategies of actors that are intended to transform institutional arrangements through their political actions (Lawrence, 2008). However, although power and institutions

have a strong relationship, this relationship, in an empirical context, has been under examined (Lawrence et al., 2013). Previous research examining power in the institutional context have highlighted the bi-directional relationships between power and institutions through actors engaging in relational forms of institutional work when their power is threatened (Currie et al., 2012), actors gaining power through collective work (Dorado, 2013) or actors achieving and expressing power through institutional work (Rojas, 2010). Expanding on the latter research, it has been illustrated how power is often acquired and expressed through “effort expended in creating, maintaining or disrupting rules, norms and expectations that govern institutions” (Rojas, 2010, p.1266; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Thus, if persons or groups wish to increase their legitimate power in an institution, they have to engage in these type of work, that is, expend some effort to redefine the institutions that define the organisations so that a “new social order ascribes them authority” (Rojas, 2010, p.1266).

In the previous research on institutional work, a clear distinction is made between the studies of ‘creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions’ and the studies of ‘creation, maintenance and disruption of institutions’ (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), where the former category focuses on activities and the latter category focuses on accomplishments (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2013). Previous studies of institutional work concentrated on the retrospective analysis of efforts on intended effects which limited the understanding of the messy everyday practices of institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2009; Lawrence et al., 2013), thereby neglecting the “unintended adaptations, mutations and other institutional consequences” ubiquitous in institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2011, p.55). Therefore, adopting a constructivist approach to institutional work, rather than paying attention to the connection between institutional work and institutional outcomes, aids the identification of the efforts that shape the institutions, efforts that do not affect the institutions as well as efforts that cause unintended consequences (Lawrence et al., 2009; Lawrence et al., 2013). Consequently, in this study, we examine the creating and maintaining of institutions rather than looking at the achievement of intended results. Further, focusing on accomplishments instead of activities has resulted in fewer studies on unintended consequences, an exception being the previous research by Khan et al., (2007) where the authors show that along with the successful implementation of objectives, the unfavourable consequences were disregarded in favour of the successful heroic actions of institutional entrepreneurs.

The usage of institutional work for studying diversity practices is said to be mutually benefitting, that is, this theory helps in understanding the social and normative factors affecting the adoption of diversity practices, while the adoption of diversity practices addresses the ‘agency versus structure’ debate of institutional theory (Yang & Konrad, 2011). By taking an institutional work perspective, it makes it possible for us to examine the micro activities involved in the adoption of diversity recruitment practices, when it is viewed as an institutional change involving multiple parties in constant negotiation and effort to create as well as maintain institutions (Timmermans & Epstein, 2010; Lawrence et al., 2011; Lawrence et al., 2013). The constructivist approach on institutional work also enabled us to refrain from the subjective illusion of institutional outcomes and move

towards unpacking the relational and interactive moments in institutional creating and maintaining (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Furthermore, analysing the adoption of diversity recruitment practices through the lens of institutional work enriches the institutional work literature through seeing the efforts to institutionalize the multidimensional, fuzzy concept of diversity (Edgley et al., 2016) in the recruitment practices.

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

To fulfil the purpose of this study, a qualitative case study method was deemed the most appropriate (Flyvbjerg, 2006), since qualitative methods are well suited to study dynamic processes, especially where these processes are constituted of individual's interpretations, actions and behaviours (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Silverman, 2013). Moreover, qualitative studies help to gain an understanding and perspectives of participants and detailed analysis of phenomenon rather than numbers and statistics (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Because qualitative research typically examines issues from the perspective of the participant (rather than from the researcher), it is especially appropriate, and therefore frequently used in the study of organizational members' accounts and constructions (Isabella, 1990; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Bryman & Bell, 2011), which is in line with the aim of this paper.

Further, case studies provide context dependent information that is crucial for developing a deeper and practical understanding of a field and giving a more nuanced picture of reality (i.e. behaviour and acts) including development of skills and learning processes (Flyvbjerg, 2006). By placing ourselves within the studied context, an advanced understanding has been developed and achieved (ibid), making it possible to recognize how different organizational actors interact and develop mutual understandings (Silverman, 2013), which aligns with the purpose of this paper. Further, as described by Yin (2018) case studies are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations. Thereby, the goal of this study will be to achieve generalization based on the corroborating, modifying and advancing of theoretical concepts, rather than to achieve statistical generalization. The chosen methodology is also relevant since interviews are well suited in order to study subjects' experiences, perceptions and opinions (Silverman, 2013).

### **Data Collection**

The primary data for this paper has been conducted at Diverscion's (the study organisation) different sites in Gothenburg, such as the headquarters, the recruitment centre and four divisional areas. Collecting the field material at various places allowed for a better contextual understanding and enabled comparisons of narratives and findings (Eisenhardt, 1989). Further, the data collection was conducted through interviews, which according to Silverman (2013, 2016) is preferred as it provides information about individual attitudes and motives, and helps researchers get examples of daily activities, which in this case study is necessary for understanding the recruitment process and the interactions and opinions about the recruitment practices in the chosen organisation.

People involved in the adoption of diversity recruitment at Diverscion include senior HR executives (Senior HR) and HR professionals which are suitable to be interviewed for this study. However, since these actors repeatedly accounted for the importance of the hiring

managers in the final selection process, it was deemed relevant to conduct interviews also with them. A hiring manager (manager) is the manager responsible for the area where there is an open vacancy and is normally working closely together with a HR professional to fill the vacancy. Initial interviews were held with researchers in the field of management, organisational change, human resource management and organisational diversity to get a thorough background of the topic. Further, the empirical data was in total built upon 28 interviews and the remaining three interviews represented interviews with recently employed co-workers, which were deemed out of the scope of this research.

<b>Position</b>	<b># of interviews</b>
Hiring managers	10
HRBPs	8
Recruiters	8
Senior HR	2
Recently employed co-workers	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>

Further, an initial contact with Diverscion was established through email, which led to interviews with a recruiter and a HRBP responsible for diversity and inclusion (D&I) training. The purpose of these interviews was to shed light and get first insights about the organisation and its work with diversity recruitment as well as obtaining information about the D&I training conducted at the company. In addition, the snowball effect (Emerson, 2015) of these interviews instigated further interviews with senior HR, HR professionals and managers throughout the organisation. The interviews were held face-to-face and were recorded, as agreed with the interviewee, and transcribed. The respondents were notified about their anonymity. Recording is according to Bryman & Bell (2011) a more efficient method in comparison to taking notes, as it will allow for complete concentration on the respondent. In addition, transcribing the recorded material is also beneficial as it helps to avoid inaccurate interpretations and understandings due to the interviewer's limited memory, which facilitates a more thorough analysis of the answers. This method will increase the reliability of the paper as it gives the opportunity to go back and control the document again (Czarniawska, 2014, Bryman & Bell, 2011). Being noted about their anonymity will also allow the respondents to speak more freely and ascertain ethical considerations (Kvale, 2006). Moreover, the length of the interviews was between 60 and 90 minutes to gain a deep understanding of the interviewees accounts and were performed in a semi-structured manner. Semi-structured interviews allow the latitude of developing new questions depending on what the interviewee responds, and therefore provides a greater understanding of the subject (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This method is subjective and requires intercommunication, which is in line with the idea of interactionism in interviews (Silverman, 2013). Further, the interviews were constructed to have open-ended questions to allow interviewees speak freely about the subject. Themes covered in the interviews were related to the recruitment process in general, D&I training and recruitment training as well as diversity targets. The combination of the semi-structured and open-ended questions allows and encourages the interviewees to go outside of the framework and interact with the interviewer (Silverman, 2013, 2016). The data was collected until saturation was reached, which implies that data was collected until the data no longer gave any new or relevant information (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

However, research has shown that there may be limitations in only conducting interviews, to mitigate this, the knowledge was complemented with several methods of collecting data (Silverman, 2016) i.e. internal documents and secondary data. In this way, our understanding was not limited to only include the interpretations of the interviews, as sensitive matters such as diversity may induce avoidance or side-stepping of sensitive areas to inhibit the interviewer asking further probing questions (Czarniawska, 2014; Silverman, 2016). To deal with this, as suggested by Silverman (2013), additional data collecting methods were used to obtain a more nuanced and complete picture of the studied phenomenon. Thus, a collection of material, such as internal documents, reports, recruitment training material containing rules, guidelines and principles regarding the recruitment process as well as D&I training material were examined to gain a deeper understanding of how the general recruitment process and practices are influenced by diversity measures. However, due to the ethical and confidential nature of data, certain information has been excluded in this report.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data has been analysed using a grounded theory approach (Silverman, 2006) which is preferable as it enables a continuous comparative analysis of the material through interacting with respondents, data and analysis throughout the research process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Silverman, 2016). The method is also useful when dealing with a large set of qualitative data, e.g. interviews and internal documents (Turner, 1981). Moreover, the method helped us to develop a theory while understanding our empirical data and complementing it with existing theories appropriate to develop a more profound understanding of our findings (Martin & Turner, 1986). In line with the grounded theory approach, the empirical material was analysed in two steps, first the data was analysed without any theoretical considerations, and then the data was analysed from the chosen theoretical framework.

The most crucial part of the analysing strategy was the coding of the collected material, where the transcribed material and the secondary data were summarized and placed in different codes and categories based on keywords and citations of interest (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this process, the process of triangulation was adopted, as the interviews were cross-checked and compared with the internal documents (Silverman, 1993). Examples of codes include *the recruitment process, D&I training, gender, conflicts and competency criteria's*. To structure the coded material, these were placed into different categories such as *'The introduction of diversity recruitment', 'Managers altering the course of diversity recruitment' etc.* By using this method, theoretical categories emerged through analysing the material which enabled us to understand the material and generate meaning (Silverman, 2016; Czarniawska, 2014).

The analysis and categorization of the collected data was done continuously during the process, combining transcriptions and the researchers' handwritten notes so as to create a complete understanding of the phenomenon. The initial 10 interviews were transcribed and coded, which served as background to get relevant and in-depth information from the remaining interviews. Following these interviews, the researchers realized the importance

of having an even distribution between HRBPs, recruiters and managers, and consciously approached their contacts about respondents in these positions. After the coding of the remaining interviews, the analysis process involved describing, defining and specifying relationships from the data, moving the study forward and enabling a closer investigation of different concepts. During the first round of coding, no theoretical concepts were placed within the existing categories and the material was analysed without theoretical considerations. This was followed by a second round of categorization, connecting and bridging the collected material with theoretical concepts from institutional work, which aligns with what Martin & Turner (1986) describes as a way of increasing the level of abstraction where one moves from analysing the data presented, to focusing on concepts with a more theoretical meaning. By incorporating the theoretical framework of institutional work and the notion of institutional entrepreneurs with the collected data, the study was able to fulfil the purpose of this paper, consequently ensuring that the data analysis was theoretically based and that the theory was grounded in data (Silverman, 2013). Based on the findings and analysis, our results have been structured and presented in different emerging themes and categories, both in text as well as in figures and tables which enabled a more comprehensive overview.

## **Findings**

### **Diverscion and the setting**

Diverscion is a multinational manufacturing company in the business-to-business market who offers transport solutions across multiple continents. With approximately 100,000 employees worldwide, multiple brands and business units, they offer products and services in different customer and market segments. Diverscion is a company that has undergone multiple reorganizations for structural efficiency, profitability and to reduce overlaps. In recent years, there have been significant changes in their industry through digitization and technological advancements which have resulted in adaptations in processes within the company. The advent of these changes has resulted in intense competition within the industry and has compelled the company to transform to meet the changing needs while avoiding negative effects on the company's sales and market shares or the risk of becoming obsolete. One of these transformations is to increase diversity while recruiting to meet the future demands of the company, since diverse teams according to the company were seen as more creative, better at problem-solving and outperforming homogeneous ones.

When diversity became a top recruitment trend in 2018, Diverscion had already been strong advocates of workplace diversity and inclusion for more than a decade. The history of which is clear in their involvement in various diversity initiatives across different manufacturing centres and other facilities and how several diversity initiatives are promoted both within the company as well as in the community. The company's commitment is also visible through pledges and collaborations with other organizations who have similar diversity and inclusion goals as well as through their adoption of diversity and inclusion into their strategic goals, sending a strong message to its customers, owners and partners about their commitment to increasing diversity. The main areas of diversity and inclusion that Diverscion work with are gender, sexual orientation, culture, diverse abilities and age. However, their work with diversity extends beyond these areas and goes deeper into the

business levels, and the statement “Diverscion is truly diverse” resonated in the interviews across different divisions and organizational levels. With the identification of a high correlation between the company’s future success and its ability to recruit, retain and develop talents, Diverscion have focused on building diverse teams, advocating human rights, value-based leadership and employee engagement. This shift towards leveraging the diversity of the workforce was particularly visible in recent years at Diverscion. According to the senior HR, diversity is one of the main factors that is considered when people are hired into the company and is especially encouraged to managers within the context of recruitment.

The recruitment process is similar across all business units and involves three main actors; the manager, the HRBP and the recruiter. The process starts with the identification of a requirement by the manager, who then makes a competence profile which becomes the base for the creation of a job specification. The manager could opt for support from the HRBP and the recruiter on a need-basis for services, starting from the job advertisement creation to recruitment follow up surveys. At Diverscion, it is a business requirement and the demand from the manager that initiates the recruitment process, which means that the overall control always lies in the hands of the manager, while HRBPs and recruiters are support functions. The instructions for the support functions have been to not force the manager to use their services, and instead take a more advisory and supporting role.

### **The changes in workforce requirements towards diversity recruitment**

One of the reasons for engaging in diversity recruitment has been to go from an engineering company to an IT company which in turn has caused a subsequent shift in the competence requirements in the workforce. More than the mechanical engineers, who were a long-standing workforce requirement at Diverscion, the company now required IT literate candidates that could secure the company's future competitiveness, which was also communicated to the managers. Also, since IT literate employees are scarce in Diverscion, they are seen as an underrepresented group of employees. Another reason for engaging in diversity recruitment was the predominance of middle-aged men in the company, resulting in an overall image of Diverscion being “old-fashioned” both within the company as well as in the labour market. To change this image and to increase the attractiveness among the younger generation who also were an underrepresented group in the company, the managers were advised by HR professionals to write ads using words such as “modern, innovative and fast moving” so as to encourage young candidates to apply. The HR professionals also encouraged the managers to be more open minded in the recruitment process and to compromise with the number of years of experience to enable younger candidates to apply and become recruited. Bringing in more young talents are considered advantageous not only for the age balance within the company but also for the prevalent belief that they were more adaptable and open to changes, such as reorganizations and workforce transformations.

Further, one of the most prominent motives for engaging in diversity recruitment has been the significant gender imbalance identified in the company. Though Diverscion’s workforce analytics data showed a positive increase in gender representation over past years, the progress has been slow. In 2018, senior HR identified that there was a gap in the gender

balance, where globally only 20% of the workforce were women, 28% of which were women in management. In Sweden, the percentages were higher for women in management, 30-35%, but widely varying in different business areas and hierarchy levels. One reason for the higher percentages in certain business areas were attributed to strict target settings, the number of employees and the level of engagement in the division towards the cause of gender balance.

To reap the benefits from diversity such as innovative thinking and creative problem solving, it was understood to be essential to move the minority groups out of their minority status, as expressed by the senior HR *“When you are less than 35 %, you feel like a minority”*. This identified gap was attributed to being in a male dominated industry with certain occupational levels within the company being more inclined to be so. The gap acted as the motivator in making gender diversity the key focus for recruitment, with top executives and senior HR setting gender targets of 35 % globally to achieve gender balance in the workforce. The senior HR and other members of the executive team widely communicated, within the company, the advantages of having gender balanced teams on the company’s business performance. In the recruitment context, the principles of having a gender balanced workforce were also communicated by senior HR to head-hunters, consultancies and the recruitment centre. According to the HRBPs, senior HR and other executive members voicing the importance of gender diversity sent a clear message to the employees that it is a directive from the top. The top executives’ involvement was also thought of by the senior HR as being role models, aiding the employees to accept and adapt the recruitment practices towards recruiting more candidates from the underrepresented groups. While there were no explicit targets set for the percentage of young or IT literate candidates, the aim to bring in these candidates have been voiced in both upper as well as lower managerial levels. Further, to enhance the commitment towards the diversity targets, the alignment of diversity objectives to strategic objectives was done which, according to the senior HR, puts a demand on the divisional HRBP to follow up on it with the manager rather than the objectives being neglected by the manager as a recommendation.

“It was not only requested to work with, it was demanded and that we work and follow up on it. You need to use that power grip if you believe in this, then there should not be any obstacles to doing this. We do not question sales, revenue and market penetration. But this (diversity) has not been on the table previously, now it is” (Senior HR)

Initially the managers were targeted to aid this recruitment process as they are the final decision makers as well as the HRBPs, even if they are only in a supporting role. Now however, in addition to the managers and HRBPs, the recruiters are also targeted due to their ability to influence the shortlist of screened candidates presented to the managers. According to the senior HR, the HRBPs and managers were open to diversity recruitment.

“[HRBPs, recruiters and managers] are happy to know that Diversity is working on that. Diversity and gender balance impacts performance and results, it is really linked to business. So they are supportive and open to that.”(Senior HR)

Further, the senior HR, in addition to setting the global gender targets, has given the power of setting divisional targets to the respective HRBP, where the HRBPs are empowered to take on necessary measures to bring about gender balance in their division.



“In 2019, the senior HR manager called me and said ‘I have made a decision in our executive team that we will go for having 35% female employees by 2023, and we are now at 24 % and we have no idea how... we need help to get there.’” (HRBP)

Moreover, according to the HR professionals, the setting of gender targets was done to motivate the managers through goal setting, which they believed was a key in getting the managers in agreement for the move towards a diversity recruitment aimed at hiring more underrepresented employee groups. In addition to working together, according to a recruiter, the HR professionals were encouraged by senior HR to be “*mini-entrepreneurs*” and take the necessary initiatives themselves and to “*get something in diversity up and running*”. Thus, the HR professionals were told to not wait for communication from the top to cascade down when it came to bringing diversity measures into the recruitment process. Consequently, divisional HRBP along with the recruiters became actively involved in embedding the diversity criteria of young, IT literate and woman, into the recruitment process. They collectively and individually became involved in various actions to influence the managers hiring decisions, such as formulating and conducting both diversity and inclusion as well as recruitment training, changing the recruitment practices towards more diversity focused ones as well as becoming increasingly involved in the recruitment process. Thus, by changing the requirements and characteristics for recruitment, the move towards diversity recruitment started to unfold in the organisation.

### **The introduction of diversity recruitment at Diverscion**

To enable the adoption of diversity recruitment, recruitment trainings were carried out by HRBPs and recruiters as a collaborative effort between them. The reasoning behind conducting these trainings was according to the HRBPs that “*the best and most effective way to actually make a difference is in recruitment*”. The trainings, directed at managers, had the aim of influencing and changing their recruitment practices to attract and recruit female, young applicants and candidates with the technological competency needed for the future. The training included both strategic level information, conveying the importance of diversity, and operative level measures on how recruitment practices could be changed to attract and facilitate the recruitment of more diverse candidates. The motive for using strategic level information had been due to the engineering mindset of managers, where research and figures to back up the new diversity recruitment process made it easier for the managers to accept the new practices. For example, previous studies on the use of gender decoding in job advertising and its results on successfully attracting more women were conveyed before the managers were introduced to how they could use the gender decoder in the recruitment process. The overall aim of the training was to guide the managers through all the stages of the recruitment process. Therefore, the managers were also given guidelines on how to conduct a competence based and structured interview. The interview guidelines included subjects ranging from unconscious bias to Sweden's discrimination laws.

“...the recruitment training includes how you should reflect and analyse your interview material. You should not go with your ‘gut feeling’ because your gut feeling is based completely on your bias and on what experiences you think are okay and not okay. So I tell them, not really intuition based

decisions, but fact-based decisions and how you then create a scorecard and grade the candidates.”  
 (Recruiter)

The importance of communicating operative measures to managers including practical advice (giving them a ‘facit’) and tools was something that has been stressed by both HRBP and recruiters. According to one recruiter, if the training consisted of only “fluffy” information, it risked being too open, lacking concrete steps on how to achieve diversity through the recruitment process. Further, the recruitment training also implied HRBPs and recruiters introducing various tools and methods in the different recruitment steps. The new practices included the usage of a gender decoder for customizing the job advertisement, a change in competency requirements to change and broaden the number of candidates, competency-based screening, non-discriminating competency-based interview questions, non-discriminatory assessments, using a scoreboard for competencies and a gender balanced selection shortlist. The stages in the recruitment process where HRBPs and recruiters bring in measures for enabling a diversity recruitment are envisioned in the figure below.

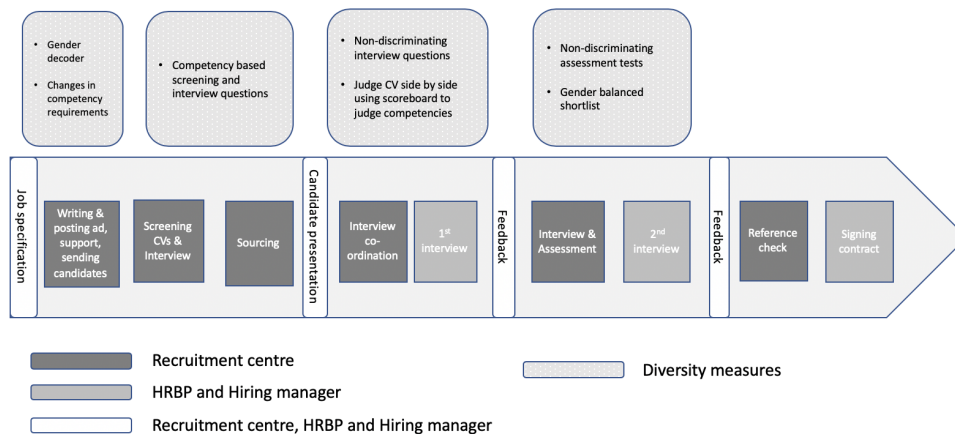


Figure 1. The diversity recruitment process at Diverscion

The new tools and practices were added on to the existing recruitment practices to facilitate diversity recruitment, for example, the managers wrote the job advertisement and, in the end, could use the gender decoder to alter words in their advertisement to make it more appealing to women or gender neutral. Likewise, the managers still made assessments on the selected candidates CV, but instead of judging the CV and candidate one after the other, they were taught in the training to judge it side by side on common criteria which made it non-discriminatory. In addition to providing the training, it was also the responsibility of the HRBPs and recruiters to bring those managers who really needed the training but were unwilling to participate in it, as it was a voluntary training and not taken as a priority by the managers.

Apart from the training, the prevalent method used during the recruitment process was for the HR professionals to question and challenge the manager’s actions and decisions, thereby creating an atmosphere of accountability towards achieving diversity. This task, according to the HRBPs and recruiters, needed a delicate balance because if they became too intrusive on the choice of candidates or on how the recruitment should be conducted, the manager may elect out of their support services. This could take the possibility of HRBPs or recruiters

to enable a diversity recruitment out of the equation. Thus, even if they engaged in challenging and questioning the managers, they refrained from creating conflicts as they did not want to be excluded from the recruitment process or lose the manager’s trust.

“But we cannot push that way, we cannot start questioning the manager, because that means that we do not trust the hiring manager, we need to trust each other.”(Recruiter)

“It is our role to support our managers, because diversity on the paper is one thing, but it is really when you get the outcome of having a diverse workforce, that is when it is paying off. It takes time because you need to have that trust in the team, that people are willing to share the same values on how we should collaborate, communicate and ways of working. That takes time to develop. And very often we try to bypass that, going directly to result, ‘now we need to deliver’” (HRBP)

The following table shows the questions of HRBPs and recruiters to managers in various stages of the diversity recruitment process so as to affect its course.

Diversity measures	The ways HR and recruiters try to influence the hiring managers
Gender decoder	“Use words like ‘support, collaborate’ instead of ‘drives, takes the lead’” (Recruiter) “The job ad we changed, we saw the effect of more younger people and more women applying” (HRBP)
Recruitment criteria	“Okay guys, but if we would like to have another type of profile, you may need to scrap half of your wish list, can we rearrange a bit internally first, so the position looks slightly different?” (HRBP) “Can it be someone with experience from a different industry” (HRBP)
Competency based screening	“in screening, you can screen and see if there are not many female applicants - ‘do we need to do something?’” (Recruiter) “5-10 years of experience, do you really need that? Really, this is not a senior position” (Recruiter)
Sourcing for diversity	“If the hiring manager really wants a woman, ‘Do we need to source them on LinkedIn and focus only on women?’” (Recruiter)
Interview questions	“Ask the same questions for all candidates, usually when you are a man you do not get the questions “how will you manage all of this travelling with your family”, but if you are a female you usually get that question. If it is relevant it should be asked to both.” (HRBP)
Assessment test and interview	“And then the assessment stage ‘ok, thank you for the selection. Why don't you have a woman?’” (Recruiter)
Challenging final shortlist decisions	“When I am there as HR, I challenge what I hear them say, getting different perspectives on why they select one or two candidates and why they did not select the other candidates.” (HRBP) “We also tell them that it's not good enough. If you have four candidates in the end of the process, at least two of them have to be women” (HRBP)

Table 1. Diversity measures and HR professional responses

Another example of HRBPs and recruiters influencing the managers was to advise the managers to “scrap half of [their] wish list” as well as to assess the candidates based on soft skills such as growth mindset, capacity to learn and willingness to change. The reason for this was that one of the barriers to hiring more women and young candidates was the existing practice by the managers of adding a long list of competency requirements in the job advertisement. For women, it presented the problem of their need to fulfil all the requirement criteria to apply for the job, while for young candidates, the requirement of many years of experience sorted them out instantly. Thus, by challenging the managers existing practices, the HRBPs and recruiters attempted to change how they judged competencies so as to enable diversity recruitment. Despite challenging the managers, it was also evident that the recruitment process was a joint effort between HRBPs, recruiters and managers, as shown in the formulation of the job advertisements.

“When the content is made for the job advertisement, it is reviewed not only by the manager, but also by the HRBP and our recruitment centre, so we have like a three-fold view on it.” (Recruiter)

In addition to the efforts of HRBPs and recruiters, the managers also acquired support from other managers regarding recruitment best practices and tools. For instance, a manager conveyed that he often received tips from a female colleague about the gender decoder as well as how she always had at the minimum one female candidate in the final shortlist. More

than that, both HR professionals and managers remarked how they kept themselves abreast of diversity literature and gained information from both internal and external sources such as Diverscion's internal portal, TED talks and podcasts. Consequently, the sources of influence towards the diversity recruitment process also came from outside company level organised activities, such as through individual actions of actors involved in recruitment as well as from informal discussions with other managers.

To further increase the number of diverse candidates in the recruitment process, the D&I training was introduced. As opposed to the voluntary nature of the recruitment training, the D&I training was mandatory for all managers and within the past five years, 45% of the managers underwent this training. The training was either open sessions for managers across divisions or held in smaller groups of managers within one division. The contents included theory which communicated the business case of having a diverse workforce, situational cases and personal experiences about the topic. Moreover, the training was not only entailed age and gender diversity but covered a broad range of diversity aspects, including those which were not measured at the company level such as personalities, accent and personal interests. The aim of the D&I training was to challenge the biases and prejudices of the managers and have open discussions. Therefore, rather than drilling down the importance of diversity, it was discussed in wider thought-provoking ways. When discussing the different types of biases, the training also showed its relevance in recruitment and what impact it had on hiring decisions. According to a HRBP (also being a D&I training facilitator), it was considered easy to affect the manager's mindset on short term, such as during a full day training session. The challenge, however, lied in them remembering it and practicing their learnings over time. The HRBP gave an example of a manager who attended the D&I training five times voluntarily, the reason for doing so being due to the different nature of the discussions as well as the variability in the manager's reactions and responses in every session. The accountability to continuing working on diversity and inclusion after training completion was through follow up meetings that the HRBP had with the manager which took place 3-6 months after. In these meetings, they discussed the promises made during the training, how the manager upholds them in the recruitment process and a route to take it forward. Lastly, the feedback from the training was that for managers, the most productive part was when the training was held with their group of divisional managers (as opposed to a mixed group of managers from different divisions). This, according to the managers, enabled them to open up with trust, share experiences and discuss their challenges, which helped them have a more ongoing dialogue with the management team even after the conclusion of the training, keeping one another accountable.

To ensure that all the efforts from diversity recruitment became realized, the focus on inclusiveness was one recent important issue identified. According to HR professionals, this came with the realization that "*inclusion is the key*" to diversity and that all the efforts that they put into diversity recruitment could become undone if the hired person did not feel included and decided to quit.

"Inclusion is a really major part. Even if you get a diverse person in the team, if that person does not feel included, then he or she is going to go right out the door. Then you are stuck with the same diversity ratio that you had before, back on square one. Which means that inclusion is just as

important as diversity. Just because you got a mandate from the top saying ‘Oh, we need a 50/50 diversity ratio - let us hire these three people’, and then when we have hired everyone we can say ‘Check, we are done!’ No, you have to include them and make them feel that they are equal to others.”(Recruiter)

Therefore, the HRBPs and recruiters took up the task of ensuring that the managers were inclusive not only in their teams, but also in the recruitment process. Emphasizing the importance of providing an inclusive experience for the candidate in all the interactions the manager had with the candidate, in email conversations, interviews and so forth. To further stress the importance of inclusion, Diverscion launched ‘inclusiveness workshops’, discussing different dilemmas such as suppression techniques as well as micro behaviours of intentional exclusion to keep power.

Consequently, HRBPs and recruiters joined forces to enable diversity recruitment at Diverscion by training managers in diversity recruitment practices as well as informing and educating them about the benefits of engaging in diversity recruitment on the business performance and additional benefits in adopting an inclusive approach in the recruitment context.

### **Managers altering the course of diversity recruitment at Diverscion**

The majority of managers were open to the support from the HRBPs and recruiters and considered their involvement a welcome addition. However, the degree of influence that HRBPs and recruiters could exert on the managers to bring about a change in the hiring decision was still limited. In the recruitment process, it was the manager who ensured that the candidate had the right experience, competence and skills from the professional work point of view, as HRBPs or recruiters could not evaluate if a candidate had detailed knowledge in, for example, the finance area. Consequently, the managers will always have the last word regardless of the efforts of the HRBPs and recruiters. This uneven distribution of power has been partly justified by HRBPs and recruiters, considering that managers indeed know the competencies required better as well as their reluctance to share their ultimate deciding power with the HRBPs and recruiters. As one HRBP put it, “*giving away power is difficult*”. This, from the manager’s viewpoint, created a dilemma as they were open to the support from HRBP and recruiters but did not want interference into how they made hiring decisions.

“HR is optional to involve as much as we want, and maybe they should always be involved a bit more... But it is difficult, it is a fine line between supporting and taking over completely” (Manager)

The disagreements between HR professionals and managers was also evident in the screening process, while recruiters requested the managers to define their candidate expectations based on hard skills (on the contrary from in the ad description where they wanted the manager to express broader more soft skills) this was met by resistance from the managers who found the recruiters screening methods limiting. The managers were asked to provide keywords of hard skills (e.g. electromobility, battery knowledge, five years of experience) instead of soft skills (e.g. driven, growth mindset, adaptability to change), since the recruiters claimed that screening CVs based on soft skills was inefficient and inclined

to bias. This limitation of the recruiter's screening methods (to not be able to screen on soft skills) was identified by the hiring managers as a challenge.

“I think here they have a challenge for the future. I want to recruit for what I think this person can learn and the HR professionals do not have the methods for that. They want me to write a list of the qualifications so they can match the CV and the list of qualifications. But it is more difficult to put a word on ‘agile, flexible, learning skills’ and what more you can bring to the table than to write down specialist skills.”(Manager)

Further, there was also a lack of trust expressed by the managers in the recruiters’ ability to evaluate the candidate which further limited the influence of the recruiters. One reason being that the centralized recruitment team was separated from the different divisions and business areas, which made them at a disadvantage of not having knowledge about the teams and their working. In addition, another issue that was brought up by the managers was the high turnover of recruiters in the recruitment centre. The high turnover rate affected the building of long-term relationships between managers and recruiters, leading to managers’ lack of trust in recruiters and their services. Moreover, the recruitment tools and methods used by the HRBPs and recruiters have also been criticised by the managers as being not at par to handle all the diversity criteria’s of candidates that they themselves want to recruit. For instance, managers found the competency-based assessment test to be non-adaptive to candidates with diverse physical or mental abilities. Consequently, to not sort these *‘extremely talented and competent candidates’* out, managers were reluctant to send out the tests to these candidates. Another example of the criticism levelled towards the methods is that there have been instances where the manager’s evaluation of a candidate during the interview and the candidate’s assessment results from the recruitment centre were different. In those cases, the manager ignored the results and relied on her own judgement of the candidate.

“I have had the situation that I have a feeling for somebody, and then I get the tests back and they show the negative sides of a person, and then you hesitate and you wonder ‘was my gut feeling wrong?, because here it says that the person is like this, but I thought that he was like that?’ What should you trust, your gut feeling or the test? I ignored the tests.” (Manager)

Throughout the interviews, there was the prevalence of managers relying on their ‘gut-feeling’ in gauging the personality and other behavioral traits of the candidates. As discussed previously, HRBPs and recruiters address these biases in diversity and inclusion as well as recruitment training and specifically tell them to not rely on their gut-feeling when making hiring decisions. However, despite these efforts, managers still continued to use their ‘gut feeling’ to make hiring decisions. According to them, they depend on their senses to understand a candidate beyond what the candidate is saying in the interview because as one manager put it, *“it is not always what they say, you need to listen to what is behind what they are talking about”*. Also, when there were discrepancies between how the manager perceived a candidate and the candidate profile from the recruiter’s point of view or the assessment test, the managers still trusted their gut-feeling more. The managers especially relied on their gut feeling to make hiring decisions when they were uncertain about the candidate’s competencies or if their competency would fulfil the requirement, as one recruiter put it *“when you do not know something about a person, you fill the gaps with*

*biases*". Consequently, the usage of their gut-feeling and the lack of trust in recruiters and their methods and tools resulted in increased involvement of managers in various steps of the recruitment process. For example, they themselves did the screening by reading all the CVs instead of using the recruitment centre's services because, as one of the managers explained, "[I] do not want to miss any good candidates".

Despite the distrust in methods and tools used by the recruiters, it was observed that the managers generally had a positive attitude towards both the diversity and inclusion training as well as the recruitment training. Which was seen as they were in agreement with the benefits of diversity in their team and on business performance which was put forth by the HRBPs and recruiters during the training. The managers themselves also stressed that they were looking for diverse people during recruitment. However, there seemed to be significant differences in managers' views on diversity recruitment in comparison to what the HRBPs or recruiters were aiming for, which in turn affected the managers hiring decisions during the recruitment process. Even with the knowledge of increased focus on bringing in more women, young and IT competent people, the inclination of managers was primarily to find a candidate who fit their existing team. Managers looked at their current team composition and what was lacking in it so as to keep the balance, both in terms of personality and technical competence as well as gender and age. For one manager, the dream candidate was a woman in the age group of 40-55 years, since that was what she did not have in her team. For another manager, diversity was to hire a candidate who was an introvert as his existing team consisted of 70% extroverts. The candidate's match within the team, especially their personality traits, were repeatedly mentioned by the managers when enquired about the diversity criteria that they consider for candidate selection. This preference for the personality of the candidate as a diversity criteria, according to the managers, was due to their previous experience of working in teams where diversity in personality was the main factor affecting the functioning and performance of the team. The considerations for making a hiring decision based on the existing team compositions and the balance within the team were described by a manager as,

"I think you need a team with different personalities as well. You need someone who is very 'go' but then you also need stability. So you cannot just have young hungry people, because then they leave, we also need someone who wants to stay, who wants to build a foundation, who is sort of the backbone of the team, who enjoys teaching newcomers. I really think that you need all the different personalities... You need someone who is really thorough, you need someone who is more of a visionary, you need a mix to have a good discussion." (Manager)

Thus, the managers claimed that it was these different people and the balance between them that was needed for having better team performance rather than having a candidate from a different country or gender. This viewpoint was significant for one manager who, even though she had a very visibly diverse team with employees from 20 different nationalities, still found the team to be like-minded. The reasoning behind this, according to the manager, was the result of employees with similar educational backgrounds that worked together for a long period of time, which in turn resulted in more consensus than friction during discussions, therefore countering the benefits from having a diverse team.

Building on this preference to find a candidate that fits the team, the inclination to look for candidates through familiar networks and universities was discussed during the interviews. Thus, even if the HRBPs and recruiters advocate to go for a “wild card” candidate, the managers still continue looking for talents in familiar ways. The managers' reluctance to bring in diverse people that did not fit the team was also due to the difficulties and uncertainties associated with such a change, i.e. possible disagreements or conflicts arising in the team due to cultural differences, socializing barriers (“*Do I want to be friends with this person?*”) or language barriers. As one manager put it “*When diversity doesn't work, it's horrible.*” More than that, having the “*diversity glasses*” always on while recruiting was considered by managers to be limiting, as one manager expressed, “*if I would have a recruitment going on and I cannot find good women, and already I have three men waiting that are actually really good, well then..*”. Further, when a “diversity” label is put on recruitment, diversity becomes an entity separate from the recruitment process instead of becoming a natural part of it. Therefore, managers advocated for diversity to be integrated into the processes instead of something outside of it which needs to be brought in.

“I find where the diversity question gets the best attention, is when you do not call it “diversity”. I think it is part of everything, I mean if you have a communication workshop and you discuss different ways of teaching communication, then that is diversity. Because then you say different people have different ways of listening to information, and that is diversity in itself.” (Manager)

Diversity for the sake of it was also not preferred by the managers who still wanted authenticity in attracting diverse candidates. This was due to the repercussions of engaging in activities such as ‘overselling’ to attract a diverse candidate, as noted by a manager “*If I oversell something that does not happen when they are in, they will not like it anyway*” which then had adverse effects on the team when the candidates expectations were not met.

Lastly, one factor brought up by a majority of the managers was the homogenous top management team, a factor resulting in the managers not being fully aligned with the focus on diversity in recruitment. Even with top executives continuously communicating the importance of diversity and inclusion through their actions, the composition of the top executive team was mostly men which was criticized by managers. The top management’s lack of walking the talk was also brought into the conversation where the female managers commented on the inability to identify themselves with any woman on the top management team as they are limited to being in support functions such as HR functions, communication or assistants. They then questioned the top management’s intentions of bringing the diversity focus when they themselves do not reflect it within their team.

“If you want to have females and people with different backgrounds, then it should be in the steering committee, in the top management team, and they are not. I think if there should be a change, there needs to be a change there, because I cannot identify myself with anyone in the top, they come from the same school, same background. They take people who are like themselves. All levels at Diverscion need to challenge and have more diversity. We have a lot of good leaders with different backgrounds, but it seen in the highest level” (Manager)

Consequently, the road towards adopting diversity recruitment was not without effort and was met by both resistance and modification of practices by the managers. This in turn induced conflicts, ambiguities and unintended developments in this process.



## Discussion

### **Erosion of power divide through institutional creation work**

The efforts of senior HR, HRBPs and recruiters towards diversity recruitment are examined through the theoretical framework of institutional work along with the associated concept of institutional entrepreneurship. The point of departure is the existing institutionalized recruitment practices at Diverscion through the routinized behavior of the recruitment actors (Greenwood et al., 2008). Consequently, the move towards adopting diversity recruitment practices presents itself as a divergent institutional change (Battilana et al., 2009), as the goal of recruiting more young, female and IT literate candidates is different from that of the previous institutionalized recruitment process. The work of introducing and adopting diversity recruitment practices was through the heroic actions of senior HR as institutional entrepreneurs (Garud et al., 2007; Battilana et al., 2009) as well as by the collective actions of HRBPs and recruiters (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). These two groups of actors acted on different organizational levels for the adoption of the diversity recruitment practices. The senior HR created a vision of change by setting companywide formal gender targets together with informal targets of young and IT literate candidates. This vision was followed by their active involvement in the mobilization of the HRBPs and recruiters by aligning the diversity objectives to strategic objectives. When senior HR sought the support from HRBPs and recruiters in bringing about changes in workforce diversity as well as empowered the HRBPs to take on necessary measures to bring about gender balance in their divisions, it enhanced these recruitment actors' social position. Another instance of enhancement of social position of HRBPs and recruiters was through the assignment of the new identity as 'mini entrepreneurs' by the senior HR so that they by themselves, instead of waiting for directives from the senior HR, could engage in entrepreneurial actions to enable diversity initiatives (Battilana et al., 2009). This change in social position affected their formal authority (Battilana et al., 2009; Phillips et al., 2000) which, in turn, resulted in them gaining 'legitimately recognized right' to engage in the changes to the existing recruitment process (Empson et al., 2013, p. 813). At the divisional level of Diverscion, the HRBPs and recruiters were the primary actors of change who directly worked with managers to actively alter the institutionalized recruitment practices.

The institutional creation work of HRBPs and recruiters included five types of institutional work: *educating*, *advocacy*, *mimicry*, *reconfiguration of normative associations* and *construction of new identities* (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). They engaged in *educating* the managers through diversity and recruitment training to enable them to effectively conduct diversity recruitment. For example, the recruitment training, with the purpose of both informing the diversity criterias as well as providing practical changes in the recruitment practices, enabled the managers to interact easily with the new institutional structures. Instances of *advocacy* include the senior HR providing legitimacy and mobilizing HRBPs and recruiters to bring about change to the existing recruitment process, as well as the political and collective work of HRBPs and recruiters to influence managers more, as illustrated through the questioning and challenging of manager at different stages of recruitment as well as the example of the "three fold view" on the job advertisements. Drawing on the institutional work form of *mimicry*, it is evident that the diversity

recruitment practices are leveraged in the existing recruitment practices so as to ease its adoption of the new practices. For example, through the introduction of the gender decoder as an extension of writing a job advertisement, the managers became aware of problems with past routinized practices and the managers could see how their previous ad formulations acted as a barrier to attract young women. For this reason, the juxtaposition of old and new practices influenced the managers and facilitated easy adoption of new practices (Townley, 2002) which led to legitimizing of certain new recruitment practices (e.g. gender decoder). Further, according to Lawrence & Suddaby (2006), for marginal actors to gain the social capital to engage in educating, mimicry and advocacy, collective actions are necessary. Thus, the collective actions of HRBPs and recruiters have elevated their social position to a unified central actor thereby giving them a higher social position than what they previously had.

Moreover, the managers at Diverscion repeatedly hired candidates with similar educational and professional experience which resulted in the managers attaching particular meanings to competencies and forming normative associations of which competencies fit for certain job positions (Zilber, 2002). Through the change in practices, such as gender decoding the job advertisements and looking for different competencies than previously, the HRBPs and recruiters challenged the meaning of what the required competencies could be (Zilber, 2002) thereby resulting in *reconfiguration of normative associations* to competencies so as to facilitate diversity recruitment. However, for the reconfiguration of normative associations to be effective, the managers have to cooperate and accept it. Through the engagement in different institutional work forms, the attempt of HRBPs and recruiters to influence the managers more is evident, that is, they engage in educating, mimicry, advocacy and reconfiguration of normative associations so as to elevate their social position. Therefore the *construction of the influential identity* of HRBPs and recruiters different from their previous supporting one in recruitment was not only through empowerment or the assigning of formal authority by the senior HR but also through the different forms of institutional work.

The institutional work of constructing new identities, in this case the influential role, is especially significant for the adoption of diversity recruitment as it shows how institutional work is carried out for achieving power and social position (e.g. Rojas, 2010). This was also stated by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, p. 215) wherein if someone wishes to increase their legitimate power, they have to engage in institutional work to affect the existing rules and norms. Through the institutional work perspective, the dimension of institutional agency can be considered in a bi-directional relationship between power and institutions (Lawrence, 2008) as the HRBPs and recruiters used their institutional agency through episodes of different institutional work forms to construct a new identity for them. This construction of new identity illustrates that the HRBPs and recruiters by themselves through political and suasive actions attempt to gain decision making power in the recruitment process. The focus of their institutional agency is then mainly on influencing other actors in the recruitment process for more equalized hiring decision making power through changing the existing institutionalized practices (Rojas, 2010).

Due to the presence of multiple actors with different interests during the adoption of diversity practices, the domination of interests that favour diversity recruitment is necessary to control the direction towards diversity recruitment (Evans 2012; Omanović, 2009). The main challenge in effective diversity recruitment efforts is for actors who favour diversity recruitment to achieve dominance through gaining hiring decision power, since this ultimately results in who is hired or not (Rivera, 2012). In the case of Diverscion, our study illustrated that instead of vesting HR professionals with decision making power for the erosion of power and status divide between HR professionals and managers (Rivera, 2012), the HRBPs and recruiters gain this power through their collective influencing work on the managers which also reduce the separation between diversity efforts and actual hiring. For example, the institutional work of HRBPs and recruiters illustrate the increased involvement of them in the diversity recruitment process which reduced the structural divide that was found to hinder diversity recruitment (ibid). Further, the achievement of legitimate recognized right to engage in diversity recruitment, as well as the increase in social position through institutional work, reduce the status divide which exists as a hindrance to effective diversity recruitment (ibid). Therefore, in addition to the suggestions of Rivera (2012) for the erosion of power and status divide, we propose the intentional efforts and various forms of institutional work by HRBPs and recruiters.

Consequently, our research contributes to the previous research that have addressed unequal power positions (Rivera, 2012a) and differences in interests between actors involved in diversity recruitment (Klarsfeld 2009; Evans, 2012) by linking power and interests (Omanović, 2009). Through the linking of power and interests we illustrate that collective, episodic and purposive efforts for the dominance of interest that favour diversity recruitment could result in distributed hiring decision power as well as an increased social position to facilitate effective adoption of diversity recruitment practices. The distributed hiring decision power among the HRBPs, recruiters and managers will also aid in reducing the resistance that Rivera (2012) predicted when HR professionals are vested with hiring decision power due to the prevalent belief among managers that HR professionals engaged in diversity recruitment are not qualified to make the hiring decision. Through our case of the adoption of diversity practices at Diverscion, we could also examine empirically the suggestion of erosion of power and status divide between HR professionals and managers by Rivera (2012) as a potential solution for effective diversity recruitment efforts.

### **Resistance through institutional maintenance work**

Despite the fact that the managers were open to the support from HRBPs and recruiters and had a positive attitude towards both training as well as understanding the benefits of diversity on business performance, the institutional creation work of diversity recruitment was also met with resistance from the managers. For example, the institutional creation work of construction of identity being a highly cooperative task as it depends on others to formally or informally assign that identity to the actor(s) (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) was in this study met with resistance. In addition to this, we also propose the ‘paradox of embedded agency’ of managers as the source of resistance (Garud et al. 2007). In the case of Diverscion, the managers, despite their possession of power to affect recruitment

practices, were too institutionally embedded and therefore lacked the motivation to engage in institutional changes (Garud et al. 2007) such as adopting the diversity recruitment practices. Thus, the divergent nature of the diversity recruitment practices which went against the goals of the existing recruitment practices, resulted in the HRBPs and recruiters facing resistance from the managers due to their institutional embeddedness (Battilana et al., 2009).

Due to the institutional embeddedness of managers, the shift towards the influential role of HRBPs and recruiters, which resulted in a distribution of the managers' decision-making power in the recruitment process, was considered as an interference to their position, making them reluctant to give away this power. To counter the threat to their position, the managers engaged in institutional maintenance work to adjust changes in the recruitment practices in a way that kept their powerful position in hiring decisions. Similar to previous research on how institutional maintenance work could result in its transformation along the way (e.g. Currie et al., 2012; Lok & de Rond, 2013), the maintenance work of managers at Diverscion conveys how they are altering the course of the adoption of diversity recruitment practices rather than countering its progress. Since the institutional creation work for the adoption of diversity recruitment practices was through persuasion rather than through enforcement, it presented only minor disturbances in the existing recruitment practices. Accordingly, as these changes did not pose an imminent threat to the managers, we draw on the institutional maintenance work classification of Lok & de Rond (2013) and propose that the managers are engaging in "containment work" as opposed to more rigorous "restoration work" (p.197). The instances of containment work consisted of the managers *ignoring* HR professionals' opinions to hire women rather than men with equal competencies or ignoring the assessment results when they were different from the manager's own candidate evaluation. This form of maintenance work in turn *reinforced* the existing practice wherein managers made the hiring decision without interference from HR professionals. The reinforcement of the belief that managers were more equipped for making effective hiring decisions was evident in their justification of having more detailed knowledge about the competency requirements to evaluate the candidate, which aligns with previous research on diversity recruitment (Rivera, 2012). The ignoring and reinforcing (containment work) aided in countering the threat to the managers' power position by minimizing the interference to it. Consequently, the managers engaged in institutional maintenance work to keep their powerful position in making hiring decisions even with changes in existing recruitment practices.

In addition to maintaining existing institutional practices due to the institutional embeddedness of managers, they are seen to resist change because of the difficulties, conflicts and uncertainties arising from having diverse people in their teams. The routinizing of recruitment practices by hiring from familiar networks or familiar methods are due to the stability from these embedded practices (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Therefore, to maintain the stability within their team, managers continued to use the existing recruitment practices while *justifying* their actions by highlighting the negative consequences of diversity recruitment. Moreover, the managers interpreted the diversity criteria for recruitment as candidates with diverse personalities, since they found a team with different

personalities to be more effective and profitable than a team with different gender or nationalities. The business case for diversity was kept intact while the managers rooted for their diversity criteria, which was different from the HR professional's diversity criteria of young, IT literate and women. This maintenance work of managers (by justifying through the business case of diversity) enabled them to recruit candidates as per their own team level requirement, which in turn illustrates their attempt to gain legitimacy to shape the diversity recruitment practices in their favour.

The adoption of diversity recruitment practices and the distribution of hiring decision power triggered parallel efforts by managers which resulted in ignoring certain new practices, reinforcing managers' hiring deciding power, justifying as well as the coexistence of different meanings. From the different forms of institutional maintenance work by managers, it is evident that instead of trying to stop the institutional change, the managers are altering its course while it is unfolding. This was also illustrated in previous research of institutional maintenance work where the work is not always done to halt changes, but could also be used by actors to "shape the change in a preferred way as it unfolds so that certain aspects of an institutional order are maintained" (Norbäck, 2017, p.4).

Our findings answer the call for more research on resistance (e.g. conflicts and tensions) towards diversity practices (Jones et al., 2000; Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Kaler, 2001; Kirton & Greene, 2006), as well as the necessity of the study of the involvement of power-resistance relationships in the adoption of diversity practices so as to provide insights to its effectiveness (Omanović, 2013). Moreover, previous research illustrates that the engagement of managers in diversity efforts resulted in their increased support to the initiative but caused resistance and backlash when the manager's autonomy in recruitment was controlled (Dobbin et al., 2015). However, our analysis has illustrated that instead of resulting in backlash or reversing changes, the threat to autonomous power and position of managers result in them engaging in institutional maintenance work, thereby shaping the diversity recruitment practices maintaining their power position. This shaping of diversity recruitment practices is relevant for the diversity recruitment literature as our findings adds on previous research by Omanović (2013) on how the concept of diversity is an ongoing production by actors with conflicting interests and unequal power relationships which affects the taken for grantedness of the concept. Likewise, the institutional maintenance work and subsequent shaping of diversity recruitment practices at Diverscion illustrate that the practices which eventually become institutionalized will be different from the diversity recruitment practices initially intended.

### **Institutional relational work for adoption of diversity recruitment**

Taking a relational institutional work perspective demonstrates that the relationship and relational actions between the HR professionals and managers also contributed to the type of institutional work these actors engage in. In the relational perspective, the institutional relationship between the involved actors are formed or shaped by their power positions and meaning frameworks (Topal, 2015). In the case of Diverscion, the erosion of power division through the shift into an influential role has brought the HR professionals to an equalized power position as the managers in the recruitment process. Moreover, as discussed

previously, there existed conflicting views on diversity recruitment criteria between the HR professionals and the managers which was both rooted in the business case of diversity, thereby indicating the co-existence of diverging meaning frameworks as the adoption of diversity recruitment was unfolding. This coexistence of divergent meaning systems between actors in equal power positions and the subsequent conflicting relationship between actors is essential for the maintenance of institutional practices and the organization's operational productivity, as illustrated in previous research (Zilber, 2002). In the same way, we argue that the coexistence of divergent meaning systems between HR professionals and managers as well as the dominant power position during the adoption of diversity recruitment is essential for the operational productivity of these practices (Zilber, 2002; Topal, 2015). In other words, the conflicting (or diverging) relationship between HR professionals and managers and the subsequent struggles they have is essential for the operational productivity of the organization. This operational productivity could also be explained through the institutional concept of strategic decoupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Hirsch & Bermiss, 2009) where the stability of an organization's core functionalities is maintained through the actions of actors within the organisation. The senior HR, HRBPs and recruiters could engage in diversity recruitment practices while managers could engage in maintaining their day to day functions by primarily filling their team competency requirement, without them affecting the operability of each other. For a relationship that results in creation work, Topal (2015) have suggested the dominance of one meaning framework between dominant actors. Therefore, for the adoption of diversity recruitment practices, the HR professionals have to bring their meaning framework into a dominant position by relating it more to the operational productivity than the managers' meaning framework. This could result in increased power position of HR professionals as well as successful adoption of the diversity recruitment practices (Topal, 2015). However, we argue that the dominance of one meaning framework by relating it more to operational productivity is difficult as both the meaning frameworks are rooted in the business case of diversity.

The dominance of one meaning framework could be facilitated, for instance, through the specialized knowledge or expertise of professionals associated with it (Topal, 2015). By examining the relationship between managers, HRBPs and recruiters, it was revealed that the managers trusted the opinions of HR professionals who had extensive experience in recruiting and were therefore more willing to cooperate with them. This coincides with the suggestion of Topal (2015) and indicates that trust on expertise could enable the dominance of the HR professionals' meaning framework and result in effective adoption of diversity recruitment. Managers also trusted the HR professionals' expertise more and relinquished their monopolistic involvement on various steps of the recruitment process when they had long standing relationships with each other. This implies that through trust and the subsequent increase in involvement of HR professionals in the various stages of the recruitment process gives them more instances to influence the managers' hiring decision. Consequently, the social capital of trust emerges as an enabling factor for the successful mobilization of managers towards the diversity recruitment goals (Battilana et al., 2009). Trust was also highlighted by the managers as a factor that increased the effectiveness of

training. The managers were more receptive towards diversity recruitment practices when they discussed it among other managers or informally with other employees during their day to day interactions rather than during training or workshops, i.e. the support and advice regarding diversity recruitment practices were higher valued when it came from other divisional managers or the managers' manager. Also, since trust is dependent on the situation at hand and based on the belief that the other person will act in accordance with the trust giver's interests (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019) it depicts the importance of trust during institutional change and in an environment of unequal power (Topal, 2015).

Through taking a relational perspective, our study makes two contributions to the existing literature on diversity recruitment. First, the conflicting relationships and struggles between HR professionals and managers is found to be essential for the operational productivity of the organization as diversity recruitment practices are being adopted. This reasoning brings the paradox of managers' hiring preferences being valued more than HR professional's diversity aims into a positive picture in contrast to how it was previously portrayed (e.g. Evan, 2012). Second, trust based relationships between HR professionals and managers could aid in reducing the status divide between these actors which was found to inhibit diversity recruitment efforts (Rivera, 2012). Our study indicates that the managers' lack of trust in HR professionals' capability to evaluate candidates due to differences in educational prestige (Rivera, 2012) could be countered through the expertise of HR professionals and through long standing relationships between HR professionals and managers, thereby eroding the status divide between these actors. As erosion of status divide is proposed to bring positive results in diversity recruitment efforts (Rivera, 2012) and a trusting climate has been demonstrated as a mediator in the relationship between HR practices and its positive outcomes (Collins & Smith, 2006; McCracken et al., 2017), our study demonstrates that trust based relationships is an essential factor that aids the diversity recruitment efforts of HR professionals and facilitates the adoption of diversity recruitment practices.

### **Unintended consequences in the adoption of diversity recruitment**

The study of the adoption of diversity recruitment practices should not focus only on the success of the adoption or its connection to intended results as it limits the understanding of the messy, everyday practices that could result in unintended consequences (Lawrence et al., 2009, Lawrence et al., 2013). Therefore, this study takes a constructivist approach to institutional work and highlights both the efforts of institutional actors towards creating or maintaining an institution as well as how these actions lead to "unintended adaptations, mutations and other institutional consequences." (Lawrence et al., 2011, p.55). Even if the intended results from the adoption of the diversity recruitment process is not yet visible, as the process has not been implemented fully, the unintended consequences and adaptations as the process unfolds could still be examined. This included the spawning of different meanings and adaptations in practices diverging from that initially intended, as well as ambiguities arising from uncertainties.

Further, an example of the unintended consequences (Lawrence et al., 2011) seen in the case of Diverscion was how, when HRBPs and recruiters required the managers to focus more on soft skills (e.g. growth mindset or ability to collaborate) than hard skills (e.g.

technical knowledge or years of experience) in the job advertisement creation, this resulted in an increase in uncertainties for effectively gauging a person with different competencies. As a result, the gaps in knowledge were filled by the manager's biases as they relied even more on their gut-feeling. Thus, the efforts of HR professionals to counter bias and hire more diverse talents resulted in even more biased decision making. Another unintended consequence was the discrepancy between the broadening of the competency list during ad creation and narrowing of it while screening the CVs. That is, on one hand, managers were required to focus on soft skills while creating job ads to attract diverse talents, but on the other, the recruiters could only screen the CVs based on hard skills as their screening methods were inadequate to screen soft skills. This posed a dilemma to the managers and to the process of diversity recruitment - when managers wanted a person with a 'growth mindset', and the recruiters could not screen the CVs based on that, the involvement of recruiters by itself became a barrier to adoption of diversity recruitment practices.

Moreover, while the senior HR and top management promoted and communicated the importance of diversity and its benefits, their own inadequacies came to limelight - such as gender imbalance and biased hiring to the top management level. As an unintended consequence, the efforts of senior HR and top management towards the adoption of diversity recruitment became contradictory in the eyes of the managers and resulted in them questioning these efforts. In addition, the ambiguity resulting from the multi-dimensionality of the term 'diversity' (Edgley et al., 2016) led to multiple interpretations and meanings in the diversity recruitment context (Zilber, 2002). As a consequence of the institutional work happening at Diverscion, the very meaning of diversity was questioned in the hiring context. While diversity was portrayed as all encompassing during the diversity training, the diversity recruitment criterias was specific to women, IT literate and young candidates which resulted in managers feeling constrained. In addition, the most significant adaptation and unintended consequence was the realization by the HR professionals to also focus on inclusion in the diversity recruitment process. The realization of its importance for the effectiveness of diversity recruitment impacted the recruitment practices, where the positive experience of candidates became an important factor to be considered in various steps. The promotion of diversity through focusing on inclusiveness in the day to day behaviors, communications and other activities is also seen in previous research (e.g. MacFarlane et al., 2010). The *ambiguities*, e.g. increase in use of gut feeling by managers, *adaptations* e.g. the focus on inclusion, *dilemmas*, e.g. recruiters trying to enable diversity recruitment by themselves becoming a barrier to it, and the *contradictions* e.g the gender and age imbalance on the top management level, illustrate that even with purposive actions for achieving an intended outcome, unintended consequences could affect the efforts independent of its success or failure (Lawrence et al., 2009).

Our study has illustrated how the adoption of diversity practices are affected by power positions, conflicts in interests and the type of relationships between the actors. Previously we have shown that for the maintenance of their power positions, managers shape the diversity practices in a way favourable for them. In addition, our study further illustrates that the unintended adaptations and ambiguities spawning from the efforts and interactions of these actors also shape the diversity recruitment practices as they are unfolding



(Omanović, 2009). This finding is significant for previous research on diversity recruitment, where the unintended consequences from diversity initiatives are based on outcomes such as target representation and false progress (e.g. Dobbin et al., 2015, Kalev et al., 2006; Weiner, 2016; Leslie, 2019). The outcome based unintended consequences, however, fail to incorporate the adaptations and ambiguities that emerge as the diversity initiatives (e.g. diversity recruitment or diversity training) are being adopted. Thus, our study illustrates that the unintended consequences in the adoption of diversity recruitment practices at Diversion would have been hidden if the focus was on the success or failure of adoption based on the targeted outcome of these diversity recruitment practices (as seen in Dobbin et al., 2015). This limitation becomes evident when the typology of unintended consequences of diversity initiatives by Leslie (2019) is applied to the case of Diversion and how her typology of unintended consequences is inadequate to bring forth the unintended consequences emerging from our study using an institutional work perspective. Therefore, we propose an institutional work perspective for unintended consequences as a better framework, since it shows the actions of the recruitment actors that causes unintended consequences (in addition existing signals e.g. Leslie, 2019) as well as broadens the focus of unintended consequences of diversity recruitment practices to provide a better understanding of the formation and maintenance of these practices (Evans, 2012; Omanović, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the adoption of diversity recruitment practices through the intentional work of senior HR, HRBPs, recruiters and managers. By studying diversity recruitment at Diversion, we found that the adoption of the practices largely depended on the power positions, conflicts in interests and establishment of relationships between these actors. The first research question was to investigate how the adoption of diversity recruitment practices is unfolding in the organisation and its influence on power positions and relationships. This study illustrated that the adoption of these practices involve the collective, intentional actions of the recruitment actors along with their interactions, negotiations and persuasion which aided in changing the existing routinized recruitment practices. Moreover, the HR professionals' collective actions resulted in the erosion of power divide between managers and HR professionals, thereby increasing their social position to facilitate adoption of diversity recruitment practices. This study has also examined empirically the suggestion of erosion of power and status divide by Riviera (2012a) and extended her suggestions to address the unequal power and social positions.

In addition, the influence of relationships between the actors on the adoption of the diversity recruitments practices was conveyed by taking a relational dimension of institutional work. Through this, it was shown that the specific relationships in terms of power positions and meaning frameworks were necessary for recruitment actors to engage in diversity recruitment efforts while keeping the core functionalities of the organization intact. Building on the relational accounts, trust based relationships through expertise and long standing relationships were also found to counter the status divide between HR professionals and managers which, according to previous research, was found to be a fundamental reason for unsuccessful diversity recruitment efforts (Riviera, 2012; McCracken et al., 2017). Further, our study also answers our second research question and reveals the resistance and

unexpected developments that arise from the interactions between the recruitment actors in the adoption of diversity recruitment practices. Though the contribution of resistance to the adoption of diversity initiatives was de-emphasized in previous literature, we have found that the efforts of managers to shape the diversity recruitment practices in their favour will have implications on the practices which will eventually be routinized. Also, considering the unintended developments in the adoption of diversity recruitment practices, the purposive actions of HR professionals for the adoption of diversity recruitment practices still produced unintended consequences such as ambiguities, dilemmas and contradictions. Moreover, our research also reveal how the institutional work perspective provides a better understanding of the shaping of the adoption of diversity recruitment, since it provides additional signals through the actions of the recruitment actors that causes these unintended consequences, irrespective of the success or failure of diversity recruitment based on targeted outcome. This also broadens the focus of previous diversity initiative literature on unintended consequences.

The paper also contributes to the existing literature on institutional work and power by illustrating how the micro-level influential actions of collective actors to impart an institutional change could shape the institution in such a way that it assigns more power to them. Also, by focusing on creating diversity recruitment practices and maintaining previous recruitment practices, rather than on the achievement of intended results from the adoption of diversity recruitment practices, the unintended consequences, which were neglected in previous studies on institutional work, was revealed. Since diversity has been indicated as a fuzzy concept open to multiple interpretation and is socially constructed by organizational actors, taking on an institutional work perspective to analyse its adoption enriches the institutional work literature as well. Moreover, the practical implications for managers and HR professionals is the centrality of trust-based relationships in the adoption of new diversity practices and how the adoption of new diversity practices may result in unintended adaptations and ambiguities. Additional practical implications are to refrain from only focusing on outcomes but also on the mundane activities that contribute towards the adoption of new diversity practices. Lastly, this study also revealed the importance of activities outside the recruitment context influencing the actions of recruitment actors in diversity recruitment, which showed that the adoption of diversity recruitment practices at Diversion was not only attributed to recruitment actors but also affected by other actors outside the recruitment context. Aligned with these findings, future research should focus on the mundane, equivocal day-to-day actions of actors both within and outside out the recruitment context, as it will bring a more nuanced picture of the institutional work of adoption of diversity recruitment.

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