How do management, in general, perceive female managers, and how do these perceptions influence organizational practices?

An exploratory study of several manufacturing companies in the Umeå Region

Authors: Matilda Brändström
         Caroline Jonsson

Supervisor: Kiflemariam Hamde
Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincerest appreciation to all the participating companies that provided us with useful insights and knowledge, which made our study possible to carry out. We would also like to thank the manager who agreed to be our pre-tester and provided us with valuable feedback. In addition, we are thankful for all the support and the statistics that our contact at Bisnode so kindly provided to us.

We are also grateful for all the advice and knowledge our dear supervisor Kiflemariam Hamde has given us during our research process. His guidance has been utmost appreciated and essential.

Finally, without the lovely lady working in Café Tornet’s kind words and coffee everyday, we simply would not have survived.

2015-05-22

Umeå School of Business and Economics
Faculty of Social Science
Umeå University

Matilda Brändström
Caroline Jonsson
[THIS PAGE LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY]
Abstract

Background: Previous researchers have identified perceptions and practices as key barriers to women's advancement opportunities. Moreover, the region of Umeå in Sweden has been experiencing a low representation of female managers, and the manufacturing industry is male-dominated throughout the country. Management perceptions of female managers could be categorized in four different perspectives and these were used after some modification, by adding other, relevant theories from the field of women in management. Organizational practices had shown to be crucial in enforcing gender equality in organizations, and for this study, internal and external recruitment, succession planning and training and development were explored. The intention was to explore how organizational practices had been influenced by management perceptions of female managers, by looking for indicators within these.

Purpose: To explore how management, in general, perceive female managers, and how these perceptions might influence organizational practices.

Research questions: How do management of several manufacturing companies in the Umeå region perceive female middle managers? and Do these perceptions affect the organizational practices? If so, how?

Key concepts:

Management perceptions: Subjective constructions of human behavior, more specifically, management attitudes and beliefs towards female middle managers.

Middle manager: Someone who deals directly with employees and is in charge of at least one subordinate level and reports to a top-level manager.

Organizational practices: Strategic activities in a company.

Methodology: This exploratory study was conducted with a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews. Primary data was collected from six different companies in the Umeå Region and secondary data consisted of scientific articles.

Findings and conclusions: The perceptions of female middle managers held by management at manufacturing companies in the Umeå Region did influence the organizational practices. In general, all had positive perceptions of women in terms of the economic benefits that they could bring to the companies. In addition, women’s opportunities in the manufacturing companies were influenced by management perceptions of whether women were considered to have the necessary, technical competencies for management positions. Furthermore, it was concluded that those manufacturing companies whose management prioritized the questions of women in management, had the highest representation of female middle managers.

Key words: female middle managers, gender equality, management, organizational practices, and perceptions.
[THIS PAGE LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY]
Table of content

1. INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Choice of topic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Problem background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Purpose and research questions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Definition of key concepts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.1 Management perceptions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.2 Middle manager</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.3 Organizational practices</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.4 Gender equality</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Limitations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Chapter guide</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Pre-understandings</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Ontological and epistemological assumptions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 Ontological considerations</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2 Epistemological considerations</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Research process</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Research strategy</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Research approach</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Research design</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Summary of methodological assumptions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Ethical principles</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 Source criticism</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10 Truth criteria</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Management perceptions of female managers</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1 Women and men are equal</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1.1 Stereotypes</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.2 Right individual on the right position</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.3 Women and men are unique</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.4 Women and men have different ambitions</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.4.1 Homosociality</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.5 Summary of our four perspectives</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Organizational practices</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1. Internal and external recruitment practices</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.2 Succession planning practices</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.3 Training and development practices</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.4 Summary of organizational practices</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Critique of our theoretical framework</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. PRACTICAL METHODOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Sampling</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1 Procedure</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.2 Participants</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Interviews</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1 Semi-structured interview approach</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2 Construction of questions</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2.1 Manufacturing companies.</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2.2 External company</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.3 Pre-testing</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.4 Conducting the interviews</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction

This chapter consists of an introduction to the selection of our research topic along with background from previous research. Further, the purpose and research questions will be defined and motivated. At the end of the chapter our key concepts and the limitations of our study will be presented and in the final section, a chapter guide will be provided to give the reader an overview of the study’s contents and structure.

1.1 Choice of topic

As graduating Business Administration students at Umeå University, our interest of what we would like to work with in the future has become an increasingly important subject, and we have realized that finding the dream job will not be a simple task. Both of us have always strived to find a challenging and stimulating job within our field, and the goal is to one day earn the trust to be employed at a management position within an interesting company.

During our studies at Umeå University we have noticed that many of our fellow female students are very ambitious and talented and of course, these qualities can be found among the male students as well. However, when observing the job market and companies in the region, we have found the representation of female managers to be surprisingly low. This motivated us to investigate this phenomenon further, to explore if women were perceived differently from men in organizations, and if this had any effect on their practices.

We hope to one day be a part of a company's practices and we are therefore motivated to learn as much as possible prior to entering the job market. In addition to our own interest, we believe that it is necessary to change the current distribution of female managers, not merely because of legal implications or justice. Rather, we believe that there are economic benefits and competitive advantages to be gained for companies, by including women in the search for suitable and competent managers. By exploring the low amount of female managers, our intention was to raise awareness of the issue, and to highlight the importance of acknowledging and discussing it. In the next section, the problem background and previous studies of the topic was presented.

1.2 Problem background

The subject of women in management has been researched for many years and from various fields of studies, including business administration, gender, psychology, etc. According to Billing and Alvessson (1989, p. 63), the topic has been explored since the 1970’s in the United States of America and has ever since gained international attention in the field of research. In the Swedish job market, men dominated the management positions within privately owned companies (Wahl, 2014, p. 132; Wombri, 2012b), even though Sweden have been nominated as one of the top ten most equal countries in the world (Zahidi, 2014). Organizations worldwide have previously utilized a restricted part of the talent pool, i.e. mainly men, when recruiting a manager, which according to Adler (1986, p. 3) has been referred to as the reason for the lack of women in management. Some studies have found structural problems, or barriers, for women to go into management, commonly known as the glass ceiling.
The term glass ceiling has historically been used in the field of women in management and has been defined by Cooper Jackson (2001, p. 30) as "... the invisible barrier that keeps women and minorities from rising above a certain level in corporations. The Glass Ceiling Commission found in 1995 that this barrier was caused by assigning most women to roles in organizations without any learning and development opportunities for higher management positions (Cooper Jackson, 2001, p. 33). Learning this, we were motivated to investigate women's opportunities in management further.

Traditionally, the responsibility of being a manager has been classified as a job for men and not for women (Billing, 2011, p. 298). Since men historically have been prominent in the construction, development and formation of businesses, Hearn and Collinson (2006, p. 303) argued, many organizations are typically masculine to begin with. However, it was reasonable for us to assume that factors other than history and traditions in companies had an impact on the selection of managers. For instance, if women were considered to be less effective as managers in comparison to men, then that could justify an unequal distribution of women in management. As one of our assumptions was that companies intended to maximize profits, having a less effective manager would essentially not be profitable for a company.

However, a review of previous research could not confirm our reflection of women as less effective. According to Adler (1986, p. 18), no evidence for claiming that female managers were ineffective was found. This was further supported by Powell and Graves (2003, p. 151), who presented women as equally effective as managers in comparison to men. The idea that the abilities of managers differed with gender was already disconfirmed back in 1975, when Reif et al. (1975, p. 78) concluded that these beliefs were mainly based on judgments, not empirical evidence. As no actual differences in the effectiveness of male and female managers had been found, we asked ourselves the rhetorical question: why do women still face barriers in management in companies?

A common agreement between researchers has been that the presence of stereotypes can play a significant role in the opportunities for women in management (Adler, 1986; Dickens, 1998; Oakley, 2000). Stereotypes was defined by Powell and Graves (2003, p. 4) as "... a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people” which was argued to put female managers in an unfavorable situation (Powell & Graves, 2003, p. 138), as it has shown to influence the recruitment, selection and development of managers (Alvesson & Billing, 1989, p. 66). Women have also been seen as uninterested in the corporate world, as their interests have been perceived as different than those of men (Billing & Alvesson, 1989, p. 75). This notion helped us to shed light onto a very crucial issue, the importance for organizations to be aware of unjustified perceptions so that they do not interfere with their business practices.

It seemed that this was the conclusion that most researchers had arrived at. The main barriers for female advancement to managerial positions lied within the perceptions and practices of an organization (Adler, 1986; Cooper Jackson, 2001; Holgersson, 2013; Oakley, 2000; Reif et al, 1975). However, it should be noted that not all perceptions that were identified were of a negative nature. Women’s different, but equally valuable contributions to management were argued for by Adler (1986, p. 6-7), who suggested that companies should combine these with the male competencies, in order to strengthen companies processes. A meritocratic suggestion from Tienari and Nentwich (2012, p. 120) stressed the need to disregard gender to focus on individual competencies instead,
which could make an organization more effective. Much research of how female managers were perceived in companies were found, and these perceptions could be divided into four different perspectives as proposed by Billing and Alvesson (1989, p. 63), which were further explored in our theoretical framework.

As for organizational practices, we found that education, development and recruitment practices were key in enforcing equal opportunities and conditions for men and women (Risberg et al., 2012, p. 203). Not surprisingly, since promotion and development practices had also been identified as barriers that women faced in companies (Cooper Jackson, 2001, p. 34). To us, it seemed that negative management perceptions of female managers had an influence on organizational practices if they posed barriers for women’s advancement in companies. In contrast, if organizational practices facilitated opportunities for women to enter management, perceptions that had influenced these were assumed to be positive. Either way, it seemed to us that perceptions and practices were connected, and we were motivated to explore if this was the case. This seemed to constitute a gap in the scientific literature, and served as the starting point for our exploratory study of how management perceptions of female managers might influence organizational practices.

Having identified our research gap and previous studies that have been carried out, the next section will present our research questions and our purpose.

1.3 Purpose and research questions

Based on previous research, we believed that perceptions and practices would be necessary to explore in order to enhance our understanding for females in management. An indication that these factors were key was supported by Tienari and Nentwich (2012, p. 123) that claimed that when recruiting managers, gender was not only “…an issue of individual stereotypes beliefs: it is the heart of the organization practices” (Tienari and Nentwich, 2012, p. 123). For our study, it was assumed that the values and attitudes within a company were influenced by perceptions of its management. Therefore, a choice was made to explore management perceptions, in general. The purpose of our thesis was formulated as:

To explore how management, in general, perceive female managers, and how these perceptions might influence organizational practices.

In order to conduct an empirical study within our time constraint of 10 weeks, we intended to specify the area of investigation further. We found that the distribution of female managers in Västerbotten was significantly lower than other parts of Sweden, 23% in comparison to Stockholm’s 38% (Wombri, 2012a). The region of Umeå, which is compromised by seven municipalities and located in Västerbotten, was selected for our study for two reasons. First, due to convenience, as the thesis course was situated here. Second, the Umeå Region has actively been working towards greater gender equality in the labor market (Umeå Region, 2014a). For instance, project Normstorm was carried out from 2011 to 2013, with an intention to increase the spread of men and women in typically gendered sectors. The project also encouraged companies to review candidates from a broader talent pool by disregarding gender in recruitment processes (Umeå Region, 2014b).
Even though an effort to improve the low representation of women in management has been made, management in manufacturing industries remains male-dominated in the Umeå Region. More specifically, recent percentages from Bisnode showed that the amount of middle managers in the manufacturing industry was only 14% (See Appendix 2). Our purpose was therefore further narrowed down to the manufacturing industry.

We have chosen to define manufacturing companies as compromised by: agriculture and forestry machinery, transport equipment, hydraulic transmission, machine and steel manufacturing. Manufacturing companies were chosen as our main focus, since the industry has one of the smallest representations of female managers in Sweden (Wombri, 2012b). It was considered to be interesting, since we assumed that a sector that had experienced this issue could provide us with more insightful knowledge than a sector where the representation of managers was equally distributed between men and women. Moreover, middle managers were chosen as our main focus, as much previous research have focused on perceptions of women at higher management positions (e.g. Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Holgersson, 2013; Oakley, 2000). We wanted to contribute to the field of women in management, by exploring a management level that had not been as emphasized in previous studies.

The following research questions were hence generated from the purpose of our study:

1. How do management of several manufacturing companies in the Umeå region perceive female middle managers?
2. Do these perceptions affect the organizational practices? If so, how?

For our study, the word several was defined as “more than two but not very many” (Hornby, 2010, p. 1400). By answering these research questions, we intended to gain an understanding of how several manufacturing companies in the region perceived female middle managers, and how this might have influenced their organizational practices. Specific definitions of the key concepts middle manager, perceptions and practices that were used for our thesis can be found in Section 1.4.

The study took place during the spring of 2015, from March to the beginning of May and five medium- and large sized manufacturing companies in the region were targeted. Medium sized companies have been defined as employing between than 50 to 250 workers (European Commission, 2009), meaning that large enterprises were defined as employers of more than 250 workers. From our strategically chosen sample, one manager from each company was interviewed using a qualitative, semi-structured approach. In addition, one company that specialized in gender equality was interviewed, to gain a general understanding of the management perceptions of female managers and organizational practices in the Umeå Region.

Having discussed the purpose and research questions, the next section expand upon four concepts that were central for our thesis and helped us answer our research questions.

1.4 Definition of key concepts
The definitions of perceptions, middle managers and practices were central to our thesis and facilitated our ability to answer our research questions and explore our purpose. Definitions of the concepts and the link between them can be found below.
Additionally, these three concepts emerged into gender equality, a concept that will also be defined in this section.

1.4.1 Management perceptions
We have explored management perceptions in our thesis. A perception has been defined by Garner et al. (1956, p. 150) as “...an intervening process between stimuli and responses...”. Despite the psychological origin of this definition, it has been considered to be highly relevant for our thesis. We argued that perceptions were subjective constructions of human behavior, more specifically that they were management attitudes and beliefs towards female middle managers. To exemplify, the manufacturing industry in Sweden has generally been male-dominated (Wombri, 2012b), which could serve as a stimulus and have caused a general perception among managers that women were not suited to work in the industry. Please note that this is our own example, and that we did not intend to identify that the stimuli that had created management perceptions.

We recognized that there was a possibility that differences existed between how men and women perceived female managers. However, a distinction between males and females perceptions was not investigated or acknowledged, as our purpose was to explore management perceptions, in general, not an individual manager's opinion.

As management perceptions have been expanded upon, the concept middle managers will be defined in the next section, which allowed us to explore management perceptions of female middle managers in particular.

1.4.2 Middle manager
A middle manager was defined as an occupation that directly deals with employees within the organization, and was responsible for the implementation of the gender equality work (Risberg et al., 2012, p. 214). Franzén et al. (2004, p. 10) described a middle managers as someone who deals directly with employees, was in charge of at least one subordinate level and reported to a top level manager. For our study, we referred to both of these definitions when we used the term middle manager.

Having defined management perceptions and middle managers, we define practices in the following section, which allowed us to explore how these were influenced by management perceptions of middle managers.

1.4.3 Organizational practices
The concept organizational practices was defined as “...common in all organizations or industries, are the various traditions, norms and rules or bodies of knowledge that state, explicitly or implicitly, how the practitioner should act in a certain situation. These practices can be written in documents stating best or preferred practices in the company...” (Blomquist et al., 2010, p. 9). Practices referred to the strategic activities that take place in a company, which may be created through habits (Jarzabkowski, 2003, p. 24).

For our study, whenever the term practices were used, it referred to organizational practices such as development, succession planning or recruitment that were in many instances enforced by the Human resource (HR) department (Risberg et al., 2012, p. 203). In line with the definition of perceptions in 1.4.1, we explored the response of the
perception, i.e. how organizational practices had been influenced by management perceptions of female middle managers.

These three key concepts emerged into gender equality, another important concept for our study that will be defined in the following section.

1.4.4 Gender equality
For our study, we assumed that if management perceived female middle managers negatively, it would influence organizational practices and, in turn, limit women’s opportunities to enter management positions. In contrast, positive perceptions were assumed to facilitate the opportunities of middle management positions for women. Either way, management perceptions of female middle managers would influence organizational practices and in turn, the gender equality in the company.

We used a definition of gender equality that was presented by Franzén et al. (2009, p. 17) as equal conditions between women and men. Further, the concept could be divided into quantitative or qualitative gender equality, where the former referred to an equal distribution between men and women, and the latter, that knowledge of men and women were considered to be equally important to an organization. For our study, both definitions were accounted for in our general definition of gender equality, but we did not make a distinction between quantitative or qualitative gender equality within the companies. Rather, gender equality referred to equal conditions for both men and women.

Management perceptions, middle managers and organizational practices were related to gender equality, as we believed that the link between our key concepts would have an impact on the gender equality in a company. We assumed that, for instance, if management of a company perceived that it was important to increase the amount of female managers, it would influence organizational practices to attain more women for management positions. This would in turn result in higher gender equality in that specific company. For our purpose, woman in management was not a question of justice, i.e. equal rights. However, as many companies treated the question of women in management in the light of gender equality, it was considered necessary for us to define it. It should be noted that this concept was not explored further in theory, as it was not a key concept for our study.

Management perceptions and organizational practices were explored further with relevant theories and additional research in our theoretical framework, see chapter 3. The concept of middle managers was not elaborated upon in this chapter, but solely served to explain the definition we referred to in our research questions and in our empirical study. Given that the central concepts to our thesis have been defined, in the next section we elaborates upon the limitations of our topic of women in management, and purpose of exploring how management, in general, perceived female managers and how these perceptions might influence organizational practices.

1.5 Limitations
The purpose of our study was to explore how management, in general, perceive female managers, and how these perceptions might influence organizational practices. Both ethical and legal factors could be identified as influencers of the subject women in management, and it was possible that the practices that we found were influenced by other factors than management perceptions.
Organizations might for instance have reacted to equality laws or regulations such as Diskrimineringslagen (SFS, 2008: 567), which prohibits discrimination or exclusion of anyone due to gender for instance (Riksdagen, 2014). It was also possible that organizational practices were constructed based on societal trends to work with gender equality, or because it was considered to be ethically right. This would not have been possible for us to assess, nor was it relevant for our purpose.

In addition, other fields of studies such as psychology, gender studies and human resource management etc. overlapped our purpose. Specific theories from these fields that could have been of relevance for our exploration were somewhat disregarded, as our field of research for this thesis was Business Administration. However, some concepts from other fields were considered to be relevant to our purpose, such as perceptions from the psychology field, and were therefore included. By limiting ourselves to Business Administration, there was a possibility that our understanding of management perceptions and its effect on practices was restricted.

We were aware of these limitations, and that practices could have been influenced by other variables that were not investigated for our purpose. However, we still considered our empirical study of how management perceived female managers and how it might have influenced organizational practices to contribute to the field of women in management. As the limitations of our thesis have been discussed, the next section consists of a presentation of the outline of our thesis.

1.6 Chapter guide
The structure of our report is presented below, in order to provide the reader with a general overview and understanding of our study.

![Chapter guide](image)

*Figure 1. Chapter guide.*
Chapter 2 describes the theoretical methodology of our thesis, such as methodological assumptions, research design and strategy. This chapter facilitated an understanding of the underlying assumptions that were made for our study. The theoretical framework presented in chapter 3 is developed from our key concepts perceptions and practices. This chapter further provides an overview of the theories that were relevant to our subject, such as four perspectives of perceptions, internal and external recruitment, succession planning and training and development. The theoretical framework also served as the foundation for the analysis in chapter 5.

The practical methodology is presented in chapter 4 and consists of an explanation of our chosen practical methods. Our choices facilitated the collection of our data and what considerations we took into account during the procedure. Our findings of management perceptions of female middle managers, and its effect on organizational practices are presented in chapter 5, along with a simultaneous analysis of each company. The results were coded, linked and compared to the theories found in the theoretical framework. Further, in order to facilitate an easy understanding for the reader, the analysis is structured in a manner where the individual analysis of each company is presented after the results and the section is finalized with a general analysis of all companies.

Chapter 6 consists of an overall discussion of our findings and is followed by our conclusion in chapter 7. The conclusion provides the reader with the answers to our research questions and a motivation for the fulfillment of our purpose. The final chapter consists of further implications that we have considered appropriate for our study.

This chapter has introduced our research topic, previous research, and our purpose and research questions. Additionally, our key concepts were defined, limitations were discussed and the outline of our thesis was presented.

2. Methodological assumptions

This following chapter will present the researchers’ pre-understandings and the research perspectives of epistemological and ontological assumptions that were selected. These assumptions will serve as the foundation for the all the considerations that are made throughout the study. Further, the research process, strategy, approach and design will be presented along with a description of the ethical principles, source criticism and truth criteria, that later will be used to assess our findings in chapter 4 along with the practical methodology.

2.1 Pre-understandings

The topic of how management perceptions of female middle managers might influence the business practices within manufacturing companies was relatively unexplored in the Umeå Region. However, prior to the study both of the authors of this study had the understanding that this subject was becoming increasingly important among companies. Especially for companies situated in Sweden, since it had been classified as one of the top 10 most gender equal countries in the world (Zahidi, 2014).

One of the researchers had little prior knowledge of the manufacturing industry but had in general noticed the lack of females on management positions and wondered why that might be. The other researcher had previously worked several years at a manufacturing
company in the region. During those years the researcher had observed that the issue of attaining more females as managers in manufacturing companies seemed to be a difficult task and an issue that was often discussed at the company. As our pre-understandings were explained, the following section deals with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of our study.

2.2 Ontological and epistemological assumptions
In order to understand and explain the world, it was necessary for us to take a stance in various research philosophies. A paradigm was defined as a reflection of the basic beliefs and what was considered to be true about the world (Lincoln, 1985, p. 29). Our study investigated organizational practices, and intended to understand how these were influenced by management perceptions of female managers. An objectivistic paradigm would have been possible to adopt, but it would have limited the opportunities to fully comprehend organizational activities (Saunders, 2012, p. 141-143) as for our study, it was believed that these were socially constructed and dependent on individuals in an organization.

A paradigm called interpretivist was therefore chosen and as Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 108) highlighted, this allowed us to account for human factors and errors that could have influenced management perceptions and organizational practices. This subjectivist stance influenced our choices of epistemological and ontological positions that were made in the following sections. It also influenced our choice of a research process, strategy, approach and design, and generated a subjective interpretation of our results. As our chosen paradigmatic stance has been argued for, the next section presents the ontological considerations that were made for our study.

2.2.1 Ontological considerations
The ontological position considered the nature of organizations; either that entities were objective constructions or social constructions, created by individuals and their behavior (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 20). If an objective position had been used for this study, organizational practices would have been seen as independent of human behavior. In addition, management structures would be considered to be similar across different businesses (Saunders, 2012, p. 131). We assumed that important insights would have been lost using this position, as social influences on organizational practices would be considered.

For our thesis, organizational practices referred to the behavior of individuals in certain situations, enforced by actions or written documents, and were therefore also considered to be socially dependent (Blomquist et al., 2010, p. 9). We assumed that practices were strategically implemented by management of the manufacturing companies to enforce a certain kind of behavior (Jarzabkowski, 2003, p. 24). Even if a practice was determined by management, it would not guarantee that it would be implemented and accepted throughout the organization, since all employees interpret it based on their individual principles and perceptions (Saunders, 2012, p. 131).

We therefore believed that our key concepts management perceptions and organizational practices had to be viewed as social constructions, thus they did not have an objective existence outside of human interaction. We viewed management perceptions as constructed by the human mind, influenced by attitudes and previous experiences that managers held. These could, in turn, influence organizational practices, that were assumed to be constructed and enforced by management, i.e. human beings. In
line with this reasoning, we considered our concepts, management perceptions and organizational practices to be socially constructed. So in order for us to explore and understand their connection, a constructivist approach was selected as the most appropriate ontological position (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 713; Saunders, 2012, p. 132) and the next section elaborates upon our epistemological considerations.

2.2.2 Epistemological considerations

The epistemological position, i.e. what was considered to be acceptable knowledge (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 15), was classified as interpretivism for our thesis. In line with our constructivist assumption, organizational practices were believed to be influenced by its management and their perceptions of female middle managers. Conducting our research using a positivistic approach would therefore not have been sufficient, as human nature was assumed to be more complex and non-rational than can be understood by methods of the natural sciences. Additionally, the intention was not to generate any scientifically tested knowledge (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 15; Saunders, 2012, p. 137), but rather to interpret the interviewed managers perceptions, to understand how business practices in manufacturing companies were influenced by these.

For our study, it was considered necessary to explore management thoughts of the practices that were carried out within the company. It was shown that the HR department played an important role in enforcing gender equality within organizational practices (Risberg et al., 2012, p. 203). HR managers were therefore considered to possess comprehensive insights of our key concepts. More specifically, we assumed that these insights were representative of the organization itself and we considered their expertise to be acceptable knowledge. For the purpose of our thesis, this knowledge provided us with necessary insights of management perceptions of female managers and how those may have affected their organizational practices. As our ontological and epistemological positions were presented and argued for, the following section reviews our choice of a research approach.

2.3 Research process

Both a deductive and inductive process was considered for the choice of our research process. However, a deductive process with hypothesis testing (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 11) was not considered to be appropriate. Our empirical study explored how management perceptions of female middle managers might have influenced organizational practices, and relied on subjective information provided by management of several companies. The intention was not to detect any correlations between these variables, but to broaden our understanding of this particular phenomenon.

An inductive process was also discussed, meaning that our data collection would had taken place prior to searching for relevant theories and that our findings would have lead to the construction of a theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 13; Saunders, 2012, p. 146). However, we initiated a systematic review and collection of scientific literature related to our chosen topic before our data collection had taken place. Our research process could therefore not be classified as inductive (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 13).

Instead, a primarily abductive process was employed for our study. Our research was initiated by discovering an eye-opening fact (Saunders, 2012, p. 147), namely that the percentage of female managers in Västerbotten was among the lowest in Sweden.
In line with an abductive process, scientific theories and our findings were simultaneously reviewed (Saunders, 2012, p. 147). This allowed us to investigate if management perceptions of female middle managers had influenced organizational practices, which could explain the low percentage of women at management positions in the region. Having selected our research process, the next section deals with our chosen research strategy.

2.4 Research strategy
In addition to our abductive approach, a qualitative strategy was chosen to be the most appropriate, as our thesis intended to interpret our findings without relying on statistical measurements (Zikmund et al, 2013, p. 132). In line with our epistemological and ontological assumptions, all of a subjective nature, the organization's practices that we explored were believed to be socially constructed.

The risk of using a quantitative research method was that certain factors of the context might be excluded, which could limit a deeper understanding of the situation and human behavior (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 106). The manufacturing companies could potentially be restricted in their opportunities to elaborate on specifically important reasons for their practices, causing little or no flexibility of their answers. Other factors such as tone of voice and body language of the interviewee would be lost using a quantitative approach. These factors were noted after each interview and influenced how the participants’ answers were interpreted in our analysis.

Even though a quantitative strategy would generate generalizable results, it was not of relevance for our study. The intention was not to draw conclusions of a larger population, but solely explore how management perceptions of female managers had influenced organizational practices, which resulted in the selection of a qualitative approach. This strategy allowed us to explore the situation thoroughly and provided rich data of the reality that these manufacturing companies functioned within (Saunders, 2012, p. 546). As we have defined our research strategy, the following section will expand upon the choice of our research design.

2.5 Research approach
As previously stated, several studies of perceptions of female managers were found (Billing & Alvesson, 1989; Gardner III et al., 1994; Holgersson, 2013) and how organizational practices could either facilitate (Risberg et al., 2012, p.203) or hinder (Cooper Jackson, 2001, p. 34) women’s opportunities to enter management. The purpose of our study was to explore companies’ organizational practices and reveal if management perceptions of female managers had an impact on these, which seemed to pose a gap in the previous scientific literature.

An exploratory research approach should be considered, when researchers intend to understand and learn more about a relatively unknown phenomenon (Saunders, 2012, p. 171), which we did. In other words, we intended to contribute with additional insight to this gap in the field of women in management, which allowed us to classify our research approach as exploratory (Stebbins, 2001, p. 7; Zikmund et al, 2013, p. 52). Additionally, an exploratory approach was considered appropriate for our study, given that previous studies had mainly focused on women at senior management positions (e.g. Oakley, 2000; Holgersson, 2013), while we explored a lower management level, namely middle managers. As our research approach has been defined, the next section specifies our choice of research design.
2.6 Research design
Two research designs were considered for the purpose of our thesis. If a traditional, single case study had been carried out, solely one company would have been investigated and analyzed (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 59) in terms of their perceptions and practices. However, a single case study would have limited the opportunity for an exploratory overview of the manufacturing companies in the region. A wide representation of manufacturing companies was believed to generate a more rich understanding of our topic, since each company can contribute with unique insights. Therefore, a single case study design was considered to be insufficient for this study.

The multiple case approach was chosen as the most suitable for this study, as it allowed us to explore various companies and obtain a broader understanding of how management perceived female middle managers and how these might have influenced organizational practices. There were some disadvantages with this approach that needed to be considered beforehand, the reduced time and effort that could be spent with each company. These disadvantages made this multiple case study somewhat more superficial than a single would have been (Maylor & Blackmon, 2005, p. 246), as it was not possible for us to thoroughly investigate all manufacturing companies to the same extent that could have been done with only one company.

However, a multiple case study allowed us to investigate common practices across companies and made it possible for us to generate conclusions of the region and strengthen our findings with previous research (Maylor & Blackmon, 2005, p. 246). As our research design has been chosen and argued for, the ethical considerations for our study will be presented in the next section.

2.7 Summary of methodological assumptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodological assumption</th>
<th>Choice for our study</th>
<th>Related to our purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paradigmatic stance</td>
<td>Interpretivist</td>
<td>We saw the world as socially constructed, human errors could have an effect on our key concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontological position</td>
<td>Constructionism</td>
<td>We considered management perceptions and organizational practices to be social constructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemological position</td>
<td>Interpretivism</td>
<td>An HR manager's expertise of the company was considered to be acceptable knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research process</td>
<td>Abductive</td>
<td>A simultaneous review of theories and findings allowed us to see the link of our key concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research strategy</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Allowed us to obtain rich data of the reality that the manufacturing companies functioned within</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research approach</td>
<td>Exploratory</td>
<td>We intended to contribute with additional insights to a gap in the field of women in management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Multiple cases</td>
<td>Allowed us to obtain a broader understanding of how our key concepts were linked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The summary of our methodological assumptions was displayed in table 1. By considering management perceptions of female managers and organizational practices as socially constructed, and by investigating this phenomenon in multiple cases with a qualitative, abductive, exploratory research approach, we were able to serve our purpose. Meaning, it allowed us as interpretivists to explore how management, in
general, perceived female managers, and how these perceptions might have influenced organizational practices. The next section describes the ethical principles that were considered for our thesis.

2.8 Ethical principles
For our study, it was necessary to consider certain ethical implications, as we believed it to be important to honor the promises that were made to our participants, but also to respect the field of research and the society in which our research took place. All stages of our report were conducted using an ethical consideration (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 232).

The following ethical principles were highly relevant for our study. First of all, informed consent of those taking part was considered, which means that adequate information should be provided to the participants, to ensure that they were fully aware of what they agreed to participate in (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 231). Further, avoidance of harm was believed to be necessary to account for in our study. This ethical principle implied that psychological and physical harm of the participant should be avoided. Privacy was also included, as it was necessary to be respectful of the participant, by ensuring confidentiality and that the findings would be handled in a considerate manner (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 231). The ethical principles of data management and responsibility of data and reporting findings was considered as well, to ensure that the data were treated in a secure (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 139) and accurate (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 232) manner.

All of the ethical considerations were taken into account throughout our study and the assessments of these were elaborated upon in our practical methodology, section 4.5. The source criticism of this report will be described in the next section.

2.9 Source criticism
In addition to data that had been collected first-hand through our empirical study, secondary sources of data were used for our report. The suitability of these sources was determined in our practical methodology, based on the following disadvantages that secondary data could bring.

First, secondary research might have been collected for a purpose that deviates from the objectives of other researchers studies, which could cause conclusions based on secondary data to be weakened (Saunders, 2012, p. 319). The purpose might also have influenced how this secondary data has been presented, which researchers need to be mindful of. Finally, using secondary sources does not give researchers any control over the quality of the data, and these should hence be evaluated with great care (Saunders, 2012, p. 320) in order to be included in a study.

These three disadvantages of secondary data were evaluated in section 4.3.1. The truth criteria, that later was used to assess the findings of our study, are presented in the following section.

2.10 Truth criteria
We assessed the quality of our findings, by adopting Miles and Huberman’s (1994, p. 277-280) general criteria that will be presented below. In this section, the theoretical aspect of the criteria will be presented, while the assessment itself takes place in section 7.4 Miles and Huberman used two or three names for each of their criteria, we have
nevertheless chosen to solely use one to avoid confusion. We referred to these as truth criteria throughout our study.

The criteria of credibility emphasized the importance of ensuring that the collected data was credible and made sense (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278). This could be ensured through respondent validation, in which the researchers checks with the participants that the findings were correctly understood (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 396). The criteria of transferability referred to the possibility of transferring the findings or conclusions from one study into another (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 398). Originality and strong applicability of the findings were referred to as necessary, in order to make a transfer between studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 279).

The use of auditing by an external peer was required to fulfill the criteria dependability, which would ensure that research was conducted properly through all stages (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 398; Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278). However, Saunders (2012, p. 382) argued that it was not realistic to assume that findings of qualitative studies would be replicable. The criteria of confirmability emphasized the objectivity of the research and ensured that the authors of a study remain objective, free from biases and personal values (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 398; Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278). The last criteria, utilization, evaluated what a study could contribute with to its participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 280). Further, the criterion assessed the usefulness, whether or not the research could contribute with a solution to a problem or change the pattern of thinking and action (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 413).

These criteria were used instead of validity and reliability, since several researchers have proposed them to be inadequate for evaluation of qualitative studies, due to the simplicity of viewing the social world in such absolute terms (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 395). We viewed management perceptions of female middle managers and its effect on organizational practices as socially constructed, and had selected an interpretive stance for our study. These criteria was therefore considered to be the more appropriate when evaluating our data, than quantitative measures would have.

This chapter has described the methodological assumptions that were selected for our study. In addition, theories of the ethical principles, source criticism and truth criteria have been presented, and these were further assessed in relation to our study in chapter 4.

3.Theoretical framework of perceptions and practices

This chapter will present findings from previous research that contributes with relevant, useful theories and concepts for our study. The theoretical framework will be divided into our key concepts: management perceptions of female managers and organizational practices. Each main concept will be summarized by a table indicating its relevancy to our purpose and to ease the reader’s understanding. This framework later served as the foundation of how our results were analyzed and discussed. The last section will discuss the critique of our theoretical framework.

Previous research has identified barriers that female managers may face in a company, and Oakley (2000, p. 322) divided these into two categories; behavioral causes and
corporate practices. The same discouraging obstacles for women’s advancement were identified by female managers themselves, in a study by Cooper Jackson (2001, p. 31). Behavioral causes were exemplified as stereotyping or having preferences for certain leadership styles (Oakley, 2000, p. 322), which we referred to as perceptions in our study. Perceptions had, according to Adler (1986, p. 23), proven to be the most important determinant for women’s opportunities in management. Corporate barriers, also referred to as the glass ceiling, included activities such as development and promotional practices (Cooper Jackson, 2001, p. 34; Oakley, 2000, p. 322). Given the attention that these two barriers had previously received in studies of women in management, we considered them to be key factors for our thesis too which led us to conduct a greater exploration of them.

Most authors have discussed our key concepts, management perceptions and organizational practices, as barriers. For our study, we argued that management perceptions of female managers could be positive as well. For instance, Adler (1986, p. 7) argued that women were equally effective managers as men. We also proposed that organizational practices could support the facilitation of women’s opportunities in companies, as Risberg et al. (2012, p. 203) stated that these could foster gender equality in companies. In short, management perceptions of female managers could be beneficial and organizational practices could be in place to help women, instead of posing barriers.

In the following section 3.1, we review theories of various management perceptions that are divided into four perspectives. Section 3.2 explores organizational practices.

### 3.1 Management perceptions of female managers

The concept of perceptions was key for our study and was defined in the introductory chapter as a process, where a perception, caused by a stimulus, has led to a response (Garner et al., 1956, p. 150). According to Billing and Alvesson (1989, p. 63), perceptions of female managers could be divided into four fundamental perspectives; equal opportunity, meritocratic, special contribution and alternative value, that were presented below.

The equal opportunity perspective embraced the notion that women and men were equal, and should be treated accordingly (Billing & Alvesson, 1989, p. 65-68). The meritocratic perspective argued for a maximization of the workforce and disregarded gender completely (Billing & Alvesson, 1989, p. 68-71). The third perspective, women can contribute with something special, highlighted the unique features of men and women and suggested that these characteristics should be combined in an organization for maximum benefit (Billing & Alvesson, 1989, p. 71-73). The last perspective, called alternative-value, argued for women's different interests and lack of desire to attain management positions (Billing & Alvesson, 1989, p. 74-76). We employed Billing and Alvesson’s perceptual framework as the foundation for our theories of management perceptions. All four perspectives were further developed and modified by including more recent findings and relevant theories of perceptions of female managers. Additionally, each perspective was renamed to fit the modifications better, see below.

**Equal opportunity** - *Women and men are equal*

**Meritocratic** - *Right individual on the right position*

**Special contribution** - *Women and men are unique*
Alternative value - Women and men have different ambitions

The employment of Billing and Alvesson’s classical framework provided us with an advantageous opportunity to arrange and assign management perceptions of female middle managers in the manufacturing companies to one or several perspectives. It was also considered appropriate to incorporate some categorization of perception theories, to clarify and facilitate our analysis, but also make the link between perceptions and practices more visible.

Our four perceptual categories of female managers will be further elaborated upon in the following sections.

3.1.1 Women and men are equal
The key assumption of Billing and Alvesson’s (1989, p. 67) first perspective was that there were few, if any, differences between male and female managers in terms of their abilities. Adler (1986, p. 7) referred to this as an equity perspective where males and females were seen as equally capable of being effective managers, since she found no empirical support that males would be more effective as managers (Adler, 1986, p. 7; Reif et al, 1975, p. 78). An unequal representation of women in management was classified as discrimination of females according to this perspective (Billing and Alvesson, 1989, p. 66), as they were not given the same opportunities as their male colleagues. For our thesis, no judgments were made of whether a certain behavior could be classified as discriminatory or not, even though the equal opportunities perspective was permeated with moral justice (Billing & Sundin, 2006, p. 105). The concept of discrimination was merely presented in this section to acknowledge that manufacturing companies might have used this term to classify the unequal representation of women in management.

As women were underrepresented at managerial positions, Billing and Alvesson (1989, p. 67) presented Kanter’s theory from 1977 where the female manager was perceived as a token, i.e. an individual who represented a minority in a group. They argued that the female manager’s unique status could increase the risk of stereotypical associations. For the purpose of our study, we recognized that the risk of stereotyping might be greater in a company where men and women were referred to as equals, especially in a male-dominated industry. We assumed that if no differences were made or acknowledged between men and women, i.e. men = women, women would be evaluated on the same grounds as men and expected to act accordingly. However, the issue was, as Billing and Alvesson (1989, p. 68) discussed, that women and men are different to some extent and if female managers would behave in a different manner compared to their male colleagues, we believed that it could create a risk of stereotyping.

For our study, if management perceptions could be assigned to the first perspective, women and men are equal; it meant that male and female managers were viewed as equally capable of contributing to the organization’s effectiveness. Our perspective was also compromised by the assumption that a low number of female middle managers in a company posed a risk of stereotypical associations to rise, in reference to the argumentation above. Various stereotypes of female managers will therefore be investigated to a greater extent in the following section, which allowed us to become familiar with common stereotypes of female managers. This was necessary knowledge for us to obtain, as we believed that stereotypes could have influenced a company’s practices like recruitment, performance evaluation and career development.
3.1.1.1 Stereotypes
Stereotypes were defined by Powell and Graves (2003, p. 4) as “... a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people” and according to scientific literature from the 1970s and onwards, stereotypes have always been present in organizations. A review by Reif et al. (1975, p. 72) found that most people believed that the exclusion of women from higher positions was justified, because of their managerial differences in comparison to men.

When citing reports from the 1970’s, Oakley (2000, p. 326) stated that stereotypes of women as incompetent were mainly based on their female traits. This was further supported by Adler (1986, p. 6), who argued that women’s effectiveness as managers were measured against the male managers performance and capabilities. Women's managerial abilities were considered not to be as effective and well executed in comparison to their male counterparts. For our study, it was necessary to include the notion of stereotypes and biases, since the literature as stated above highlight the presence of them and that it most certainly has an effect on the perception of female managers. Our study specifically investigated the manufacturing industry and as this sector was known as heavily male dominated, we found that stereotypes of female managers needed to be explored in order to identify whether or not they were present in the participating companies.

The underlying thought of women as less competent seem to have historically followed women’s advancement to management positions, despite the lack of empirical evidence. This has been referred to as the key danger of stereotyping, that candidates for managerial positions might be evaluated based on unjustified gender perceptions, instead of the candidates actual abilities (Beeson & Valerio, 2012, p. 420). In a company were men and women were referred to as equals, but the male norm was still dominant and women were underrepresented, we believed that stereotyping could occur and in turn, influence companies’ practices.

Leaving women and men are equal, the following section elaborates upon a more competitive, result-based perspective called right individual on the right position, where competence is key.

3.1.2 Right individual on the right position
The second perspective that Billing and Alvesson (1989, p. 68) presented has a meritocratic foundation, meaning that the perception was that a company would be stronger, if recruitment from the entire labor pool of motivated and intelligent individuals was carried out. Companies would then disregard demographic characteristics in their organizational practices, and focus on actual qualifications instead (Billing & Alvesson, 1989, p. 69). Further supported by Tienari and Nentwich (2012, p. 120), the choice to recruit either a man or a woman would be based on their individual competencies and experiences, not gender. According to this perspective, women were perceived as profitable to include in management, if they possessed the right competencies for the job.

Underutilization of the entire labor pool was considered to be a disadvantage, not in terms of discrimination, rather as inadequate management of human resources (Billing & Alvesson, 1989, p. 70). For our study, this perspective was considered realistic, as all companies were assumed to be interested in maximizing profits and having more female managers could be classified as a competitive advantage.
An alternative argumentation was made by Billing and Sundin (2006, p. 107), which explained that companies’ intention of recruiting from a diversified talent pool might originate from a desire to improve their image. A balanced representation of individuals was assumed to both reflect today’s society but also give companies access to new knowledge and thus possibly increase their profitability. When this perspective was adopted, Billing and Sundin focused on diversity in general, not gender equality, meaning that factors such as ethnicity, age and religion were also included. However, gender was the sole focus in our thesis and other diversity factors were disregarded.

For our study, *right individual on the right position* meant that the manufacturing companies removed the gender connotation from their processes and focused on the individual competencies that were necessary to maximize profitability instead. If women were perceived to have the adequate competencies, they would contribute to the company’s economic benefit.

Our third perspective that argued for women’s unique contribution is presented in the following section.

**3.1.3 Women and men are unique**

In Billing and Alvesson’s (1989, p. 71-72) third perspective, women were seen as contributors of something special and as influencers on leadership and organizational culture. Women were also presented as contributors to a less hierarchical structure and essentially a more effective work environment.

Their third perspective had similarly been referred to as the complementary contribution model by Adler (1986, p. 6), where female and male managers were considered to have different but equally important capabilities in a company. The model encouraged women to retain their female attributes, and stressed that companies need to enable a reward systems for contributions of both men and women and combine those into stronger solutions and processes (Adler, 1986, p. 6-7). For our study, we believed that manufacturing companies could perceive women as contributors of other types of knowledge and qualities than their male counterparts.

The strategic benefits of employing women for management positions have been portrayed by Cassell (1997, p. 11) as the business case; effective usage of the female competencies in organizations. Furthermore, the value of including women in the talent pool was not in terms of additional candidates, but the managerial capabilities they could contribute with (Cassell, 1997, p. 12-13). Cassel (1997, p.14) argued for the need to emphasize the business advantages of gender equality that was claimed to generate a greater acceptance among members in organizations. For our thesis, we assumed that the manufacturing companies were profit seeking, and that companies that had a great dedication to the question also saw the strategic benefits to be gained from female managers, i.e. employed the business case.

For our thesis, if arguments of the manufacturing companies could be assigned to *women and men are unique*, it implied that women were seen as contributors of unique qualities that could complement the male counterparts. Further, the motivation for the employment of this perspective could be of a strategic nature, meaning the business case. In summary, this perspective facilitated our exploration of the strategic management perceptions of female middle managers in manufacturing companies,
which were believed to influence organizational practices. The last perspective, in which women were perceived as having different interests, will be discussed in the following section.

3.1.4 Women and men have different ambitions

The fourth, alternative-value perspective that Billing and Alvesson (1989, p. 74) presented assumed that women and men were different, which resulted in different interests. Women were perceived as being less interested in the masculine world that was compromised by careers and leadership positions (Billing & Alvesson, 1989, p. 75). Further research by Billing (2011, p. 298) stated that “Managerial jobs have conventionally been understood as male and thus as not being directly suitable for women...”. We assumed that these perceptions of female managers could be present in companies, especially in male-dominant industries, such as the manufacturing industry.

This notion has further been discussed by Billing (2011, p. 298) from a different angle, where she questioned using masculinity in management as an excuse for the low representation of women. The male norm, i.e. having men as managers, ignored that jobs and organizations were different and that some managerial constraints for women might have arisen from the constant pressure on companies to be effective and competitive. Hence, some of the barriers women faced in companies might not necessarily have originated from a male management culture per se (Billing, 2011, p. 300). For our study, it was relevant to include this alternative view. Companies’ preference for male managers might not always have been the cause of an uneven representation of women. It was relevant for us to consider that other factors or perceptions that were not dependent on gender might have influenced the situation.

The differences in gender, according to Billing and Alvesson’s (1989, p.75) alternative-value perspective, caused women to choose more relational fields of employment. These fields might be chosen as they provide a better fit to women’s needs and interest. Women typically hold management positions in human resources, administration, legal and marketing, which might have caused them to lack some of the experience that was needed in senior management (Beeson & Valerio, 2012, p. 421). We assumed that if these perceptions of women were present at the top of organizations, they would have influenced the middle management level too.

The perception that women lack the necessary knowledge for management positions was further supported by Holgersson (2013, p. 458), who investigated recruitment processes of Swedish boards. Holgersson’s research showed that male board members perceived female candidates as less skilled because of their previous inadequate choices of education, jobs and industries. We recognized that women might be perceived as lacking necessary competencies for management positions within male-dominated industries, such as the manufacturing industry, due to their choices of different educational programs or jobs.

For our study, the perspective women and men have different ambitions implied that management of the manufacturing companies perceived men and women's interests to be different, which in turn might have influenced their organizational practices. More specifically, we assumed that the perception of women as neither interested nor capable for management positions could have caused women to be overlooked in organizational practices. In addition, a low representation of female managers could have been caused by a preference for males as managers, called homosociality, that we believed could
influence organizational practices. For instance, this could result in a sole recruitment or advancement of men for management positions. This concept and its potential effects are elaborated upon in the following section.

3.1.4.1 Homosociality
A person's preference for individuals with similar characteristics such as gender has been conceptualized as homosociality, and has further been researched by Holgersson and she argued that this was an unreflexive tendency. Holgersson (2013, p. 455) found that men were almost exclusively recruited for board positions, even though an increased amount of male managers had advocated for gender equality, since those responsible for the recruitment only were men, they in turn solely recruited men, because of their similar characteristics.

We believed that homosocial tendencies could occur in a male-dominant industry, such as the manufacturing industry, where male managers tended to be the norm. Within manufacturing companies, we assumed that homosociality could be connected with a management perception that men were more suited to be managers, which could influence how organizational practices were carried out. To exemplify, Holgersson (2013, p. 461) found that evaluation of candidates were based on a male preference, which excluded women from board positions. This concept was assumed to be relevant to incorporate in our study, even though Holgersson’s research investigated boards in particular, as we assumed that these inclinations could be found in middle management as well.

A similar concept called relational similarity was identified by Gardner III et al. (1994, p. 120). This implied that individuals were more attracted to people that possessed similar attributes, in comparison to someone who lacked those similarities. Relational similarity therefore generates more positive perceptions of similar individuals. The authors discussed an implication of this tendency, that perceptions of female managers might be based on the attributes that they do not share with their male counterparts (Gardner III et al., 1994, p. 131), instead of their individual capabilities. What we found particularly interesting about this concept, was that it diverged from a strict gender division, and argued that unfavorable perceptions of female managers could cover other, personal attributes as well.

Having presented all of our perspectives of perceptions, a summary of these can be found in the next section.

3.1.5 Summary of our four perspectives
Based on Billing and Alvesson’s four perspectives and additional scientific literature, we developed the following four perspectives of how management could perceive female managers. Their characteristics and connection to the purpose of our study have also been displayed in the table below.
Our intention was to explore management perceptions of female middle managers, and detect their link with the manufacturing companies practices, in order to explore how these had been influenced. These four perspectives, in combination with theories of organizational practices, formed the foundation on which our findings were later analyzed, which helped us investigate our purpose. The characteristics of management perceptions in table 3.1 served as indicators in the analysis to detect how organizational practices had been influenced by these perceptions.

Various theories of organizational practices will be expanded upon in the following section.

3.2 Organizational practices
Organizational practices were the second key concept for our study, and we had chosen to define it as the strategic and habitual activities in a company (Jarzabkowski, 2003, p. 24). More specifically, for our study, organizational practices referred to recruitment, succession planning and development practices that were enforced by the HR department. These have been argued to be crucial when fostering gender equality in organizations (Risberg et al., 2012, p. 203), which made them highly relevant to explore for our purpose. Additionally, Cooper Jackson (2001, p. 34) showed that the same HR practices could form barriers for women’s opportunities to enter into management, which illustrated that organizational practices could both have positive and negative effects on the opportunities for female managers in companies.

We proposed that this influence, regardless of its nature, was caused by the perceptions of female middle managers that management in manufacturing companies held. This was assumed to be connected with how companies value working with gender equality, as Franzén et al. (2009, p. 48) argued that management needed to be engaged, in order for changes to be carried out in practice. We believed that a company’s determination to increase the amount of female managers would be reflected in its organizational practices.
The following sections explore *internal and external recruitment practices, succession planning practices* and *training and development practices* to a greater extent. This allowed us to familiarize ourselves with these organizational practices, which helped us to detect how perceptions might have influenced them.

### 3.2.1. Internal and external recruitment practices

For our study, it was assumed that recruitment of a manager could either be performed internally or externally. More specifically, by offering a vacant position to an already existing employee, or by advertising the vacancy for external professionals to apply for. One initial step of the recruitment practice has been described as the creation of a desired profile with necessary competencies for the vacant position in a study by Holgersson (2013, p. 458). This profile would thereafter be used to evaluate candidates and for our study, it was assumed that this process, or a similar one, was carried out in an initial stage of a recruitment practice of middle managers.

However, Dickens (1998, p. 29) found that criteria against which management candidates were assessed could be a subject of bias. Even if an attempt was made to form criteria in a gender-neutral manner, chances were that formulations had been made using a male manager as a reference. This bias, or male preference, was found to have influenced job advertisements and descriptions as well, according to Risberg et al. (2012, p. 194). The authors argued that this might have caused women to refrain from applying for certain positions. For our study, it was important to acknowledge and explore this notion, especially since the manufacturing industry was male-dominated (Wombri, 2012b) and there was a possibility that formulations of required competencies had been based on male norms.

Male attributes, such as strength, rationality and competitiveness have been discussed by Tienari and Nentwich (2012, p. 115-116). They argued that these qualities were considered crucial for candidates, in order to advance into management positions. Essentially, this created an obstacle for women to become managers, as these attributes were mainly associated with men. This was further supported by Holgersson (2013, p. 458), who found that male attributes, such as profit-focused and loss averse, were identified as highly important in recruitment processes of top managers. Consequently, her participants, all male managers, claimed that these attributes were seldom possessed by females. We assumed that if an organizational preference for men and masculine attributes existed at the top level, it would most likely influence the middle management level as well.

Researchers suggested that companies should revise and challenge their practices and policies, in order to detect potential gender bias that might restrict women’s advancement to management positions (Billing & Sundin, 2006, p. 105; Cooper Jackson, 2001, p. 33), where Tienari and Nentwich (2012, p. 126) emphasized the particular need to challenge the association between male attributes and competence. It was therefore of interest for our study to explore if the manufacturing companies had reflected upon the effects of using typically masculine wordings, and to what extent it had influenced their recruitment practices.

For our thesis, the theories that were investigated in *internal and external recruitment practices* were used to scrutinize the manufacturing companies recruitment practices and detect how management perceptions of female middle managers had influenced
these. Having discussed recruitment practices, the next section elaborates upon succession planning activities.

### 3.2.2 Succession planning practices

Succession planning was defined by Barnett and Davis (2008, p. 721) as a system for managing the talent pool, where the intention was “... to ensure that the quantity and quality of executive leaders the organization needs are identified, fully capable, and ready to contribute to the effective performance of a business over time” (Barnett and Davis, 2008, p. 721). In other words, an organizational investment for retaining the most qualified employees and for our thesis, this was the definition that we referred to when succession planning practices were discussed.

Succession planning practices, according to Beeson and Valerio (2012, p. 422-423), should be in place to directly address and challenge potential perceptions and stereotypes of female managers. Additionally, Barnett and Davis (2008, p. 736) suggested that organizations should integrate succession planning practices at lower levels of management as well, not only at a top management level. For our study, it was of interest to learn whether or not the manufacturing companies had implemented such activities for female middle managers particularly.

Even though succession planning was described as an important investment for a company, Barnett and Davis (2008, p. 724) showed that many managers had little confidence in their own succession planning practices and considered them to be insufficient to the extent that external recruitment was needed. In reference to these findings, we were mindful of the opportunity that manufacturing companies might not have fully implemented succession planning practices in place.

The theories that were presented in succession planning practices were used to explore if management had any succession planning practices in place for female middle managers. Our intention was not to scrutinize their succession system per se, rather we wanted to learn if management perceptions of female middle managers had influenced this activity, essentially if female candidates were overlooked or emphasized. As we have discussed succession planning practices, the following section expands upon training and development practices in detail.

### 3.2.3 Training and development practices

Previous research highlighted the importance of incorporating development practices in companies, in order to enhance effectiveness and facilitate employees’ progress (Beeson & Valerio, 2012, p. 422; Cooper Jackson, 2001, p. 34). Training and development practices could include mentoring programs, coaching and skill improvements, and for our study it essentially meant strategic activities that promoted career advancement (Beeson & Valerio, 2012, p. 422; Cooper Jackson, 2001, p. 34). As women were more likely to face biased perceptions within organizations, Beeson and Valerio (2012, p.419) argued that development plans were particularly relevant for females and we were inclined to learn if manufacturing companies had recognized the importance of such practices.

It was found by Beeson and Valerio (2012, p. 422-423) that implementing specific development programs for women might create additional barriers. The subject have been discussed by Reif et al. (1975, p. 72) as well, and suggested that women should be included in the same leadership training practices as their male counterparts, since all
managers, regardless of gender, should have the same opportunities. We believed that a company’s construction of training and development practices would tell us something about how its management perceived female middle managers. We also acknowledged the possibility that inequalities in a company might increase by creating additional programs for women, as that would separate them from their male colleagues.

For our study, *training and development practices* were explored, since previous research had shown its importance when fostering women’s advancement opportunities. We assumed that by investigating how these practices were constructed at each manufacturing company, we would be able to detect how management perceived female middle managers. We also wanted to learn if women were included in the same training and development practices as men. In the following section, a summary of all organizational practices can be found.

### 3.2.4 Summary of organizational practices

Based on the scientific literature of various organizational practices, we selected the following practices for exploring how management perceived female middle managers. Their characteristics and connection to our purpose have also been displayed in the table below.

#### Table 3. Summary of organizational practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICE</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>RELATED TO OUR PURPOSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal and external recruitment</td>
<td>Desired competencies. Creation of profile used for evaluation of candidates. Masculine wordings and its implications.</td>
<td>To investigate the manufacturing companies recruitment practices regarding female middle managers and explore how management's perceptions had influenced these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Succession planning and advancement</td>
<td>Investment to retain qualified employees. Necessity at lower management levels. Could be used to address gender bias.</td>
<td>To explore if management had any succession planning practices in place and if these had accounted for female middle managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and development</td>
<td>Career advancement, of high importance for women. Mentoring programs, skill improvements. Additional programs/special treatment.</td>
<td>To explore how management's perceptions of female middle managers might have influenced training and development practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To summarize, the four different perspectives that were displayed in table 2 allowed us to explore different management perceptions of female managers. The three categories of organizational practices, displayed in table 3, allowed us to explore how these could facilitate or restrict female managers opportunities in organizations. For our study, we assumed that these were connected, that management perceptions of female managers had an influence on organizational practices. The characteristics of these perspectives of management perceptions served as indicators of this influence.
Figure 2 illustrates the link between table 2 and table 3 that we explore in our study.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 2. Link between table 2 and table 3.*

Our intention was to gain an understanding of how these various management perceptions of female managers had influenced organizational practices, i.e. a linear relationship between our key concepts that allowed us to serve our purpose. However, we were also mindful of the possibility that organizational practices that had been influenced by management perceptions could in turn reinforce these perceptions, i.e. a circular relationship, as indicated by the arrow in figure 2. We did nevertheless not investigate this circular relationship in our study; instead this was a future suggestion for researchers that can be found in chapter 8.

In order to be able to answer our research questions, table 2 and 3 were linked and used as the foundation on which the findings from our empirical study were analyzed in chapter 5. Our theoretical framework will be further criticized in the next section.

### 3.3 Critique of our theoretical framework

Some of the literature that was used for this thesis was conducted in the United States of America. Therefore, we were aware that these studies might have been influenced by aspects such as culture, legislation and corporations that could be substantially different from Sweden. This implied that some theories, concepts and results might not have been applicable to our empirical study, due to different circumstances or different research objectives that affected the directions of their research. However, the relevance of all theories was evaluated in relation to our purpose, and the articles that were included were assumed to reveal important insights that needed to be accounted for in our empirical study.

In addition, several articles that we used for our thesis were published between 20 and 40 years ago. There was therefore a risk that the old publication dates of the scientific literature could have reduced the relevance and credibility of our analysis and conclusions. However, it was of interest for our thesis to see if various attitudes towards female middle managers could be assigned to the same categories today as 25 years ago. In addition, the authors of these articles, for instance Billing and Alvesson, were prominent and well known in the field of women in management, which increased the credibility of these sources.
Critique of the data sources that were used for our report is further discussed in section 4.3.1.

This chapter explored our key concepts, management perceptions and organizational practices. Management perceptions consisted of four different perspectives, whereas organizational practices referred to three categories of practices that had shown to be important for women’s advancement opportunities. These theories will later be used for the evaluation of our findings.

4. Practical methodology

Following the theoretical framework, the practical methodology will be presented in this chapter. It elaborates upon how our practical methodology was carried out through sampling and interviews. Further, our choices of literature, our data analysis and the ethical principles that we have taken into account throughout our study will be presented. In addition, critique of the sources that we used for our study can be found in the end of the chapter.

4.1 Sampling

In the following section, a review of our sampling procedure and the participants of our study was carried out, both from a theoretical and practical perspective.

4.1.1 Procedure

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of management perceptions of female middle managers, a purposive sampling method was employed for our study. The purpose of using a nonprobability technique was to strategically sample businesses based on our own judgment (Saunders, 2012, p. 287). The intention was to interview the companies that would contribute to our research and purpose in a satisfactory manner (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 442; Zikmund et al, 2013, p. 393), and five manufacturing companies were therefore strategically selected. The intention was not to generalize our findings, but to ensure a wide range of variety in our results (Saunders, 2012, p. 287), by exploring multiple companies, their perceptions and practices. As our sampling approach was defined, the following sections described and explained the procedure and participants of our sample more in detail.

Our study was conducted in Sweden since we had a limited time frame of 10 weeks for our thesis, and it was therefore deemed to be the most convenient choice. We learned that Västerbotten county had among the lowest amounts of female managers in comparison to the rest of the country (Wombri, 2012a), which sparked the interest for our study and also the selection of our sample. Our study was further narrowed down to the region of Umeå, a convenient choice as we were situated here. The region of Umeå consists of seven municipalities: Umeå, Vindeln, Örnsköldsvik, Nordmaling, Bjurholm, Vännäs and Robertsfors (Umeå Regionen, 2014c) and out of these, four were included in our study as relevant companies for our study were located within these.

The Umeå Region was selected instead of Västerbotten county, as it allowed us to include Örnsköldsvik in our study. Örnsköldsvik is a city within close proximity to Umeå where several large businesses are located, and excluding it would have limited our sample selection. The sample was further narrowed down to the manufacturing
industry that we chose to define as compromised by: agriculture and forestry machinery, transport equipment, hydraulic transmission, machine and steel manufacturing. The manufacturing industry in the region had a small representation of female middle managers, only 14% according to recent statistics from Bisnode (Appendix 2), it was therefore believed to be important to explore this specific sector. In addition, we believed that an industry that faced this issue would be able to provide more insightful knowledge than companies in an industry where the distribution of men and women was equal.

In order to find relevant manufacturing companies, the database Retriever Business was used and the search was limited to companies within the Umeå Region. The search was further narrowed down to the amount of employees within each company, as our purpose was to explore management perceptions of female middle managers and we assumed that a company has to be of a larger size to have several levels of managers. The companies we wanted to explore could therefore be classified as medium-large enterprises, meaning employers of more than 50 employees (European Commission, 2009). More specifically, our intention was to select companies with similar structures and sizes, in order to make the findings somewhat comparable.

From the database search, 10 manufacturing companies in the Umeå Region was found. The sample was further narrowed down to an amount of approximately 100-450 employees, as most of the manufacturing companies fell within this range. One company was excluded at this stage, as their number of employees differed substantially from the other nine. The final five companies was chosen by a purposive selection (Saunders, 2012, p. 287), identifying those that we thought would contribute with valuable insights for the purpose of our study. We selected five companies from a variety of municipalities, as a representative spread between companies and municipalities was prioritized, instead of a larger quantity of interviewees. In addition, easy access to contact information of company representatives and personal contacts helped us determine what companies to include in our study. The remaining companies were excluded due to lack of access or that including them would have caused an overrepresentation of two of the municipalities.

Additional information of the Umeå Region in general was also considered relevant for our study, which caused us to target an external company that had experience of this area. The location of this external company was not considered to be important for our study, and therefore this criterion was excluded. Two criteria were instead created: experience of working with manufacturing companies in the region, and experience of working with gender equality. One company fulfilled both of these criteria, and was therefore contacted. This company was interviewed to make additional contributions and give us an overview of how management perceptions of female middle managers might have influenced organizational practices in the Umeå Region.

In the next section, we will go into more depth about the interviews and participants of our study.

4.1.2 Participants
Initial contact with all companies was made by telephone, where the Manager of Human Resources (HR) was approached. In addition, the contact and scheduling of interviews was, with some of the companies, continued over email, as it was the most convenient way of interaction with the participants.
Our intention was to interview the HR manager at each manufacturing company. An HR manager traditionally holds general knowledge of the organization and its policies (Risberg et al., 2012 p. 203; Barnett & Davis, 2008, p. 730). Therefore, we assumed that an HR manager from each manufacturing company would be able to provide valuable insights of the management perceptions of female managers, and present relevant information regarding the organizational practices. These insights were also assumed to be representative of the entire organization. However, one of the companies did not have a HR department. In that case, the CEO of the organization informed us that the product manager would be an appropriate interviewee, as this person was responsible for most recruitments. All company representatives that were asked agreed to participate in our study. As for the external company, a gender equality strategist was interviewed and provided us with a general overview of both management perceptions and organizational practices in the Umeå region.

In total, four HR managers and one product manager was interviewed and the interviews ranged from 31 to 64 minutes. As for the external company, the interview lasted for approximately 35 minutes.

Table 4. Information of participants and interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Gender equality strategist</td>
<td>35 min, 54 sec</td>
<td>04-05-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>HR manager</td>
<td>31 min, 43 sec</td>
<td>28-04-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>Product manager</td>
<td>42 min, 27 sec</td>
<td>21-04-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4</td>
<td>HR manager</td>
<td>60 min, 04 sec</td>
<td>23-04-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5</td>
<td>HR manager</td>
<td>52 min, 36 sec</td>
<td>27-04-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6</td>
<td>HR manager</td>
<td>54 min, 39 sec</td>
<td>24-04-2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As our sample and the participants have been discussed, the next section describes how the interview questions were formulated and the interviews were carried out.

4.2 Interviews

For our study, it was decided in an early stage to conduct the interviews using a semi-structured approach. This essentially influenced the construction and formulation of our interview questions. It was proposed by Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 477) to follow a certain structure when formulating an interview guide, and this was followed with some minor modifications to fit our study. Using their structure as a foundation, we initially identified relevant themes for our purpose and then formulated specific research questions based on these. The interview questions, originating from our themes, were also based on our findings from the theoretical framework. In order to identify any flaws and/or uncertainties, pre-testing of our interview questions took place before our guide was finalized.

4.2.1 Semi-structured interview approach

Our choice of an interview approach was dependent on our desired structure, i.e. the extent of flexibility we wanted it to have. If an unstructured approach would have been employed, no specific questions would have been asked but rather a broader discussion
of our subject (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 472), management perceptions of female middle managers and its influence on organizational practices, would have taken place.

However, using a more conversational structure of the interviews would have posed a risk to us of not exploring the specific concepts and theories that we had found. In order to draw credible conclusions of the manufacturing companies’ perceptions in the Umeå region, it was considered to be important that all interviews were performed in a fairly similar manner (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 473). It was also appealing to us to have an outline of the questions as an aid during the interviews. A semi-structured interview approach was therefore selected, instead of an unstructured one.

Given that a semi-structured approach was chosen, our intention was to have a flexible outline of our questions. It was flexible in the sense that it was possible for us or the interviewees to deviate from the proposed interview structure and speak freely about the topic (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 467). It gave us the opportunity to follow up with questions promptly to ensure that the questions were properly understood and completely answered (Zikmund et al, 2013, p.141), thus removing any ambiguity that could arise.

4.2.2 Construction of questions

Our research questions how do management of several manufacturing companies in the Umeå region perceive female middle managers? and Do these perceptions affect the organizational practices? If so, how? along with our three key concepts; management perceptions, middle managers and organizational practices, were used as a foundation for our interview guide. The theories and concepts we had found in the scientific literature were used in combination with the key concepts as the basis for the construction of our interview questions.

When our interview questions were formulated, some specific issues were accounted for. The questions were constructed in an open-ended manner, allowing the interviewee to speak freely and shape the discussion. Ambiguous terms in our interview questions were carefully avoided, to reduce the risk of confusion or misunderstandings during the interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 255). As our intention was not to judge the participants reasoning nor the practices of the companies, negative words were avoided to keep the questions neutral.

An effort was made to not ask any leading questions and the interview questions were phrased accordingly, but some follow-up questions during the interviews were of a leading nature. This will be further discussed in section 4.6. Our interview guide included some long questions, a tendency which has been discouraged in the literature (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 256). However, we had to define some concepts and introduce previous research in order to clarify the interviewees understanding of some of our questions, see for instance questions five and six in Appendix 1.

4.2.2.1 Manufacturing companies

To ensure that the interview questions were relevant to the purpose of our study, a figure was drawn, consisting of three circles that overlapped and each key concept was assigned to one of the circles, see Figure 4.2. The core of the figure had all three themes overlapping, hence portrayed our research questions, to explore management perceptions of female middle managers and its influence on organizational practices.
After formulating a first set of questions, each question was identified and marked in the figure. Some questions belonged to a single concept, while others covered more than one and were hence put in the intersection between the key concepts. Question number eight was directly related to our purpose, as it consisted of all three concepts. Interview questions that could not be assigned to any concept were removed, as these would not provide any relevant insights to our study. In total, 12 questions were constructed for the manufacturing companies.

![Diagram of overlapping concepts: Middle managers, Management perceptions, Purpose, Organizational practices, Questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.]

Question 12: Is there any other information you would like to add?

Figure 3. Construction of interview questions for manufacturing companies.

**4.2.2 External company**

The same questions that were formulated for the manufacturing companies were also used for the external company, after an appropriate revision and reformulation to create more general questions. These questions were not assigned to the same concept process as for the manufacturing companies, since the questions for the external company were more focused on general management perceptions of female managers in the region.

However, all questions were carefully examined in relation to the research questions, in order to ensure their relevance for our thesis (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 255). Some of the questions were almost completely identical to the manufacturing company questions, except for some minor differences in formulations, to ensure that the interview guides were fairly consistent. In total, eight interview questions were constructed for the gender equality company.

After the questions had been initially formulated, the questions for the manufacturing companies were pre-tested which will be explained further in the next section.

**4.2.3 Pre-testing**

Pre-testing of our interview questions was conducted on the 15th of April over email with an HR manager at another manufacturing company in the Umeå Region. This company was excluded from our sample, as one of the researchers of our thesis have close personal connections to the company. This decision was made since using this company in our sample could pose a risk of bias, and reduce the credibility of our study.
Instead, the HR manager of this company was used as our pre-tester. This manager's feedback was determined to be relevant to receive for our study, since the company fulfilled our criteria of size and industry.

Our pre-test was conducted in order to ensure that the questions were well formulated, relevant and easy to understand. Another benefit was that the pre-test contributed with valuable insights of other wordings that were more appropriate to use in this particular situation (Saunders, 2012, p. 442; Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 396). An HR manager that on a daily basis work with these matters in practice might use terms that was different in comparison to those used in the scientific literature. The use of a pre-test helped identify typically academic phrasings that could be modified, by using terms and concepts that were more frequently used by HR personnel within the manufacturing industry.

After the pre-test, several questions and terms were revised to enhance the participants understanding and essentially provide more credible results to our study. The revisions mainly included rephrasing of questions that were too general, and substituting concepts for more commonly used terms that could be more appropriate when interviewing an HR manager. Our interview questions for the external company did not undergo any pre-testing, as they were in large part similar to the manufacturing company questions. Instead, they were revised in line with the results of the pre-testing, in order to ensure the consistency of the interview guide.

The semi-structured interview guide was finalized after the pre-test, see Appendix 1. All participants were, prior to the interview, sent a copy of the interview questions, along with the purpose of our thesis, the confidential treatment of their answers and our definition of middle managers. This information was sent out before the interviews took place in order to reduce the risk of misunderstandings and it essentially ensured us that the participants were aware of what specifics we were exploring.

4.2.4 Conducting the interviews

All interviews were carried out from April to the beginning of May of 2015 and took place at the head office at each manufacturing company. The interview with the external company took place at a location of the participant's choice. Our intention was to ensure that participants felt comfortable and calm throughout the interviews. We made an assumption, based on previous experiences that people in general were more comfortable speaking Swedish than English, which was the reason for conducting the interviews in Swedish.

Two different interview roles were employed during the interviews. Caroline Jonsson had the active role of asking questions and leading the interview, while Matilda Brändström had the passive role of taking notes and filling in with follow-up questions. These roles were strictly followed in order to increase the consistency of our findings, and it ensured us that questions were asked in a similar manner. The interviews were recorded using a dictaphone, after permission had been granted from the participants.

Each interview was introduced by informing the interviewee of some formalities. The purpose of our study was introduced, along with the definition of middle managers. Thereafter, the participants were told that neither their name nor the organization's name would be mentioned in our study. The participants were also informed that, since their title would be mentioned in our study, there was a risk of identification or association, thus full anonymity could not be ensured. Finally, participants were informed that they
had the choice of discontinuing the interview at any time and that they were not required to answer all questions.

The recordings from the interviews were transcribed manually in a short period of time after the interviews had taken place. All participants were sent a copy of the transcripts after they had been finalized, where they had an opportunity to change or add something if they wished to do so. Our intention was to ensure respondent validity, i.e. ensure that the interviews corresponded to what the interviewees themselves wished to express (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 396), so that our results were representative of the manufacturing companies reality. As all steps and procedures of our interviews have been described, the next section presents the choices of literature for our study.

4.3 Choices of data
Both primary and secondary sources of data were used for our empirical study. The primary data originated from interviews with managers of the manufacturing companies and the gender equality strategist from the external company. The secondary data that was used for our thesis was compromised by scientific, peer-reviewed articles in combination with research-based books and course literature. In addition, statistics from Bismode (Appendix 2), Umeåregionen and Women's Business Research Institute have been used to exemplify the low representation of female managers within the manufacturing industry and the Umeå Region.

Several databases have been used to find scientific, electronic articles and access to them was granted through Umeå University. These were Business Source Premier, EBSCO, Emerald, Google Scholar, Wiley, SAGE, DiVA and Retriever Business. Additionally, one of the researchers had access to the online portal Western Libraries of University of Western Ontario, in London, Canada. This search function, and the databases Gender Studies Database and ProQuest in particular, were used to find articles that could not be accessed using our Umeå University’s resources. Umeå University Library was used to find research-based books, scientific journals and articles in print.

The keywords that has been continuously used and combined throughout our literature search were the following, in alphabetical order:

barriers, development, differences, diversity, doing gender, female, gender equality, glass ceiling, homosociality, leadership, male, management, managerial, managers, middle management, Nordic, perceptions, policies, practices, recruitment, Scandinavia, stereotypes, succession planning, training, women.

As this section defined the sources of data that we used for our thesis, the next section criticizes our choices.

4.3.1 Critique of data sources
For our thesis, we used both primary and secondary sources of data and there were both pros and cons with using these. The main advantage of using primary data was that we had collected it first-hand ourselves through the semi-structured interviews. In other words, we were confident that the data we used for our analysis and conclusions were representative of the phenomenon we intended to explore. The disadvantage of using primary data was the time consumption of collecting it. Given that our thesis was
restricted to a 10 week period, there was only a certain amount of primary data that could be collected for our study.

Secondary data, in the form of scientific articles and research books, provided useful knowledge to our report. It made it possible for us to easily access an extensive amount of theories and concepts. Additionally, it provided us with guidance for our exploration, in terms of findings that had support in previous research. The disadvantage of using secondary data was a question of relevance. The theories and findings that were used to strengthen our report, might have had a different objectives and direction than our study. It might also have influenced how this data was presented (Saunders, 2012, p. 319-320). In other words, we risked supporting our findings with studies that had not been investigating the same phenomenon as ours did. We attempted to counteract the risk of low relevance, by carefully scrutinizing all sources of secondary data before they were included in our study. We could neither control the quality of the findings of these secondary sources (Saunders, 2012, p. 320), as we had not collected the data ourselves. However, we restricted our usage to peer-reviewed articles, which we hoped would limit the risk of supporting our findings with weak research.

As our sources of data have been presented and criticized, the next section elaborates upon our data analysis.

4.4 Data Analysis
The transcripts of our interviews were analyzed using coding, simply referred to as a process of decomposing findings into categories and concepts (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 578), which has commonly been used in qualitative research. The process of coding served as a keystone in grounded theory, a complex method of analysis that entailed data and concepts to be constantly compared, revisited and collected (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 577), to eventually terminate in testing of hypothesis (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 580).

Even though this method would have allowed us to explore how management perceptions of female middle managers have influenced organizational practices in the Umeå Region on a deeper level with more extensive explanations (Zikmund et al., 2013, p. 139), it would not have been possible to carry out under our conditions. The time restriction of 10 weeks forced us to incorporate a data analysis technique that was less extensive and complex. In addition, it was probable that the opportunity to meet with organizational representatives repeatedly also would have been limited, which would have made it difficult for us to employ grounded theory. Coding was therefore solely used as a method of data analysis in our thesis.

The results from our study were simultaneously analyzed in what can be described as three stages; data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10-11). The first stage, called data reduction, referred to the coding process. We initiated the coding process by reading through all transcripts, only taking rough notes (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 586). During the second review of our transcripts, more thorough notes were made about the different phenomenon described by the participants (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 586) based on a discussion of the initial notes that took place between us.
In general, descriptions and insights that were relevant for our study, or other notions that caught our attention in particular, were noted. These notes were thereafter reviewed to identify differences, similarities and relationships between them in relation to our purpose and specific codes were developed (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 586). This process could be referred to as axial coding, as we were concerned with analyzing the influences of concepts, and how they were being managed within the specific context (Saunders, 2012, p. 571).

The second stage of the analysis was concerned with the display of our findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). The codes that emerged from the data reduction stage were used to present our results, and the results were thereafter analyzed using our theoretical framework as the foundation. Our intention was to identify if the management perceptions and organizational practices that we had found in the manufacturing companies, and if those had any support in the scientific literature.

We decided to present the analysis of each company immediately after each result. The management perceptions and organizational practices that we found were assumed to be created and enforced within their specific context, i.e. each company. This structure was therefore selected, as we believed that some information would have been lost otherwise, if the findings from all companies had been analyzed under one section.

The individual results and analysis were thereafter displayed in so-called role-ordered matrices, meaning that the information was divided by each company (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 123). This made the results and analysis easily accessible and understandable for the reader, but it also facilitated a convenient development of our conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). In the final section, our findings were further analyzed in a more general manner. Hence, subdivisions of our analysis did not hinder us from carrying out a general analysis of the entire region, rather it reduced the risk of losing important insights from each company.

Following the data analysis will the access gain along with our ethical consideration be presented in the next section.

4.5 Access gain and ethical considerations

4.5.1 Access gain
For this thesis, we were able to gain physical access to six different companies, conducting traditional access through interviews (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 210). Furthermore, we accessed several beneficial sources of information through personal connections. These made it possible for us to receive contact details to interviewees that were relevant for our study. This allowed us to save time and effort searching for relevant managers in the Umeå Region.

Specific statistics from Bisnode (See Appendix 2) for the manufacturing industry that was explored in our study was also accessed through personal contacts. This gave us the ability to include relevant, statistical support for the research gap that was explored. Additionally, because of a previous exchange semester abroad, the general search function Western Libraries in Canada was accessed. Through this database, we accessed articles that otherwise could not be found using Umeå University’s resources or Google Scholar, which strengthened our theoretical framework.
4.5.2 Considerations of ethical principles
As presented in section 2.8, the following ethical principles were considered to be highly relevant for our study. First of all, informed consent of those taking part was considered (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 231). As we contacted our participants over telephone, they were informed of the purpose of our study. When a company representative agreed to participate, information regarding the interview along with our questions were emailed to the participant. This was done in order to ensure that sufficient information was provided to each participant, so that the topic and implications of our study was fully understood (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 133; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 231). Essentially, this allowed our participants to make an informed decision of whether or not to participate in our study.

Since our topic could be somewhat sensitive, both principles avoidance of harm and privacy were considered (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 231). During the interviews, all participants were informed that their names and the company name would be excluded from our study. However, information of their titles, the Umeå region and the manufacturing industry were included. Therefore, we emphasized to the participants that, even if our study intended to ensure confidentiality by excluding certain information and coding the transcripts, it could still be possible for someone to make associations to the company (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 136). We also protected all information the participants provided us with in a confidential manner, in order to ensure their privacy.

Other than from ensuring that the right information was given, the interviews were conducted in a manner where we made our utmost to make the participant feel secure, relaxed and that they could trust us as researchers. By conducting the interviews at a location of their own choice, and giving participants an opportunity to take as much time as desired when answering our questions and avoid any pressure to answer if they chose not to, we intended to reduce the risks of harm. However, it was not possible for us to evaluate all circumstances in which harm could have been posed to our participants (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 129-132; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 231).

Finally, ethical principles of data management and responsibility of data and reporting findings was also considered for our study. Throughout our research, the participants privacy was always prioritized. We did not alter the information that was given to us when our findings were analyzed, rather remained respectful to our participants (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 232). It was also important for us to acknowledge which part of the information that was provided by the participants, and which arguments that were our own. Since sharing information over the internet or social media could raise concerns of whether or not an outsider could access the information (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 139), we limited our sharing to more secure sites. For instance, all transcripts were saved in a dropbox online that only the researchers could login to and access. The final section of this chapter, explains the critique of our practical methodology.

4.6 Critique of our practical methodology
In order to reduce misunderstandings, it was necessary for us to clarify or provide examples of certain concepts during some of the interviews. In addition, some participants had difficulties understanding a few questions that we asked, which caused us to ask follow-up questions in order to limit misinterpretations. However, even if we considered it to be necessary, this could be classified as leading.
One of our key concepts for this thesis was organizational practices, which was defined in section 1.3. When the term was translated to Swedish and communicated to our participants, we realized that the term could be perceived as ambiguous. In retrospect, a better clarification of our key terms prior to the interviews would have been useful and would have limited the risk of us leading the interviews.

In addition, there was a risk of the participants’ subjectivity during our interviews. We intended to explore management perceptions in our study, and our findings would have been representative if we had interviewed all managers within all manufacturing companies. However, our sample had to be narrowed down due to time constraints, and we decided to investigate HR managers, as they were assumed to hold knowledge that was representative of entire organizations (Risberg et al., 2012 p. 203; Barnett & Davis, 2008, p. 730). It was not possible for us to assess if the information of management perceptions and organizational practices were representative of the manufacturing companies, or if the participants’ individual, subjective opinions had interfered with the responses. We attempted to limit this risk by formulating questions in the following manner “according to your organization…” (See for instance question 4, Appendix 1) but whether or not this was successful was difficult to determine.

This chapter displayed our data collection method and the method of analysis that were used for our study. In addition, we discussed the ethical principles that have been considered, and criticized the practical methodology that was carried out.

5. Results and analysis

This chapter will present our findings from the semi-structured interviews. The empirical findings were derived from our coding process and each company’s result will be presented separately. The analysis will be displayed directly after each company’s findings and will be followed by a general analysis at the end of this chapter. Our decision to combine the results and analysis was chosen, as we consider important information would have lost its context otherwise. Additionally, it provides the reader with a cohesive structure that can easily be followed.

5.1 Company 1 (C1) - General views of the region

As mentioned in section 4.1.1, C1 provided us with an overview of the Umeå Region in terms of management perceptions of female middle managers, and organizational practices that had been carried out in manufacturing companies. C1 works with various educational activities for organizational development and to them, working with gender equality was foremost a question of justice.

5.1.1 Results of C1

The participant described the manufacturing companies motives of working with women in management to be mainly in terms of economic gains, but also a result of societal and political trends.

Overall, a basic understanding of the problem and a strong will to work with women in management have been noted in the region. Further, C1 argued that several manufacturing companies had realized the importance of working with gender equality on a management level, to enforce practical equality throughout the company. In
general, the participant described that the management perceptions of female managers were positive, and that an awareness of homosocial tendencies existed. In the participant’s opinion, homosociality was also a tendency that the HR department of most manufacturing companies worked hard to prevent.

C1 explained that the most common gender equality practices among the manufacturing companies in Umeå Region were educational activities, arranged and carried out by the HR departments. In addition, recruitment was considered to be the most important forum for working with gender equality. C1 explained that they have reviewed and discussed recruitment advertisements with companies and when discussing masculine wordings, the participant described the following scenario:

“...we have done missions where we have looked at wordings in general and performed text analysis of those sorts of wordings and we perceived that it was an aha-experience for many, and many recognized what the impact would be if they changed the words and how controlled we are by gender and how effective, rational is connected to a man, there is just no question about it.”

Essentially, these types of activities were carried out by the manufacturing companies, since many recognized that they otherwise would limit the competencies that could be found. Furthermore, the participant suggested that homosocial tendencies could be avoided by implementing structured HR processes, which limits the risk of using masculine wordings and only recruiting individuals who fits the norm.

In general, C1 observed that the trend of working with women in management has increased in the region. Many educational efforts were made among manufacturing companies internally. However, the change has been slow and the industry still remained dominated by men. Moreover, C1 stated that the main challenge for the manufacturing companies was to enforce gender equality in practice and to critically scrutinize their own processes, to challenge the male norm and to reflect upon excluding tendencies. As the results of C1 have been presented, these are analyzed in the next section.

**5.1.2 Analysis of C1**

Based on the results from C1, only one perspective could, to some extent, be connected to the general view of the manufacturing companies perceptions in the region, namely *right individual on the right place*. C1’s responses were permeated by their subjective stance that women in management was a question of fairness and justice, and not mainly profitability, which we believed made it difficult for us to detect any clear perceptual perspectives in some instances.

Manufacturing companies had mainly prioritized the economic benefits of working with women in management and we found support for their intentions in the literature, since Billing and Sundin (2006, p. 107) stated that having a representation of different types of individuals was a way to maximize profitability. This argument could to some extent be related to *right individual on the right place*, which was detected as a perception that had influenced the organizational practices. The economic objective had led manufacturing companies to employ various educational activities, which with support from Beeson and Valerio’s (2012, p. 419) research, was an intention to enhance the company effectiveness. We did not learn if gender was disregarded in organizational practices, like Billing and Alvesson (1989, p. 69) proposed, solely that the general
perception of female middle managers could be classified as positive, in economic terms, according to the participant.

In the participant's view, manufacturing companies in the Umeå Region were aware of the risk of homosociality, a preference for individuals with similar attributes (Holgersson 2013, p. 455), in organizational practices and had made an effort to prevent it. In our opinion, this could be related to an ambition to recruit from a broader labor pool, to increase effectiveness. Holgersson (2013, p. 461) proposed that homosociality could influence the selection of candidates and formulation of desired competencies, and we assumed that this caused C1 to suggest that companies should standardize their HR practices. We could detect that this awareness had influenced the manufacturing companies practices, as they had reviewed masculine wordings with guidance from C1. However, it was not possible for us to identify any underlying perception for these practices that limited homosociality and masculine wordings among the manufacturing companies.

C1 explained that, despite the trend among manufacturing companies to actively challenge the male norm, the industry remained dominated by men and according to Billing (2011, p. 298), this could be a result of the constant pressure of effectiveness that companies face. We believed that this was caused by a perception that was not visible to us during the data collection, namely women and men have different ambitions. If effectiveness was the motivation to work with gender equality, but the representation of women remained low, competence had to be the reason. Either, there were not enough women with the required competencies, or the perception was that women were not skilled enough. Competence might still be connected with male attributes, like Tienari and Nentwich (2012, p. 126) suggested. In our opinion, this could explain the slow changes that C1 described, and also support why manufacturing companies were advised to challenge typically masculine wordings.

There was also a possibility that change has been slow in the region, due to insufficient revisions of organizational practices. Manufacturing companies in the Umeå Region tended to mainly focus on recruitment practices, while researchers have suggested that all practices need to be challenged and revised to limit barriers for women in management (Billing & Sundin, 2006, p. 105; Cooper Jackson, 2001, p. 33). This discrepancy between research and organizational practices, could justify C1’s proposition that gender equality should be enforced throughout all organizational practices, which C1 also referred to as manufacturing companies main challenge. Having analyzed the results from C1, the next section presents the results from C2.

5.2 Company 2 (C2)
C2 had few female middle managers and these were mainly found within the purchasing and economic department. The participant expressed that it was easy to talk about gender equality issues in the organization, but it was considered difficult to implement in practice. C2 have non-Swedish owners, but this was not considered to be an influencing factor.

5.2.1 Results of C2
An increased representation of female middle managers would be positive for C2, as it was considered to have economic benefits. However, the participant stated that competencies were prioritized over gender. A mix of men and women was described as beneficial, since it would allow for greater profitability and success. For C2,
competence of middle managers was considered to be of highest importance. As the participant described it:

“...then in the end it is the right skills that decides, we would never hire a women just because we have many men...”.

The company made no difference between the abilities of women and men in management, rather was individuals leadership competencies emphasized. In general, diversity was highlighted to a greater extent in the company, as different ethnicities, ages and experiences have been sought after as well.

C2 focused on general HR practices and core values, and the participant stated that gender equality was included in these practices. No gender equality plan had been implemented, although the company had a discrimination plan in place. The participant expressed a will to increase the amount of women, or more specifically a diversified group of employees, but all quantifiable goals had been removed and replaced with a vision instead.

C2 carried out a thorough, standardized process of recruitment, identical for both internal and external candidates. At least one manager, along with a HR representative participated in recruitment practices, to avoid the risk of employing individuals with similar characteristics. When asked about masculine wordings in job advertisements, the participant explained that no such notion had been reflected upon. In addition, personality tests and various interviews were carried out to determine candidates suitability.

The participant mentioned employee performance appraisals as the key forum for determining development and advancement plans of employees. The company offered developmental activities in areas of leadership, language and task-specific knowledge.

In general, the participant pointed to politics and laws as influencing factors of the amount of female middle managers in the company, and mentioned the low participation rate of women in engineering programs as troublesome. C2 had previously collaborated with schools, to attract more girls into technical professions. The more female engineers C2 could attract, the easier it would be to have more female middle managers, the participant argued. In general, having women in top management was referred to as beneficial, as it was considered to form an organization.

At last, when asked about future goals, the participant explained that C2 would work with the question of women in management to the same extent as they have previously done. In the following section, the results of C2 are analyzed.

5.2.2 Analysis of C2
Based on the results from C2, three perspectives on management perceptions could be identified: right individual on the right position, women and men are equal and women and men have different ambitions.

Employing more women for middle management positions was considered to be economically beneficial and competencies, not gender, were highly important at C2. With support from previous research, it meant that selection of candidates were based on their competencies (Tienari & Nentwich, 2012, p. 120) and that gender was
disregarded (Billing & Alvesson, 1989, p. 69) which allowed us to assign C2’s perceptions to our perspective right individual on the right position. In addition, the argument that a mix of individuals was valued in the company verged onto the perspective women and men are unique, which according to Adler (1986, p. 6-7) would imply that men’s and women’s different competencies were equally valuable. However, we could not see any connection between this perception and the company’s practices that were carried out. C2 expressed that having more female middle managers would be valuable, yet no goals or practices were in place to increase the representation. We therefore found C2’s statement to be contradictory.

The participant explained that C2 did not make any differences between women and men's management abilities. This statement had support from Adler (1986, p. 7), who stated that managers should be seen as equally capable regardless of gender, which allowed us to classify this perception as the women and men are equal perspective. We believed that this perception was generated from the management and as a result, C2 did not have any gender equality plan in place. Since men and women were referred to as equals, we got the impression that C2 though that a specific plan would not be necessary, or important. In addition, C2’s decision not to reflect upon masculine wordings and the male norm was also considered to be caused by this perception.

Researchers have suggested that companies should challenge and revise their practices, in order to identify potential gender biases that could form obstacles for women to become managers (Billing & Sundin, 2006, p. 105; Cooper Jackson, 2001, p. 33). C2 had recognized homosociality, which we believed caused their recruitment practice to be standardized to a large extent. But given the male-dominated industry that C2 operates within, their decision not to challenge potential male norms further may have caused a failure to provide women with the same type of opportunities as men (Billing & Alvesson, 1989, p. 66). The participant explained that gender equality was included in their general HR practices, but given the low amount of female middle managers in the organization, we could not detect that such practices had been successful. We believed that this was partly caused by the challenge that C1 had expressed, that gender equality was poorly integrated throughout the company’s practices.

In addition, we believed that the perspective right individual on the right place was combined with another category of management perceptions; women and men have different ambitions. According to Billing and Alvesson’s research, women was argued to choose other fields of employment based on their interests (1989, p. 75). C2 expressed that it had been difficult to find female candidates, which could explain the company’s low amount of female middle managers. However, we perceived that C2’s attitude towards the question of women in management and the absence of practices that could facilitate their advancement indicated that C2 perceived women in general to lack the necessary technical competencies for management positions. We believed that this perception had an impact on their practices, and that the low amount of female middle managers was the result of it. As the results of C2 were analyzed, our findings from C3 will be presented in the next section.

5.3 Company 3 (C3)
C3 had no female middle managers and expressed that it has been difficult to find female candidates in the industry in general. The company has no Human Resource
department; instead each individual manager was responsible for managing recruitments.

5.3.1 Results of C3
The participant described that the value of working with women in management was to gain different types of knowledge and views. This was considered necessary, since it otherwise could lead to a loss of important insights that would strengthen their competitors instead. The participant further explained, when asked about the perceived acceptance of the gender equality work within the organization, that there has not been any extensive engagement. The involvement from top management was argued to be important, in order to gain acceptance throughout the entire organization.

The participant explained that C3 did not perceive any differences between men and women in management, instead competencies and personality was described as the most important factors for middle management positions. The perception of male and female managers as different was classified as old school by the participant, however some difficulties that female managers might face were also reflected upon:

“I think that, for sure a woman has to work hard, I mean even if they are super capable, I feel like if a women makes a mistake she gets an even harder time about it”

Furthermore, the participant explained that qualifications were key and this could be a reason for the lack of female managers. It was argued that not many women were educated within technical professions, nor did many women have the industrial experience that was considered to be necessary for a middle manager position. When the participant was asked to describe the reason for the difficulties of recruiting female middle managers, it was explained that:

“... if it is a big company, you can recruit a manager that is good at being a manager, because then you only search for someone who is supposed to think about the employees and does not have to know anything about the business so your job is to lead the resources, but I mean this company is too small for that, here you can’t hire someone that does not know anything...”

Since C3 did not have an HR department, all recruitments were carried out by the manager in charge together with a consultancy agency. The recruitment process was described as standardized and consisted of competence profiling and personality tests. The agency facilitated the selection and formulation of job advertisements, and also identified and removed typical masculine wordings. Homosociality was also recognized by C3 as a notion that could cause problems; the participant stated that being aware of this was important in order to avoid its occurrence.

Developmental activities were identified and initiated through performance appraisals with employees. Additionally, if individuals requested task specific knowledge they were given an opportunity to obtain it. There were also some general activities such as education in leadership, but the company did not offer any management developmental activities. C3 had a succession planning system in place, but it was described as difficult to manage.

The company had a gender equality plan, although the participant explained that the specific goals of the plan would be removed since they had not been reached. Instead,
the plan would be revised to a vision. It was further explained that C3 did not have any goals to obtain more women as managers; the plan was instead to become more equal among all employees at all levels.

The participant emphasized that the main challenge lies at a societal level. Few women could be found in the right network for recruitment to middle management positions, since they had not chosen an education within engineering from the start. Further, it was described that C3 has done several collaborations with schools in order to spark an interest among younger students, more specifically girls. It was believed that if more girls would become interested, the result would be that more women would work within the manufacturing industry. The participant stated that C3 would continue with the work they were currently doing in the future. In the following section, the results of C3 will be analyzed.

5.3.2 Analysis of C3

C3 results showed that both right individual on the right position and women and men have different ambitions could be identified, where the latter had the most prominent effect on the organizational practices.

C3 described competencies as the most important factor for management positions. This perception could be classified as the right individual on the right position, since the recruitment decisions were explained as dependent on the individual competencies, not on gender (Tienari & Nentwich, 2012, p. 120). However, as C3 currently did not have any female middle managers, we believed that the company has failed to adequately manage the human resources, which could be the risk with this type of perception (Billing & Alvesson, 1989, p. 70). Since competency was considered to be priority for managers, but no women were employed, it was assumed that C3 had disregarded competent women, due to some other attitudes of female managers.

The participant argued that no differences between male and females were made, as such a distinction was referred to as old school. This type of argumentation could be considered to be women and men are equal, and would in theory imply that C3 perceived female and male managers to be equally effective (Adler, 1986, p. 7). C3 also had a vision of becoming more equal in general, which related to the equal perspective. However, we saw no indicators of this perception in practices. No organizational practices that embraced this statement could be found, nor was any women were employed for middle management positions, which caused us to believe that this was merely a statement.

Furthermore, C3 was described as a company that considered employment of female middle managers to be a competitive advantage, and that women could contribute with different knowledge and views. This statement could be linked with our perspective women and men are unique, as C3 emphasized the effective usage of the additional competencies that female managers could contribute with (Cassell, 1997, p. 11-13). As noted with the perception women and men are equal, there was a lack of indication between the statements that the participant made and the practices that were carried out. We therefore considered neither of these management perceptions to be present within the company.

C3 explained that it had been difficult to find female candidates for management positions, as they seldom possessed the specific industry knowledge that was considered
to be necessary. According to the participant, women’s choices of education had caused the lack of competence, an argument that was very similar to the ones Holgersson (2013, p. 458) found, where managers considered female candidates to be less skilled due to their selection of education. We experienced that women in general were perceived as lacking technical skills that were necessary for management positions.

As the participant stated that C3 had no ambitions to increase the amount of women in the company and no quantifiable goals were in place, we believed that women were not considered to be suitable for middle management positions due to their lack of competencies. All perceptions that we saw as predominant at C3 could hence be assigned to the perspective women and men have different ambitions, which evidently had an impact on how their organizational practices were carried out, as the company had no female middle managers.

However, we believed that these perceptions and its effect on organizational practices also could have been caused by the low engagement from management. The participant explained that gender equality was not emphasized from the top and according to Franzén et al. (2009, p. 48), top management need to be involved with gender equality for change to be implemented. During our visit, we experienced that the question of women in management had neither been prioritized nor permeated throughout the company. However, this situation could be a result of the absence of an HR department, which Risberg et al. (2012, p. 203) described as a key player when implementing gender equality activities. Having analyzed the findings from C3, the next section present the results from C4.

5.4 Company 4 (C4)
In C4, approximately 30% of the middle managers were women and these were found in departments of production and IT. In general, the participant described C4’s corporate philosophy as being permeated by gender equality to a great extent.

5.4.1 Results of C4
Women in management were, for C4, a question of competitive advantage and growth. The participant stated that the company wanted the most qualified individuals to work for them, everyone’s capabilities should be put to best use and the recruitment base should therefore not be restricted. Further, the participant explained:

“...we want to be an attractive employer, we want to create an attractive work environment for both women and men where everyone both have the opportunities to evolve and that they feel like they want to take that step [...] we believe that gender equality and diversity creates effectiveness, profitability and comfort too and we have actually seen this in various ways...”.

Here, the participant referred to the various projects for gender equality that C4 have been active in, which have brought changes of attitudes, culture, jargon and thinking in the company. The participant also described C4’s initial gender equality project, a pilot study that was carried out and included education for employees and management. The results from the study that C4 conducted were; a better attitude to paternal leave and an improved psychosocial environment. The employees got healthier, acceptance of using supporting tools in production increased along with productivity, while absenteeism decreased. This study with accompanying results served as the foundation for C4’s philosophy that was created thereafter.
The company has a gender equality plan, in which the current goals of the amount of female managers have already been reached. The plan also emphasized that gender division of work teams should be reflected upon. C4 has an ambition to increase the amount of female managers in the future, and the participant referred to this as a continuous improvement process. The participant explained that the gender equality plan would be revised and modified for the coming three years. This will be executed after a critical scrutinization of the current plan to find improvements, to be even more extensive and anchored with top management. In general, the participant described the question of women in management to be highly prioritized by top management.

At C4, a minimum of two individuals was required to participate in internal and external recruitment processes to limit the risk of homosociality. This tendency had previously occurred within the company, and was now actively prevented through this mechanism. The participant shared an own, interesting example that had occurred at previous workplaces:

“...if a candidate have written in his CV that he has been very active in for instance football, then this automatically becomes a huge merit for some male bosses, partly because they can identify with it and then you conclude that this is a team player while a candidate that have been involved with a more individual sport or horseback riding or something then you don’t make the same connection...”

The company was aware of how titles, descriptions and wordings could be perceived and attract different individuals, which was the reason why C4 used gender-neutral formulations in their job advertisements. The participant also explained that HR worked in a standardized manner, to reduce the risk that employees might perceive male and female managers differently. For C4, practices were in place to serve as a reminder to treat people equally. C4 has a succession planning system in place, and employee performance appraisals were referred to as the most important forum for identification and discussions of development and advancement opportunities. In addition, education of gender equality in the form of seminars had recently been carried out for both management and employees.

When asked how the company could work to attract more women to these professions, the participant explained that C4 strived to work broadly and have collaborated with secondary schools to learn how more girls can be encouraged to choose the technical field. Besides from continuing the current activities in the future, the next step in C4’s work with women in management was described as the implementation of an introductory education of core values and philosophy for new employees. This would be carried out to ensure that all employees shared the company’s values. The participant also emphasized the need for full implementation of gender equality throughout the company, instead of a separate plan. The results that C4 generated will be analyzed in the following section.

5.4.2 Analysis of C4
C4’s results revealed that the perceptions in the company could be assigned to the two perspectives right individual on the right position and women and men are equal.

The primary benefit of actively working with women in management was described as economic. Gender equality was further considered to be a competitive advantage, since
it would create an attractive work environment where all individuals’ competencies were put to best use. As supported by Billings and Alvesson (1989, p. 68-69), recruiting from the entire labor pool of competent and intelligent individuals was considered to strengthen the company, which essentially could lead to economic gains. It was evident that C4’s prioritized the subject of female managers as their practices facilitated women’s advancement and the results were remarkably positive. C4 had achieved the objective that 30% of the managers should be female from the gender equality plan. We believed that by combining this management perception with an acknowledgement of women’s competencies, changes in the representation of female managers could evidently be reached.

At C4, equal opportunities for women and men were emphasized and we could connect this to Adler’s (1989, p. 67) findings, that both female and male managers should be viewed as equally capable to contribute to an organization’s effectiveness. This perception could be assigned to the perspective *women and men are equal*, and how it had influenced C4’s practices was evident. Formulations and descriptions had been revised to detect masculine formulations, as recommended by several authors (Billing & Sundin, 2006, p. 105; Cooper Jackson, 2001, p. 33), which thereafter had been replaced by gender-neutral formulations. In addition, a standardization of organizational practices had been employed to limit the risk of employees having gendered perceptions of their managers. The risk of homosociality was acknowledged and counteracted by using a standardized recruitment practice and in general, C4’s practices were permeated with a high level of awareness, which illustrated how important equal treatment was considered to be.

To us, it was interesting to see how C4 differed in comparison to C2 and C3. All companies had adopted a *right individual on the right position* perspective, but C4 was the only company among those three who had increased the amount of female middle managers. We believed this was a result of their perception that women were equally competent of being managers, which had influenced their practices and in turn facilitated this change. In addition, we considered it to be a result of a highly involved top management and a corporate philosophy permeated by gender equality. As stated by Franzén et al. (2009, p. 48), this was considered to be key to implement gender equality and to carry out changes successfully in a company. As described by the participant, C4’s top management emphasized women in management to a great extent, which could be determined as a key influencer of the various gender equality projects that were carried out. As C4 have been analyzed, the following section expands upon the results of C5.

5.5 Company 5 (C5)
C5 had few female middle managers, a distribution that the company was not satisfied with. Vacant positions were always recruited internally first, but when not possible, an external recruitment took place. The overall perception was that there were few females within the sector, and few that applied for the vacant jobs. C5 had non-Swedish owners, which was perceived to have affected the low priority of the question of women in management. Top management did not emphasize gender equality.

5.5.1 Results of C5
The perceived benefits of having women in management, according to C5, was foremost the economic profits that could be gained, and to create a diversified workforce with competent employees. It was also argued that more women in
management would lead to a more comfortable work environment with advancement opportunities for all, regardless of gender. This would essentially make it possible to retain the most competent employees.

The participant explained that there had not been any particular reflections of differences between men and women in C5. The company was aware of the male norm that existed within the industry, but had failed to actively challenge this in practice. The participant exemplified the management perceptions of female managers in C5:

“...I think as a women you get an even harder time [...] Because we have a norm of how you’re supposed to be [...] so if I take like someone working with assembly, what do you think of? Yeah, I think most people think of a man in his 40s with his working clothes on. You don’t think of a woman... And then to lead in that type of work...as it is all about the competency [...] and then you would have to know for example how to be good at working with assembling. Then you’re already doomed as a woman...because it’s difficult to lead that kind of group”

An employee evaluation that had taken place in the company showed positive results, where a majority of the employees were satisfied with C5’s gender equality work. However, when the gender division of these answers was examined, C5 found that females were less satisfied with the gender equality work in comparison to men. The participant stated that if any of the employees would be asked how the company had worked with gender equality, they would most likely not be able to answer the question.

C5 has employed a gender equality policy, which mainly consisted of the company’s corporate values, and did not include any goals or plans to increase the amount of female middle managers. C5 has instead been active in educational practices and seminars addressing attitudes, offensive treatment and discrimination, in order to gain more knowledge of these tendencies. Apart from that, C5 did have a gender equality group that was responsible for various activities to raise awareness of these topics.

The internal and external recruitment practices were described as standardized and two individuals were required to participate in recruitment processes to avoid homosocial tendencies. The participant stated that C5 had considered the effects of masculine wordings, but had not yet succeeded to implement this in practice. It was also argued that the pictures that C5 displayed in recruitment advertisements had not been successful in attracting candidates from both genders. The participant additionally stated that C5 might need to clarify the expectations of certain roles and better display how women could advance within the company. This was believed to attract more females’ interest to become managers in C5.

As for development practices, performance appraisals were stated to be key for identification of individuals’ ambition and opportunities in C5. These developmental activities were foremost employed for individuals requesting additional knowledge in task specific areas. Further, C5 had a succession planning system, because internal advancement was prioritized and considered to be an important part of C5’s corporate culture.

The participant also explained that C5 often have collaborated with schools, to spark an interest among younger students and to make them aware of the company’s existence.
C5 did not have a specific plan or strategy to encourage more women to go into management, but there was no doubt that it would be necessary to continue the work with this question somehow, as the participant explained:

“Yes, absolutely! I don’t think we have...have any choice. Even if we would think that no we don’t have energy to handle this. We don’t have a choice.”

Having presented the results from C5, an analysis of these will be carried out in the next section.

5.5.2 Analysis of C5

Based on C5’s results, the perspectives *right individual on the right position* and *women and men have different ambitions* could be identified as the prominent perceptions within the company.

C5 expressed that including female managers was considered to generate primarily economic benefits to the company, and that it would create a diversified workforce with the most competent individuals. Since C5 emphasized qualifications over gender (Tienari & Nentwich 2012, p. 120), the perception could be connected to the *right individual on the right position* perspective. Although, by foremost recruiting internally in an already male-dominated industry, we could assume that C5’s practices was insufficient to facilitate recruitment of female middle managers, which had resulted in a low representation of female middle managers in the company. As supported by Billing and Alvesson (1989, p. 70), the risk of the perception *right individual on the right position* was that a company might underutilize the labor pool, which was evident at C5.

The participant highlighted that having female managers at C5 would result in a more comfortable work environment that essentially would retain and attract competent employees. Supported by Billing and Alvesson (1989, p. 71-72), who stated that women contributed to something special, which could facilitate a more effective work environment, C5’s statement could be connected to *women and men are unique*. Even though women in management were argued to be important at C5, we could not identify any practices that facilitated nor supported this perception. Therefore we believed that these statements were generated from the participant’s positive attitude towards recruiting more female managers in the future, rather than a perception that C5 planned to enforce throughout its practices.

C5 perceived that few females had the necessary competencies to become managers within the company, which could explain the low amount of female applicants, which in turn had generated a low amount of female middle managers. This perception of inadequate competency could have been caused by women’s choices of education or careers. However, in the case of C5, we believed that their situation mainly was influenced by a masculine company culture. As stated by Billing (2011, p. 298), managerial professions has traditionally been considered unsuitable for women and from what the participant described, we got the impression that this was an attitude that C5’s top management held. More specifically, the question of gender equality was given low priority from top management, which could explain why no practices to enforce this were in place (Franzén et al., 2009, p. 48).

The participant stated that C5 had failed to challenge the male norm that existed, and as we understood it, it was not only in regards to the male-dominated technical industry
but the male norm in general within the company. This was believed to influence how female candidates for management positions were perceived. This allowed us to classify the company’s perceptions under the *women and men have different ambitions* perspective, and this could be detected in C5’s lack of practices to increase the amount of female middle managers.

It was acknowledged that pictures, wordings and role descriptions of a masculine nature could influence candidates’ decisions to apply for positions within the company. However, C5 had not been successful in attracting applicants from both genders, a result that we believed was caused by not challenging the male norm in practice. Recruitment practices had been standardized to avoid homosocial tendencies, a practice that we found support for in C1’s recommendation. But given that women were considered to be unsuitable candidates, we considered that this practice did not facilitate any change within the company. Given that the results of C5 were analyzed, the next section deals with the findings of C6.

5.6 Company 6 (C6)

Approximately 30% of the middle managers in C6 were women, a number that the company was satisfied with. Jobs within departments such as HR, economics, administration and logistics were traditionally referred to as feminine, and the industry in general was classified as male-dominated. The company had non-Swedish owners, which according to the participant had a positive impact on both the company culture, and how prioritized the subject of women in management was.

5.6.1 Result of C6

The benefits of having women in management were described in terms of performance and in general, the company focused more on diversity than gender equality. Mixed groups were considered to perform better, as different individuals were assumed to examine questions from different perspectives that would allow better decisions to be made. Differences between men and women’s abilities were not acknowledged or discussed at C6; individual’s personalities were instead valued. The participant stated:

“A mirror of society is the value and we believe that we will perform better, which is the most important and we actually do think that our results will improve if we are a mixed group”

The gender equality plan that C6 had was revised more often than what Swedish regulations demanded, and this was done in order to display how important the subject was considered to be. Gender equality was highly accepted within the organization and had been emphasized in various projects. The company had quantitative objectives in their gender equality plan for how many women that should be employed on different management positions. More specifically, this amount was a predetermined percentage that was higher than the amount of women who graduated from the engineering programs in Sweden every year. Solely relying on quantitative measures was considered to be inadequate, and C6 had therefore focused on treatment, behavior and respect within the company as well.

C6 used both internal and external recruitment, but internal recruitment was prioritized, as employees should be given development opportunities first. Candidates’ suitability was determined using a standardized test, along with references and interviews as an evaluation tool. When asked about masculine formulations, the participant described
that such wordings had been recognized and modified a couple of years back, during collaboration with a researcher in the field. The objective was to increase the amount of female applicants, which the company had succeeded with. C6 had also acknowledged homosociality, and was planning to raise awareness of this tendency in the creation of work teams in the future. Work teams were currently composed based on competency and availability.

Employee performance was acknowledged and career opportunities were discussed during performance appraisals, and there were no differences between male and women’s advancement opportunities. C6 consciously encouraged women to accept management positions, with the hope that other women would indirectly be motivated. In general, the company had many development activities in place, where leadership talent was identified and these individuals were allowed to try out the responsibilities of being a manager. C6 also had a specific leadership program for women, where they learned how to make their voices heard in a male-dominated industry. In addition, C6 had a women's group, where female employees met up to discussed and shared their experiences.

The participant also discussed women in management from a societal perspective, and pointed to the gender division of high school education. Boys were described as more attracted to technology in a natural way and in order to change the current situation, it was considered necessary to encourage girls at an earlier stage. As quantitative goals had been reached, C6 planned to work more with attitudes in the future. Awareness was considered to be important in the question of women in management, but the participant mainly stressed that behavior need to be challenged in the moment, that change need to happen in practice. The results that were generated through the interview with C6 will be analyzed in the next section.

5.6.2 Analysis of C6

Based on the results of C6, the main management perception of women in management that was detected could be assigned to women and men are unique. In addition, some argumentations also resembled right individual on the right position and women and men have different ambitions.

At C6, mixed groups were desirable as they were considered to perform better and female managers were sought after. This perception had support in Cassell’s (1997, p. 11) business case that suggested an effective usage of women in organization but also in Billing and Alvesson’s (1989, p. 71-72) research that portrayed female managers as facilitators of effectiveness. In addition, C6’s management was engaged in the question, which was crucial when gender equality changes were to be carried out in organizations (Franzén et al., 2009, p. 48). Given that individuals’ different capabilities were highly valued at C6, we could assign this perception to women and men are unique and this had evident effects on the company’s organizational practices. All of their organizational practices indicated that female middle managers were perceived to increase the performance of C6, and we also believed that top management’s involvement in the question contributed to this priority. As a result, C6 had reached a representation of 30% female middle managers.

Given the management perception that women and men have different experiences and capabilities, a specific leadership program for females had been created and women at C6 had the opportunity to join a group for women. The literature has emphasized the
importance for women to undergo development programs, as they could be subject to unjustified perceptions (Beeson & Valerio, 2012, p. 419). However, researchers had argued that there was a danger of creating additional programs for women, as it might create more differentiation between men and women (Beeson & Valerio, 2012, p. 422-423). Even though the majority of C6’s programs were offered to both men and women, we believed that there could be a risk of distinguishing between men and women’s development needs. We could however not detect any effects of this division, which led us to wonder if these additional programs had facilitated an increase of female middle managers in the organization instead. Regardless of its outcome, having additional practices to encounter women’s needs were influenced by C6’s perception that women and men were unique.

Even though the perspective women and men are unique was the most prominent at C6, arguments that were in line with other perceptions were identified as well. C6 explained that one of the objectives of working with women in management was to mirror society, in order to increase performance and make better decisions. As Billing and Sundin (2006, p. 107) stated, companies’ intentions to recruit a diversified group of individuals may originate from a desire to reflect society and access new knowledge. The argumentation made by C6 could therefore be linked to right individual on the right position, since the company believed that a greater amount of female managers would be a more representative image of society today. However, we found no clear indicators of this argumentation, and considered that women’s unique competencies were emphasized to a greater extent.

Furthermore, C6 perceived that young girls lacking interest in technology to be an issue and it was pinpointed that society created gender biases in education, which caused a need to encourage girls in order to spark their interest for the industry. This could be linked to Billing and Alvesson’s (1989, p. 75) findings, which described that women may be perceived as having different interest, which causes them to be less interested to work with typically male jobs, which in this case referred to more technical professions. C6’s argumentation could therefore be classified within women and men have different ambitions. However, the participant presented this as a description of a bigger problem, and not as a perception that C6 held and enforced within its practices.

In addition, we could detect that C6’s awareness of homosociality and masculine wordings had been counteracted by implementing various practices. The company had modified their formulations and used standardized practices to restrict potential biases to arise, with the intention to attract more female middle managers. It was interesting for us to see that C6’s practices had support in the recommendation that C1 gave, that these tendencies could be avoided by having structured practices in a company. In general, C6’s primary perception of women and men as unique had evidently influenced the organizational practices that were carried out in the company, and they were additionally permeated by high awareness among all employees in combination with top management’s engagement in the question. Having analyzed all individual companies, the next section summarizes our findings and analysis in a table, and a broader analysis of the region will be carried out.
Table 5. Summary of each company’s results and analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPANY (C)</th>
<th>PERSPECTIVES</th>
<th>INDICATORS</th>
<th>INFLUENCE ON ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General view of the</td>
<td>Right individual on the right position</td>
<td>Economic gain, Positive view, Aware of homosociality, Slow change</td>
<td>A will to work with this question in the region, Educational activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>region, C1</td>
<td>(Women and men have different ambitions)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Worked hard to prevent, Reviewed masculine wordings/vids., Structured HR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male-dominated industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Right individual on the right position</td>
<td>Economic benefit/competence is key, Low rate of women = troublesome</td>
<td>Few females, Collaboration with schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women and men have different ambitions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership capabilities emphasized, No masculine wordings, Two representatives in recruitment practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women and men are equal</td>
<td></td>
<td>No plans to obtain more women, No female middle managers, Collaboration with schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women and men have different ambitions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Help from consultancy agency to standardize practices, No plans to obtain more women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women are not in the network/hard to find candidates</td>
<td></td>
<td>No plans to obtain more women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women do not have the right education</td>
<td></td>
<td>No female middle managers, Collaboration with schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls are not interested in technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>Right individual on the right position</td>
<td>Corporate philosophy/top management engaged</td>
<td>30% female middle managers, Various gender equality projects, Quantitative goals, Two representatives in recruitment practices, Standardized practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women and men are equal</td>
<td>Aware of homosociality, Aware of masculine wordings, No difference between men and women,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women and men have different ambitions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gender-neutral formulations, Collaborations with schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women are not in the network/hard to find candidates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women do not have the right education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls are not interested in technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4</td>
<td>Right individual on the right position</td>
<td>Aware of homosociality, Economic benefit/competence is key</td>
<td>Two representatives in recruitment practices, Standardized practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women and men have different ambitions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women are not in the network/hard to find candidates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women do not have the right education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls are not interested in technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5</td>
<td>Right individual on the right position</td>
<td>Aware of homosociality, Economic benefit/competence is key</td>
<td>Two representatives in recruitment practices, Standardized practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women and men are unique</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women and men have different ambitions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women are not in the network/hard to find candidates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women do not have the right education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls are not interested in technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6</td>
<td>Women and men are unique</td>
<td>Top management engaged, Mixed groups perform better, Women have unique experiences</td>
<td>30% female middle managers, Women’s group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women and men have different ambitions</td>
<td>Aware of masculine wordings/Aware homosociality</td>
<td>Environment of gender equality plan more often, Gender equality emphasized in projects, Quantitative goals to increase female middle managers, Specific leadership programs for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results and analysis of each individual company has been displayed in Table 5. The first column presented the different companies, and the second displayed the perspectives of management perceptions that had been identified within each company. The third column displayed the indicators of each perspective, a link that has been illustrated with a colored line. In turn, the indicator of each perspective was linked with a colored arrow to the organizational practice it had influenced in the fourth column, as we found that management perceptions of female middle managers had influenced organizational practices. Each perspective was given a color, in order to simplify our line of reasoning: *Women and men are equal* - green, *Right individual on the right position* - purple, *Women and men are unique* - blue, *Women and men have different ambitions* - red. Indicators that did not belong to a specific perspective were given the color grey.

In general, all manufacturing companies had the same or similar practices in place: gender equality plan, development opportunities, educational projects and performance appraisals. We were however surprised to see that succession planning had been given little attention in the companies, as Barnett and Davis (2008, p. 721) referred to it as an important tool to retain competencies within a company. It could perhaps be due to little confidence in these practices, which Barnett and Davis (2008, p. 724) had found too.

In reference to C1’s proposition that structured HR processes were necessary, we found that all companies had standardized their recruitment practices to limit the risk of male norm tendencies and homosociality. Overall, we considered C1’s perception of the Umeå Region to be accurate and representative to our own findings. We found it interesting, that even though similar practices were in place, the amount of female middle managers employed were different among the companies. This was believed to be a result of the various perceptions that were present and had influenced companies practices.

We found that perceptions of female middle manager differed within the region. The economic gains of an increased representation of female middle managers, i.e. the *right individual on the right position* perspective, was the perception that was shared among all manufacturing companies. But what we found particularly interesting was that all companies had combined it with one or two other perspectives of perceptions.

For instance, C2, C3 and C5 combined *right individual on the right position* with *women and men have different ambitions*. The intention in these companies was to disregard gender and focus on competencies to maximize effectiveness (Tienari & Nentwich, 2012, p. 120). But in line with Adler’s (1986, p. 6) statement, that despite an ambition to be gender-neutral, women could be perceived as less attractive candidates. We found that women were perceived as less technically competent for middle management positions in comparison to men in these companies. In other words, the perception *women and men have different ambitions* was present. The ambition to disregard gender was considered to be easier in theory than in practice, and since this company had negative perceptions of women’s capabilities, these interfered with the companies’ practices.

Another scenario was identified where *right individual on the right position* could be combined with either *women and men are equal* or *women and men are unique*. Both C4 and C6 emphasized that competencies were key for middle managers, however, they
either made no differences between men and women's management capabilities (Adler, 1986, p. 7) or believed that having female middle managers was a strategic benefit that increased the company’s effectiveness (Cassell, 1997, p. 11). In contrast to C2, C3 and C5, C4 and C6’s attempt to disregard gender had been successful, as women were perceived as competent. The various practices that C4 and C6 had in place had fulfilled its intention to increase the amount of female middle managers. We also found that these companies had succeeded with the integration of awareness in their practices.

Another factor that we considered to influence the perceptions were management's attitude and engagement towards women in management. In C2, C3 and C5, top management had not prioritized the question of gender equality, which had influenced how practices were carried out throughout the company. In contrast, the top management at C4 and C6 were highly determined to increase the amount of female middle managers and considered gender equality to be important. We found that top managers priority of the question formed the foundation for how women were perceived throughout the companies, which evidently had an impact on how practices were constructed and carried out, which had support in Adler’s (1986, p. 23) findings. We believed that C1 had good reasons for stressing the importance for companies to scrutinize their practices in order to detect biases, and that this activity would be easier to enforce if top management was engaged.

In general, we were surprised to learn that all companies were aware of homosocial tendencies and had worked hard to counteract these, as Holgersson (2013, p. 455) had argued that this was an unreflexive practice. Therefore, we challenge Holgersson’s findings, and propose that this was not unreflexive for the manufacturing companies in the Umeå Region. However, Holgersson had investigated board positions, not middle management and recruitment practices might differ between these two management levels. The difference in our findings of homosociality could therefore be a result of this, which we are mindful of.

Based on our results, we learned that stereotypes were more difficult to identify than we had expected. The risk of stereotypes was, according to the scientific literature, connected with the perspective that we referred to as women and men are equal. In our study, the organization that had a consistent perception that women and men were equal, had also been successful in challenging male norms and formulations. This was believed to have limited the risk of stereotypes that this perspective otherwise would have posed.

The perspective women and men have different ambitions could to some extent be classified as a stereotype, since the underlying perception was that women were incompetent. Whether women's incompetency was a stereotype or true in reality could not be assessed in our study, as we could not determine whether women had the right competencies for management within the manufacturing industry or not.

We learned that all manufacturing companies experienced some difficulties of finding female candidates. This was derived to young girls educational choices and their lack of interest for the technical industry, which had caused the companies to carry out various collaborations with schools. Education was a societal factor that was not investigated in our study. This could have influenced the low amount of female candidates, which in turn could have caused few female middle managers in the manufacturing industry.
However, our perception was that some companies used this as an excuse. That there was no point of making efforts to increase female middle managers, and that goals were removed as the situation was considered to be a “dead end” that would not change. In other cases, based on what the participants described, companies had continued their work and succeeded in increasing the amount of female middle managers, despite this big societal problem that was identified. We considered that finding new ways of integrating more women in the organization could be the recipe for success, while relying on society to fix the problem will not lead to any changes.

In summary, the results and analysis from all companies allowed us to see that management perceptions of female middle managers differed among the manufacturing companies in the Umeå Region, and that it had an evident effect on the organizational practices that were carried out.

6. Conclusion

This chapter describes the conclusions that we have been able to draw from our study. It will further motivate and answer our two research questions and argue for the fulfillment of our purpose.

The main conclusions that could be drawn from our study were the following:

Table 6. Main conclusions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. In the manufacturing companies where management perceived female middle managers as competent, these perceptions had influenced organizational practices to facilitate women's opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In the manufacturing companies where management perceived female middle managers to lack competencies, these perceptions had influenced organizational practices to hinder women's opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. All manufacturing companies had the same or similar organizational practices in place. However, the extent and accentuation of those varied with management perceptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Management engagement in the question of women in management had an impact on how organizational practices were carried out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These will be further motivated throughout this chapter.

Our study intended to answer the research questions How do management of several manufacturing companies in the Umeå region perceive female middle managers? and Do these perceptions affect the organizational practices? If so, how? We were able to answer our research questions through the findings gathered from the manufacturing companies that participated in our study. Most participants were surprisingly straightforward. We got the impression that our participants were honest and genuinely
concerned about this subject, therefore we could conclude that their responses were realistic representations of management perceptions and organizational practices that were present within the companies.

Our initial intention was to enhance our understanding of why the representation of female managers in the Umeå Region was low. A theory by Billing and Alvesson from 1989 was used to facilitate our understanding for management perceptions of female managers. We found it both surprising and interesting that the theory turned out to be classic, in the sense that all perceptions could be found among the manufacturing companies in the region, despite the age of the original theory. Prior to our data collection, our underlying preconception was that we would be able to identify one perspective of perceptions that was shared by a majority of the companies. Quite contrary, the perceptions were unique to all manufacturing companies, with the only common denominators being the importance of competency and the economic benefits that could be gained from having more female middle managers.

To answer our first research questions, the general management perception towards female middle managers was positive, as all participants highlighted that there were benefits to gain from including females on middle management positions. However, several arguments that were made by the companies were somewhat contradictory, as their practices in reality failed to facilitate women’s opportunities. The extent to which female middle managers were perceived as having the necessary technical competency differed, and it turned out to be the management perception that in general influenced the overall attitude towards female middle managers in the company. We also found that the manufacturing companies perceptions was affected by their owners’ country of origin.

To answer our second research question, management perceptions of female middle managers did affect the organizational practices. We found that management perceptions both had positive and negative effects on companies’ practices. We concluded that all companies had the same or similar organizational practices in place. However, the extent and the accentuation of those turned out to vary across the companies.

Manufacturing companies that perceived women as competent for middle management positions, either with equal capabilities or unique capabilities, had more thorough practices in place. These practices were constructed in a manner that facilitated females’ advancement and were permeated by gender equality. These companies had also worked to counteract male norms and tendencies such as homosociality to a larger extent. Manufacturing companies, who perceived that women had different interest, causing them to lack necessary knowledge for middle management positions within the industry, had almost the same practices in place but these were influenced differently. This perception had a negative effect, as it did not facilitate any genuine interest or activity to change the current situation.

It was evident to us that management perceptions had a distinctive influence on the organizational practices, since those who prioritized the question had the largest representation of female middle managers. In contrast, those who had failed to emphasize this question or thought the problem was caused by external, social factors had a low representation of female managers. We could also conclude that
homosociality was a tendency that all companies had identified and tried to counteract through standardized processes, despite previous research proposition that was an unreflexive practice. We determined that succession planning was not largely reflected upon in the companies, and that stereotypes were not as easily identified as we initially thought.

We were able to answer both of our research questions, and came to four main conclusions about the region of Umeå and the manufacturing companies that we explored. It was nevertheless not possible for us to claim that these conclusions were representative of management perceptions in other regions or industries. However, by visiting six companies within the Umeå Region and by interviewing participants that possessed a representative view of the company’s perceptions, we concluded that we have explored how management, in general, perceived female managers, in general. And as the participants had adequate knowledge of the various practices that were carried out, we could also conclude that we have explored how these management perceptions have influenced their organizational practices. We could therefore conclude that we have fulfilled our purpose, namely to explore how management, in general, perceive female managers, and how these perceptions might influence organizational practices.

This chapter have presented our conclusions, answered our research questions and argued for the fulfillment of our purpose.

7. Further implications

This chapter presents our motivation for the studies societal, managerial implications and the recommendations that we propose for future research. This chapter will be finalized by assessing the quality of the gathered data.

7.1 Societal implications
The nature of our subject was considered to be sensitive, as we did not want companies to feel accused of having discriminatory practices or of not prioritizing the recruitment of female middle managers. Therefore, our topic had several ethical and social aspects that were considered. The ethical considerations of our study have mainly emphasized the integrity and confidentiality of our participants, and these elaborations were found in chapter 4.

However, our subject did not merely affect the companies immediately concerned with the study, but our entire society. Our findings showed that all companies indicated that the low amount of women in the manufacturing industry is a societal issue. Some participants highlighted that girls are not encouraged to express a technical interest in the same ways as boys are, nor are they motivated to choose educational programs in engineering and technology.

Even though the purpose of our study was not to present any solutions to this issue, we could argue that if society desire to become more gender equal among industries, departments and hierarchy levels, changes must be made. We believe that all children needs to be encouraged within different subjects, regardless of its masculine or feminine classification. In order to secure the future workforce, everyone needs to take
responsibility in challenging “old” gender classifications. Needless to say, this is not solely an issue for manufacturing companies, but for all industries.

On an organizational level, one of our participants that was interviewed raised a discussion after the tape recorder was turned off, that maybe companies current efforts are not good enough. The participant argued that despite all their efforts, the change in practice has been so incredibly slow. It was proposed that perhaps quotas were the only way to get more women in the network at an initial stage. That would increase the likelihood of a woman becoming employed for management positions, as the woman is not given the opportunity today. We do not take a personal stance in the question of quotas, however we agree that more extensive efforts need to be made in order to change the current situation. Therefore, we believe that it is necessary, for companies, schools and society, to take active action and not rely on the evolution of time to change the situation.

7.2 Managerial implications
For management of the manufacturing companies that participated in our study, we hoped that the interview itself would lead to a reflection of how perceptions might have influenced their practices. Our intention was to raise awareness of the importance to actively work with the issue of few female managers within the industry. All the companies were provided with a copy of our thesis, and we hope that companies who intend to continuously improve their practices, would consider our thesis as an indicator of important factors and notions to take into account.

In our study, we have illustrated how management perceptions, in general, of female middle managers can influence organizational practices in both positive and negative ways. For management of other companies in other industries, we hope that our findings will be able to trigger a line of thought, if activities to increase the amount of female managers have failed in achieving the results that companies had hoped for. In addition, our study exemplifies the important role that HR has, in combination with management in general, in enforcing gender equality in companies.

In a larger perspective, we have contributed with additional knowledge to the field of women in management by investigating certain HR practices, which we hope that managers at all levels can find insightful.

7.3 Future research
We found through our analysis that several of the companies highlighted that a non-Swedish ownership had influenced the extent and value of attracting more women to middle management positions. Since this was a factor that we did not foresee, it was not possible for us to further investigate it. We therefore suggest that future research could investigate how national culture could have an impact on management perceptions of female managers, and in turn organizational practices.

In order to collect more reliable and generalizable results, we propose that researchers could compare the region of Umeå to other regions in Sweden, to analyze if any bigger patterns of perceptions can be detected. Alternatively, explore if management perceptions of female middle managers could be different among other industries, thereby evaluate whether any perceptions could be generalized to a sector.
For the purpose of our study, we only investigated a linear influence of management perceptions on organizational practices. Future researchers could investigate if organizational practices in turn could enforce these management perceptions to a greater extent, and if this could constitute a circular relationship, as illustrated in Figure 3.3.

7.4 Assessment of truth criteria
The quality of our data was assessed based on Miles and Huberman’s general criteria (1994, p.277-280), as mentioned in section 2.10. The assessment accounted for the different issues related to our semi-structured interview and the data that was gathered.

The first criteria credibility was accounted for by providing all of our participants with a copy of their transcripted interview and we encouraged them to give us feedback if they felt that any information was misplaced or that a clarification was needed. Further, all participants expressed a genuine interest in the subject and requested a copy of the thesis in its final form. In addition, our findings were translated to English after having conducted the interviews in Swedish. The translations posed a risk of losing the initial context or meaning of the participants’ responses. However, by giving participants access to our transcripts and the final results could these risks be reduced and the credibility of our gathered data strengthened. We were also aware of this throughout our data analysis and tried our utmost to ensure accuracy of all translations that had been made.

The criteria of transferability was not applicable, since we did not intend to generalize our findings of how management in the manufacturing companies perceived female middle managers and how it had influenced their organizational practices. Our findings were not representative of the entire Umeå Region, as only six companies were explored. Therefore, we did not consider our findings to be original in the sense that it could be applied to other contexts, and the second criteria could hence not be fulfilled.

The third criteria dependability was not considered applicable, since an attempt to have dependable results was considered to have hindered the flexibility of our study and data collection. It would not have been possible to find any peers who had the time and appropriate knowledge to perform an audit of our study. The only reassurance of a correct research process has been through our weekly meetings with our supervisor Kiflemariam Hamde and by occasional crosschecking with the thesis manual from Umeå University. Due to the lack of auditing, this criterion was not fulfilled.

The criteria confirmability was considered throughout the process and we did our utmost to remain objective in our exploration of management perceptions by not taking any personal stances of what could be considered morally right or wrong. All participants were also informed that our study did not intended to judge their answers. However, during some of the interviews the participant tended to wander off topic, in which we repeated the question or asked a follow-up questions in order to lead the interview back to the subject. This could have caused an interview bias since we interrupted the interviewees’ line of thoughts and possible angled the follow-up question (Saunders et al., 2012, p.381). To reduce the bias we did our utmost to cautiously pose our questions in a neutral manner and remain free from our personal beliefs. We believed that the fourth criteria could be fulfilled to an acceptable extent.
Our final criteria *utilization* was evaluated. Since our study intended to explore a subject and not create any specific solutions, this criterion could not fully be fulfilled. However, all participants evaluated the company’s perceptions of female middle managers during the interviews, and were also provided with a copy of our finalized results. Therefore, we argued that our research to some extent raised additional awareness to the subject of women in management. Along with the managerial implications that we argued for in section 7.2, this criteria could somewhat be fulfilled.

The quality of our data could therefore be considered to fulfill two criteria, and to some extent a third. We considered our data to be credible and as far as we could control, free from biases.

*This chapter presented further implications of our findings, and evaluated the findings of our study based on our selected truth criteria.*
References


Appendix

Appendix 1

Hej XXXXX

Nedan är de intervjufrågor som vi kommer att diskutera och ställa på vårt möte TID/DATUM

Intervjun kommer att kodas och all information som vi samlar in kommer att behandlas konfidentiellt. Syftet med studien är att utforska organisationers uppfattning av kvinnliga mellanchefer och hur detta i sin tur kan påverka processer samt företagspolicy i tillverkningsindustrier runt om Umeå.

Nivå: Kandidatuppsats inom Management, Ekonomi vid Umeå Universitet.

Vi har valt att definiera mellanchefer som någon som är ansvarig för minst en underställd personalnivå samt rapporterar och förmedlar information till högre uppsatta positioner.

Stort tack för att du tar dig tid att hjälpa oss med vår studie och vi ser fram emot vårt möte hos er!

Med vänlig hälsning,

Caroline Jonsson 070 XXX XX XX
Matilda Brändström 076 XXX XX XX

TILLVERKNINGSFÖRETAG, FRÅGOR

1. Hur många män respektive kvinnor arbetar som mellanchefer i er organisation? Hur resonerar ni inom organisationen kring denna fördelning?
   (What is the amount of females and males on middle manager positions? What is the perceived reason for this number within the organisation?)

2. Vilka jämställdhetspolicies har ni inom företaget gällande mellanchefer? Hur skulle ni beskriva företagets engagemang och acceptans kring era jämställdhetspolicies?
   (What policies do you have in place regarding gender equality? How would you describe the organizations commitment and acceptance in relation to this policy?)

3. På vilket sätt och i vilken omfattning har er organisation arbetat med jämställdhetsfrågor?
   (To what extent have your organization been working with gender equality questions?)

4. Enligt er organisation, vad är värdet av att arbeta med jämställdhetsfrågor?
(According to your organization, what is the importance or value of working with gender equality questions?)

5. Ett vanligt förekommande resonemang är att chefer kan ha olika roller och egenskaper, baserat på manliga och kvinnliga karaktärsdrag. Hur resonerar ni kring skillnader och likheter mellan manliga och kvinnliga mellanchefer i er organisation?
(A common way of reasoning, is that managers differ in their roles and characteristics based on masculine and feminine qualities. How have you reflected upon differences and similarities between male and female middle managers in your organization?)

6. En vanlig förekommande preferens bland individer är att arbeta tillsammans med eller rekrytera personer som besitter liknande egenskaper eller intressen som en själv. År detta något som ni har reflekterat över i er organisation, i samband med rekrytering, successionsplanering, arbetsgrupper?
(A common preference among individuals is to work in teams with or recruit people who possess similar characteristics and interests as themselves. Is this anything that you have been reflecting upon in your organization, in relation to recruitment, succession planning and work teams?)

7. Beskriv era interna och externa HR processer, när det gäller rekrytering, kompetensutveckling och avancemang.
(Describe your internal and external HR practices, in terms of recruitment, competence development and advancement.)

8. I vilken utsträckning anser ni att organisationens uppfattning av kvinnliga mellanchefer har påverkat era processer och policies?
(To what extent do you believe that the organizational perceptions of female middle managers have affected your practices and policies?)

9. Enligt tidigare studier används ofta formuleringar som “effektiv, rationell och resultat inriktad” i rekryteringsannonser för chefstjänster, då dessa värderas som viktiga chefssegenskaper. De brukar även klassas som maskulina termer. Har ni reflekterat över hur detta eventuellt kan påverka era processer och HR-aktiviteter?
(According to previous research, wordings such as “effective, rational and profit and loss focused” are often used in recruitment ads for managerial positions, as they are considered to be important management qualities. They are also often classified as masculine terms. Have you reflected upon how this may have an impact on your processes and HR activities?)

10. Hur skulle er organisation bättre kunna förbereda kvinnor att avancera till en mellanchefsnivå? Hur skulle er organisation kunna förbättra möjligheterna för kvinnliga mellanchefer att avancera ytterligare?
(How can your organization better prepare women for advancement to a middle manager level? How can your organization improve the opportunities for female middle manager advancement?)

11. Hur tänker ni långsiktigt med dessa frågor i er organisation?
What do you think about these questions in the long term perspective?

12. Finns det någon mer information ni vill tillägga?
   (Is there any other information you would like to add?)

EXTERNT FÖRETAG, FRÅGOR

1. Vilken typ av service erbjuder ni företag i Umeåregionen?
   (What service do you provide for companies in the Umeå Region?)

2. Enligt ert företag, vad är värdet av att arbeta med jämställdhetsfrågor?
   (According to your agency, what is the importance or value of working with gender equality questions?)

3. Hur skulle ni beskriva utvecklingen av jämställdhetsarbeten hos företag i Umeåregionen?
   (How would you describe the evolution of gender equality work among companies in the Umeå region?)

4. Beskriv det jämställdhetsarbete som pågår inom tillverkningsindustrin, gällande kvinnliga chefer.
   (Describe the gender equality work within the manufacturing industry in particular, in terms of female managers.)

   a. Vad upplever ni att den generella uppfattningen är av kvinnliga chefer i Umeå regionen?
      (According to your company, what is the general perception of female managers in the Umeå region?)
   b. Vilka huvudsakliga utmaningar upplever ni att denna industri ställs inför?
      (What main challenges do you perceive that this industry is facing?)

5. Enligt tidigare studier används ofta formuleringar som “effektiv, rationell och resultat inriktad” i rekryteringsannonser för chefstjänster, då dessa värderas som viktiga chefsegenskaper. De brukar även klassas som maskulina termer. I vilken utsträckning har ni observerat och diskuterat detta med företagen i Umeåregionen?
   (According to previous research, wordings such as “effective, rational and profit and loss focused” are often used in recruitment ads for managerial positions, as they are considered to be important management qualities. They are also often classified as masculine terms. When consulted, how are the potential differences between male and female managers discussed with the company?)

6. En vanligt förekommande preferens bland individer är att arbeta tillsammans med eller rekrytera personer som besitter liknande egenskaper eller intressen som en själv. I vilken utsträckning har ni observerat och diskuterat detta med företagen i Umeåregionen?
A common preference among individuals is to work in teams with or recruit people who possess similar characteristics and interests as themselves. To what extent has this been observed and discussed with the companies in the Umeå region?

7. Hur tänker ni långsiktigt med dessa frågor i er organisation? (What do you think about these questions in the long term perspective?)

8. Finns det någon mer information ni vill tillägga? (Is there any other information you would like to add?)

Appendix 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Man</th>
<th>Kvinna</th>
<th>Okänt kön</th>
<th>% Kvinnor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PBE27100 Personalechef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE23100 Ekonomichef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE28100 Inköpschef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE26100 Inköpschef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE13200 Plats-, filialchef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE42100 Marknadschef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE44200 Informations-, PR-chef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE42300 Produktchef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE41100 Förslöjningschef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE55400 Miljöchef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE41400 Produktionschef</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE31110 Datachef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE21100 Administrativ chef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE31210 IT-chef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE13100 Distrikts-, regionchef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE62100 Servicchef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE81100 Lagerchef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE55300 Kvalitetschef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE55100 Teknisk chef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE45400 Logistikchef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE53100 Konstruktionschef</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE41400 Reklamchef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE28100 Utbildningschef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE26200 Importchef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE26200 Importchef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE23300 Finanschef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE21350 Kontorschef</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE65200 Transportchef</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE54300 Verkstadschef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE41300 Exportchef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE31130 Datadirektchef</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE27400 HR-ansvarig</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE23600 Redovisningschef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE21830 Teleansvarig</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE23810 Kvalitetsansvarig/-samordnare</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE21400 Planeringschef</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE13300 Avdelningschef</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE13201 Verksamhetschef/-ansvarig</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBE13110 Områdeschef</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 14%