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NUANCING RECRUITERS' WORK WITH DIVERSITY: A PARADOX PERSPECTIVE

PhD dissertation

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Part one – An introduction to the dissertation

Acknowledgements

Someone once taught me there is something poetic in what is problematic. You only have to remove five letters. P R O B L E M A T I C. Sometimes, what is challenging is what brings the most happiness, because it requires more to achieve it. Once achieved, it creates happiness beyond anything else. The same applies to doing a PhD. It is problematic when struggling to pass a PhD course that is far beyond your own expertise, but poetic once you get the hang of it and pass. It is problematic when standing at conferences and receiving critical comments on some of your proudest work, but poetic once you talk with someone in the hallway who praises you for doing something differently. And it is problematic when spending over two years trying to publish that paper you thought would be impossible, but poetic once you receive that golden email that gets you over the finish line for publication.

Doing a PhD is a constant balance between the problematic and the poetic. They cannot be separated, because to experience the poetic, a PhD student must travel through the problematic. Though, the journey cannot be done alone, and the poetic is only truly wonderful once you enjoy it with someone else. During my PhD journey, I was accompanied by great colleagues who over time grew into friends and to whom I owe great acknowledgements. To the *People and Communication Management research group* and the *Human Resource Management research group* at Aarhus University who both provided me with an outlet to develop myself professionally and personally. To the *Human Resource Management and Employment Relations Group* at Innsbruck University in Austria, who not only invited me into their professional community, but who also provided me with a home away from home. Thank you to all of you for your invaluable collaboration, inspiration, and honesty throughout this journey.

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But obstacles and joys are not only shared with colleagues. I also owe great thanks to my friends and family for cheering on me from the side and listening to my endless monologues about my research ideas. But most importantly I owe thanks to my wonderful partner, John, who stood by my side from the very beginning. After time apart, we surprisingly met again at the parking lot during my first day of conducting fieldwork at my case organization. While I was just starting my project, you had just started a new job there. Now reflecting, I am certain that someone or something deemed your presence important for my journey. You have become my sanctuary with no expectations other than for me to be myself throughout this. You have provided me with comfort when I needed it the most. I could not have traveled through the problematic without you and the poetic would not have been as wonderful if you were not there to celebrate with me. Thank you, my love. And finally, my furry colleague. My cat, Aslan. I am certain that you have been attending more virtual meetings than any other cat. You have sat by my side to inspect my work and to support me and just as I am writing this final chapter, you are walking over the keyboard to give your final touches to the dissertation. Mommy loves you, Bibi! Snacks will be gifted.

I hope each one of you knows how important you have been to me during this journey and how your support has helped me to work through the problematic and enjoy the poetic. Your support has made a profound difference for me and for that, I cannot thank you enough.

With my sincerest gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maria Dahl Andersen". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "With my sincerest gratitude,".

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Summary

Researchers have begun to turn their attention to the tensions and paradoxes inherent in organizations' work with diversity. Recruiters, as essential gatekeepers in organizations' increased quest for diversifying the workplace, are also encountering tensions and paradoxes in their work with diversity. This requires organizations to find ways of educating their recruiters about strategies for navigating these tensions and paradoxes. Yet, when turning to the field of diversity recruitment within Human Resource Management (HRM), a striking contradiction appears, with some previous studies portraying recruiters as entities fostering diversity and others hindering diversity. This dissertation questions this portrayal by asking why recruiters, essential gatekeepers for diversity, would work to hinder diversity. Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of research seeking to address this contradiction for recruiters and existing studies fail to reveal *how* tensions and paradoxes come into being and *how* they are navigated. This means that we still do not fully understand what could hinder recruiters in fostering diversity and how recruiters and their employers can navigate it. Failure to recognize this, risks creating a fragmented picture of some of the essential gatekeepers, i.e., recruiters, in diversifying the workplace. Moreover, it challenges the ability for organizations in educating recruiters how to navigate tensions and paradoxes when working with diversity.

Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand the tensions and paradoxes inherent in working with diversity, which is used to reveal some of the tensions and paradoxes in recruiters' work with diversity and how recruiters navigate these. Altogether, this is used to nuance existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity. To fulfill this purpose, the dissertation raises the following overall research question: *How can we understand the tensions and paradoxes inherent in working with diversity and how can we use this knowledge to nuance existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity and their strategies for navigating tensions and paradoxes related hereto?* This knowledge is important because only through understanding the tensions and paradoxes inherent in working with diversity can we come to a more nuanced understanding of what might challenge recruiters in fostering diverse workplaces. This will help organizations in educating recruiters about strategies for navigating tensions and paradoxes in the future.

To contribute with this knowledge, the dissertation approaches the topic from a different methodological and theoretical angle compared to previous research. This is done through a

relational ontology, a qualitative ethnographic methodology, and a theoretical framework grounded in a constitutive approach to paradox theory. A constitutive approach is valuable, as it offers an in-depth account of the various human and non-human agents that can become part of the formation and response to tensions and paradoxes in recruiters' work with diversity. Additionally, it focuses on how recruiters find ways of moving forward in paradoxical situations.

The dissertation is based on qualitative ethnographic methods applied in a single case study design with fieldwork being conducted intermittently for 17 months between 2021-2023 in a Northern European organization referred to as PIM. PIM epitomizes and typifies a broader category of organizations who are placing diversity on the agenda and facing the tensions and paradoxes of doing so. This makes PIM an exemplary case for revealing some of the tensions and paradoxes recruiters encounter in their work with diversity and their strategies for navigating these. Based on the extensive fieldwork, the dissertation presents four papers that contribute to answering the overall research question by studying various topics related to recruiters' work with diversity through a constitutive paradox perspective.

Paper I broadens our understanding of paradoxes in managing diversity through the utilization of a paradox lens that allows for challenges to be brought to the forefront instead of hidden away as a means of utilizing these for development. *Paper II* reveals how tensions related to recruiters' role and their relationships with hiring managers can challenge recruiters' work with diversity. Yet, recruiters find ways of moving forward in these tensional situations through adaptive strategies. *Paper III* nuances recruiters' use of their intuition as paradoxical, bringing both possibilities and challenges, which recruiters navigate through dialogic interactions with and relational support from their colleagues. *Paper IV* illuminates how recruiters' experiences of an HRM function's implementation of a diversity and inclusion strategy become a barrier to recruiters' aspirations of developing their identities as partners and diversity promoters. This leaves recruiters feeling entrapped and unable to move forward in such a tense situation.

Collectively, these four papers advance the field of diversity recruitment within HRM by utilizing a constitutive approach to paradox theory that contributes with a paradox perspective on diversity and a micro-level paradox perspective nuancing existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity. This knowledge provides us with a more nuanced understanding of how these tensions and paradoxes can challenge recruiters in working with diversity as well as demonstrating to organizations how to educate recruiters about strategies for navigating these in the future.

Dansk resumé

Forskere er begyndt at vende deres opmærksomhed mod de spændinger og paradokser, som eksisterer i organisationers arbejde med diversitet. Eftersom rekruttere er essentielle gatekeepere i organisationers øgede arbejde med diversitet, vil ikke mindst denne gruppe af medarbejdere møde spændinger og paradokser i deres arbejde med diversitet. Derfor må organisationer finde måder, hvorpå de kan uddanne deres rekruttere om strategier, der kan bruges i mødet med spændinger og paradokser. Vender man blikket mod den eksisterende forskning i diversitetsrekruttering indenfor Human Resource Management (HRM), vil man dog støde på en påfaldende modsigelse, hvor dele af den tidligere forskning portrætterer rekruttere, som nogle der bidrager til diversitet og nogle, der hindrer diversitet. Denne afhandling stiller spørgsmålstejn til, hvorfor rekruttere overhovedet vil være interesserede i at hindre diversitet, eftersom de er essentielle gatekeepere i organisationers strategiske arbejde med diversitet. Desværre er mængden af forskning, der beskæftiger sig med denne modsigelse begrænset, og de få studier der gør, lykkes ikke med at vise, *hvordan* paradokser opstår, og *hvordan* de navigeres. Det betyder, at vi stadig ikke forstår til fulde, hvad der skulle hindre rekruttere i at bidrage til diversitet, samt hvordan rekruttere og deres arbejdsgivere kan navigere i dette. Den manglende evne til at anerkende denne modsigelse risikerer at skabe et fragmenteret billede af rekrutteres arbejde med at skabe mere diverse arbejdspladser. Samtidig udfordrer det organisationers evne til at uddanne rekruttere i, hvordan spændinger og paradokser kan navigeres i arbejdet med diversitet.

Formålet med denne afhandling er derfor at forstå de spændinger og paradokser, der opstår i arbejdet med diversitet. Denne viden bruges efterfølgende til at afdække nogle af de spændinger og paradokser, som eksisterer i rekrutteres arbejde med diversitet, samt hvordan de navigerer disse. Tilsammen vil denne viden blive brugt til at nuancere eksisterende forståelser af rekrutteres arbejde med diversitet. For at opfylde dette formål, rejser afhandlingen følgende overordnede forskningsspørgsmål: *Hvordan kan vi forstå de spændinger og paradokser, der eksisterer i arbejdet med diversitet? Hvordan kan vi bruge denne viden til at nuancere eksisterende forståelser af rekrutteres arbejde med diversitet og deres strategier for at navigere i spændinger og paradokser relateret til dette arbejde?* Denne viden er vigtig, for kun gennem at forstå de spændinger og paradokser der eksisterer i arbejdet med diversitet, kan vi komme til en større forståelse af de udfordringer, rekruttere potentielt står overfor i deres arbejde med at skabe diverse

arbejdspladser. Dette vil hjælpe organisationer med at uddanne deres rekruttere i strategier, der kan anvendes i mødet med spændinger og paradokser i fremtiden.

For at kunne bidrage med denne viden, vil afhandlingen tilgå emnet anderledes rent metodisk og teoretisk, end hvad tidligere forskning har gjort. Dette gøres gennem en relational ontologi, en kvalitativ etnografisk metodologi og en teoretisk ramme der er funderet i en konstitutiv tilgang til paradoksteori. Den konstitutive tilgang er værdifuld, da den gør det muligt at bidrage med en dybdegående fortælling om de forskellige menneskelige og ikke-menneskelige aktører, der bliver en del af – og svar på – de spændinger og paradokser, der opstår i rekrutteres arbejde med diversitet. Derudover fokuserer denne tilgang også på, hvordan rekruttere formår at arbejde sig igennem paradoksale situationer.

Afhandlingen er baseret på et 17 måneder langt kvalitativt etnografisk feltstudie i perioden fra 2021-2023 i en nordeuropæisk organisation, der kaldes for PIM. PIM er et eksempel på så mange andre virksomheder, der sætter diversitet på agendaen, men som også møder de spændinger og paradokser, som et sådant arbejde inbefatter. Dette gør PIM til en eksemplarisk caseorganisation, når formålet er at afdække nogle af de spændinger og paradokser, som rekruttere møder i deres arbejde med diversitet samt deres strategier til at navigere disse. Med udgangspunkt i dette omfattende feltstudie, præsenterer afhandlingen fire forskningsartikler, som hver især bidrager til besvarelsen af det overordnede forskningsspørgsmål. Gennem et konstitutivt paradoks perspektiv, sætter forskningsartiklerne fokus på forskellige emner og problemstillinger, der alle er relateret til rekrutteres arbejde med diversitet.

Forskningsartikel I udvider vores forståelse af paradokser i arbejdet med diversitet. Ved at anvende et paradoksperspektiv viser artiklen, at udfordringerne i forbindelse med arbejdet med diversitet med fordel kan blive bragt frem i lyset i stedet for at blive gemt væk med det formål at udnytte paradokser til videre udvikling. *Forskningsartikel II* afslører, hvordan spændinger relateret til rekrutteres rolle og deres relation til ansættende ledere kan udfordre rekrutteres arbejde med diversitet. Rekruttere finder dog måder at arbejde sig igennem disse spændingsfyldte situationer ved at være adaptiv. *Forskningsartikel III* nuancerer forståelsen af rekrutteres brug af deres egen intuition som værende paradoksal, idet intuition både giver muligheder og udfordringer for rekruttere, som de navigerer gennem dialogiske interaktioner med deres kolleger samt relationel support fra disse. *Forskningsartikel IV* belyser hvordan rekrutteres oplevelser af en HR funktions implementering af en diversitets- og inklusionstrategi bliver barrierer for rekrutteres aspirationer

om at udvikle deres identiteter som partnere og diversitetspromotører. Dette efterlader rekruttere med en følelse af at være fanget og ikke kunne se sig ud af den spændingsfyldte situation.

Tilsammen bidrager disse fire forskningsartikler til at bringe det eksisterende forskningsfelt i diversitetsrekruttering indenfor HRM væsentlig fremad. Det gør de ved på den ene side at anvende en konstitutiv tilgang til paradoksteori, som bidrager med et paradoksperspektiv på diversitet og på den anden side at anlægge et mikrofunderet paradoksperspektiv, der nuancerer vores eksisterende forståelser af rekrutteres arbejde med diversitet. Denne viden giver os en mere nuanceret forståelse af, hvordan disse spændinger og paradokser kan udfordre rekrutteres arbejde med diversitet. Samtidig muliggør denne ny erhvervede viden, at organisationer kan uddanne rekruttere om strategier, der er anvendelige, når de skal navigere i disse spændinger og paradokser i fremtiden.

Part two – The frame of the dissertation

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter argues for the motivation and aim guiding this dissertation. On this basis, it presents the overall research question, followed by an explanation of the four sub-questions in the individual papers that set out to address the overall research question. The chapter ends with a table displaying the structure of the dissertation to show its structural coherence.

Motivation and aim

Organizations increasingly focus on diversifying their workplace when it comes to the representation of, for example, different races, religions, ethnicities, genders, personalities, sexual orientations, abilities etc. (Roberson, 2006). Here, “recruitment is considered a key HRM [Human Resource Management] lever when attempting to build a diverse workforce” (Evans, 2012, p. 749). The responsibility of advising and/or deciding what kind of diversity to invite into the organization, therefore makes recruiters essential gatekeepers in organizations’ quest for diversifying their workplace. However, working with diversity is not without challenges, with many researchers beginning to turn their attention to the inherent tensions and paradoxes (e.g., Daubner-Siva, Vinkenburg, and Jansen, 2017; Francis and Michielsens, 2021; Nadiv and Kuna, 2020; Jaeck, Marais, Joly, and Preuss, 2023; Brøgger and Andersen, 2023), concepts which are used interchangeably throughout the dissertation.

Researchers have previously contributed with knowledge on recruitment practices aimed at fostering diversity through, for example, the establishment of discrimination policies (Shen, Chanda D’Netto, and Monga, 2009), use of inclusive language in job advertisements (Hodel, Formanowicz, Sczesny, Valdová, and von Stockhausen, 2017), and being sensitized to prejudices that foster discriminatory behavior (McKay and Avery, 2005). Though, when studying the field of diversity recruitment within HRM literature, some prior research focuses largely on the discriminatory nature of recruiters’ practices, suggesting that recruiters play an important role in the processes leading to workplace inequality due especially to the risk of bias in recruitment processes (e.g., Cohen and Bunker, 1975; Graves and Powell, 1988; Graves and Powell, 1996; Newman and Lyon, 2009; Moore, 2015; Pyburn, Ployhart, and Kravitz, 2008; Ployhart and Holtz, 2008; Uggerslev, Fassina, and Kraichy, 2012; Hofhuis, van der Zee, and Otten, 2016; Brooks, Guidroz, and Chakrabarti, 2009; Goldberg, 2005). This creates a striking contradiction with some previous studies portraying recruiters as entities fostering diversity and others hindering diversity.

With recruiters being essential gatekeepers in inviting diversity into organizations, it is necessary to question why recruiters would have interest in hindering diversity; it is only natural to assume that recruiters should want to foster diversity. However, scarce research has sought to address this contradiction of recruiters being portrayed as entities both fostering and hindering diversity, meaning that we still do not fully understand what should hinder recruiters in fostering diversity. This is problematic, as we risk portraying a fragmented picture of some of the essential gatekeepers in diversifying the workplace.

When turning to the field of diversity recruitment within HRM, some scholars have already argued for the inherent tensions and paradoxes for recruiters working with diversity, prompting calls for further studies enriching our understanding of how recruiters navigate these (Ryan and Derous, 2016). Despite these calls, only a few studies have adopted a paradox perspective to capture this complexity for recruiters (e.g., Jacksch and Klehe, 2016; Rivera, 2011; Evans, 2012) with almost no studies contributing with knowledge on how recruiters navigate this. For example, Rivera (2011) finds a tension between those overseeing diversity recruitment and those making hiring decisions by studying processes of diversity recruitment in elite law firms, investment banks, and management consulting firms. Additionally, Evans (2012) identifies the tension between hiring for competencies and hiring for diversity by showing that despite the rhetoric of soft skills in the diversity initiatives by information organizations, the reality demonstrated that technical skills often associated with masculine traits were valued more highly than soft skills often associated with feminine traits.

These studies adopt more functionalist ontologies, which can help practitioners to create alignment between tensions (Harley, 2015; Janssens and Steyaert, 2009). However, such ontologies are less useful for revealing *how* tensions and paradoxes come into being and *how* they are navigated. Therefore, there is a need to approach this topic from a different ontological, methodological, and theoretical angle than that of previous research in order to reveal the tensions and paradoxes recruiters encounter in their work with diversity and their strategies for navigating these. Utilizing a paradox perspective is valuable, as it attends to the potential in foregrounding – rather than abandoning – paradoxes and addressing the contradictions simultaneously as sources for development (Putnam, Fairhurst, and Banghart, 2016).

Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand the tensions and paradoxes inherent in working with diversity, which is used to reveal some of the tensions and paradoxes in

recruiters' work with diversity and how recruiters navigate these. Altogether, this is used to nuance existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity. The importance of this knowledge lies in the fact that only through understanding the tensions and paradoxes inherent in working with diversity, can we come to a more nuanced understanding of what might challenge recruiters in fostering diverse workplaces. This will impact organizations with insights into the challenges to recruiters' work with diversity thus being able to educate recruiters about strategies for navigating these challenges in the future. To fulfill this purpose, the dissertation raises the following overall research question:

How can we understand the tensions and paradoxes inherent in working with diversity and how can we use this knowledge to nuance existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity and their strategies for navigating tensions and paradoxes related hereto?

The dissertation aims to contribute with a paradox perspective on diversity management, which is used as departure for providing a micro-level paradox perspective that nuances existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity and how they navigate the tensions and paradoxes related hereto. To do so, a constitutive approach to paradoxes (Putnam et. al., 2016; Fairhurst and Putnam, 2023) is utilized. This approach deviates from earlier approaches to paradox theory (e.g., Lewis, 2000) as it attends to the focus on sociomateriality in the becoming of tensions and paradoxes (Fairhurst and Putnam, 2023). This approach is highly relevant for the purpose of this dissertation, as it allows a focus on the various human and non-human agents, e.g., experiences, structures etc., that can become part of the formation of and responses to tensions and paradoxes in recruiters' work with diversity. Moreover, as recruiters continually find themselves working in tensional situations due to the focus on efficiency and human value (Aust, Brandl, and Keegan, 2015), it can be assumed that they have found (or try to find) ways of navigating these. Here, the constitutive approach proves valuable in focusing on how practitioners find ways of moving forward in paradoxical situations (Fairhurst and Putnam, 2023).

The dissertation is based on qualitative ethnographic methods applied in a single case study design with fieldwork being conducted intermittently for 17 months between 2021-2023. Ethnographic methods are invaluable in answering the dissertation's overall research question, as these methods enable the study of people "in their naturally occurring settings as means of grasping the complexity, intricacy, and mundanity (commonplace activities) of organizational life" (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, and Kamsteeg, 2009 in Cunliffe, 2010, p. 229). As such, ethnographic

methods render the contribution of a micro-level paradox perspective possible by attending to recruiters' daily work with diversity while revealing the various tensions and paradoxes they encounter in relation to this.

The dissertation aims to advance the field of diversity recruitment within HRM theoretically and methodologically. It does by utilizing a constitutive approach to paradox theory that contributes with a paradox perspective on diversity and a micro-level paradox perspective nuancing existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity enabled through ethnographic methods. These contributions resonate with the call made by Aust, Brandl, Keegan, and Lensges (2017), who argue that “despite the apparent importance of tensions to understanding HRM systems, in-depth study of how actors cope with and respond to tensions lags compared to other areas of management theory” (p. 414), and “nor do they [the dominant perspectives in HRM research on tensions] focus on practical, concrete ways of coping with dynamically evolving paradoxical tensions” (p. 418). The micro-level perspective opens a window into recruiters' activities and social interactions which reveal the tensions and paradoxes impacting their work with diversity. This nuances the portrayal of recruiters as entities both fostering and hindering diversity by revealing some of the challenges to recruiters' work with diversity and how – or if – they navigate these. With this, the dissertation responds to the call by Aust et al. (2017) as well as other scholars advocating for a focus on paradoxes within HRM (e.g., Keegan, Bitterling, Sylva, and Hoeksema, 2018) with an in-depth study of how recruiters cope with and respond to tensions and paradoxes in a practical and concrete way.

The dissertation is comprised of four individual papers addressing different sub-questions which collectively set out to address the overall research question. The dissertation will now present each of the four sub-questions related to their respective papers and argue for how each paper supports the purpose of the dissertation.

Overview of research papers

Paper I

There is an increasing focus within the field of diversity management (DM) on the paradoxes associated with managing diversity (e.g., Daubner-Siva, Vinkenburg, and Jansen, 2017; Francis and Michielsens, 2021; Nadiv and Kuna, 2020; Jaeck et al., 2023). As early as 2009, this brought researchers to call for a new theoretical approach that deals with the seemingly opposing rationales of what is identified as the *business case rationale* and *social justice rationale* in DM (Syed and Kramar, 2009 in van Dijk et al., 2012, p. 74). To understand recruiters' work with diversity and how they navigate the tensions and paradoxes related hereto, it is important for the dissertation to first and foremost dig deeper into the paradoxes associated with managing diversity on a theoretical level. Paper I is therefore motivated to contribute with a reconceptualization of DM from a paradox lens that actively considers the growing number of paradoxes faced in DM. The research question that this paper sets out to answer is therefore: *How can a paradox lens be utilised to bridge existing understandings of diversity management?*

The way this paper utilizes paradox theory (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Putnam et al., 2016) differs from contemporary researchers, in that it applies paradox theory on DM in a meta-theoretical and conceptual manner. The aim is to integrate the paradox lens as a tool toward utilizing both the challenges and possibilities of DM. The paper supports the purpose of the dissertation by contributing to the increased focus on the paradoxes of managing diversity through an approach that allows for challenges to be brought to the forefront instead of hidden away. This brings forth a new understanding of diversity that brings insights into the tensions and paradoxes recruiters face in their work with diversity.

Paper II

This paper moves on to focus on recruiters' work with diversity and the tensions and paradoxes related hereto. As prior research has found recruiters to both foster (e.g., Shen, Chanda D'Netto, and Monga, 2009; Hodel, Formanowicz, Sczesny, Valdrová, and von Stockhausen, 2017; McKay and Avery, 2005) and hinder diversity (e.g., Cohen and Bunker, 1975; Graves and Powell, 1988; Graves and Powell, 1996; Newman and Lyon, 2009; Moore, 2015; Pyburn, Ployhart, and Kravitz, 2008; Ployhart and Holtz, 2008; Uggerslev, Fassina, and Kraichy, 2012; Hofhuis, van der Zee, and Otten, 2016; Brooks, Guidroz, and Chakrabarti, 2009; Goldberg, 2005), this paper nuances this contradiction by studying how recruiters work with hiring managers throughout recruitment

processes to foster diversity. Hiring managers often struggle to hire between ideal and diverse candidates, and this tension undeniably shifts to recruiters as well, who must find ways to navigate this tension to foster diversity. The research question that this paper sets out to answer is therefore: *How do recruiters carry out their role throughout the recruitment process when working with hiring managers to foster diversity and how do they navigate tensions in relation to this?*

The paper utilizes role theory (Biddle, 1986) to understand the expectations related to how recruiters should carry out their role when working with managers to foster diversity. Moreover, it uses paradox theory (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Putnam et al., 2016) to convey how recruiters act when they are confronted with tensions during the recruitment process. The paper reveals two interrelated tensions faced by recruiters when working with managers to foster diversity: (1) the tensional role undertaken by balancing between being administrators and being sparring partners who challenge managers and (2) the tensional situation that arises when managers struggle to hire between ideal and diverse candidates. Recruiters navigate these tensions by being adaptive to the needs of managers to create closer relationships with them. Closer relationships enable recruiters to better challenge managers on issues of diversity. Adapting oneself to the needs of managers to build relationships while navigating tensions associated with too close a relationship is shown to be an imperative competence for recruiters in fostering diversity throughout the recruitment process. The paper supports the purpose of the dissertation by revealing how tensions related to recruiters' role and their relationships with managers can challenge recruiters' work with diversity.

Paper III

The focus of prior research on the discriminatory nature of recruiters' work with diversity suggests that recruiters play a significant role in the processes leading to workplace inequality due to the risk of biases in recruitment processes (e.g., Cohen and Bunker, 1975; Graves and Powell, 1988; Graves and Powell, 1996; Newman and Lyon, 2009; Moore, 2015; Pyburn, Ployhart, and Kravitz, 2008; Ployhart and Holtz, 2008; Uggerslev, Fassina, and Kraichy, 2012; Hofhuis, van der Zee, and Otten, 2016; Brooks, Guidroz, and Chakrabarti, 2009; Goldberg, 2005). Here, recruiters face the ongoing paradox of consistently relying on facts while navigating the subjective nature of their intuition that is ingrained in their work. Much research suggests that intuition is what leaves room for systematic errors and biases; however, as intuition occurs involuntarily in the complex setting characterizing recruitment processes, it is imperative that intuition is acknowledged and managed

effectively (Miles and Sadler-Smith, 2014; Sadler-smith, Akstinaite, and Akinici, 2021). However, little empirical research has been conducted on the use of intuition in recruitment, despite it being a fundamental phenomenon of human nature. The research question that this paper sets out to answer is therefore: *How do recruiters understand their use of intuition in their work and how do they navigate tensions associated with its use?*

Based on a qualitative approach and the utilization of paradox theory (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Putnam et al., 2016) and more specifically, paradox mindsets (Miron-Spektor, Ingram, Keller, Smith, and Lewis, 2018), the paper empirically extends the understanding of intuition in recruitment. By doing so, it goes a step further than previous research by attempting to find ways in which tensions of intuition can be navigated while actively integrating intuition into recruitment. The paper reveals how recruiters use their intuition to make more informed decisions. Though, their use of intuition creates tensions on individual, organizational, and societal levels and they navigate these tensions through internal and external interactive practices. Based on these findings, the paper foregrounds possibilities for integrating intuition into recruitment whilst navigating its tensions. The paper supports the purpose of the dissertation by nuancing recruiters' use of their intuition as paradoxical that brings both possibilities and challenges for recruiters.

Paper IV

Despite the focus on recruiters as entities both fostering and hindering diversity, prior research cements recruiters as critical to the successful adoption and implementation of diversity and inclusion strategies (D&I) because they are custodians of people-centered activities (Shen, Chanda D'Netto, and Monga, 2009). The Human Resource Management (HRM) function is critical for recruiters in this regard, because the HRM function is the one governing the implementation of such strategies, making recruiters rely heavily on it to perform their activities. However, with these strategies being subject to tensions (e.g., Nadiv and Kuna, 2020; Jaeck et al., 2023; Brøgger and Andersen, 2023), the HRM function risks mismanaging the implementation, thereby reducing recruiters' aspirations for engaging with diversity. This paper observes a predominant understanding of the HRM function as rather structural with a static link to HR specialists' identities (Ulrich, 1997). This means that current literature has yet not shed light on the dynamic impact of the HRM function in relation to recruiters' identities where ideals and reality deviate. The research question that this paper sets out to answer is therefore: *How do recruiters experience*

tensions in relation to the Human Resource Management (HRM) function's implementation of a diversity and inclusion strategy and how do these experiences impact their identities?

By applying identity aspiration (Gregori, Hollmann, and Schwarz, 2021) as a theoretical concept, the paper reveals a key tension between the recruiters' identity aspirations triggered by the HRM function's implementation of a D&I strategy concerning their aspirations of becoming partners and diversity promoters and their experiences of not being able to realize such aspirations. Due to this gap, they experienced a state of tension, which they solved by resigning from developing such aspirations. The paper supports the purpose of the dissertation by illuminating how the experiences of an HRM function's implementation of a D&I strategy can become barriers to recruiters' aspirations of developing their identities as partners and diversity promoters.

Together, these papers support the purpose of this dissertation in utilizing a constitutive approach to paradox theory that contributes with a paradox perspective on diversity and a micro-level paradox perspective that nuances existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity and how they navigate the tensions and paradoxes related hereto. Table 1.1 below brings together the four papers by illustrating their central insights concerning research questions, data, theoretical concepts, main findings, contributions, and their status.

Table 1.1. Overview of research papers

	Paper I	Paper II	Paper III	Paper IV
Title	Reconceptualising Diversity Management from a Paradox Lens	Unpacking the adaptive role of recruiters in fostering diversity	Navigating tensions of intuition in recruitment	The HRM function as a double-edged sword for recruiters' identities
RQ	How can a paradox lens be utilised to bridge existing understandings of diversity management?	How do recruiters carry out their role throughout the recruitment process when working with hiring managers to foster diversity and how do they navigate tensions in relation to this?	How do recruiters understand their use of intuition in their work and how do they navigate tensions associated with its use?	How do recruiters experience tensions in relation to the Human Resource Management (HRM) function's implementation of a diversity and inclusion strategy and how do these experiences impact their identities?
Data	Conceptual paper	Observations in meetings along the recruitment process, informal interviews with diversity professionals, informal interactions with recruiters and recruitment managers, semi-structured interviews with recruiters, semi-structured focus group interview with recruiters and recruitment managers.	Observations in meetings along the recruitment process as background data. One semi-structured interview with recruiter in Northern European office, one semi-structured focus group interview with recruiters in US office and one semi-structured focus group interview with recruiters in Northern European office as foundational data.	Observations in meetings along the recruitment process and informal interactions with recruiters and recruitment managers as background data. Five semi-structured interviews with recruiters as foundational data.
Theoretical concepts	Paradox theory; Paradox mindsets	Paradox theory; Role theory	Paradox theory; Paradox mindsets	Identity aspiration; Tensions
Main findings	We argue that the use of a paradox lens on DM allows for challenges to be brought forward instead of ignored or hidden away by illuminating and actively acknowledging both the liberating but also the challenging and oftentimes constraining experiences for the actors involved. Thus, a paradox lens offers space for embracing and utilising paradoxes when working with diversity.	Findings demonstrate two interrelated tensions faced by recruiters: (1) a tensional role balancing between being administrators and being sparring partners who challenge managers and (2) a tensional situation when managers struggle to hire between ideal and diverse candidates. Recruiters navigate these tensions to foster diversity by being adaptive to the needs of managers to create closer relationships with them. Closer relationships enable	Findings demonstrate that intuition is understood as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that supports recruiters in making more informed decisions. However, the use of intuition creates tensions on individual, organizational, and societal levels and recruiters navigate these tensions through internal and external interactive practices. Drawing on paradox theory, the paper contributes to the recruitment literature within HRM by foregrounding possibilities for integrating intuition into recruitment processes	Findings demonstrate the experience of the HRM function as triggering recruiters' aspirations of becoming partners and diversity promoters. The HRM function allows them to test their aspirations because they make experiences, which leads to the loss of aspirations because of their failed attempts to properly practice these identities in a real HRM function. Thereby, the paper contributes to the diversity recruitment literature and the HRM literature with an

		recruiters to better challenge managers on diversity, but too close relationships can create blindness toward diversity. This shows how recruiters' roles are largely constructed through the relationship with managers. Adapting oneself to the needs of managers to build relationships, while navigating tensions associated with too close a relationship, is shown to be an important competence for recruiters in fostering diversity.	whilst navigating its tensions.	understanding of the HRM function as a double-edged sword for recruiters' identities that both enable identity aspirations and abandon them.
Author(s)	Co-authored with Stina Rydell Brøgger Aarhus University	Single authored	Co-authored with Christa Thomsen Aarhus University	Co-authored with Julia Brandl Innsbruck University
Contribution	Broadening the understanding of paradoxes in managing diversity through an approach that allows for challenges to be brought to the forefront instead of hidden away as means of utilizing these for development.	Revealing how tensions related to recruiters' role and their relationships with hiring managers can challenge recruiters' work with diversity.	Nuancing recruiters' use of their intuition as paradoxical that brings both possibilities and challenges for recruiters.	Illuminating how recruiters' experiences of a HRM function's implementation of a D&I strategy can become barriers to recruiters' aspirations of developing their identities as partners and diversity promoters.
Process and status	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accepted and presented at EGOS 2022 2. Submitted for Human Resource Management Review (AJG 3), Oct' 22', desk rejection Nov' 22' 3. Submitted for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: An International Journal (AJG 2), Jan' 23' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R&R July 23' • Re-submitted 16th of Oct' 23' • Accepted for publication, Nov' 23' • Published 8th of Dec' 2023 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accepted and presented at EGOS 2023 2. Submitted for The International Journal of Human Resource Management (AJG 3), July 23' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R&R Oct' 23' where I asked for an extended deadline to the 1st of April 24' 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accepted for British Academy of Management Conference 2023 – withdrawn due to lack of money 2. Submitted for Human Resource Management Journal (AJG 4*), July 23', desk rejection July 23' 3. Submitted for Group & Organization Management (AJG 3), Sep' 23' – rejection Dec' 23' after review 4. In preparation for submission to European Management Journal 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Submitted for Human Resource Management (AJG 4), Jan' 24'

The structure of the dissertation

This chapter presents the structure of the dissertation in Table 1.2 below, which displays the purpose and central arguments of each chapter.

Table 1.2. Overview of the structure of the dissertation

Ch.	Title	Purpose	Central arguments
1	Introduction	To motivate the research gap on the tensions and paradoxes inherent in DM and its impact on recruiters' work with diversity.	<p>The purpose of the dissertation is to understand the tensions and paradoxes inherent in working with diversity, which is used to reveal some of the tensions and paradoxes in recruiters' work with diversity and how recruiters find ways to navigate these. Altogether, this is used to nuance existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity.</p> <p>Based on this, the dissertation aims to advance the field of diversity recruitment within HRM theoretically and methodologically. It does so by utilizing a constitutive approach to paradox theory that contributes with a paradox perspective on diversity and a micro-level paradox perspective nuancing existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity enabled through ethnographic methods.</p>
2	Scientific positioning	To argue for how the dissertation's ontological and epistemological assumptions inform the research produced.	The dissertation is guided by the ontological and epistemological assumptions of a constitutive approach to paradoxes attending to the role of sociomateriality and the becoming of tensions and paradoxes in recruiters' work with diversity.
3	Research design	To motivate the relevancy of ethnographic methods for investigating the purpose of the dissertation and to argue for the methods applied.	The dissertation utilizes ethnographic methods concerning observations, field notes, and interviews as they render the contribution of a micro-level paradox perspective possible by attending to recruiters' daily work with diversity while revealing the various tensions and paradoxes they encounter.
4	Central literature and theoretical framework	To review central literature within DM and diversity recruitment, to motivate a constitutive approach to paradoxes as a relevant theoretical framework for investigating the purpose of the dissertation, and to introduce the theoretical concepts applied in the papers.	Tensions and paradoxes are found to be inherent in DM and for recruiters, but previous studies have yet not utilized paradox theory to its fullest potential in studying recruiters' way of navigating these. With a sociomaterial and processual ontology, the constitutive approach allows the dissertation to focus on the multiplicity of agents that become part of the formation

5	Paper I	To discuss how a paradox lens can be utilised to bridge existing understandings of diversity management.	of and responses to tensions and paradoxes in recruiters' work with diversity. The use of a paradox lens on DM allows for challenges to be brought forward instead of hidden away by acknowledging the liberating and constraining experiences for the actors involved. A paradox lens therefore offers space for embracing and utilising paradoxes in DM.
6	Paper II	To explore how recruiters carry out their role throughout the recruitment process when working with hiring managers to foster diversity and how they navigate tensions in relation to this.	Recruiters are found to be both administrators and sparring partners. They adapt themselves to the needs of managers to build relationships, which supports them in fostering diversity. Though, they must also navigate tensions associated with too close a relationship to not become blind toward the diversity needed.
7	Paper III	To explore how recruiters understand their use of intuition in their work and how they navigate tensions associated with its use.	Recruiters use their intuition to make more informed decisions. Though, their use of intuition creates tensions on individual, organizational, and societal levels and they navigate these tensions through internal and external interactive practices.
8	Paper IV	To explore how recruiters experience tensions in relation to the HRM function's implementation of a diversity and inclusion strategy and how these experiences impact recruiters' identities.	Recruiters experience the HRM function as a double-edged sword that both enable their aspirations of becoming partners and diversity promoters, but also abandon these aspirations because of recruiters failed attempts to properly practice these identities in a real HRM function.
9	Discussion	To conclude on the main findings of the dissertation and discuss their theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions followed by an outline of limitations and future research avenues.	The dissertation proves to the field of diversity recruitment within HRM how a constitutive approach to paradox theory is successful in revealing the liberating as well as constraining experiences associated with working with diversity. With this, the dissertation nuances existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity by revealing the duality of recruiters' roles, their relationships with hiring managers, the use of their intuition, and the HRM function as constituting tensions and paradoxes for recruiters. With this, the dissertation broadens diversity management through paradox theory, it nuances the diversity recruitment literature through a micro-foundational paradox perspective, and it advances the HRM literature through a constitutive approach to paradox theory.
10	Appendices	To display the appendices of the dissertation.	This chapter displays the co-author statements for Papers I, III, and IV.

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CHAPTER 2: SCIENTIFIC POSITIONING

This chapter begins by arguing for the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions of the dissertation guided by a constitutive approach to paradoxes, before ending with an elaboration on how these assumptions impact the construction of the dissertation's research design.

Ontological and epistemological assumptions

This dissertation is guided by a constitutive approach to paradox, taking a relational ontology and an epistemology focusing both on moments of doing (i.e., recruiters' lived experiences of tensions) and moments of accounting for tensions (i.e., recruiters' explanations of and analyses of their actions) (Fairhurst and Putnam, 2023, pp. 21-23).

According to Schad (2017), the ontology of paradox remains paradoxical itself, with some researchers conceptualizing paradoxes as inherent in organizational systems existing "out there" prior to organizational actors' cognition (e.g., Quinn and Cameron, 1988) and others conceptualizing paradoxes as socially constructed through organizational actors' sensemaking and experiences (e.g., Putnam, Fairhurst, and Banghart, 2016). Other researchers propose paradoxes to be both inherent and socially constructed (e.g., Smith and Lewis, 2011). Though, without offering a conceptualization of how both views together explain the nature of paradox (Hahn and Knight, 2021). In their 2016 paper *Contradictions, Dialectics, and Paradoxes in Organizations: A Constitutive Approach*, some of the leading scholars within paradox research, Linda Putnam, Gail Fairhurst, and Scott Banghart, contribute with the constitutive approach as an alternative approach to the study of paradox. They defined this approach in the following way:

"In a constitutive view, paradoxes emanate from social actions and interactions as organizational members respond to and process contradictions in ways that create systematic patterns. These patterns become embedded in routines and structures, are brought from the past into the future, and evolve as organizing continues across time and space."

(Putnam et al., 2016, p. 13)

Due to divergent interpretations of this definition, Fairhurst and Putnam recently published the handbook *Performing Organizational Paradoxes* (2023), where they bring some clarity to the key features and assumptions of this approach. In this handbook, they explain how they "never intended for discourse to exclude the nonhuman aspects of organizing" (p. 3). According to the authors, this led "other scholars [to] misconstrue this stance as being only socially constructed or

that paradoxes exist only after actors perceive or construct them in language use (e.g., Hahn and Knight, 2021; Hargrave, 2021; Schad and Bansal, 2018)” which “embraces a very narrow view of discourse and often treats communication as equivalent to perception” (p. 3). Instead, they contribute with the following refined definition of the constitutive approach:

“The constitutive view is both material and discursive (sociomaterial), embraces both structure and agency, and is both bottom-up (local) and top-down (global). As such, it adopts a stance grounded in performativity and sociomateriality and focuses on the ongoing development of tensions and contradictions.” (Fairhurst and Putnam, 2023, p. 18).

Here, they make clear that while encompassing different metatheoretical assumptions, the reframed constitutive approach holds an ontological position grounded in sociomaterial performances that are often outside of individuals’ awareness (p. 36). As such, “humans are not the only actors who constitute paradoxes and contradictions, rather objects, spaces, bodies, and other matter co- develop these paradoxical performances” (pp. 40-41). The constitutive approach then adopts a relational ontology that includes both inherent and socially constructed aspects of paradox, but not with a purely realist or socially constructionist view (p. 36). This ontology does not deny the existence of a physical world of objects and facts that exist outside of human perception (p. 36). Yet, when individuals describe and use them, they draw on sociomaterial affordances and discourses that come together in tension-based performances in which key dimensions of these performances include temporality, language, practices, bodies, objects, sites, and/or spaces (p. 36 and p. 47). These performances are enacted in the daily experiences of individuals, and the performances occur in situ and draw from past, present, and future activities (p. 19). Applying the notion of constitutive to paradox thereby underscores the development of paradoxes over time and the dynamic relationships among their tensions, contradictions, materiality, practices, structures, and systems, regardless of whether individuals are conscious of this process (p. 4).

The approach adopts an epistemology that regards individuals as coming to know, understand, and act in paradoxical situations through moments of doing and accounting for their experiences (p. 48). Fairhurst and Putnam (2023) argue that the purpose of early paradox theory was rather prescriptive, helping organizational actors to manage paradoxes, whereas the purpose of the constitutive approach is more descriptive, helping organizational actors to move forward in paradoxical situations (p. 21). They do acknowledge, however, that some schools of thought within

paradox theory adhere to all assumptions of the constitutive approach, while others privilege some assumptions over others and differ with a few of them (p. 19).

By applying a relational ontology, the dissertation argues that the tensions and paradoxes recruiters face when working with diversity can be both inherent in the organization, stemming from various structures, and socially constructed. The dissertation therefore acknowledges that recruiters, other stakeholders, and objects collectively can become part of co-developing these tensions and paradoxes. Additionally, the dissertation acknowledges that when recruiters describe and respond to these tensions and paradoxes, they draw on various sociomaterial affordances such as their role and own experiences that come together in tensional performances, e.g., languages, practices, and objects. These performances are enacted in the daily experiences of recruiters' work with diversity. The performances occur in the moment and draw from the recruiters' past, present, and future activities in relation to their work with diversity. Through the relational ontology, it is possible for the dissertation to examine the different ways in which tensions and paradoxes come into being in recruiters' daily work with diversity and the different ways in which recruiters enact responses to these in situated contexts. These ontological and epistemological assumptions emerge in the four papers in different ways and to various degrees, which will now be briefly outlined.

Paper I adopts a descriptive approach by demonstrating how organizations and specialists can manage diversity through the adoption of a paradox mindset that can aid organizations and specialists in finding alternative ways to move forward when facing paradoxical situations. Moreover, the paper demonstrates that in conjunction with being socially constructed, paradoxes of managing diversity are also constructed through materiality, e.g., structures, systems, objects, and discourses.

Paper II utilizes the processual nature of the constitutive approach by studying recruiters' behaviors and interactions throughout recruitment processes when working with hiring managers to foster diversity. The paper adopts a descriptive approach by demonstrating how recruiters find ways to move forward when facing tensional situations related to their role and when working with managers who struggle to hire between ideal and diverse candidates. These tensions occur both through the structure of the recruitment process itself and through the social interactions with hiring managers. When recruiters describe and respond to these tensions, they draw both on the way the recruitment process constructs their role and the way they themselves and hiring managers

construct their role. This is expressed in their activities throughout the recruitment process and when they account for the tensions they experience.

Paper III adopts a descriptive approach by demonstrating that when recruiters experience tensions related to their use of intuition, they find ways of moving forward through the dialogic interactions and relational support of their colleagues and hiring managers. When recruiters account for the use of their intuition, they experience these tensions to come about through the expectations held by the organization and society about recruiters' appropriate use of intuition and through interactions with colleagues and other stakeholders.

Paper IV connects to Fairhurst and Putnam's (2023) chapter on *Narrating Paradox, Bodies, and Emotions* that calls for a focus on individuals living with tensional struggles and how these tensions surface in extended narratives (p. 127). Paradoxical situations often arise due to a pull between the past and the present or the present and the future (p. 131). Paper IV focuses on recruiters' lived experiences with the HRM function's implementation of a diversity and inclusion strategy. The paper demonstrates that recruiters narrate about an imagined future where they aspire to become partners and diversity promoters. However, drawing on their past and present activities leads them to experience tensions that result from the realization that these aspirations will never become reality, leaving the future dangling for the recruiters in terms of becoming partners and diversity promoters. The paper adopts a descriptive approach by showing that in some instances, tensions can entrap recruiters and hinder them from responding to and moving forward in paradoxical situations. Moreover, these tensions come into being both through the structure of the HRM function itself and through the social interactions with other stakeholders who play a significant role in recruiters' identity aspirations.

In summary, these ontological and epistemological assumptions are shown to have significant implications for what I as a researcher have seen when observing the world of recruiters and what I have and have not reported about that world. The chapter now moves on to argue how these ontological and epistemological assumptions impact the construction of the dissertation's research design.

Implications for the research design

The dissertation's constitutive approach to paradox has implications for the practical construction of the research design. In this regard, Fairhurst and Putnam (2023) argue that when it comes to the obtainment of empirical material, a constitutive approach focuses on "how something comes into being," centering on "the in situ enactment or the sayings, doings, and collective sensemaking of organizational actors as they produce tensions in situated contexts" (p. 28). To capture such situated enactments, it is important for the dissertation to get as close as possible to recruiters' work with diversity and the tensions and paradoxes they encounter. A method that provides researchers with such closeness is the ethnographic method (Cunliffe, 2010), which considers the situated interactions, behaviors, cultural artifacts, symbols, stories, and meanings of the community under study (Cunliffe, 2010). The dissertation provides an in-depth argumentation for the relevance and application of the ethnographic method in chapter 3.

Based on the dissertation's epistemological assumptions focusing on individuals as coming to know, understand, and act in paradoxical situations through moments of doing and accounting for their experiences (Fairhurst and Putnam, 2023, p. 48), the dissertation collects and interprets data about recruiters' doings (i.e., focusing on their lived experiences of tensions and paradoxes) and moments of accounting for tensions and paradoxes (i.e., focusing on their explanations and analyses of actions) (p. 11). To collect data that captures both the doing and accounting for tensions and paradoxes, the dissertation draws on multiple data points such as interviews and observations across time focusing on the tensional and paradoxical dynamics experienced and reported by recruiters.

In summary, the dissertation's ontological and epistemological assumptions call attention to the collection of contextually dependent data within the working life of specific recruiters. Their doings and moments of accounting represent the organizational reality and cultural context of which they are a part, and it becomes the purpose of this dissertation to report about that world through its own assumptions. Therefore, the ontological and epistemological assumptions guiding this dissertation inevitably also bring some methodological implications for what the dissertation can and cannot report about, which will be discussed in further detail in chapter 9.

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CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter begins by arguing for the relevancy of applying ethnographic methods as the overall methodological approach of the dissertation, which is followed by a more thorough account of the choices made regarding participant observation. Afterwards, the chapter moves on to present the empirical setting where the fieldwork has been conducted focusing on the choices made regarding the selection of the case organization and its most central characteristics. The chapter then elaborates on the process of conducting fieldwork with a focus on the choices made with regards to data collection before ending with a short description of the analytical approach applied in the dissertation. The considerations regarding the methodological limitations of the dissertation's findings will be elaborated and discussed in further details in chapter 9, in which I will engage in a reflexive discussion about my role as a researcher when contributing with the dissertation's findings.

Ethnographic methods

This dissertation is based on ethnographic methods, with the aim of “studying people in their naturally occurring settings as a means of grasping the complexity, intricacy, and mundanity (commonplace activities) of organizational life” (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, and Kamsteeg, 2009 in Cunliffe, 2010, p. 229). Often, this requires considering the situated interactions, behaviors, cultural artifacts, symbols, stories, and meanings of the community under study through, e.g., meetings, conversations, texts, and work practices (Cunliffe, 2010). This makes ethnographic methods highly context-dependent, occupying an emic perspective that focuses on organizational members' understandings in contrast to an etic perspective that focuses on using academic categorizations and theorizing (Cunliffe, 2010). According to Cunliffe (2010), “good organizational ethnographies can reveal and explore the intricacies, challenges, tensions, and choices of life in organizations” (p. 226). Additionally, Keegan, Brandl, and Aust (2018, p. 20, citing Schneider, 2016) argue that “ethnographies are particularly useful for teasing out the dynamics of tensions resulting from the interaction of ordinary managers and the resources and capabilities they invoke to manage such tensions”. This method is therefore highly relevant for this dissertation, as it allows me as a researcher to be drawn into the everyday working lives of recruiters to study their behavior and interactions with other organizational members while

revealing the various tensions and paradoxes they encounter in relation to their work with diversity and how they manage these.

A distinction is usually drawn between *realist* and *impressionist* ethnographies. A *realist* ethnographer sees sociality, i.e., how people live their lives and make meanings together, in terms of phenomena (e.g., structures, institutional practices and processes, values, routines, artifacts) and true meanings, making them concerned with “telling it like it is” in a factual manner (Cunliffe, 2010). An *impressionist* ethnographer, on the other hand, sees sociality as intersubjective, emerging in interactions between people. Impressionist ethnographers thus search for multiple rather than true meanings, while emphasizing their own role as part of the meaning-making process (Cunliffe, 2010). This dissertation is an impressionist account of the organizational community under study, as I immersed myself in the organization to observe recruiters’ behaviors and interactions with other organizational members to gain an understanding of how tensions and paradoxes associated with recruiters’ work with diversity emerge in these interactions. My professional interest is in how sociality about recruiters’ work with diversity emerges from these behaviors and in these interactions. Therefore, I do not provide a realist and objective account of what diversity *is* and what recruiters *are* as would be interpreted from a realist standpoint.

The ethnographic method furthermore differs from other qualitative research methods because it requires the researcher to actively immerse her- or himself into the organizational community of study for a longer period. In addition to observing organizational members, the researcher often prioritizes to building relationships and engaging in the organizational life with the aim of producing rich accounts of everyday organizational life (Cunliffe, 2010). This method is therefore also highly concerned with temporality. Rather than a mere snapshot of the organizational community, a temporal approach allows for meanings, social process, continuities, and discontinuities to emerge across the past and present (Cunliffe, 2010), which is essential to fully grasp the complexities of everyday organizational life.

The fieldwork that this dissertation builds on was carried out intermittently over 17 months from October 2021 to March 2023, during which time I observed and interacted with recruiters and other organizational members. The length of the fieldwork allowed me to build and nurture these relationships, enabling the development of rich, in-depth accounts of the recruiters’ work with diversity and the tensions and paradoxes they encountered. The temporal aspect of the data has been incorporated especially in Papers II and IV, as it allowed me to observe the recruiters’

different behaviors, interactions, and/or experiences unfolding in relation to the phenomenon under study. This allowed me to conduct data collection to address any changes in these behaviors, interactions, and/or experiences, which occurred on more than once occasion. For Paper II, the temporal aspect enabled me to understand why certain situations occurred during the recruitment process because I could connect the situation to decisions made in the past. For example, in the end of a recruitment process, I sometimes understood why a hiring manager would deselect a candidate based on qualifications, because the manager had outlined the required qualifications in the beginning of the recruitment process with which the candidate did not comply. In Paper III, the temporal aspect is used as a supporting element that helped to understand how intuition emerged in the everyday work of recruiters, which then led to studying intuition through a qualitative interview study with the recruiters to understand their use of intuition more thoroughly. For Paper IV, the temporal aspect allowed me to see how the recruiters' experiences of the HRM function's implementation of the diversity and inclusion strategy unfolded throughout the fieldwork period. For example, in the beginning of the fieldwork period, the recruiters did not share many experiences with the implementation, because the strategy was not yet being implemented. However, over time, they began to share experiences of negative dynamics in relation to the HRM function's work with diversity and inclusion in PIM.

In relation to the utilization of ethnographic methods, Spradley (2016) distinguishes between high and low degrees of researcher involvement *with* the people being studied and *in* the activities being observed (p. 58). This variation is shown in five types of researcher participation that range along a continuum of involvement from *Complete*, *Active*, *Moderate*, *Passive*, and *Nonparticipation*. Here, I employed various types of involvement strategies depending on the situation. When observing situations related to the recruitment process (e.g., recruitment meetings, job interviews, and discussions between recruiters and hiring managers), it was important that I polluted the setting as little as possible especially with regard to the candidates who should not be too affected by my presence. In these situations, I mainly acted as a passive observer (Spradley, 2016, p. 59), jotting down field notes in the corner or turning off my camera during video meetings. However, I would briefly introduce myself and the purpose of my presence before ensuring that my focus and notes would revolve solely around the recruiter and his or her interactions with the hiring manager. Therefore, I did my best to avoid eye contact with the candidates and refrained from reacting with smiles and nods when they uttered something and/or answered questions.

Almost to my own surprise, every candidate that I met reacted very positively to my presence and even wished me the best of luck with the project.

When observing situations where recruiters engaged in interactions with each other, I participated moderately (Spradley, 2016, p. 60), seeking to maintain a balance between being an insider who could jump in and ask the recruiters questions while remaining an outsider by not actively interacting in the same way as them. As a self-reflexive practice, I learned that the way I dressed enabled me to better shift between these different types of involvement, viewing my attire as a reflection of the situation I was observing and thus making me more relaxed in the field. Consequently, a few months into fieldwork, I began to dress according to the different settings I would observe either to affect the setting as little as possible or to mirror the culture of the recruitment team as much as possible. Over time, I experienced my role becoming more and more natural for the organizational members. This was mostly expressed by the transition in how recruiters introduced me to hiring managers, evolving from “our researcher” to “our colleague”. However, I consciously and continually kept a distance to the field by inviting colleagues to discuss my data to avoid not going completely native.

My most memorable moment from conducting fieldwork that exemplifies how my role as a researcher was quickly accepted, comes from a job interview. After shaking hands with the candidate, the recruiter, the hiring manager, and I sat down and introduced ourselves and our respective roles during the interview. Here, as usual, I briefly introduced myself and explained my presence in the meeting, assuring the candidate that he would not be the focus of my attention or the subject of the notes I would be taking. When the interview was over and the candidate escorted back to the reception, the recruiter relayed the candidate’s reply when asked about my presence during the interview: “At first, I tried looking at her [*me as a researcher*], but after several times where she didn’t look back at me, I just ignored her”. Under normal circumstances, such an utterance would be hurtful, but as an ethnographer attempting to be as passive as possible during fieldwork, it was the greatest compliment. My fieldwork therefore became a constant balancing act between mirroring the recruiters while not acting like one, even when introduced as one.

During and after observations, the researcher translates insights from the field so that they become meaningful to the reader. Contrary to quantitative methodology, such a translation is not carried out by testing hypotheses about the observations and producing generalizable knowledge. Instead, it is concerned with telling a story using the language of the organizational members and

by weaving observations and insights about the dynamics of the organizational community into the text (Cunliffe, 2010). The dissertation's fieldwork is generally characterized by an inductive reasoning (Van Maanen, Sørensen, and Mitchell, 2007) where patterned insights gained from the field are used to form some initial ideas about the organizational life of the recruiters. Here, I was very attentive to remaining close to the language of the recruiters and other organizational members, as this enabled me to convey stories that remained true to their understandings of their work with diversity. During fieldwork, I had already begun translating some of the insights by continually reading different theories that I thought could explain the activities I was observing and the talks I was part of, making it impossible for me to remain purely inductive. Over time, it therefore became a constant abductive movement back and forth between the insights and theories that I thought could be relevant to understanding the observations and talks (Van Maanen, Sørensen, and Mitchell, 2007).

When applying ethnographic methods, Cunliffe (2010) argues that who you are as an ethnographic researcher influences what you see and say, forcing you to continually address your own assumptions and be reflexive about what you do as a researcher to acknowledge your own position and impact. In this section, the dissertation has foregrounded the most important choices made in relation to applying ethnographic methods that have laid the foundation for the dissertation's findings. In this regard, it is important that I take a reflexive stance toward my own way of theorizing, as these aspects will reinforce one form of knowledge in the dissertation over other forms. Therefore, after having presented the research papers in chapters 5-8, I will present a chapter on the methodological contributions of the dissertation through a reflexive stance, where I rely on Cunliffe's (2010; 2022) concept of *reflexivity*. Here, I question what I have been – and not have been – seeing, saying, and doing in my research to acknowledge the impact of my own position in relation to the findings.

The empirical setting

The empirical setting is grounded in an exploratory single-case study design, which has been chosen for its usefulness in studying a phenomenon like recruiters' work with diversity within its real-life context in an in-depth manner (Stake, 1995, p. 11). Furthermore, the empirical setting takes an embedded approach to the case-study design, as this approach is useful for studying multiple units of analysis within a single case as for example different organizational actors,

processes, and/or practices (Stake, 1995, p. 11). This is done with the purpose of providing a more nuanced understanding of the case in question by comparing the different perspectives to each other (Stake, 1995, p. 11). This is relevant when the aim is to study a complex case with multiple aspects requiring separate attention (Stake, 1995, p. 11) to understand the complexity and unique nature of the case in question (Bryman, 2016, p. 59). As such, this case study design is useful for studying the multiple units of analysis related to recruiters' work with diversity.

My search for a relevant case began prior to my acceptance into PhD program at Aarhus University. Initially, when I began writing my PhD application, I had a different topic in mind related to sustainability, diversity, and recruitment. My interest in sustainable human resource management, diversity, and recruitment guided me into a pool of organizations whose values should be based on sustainability and diversity. Given the resource-intensive nature of managing diversity, I decided to narrow my focus to include only larger organizations, as they often have more resources and people allocated to these agendas than smaller organizations. Moreover, I wanted to focus on how organizations employing their own recruitment function compared to organizations hiring recruiters from external agencies. This is due to my assumption that recruiters employed in the organization for whom they are recruiting would have greater, more in-depth knowledge of the organization owing to their firsthand experience with internal challenges relating to diversity. Focusing on external recruiters would not allow this in-depth examination of recruiters' work with diversity, because it would not be possible to shed light on the organizational dynamics surrounding their work with diversity. These criteria directed me to an organization that I was already familiar with due to its focus on the aforementioned values. I approached the organization directly and came in contact with the professionals responsible for recruitment, with whom I eventually came to an agreement.

The organization is pseudonymized and referred to as PIM throughout the dissertation and in the four papers. Similarly, all names, places, and date identifiers have been anonymized. PIM is a multinational production company within the energy sector with headquarters in Northern Europe and is the largest manufacturer in its industry. In addition to its core business, it is recognized for both its sustainable approach to business and its focus on recruiting a gender-diverse workforce especially due to operating in a male-dominated industry. As such, PIM would be considered an exemplifying case (Bryman, 2016, p. 62) because it exemplifies a broader category of organizations working with diversity who are employing their own recruiters to which

it is a member. Therefore, PIM has not been chosen because it is extreme or unique, but because it epitomizes and typifies a broader category of organizations who are placing diversity on the agenda and facing the tensions and paradoxes of doing so. This makes PIM a highly suitable organization for answering some of the most critical questions regarding recruiters' work with diversity and their navigation of tensions and paradoxes related hereto. In line with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the dissertation, the approach for engaging with the empirical setting was through an interpretative manner (Bryman, 2016, p. 59). Here, I wanted to understand recruiters' work with diversity as it is experienced from their point of view rather than from my objective frame of reference. This also means that the dissertation contributes with theoretical concepts that are grounded in the empirical fieldwork to provide deep and valuable insights into "the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118).

The recruitment function in PIM is situated within the HR function, with different recruitment teams responsible for recruiting employees in different areas of the world. Given my interest in following and observing the recruiters during their work, I decided to focus on the Northern European recruitment team, referred to herein as "the recruitment team." From day one, PIM allowed me full access to observe the recruitment team and talk to them whenever I needed, as they were eager to learn more about themselves in their ongoing efforts to create diverse workplaces. Therefore, I agreed to give back some of the knowledge I gained throughout the course of the project in the form of workshops, which not only provided insights to my project and the recruitment team but also established and strengthened our collaboration. The feelings of mutual respect and interest this fostered allowed me to bring new perspectives on recruiters' work with diversity into the foreground.

When the fieldwork began in October 2021, the recruitment team consisted of four full-time recruiters with varying experiences in recruitment, a recruitment manager, and a head of global recruitment. Throughout the study period, some recruiters resigned, and new recruiters were hired. Generally, each recruiter in the recruitment team is assigned to a different functional area in the organization in which they are responsible for hiring, e.g., technical, legal. One of the main issues that this organization faces in terms of recruitment and diversity is the challenge of recruiting women into male-dominated roles, especially management positions. The organization has a predominant focus on gender diversity when it comes to recruitment, further evident in the

targets formulated by the diversity team calling for a 3.3 percentage increase between 2021-2025 in the number of women being represented in leadership positions. Though, the organization focuses on various diversity dimensions (e.g., ethnic, personality, special needs, neurodiversity) when it comes to employee representation and recruitment, with gender being the dominant one.

Alongside my introduction to the recruitment team, I was introduced to four professionals working in the diversity team. I learned that from 2020 to 2025, the diversity team launched a new diversity, equality, and inclusion strategy (DE&I), because the company sees DE&I as a competitive advantage. The purpose of the diversity team is to function as a central office that supports and leads heads of different areas in the organization with diversity initiatives, which in this context refers to the global head of recruitment. As such, the recruitment function in general and the recruitment team in particular also become part of the diversity agenda in PIM. However, the diversity team does not require the recruitment function to deliver specific diversity targets. Instead, the diversity team is responsible for formulating recruitment targets that the organization overall should attempt to reach. While the data collection primarily originates in the recruitment team, it also captures talks with professionals in the diversity team serving as contextual data to understand their role in PIM, their role in relation to the recruitment function, and more generally, to understand their purpose in the organization.

Throughout the fieldwork, the topic of sustainable human resource management fell more and more into the background. Instead, I began to see more clearly the tensions and paradoxes that diversity brought to the recruitment team and how the recruiters navigated these in their work. Therefore, I decided to remain faithful to the field and narrow my focus onto diversity and recruitment with a specific interest in the tensions and paradoxes that appeared and how the recruiters navigated these. Choosing PIM as the empirical setting for this dissertation thus proved to serve as a highly relevant case for advancing the understanding of recruiters' work with diversity and how they navigate tensions and paradoxes in relation to this.

Conducting fieldwork

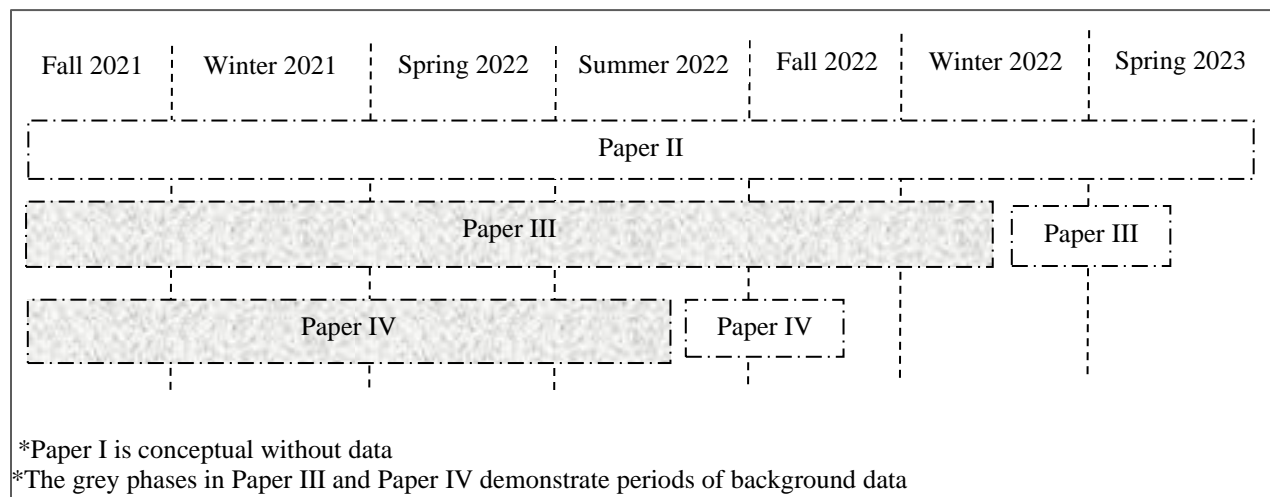
This section describes the process of conducting fieldwork, how the different data sources have been collected, and in which ways they serve the dissertation. Table 3.1 below displays a complete overview of the data that has been collected during fieldwork.

Table 3.1. Overview of collected data during fieldwork

Data sources	Amount	Hours (approx.)
Days of fieldwork in the office of PIM	41	250
Observations of meetings along the recruitment process	49	70
Observations of meetings and/or workshops in the diversity team	11	17
Informal talks with recruiters and other HR-professionals	23	15
Semi-structured interviews with recruiters and other HR-professionals	17	13
Semi-structured focus group interviews with recruiters	4	13
Travel to American headquarters	1 week	50
Documents and emails serving as contextual data	Approx. 200 pages	
Total		428

Figure 3.1 below illustrates the different periods of data collection for each of the three empirical papers, in which Paper I is omitted due to its conceptual nature. Papers II, III, and IV all draw on the same data set displayed above, though the foundational data for each paper differs according to their different purposes.

Figure 3.1. Overview of the papers' data collection periods



As displayed in Figure 3.1, Paper II draws on almost all data across the entire period of fieldwork (except that collected during travel to the American headquarters), as it uses this broader view to explore how recruiters carry out their role throughout the recruitment process when working with hiring managers to foster diversity and how they navigate tensions in relation to this.

Paper III has a narrower focus, as it draws on two focus group interviews and one semi-structured interview, with one of the focus group interviews conducted during travel to the American headquarters, with the aim of investigating recruiters' use of intuition. Paper III also uses observations, field notes, and other interviews as background data to understand how the phenomenon of intuition emerges in the everyday work of recruiters.

Paper IV focuses narrowly by utilizing five semi-structured interviews with the recruiters that were collected approximately one year into the fieldwork. Paper IV also uses observations, field notes, and interviews as background data that serve to inform the ongoing data collection, which helped to direct the attention toward the recruiters' experiences working with diversity and inclusion in PIM. Additionally, the grey phases in Papers III and IV demonstrate the periods of background data for each paper which are not used for the respective analyses but for understanding why the phenomenon in each study has been investigated.

Table 3.2 below summarizes how each of the four papers utilize data focusing on their respective research questions, units of analysis, and the data used.

Table 3.2. Overview of the papers' utilization of data

	Paper I	Paper II	Paper III	Paper IV
Title	Reconceptualising Diversity Management from a Paradox Lens	Unpacking the adaptive role of recruiters in fostering diversity	Navigating tensions of intuition in recruitment	The HRM function as a double-edged sword for recruiters' identities
RQ	How can a paradox lens be utilised to bridge existing understandings of diversity management?	How do recruiters carry out their role throughout the recruitment process when working with hiring managers to foster diversity and how do they navigate tensions in relation to this?	How do recruiters understand their use of intuition in their work and how do they navigate tensions associated with its use?	How do recruiters experience tensions in relation to the Human Resource Management (HRM) function's implementation of a diversity and inclusion strategy and how do these experiences impact their identities?
Units of analysis	Diversity management as seen from a paradox lens.	Recruiters' interactions and behaviors when working with hiring managers to foster diversity.	Recruiters' understandings of their use of intuition.	Recruiters' experiences of the HRM function's implementation of a diversity and inclusion strategy.
Data	Conceptual paper	Observations in meetings along the recruitment process, informal interviews with diversity professionals, informal interactions with recruiters and recruitment managers, semi-structured interviews with recruiters, semi-structured focus group interview with recruiters and recruitment managers.	Observations in meetings along the recruitment process as background data. One semi-structured interview with recruiter in Northern European office, one semi-structured focus group interview with recruiters in US office and one semi-structured focus group interview with recruiters in Northern European office as foundational data.	Observations in meetings along the recruitment process and informal interactions with recruiters and recruitment managers as background data. Five semi-structured interviews with recruiters as foundational data.

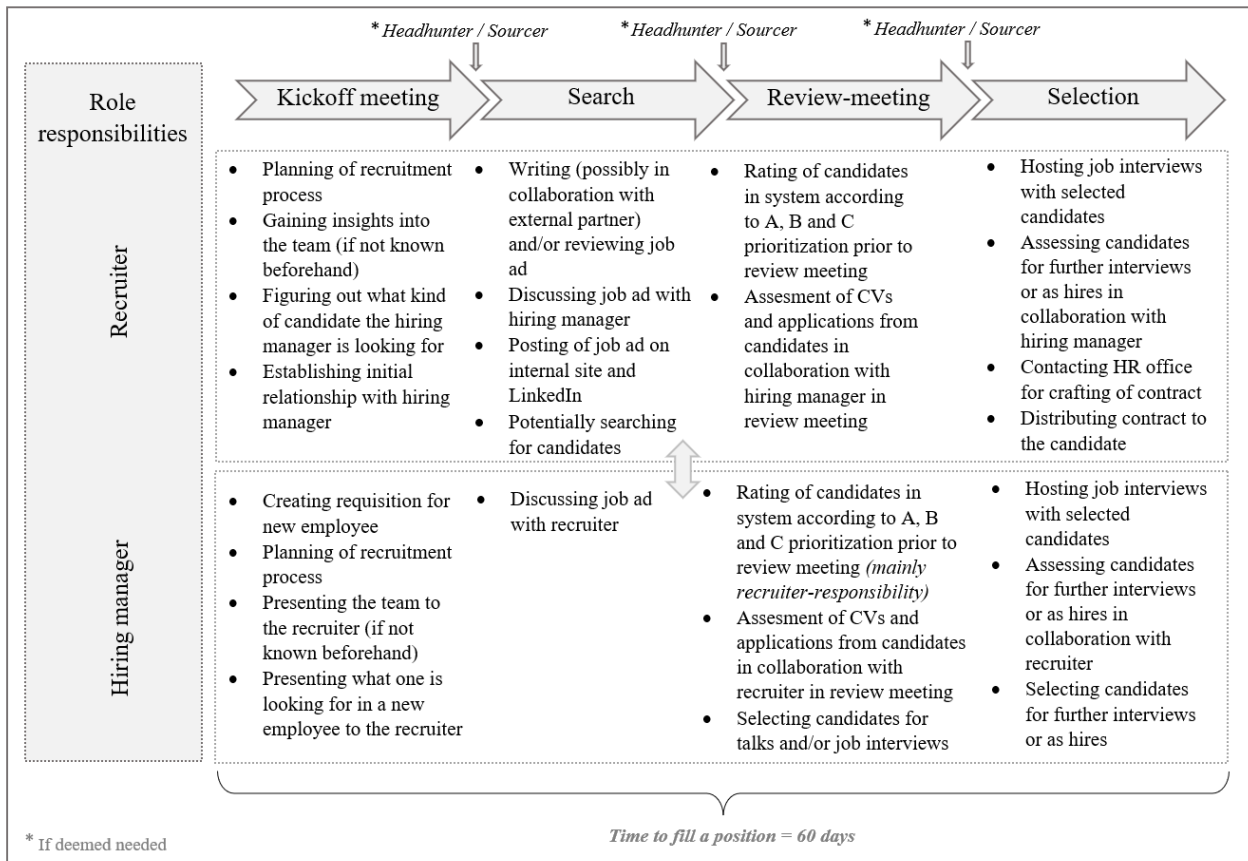
The period of fieldwork lasted 17 months, during which time I was present in the office for 41 days with the purpose of embedding myself in the organizational setting. From fall of 2021 to winter of 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic forced almost all employees to work from home, with the exception of those working in production. Therefore, during this period, parts of the data covering observations of meetings throughout the recruitment process had to be collected virtually. This limited my ability to capture the in-situ activities of the recruiters and to engage in informal talks

with them when I observed and/or heard something of interest. Moreover, it impeded my ability to be as present in the office during this period as I would have otherwise. As a way of mitigating these consequences, I invited the recruiters to short, informal online meetings, where I could ask questions about what I had observed or heard virtually. The online format proved to serve my approach to the ethnographic method quite well, as it allowed me to be invisible and passive during recruitment meetings.

After being introduced to the recruitment team on my first day at PIM, I was provided with a corporate computer with access to anything of interest for my research project as well as my own corporate email address. I was also given my own ID card that allowed me to enter the organization during normal working hours and move around freely in those areas that were relevant to my work. I had my own desk placed with the recruitment team in close proximity to the recruitment manager and the global head of recruitment, whom I could reach out to whenever I needed. Those professionals that were not in close physical proximity to me, I contacted by email or invited for online meetings. Almost every time I was present at the office, I would eat lunch with the recruitment team, the recruitment manager, and the global head of recruitment or with the recruiter and the hiring manager that I was observing for the different recruitment processes. Additionally, I participated in a couple of events such as anniversaries hosted by PIM where the recruitment team was expected to be present. Over time, this organizational embeddedness allowed me to build trust and close professional relationships with the professionals that were involved in the research project. This strengthened the field research by allowing for profound experiences and opinions to emerge.

As displayed in Table 3.1, the primary data set is a collection of observations and interviews, whereas the textual material in the form of email correspondences between recruiters and hiring managers, PowerPoints from the diversity team, content from PIM's webpage, and glimpses of CVs, résumés, and assessments of candidates served to inform the ongoing data collection and the contextually framing of Papers II, III, and IV. The observational data was mainly produced by observing meetings along the course of the recruitment process. In PIM, the recruitment process is structured around four phases: a kickoff meeting, a search phase, a review meeting, and a selection. These phases are illustrated in Figure 3.2 (this figure is also displayed in Paper II), which displays the structure of the recruitment process in PIM.

Figure 3.2. The recruitment process in PIM



These are the four phases referred to when mentioning the phrase “recruitment process” throughout the dissertation. When fieldwork began, the recruiters approached me with the opportunity of observing a recruitment process that they had agreed on with the individual hiring managers. After observing a couple of recruitment processes, I would reach out to the individual recruiter and ask to observe either a scheduled process displayed in their individual calendar or plan for my attendance in potential upcoming processes. Before I was allowed to observe a recruitment process, the hiring manager recruiting for the given position had to agree to my participation. If they had any doubts, the recruiter would usually decide against my participation. When a verbal agreement was made, I then collected data inductively (Glaser and Strauss, 2017, p. 238) by observing kickoff meetings, review meetings, and job interviews. These phases were chosen because they allowed me to observe recruiters’ daily work with diversity. In the search phase, the recruiters produce job descriptions in collaboration with the hiring manager and search for relevant candidates. I had to reduce my focus on this phase, as it was typically a time when the recruiters would work more sporadically and alternate between different tasks. This made it difficult for me

to keep track of the entire recruitment process, for which reason I decided to narrow my observational focus to the kickoff meetings, review meetings, and job interviews. However, this did not hinder me from inquiring into decisions being made during the search phase, which was necessary to understand what was being discussed and referred to in the review meetings and job interviews.

Observations served as a means to capture in-situ activities carried out by the recruiters. As a main tool for capturing my observations, I always carried a physical notebook with me to quickly note my observations and impressions that could be relevant, following the tradition of Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995). When writing field notes, I prioritized verbatim notes of the recruiters' conversations; however, I also strived to note their physical gestures and my own impressions of their feelings, such as a person appearing to feel insecure (Van Maanen, 2011). These field notes have played a major role in enabling me to convey thick descriptions of recruiters' work with diversity and how they navigate tensions and paradoxes related hereto.

To complement these in-situ observations, I conducted audiotaped, semi-structured interviews (Spradley, 2016) with recruiters and other HR professionals that I had observed as a way of following up on my observations in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. In connection with this, I also collected written, informal talks (Spradley, 1979) with these organizational actors when they were too busy for formal interviews, when I had only few questions that could easily be discussed in shorter conversations, or when my observations were too few to compose a full picture yet still too interesting to let go of. Moreover, when I had observed collective behaviors among the recruiters, I collected semi-structured focus group interviews with the recruitment team to have them collectively reflect on their work. These focus groups took the form of workshops in which I typically began by introducing some theoretical concepts within diversity and recruitment that I deemed relevant for the team. Then, I would share some of my observations and/or anonymized extracts of transcripts from interviews with the team and have them collectively reflect on the material. This served three purposes: 1) it provided data that aided me in getting closer to the phenomenon that I had observed, 2) it allowed me to validate my preliminary findings and observe if new topics presented themselves, and 3) it allowed me to actively give something back to the organization, and particularly the recruitment team, that nurtured our professional relationship.

Throughout the fieldwork, I experienced how trust was built between the recruiters and other professionals and myself. My presence and wish of giving back to the organization helped nurture this trust. For example, when some recruiters resigned, I prioritized coming into the office on their final day and participating in informal arrangements where they said their goodbyes to colleagues.

One and a half years into the fieldwork, I discussed my observations concerning the recruiters' use of intuition with the recruitment manager who showed great interest in the project throughout my time in the organization. Based on our discussions, the manager invited me to PIM's American headquarters where the manager would meet with the American recruiters after years of Covid-19 lockdowns. Because I prioritized sharing my observations and knowledge with the recruiters throughout these years, I am confident that the recruitment manager saw great value in sharing these insights with recruiters beyond the Northern European recruitment team. I now had the opportunity to accompany the recruitment manager to the American headquarters and gain more deeper insights into the phenomenon of intuition that eventually became Paper III of the dissertation. During our visit, we engaged in various professional events at which I usually presented myself and remained a passive observer so that people would not be too affected by my presence as a researcher. Moreover, social arrangements allowed people to get to know each other beyond the professional sphere. Line-dancing, shopping, lunches and dinners, sightseeing, and visits to peoples' homes were just a few of the experiences. The trip was a rewarding experience both professionally and personally. Additionally, it is a great example of how continuously focusing on giving back to the organization provided me with topics to explore further that eventually contributes with novel insights to the field of diversity recruitment within HRM.

All organizational actors that were interviewed and/or observed for the project are presented below in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3. Overview of organizational actors in PIM involved in the project

Org. actor	Position	Observation	Informal talk	Interview	Group interview
1	Recruitment manager	-	2	2	X
2	Global head of recruitment	-	2	-	-
3	Full-time recruiter	16	2	3	X
4	Full-time recruiter	8	3	2	X
5	Full-time recruiter	8	2	2	X
6	Full-time recruiter	6	2	2	X
7	Full-time recruiter	-	1	2	X
8	Full-time recruiter	-	1	-	X
9	Full-time recruiter	-	1	-	X
10	Full-time recruiter (USA)	-	-	-	X
11	Full-time recruiter (USA)	-	-	-	X
12	Full-time recruiter (USA)	-	-	-	X
13	Full-time recruiter (USA)	-	-	-	X
14	Full-time recruiter (USA)	-	-	-	X
15	Full-time recruiter (USA)	-	-	-	X
16	Full-time recruiter (USA)	-	-	-	X
17	HR professional in organizational growth	-	-	-	X
18	Head of diversity team	3	2	2	-
19	Global head of organizational growth	-	1	1	-
20	HR professional in diversity team	-	2	1	-
21	HR professional in diversity team	8	2	-	-
(20 hiring managers)		-	-	-	-
Total		49	23	17	4

Analytical approach

Findings from the fieldwork are discussed in chapters 5-8 presenting the research papers, in which the individual procedures for analyzing the vast amount of data are presented.

In connection with the dissertation's fluctuation between the inductive and abductive reasoning (as presented in chapter 3 on *Ethnographic methods*), the general analytical approach of the dissertation is characterized as iterative, thereby taking place throughout the process of collecting the data to continually interpret activities being observed. Therefore, as the analysis proceeded, it became a constant abductive movement back and forth between the data and the theoretical concepts that could be relevant to explain what I was observing (Van Maanen, Sørensen, and Mitchell, 2007). This iterative approach to analysis allowed for the papers' individual ideas to come to the surface, as no explicit theoretical concepts were directing what I could and could not see. Instead, as certain dynamics surfaced, I turned to the literature to source through theoretical concepts that could aid my understanding of the reasoning for how and why those dynamics might have appeared. As such, theory became a tool for me as a researcher to

understand what I was observing while engaging in fieldwork and not as a priori assumption of what I expected to see. This approach brought forth the ideas for the three empirical papers.

Throughout numerous recruitment processes, I observed the relevance of the relationship between recruiters and hiring managers in fostering diversity and the tensions recruiters were facing in this regard, which spurred the idea for Paper II. Moreover, the many observations of recruitment processes also illuminated how intuition became an influential part of the decisions made by recruiters and hiring managers, which then spurred the idea for Paper III. Over time, countless talks with the recruiters also brought insights into their experiences of the HRM function's implementation of the diversity and inclusion strategy and the negative dynamics they were encountering in relation to this, which resulted in the fourth and final paper.

Despite the conceptual nature of Paper I, the idea for this paper was also influenced by my initial observations and conversations with the various HR specialists in PIM who all shared the tensions and paradoxes inherent in their work with diversity. After revisiting the contemporary diversity literature within HRM and realizing the lack of theoretical attention to these tensions and paradoxes, I approached my co-author to initiate a collaboration with the purpose of bringing forth more theoretical knowledge on the paradoxes of managing diversity. As such, Paper I is very much inspired by the iterative approach to analysis, which altogether is shown to have laid the foundation for the analytical approach of this dissertation's findings.

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CHAPTER 4: CENTRAL LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter is split into two interrelated sections: the first section reviews the central literature dealing with paradoxes in diversity management and paradoxes in diversity recruitment before moving to the second section, which introduces a constitutive approach to paradox theory as the theoretical framework for attending to the purpose of the dissertation. It is important to first outline central aspects from previous studies to understand the intricate nature of diversity management as argued by the literature as well as the impact on specialists involved in its planning and execution. The predominant utilization of paradox theory within these studies is used to argue for the relevancy of this dissertation in applying a constitutive approach to paradox theory. The second section of this chapter introduces a constitutive approach to paradox theory as a valuable alternative in studying recruiters' work with diversity and argues for the dissertation's contributions in doing so. The chapter concludes by briefly presenting a constitutive approach to paradox theory as a metatheoretical perspective, arguing how various theoretical concepts have been utilized in conjunction with paradox theory to contribute with different insights to the overall purpose of the dissertation.

Paradoxes in diversity management

Diversity management (DM) was introduced to the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) in the 1980s, and the discipline has since received increasing yet contradictory attention (Yadav and Lenka, 2020) due to ontological and epistemological differences within the two overarching approaches to DM, i.e., *the business case rationale* and *the social justice rationale* (Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2015; Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010). Organizations are often motivated to implement DM strategies and practices due to the wealth of research documenting the business case of diversity by demonstrating how diverse workplaces contribute with increased innovation, performance, and profitability (e.g., Dennissen, Benschop, and van den Brink, 2020; Trittin and Schoeneborn, 2015; Frémeaux; 2020). Over time, organizations have begun to extend the purpose of diversity beyond a purely economic endeavor toward a social responsibility (Köllen, 2020; Köllen, 2021; Sinicropi and Cortese, 2021) that explores the social value of diversity and the improvement of an organization's image and license to operate. A social justice rationale acknowledges that DM does not always produce the desired results, and if not handled properly,

can contribute to more conflict than intended (Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2015; Fernando, 2021; van Dijk, Van Engen, and Paauwe, 2012). This has prompted various researchers to address the tension inherent in the debate between these two approaches (e.g., Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010; Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2015; van Dijk et al., 2012), calling for a new theoretical approach toward dealing with these opposing rationales.

Consequently, researchers have recently begun to apply paradox theory to the field of DM with the purpose of acknowledging the intricate dynamics, tensions, and paradoxes inherent in DM (e.g., Daubner-Siva, Vinkenburg, and Jansen, 2017; Nadiv and Kuna, 2020; Jaeck, Marais, Joly, and Preuss, 2023). For example, Daubner-Siva et al. (2017) study talent management and find a paradox between organizations' focus on identifying and developing a few select employees while simultaneously promoting inclusion to minimize inequalities for marginalized groups. Additionally, Nadiv and Kuna (2020) contribute with knowledge on the limited success of DM strategies and practices by showing how such initiatives generate tensions that paradoxically compromise the very success of the initiatives, thereby amplifying the need for further initiatives, resulting in a vicious circle. Recently, Jaeck et al. (2023) highlight the importance of a multi-stakeholder perspective on DM, showing how a plurality of stakeholder perceptions impact organizational outcomes of DM. This is because espoused diversity policies are often implemented in multi-objective contexts where stakeholders regard diversity and its purpose in the organization differently (Jaeck et al., 2023).

This dissertation has contributed to this incipient move within DM with the publication of Paper I, titled *Reconceptualising Diversity Management from a Paradox Lens* (Brøgger and Andersen, 2023). Here, my co-author and I utilize paradox theory on DM in a meta-theoretical manner to bridge the division between the business case rationale and the social justice rationale with the aim of utilizing both challenges and possibilities in managing diversity. As such, we demonstrate how the utilization of paradox theory in the field of DM enables organizations and specialists to attend to competing demands simultaneously, acknowledging that diversity is an organizational and societal responsibility whose rationales cannot be separated and that those rationales yield both constraining and liberating outcomes. This paper is different than previous DM studies within HRM applying paradox theory to DM, as the primary purpose of this paper is not to help organizations and specialists create alignment between competing rationales. Instead, the purpose is to show how the adoption of paradox theory can support organizations and

specialists in moving forward when finding themselves in paradoxical situations and actively acknowledge the liberating but also challenging – and often constraining – experiences of DM. As such, our utilization of paradox theory offers space for organizations and specialists to approach paradoxes in DM as something to not only be managed but also exploited for potential development.

Having presented the intricate nature of DM as discussed in the literature, it is now relevant to depart from this section and connect it more closely to the field of HRM and more specifically, diversity recruitment, to understand how this profession is impacted by the intricate nature of DM.

Paradoxes in diversity recruitment

According to Keegan, Brandl, and Aust (2018), the notion of tensions and paradoxes seem to be the most accurate reflection of HR specialists' experiences of their work:

“HR practitioners are confronted with myriad tensions embedded in the structured antagonism that pervades the employment relationship, in the clash between operational and strategic activities, and in the people-centered versus business-centered interests served by HR practitioners and the policies and practices they develop.”

(Keegan et al., 2018, pp. 79-80).

Tensions and paradoxes are inherent aspects of HR specialists' organizational life given the duality of HR roles, the plurality in the management of humans within the context of the employment relationship, and the attention to efficiency in conjunction with human value (Aust, Brandl, and Keegan, 2015). This can also relate to HR specialists' work with diversity encompassing the plurality in their management of various diversity attributes and the continuous emphasis on efficiency and economic outcomes while remaining attentive to the social value of diversity (i.e., the constant balance between the business case rationale and the social justice rationale as outlined above). When zooming in on the field of diversity recruitment, a few studies can be found focusing on some of the tensions faced by recruiters in their work with diversity.

In the special issue paper *Highlighting Tensions in Recruitment and Selection Research and Practice* (Ryan and Derous, 2016), the authors identify five tensions in recruitment and selection research and practice. Here, the *tension between diversity and standardization* relates to the tensions that can arise when standardization and consistency with what applicants and employers have come to expect from hiring processes do not align with what might most

effectively promotive diversity in the workforce (Ryan and Derous, 2016). For example, the authors draw on a study by Jacksch and Klehe (2016) that demonstrates how transparency during personnel selection procedures to reduce stereotype threat, i.e., revealing to candidates the dimension on which their performance is being assessed, only benefit some groups of candidates while hurting others. The authors conclude that it is important to understand when and for what purpose the desire for standardized approaches is needed in the context of diversity recruitment to handle this tension.

Rivera (2011) conducted another study focusing on the tensions in diversity recruitment. Drawing on interview and ethnographic data, the author examines *the tension between those overseeing diversity recruitment and those making hiring decisions* by studying processes of diversity recruitment in elite law firms, investment banks, and management consulting firms. The author concludes the findings in the following way:

“Although these firms tend to have the ingredients for success on paper, in practice the presence of structural and status divides between those responsible for overseeing diversity recruitment and those making hiring decisions, alongside widespread cultural beliefs among decision-makers that diversity is not a valid criterion of evaluation, stymies firms’ efforts to diversify.” (Rivera, 2011, p. 6).

Rivera highlights that to navigate tensions between theory and practice in diversity recruitment and translate diversity initiatives into success, organizational authority and power are crucial, as “those charged with overseeing diversity programs need not only formal organizational authority but also sufficient informal power and status to wield influence” (p. 6). In a third study highlighting tensions in this area, Evans (2012) investigates changes in recruitment practices aimed at increasing the gender diversity within information technology, electronics, and computing (ITEC) organizations. Through multiple interviews with HR and hiring managers, the author identifies *the tension between hiring for competencies and hiring for diversity* by showing that despite the rhetoric of soft skills in their diversity initiatives, the reality was that technical skills often associated with masculine traits were valued more highly than soft skills often associated with feminine traits. The author concludes that “despite the espoused commitment to making ITEC workplaces more attractive and appealing to women the fact remains, that the number of women employed in this sector continues to decline” (p. 749).

Common among the four studies presented here is their focus on presenting various tensions that recruiters experience, but the authors fail to incorporate two central parameters, the first being the actual utilization of paradox theory and the second being a demonstration of how recruiters navigate such tensions. This resonates with the argument made by Ryan and Derous (2016) that a “greater discussion of how to manage tensions by both practitioners and researchers would be most useful” (p. 18) in terms of moving forward when facing tensions and paradoxes in diversity recruitment. When considering the HRM field in general, an explanation for the lack of utilization of paradox theory within diversity recruitment is identified, as according to Aust, Brandl, Keegan, and Lenses (2017), HRM researchers have not yet mobilized paradox theory extensively to understand tensions and responses to these within the field of HRM.

Some examples include the study by Link and Müller (2015) on the identification of tensions emerging from delegated HR activities and decentralized responsibilities assigned to line managers. Gerpott (2015) discusses the shortcomings of the business partner model in the structuring of the HRM function and explores how organizational actors can reframe their work to embrace the multifaceted nature of HRM. Recently, Bennett, McCracken, O’Kane, and Brown (2023) studied how the HR business partner role can fall into an operational frame of reference, illuminating the operational and strategic tensions of HR roles. This has prompted Aust et al. (2017) to argue that “the potential for further development of HRM analysis of tensions based on paradox theory is significant” (p. 426). Reversely, this is also valuable to paradox theory, as paradox researchers have engaged little with the field of HR (Aust et al. 2017).

The above examples show that the approach to paradox theory being utilized focuses on how HR specialists can create alignment between contradictions when facing tensions and paradoxes rather than demonstrating how specialists work through these and actively utilize them for development. This creates a rather limited understanding of what tensions and paradoxes are and how they can be actively navigated and utilized. Though, the reason for some HRM studies utilizing this approach to paradox theory might relate more generally to a question of scientific positioning within the field of HRM research. Despite some HRM studies calling for more constructivist and critical paradigms (e.g., Francis and Keegan, 2006; Watson, 2004; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007; Lê and Bednarek, 2023), HRM scholarship is argued to be “increasingly dominated by ‘scientific’ research characterized by a positivist methodology, complex statistical techniques, correlational theorising and incremental advances in

knowledge” (Harley, 2015, p. 399). However, this is of no surprise as a positivist methodology is “the most widespread approach in the social sciences” (Bonache and Festing, 2020, p. 104 citing Lee, 1991 and Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2011). This also means that some HRM literature has approached tensions and paradoxes with the notion that we can create alignment between the contradictions or make a trade-off. However, this oversimplifies what tensions and paradoxes are and how they can be approached. Furthermore, it disregards the potential of foregrounding tensions and paradoxes and addressing the contradictions simultaneously as sources for development, notwithstanding the discomfort in doing so, whether within diversity management or the myriad other parts of organizational life where tensions and paradoxes are inescapable elements that organizations must embrace. In his provocative paper, Harley (2015) therefore calls for studies that “challenge the current norms of scholarship in HRM” resulting in research that is “theoretically and methodologically rigorous and which put forward genuinely new arguments” through alternative methods and theory (p. 405). This is in line with Janssens and Steyaert (2009) adding that a new line of interpretation is needed where “HRM takes on a more pluralistic perspective, searching for conceptualizations that can accommodate the complexity of employment relationships, characterized by not only shared but also conflicting goals and interests” (p. 146).

This dissertation aims to answer these calls by advancing the field of diversity recruitment within HRM not only methodologically through the application of ethnographic methods, but also theoretically by applying the ontological and epistemological assumptions of a constitutive approach to paradox theory as presented in chapter 3. The dissertation aims to advance the field of diversity recruitment within HRM field by illuminating how a constitutive approach to paradox theory is valuable in revealing and accommodating the tensions and paradoxes in recruiters’ work with diversity and their way of navigating these. The following section presents the central aspects concerning a constitutive approach to paradox theory and argues for choosing this as the dissertation’s approach to paradoxes, highlighting the dissertation’s contributions in doing so.

A constitutive approach to paradox theory

According to Fairhurst and Putnam (2023), paradox theory helps us understand, explain, and guide the contradictory elements that we observe and experience in organizational life (p. 1). In recent years, there has been a growing interest in organizational paradoxes (e.g., Brandl, Keegan, and

Aust; 2022; Berti and Simpson, 2021; Griffin, King, and Reedy, 2022; Jaeck, Marais, Joly, and Preuss, 2023; Pamphile, 2022; Pradies, Tunarosa, Lewis, and Courtoius, 2020; Sadler-Smith, Akstinaite, and Akinici, 2021; Slesman, Hollenbeck, Davison, and Scott, 2022) focusing on how we can understand the intricate nature of organizational life through a focus on dealing with contradictory elements simultaneously. Despite a general interest in understanding the way organizational actors navigate contradictory elements, researchers approach paradox theory differently according to their ontological assumptions, with this dissertation primarily adhering to a constitutive approach, as argued in chapter 2. This section will briefly describe the unifying features of the other approaches to paradox theory before elaborating on the constitutive approach and arguing for its relevance for the dissertation.

According to a general understanding among paradox researchers, paradoxes can be defined as “contradictory elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time. Such elements seem logical when considered in isolation but irrational, inconsistent, and even absurd when juxtaposed” (Lewis, 2000, p. 760). According to Smith and Lewis (2011), responses to these contradictory elements may be a fundamental determinant of an organization’s fate, demonstrating the importance for organizational members to find ways in which they are able to actively cope with and respond to these elements.

Central to this general understanding is the notion that organizations and specialists can respond to paradoxes by approaching the contradictory elements as possible avenues for change (Smith and Lewis, 2011). As such, organizations and specialists are concerned with capturing the potential of such paradoxes by setting out an alternative approach in which they can attend to contradictory elements simultaneously (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Paradox theory thus prescribes that specialists benefit from abandoning the idea that contradictory elements are negative and can be resolved (Putnam, Fairhurst, and Banghart, 2016; Keegan, Brandl and Aust, 2018). Instead, they can be approached as sources of creativity and promote proactive strategies of response (Keegan et al., 2018). Applying paradox theory therefore goes beyond an either-or logic wherein individuals are required to choose between contradictory elements, assuming instead a both-and logic wherein individuals acknowledge the value of both sides of a paradox (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Such a transition in approach enables researchers to detect the potential of a paradox’s elements to guide new ways of theorizing (Schad, 2017 citing Farjoun, 2010; Poole and Van de Ven, 1989). Therefore, according to Aust et al. (2017), “the stance of the paradox lens and the

assumption of the permanent and dynamic nature of tensions reminds us that managing is about finding ‘paradoxical coping strategies’ rather than achieving ‘balance’” (p. 418). Hence, paradox researchers do not advocate for organizations and specialists to choose between contradictory elements. Instead, organizations and specialists should attend to contradictory elements simultaneously as means of development.

Generally, the term “paradox” represents a family of concepts including *tensions* and *contradictions* that together form the theoretical basis of paradox theory. Tensions are associated with the stress, discomfort, or anxiety experienced when making choices in organizational situations (Putnam, et al., 2016). Tensions are inherent emotional experiences related to every concept, which signify the dynamics arising from complex and ambiguous situations (Putnam et al., 2016). Contradictions are referred to as bipolar opposites that are mutually exclusive and interdependent in a way that the opposites define and potentially negate each other (Putnam et al., 2016). As such, contradictions can often be treated as opposite sides of the same coin, so that the more organizational members move toward one pole, the more they draw away from the other (Putnam et al., 2016). To create internal coherence and avoid confusion, this dissertation principally uses the concepts of tensions and paradoxes interchangeably.

Despite agreeing on the central premises of paradox theory, some researchers differ in the way they approach paradoxes and the responses to these explained by differences among their ontological positioning. According to Fairhurst and Putnam (2023), a broad categorization of approaches can be made between what the authors define as early paradox theory and constitutive approaches, with some researchers positioning themselves between these. The dissertation will now explain how the constitutive approach differs from the former in terms of its responses to paradoxes before detailing its relevance for the dissertation’s purpose of studying recruiters’ work with diversity. Deviating from early paradox theory, the constitutive approach incorporates sociomateriality, i.e., human and non-human agents, as pivotal for the formation of and responses to paradoxes, as expressed in the following quote:

“This alternative centers on a sociomaterial world of performances, actions, interactions, and everyday practices that transfer across time and space; become materially rooted in bodies, sites, objects, spaces; and are brought into moments as networks of actors (human and nonhuman) that constitute tensions and contradictions.”

(Fairhurst and Putnam, 2023, pp. 4-5).

The authors acknowledge the complexity, interconnection, and consequentiality among these elements, which opens research up to approaches that acknowledge humans and non-human agents in the formation of and responses to paradoxes (Fairhurst and Putnam, 2023, p. xiii). This draws the awareness of organizations, specialists, and researchers to the importance of artifacts, physical space, and physiological responses to paradox as constituting elements of both the construction of and response to paradox (Fairhurst and Putnam, 2023, p. xiii). Whereas early paradox theory mainly adopts a being and static ontology to paradoxes, the constitutive approach aims to “deconstruct the notion of paradox as a reified ‘thing’ – that it, as a self-contained object around which people orient” (p. 4) by adopting a becoming and processual ontology to paradoxes. As such, it represents an alternative to the study of paradox by focusing on the development of paradoxes in sociomaterial performances, thereby treating paradoxes as processes rather than perceptions or types of thinking (p. 20).

In relation to responses, the constitutive approach aims to treat these as “intricately intertwined with the ongoing development of paradoxes,” which moves the focus away from “managing tensions” and “coping with them” to “center on ongoing movement, timing, and sequencing” (p. 9). With this, Fairhurst and Putnam (2023) introduce what they term *more-than* strategies where individuals utilize the intellectual capital of a group to enact creative responses to paradoxes that alter the pattern of actions and reactions over time (p. 6). This allows options for self-reflection in identifying paradoxes individually and collectively (p. 6). Some of the responses include dialogic interactions, humor, and relational support, which are often combined with other responses, including both-and strategies (p. 9).

Some studies have already utilized the constitutive approach, including Jarzabkowski and Lê, 2016, Pradies et al., 2020, and Pamphile, 2022. However, most studies utilizing the constitutive approach are predominantly positioned within management and organizations studies with a striking scarcity of research within the field of HRM and more specifically, within diversity recruitment, where it is non-existent. As HRM researchers have argued for the inherent existence of paradoxes in HR specialists’ organizational life (Keegan et al., 2018), the dissertation sees great value in utilizing an alternative approach to paradoxes in the study of recruiters’ work with diversity for three overall reasons.

First, in general, paradox theory is relevant for the dissertation’s purpose, as the theory allows me to foreground the intricate nature of recruiters’ work with diversity, which is found to

be tensional according to previous diversity recruitment literature (as argued in the section *Paradoxes in diversity recruitment*). As previous diversity recruitment literature has not yet utilized paradox theory to understand how recruiters navigate such tensions, the dissertation contributes with novel insights to this stream of literature by focusing on recruiters' coping strategies when finding themselves in tensional situations related to their work with diversity.

Second, utilizing an alternative approach to paradoxes, i.e., the constitutive approach, serves the dissertation's purpose well, as this approach allows a focus on how human and non-human agents become part of the formation and responses to paradoxes. This is of particular importance to this dissertation in dealing with notions of recruiter roles, intuition, and the HRM function within the context of workplace diversity, things which are all nonhuman but can still constitute paradoxes and responses to them. Additionally, the processual ontology of the constitutive approach allows the dissertation to focus on how tensions and paradoxes come into being in recruiters' work with diversity and how their responses to these develop over time. Together, a socio-material perspective as well as a processual ontology allow the dissertation to contribute with valuable insights to the field of diversity recruitment within HRM, with a focus on the multiplicity of agents that become part of the formation of and responses to tensions in recruiters' work with diversity.

Finally, and in relation to the second point, the constitutive approach supports the dissertation in adopting a micro-level perspective by attending to various elements that can constitute tensions and paradoxes. As such, the dissertation can adopt and contribute with a micro-level perspective focusing specifically on recruiters' work with diversity while remaining open toward macro-level discourses that could impact their work. This is highly relevant, as the review of central aspects concerning DM (see the section *Paradoxes in Diversity management*) has revealed how organizations adopt the conflicting purposes of business case rationales and social justice rationales in their attempt to diversify the workplace, purposes that could impact recruiters' work with diversity as well.

After having outlined the reasons for choosing the constitutive approach as the theoretical framework of the dissertation, the following section will finalize this chapter by briefly arguing for the relevance in applying the framework as a metatheoretical perspective.

A constitutive approach to paradox theory as a metatheoretical perspective

Fairhurst and Putnam (2023) cast the constitutive approach as a metatheory for studying organizational tensions (p. 5), meaning it can be combined with other theoretical perspectives to conceptualize tensions and paradoxes (Aust et al., 2017). This allows the dissertation to combine other theoretical perspectives with paradox theory in the study of recruiters' work with diversity. While the four papers of the dissertation all to some extent draw on paradox theory as the overall theoretical framework, each of the papers also draws on other theoretical concepts in their effort to foreground tensions and paradoxes in recruiters' work with diversity and their navigation of these. Individually, the four papers theorize different yet related perspectives on recruiters, their work with diversity, and how they navigate tensions and paradoxes. Collectively, the four papers contribute with different insights to the overall purpose of the dissertation.

It is important to note that the dissertation does not focus on tensions and paradoxes *per se*, and none of the four papers approach these as distinct constructs. Instead, the papers approach topics of diversity, recruiter roles, intuition, and the HRM function from a paradox perspective informed by the constitutive approach. Therefore, the dissertation does not aim to contribute directly to paradox theory but instead aims to contribute to the field of diversity recruitment within HRM with a constitutive paradox perspective on DM and recruiters' work with diversity. This knowledge may also contribute indirectly with insights to paradox literature advancing how organizational specialists beyond the most frequently investigated ones (i.e., recruiters) are confronted with and respond to tensions and paradoxes, thereby advancing knowledge about tensions within the field of HR.

Table 4.1 below shows the theoretical concepts of each of the four papers which will be presented in the next chapter of the dissertation.

Table 4.1. Overview of the papers' theoretical concepts

	Paper I	Paper II	Paper III	Paper IV
Title	Reconceptualising Diversity Management from a Paradox Lens	Unpacking the adaptive role of recruiters in fostering diversity	Navigating tensions of intuition in recruitment	The HRM function as a double-edged sword for recruiters' identities
RQ	How can a paradox lens be utilised to bridge existing understandings of diversity management?	How do recruiters carry out their role throughout the recruitment process when working with hiring managers to foster diversity and how do they navigate tensions in relation to this?	How do recruiters understand their use of intuition in their work and how do they navigate tensions associated with its use?	How do recruiters experience tensions in relation to the Human Resource Management (HRM) function's implementation of a diversity and inclusion strategy and how do these experiences impact their identities?
Data	Conceptual paper	Observations in meetings along the recruitment process, informal interviews with diversity professionals, informal interactions with recruiters and recruitment managers, semi-structured interviews with recruiters, semi-structured focus group interview with recruiters and recruitment managers.	Observations in meetings along the recruitment process as background data. One semi-structured interview with recruiters in Northern European office, one semi-structured focus group interview with recruiters in US office and one semi-structured focus group interview with recruiters in Northern European office as foundational data.	Observations in meetings along the recruitment process and informal interactions with recruiters and recruitment managers as background data. Five semi-structured interviews with recruiters as foundational data.
Theoretical concepts	Paradox theory; Paradox mindsets	Paradox theory; Role theory	Paradox theory; Paradox mindsets	Identity aspiration; Tensions

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Part three – The papers of the dissertation

CHAPTER 5:

Paper I: Reconceptualising Diversity Management from a Paradox Lens

Table 5.1. Overview of Paper I

Author(s)	Maria Dahl Andersen and Stina Rydell Brøgger*
Research question	How can a paradox lens be utilised to bridge existing understandings of diversity management?
Main findings	We argue that the use of a paradox lens on diversity management allows for challenges to be brought forward instead of ignored or hidden away by illuminating and actively acknowledging both the liberating but also the challenging and oftentimes constraining experiences for the actors involved. Thus, a paradox lens offers space for embracing and utilising paradoxes when working with diversity.
Presentation outlets	Accepted and presented at European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) 2022 at sub-theme 09: <i>Balance in an Unbalanced World - Understanding Competing Demands through Paradox Theory</i> .
Status	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Submitted for Human Resource Management Review (AJG 3), October 2022 – desk rejection2. Submitted for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: An International Journal (AJG 2), January 2023 – revise & resubmit<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Re-submitted for second revisions, October 2023○ Accepted for publication in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: An International Journal, November 2023○ Published in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: An International Journal, December 2023

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Reconceptualising Diversity Management from a Paradox Lens

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Abstract

Purpose – Since the 1980's, diversity management (DM) has been regarded as a relevant scholarly and practical endeavour laden with different and often contrasting rationales and conceptualisations. In this regard, the current literature on DM largely differentiates between two overarching approaches: the instrumental and the critical approach with varying conceptualisations and underlying understandings of DM. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how a paradox lens can be utilised to bridge existing understandings of diversity management.

Design/methodology/approach – We aim to discuss the current state of DM literature and reconceptualise DM from a paradox lens.

Findings – We argue that the use of a paradox lens on DM allows for challenges to be brought forward instead of ignored or hidden away by illuminating and actively acknowledging both the liberating but also the challenging and oftentimes constraining experiences for the actors involved. Thus, a paradox lens offers space for embracing and utilising paradoxes when working with diversity.

Originality/value – Diversity management is no new concept in the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) and several scholars argue that the longstanding divide between the instrumental and critical approach remains problematic and limiting for the practice of DM. Hence, the value of reconceptualising DM from a paradox lens lies in bridging the two approaches in order to give way to viewing DM as a nuanced, dynamic, and multifaceted practice that can accommodate complexity and contradictions in new and potentially beneficial manners.

Keywords – Diversity Management, Paradoxes, Paradox mindset, Reconceptualisation

Paper type – conceptual paper

Introduction

Diversity management (DM) is by no means a new organisational endeavour (Shore et al., 2009, McMahan et al., 1998). However, calls for new ways of understanding and managing an increasingly diverse workforce have emerged in the DM literature (Yadav and Lenka, 2020a; Heres and Benschop, 2010; Trittin and Schoeneborn, 2015; Nadiv and Kuna, 2020). In spite of these calls, some debate whether or not it is even relevant to discuss the issue of DM in the workplace and if problematising diversity is actually just creating more challenges than it is solving (Bassett-Jones, 2005). We argue that DM is still highly relevant to consider for organisations especially if approached in ways that allow for challenges to be brought to the forefront instead of ignored or hidden away.

Acknowledging that diversity is a heavily debated topic, the management of diversity is not without difficulties giving way to multiple challenges and paradoxes. The current literature on DM largely differentiates between two distinct approaches: (1) the instrumental and (2) the critical approach (Trittin and Schoeneborn, 2015). Based on our reading of the DM literature, we have observed a call for more conceptualisations that take into account the growing number of challenges and tensions modern DM faces (Nadiv and Kuna, 2020; Omanović, 2009), hence making it relevant to ask the following research question: how can a paradox lens be utilised to bridge existing understandings of diversity management?

We believe that the utilisation of a paradox lens on DM can help bridge the existing tensions between the instrumental and the critical approach by transitioning from an either-or mindset towards a both-and mindset. With a paradox lens, researchers and practitioners can thus illuminate and actively acknowledge both the liberating but also the challenging and oftentimes constraining experiences for the actors involved in DM. In doing so, we advocate for seeing DM as creating space for, embracing, and utilising paradoxes (Lüscher and Lewis, 2008 in Daubner-Siva et al., 2017).

In our attempt to answer our research question, we start by presenting DM related literature according to the two overarching approaches of DM: the instrumental and critical approach. Since our aim is to reconceptualise DM from a paradox lens, it makes sense to outline different aspects of paradox theory prior to presenting our reconceptualisation of DM from a paradox lens. We finalise the paper by discussing theoretical and practical implications before reflecting on the limitations of our paper and future research avenues.

The Complexity of Diversity Management

DM is complex and ambiguous making it inherently difficult to define (Kramar, 2012) due to ontological and epistemological differences within specific paradigms (Ely and Thomas, 2001 in Oguntebi et al., 2012). Since its introduction to the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) in the 1980s, the concept of DM has received increasing and contradicting attention (Yadav and Lenka, 2020a). When defining DM, the complexity of the field becomes evident and according to Kramar there is no overarching and clear way to define DM (2012). On the contrary, it is argued that the definition of DM depends on context, rationale, paradigm, and to a certain extent organisational, group, and individual perceptions of what diversity consists of (Bassett-Jones, 2005; Shen et al., 2009; Tatli et al., 2012). This makes it increasingly challenging to establish what exactly is meant when referring to DM.

Regardless of the different ways of defining DM, the field largely differentiates between two distinct approaches. In the following, we will present and account for these approaches labelled as the instrumental and the critical approach in accordance with Trittin and Schoeneborn's (2015) conceptualisations. In doing so, we acknowledge that the DM literature has more nuances than what is possible to illustrate with two overarching approaches as presented here. We also recognise that the two approaches are not always this sharply divided in practice and that they sometimes tend to overlap in their understanding of DM. In that way, they represent different tendencies in the two approaches. In the following, we will focus on the central differences between the approaches and look at how they each conceptualise DM.

The Instrumental Approach

Its origin in the US has especially influenced the early stages of DM research, which is evident in the emphasis on the business case, which we view as defining for the first of the two approaches: the instrumental approach. DM was initially presented as an alternative to previous equality programs in the US such as Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity due to its focus on competitive advantages and human resource utilisation (Holvino and Kamp, 2009, Frémeaux, 2020).

The central argument for managing diversity in the instrumental approach is the emphasis and indication of the business case that diversity is good for performance (Das, 2021; Frémeaux, 2020). A majority of research in this stream focuses on numeric outcomes in determining the

effectiveness of DM (Dennissen et al., 2020; Holvino and Kamp, 2009). Managing diversity in the instrumental approach is thereby an organisational priority due to its economic benefits; it simply pays off to have a diverse workforce as it has been proven to positively influence performance (Christiansen and Just, 2012; Köllen, 2021; Pitts and Wise, 2010). DM in the instrumental approach can therefore be viewed as largely dominated by an economic rationale with a focus on how human resources can contribute to better performance, productivity, and profitability (Christiansen and Just, 2012; Holvino and Kamp, 2009; Yadav and Lenka, 2020b). This is with the hopes of “making use and leveraging human differences toward organizational effectiveness.” (Plummer, 2003, p.13 in Holvino and Kamp, 2009).

It can be argued that DM is seen as a means to an end and approached as a rational and well-organised practice that can be managed by top-down, well-planned strategic initiatives (Oguntebi et al., 2012; Christiansen and Just, 2012; Nadiv and Kuna, 2020). Therefore, if DM fails to contribute to an organisation’s numeric outcome, it is most likely due to mismanagement (Knights and Omanović, 2016; Shen et al., 2009). The responsibility for DM is thereby placed at the level of managers and especially with that of top-management and organisational boards (Holvino and Kamp, 2009). This is to a large extent related to the economic rationale dominating the instrumental approach and the focus on the business case and DM’s potential to increase performance and thereby harvest numeric outcomes (Bassett-Jones, 2005; Das, 2021, Francis, and Michielsens, 2021; Jonsen et al., 2011; Manoharan et al., 2021; Martín-Alcázar et al., 2012; Sinicropi and Cortese, 2021). In order for organisations to implement new DM practices, top-management needs to be convinced of the monetary benefits of these practices, ultimately making top-managers highly relevant when deciding whether or not to embark on the road to more organisational diversity (Dickens, 1999 in Heres and Benschop, 2010).

It can be argued that the instrumental approach is characterised by a normative and linear trail of thought where the understanding of diversity is concerned with observable attributes, typically also referred to as surface-level diversity, which refer to visible sociodemographic differences amongst organisational members (Jackson et al., 2003 in Yadav and Lenka, 2020a). According to Das “Surface-level diversity consists approximately of 89% of management literature (Jackson et al., 2003), as its attributes are easy to operationalize” (2021, p. 3). These differences are seen as manageable variables that can contribute to the overall goal of DM; to gain a competitive and economic advantage (Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010). Hence, they are

seen as likely to produce a quick numeric outcome and thereby contribute to the business case of DM (Tatli et al., 2012). However, a critique of the instrumental approach has often been that solely focusing on the business case limits DM practices to only focus on observable and surface-level attributes that can yield short-term benefits for the organisation while ignoring or disregarding more invisible attributes. As a consequence, different DM practices might be completely abandoned if they do not result in enhanced performance, hence suffering from what Noon (2007) and Heres and Benschop (2010) refer to as short-termism.

The instrumental approach's focus on economic rationale and establishing the business case was seen by many researchers and practitioners as an important first step to introducing DM to organisations (Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014; Gotsis and Kortezi, 2013). It is still often seen as the driver for establishing DM practices in organisations (Köllen, 2020) while also being a highly prevalent and popular topic in the DM literature (Heres and Benschop, 2010), sometimes indicating that this is the mainstream approach to DM (Tatli, 2011; Fernando, 2021; Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2015). However, it has been criticised for its overly economic rationale and its focus on strategic, linear, and normative practices (Knights and Omanović, 2016; Gotsis and Kortezi, 2013) giving way to the critical approach.

The Critical Approach

The critical approach identifies DM as a social responsibility rather than as a purely economic endeavour (Köllen, 2020; Köllen, 2021; Kramar, 2012; Manoharan and Singal, 2017; Sinicropi and Cortese, 2021) contrasting the economic rationale identified as central to the instrumental approach. Significant for the critical approach is how DM can potentially create inclusive work environments for disadvantaged groups in organisations (Christiansen and Just, 2012; Frémeaux, 2020). Unlike the instrumental approach, the critical approach positions itself as a sceptical approach to the relationship between diversity and performance upon which the business case embarks on (Bassett-Jones, 2005). It starts to question the assumption that DM can be strategically planned from a managerial position (Omanović, 2009) and it emphasises that diversity initiatives also hold the potential to create organisational tensions that undermine the alleged performance outcome highlighted by the instrumental approach (Kuna and Nativ, 2021).

The critical approach explores the options that diversity might not always produce desired results and can even contribute to more conflict and difficulties in organisations if not taken

seriously and handled properly (Bassett-Jones, 2005; Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2015; Fernando, 2021; Dick and Cassell, 2002; Omanović, 2009; van Dijk et al., 2012). In doing so, the approach sees DM as filled with power, potentially giving managers access to decide which aspects of diversity will be welcomed and which will be ignored (Holvino and Kamp, 2009), something that is largely overlooked in the instrumental approach. Zanoni et al., goes even further in this argument and discuss how a critical view not only reflects existing unequal power relations within organisations but likewise holds the potential to maintain, resist, and/or transform these, giving way to an understanding of DM as being socially produced and reproduced (Zanoni et al., 2010).

A common theme of the critical approach is trying to nuance the understanding of DM and not only portray it as a positive undertaking that contributes to organisational outcomes (Bassett-Jones, 2005). On the contrary, studies from the critical approach highlight that DM done wrong can damage cohesiveness, reduce communication, and create in- and out-groups in organisations (Bassett-Jones, 2005). Furthermore, the appealing tenets of the business case could potentially limit the long-term influence DM could have in organisations by simply focusing on economic outcomes and disregarding social responsibilities and social change (Knights and Omanović, 2016; Heres and Benschop, 2010).

Central to the critical approach is the interest in how different observable and non-observable attributes are constructed socially and how they can be challenged and overcome by different DM practices (Trittin and Schoeneborn, 2015; Omanović, 2009). This makes discourse and individual interpretation central to this approach (Heres and Benschop, 2010; Fernando, 2021). In continuation hereof, the critical approach is concerned with observable as well as non-observable attributes, also referred to as deep-level diversity such as values (Buengeler et al., 2018), personality (Das, 2021), beliefs (Frémeaux, 2020), and attitudes (Yadav and Lenka, 2020b), that set organisational members apart (Trittin and Schoeneborn, 2015). Instead of seeing these attributes as stable and fixed entities, the critical approach argues that diversity is socially constructed, dependent on individual interpretation, and produced and reproduced by the use of different discourses (Fernando, 2021; Janssens and Zanoni, 2005; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004). The critical approach highlights the fact that diverse attributes cannot easily be grouped and kept separate when entering organisations. The approach therefore calls for more research that looks into the intersectionality of diversity (Heres and Benschop, 2010; Dennissen et al., 2020; Sinicropi and Cortese, 2021) defined as the interaction between multiple categories of differences

(Dennissen et al., 2020). Hence the notion that one can belong to multiple minorities and move in and out of disadvantaged groups depending on context (Knights and Omanović, 2016).

Based on our reading of the DM literature, we have observed a call for more conceptualisations that take into account the growing challenges and tensions modern DM faces (Omanović, 2009; Nadiv and Kuna, 2020). After reviewing central papers within the two approaches, we conclude that they share a unifying focus on the rationale of DM, the outcome of DM, and the role of managers. Therefore, we will depart from these three dimensions in our own reconceptualisation of DM from a paradox lens. Thus, we introduce the theoretical framework of paradoxes as a potential reconceptualisation of DM.

Towards a Paradox Reconceptualisation of Diversity Management

After having discussed central aspects of the literature within the instrumental and critical approach, we observe an increasing number of papers that address the debate between the business case rationale and the social justice rationale (Barnes and Ashtiany, 2003; Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2015; Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010; Maxwell, 2004). Tomlinson and Schwabenland introduce the tension inherent in this debate by arguing that “The tension between the business case and social justice approaches forms a crucial point of debate in the diversity and equality field” (2010, p. 101). This highlights that the two rationales are to some extent still regarded as essentially oppositional in DM. However, this becomes questionable when the ‘business’ of DM is also concerned with achieving social justice (Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010). Some researchers are claiming that business arguments can coexist with social justice arguments in DM (Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010; Barnes and Ashtiany, 2003; Maxwell, 2004; Köllen, 2021), thus acknowledging the coexistence of diversity polarities. Already fifteen years ago, this brought researchers to call for a new theoretical approach towards dealing with the seemingly opposing rationales of the business case and social justice in DM:

However, 15 years of debate between equality and business case proponents have not yet lead to a theoretical perspective on dealing with diversity in organizations that adequately integrates the main arguments of the equality and the business case perspective (Syed and Kramar, 2009 in van Dijk et al., 2012, p. 74).

Based on this, our observation for more conceptualisations that take into account the growing number of challenges and tensions faced in modern DM is argued to be highly pertinent. Though, a few contemporary papers have already applied a paradox lens on DM.

For example, Nadiv and Kuna (2020) argue that efforts at DM yield mixed results or even fail in promoting workforce diversity. The use of a paradox lens for analysing DM has been relatively sparse in prior research, which led the authors to apply such a lens to better understand the challenges of DM from the vantage point of diversity managers, who they argue to play a central role in the promotion and implementation of diversity initiatives. Findings demonstrate how diversity initiatives generate organisational tensions that undermine the success of these initiatives and hence amplify the need for further initiatives, resulting in a negative and self-reinforcing spiral. The authors show how applying a paradox lens contributes to “depicting the inherent tensions and contradictions that arise during DM implementation” (Nadiv and Kuna, 2020, p. 368). The paradox lens thus contributes to a novel understanding of the, often times, limited success of DM initiatives and how it can be navigated for future scenarios (Nadiv and Kuna, 2020).

Additionally, Daubner-Siva et al. (2017) argue that organisations promote exclusion through a talent management (TM) architecture that focuses on the identification and development of a few selected employees, while simultaneously, promoting inclusion in the attempt to minimise existing inequalities for traditionally marginalised groups. After having reviewed TM and DM literature, they apply a paradox lens to the conceptual tension between exclusive TM and inclusive DM. This paradox calls for organisations to establish an exclusive TM architecture for those deemed as high potential employees, while simultaneously, embracing inclusive DM principles that allow every employee to develop their talents. Thereby, the authors demonstrate that by adopting a paradox lens, TM and DM can be dovetailed to create a closer alignment between the two and move the field of TM forward (Daubner-Siva et al., 2017).

Recently, Jaeck et al. (2023) published a paper arguing that one reason for the oftentimes mixed results of DM, is the fact that espoused diversity policies are often implemented in multi-objective contexts in which various stakeholders perceive diversity and its place in the organisation differently, which affects organisational outcomes. To shed light on these challenges, the authors argue for the relevancy of applying paradox theory. They propose considering DM “as an

inherently paradoxical organizational phenomenon, characterized by persistent interdependent, yet contradictory tensions between moral and economic objectives” (p. 6).

From these studies, we observe the utilisation of a paradox lens as focusing on how to utilise paradox theory on DM in empirical settings. We take this utilisation of paradox theory a step further by applying paradox theory on DM in a meta-theoretical and conceptual manner with the aim of integrating the paradox lens as a tool towards utilising both the challenges and possibilities in managing diversity. More so than ever we therefore find this gap to actualise the relevancy, novelty, and aim of this paper in which we are going to explore the paradox lens as a tool towards utilising both the challenges and possibilities in managing diversity. Therefore, we will briefly outline the central aspects of paradox theory in the following.

Paradox theory

Paradoxes are defined as “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time. Such elements seem logical when considered in isolation but irrational, inconsistent, and even absurd when juxtaposed” (Smith and Lewis, 2011, p. 386). Managing paradoxes is concerned with capturing its inherent potential by setting out an alternative approach thus exploring how organisations can attend to competing demands simultaneously (Smith and Lewis, 2011).

In their paper from 2011, Smith and Lewis elaborate on the nature of paradoxes and how individuals can navigate these by proposing a dynamic equilibrium model. The model has three features: First, paradoxical tensions are both latent – existing within the system – and salient – socially constructed and created by individuals’ cognition or rhetoric. Second, responses to tensions entail iterating among management strategies via splitting, integrating, and acceptance. And third, the impact of management strategies towards tensions can foster sustainable learning, creativity, resilience, and human potential (Smith and Lewis, 2011). As such, they demonstrate how responses to paradoxes are crucial for the outcome of the situation. Responses can fuel either vicious or virtuous cycles, which is referred to as “iterative spirals of self-reinforcing sequences of events that grow out of the ways that actors process contradictions” (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 81). Vicious cycles can emerge when individuals negate tensions and/or prioritise either one or another contradictory element. Virtuous cycles, on the other hand, are triggered by individuals engaging actively with tensions through acceptance of the both-and elements of the paradox (Smith and

Lewis, 2011). Therefore, Smith and Lewis (2011) propose that “attending to competing demands simultaneously requires cognitive and behavioral complexity, emotional equanimity, and dynamic organizational capabilities” (p. 391). Applying a paradox lens therefore moves management approaches away from an either-or mindset to consider a both-and mindset acknowledging that both sides of a paradox are preferable (Smith and Lewis, 2011).

This has spurred an increased focus on paradox mindsets in contemporary paradox research, which refers to individuals who have “a tendency to value, accept and feel comfortable with tensions” and who “see tensions as opportunities, confront them, and search for both-and strategies” (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018, p. 27). Thereby, individuals are continuously looking for ways to navigate and manage these tensions in order to utilise paradoxes constructively (Smith and Lewis, 2011 in Nadiv, 2021). Shifting the notion towards a paradox lens may then serve as a means for researchers and practitioners “to move beyond oversimplified and polarized notions to recognize the complexity, diversity and ambiguity of organizational life” (Lewis, 2000, p. 770).

Reconceptualising Diversity Management from a Paradox lens

According to Keegan et al. (2015), paradoxes are inherent in organisational life and particularly in the field of HRM given the relational nature of the employment relationship and the attention given to efficiency and organisational outcomes. Yet, acknowledging the inherent paradoxical nature of DM is still relatively overlooked in HRM research, which actualises the relevancy of utilising paradox theory for reconceptualising DM in this paper. We will focus on the three dimensions derived from the literature review of the instrumental and the critical approaches as point of departure for our reconceptualisation.

As paradox theory relies on the premise of attending to competing demands simultaneously, we acknowledge the coexistence of the business case and social justice rationale as opposing poles that bear individually unique characteristics. Characteristics that should be embraced and managed differently. However, we extend previous DM conceptualisations by acknowledging the intertwinement of the poles. Without the business case rationale there would be no social justice rationale. Therefore, the latter exists purely due to the former, highlighting how each pole influences the other. Managing the intertwinement of the poles thus requires a transition from an either-or mindset towards a both-and mindset in order to utilise both challenges and possibilities in managing diversity. The intertwinement posits that DM bears both an

economic, yet also a socially just rationale. Additionally, and what distinguishes our approach from the instrumental and the critical approach that have inherent opposing purposes of DM, is the acknowledgement that DM is not constrained to only these two poles of purposes. With this, we invite further understandings and potential diversity polarities to coexist, which requires balancing the potential opposing rationales.

As pointed out in the presentation of the DM literature, the instrumental approach emphasises a clear linearity between DM and performance. This is later on highly contested by the critical approach that questions the linearity between DM and performance arguing that even though DM is managed properly, it does not always lead to positive performance results. Hereby, we observe the existence of two rather opposing poles. However, as we acknowledge the coexistence of diversity polarities, among these the business case and social justice rationale, we start to question whether the relationship between DM and performance is in fact only linear and one-dimensional. Additionally, researchers argue for applying a more proactive perspective that is not afraid to consider alternative approaches to the practice of DM (Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2015; Tatli, 2011; Zanoni et al., 2010). As such, organisations are inviting in more diversity whilst also addressing economic concerns (Janssens and Zanoni, 2014). By approaching DM from a paradox lens, we therefore acknowledge the distinction between the performance driven business case rationale and the contesting nature of the critical approach; however, as seen from the paradox literature, these cannot be separated due to their inevitable intertwinement. Thus, we argue that the former approach of isolating the purpose of DM to only one of these poles seems to be constraining and limiting. Instead, multiple goals should to be considered.

Combining the business case and social justice rationale invokes goals of creating economic benefits for the organisation in question and society, as well as the inclusion and emancipation of disadvantaged groups (Christiansen and Just, 2012). According to Christiansen and Just (2012), this two-fold emphasis may, however, be restricting and liberating to the involved organisational members. Nevertheless, we question why restricting and liberating experiences should necessarily be viewed upon as separated from each other. Applying paradox theory in dealing with the seemingly contradictory nature of these experiences allows DM practitioners to move away from having to separate these. Instead, it should be acknowledged that DM practices do, and most likely will, give rise to both constraining and liberating experiences for the disadvantaged group in question and also for the privileged groups.

Looking at the instrumental approach, the responsibility for DM is placed in the hands of managers and more specifically with top-management and organisational boards. However, the critical approach begins to question the social nature of diversity. Within this approach, diversity is a socially constructed concept produced and reproduced in the social interactions of organisational members (Fernando, 2021). When the conceptual nature of diversity changes to embrace social discourses, the members responsible for the process of DM also changes from only managers to include any members of the organisation in question and also in society. As such, managers can and should no longer be placed as solely responsible for strategising and managing diversity. DM therefore becomes constructed, negotiated, and managed between any organisational member whilst also including potential actors from society, for example NGOs and politicians.

However, what the critical approach does not fully acknowledge is the often time contradicting agendas and interests such different stakeholders hold in relation to diversity. For example, whilst politicians often have a political and social agenda in mind when it comes to establishing for example gender quotas in organisations, the organisation often must balance this up against an economic rationale, as well, which are not always free from challenges and contradicting interests inside and outside the organisation. Inside the organisation, some employees might experience liberating feelings when it comes to gender quotas whereas others are feeling constrained on the matter. An argument that the critical approach does not take fully into consideration when opening up for including more members responsible for the process of DM. A paradox lens brings this argument into the foreground by illuminating the liberating but also challenging and often times constraining agendas held by these different stakeholders. As such, the responsibility of DM is not confined only to the role of managers and organisational members, but goes beyond the organisation to include any societal actor. Based on a paradox lens, each actor has their own agendas and interests for the purpose of DM and those can be both liberating and constraining for the involved actors in question. Therefore, we move away from the notion of placing sole responsibility of DM in the hands of managers for the benefit of the economic prosperity of the organisation. This move is supported by the inherent nature of paradox theory by attending to competing demands simultaneously thus acknowledging that diversity is an organisational as well as a societal responsibility whose rationales cannot be separated and that those rationales often time yield both constraining and liberating outcomes. Thus, the paradox lens

illuminates and actively acknowledges the liberating but also challenging and often times constraining agendas held by these multiple and inherently different actors, when the responsibility of DM is shared by multiple stakeholders.

When relating the instrumental approach to the paradox framework, it becomes clear that observable attributes, surface-level diversity, are separated from the non-observable, deep-level diversity without relating them to each other. What the critical approach thus criticises is the overlooked need to additionally take into account non-observable attributes that also set organisational members apart as those bear just as great an importance as the observable attributes. The critical approach stresses that these observable and non-observable attributes can exist in and move between multiple contexts fuelled by the concept of intersectionality. The critical approach thus starts to challenge the “normalised” discourse of diversity attributes entailed by the treatment of sameness and difference in relation to single identity categories for example gender, age, and ethnicity within DM by introducing the concept of intersectionality and the notion that one can belong to multiple minorities at the same time and move between these depending on social context (Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2015). Furthermore, the notion of intersectionality can relate to both observable and non-observable attributes and also to a combination of the two (Dennissen et al., 2020). Such an understanding raises questions concerning the consequences of alternative ways of approaching diversity attributes and how differences amongst organisational members are dealt with (Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2015). Within the paradox lens, we thus argue that this move can be seen as a stepping-stone towards an understanding of observable and non-observable diversity attributes that can be both stable and socially constructed existing in multiple contexts. Though, with the paradox lens we acknowledge that organisational members can – and most likely will – experience both liberating and constraining feelings in relation to intersectionality depending on the contexts in which they are working.

With this reconceptualisation, we have proposed arguments for bridging the distinctions between the instrumental and the critical approach in DM by applying paradox theory. In table 1 below we summarise and compare the instrumental and critical approach to DM with our reconceptualisation from a paradox lens and group these into the three different focus points identified in the literature review: conceptualisations of DM, its outcome, and the role of managers.

Table 1. Comparison of the instrumental and critical approach with the paradox lens on diversity management

	Instrumental	Critical	Paradox
Conceptualisation and rationale	<p>Economic rationale</p> <p>DM is an economic advantage that leads to better organisational performance if managed correctly</p>	<p>Social justice rationale</p> <p>DM is about inclusion of underrepresented groups of employees in the organisation</p>	<p>Economic, yet socially just rationale</p> <p>DM is not constrained only to the poles of economic and social responsibilities</p>
Outcome of DM	<p>DM is a means to an end</p> <p>If diversity does not contribute directly to performance, it is because it had been mismanaged</p>	<p>DM is about being socially responsible for disadvantaged groups</p> <p>DM does not necessarily lead to better performance or economic advantages</p>	<p>The relationship between DM and performance is not linear and one-dimensional, but allows for multiple contextual factors to be considered</p> <p>DM can be both constraining and liberating for the actors involved</p>
Role of managers	<p>The responsibility for DM is placed with managers and organisational boards</p>	<p>DM is inherently power laden and managers have the potential to decide which aspects of diversity will be welcomed and which will be ignored</p>	<p>The responsibility for DM is distributed amongst different organisational and societal members and does not only take the role of managers into account. The actors can have conflicting agendas towards diversity causing potential liberating and constraining experiences</p>

Conclusion

Theoretical implications

The main theoretical contribution of our paper consists of our presentation of a paradox reconceptualisation of DM to the field of HRM, and more specifically to the field of DM studies. In doing so, we answer the call for more conceptualisations of the understanding of DM as requested by researchers in the field (Nadiv and Kuna, 2020; Trittin and Schoeneborn, 2015; Jonsen et al., 2011). We did so because Jonsen et al. argue that “Despite the many thoughtful and important scholarly contributions we have reviewed, we conclude that the field of diversity is not so diverse itself” (2011, p. 52). In a similar vein, we can conclude that a large part of the DM literature operates within only one of the two identified approaches: the instrumental or the critical approach, with a considerable emphasis on papers applying an instrumental approach. Hence, our paper contributes to the DM literature by presenting a nuanced, dynamic, and multifaceted approach that can accommodate complexity and contradictions in a new and potentially beneficial manner by bringing attention to both the constraining and liberating experiences of DM.

In that way, our paper demonstrates that we can enhance our knowledge about diversity and DM by incorporating other research streams, in this case that of paradoxes, and thereby enrich our understanding of the growing number of challenges and tensions in managing diversity. Similar to the approach taken by Trittin and Schoeneborn (2015) with their use of polyphony in reconceptualising DM from a communication-centred perspective, we believe that the utilisation of a paradox lens can help bridge the existing tensions between the instrumental and the critical approach and thereby transition from an either-or mindset towards a both-and mindset. The connection between DM and paradoxes has therefore proven to be an interesting subject that requires further research. Something we will touch upon briefly in the section regarding future research avenues below.

Practical implications

Our reconceptualisation of DM suggests significant practical implications for DM and other HRM practitioners working with DM that may advance how to manage diversity in ways that illuminate and actively acknowledge both the liberating but also the challenging and oftentimes constraining experiences for the actors involved. Thus, a paradox lens offers space for practitioners to embrace and utilise paradoxes when working with diversity.

Given the inherent balancing with paradoxes, DM practitioners are facing the need to better navigate paradoxes as well as learn how to cope with the tensions associated with paradox navigation (Nadiv and Kuna, 2020). Thus, we are advocating for adopting a paradox mindset (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018) in the continuous education of DM practitioners, while also taking into account the role of societal actors. A paradox mindset can enable DM practitioners to better value, accept, and feel comfortable while experiencing – or creating – constraining and liberating tensions and to seek opportunities to confront those tensions (Smith and Lewis, 2011 in Nadiv, 2021).

Intercultural differences are a great example of how a paradox mindset can aid DM practitioners in navigating constraining and liberating experiences for themselves and for the actors involved. One might ask; what do multinational organisations who officially support LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and more) and employees who self-identify as such do in those parts of the world where other sexualities besides heterosexuality are strongly disapproved of or even illegal? Does the organisation choose to openly support LGBTQIA+ or are they required from local government policies to refrain from that? And what consequences do such decisions have for the DM practices in the main location of the organisation when it comes to trust and credibility? This leads to paradoxical tensions that call for other approaches of DM besides the instrumental approach and the critical approach in addressing and managing such constraining and liberating situations. Through an application of the paradox lens, it is possible to clearly acknowledge both the constraining and liberating experiences of the practitioners and societal actors involved but also those organisational members to whom the agenda intends to have the greatest impact. As a way to navigate these tensions, the organisation might consider engaging with local non-governmental organisations to gain public awareness of their shared agenda about LGBTQIA+, thereby adopting a paradox mindset by accepting the liberating and constraining tensions and seeking opportunities to navigate within them.

Conclusively, we hope that the practical implications of this paper motivate DM practitioners to adopt a paradox mindset that allows for the movement from an either-or approach towards embracing a both-and approach in managing diversity.

Limitations and future research

Despite the theoretical aim of the paper, we acknowledge that empirical insights could have supported our reconceptualising arguments even further. In this way, we would have had the opportunity to relate our observations from the different conceptualisations in the DM literature with practice thus supporting the credibility of our arguments.

Regardless of the abovementioned limitation, we strongly encourage the utilisation of a paradox lens in the future study of DM as it presents an untapped potential in advancing the movement from an either-or mindset towards a both-and mindset in managing diversity. Future research could therefore delve further into how paradoxes manifest themselves in the everyday working life of DM practitioners and how they navigate both constraining and liberating experiences. Therefore, we are advocating for employing ethnographic and case study approaches to dig deeper into the tensions and paradoxes of managing diversity as they evolve over time (Putnam et al., 2016) and how practices are enacted to navigate such tensions and paradoxes.

Further research is needed to understand how DM practitioners navigate paradoxes, cope with its inherent tensions, and more importantly, how the adoption of a paradox mindset could aid DM practitioners in utilising both the challenges and possibilities in managing diversity. This will shed some much-needed light on the practices enacted by DM practitioners in navigating paradoxes. Additionally, this will provide knowledge to the field of HRM on how paradoxes are enacted and co-evolve with responses over time, providing highly practical knowledge relevant to practitioners confronting paradoxes (Keegan et al., 2018). We hope that this will benefit both DM practitioners and researchers in the movement towards a both-and mindset in managing diversity thus acknowledging the potential in conceptualising DM as creating space for, embracing, and utilising paradoxes.

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CHAPTER 6:

Paper II: Unpacking the adaptive role of recruiters in fostering diversity

Table 6.1. Overview of Paper II

Author(s)	Maria Dahl Andersen
Research question	How do recruiters carry out their role throughout the recruitment process when working with hiring managers to foster diversity and how do they navigate tensions in relation to this?
Main findings	Findings demonstrate two interrelated tensions faced by recruiters: (1) a tensional role balancing between being administrators and being sparring partners who challenge managers and (2) a tensional situation when managers struggle to hire between ideal and diverse candidates. Recruiters navigate these tensions to foster diversity by being adaptive to the needs of managers to create closer relationships with them. Closer relationships enable recruiters to better challenge managers on diversity, but too close relationships can create blindness toward diversity. This shows how recruiters' roles are largely constructed through the relationship with managers. Adapting oneself to the needs of managers to build relationships, while navigating tensions associated with too close a relationship, is shown to be an important competence for recruiters in fostering diversity.
Presentation outlets	Accepted and presented at European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) 2023 at sub-theme 34: Exploring Paradox' Meta-Theoretical Potential for Theorizing.
Status	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Submitted for The International Journal of Human Resource Management (AJG 3), July 2023 – revise & resubmit, October 2023 with 4-month deadline that I asked to be extended to 1st of April 2024 <p>This version contains some overall changes based on some of the comments received from the three anonymous reviewers and the Editor. These changes are concerned with some methodological specifications and a more thorough analysis of the findings in relation to the literature to clarify the contributions of the study even further. After submitting the dissertation, these changes will be further elaborated and re-submitted for a second round of revisions.</p>

Unpacking the adaptive role of recruiters in fostering diversity

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Abstract

Recruiters are facing a tension, when hiring managers struggle to hire based on their own perceptions of what makes a suitable candidate and remaining open toward candidates differing from those perceptions. However, prior literature has yet not brought awareness to this tension for recruiters and how they navigate it, which is problematic as the challenges for recruiters in fostering diversity are not fully brought into the foreground. Based on 14 months of ethnographic fieldwork, the purpose of this study is to foreground knowledge to the field of diversity recruitment within Human Resource Management about this tension by studying how recruiters carry out their role throughout the recruitment process when working with managers to foster diversity and how they navigate tensions in relation to this. The analysis suggests two interrelated tensions faced by recruiters: (1) a tensional role balancing between being administrators and being sparring partners who challenge managers on diversity and (2) a tensional situation when managers struggle to hire between ideal and diverse candidates. Recruiters navigate these tensions to foster diversity by being adaptive to the needs of managers to create closer relationships with them. Closer relationships enable recruiters to better challenge managers on diversity, but too close relationships can create blindness toward diversity. This shows how recruiters' roles are largely constructed through the relationship with managers. Adapting oneself to the needs of managers to build relationships, while navigating tensions associated with too close a relationship, is shown to be an important competence for recruiters in fostering diversity.

Keywords

Recruiter; Diversity recruitment; Role theory; Paradox theory; Tensions; Ethnographic field study

Introduction

“Well, because again, the hiring manager starts to analyze his needs. Somebody resigned, so you’re allowed to recruit a new one. Then all the wishes start. Completely like some 5-year-old child who’s making a wish list for Christmas, but do the 5-year-old child gets what he or she wants? No. Neither does the hiring manager and that has a lot to do with the challenges we’ve come with. But when you say no to something, you also say yes to something else; diversity, and that we are also part of challenging and the hiring manager should see that as a plus even though it wasn’t on the wish list from the beginning. I think we challenge all the time.”

[Excerpt from an interview with a recruiter at case organization]

This quote stems from an ethnographic research project investigating recruiters’ work with diversity and how they navigate tensions and paradoxes related hereto. One day, the author conducted a focus group interview with the recruiters focusing on how they worked with diversity and the challenges they were facing in relation to this. They expressed how hiring managers often have their own conception of what makes a qualified candidate who often resemble more existing high performers in the team than otherwise more diverse ones. Managers are thus facing a tension between struggling to hire more diverse employees and hiring those that best resemble existing high performers. This tension undeniably shifts to recruiters as well, who must find ways to navigate this tension when working with managers to foster diversity throughout the recruitment process. The purpose of this paper is therefore to foreground knowledge about this tension by studying how recruiters carry out their role throughout the recruitment process when working with managers to foster diversity and how they navigate tensions in relation to this.

This knowledge is highly pertinent as prior research in the field of diversity recruitment within Human Resource Management (HRM) has yet not brought that much awareness to tensions for recruiters and how they cope with them. Instead, the focus has been especially on the discriminatory nature of recruiters’ behavior suggesting that recruiters play an important role in the processes leading to workplace inequality (e.g., Cohen and Bunker, 1975; Graves and Powell, 1988; Graves and Powell, 1996; Newman and Lyon, 2009; Moore, 2015; Ployhart and Holtz, 2008; Uggerslev, Fassina and Kraichy, 2012; Hofhuis, van der Zee and Otten, 2016; Brooks, Guidroz and Chakrabarti, 2009; Goldberg, 2005). Besides some of these studies being rather old, they also have a predominant focus on quantitative approaches and have yet not offered an in-depth, micro-level account of recruiters’ role and their behaviors and interactions with managers when working

with diversity. This is problematic as these approaches take a rather surface-level perspective that does not fully bring recruiters' tensions into the foreground. The predominant utilization of quantitative approaches might also explain why prior research has failed to bring sufficient attention to this tension for recruiters, which could nuance the focus on recruiters as contributors to inequality, as well. This paper argues that many insights are lost when merely viewing recruiters and their work with diversity from a quantitative and rather functionalist perspective. Instead, this paper is interested in nuancing existing research by approaching recruiters and their work with diversity differently by employing an ethnographic and longitudinal fieldwork methodology focusing on the recruitment process in its whole. This approach provides an in-depth, micro-level account of recruiters' work with diversity and can reveal tensions surfacing from recruiters' behaviors and interactions with managers.

The paper aims to contribute to existing literature in the field of diversity recruitment within HRM that look at the various tensions recruiters are facing when working with diversity, with a focus on the tensions occurring between recruiters and managers and how recruiters are navigating these. This resonates with several researchers who have prompted calls for richer evidence that provides insights into how tensions and paradoxes within HR occur and how HR specialists are confronting them (e.g., Aust, Brandl, Keegan, and Lensges; 2017; Keegan, Bitterling, Sylva, and Hoeksema, 2018). Moreover, the study also contributes to existing research focusing on the importance of HR specialists in contributing to diversity (e.g., Shen, Chanda, D'Netto, and Monga, 2009; Nachmias, Mitsakis, Aravopoulou, Rees, and Kouki, 2022) in which this study sheds light on the role of recruiters. The following research question is thus raised: How do recruiters carry out their role throughout the recruitment process when working with hiring managers to foster diversity and how do they navigate tensions in relation to this?

The study is based on 14 months of ethnographic fieldwork between October 2021 to December 2022 in a multinational production company focusing on five internal recruiters and how they work with diversity. Due to the focus on the recruiter role and tensions, role theory and paradox theory are utilized to examine how recruiters carry out their role and how they navigate tensions in relation to this.

The following chapter presents the theoretical background followed by an account of the methodology used. Afterwards, the paper embarks on the analysis before ending with a concluding

discussion of the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions followed by limitations and future research avenues.

Theoretical background

Role Theory (Biddle, 1986) is helpful to understand the expectations related to how recruiters should carry out their role when working with managers to foster diversity. Moreover, paradox theory (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Putnam, Fairhurst, and Banghart, 2016) is useful for understanding how recruiters act when they are confronted with tensions during the recruitment process.

Role theory

Role theory assumes that individuals have various roles they play throughout their daily life (Biddle, 1986). A role represents a set of behavioral expectations tied to a social group that defines appropriate behavior for group members (Biddle, 1986; Anglin, Kincaid, Short, and Allen, 2022). Therefore, role theories were developed to explain how individual behavior is influenced by roles and how individual behavior is judged by oneself and others in light of these roles (McCall and Simmons, 1978; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Anglin et al., 2022).

Role theory adopts an either structural-functional or a symbolic-interactionist view to studying and understanding roles (Anglin et al., 2022). The structural-functional view evolved during the 1950s and sees society as structured according to a set of rules that bring order to society (Anglin et al., 2022). Roles “represent the building blocks of social systems that engender behavioral expectations that transcend role occupants” (Vandenberghe, Bentein, and Panaccio, 2017, p. 2092). As such, roles tend to be relatively fixed with uniformly imposed expectations guiding the behavior of that role (Anglin et al., 2022). Concepts such as e.g., *role consensus*, i.e., “broadly shared expectations concerning behaviors that are desirable, proper, or expected of a person in a particular role and behaviors people in that role would ideally portray” and *role conformity*, i.e., “how closely one adheres to role expectations”, have been used to explain role behavior (Anglin et al., 2022, p. 1473) (e.g., Kanze, Huang, Conley, and Higgins, 2018; Akinola, Martin, and Philips, 2018).

In contrast, the symbolic-interactionist view developed throughout the 1960s- and 70s and was integrated into the structural-functional view due to disagreements about the theoretical

assumptions of this view (Stryker, 2001). A micro-oriented approach is adopted to study the subjective meanings that individuals impose on objects, behaviors, and events (Stryker, 2001). Here, role identity theory is a central contribution contending that individuals act based on how they like to see themselves and how they like to be seen by others in social positions, which is assumed to be influencing their interactions with others (McCall and Simmons, 1978). Roles are therefore expanded to include individual goals, values, beliefs, norms, and interactions styles (Sluss, Van Dick, and Thompson, 2011). Thus, much greater focus is placed on the individual's relationship with a role than on the uniformly imposed nature of the role (Anglin et al., 2022). Therefore, individual level micro processes allow for the construction and negotiation of behavioral expectations that create a more dynamic view of roles (Anglin et al., 2022). This also provides opportunities for understanding how individuals respond to demands placed on them when facing different role expectations (Anglin et al., 2022).

According to Anglin et al. (2022) this literature argues “that the construction and maintenance of role identities result from a complex interplay of both individual and situational factors where individuals develop and negotiate role identities within themselves and with others” p. 1481). Here, concepts such as *role accumulation*, i.e., “obtaining and occupying multiple roles at once” and *role transition*, i.e., “the psychological, and sometimes physical, changes between or among roles, including the process of disengaging from one role and engaging in another”, have been used to elucidate this negotiation (Anglin et al., 2022, pp. 1472-1473) (e.g., Seibert, Nielsen, and Kraimer, 2020; Ashforth, 2000).

Paradox theory

Paradoxes are defined as “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time. Such elements seem logical when considered in isolation but irrational, inconsistent, and even absurd when juxtaposed” (Lewis, 2000, p. 760). When navigating paradoxes, one is concerned with capturing the potential of such paradoxes by setting out an alternative approach in which organizations can attend to contradictory elements simultaneously (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Paradox theory thus argues that practitioners may benefit from abandoning the idea that tensions are negative and can or should be solved (Keegan et al., 2018). Instead, tensions can be approached as sources of creativity and promote proactive strategies of

responses (Keegan et al., 2018). Applying paradox theory therefore moves management approaches away from an either-or approach to consider a both-and approach acknowledging that both sides of a paradox are valuable (Smith and Lewis, 2011).

When tensions become salient, practitioners therefore need to respond to the contradictory elements. In the end, their responses can spur virtuous or vicious cycles and to achieve virtuous cycles, proactive responses to tensions are needed (Jarzabkowski, Lê, and Van de Ven, 2013). Putnam et al., (2016) define these cycles as “iterative spirals or self-reinforcing sequences of events that grow out of the ways that actors process contradictions” (p. 81). Vicious cycles can emerge when actors negate tensions and/or prioritize either one or another contradictory element (Putnam et al., 2016). Contrary to this, virtuous cycles are triggered by actors engaging actively with tensions through accepting both-and elements of the paradox thus working through them (Putnam et al., 2016). Thus, different responses to paradoxes can spur different results depending on the nature of such responses.

Defensive responses typically foster vicious cycles, including that of suppressing, opposing, and splitting (Keegan et al., 2018). Suppressing refers to one preventing contradictory demands from being articulated, while opposing refers to one engaging in active confrontation and splitting refers to one spatially separating the contradictory demands (Keegan et al., 2018). In sum, defensive responses potentially provide relief for a short time but without having proactively dealt with the contradictory elements, vicious cycles are likely to occur. Therefore, the proactive response of adjusting is needed. Adjusting is related to an ability to recognize more complicated interrelationships and to accept them (Keegan et al., 2018). Hereby, one is taking contradictory elements of the paradox into account and adjusting one’s approach accordingly whilst acknowledging that solutions to the paradox are not permanent (Keegan et al., 2018).

Method

The place of investigation

An embedded single-case study design (Stake, 1995, p. 11) has been chosen to collect in-depth knowledge on the behavior of the recruiters. The organizational name is pseudonymised and referred to as PIM and all names, places, and date identifiers are anonymised. The organization employs its own recruitment function where the author zoomed in on the work of the recruiters in

Northern Europe referred to as ‘the recruitment team’. When the fieldwork was initiated, the recruitment team consisted of four full-time recruiters, a recruitment manager, and a head of recruitment, but throughout time some recruiters resigned and new ones were employed. Each recruiter has different functional areas in the organization in which they are responsible for hiring.

PIM is a multinational production company within the energy sector with headquarters in Northern Europe and the largest manufacturer in its industry. Beside from its core business, it is also recognized for its high focus on recruiting a gender diverse workforce especially due to operating in a male-dominated industry. From 2020 toward 2025, the diversity team launched a new diversity, equality, and inclusion strategy (DE&I), because the company sees DE&I as a competitive advantage. The purpose of the diversity team is to function as a central office that supports and leads heads of different areas in the organization with diversity initiatives. One of the main issues that this organization faces in terms of diversity recruitment is the challenge of recruiting more females to male-dominated jobs and especially to management-positions. Therefore, the organization has a predominant focus on gender diversity when it comes to recruitment, which is also evident in the targets formulated by the diversity team calling for a 3.3 percentage of increase from 2021-2025 of females being represented in leadership positions. Though, PIM also focuses on other diversity dimensions beyond gender (e.g., ethnic, personality, special needs, neurodiversity) when it comes to employee representation and recruitment, with gender being the dominant one.

While the data collection originates in the recruitment team, it also captures talks with employees in the diversity team serving as contextual data to understand their work. The intensified focus on diversity makes this organization an interesting case to study as it provides knowledge on how recruiters work with such an intensified focus, the tensions they face, and how they navigate through these. Table 1 depicts an overview of the organizational members in PIM, who were observed and/or interviewed for the study.

Table 1. Overview of organizational members in PIM observed and/or interviewed for the paper

Organizational member in PIM	Responsibility in PIM
Anne	Full-time recruiter
Marjorie	Full-time recruiter
Nellie	Full-time recruiter
Michaela	Full-time recruiter
Leslie	Recruitment manager
Luke	Head of recruitment
Addison	Head of diversity team
Charlotte	Head of organizational growth
William	HR professional in diversity team
Denise	HR professional in diversity team
20 hiring managers	

Ethnographic fieldwork

The study is based on ethnographic methods aiming at “studying people in their naturally occurring settings as a means of grasping the complexity, intricacy, and mundanity (commonplace activities) of organizational life (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, and Kamsteeg, 2009 in Cunliffe, 2010, p. 229). Moreover, according to Cunliffe (2010) “good organizational ethnographies can reveal and explore the intricacies, challenges, tensions, and choices of life in organizations” (p. 226). Therefore, ethnographic methods are highly relevant for conducting an in-depth analysis of recruiters' behavior and their interactions with managers, whilst revealing the tensions they encounter in carrying out their role and how they manage these.

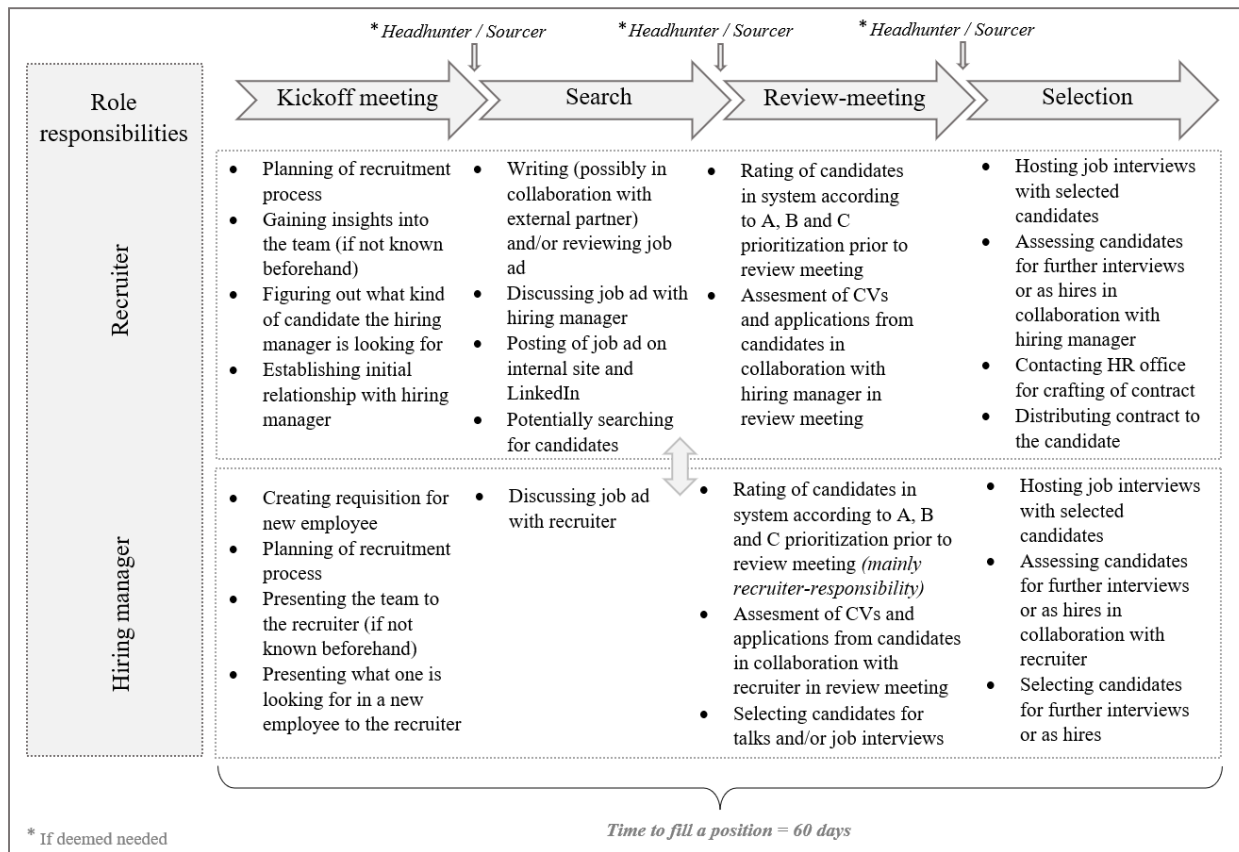
Besides observing the recruiters' work with diversity, the author interacted informally with the recruitment team throughout their workday and participated in organizational activities such as events and lunches to build relationships. This led to feelings of greater trust and mutual respect, which eventually enabled the author to understand recruiters' work with diversity even better and the tensions they encounter. When entering PIM, the author had to pollute the setting as little as possible for the candidates not to be too affected by the author's presence. Thus, the author mainly participated as a passive observer (Spradley, 2016, p. 59) in meetings. As a self-reflexive practice, the author began to dress according to the different settings that would be observed to either affect the setting as little as possible or to mirror the culture of the recruitment team as much as possible. Over time, the author experienced the researcher role becoming more and more natural for the

recruiters, managers, and candidates. This was mostly expressed by the transition in how recruiters introduced the author to managers going from “our researcher” to “our colleague”. However, to avoid not going completely native, the author continually kept a distance to the field by inviting colleagues to discuss the data.

Data collection

In PIM, the recruitment process is structured around four phases: a kickoff meeting, a search phase, a review meeting, and a selection. Here, recruiters and managers have expectations assigned to their roles further elaborated in Figure 1 below, in which the manager always has the final say. The author collected data inductively (Glaser and Strauss, 2017, p. 238) by observing kickoff meetings, review meetings, and job interviews. The data were then analyzed abductively following an iterative process where the author went back and forth between data and literature (Glaser and Strauss, 2017, p. 238).

Figure 1. The recruitment process in PIM



The data are a collection of observations and field notes (following Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995) from participating in the aforementioned meetings. Moreover, it consists of informal talks with recruiters, HR-professionals, and diversity professionals to understand their work. Semi-structured interviews with recruiters were collected along the recruitment process, whenever the author wanted to understand more about their way of working with diversity. When collective behaviors were observed among the recruiters, semi-structured focus group interviews with the recruitment team were collected to make them collectively reflect on their behaviors. Additionally, the author viewed secondary data such as email correspondences between recruiters and managers, PowerPoints from the diversity team, content from PIM’s webpage while also looking at CVs, résumés, and assessments of candidates. These documents served to inform the ongoing data collection and to contextually framing this paper. Furthermore, the author engaged in numerous informal talks and gathered observations from being present in the office.

Table 2 depicts an overview of the collected data used for this paper. To manage this substantial volume of data, the author transferred the field notes into one, single Word document that allowed the author to search through the various notes in a comprehensive manner and observe potential connections between them. Generally, after having observed connections between the notes, the author would then transfer these into Nvivo to start initial coding procedures. For the analysis of this paper, field notes, interviews, informal talks, and focus group interviews have been used.

Table 2. Overview of collected data

Data	Amount	Hours (approx.)
Days of fieldwork	40	250
Observations of recruitment meetings	45	68
Observations of meetings in the diversity team	8	8
Informal talks	23	15
Semi-structured interviews	15	12
Semi-structured focus group interviews	2	7
Documents	Approx. 100 pages	
Total		360

Analysis

The analysis took place throughout the process of collecting and writing up the data resulting in a three-staged process (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2014).

Firstly, writing the field notes constituted an initial phase of processing the data that allowed for an early emergence of themes (Emerson et al., 1995). Secondly, when the author had a clearer theoretical direction, the data were coded in Nvivo. Here, Braun and Clarke's (2012, p. 57) six-phased approach was used as it is useful to make sense of shared meanings and experiences across a large data set. The analysis is done inductively in a way where codes and themes closely match the data to prioritize databased meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2012). However, as initial phases of data processing already occurred during the fieldwork, it was impossible for the author to remain purely inductive (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Thirdly and during phase 1 (Braun and Clarke, 2012, pp. 60-70), the author familiarised oneself with the data by listening to audio recordings and later transcribing it. In phase 2, initial descriptive codes were generated by reading line-by-line of the transcripts. Whenever something potentially relevant for the research question appeared, the data was coded. In phase 3, themes that captured something interesting in relation to the research question were searched for. Those codes that seemed to share some unifying features were collapsed to reflect a coherent pattern. In phase 4, these themes were reviewed in relation to the coded data to determine whether they meaningfully captured the entire data set. In phase 5, the themes were named in a way where they directly address the research question and finally, in phase 6, the analysis was finalized.

Findings

The paper draws on one recruitment process as an illustrative example, which demonstrates how the recruiter, Anne carries out her role when working with the manager, Kim to foster diversity and how Anne navigates tensions related hereto. Quotes from the rest of the recruiters are used to substantiate the analysis. Table 3 presents an overview of the coded subthemes and themes.

Table 3. Overview of coded themes

Illustrative quotes	Subtheme	Theme
<p>“[...] when you see the process like that, it’s very rigidly drawn and I always describe the process as a pen you can bend here and there and there are some processes where it’s more dynamic.”</p> <p>“There is probably no denying that we do have our process and the fact that I’m saying that it’s recruitment and it’s people we’re dealing with, we have to bend it or do something else or build it differently with these bricks, but we still have some sort of framework of how it looks. That’s the structure of what you should do as a recruiter. Like, I have an expectation that you challenge. I have an expectation that you’re service-minded and that you do these things that a recruiter should do. But because we’re dealing so much with people and because we’re doing what we’re doing, we will also change and be more interactionist.”</p>	<p>The recruitment process is structural and dynamic</p>	<p>Recruiters embody a structural role and a dynamic role</p>
<p>“Sparring partner to me means that I’m not just administrative and do the things, they [hiring managers] say. It means that I actually discuss with them and ask them these questions that make them reflect about why is it that we do as we do or I say ‘well, we should do this’. It’s both making decisions but also to make them reflect about how we do things. [...] Try giving them these ideas and my know-how during the recruitment process. That is what I would call a sparring partner. That is to give them that insight they don’t have themselves. Make each other good. Yeah, that’s what I see as a sparring partner. Challenge them, maybe.”</p> <p>“You can say my role as a recruiter, as I see it, is that I should support the hiring manager as good as possible throughout the entire recruitment process and then it’s basically the hiring manager’s responsibility. Then I’m actually just a support function who should make sure that all processes and procedures are followed. Then I should make sure that everything runs as smoothly as possible and then be the sparring partner to the hiring manager, as I should be and then challenge the hiring manager as good as I possibly can. That is my job as challenger; that is exactly to get the hiring manager to make other considerations instead of making the easy decision.”</p>	<p>Being administrators and sparring partners</p>	
<p>“I think that’s my foremost duty as a recruiter that is to challenge. If not, we’re just doing replacements after replacements, then we’re not moving anywhere as an organization, team or whatever it may be.”</p> <p>“The hiring manager starts to analyze his needs. Then all the wishes start. Just like a five-year-old kid who’s making a wish list for Christmas. But does the five-year-old get what he or she wants? No. Nor does the hiring manager and much of that is because of the challenges we’ve given. But when you’re excluding something, you might add</p>	<p>Challenging hiring managers</p>	<p>Recruiters are challengers</p>

something else and that's what we're part of challenging. The manager should see that as a plus even though it wasn't on the wish list from the beginning. I think, we challenge all the time."

"I experience great variation among both managers and service. Every time I start a new recruitment, I'm always like 'okay, do I give too much?'. You really have to feel what are their needs. On the same time, I have a certain proudness; I guess all recruiters have, that I also want to defend my job. The process and so on. And that's just very different, I feel. It's very different what kind of service I give and how many challenges I give the hiring manager."

"A better relationship makes it easier to challenge. No doubt. That is a part I use quite a lot of time on when working with my stakeholders; that is the private part of it."

"I challenge managers both when I know them and when I don't, but it's in different ways. I think the more I know the team, the better I become in my service and a better sparring partner. That's what I'm doing now; building relationships so that I can become a sparring partner and get to know the teams and the organization I'm responsible for. I think that's important. Otherwise, it's very much on their premises. Then it's this service-part who's just inviting in for meetings and then it becomes very administrative and that's what I would like to turn away from. I also want to be administrative, but I also really want to see, if I can create some thoughts in their heads."

Building relationships with hiring managers to better challenge them whilst being aware of its challenges

Recruiters adapt to build relationships with hiring managers

"Sometimes we have those managers we've worked with before and you know each other, then you probably don't have to use that much energy to get to know each other and how the process should be. Then you know each other so well that you might challenge them on diversity and other things. [...] So it's clear; the better relationships you have to them [hiring managers], the more you know them, the easier it is to sometimes take those dialogues."

"[...] having recruited a position many times, it often goes as usual and then sometimes you end up forgetting to challenge each other because you're used to looking for these profiles. So it can be both good and bad depending on the relationship".

"[...] I also just try to be as close to who I am as a human being. I adapt. I'm also that kind of person, I adapt a lot to the situation whilst still trying to hold onto the core of what I should do in this process. I think, I'm someone who gives a lot of myself without necessarily advertising my personal life to everybody."

Using myself to adapt to the relationship

"[...] it's a lot about reading the person and using yourself, because then I also try giving more of myself. If it's a yellow profile, who really likes

to talk, then I also enjoy talking, so I really try to adapt to create that relationship. Because a good relationship is not just if it's the yellow profile, where we talk a lot. It can also be a good relationship, if we jump directly to work. That can be just as good a relationship. I just have to sense the situation, because if I talk about something completely off where they're thinking 'okay, now we just have to get started', they probably lose something for me in the beginning."

Anne recruited for a new Manufacturing Manager together with the manager, Kim. They had not recruited together before and the process lasted for four months in which the author participated in almost every meeting. The paper will now briefly analyze how Anne herself, her colleagues, and other HR-professionals describe the recruiter role in PIM. This analytical intro is important to understand not only the recruiter role PIM, but also the expectations tied to recruiters' role and how they are expected to work with diversity in this organization. This is followed by a more extensive analysis of the recruitment process with Anne to convey how she carries out her role when working with Kim to foster diversity and how Anne navigate tensions in relation to this.

Recruiters embody a structural role and a dynamic role

The recruitment manager explains that the recruitment process is structured as a formalized framework that allows for dynamic changes:

Recruitment manager, Leslie: There is probably no denying that we do have our process and the fact that I'm saying that it's recruitment and it's people we're dealing with, we have to bend it or do something else or build it differently with these bricks, but we still have some sort of framework of how it looks. That's the structure of what you should do as a recruiter. Like, I have an expectation that you challenge. I have an expectation that you're service-minded and that you do these things that a recruiter should do. But because we're dealing so much with people and because we're doing what we're doing, we will also change and be more interactionist.

She expects the recruiters to portray behaviors that 'a recruiter should do' i.e., providing service and sparring to the managers. This resonates with the head of recruitment: "A recruiter should give some perspective and sometimes open up the managers' eyes to see the possibilities of some candidates who might not be directly fitted for the job". The head of organizational growth agrees: "If I try to put myself into the shoes of a recruiter, then oh my God you need to be good in terms

of being able to understand the role that the leader is trying to find and the skillset that is needed”. This indicates that shared expectations concerning the expected behavior of recruiters in PIM are prevalent, who should provide service and challenge managers. Yet, what also becomes clear is the dynamic character of the recruitment process expressed by the analogy of ‘a pen you can use here and there’. The recruitment manager believes this is fostered by the recruiters’ continuous work with people, e.g., managers that ‘changes’ the behavior of the recruiters toward becoming more attuned to the interaction with managers. The structural and dynamic intertwinement of the recruitment process is inevitable “because you will never put the structural part away, but this part [the interactionistic] will always be there and you probably won’t be able to take it away, because we’re human beings. You’ll end up meeting someone you don’t get along with”. Even though they all express shared expectations about recruiters, these insights illustrate the duality of the recruitment process fluctuating between structural and dynamic expectations. The structural and dynamic fluctuation is also mirrored in the way Anne talks about her role as being both an administrator and a sparring partner:

Recruiter, Anne: You can say my role as a recruiter, is that I should support the hiring manager as good as possible throughout the entire recruitment process and then it’s basically the hiring manager’s responsibility. Then I’m actually just a support function who should make sure that all processes and procedures are followed. Then I should make sure that everything runs as smoothly as possible and then be the sparring partner to the hiring manager, as I should be and then challenge the hiring manager.

Anne resonates with the duality of her role fluctuating between being ‘just a support function who should make sure that all processes and procedures are followed’ and ‘then be the sparring partner to the manager [...] and then challenge the hiring manager’. She frames this duality further by explaining the wish of not only wanting to be ‘administrative’ in ‘this service-job’ but also wanting to ‘create some thoughts’ in the heads of managers:

Recruiter, Anne: Then it’s this service-part who’s just inviting in for meetings and then it becomes very administrative and that’s what I would like to turn away from. I also want to be administrative, but I also really want to see, if I can create some thoughts in their heads.

The use of 'but' illustrates that she is contrasting 'being administrative' in 'this service-job' with that of 'creating thoughts in the heads of managers' i.e., a 'sparring partner', which indicates a tensional nature to her role. However, according to the recruiter Nellie, there is a certain degree of cultural differences among the expected behaviors of recruiters:

Recruiter, Nellie: There're a lot of different views on the recruiter-role, because in some organizations and countries it's just people moving papers. Here, you're just moving things around and controlling the process and in other contexts, you're a sparring partner, where you bring in your own competences and experiences and you're on the same level.

The organizational members thus seem to share common expectations about the behaviors of recruiters in PIM, who should provide both service to the managers and challenge them. This is mirrored in the duality of the recruitment process that fluctuates between structural and dynamic expectations about the recruiter role. This shines through in the way recruiters describe the tensional nature of their role as both administrators and sparring partners, which to some degree causes feelings of tensions among them. The following section illuminates this role through the illustrative example with the recruiter, Anne and the manager, Kim.

Recruiters are challengers

In the kickoff meeting, Anne initiates the conversation to get to know Kim's role followed by a formal talk to get Kim to explain how she imagines the set-up of the process. Anne then invites Kim to picture the candidate that could be most suitable for the job to which Kim is determined that it should be someone professionally competent while having strong leadership skills. However, Kim is aware of the challenge in recruiting someone with such broad competences, which Anne also makes clear in the following fieldnote extract with great appreciation from Kim:

Fieldnote extract: Kim is pondering about the difficulties in finding someone with a solid manufacturing background AND strong leadership and strategic skills. Anne interjects that they can't get everything: "that's when I say, what kind of competences have you prioritized? When I do the screening, then I'll focus mostly on those. When you're saying 'it should be her', I always go back to the job description and try to get you back on track by saying 'with these competences, she's like this and this, but with these she's very low'. You know, then I'll try giving you this challenge." Kim replies, almost with excitement in her voice, "Great, Anne!

THAT right there, that's a good idea. That's such a super important part of your job that you're doing that."

Already here in the beginning of the process, it becomes clear that Kim is struggling to balance the tension between her own perception of what makes a candidate qualified for the job and being open toward candidates that differ from that perception. This tension also transfers to Anne, who appears to move into her sparring partner role by challenging Kim's perceptions of what could also constitute a qualified candidate. Anne proceeds by discussing the formalities of the job and ends the meeting by arranging the review meeting. Here, in the kickoff meeting, it thus appears that Anne carries out both the administrative part of her role by organizing and formalizing the process and her sparring partner role by challenging Kim's perceptions of a suitable candidate thereby broadening Kim's vision to a more diverse pool of candidates. Moreover, Kim implicitly adheres to the expectations about recruiters in PIM as someone who should challenge managers and this example illustrates how Anne conforms to these expectations. As such, Anne acts based on how she would like to see herself and how she would like to be seen by Kim, as a recruiter who challenges.

Anne's conformity is also strongly displayed in the following quote, but where she once again describes the wish of not only being tied to the fixed expectations of her role but 'be more than that', a sparring partner:

Recruiter, Anne: That is my duty as recruiter; that is to challenge. If not, we are just doing replacements after replacements, then we are not moving anywhere as an organization or team. We should not just sit and say yes. Then we are just sitting and structuring things, like secretary-work. We should be more than that. We should be sparring partners. That is the difference between just sitting and doing operational work, so if you can go a step further and talk strategically with the hiring managers. That's what I think is important and what I think we should do in the recruitment process.

By using the phrases 'we should not just', 'we should be more than that', and 'if you can go a step further', Anne expresses how she occupies the role of both an administrator and a sparring partner at once. In the fieldnote extract above, we see this in how she transitions from the administrator-role and engages in the role of a challenger toward Kim's struggles to hire based on competencies

and diversity. Anne experiences great variation of needs among managers, which she contrasts with also having ‘a certain proudness’ that makes her ‘want to defend [her] job’:

Recruiter, Anne: I experience great variation among both managers and service. Every time I start a new recruitment, I’m always like ‘okay, do I give too much?’ You really have to feel what are their needs. On the same time, I have a certain proudness; I guess all recruiters have, that I also want to defend my job. The process and so on. And that’s just very different, I feel. It’s very different what kind of service I give and how many challenges I give the hiring manager.

Here, she describes that the degree to which she challenges is determined by the managers’ needs. Together with the fact that she also wants to ‘defend her job’, this indicates some sort of imbalance between the behavioral expectations held by herself and the managers. Thus, when facing different role expectations, Anne experiences an imbalance between the different demands placed on her.

Moving to the review meeting, Anne opens the conversation from where they ended by briefly discussing the process. She then follows up on practicalities and asks for Kim’s reaction to the incoming candidates. Anne explains that she always asks for the manager’s reaction first “[...] so [she] doesn’t pollute the managers’ opinion”. Anne presents another four candidates and stresses the following: “[...] I would like you to have an open mindset, because they are very different, but that’s intentional because I want to show you something different”. This emphasizes how Anne continuously challenges and takes on the role as a sparring partner to Kim to challenge her on what could also constitute a qualified candidate. Together, they weigh the plusses and minuses of each candidate in which Anne focuses on voicing the potentiality of each of the candidates. After two rounds of review meetings struggling to find the person who has both strong manufacturing and leadership skills, they end up with two candidates: Thomas and Derick. Both possess strong leadership skills but lack some of the manufacturing skills, which makes Kim unsure about their abilities. During the second review meeting, Anne calls attention to this by challenging Kim to remain open toward other possible and potentially diverse candidates:

Fieldnote extract: Kim seems to be quite unsure if they’ll find the person who can do both. With an almost eager voice, Anne says that in some way, she really wants Kim to meet Thomas, because Kim might learn something from what Thomas is doing in his current job. ‘I think that’s a good idea, because you’re saying something, where I’m like oh okay, did he really do that?’,

Kim replies. 'It's some good thoughts, you have, Kim, but we have to consider what to do if the candidates are not there', Anne adds.

Even though Kim is insecure, they arrange for interviews with both Thomas and Derick. Before Thomas is invited into the room, Kim says to Anne: "You know, I don't see it being Thomas because of his lack of manufacturing skills". Anne does not interject but moves the conversation to a rather formal tone by briefly presenting the agenda for the interview. She then picks Thomas up from the front desk. When Thomas enters the door, we shake hands before proceeding to a presentation of Kim, Anne, and the researcher. Afterwards, Anne encourages Thomas to briefly tell some personal information about himself before inviting him to share his motivation for the job. Kim then presents the role and the team, which opens a broader discussion about the job. Anne concludes the interview with some information about the procedure from there. After having sent Thomas off, Anne asks Kim about her opinion leading to a short discussion about the plusses and minuses of Thomas. The following fieldnote extract demonstrates how Kim's insecurities about Thomas have changed during the interview:

Fieldnote extract:" He just needs some training and counseling in manufacturing", Kim says with a surprised tone. "So, I can see him in this job", she adds confidently. Anne weighs in and says there's plusses and minuses about Thomas. "But maybe I just end up going with Thomas. We'll just do that. Then he'll be good. He can be really good", Kim says wonderingly.

After another round of interviews, Kim ends up employing Thomas. It became evident during this recruitment process that Kim's main struggle was the tension between her own perception of what made a suitable candidate and remaining open toward candidates like Thomas that differed from that perception. Here, the diversity dimension was not that much related to discussions about gender, but more so about competencies and personality. The tension transferred to Anne, who continuously had to balance being an administrator who organized the process and being a sparring partner that challenged Kim's perceptions of a qualified candidate by introducing Kim to more diverse candidates. The result of Anne's continuous challenges was the hiring of Thomas, who initially deviated from Kim's perception but who ended up being the most suitable. This underscores how Anne's embodiment of a sparring partner who challenged Kim fostered diversity

throughout the recruitment process. The following section argues why relationships with managers are crucial for recruiters in navigating this tension.

Recruiters adapt to build relationships with hiring managers

The recruiter, Michaela explains that “a better relationship [with managers] makes it easier to challenge. No doubt. That is a part that [she] use quite a lot of time on when working with [her] stakeholders, that is the private part of it”. Her colleague Marjorie clarifies that “[...] then you know each other so well that you might challenge them [managers] on diversity and other things”. They are backed up by Anne who explains that closer relationships with managers enables her to provide better service and challenges:

Recruiter, Anne: I challenge managers both when I know them and when I don't, but it's in different ways. I think the more I know the team, the better I become in my service and a better sparring partner. That's what I'm doing now; building relationships so that I can become a sparring partner and get to know the teams and the organization I'm responsible for. I think that's important. Otherwise, it's very much on their premises.

This shows that the recruiters themselves also expand their role to include their own individual goals of ‘building relationships’ to ‘become a sparring partner’ and not only being guided by the expectations of managers. The recruitment manager agrees that closer relationships potentially enable the recruiters to better challenge managers on diversity, which should also be supported by the organizational structure:

Recruitment manager, Leslie: I also think it creates something internally for the recruiters that they meet the same managers over and over and know the same managers. If you're able to make the organization around that. So, they dare to challenge on things like diversity instead of just getting a manager you never met and talked to, because you're taking over a requisition and then have to assess candidates.

The importance of building relationships with managers to better embody the role of a sparring partner, is also mirrored in Anne's reflections about the recruitment with Kim:

Recruiter, Anne: I think it was a relationship that developed. It started really badly with her questioning my competences. In the end, she sent my boss a mail saying ‘next time I'm

recruiting, I really want Anne'. So it went from her questioning whether I was actually competent to this job to 'next time, I really want Anne'. So over time I probably did a great job and gave good sparring that made her think 'hmm, Anne actually gave me something to think about'. So we got that relationship because in the beginning I thought 'holy moly, I can't manage this'. She was so negative. But that's cause she acts and reacts differently than me, where in the end, I found the same way to work. So we just had to find each other and then we got a really good relationship in the end. And how did we get the relationship? I think it was by getting to know each other on the way. Learning each other's ways of communicating and 'how would you like to work', I think. I think we had to find each other and then we succeeded quite well in the end.

This demonstrates how their relationship changed from a challenging one to a positive one throughout time. To avoid standing in a potentially vicious cycle of prioritizing a certain behavior toward Kim, Anne instead adapted herself to the situation by getting to know Kim's way of working, which led to a positive relationship. She further explains how sparring enabled her to convince Kim about Thomas' qualifications:

Recruiter, Anne: It was also quite like a process of overcoming something, because in the beginning I showed her a lot of candidates and she was like 'No, oh no'. It ends up with sparring in the end, where we had two equally good candidates, so what are we doing? She actually had someone else in first place than me and then it's about arguments. Then we ended up going with my pick and that's cause I was prepared for why I see this candidate as number one.

Though, the recruiter Marjorie nuances the seemingly positive side of closer relationships with managers elucidating its tensional nature, by arguing that "[...] having recruited a position many times, it often goes as usual and then sometimes you end up forgetting to challenge each other because you're used to looking for these profiles. So it can be both good and bad depending on the relationship". Furthermore, when asked about what makes a 'good relationship' with managers, Anne explains:

Recruiter, Anne: [...] it's a lot about reading the person and using yourself, because then I also try giving more of myself. If it's a yellow profile [referring to a personality test], who really likes to talk, then I also enjoy talking, so I really try to adapt to create that relationship. Because a good relationship is not just if it's the yellow profile, where we talk a lot. It can also be a good relationship, if we jump directly to work. That can be just as good a relationship. I just have to

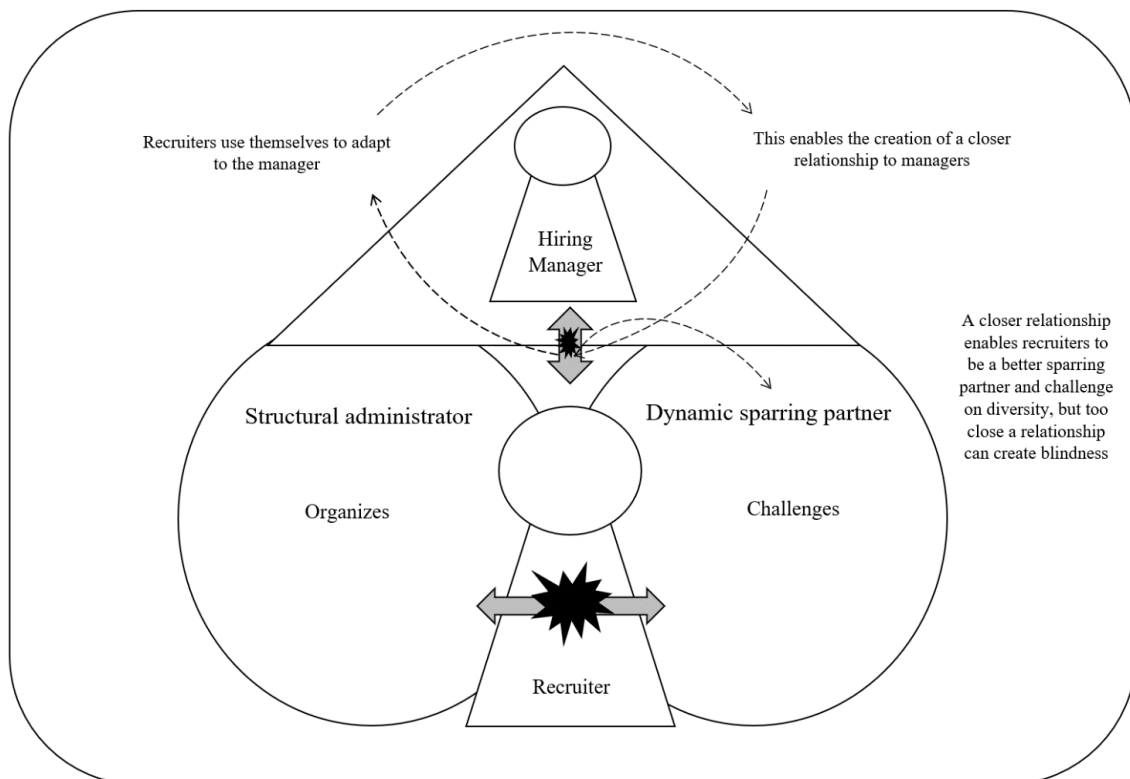
sense the situation, because if I talk about something completely off where they're thinking 'okay, now we just have to get started', they probably lose something for me in the beginning.

This illustrates that even though Anne does not want her role to only be guided by the expectations of managers, managers do play a great part in the construction and negotiation of her role. She 'reads the person and uses herself' to adapt to the manager and ultimately 'create that relationship', which can be 'good' no matter the nature of it. This underscores that the recruiter role is largely constructed and negotiated through the relationship with managers. The following section summarizes the findings of the analysis through the presentation of recruiters as being adaptive in fostering diversity.

The adaptive role of recruiters in fostering diversity

The paper has demonstrated how recruiters carry out their role throughout the recruitment process when working with managers to foster diversity and how they navigate tensions in relation to this. The findings are visualized in Figure 3, which will now be elaborated.

Figure 3. The adaptive role of recruiters in fostering diversity



The analysis has demonstrated how recruiters are facing two interrelated tensions when carrying out their role throughout the recruitment process: the first being related to their role and the second being related to managers. The first tension is evident in the duality of the recruiter role that fluctuates between being an administrator who organizes and being a sparring partner who challenges managers. This duality is also expected by recruiters themselves and other HR-professionals who have certain expectations to proper behavior of recruiters in PIM. Though, accumulating these roles at once can lead to feelings of tensions for recruiters due to, sometime, inconsistent expectations from the recruiters themselves and managers. The way recruiters navigate this tension is interrelated with the second tension.

The second tension occurs when managers struggle to balance their own perceptions of what makes a suitable candidate and remaining open toward candidates that differ from those perceptions. This tension shifts to recruiters as well, who use themselves through their personal qualities of being e.g., humorous and kind to adapt to the manager with the aim of creating a closer relationship. As such, recruiters navigate this tension by being adaptive and adjusting their work-approach to the individual needs and expectations of the managers whilst still trying to remain true to their own principles of being a recruiter. A closer relationship enables the recruiters to better embody the role of a sparring partner and challenge managers to foster diversity throughout the recruitment process. Though, recruiters must be aware of the challenges associated with a closer relationship with managers, as too close a relationship can cause blindness toward diversity.

The analysis therefore concludes that recruiters have a tensional role fluctuating between being an administrator and being a sparring partner who challenges managers. They face an interrelated tension when managers struggle to hire between ideal and diverse candidates. Recruiters carry out their role and navigate these tensions to foster diversity by being adaptive to the needs of managers throughout the recruitment process to create closer relationships with them. Closer relationships enable recruiters to better challenge managers on diversity. Adapting oneself to the needs of managers to build relationships, while navigating tensions associated with too close a relationship, is therefore shown to be an important competence for recruiters in fostering diversity.

Concluding discussion

Theoretical and methodological contributions

The theoretical aim of this study is a contribution to the field of diversity recruitment within HRM that looks at the various tensions recruiters are facing when working with diversity incorporating a focus on the tensions occurring between recruiters and managers and how recruiters are navigating these. Through the study's findings, the paper has brought attention to understudied tensions surfacing from recruiters' behaviors and interactions with managers when recruiters are trying to foster diversity along the recruitment process. The ethnographic and longitudinal fieldwork methodology has proven optimal for understanding the relationship between recruiters and managers and the tensions surfacing from this as it enabled the ability to zoom in on recruiters' behaviors and interactions with managers throughout the recruitment process. Based on the findings, the paper now presents three theoretical contributions and a methodological contribution to the field of diversity recruitment within HRM.

Firstly, through an empirical, micro-level approach, the study found that in this organization, recruiters have a duality to their role fluctuating between being an administrator and a sparring partner. Recruiters are not occupying either or but both roles simultaneously, which has yet not been foregrounded specifically for these HR specialists in current diversity recruitment literature within HRM. Though, the HRM literature has documented how the HR function is founded on multiple roles that are inherently paradoxical in the clash between operational and strategic activities and obligations (e.g., Cohen, 2015; Pritchard, 2010; Bennett, McCracken, O'Kane, and Brown, 2023). The findings of this study contribute to this current debate by bringing in the notion of role-based tensions specifically for recruiters and their strategies for coping with these in their work with diversity.

Secondly, the study found that in this organization, the recruiter role is largely constructed and negotiated through the relationship with managers. Recruiters make efforts to adapt to this, as closer relationships enable them to better embody the role of a sparring partner and challenge managers on diversity. Not only does this emphasize the importance of the relationship between recruiters and managers in fostering diversity, but it also points to how managers are to a high degree constituting recruiters' role throughout the recruitment process. To the best of the author's

knowledge, no specific studies in the field of diversity recruitment within HRM have focused on the relationships between recruiters and managers in fostering diversity. The study has found both positive and negative implications from these relationships indicating that on the one hand, closer relationships with managers enable recruiters to better challenge managers on diversity. On the other hand, too close a relationship can create blindness for recruiters (and managers) toward the diversity needed. Due to the double-edged sword consequences of these relationships, the author encourages more research to study the nature of these relationships even further to enrich the understanding of how recruiters and managers collectively foster diversity throughout the recruitment process and how they impact each other.

Thirdly, the study has contributed to the field of diversity recruitment within HRM by showing how tensions are an integral part of recruiters' work with diversity. This is evident both in relation to their own role and the expectations held to it and when facing managers' tension between struggling to hire more diverse employees and hiring those that best resemble existing high performers. Therefore, recruiters are facing multiple tensions at once when working with diversity. These findings substantially nuance the research focusing on recruiters' contribution to inequality by showing that in real life their role and the context they are operating in is even more complex than so. This knowledge resonates with the increasing focus on the paradoxes of managing diversity (e.g., Jaeck, Marais, Joly, and Preuss, 2023; Brøgger and Andersen, 2023) incorporating a focus on tensions faced by recruiters in their work with diversity.

Methodologically, while many researchers have contributed with ethnographic studies to the HR literature (e.g., Luring and Selmer, 2009; Gamble and Huang, 2009; Vickers and Fox, 2010; Leuridan and Demil, 2022), this is one of the few ethnographic studies zooming in on recruiters' work with diversity, the tensions they face, and most importantly, how they navigate these. Hence, this study can be considered a novel methodological advancement to the field of diversity recruitment within HRM more specifically and for the HRM field more generally by showing how ethnographic methods are critical to understand challenges to HR specialists' work with diversity and how – or – if they navigate these. With this, the study argues that we cannot fully understand challenges from a mere functionalist positioning as it tends to simplify the challenges specialists are facing. Instead, we need other methods that are more sensitive to

specialists' behaviors and interactions because it is only through this in-depth account, we can reach a full understanding of specialists' challenges to carrying out their work with diversity.

Practical contributions

Findings show that when recruiters establish closer relationships with managers, they experience being able to better challenge managers on diversity. Thus, organizations employing internal recruiters are encouraged to consider how recruiters are structurally positioned in the organization. This could support recruiters in working more frequently with the same managers to be able to establish closer relationships. This also leaves a task for recruitment managers in training recruiters in how to establish these relationships while navigating its tensions.

Limitations and future research

Future studies of qualitative nature could spread out data collection to multiple cases to increase validity, as this study was conducted within a specific country, culture, and context. While this study focuses on recruiters, the findings also emphasize the importance of the relationships between recruiters and managers in fostering diversity. Future studies could focus on hiring managers' experiences of the relationships with recruiters and whether managers see themselves as playing a part in constructing and negotiating recruiters' role and if they assign value to building and having closer relationships with recruiters to foster diversity. By including managers in future studies, it is possible to explore how recruiters and managers individually and collectively construct and negotiate their roles while being imposed to each other's expectations in fostering diversity.

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CHAPTER 7:

Paper III: Navigating tensions of intuition in recruitment

Table 7.1. Overview of Paper III

Author(s)	Maria Dahl Andersen* and Christa Thomsen
Research question	How do recruiters understand their use of intuition in their work and how do they navigate tensions associated with its use?
Main findings	Findings demonstrate that intuition is understood as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that supports recruiters in making more informed decisions. However, the use of intuition creates tensions on individual, organizational, and societal levels and recruiters navigate these tensions through internal and external interactive practices. Drawing on paradox theory, the paper contributes to the recruitment literature within HRM by foregrounding possibilities for integrating intuition into recruitment processes whilst navigating its tensions. With this, the paper also offers practical contributions for how HR practitioners and others can integrate intuition into recruitment and navigate its tensions effectively.
Presentation outlets	Accepted for British Academy of Management Conference 2023 but withdrawn due to lack of money.
Status	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Submitted for Human Resource Management Journal (AJG 4*), July 2023 – desk rejection2. Submitted for Group & Organization Management (AJG 3), September 2023 – rejection after review3. In preparation for submission to European Management Journal

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Navigating tensions of intuition in recruitment

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Abstract

Recruiters are facing the paradox of consistently relying on facts, while navigating the subjective nature of intuition that is ingrained in recruiters' work. While a majority of studies have approached intuition from a theoretical perspective, not much research has applied an empirical perspective with the aim of providing empirical insights into how to effectively navigate tensions of intuition in recruitment whilst integrating intuition into recruitment. This is despite intuition being a fundamental phenomenon of human nature. Therefore, this study explores how recruiters understand their use of intuition in their work and how they navigate tensions associated with its use. The study utilizes a qualitative approach to empirically extend our understanding of intuition in recruitment. It thus puts intuition forward as a valuable human tool to be acknowledged and effectively utilized in the praxis of recruitment and potentially related disciplines. Findings demonstrate that intuition is understood as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that supports recruiters in making more informed decisions. However, the use of intuition creates tensions on individual, organizational, and societal levels and recruiters navigate these tensions through internal and external interactive practices. Drawing on paradox theory, the paper contributes to the recruitment literature within Human Resource Management by foregrounding possibilities for integrating intuition into recruitment processes whilst navigating its tensions. With this, the paper also offers practical contributions for how HR practitioners and others can integrate intuition into recruitment and navigate its tensions effectively.

Keywords

Recruitment; Recruiter; Intuition; Paradox theory; Paradox mindset; Tensions; Qualitative study

Introduction

Decision making in recruitment is generally encouraged to be based on facts (Miles and Sadler-Smith, 2014). However, recruiters are facing an ever-present paradox, i.e., consistently relying on facts when making decisions, while navigating the subjective nature of intuition which is ingrained in recruiters' decision making (Sadler-Smith, Akstinaite, and Akinci, 2021). On the one hand, research suggests that intuition can help make effective decisions (Simon, 1987), save time, and conserve scarce cognitive resources (Sadler-Smith et al., 2021). On the other hand, much research suggests that intuition leaves room for systematic errors and biases (e.g., Gilovich, Griffin, and Kahneman, 2002; Derous and Ryan, 2019; Montoya, Horton, and Kirchner, 2008), thereby making it a “troublesome decision tool” (Miller and Ireland, 2005, p. 29). As intuition occurs involuntarily in the complex and uncertain social setting characterizing hiring processes, Miles and Sadler-Smith (2014) argue that “it is imperative that gut feelings are acknowledged and managed effectively” (p. 622). This leaves the question of how to navigate tensions of intuition in recruitment while actively utilizing it, which is the point of departure for this paper.

Recently, various research fields have started to put intuition on the agenda spanning from areas such as Human Resource Management (HRM) (e.g., Sadler-Smith, Akstinaite, and Akinci, 2021), management (e.g., Larsen, 2023; Sleesman, Hollenbeck, Davison, and Scott, 2022; Keller and Sadler-Smith, 2019), and even within research itself (e.g., Kump, 2022). In recruitment, researchers have investigated how practitioners use intuition effectively to understand how the use of intuition influences organizational practices and effectiveness (e.g., Khatri and Ng, 2000; Salas, Rosen, and Granados, 2010; Akinci and Sadler-Smith, 2012; Sleesman et al., 2022). Despite this, the literature on the role that intuition plays within recruitment remains scarce, as only some empirical research has been conducted on the use of intuition in recruitment (e.g., Kravitz, 2007; Mirowska and Mesnet, 2022; Sadler-Smith, 2016; Sadler et al., 2021; Sayegha, Anthony, and Perrewé, 2004; Miles and Sadler-Smith, 2014; Lodato, Highhouse, and Brooks, 2011). This is unfortunate, as more knowledge is needed to better understand the phenomenon of intuition and its paradoxical tensions as it is a fundamental phenomenon of human nature, somewhat neglected in HRM research but widely recognized and used in HR practice (Miles and Sadler-Smith, 2014).

The purpose of this study is therefore to find ways in which tensions of intuition can be navigated while actively integrating intuition into recruitment. The following research question is thus raised:

How do recruiters understand their use of intuition in their work and how do they navigate tensions associated with its use?

The paper aims to contribute to the recruitment literature within HRM with an empirical perspective on the use of intuition and how recruiters navigate its tensions. This is relevant and important for several reasons. Firstly, by approaching intuition in recruitment as a paradoxical phenomenon, we contribute with novel theoretical knowledge to the recruitment literature within HRM on how to navigate its tensions whilst actively utilizing intuition into recruitment. Secondly, empirical studies on the use of intuition in recruitment are scarce. This study stems from an ethnographic fieldwork methodology, including interviews and participant observation; a rigorous technique to collect qualitative data over time thereby allowing an insider view (Cunliffe, 2010). As ethnographic field studies and participant observations are scarce in recruitment, this study can be considered a pioneering effort. Thirdly, models on the use of intuition in recruitment will help practitioners to better navigate tensions of intuition effectively, thus seeing intuition as a valuable tool. In the next section, we embark on the literature review before introducing paradox theory as our theoretical perspective as well as the concept of paradox mindsets. We then present our method and findings after finishing the paper with a discussion, limitations, and future research avenues.

Literature review

Intuition in management and organization studies

Within the field of management and organization studies, Dane and Pratt (2007) defined intuition as “affectively charged judgments that arise through rapid, non-conscious, and holistic associations” (p. 33). In the same vein, Betsch (2008) defined intuition as a process of thinking where the input is mostly “provided by knowledge stored in long-term memory that has been primarily acquired via associative learning” (p. 4). In line with the definition by Dane and Pratt (2007), the definition by Betsch (2008) claims that the input is processed automatically and without conscious awareness. The output of the process is a feeling that can serve as a basis for judgments

and decisions. Thus, we can think of intuition as a type of cognition that differs from conscious and analytical reasoning. Salas et al. (2010) expanded on the work by Dane and Pratt (2007; 2009), Betsch (2008), and Hodgkinson et al. (2009) focusing on what they call experience-based intuition. Experience-based intuition is defined as “the intuitions that occur at later stages of experience where the decision maker has developed a deep and rich knowledge base from extensive experience within a domain” (Salas et al., 2010, p. 944). This definition invites us to think of intuition as a type of cognition that incorporates experience and contextual knowledge.

The focus in the literature has mainly been on the challenges related to intuition and to a lesser extent on how to navigate these challenges. Recently, however, researchers have shifted the focus from challenges to opportunities by applying a paradox perspective. For example, Calabretta, Gemser, and Wijnberg (2016) acknowledge that both intuition and rationality can play important roles in strategic decision making. However, a framework that specifically accounts for the interplay between intuition and rationality is missing. Thus, the authors decided to address this gap by using a paradox lens and conceptualizing the intuition-rationality duality as a paradoxical tension. They empirically derived a three-step process for managing the intuition-rationality tension through paradoxical thinking. Keller and Sadler-Smith (2019) also highlight the “nestedness” of intuition and analysis and identify four themes in the relationship between intuition and analysis. In specific, they introduce an integrative framework that assimilates these two perspectives and sets out an agenda for future research and implications for management (Keller and Sadler-Smith, 2019). Furthermore, Sleesman et al. (2022) demonstrated the important role of contingency factors such as information load and introversion as key moderators influencing the impact of a leader’s intuitive style on Multiteam System Performance. Overall, the authors contribute with a better understanding of when intuition is effective and ineffective. They call for further research within the field that expands their results using other methods of studying intuition (see Dane and Pratt, 2009). Researchers could for example interview leaders to ascertain the extent to which they use intuition and how their intuitive understanding may shape their ability to facilitate effective coordination within their unit (Sleesman et al., 2022, p. 31).

As our above review shows, the focus in the literature has especially been on boundary factors (Sleesman et al., 2022). Relying on intuition in certain circumstances can be a source of error (e.g., Salas et al., 2010), whereas in other circumstances, it can be a source of enrichment

(e.g., Calabretta et al., 2016; Keller and Sadler-Smith, 2019). Our study aims to contribute to the above research. However, in contrast to previous research, our aim is not to “understand the boundary between intuition and evidence-based decision making” (Sleesman et al., 2022, p. 29) but rather to understand how organizations and in our case, recruiters can navigate tensions of intuition in ways where intuition is integrated into recruitment and seen as valuable. We argue that paradox theory will help us to achieve this aim, as the theory will allow us to see how recruiters turn a vicious cycle of using intuition into a virtuous one (Jaeck et al., 2023, p. 7, quoting Pradies et al., 2021).

Intuition in Human Resource Management Studies

When turning to the HRM literature, Sadler-Smith et al. (2021) provide knowledge on how HR practitioners put their intuition into words and Lodato et al. (2011) examine personal and situational characteristics that may relate to preference for intuition-based approaches to hiring. Even though there have been many advances in theorizing intuition (e.g., Hodgkinson, Langan-Fox, and Sadler-Smith, 2008; Hodgkinson and Clarke, 2007; Hodgkinson et al., 2009; Hogarth, 2001; Dane and Pratt, 2007; Salas et al., 2010), Sadler-Smith (2016) argues that empirical work on intuition is not extensive and that the subjective experience of intuition is poorly understood. As current knowledge on intuition rests largely on abstract theorizations, Sadler-Smith (2016) argues for the need in obtaining more knowledge about intuition from the perspective of the intuitor. Sadler-Smith (2016) provides such knowledge and encourages further research focusing on conceptualizing intuition from data rather than from theory.

Such efforts are attempted by Miles and Sadler-Smith (2014), who are motivated by the dearth of understanding how and why managers use intuition in employee selection decisions. They argue that decisions are governed by two, sometimes complementary and competing modes of cognition, one of which being rational and the other being intuitive (Miles and Sadler-Smith, 2014). Through semi-structured interviews with managers, they find intuition to be used as indicator for the candidate’s performance, personality, and person-environment fit. Additionally, a consistent finding was that a combination of rationality and intuition yield a better outcome in the selection process than solely relying on one or the other. However, the authors do not explicitly interview for intuition but instead focus on decision making in general. Moreover, the sampling

fails to consider the context of the organizations that the respondents represent (e.g., size, organizational design), which can affect how recruitment is practiced. Lastly, the authors approach intuition from merely a decision making point of view, potentially neglecting other situations in which intuition might be used.

Despite these shortcomings, the above findings substantiate the need for even further research on how recruiters navigate tensions of intuition. In this study, we accommodate these shortcomings by: 1) we ask the participants directly about their use of intuition to obtain explicit knowledge about the phenomenon, 2) we sample participants from the same organization to account for the relevance of the organizational context, and 3) we approach the interviews from a broader thematic context than merely that of decision making to capture other potential situations in which intuition might be used. By investigating the phenomenon of intuition from the perspective of practitioners, such empirical understandings will ultimately broaden the knowledge of intuition beyond that of mainly theoretical.

Theoretical perspective

Paradox theory

Paradoxes are defined as “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time. Such elements seem logical when considered in isolation but irrational, inconsistent, and even absurd when juxtaposed” (Lewis, 2000, p. 760). According to Putnam, Fairhurst, and Banghart (2016), tensions are defined as “stress, anxiety, discomfort, or tightness in making choices and moving forward in organizational situations” meaning that tensions are “feeling states, ones that often result from frustration, blockage, uncertainty, and even paralysis that individuals face in dealing with contradictions and paradoxes” (p. 4). Thus, tensions are emotional experiences that signify the dynamics arising from complex situations (Putnam et al., 2016). When navigating paradoxes, individuals explore how to attend to competing demands simultaneously (Smith and Lewis, 2011), thus acknowledging that engagement with competing demands fosters learning (Brandl, Keegan, and Aust, 2022). Paradox theory thereby argue that individuals may benefit from abandoning the idea that tensions are negative and should be solved (Keegan, Brandl, and Aust, 2018). Instead, tensions can be approached as sources of creativity and

promote proactive strategies of responses (Keegan et al., 2018). Applying paradox theory therefore moves management approaches away from an either-or approach to consider a both-and approach acknowledging that both sides of a paradox are valuable (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Moreover, Putnam et al., (2016) introduce a more-than approach as a strategy for navigating paradoxes, which moves away from the focus on managing contradictions. Instead, individuals are concerned with “preserving the dynamic interplay between opposites” (p. 66) to cultivate a variety of responses. Some of these responses include dialogic interactions and relational support, which is often combined with other responses including both-and strategies (Putnam et al., 2016).

Paradox mindsets

Some individuals appreciate competing demands and see them as opportunities for learning. According to Miron-Spektor, Ingram, Keller, Smith, and Lewis (2018) such people are likely to have a paradox mindset, which refers to “a tendency to value, accept and feel comfortable with tensions” and they “see tensions as opportunities, confront them, and search for both-and strategies” (p. 27). By adopting a paradox mindset, individuals thus “shift their expectations from rationality and linearity to accept paradoxes as persistent and unsolvable puzzles” (Smith and Lewis, 2011, p. 385). Much research has focused on individual processes of working through paradoxes (e.g., Lüscher and Lewis, 2008; Knight and Hahn, 2020), which has been termed *an individualistic approach to paradox mindsets* (Griffin, King, and Reedy, 2022). As Berti and Simpson (2021) state, this literature regards paradox mindsets as individual resources exploring individuals’ cognitive capabilities that enable them to work with paradoxes. Recent contributions to paradox literature, however, have stressed the “relational, socially constructed, and sociomaterial context of paradox thinking” (Griffin et al., 2022, p. 626) (e.g., Berti and Simpson, 2021; Pradies, Tunarosa, Lewis, Courtois, 2021). These contributions stress how paradoxes are understood socially through interactions with others (e.g., Pamphile, 2022; Jarzabkowski and Lê, 2017), which has been termed *a relational approach to paradox mindsets* (Griffin et al., 2022). This approach demonstrates that “the processes through which paradoxes are made salient is situational and contextually constrained, informed, and shaped by systemic power and the sociomaterial context” (Cunha and Putnam, 2019 in Griffin et al., 2022, p. 627). For example, Pamphile (2022) argues that “managing paradox may be thought of as fundamentally relational,

since it is through interacting with others that people debate the merits of competing goals” (p. 1294). She therefore encourages researchers to expand their focus beyond the individualistic approach to a broader relational one that “enables a better understanding of how social exchanges cultivate and sustain engagement with paradox” (Pamphile, 2022, p. 1294).

Method

Empirical setting

This study is part of a larger ethnographic project with the aim of investigating recruiters’ work with diversity and how they navigate tensions and paradoxes related hereto. The field study has been conducted through 17 months between October 2021 to March 2023 in a multinational production company, which is pseudonymised and referred to as PIM. PIM is the largest manufacturer in its industry and recognised for recruiting a diverse workforce especially due to operating in a male-dominated industry. Here, we specifically zoomed in on the practices of recruiters in the Northern European team. When the fieldwork was initiated, the recruitment team consisted of four full-time recruiters, a recruitment manager, and head of global recruitment, but throughout time, some recruiters resigned and new ones were employed. Each recruiter has different areas in the organization in which they are responsible for hiring.

Data collection

Throughout the period, the first author passively observed (Spradley, 2016, p. 59) the work of the recruiters throughout the recruitment process, interacted informally with them throughout their workday, and participated in organizational activities such as lunches, events, and informal arrangements to establish relationships. Throughout the fieldwork, intuition kept appearing from the recruiters and/or in conversations with hiring managers. Often, after having talked to candidates, recruiters would initiate conversations with hiring managers with the phrase “what is your gut feeling?”. Thus, when offered the opportunity to do a focus group interview with recruiters in the American team, the first author spent one week in the American headquarters. The purpose was to interview American recruiters about their use of intuition, which spurred a further interest in intuition from an empirical perspective. Thus, afterwards, a similar focus group

interview was conducted with recruiters in the Northern European team. These focus groups lay the foundation for providing more knowledge on how recruiters use intuition.

Table 1 depicts an overview of the participants, who were observed and/or interviewed for this study. We find this sample size highly valuable as foundation for this paper, as it allows us to get as close as possible to the recruiters’ understanding of their use of intuition. As such, we are not interested in providing any factual accounts of intuition, but rather give primacy to how these practitioners understand the reality of intuition in their everyday work, which helps us to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, we highlight that our interest is not to conduct a comparative study between the American and Northern European recruiters. Instead, Table 1 demonstrates who have contributed to the study. All names of the participants, places, and date identifiers have been anonymised, where (NE) refers to recruiters in the Northern European team and (US) to recruiters in the American team.

Table 1. Overview of participants in PIM observed and/or interviewed for the paper

Participants in PIM	Responsibility in PIM	Observed	Interviewed
1	Full-time recruiter (NE)	X	X
2	Full-time recruiter (NE)	X	X
3	Full-time recruiter (NE)	X	X
4	Full-time recruiter (NE)	X	X
5	Full-time recruiter (NE)		X
6	Full-time recruiter (NE)		X
7	Full-time recruiter (NE)		X
8	Full-time recruiter (US)		X
9	Full-time recruiter (US)		X
10	Full-time recruiter (US)		X
11	Full-time recruiter (US)		X
12	Full-time recruiter (US)		X
13	Full-time recruiter (US)		X
14	Full-time recruiter (US)		X
15	Recruitment manager (NE)		X

For this paper, we thus conducted a focus group interview with the American recruiters and a focus group interview with the Northern European recruiters. Additionally, one semi-structured interview with a Northern European recruiter was conducted, as this person was unable to attend the focus group interview. For this paper, the ethnographic data, i.e., observations, field notes, and interviews, thus serve as background data to understand how intuition emerges in the everyday

work of recruiters, while the two focus group interviews and the semi-structured interview are used for the analysis of this paper to get a deeper account of the phenomenon. Table 2 depicts an overview of the entire collected data throughout the fieldwork.

Table 2. Overview of entire collected data throughout the fieldwork

Data	Amount	Hours (approx.)
Days of fieldwork	40	250
Observations of recruitment meetings	45	68
Observations of meetings in the diversity team	10	10
Informal talks	23	15
Semi-structured interviews	15	12
Semi-structured interviews for this paper	1	1
Semi-structured focus group interviews	2	7
Semi-structured focus group interviews for this paper	2	6
Travel to office in United States	1 week	50
Documents	Approx. 200 pages	
Total		417

Analysis

We made use of a thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phased approach, as we found it useful to make sense of the participants’ understandings across the data set. The analysis is done inductively in a way where codes and themes closely match the data to prioritize databased meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2006), thus remaining close to the language of the participants. This approach enables us to convey a story that remains true to the understandings of the participants, which are in line with the purpose of our paper. However, as initial phases of data processing already occurred during the fieldwork, it was impossible for us to remain purely inductive (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Therefore, as the analysis proceeded, it became a constant abductive movement back and forth between the empirical material and theories that we thought could be relevant to understand the data (Van Maanen, Sørensen, and Mitchell, 2007). We now outline the six-phased approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp. 87) that we employed for the analysis.

During phase 1, we familiarized ourselves with the data by listening to audio recordings and later transcribing it. In phase 2, we generated initial descriptive codes by reading line-by-line of the transcripts. Whenever something potentially relevant for the research question appeared, we

coded it by assigning inductive first-order codes to segments of data. For example, statements such as “I was also gonna say that for me, intuition is like a tool” and “It’s an additional tool to dig deeper because they may have the experience, but your intuition is telling you there is something there that doesn’t seem right, so that’s gonna force me to dig deeper” kept occurring. In phase 3, we gathered all codes that appeared to share some unifying feature and collapsed them into subthemes that reflected a coherent pattern and captured something interesting in relation to the research question. As an example, the abovementioned statements were collapsed into the subtheme of intuition as being ‘A tool’. In phase 4, we reviewed each subtheme in relation to the coded transcripts to determine whether they meaningfully captured the entire data thus securing that we did not leave out any interesting and potentially important nuances. In phase 5, we synthesized the subthemes that appeared to share some coherent pattern into overarching themes that directly addressed the research question. The subthemes of ‘A gut feeling’, ‘Based on past experiences’, ‘A tool’, ‘It cannot stand alone; it requires facts’, and ‘You cannot turn it off: it’s always there’ appeared to group around an overall theme of understanding intuition as being a multidimensional phenomenon; what we describe as a phenomenon having or relating to multiple dimensions or aspects. In phase 6, we selected the most compelling statements to use for the analysis and finalized writing the findings.

Findings

Table 3 depicts an overview of the subthemes and themes, which will now be analyzed. Firstly, we descriptively elaborate on the theme of ‘Intuition: a Multidimensional Phenomenon’ to grasp how recruiters understand intuition. Afterwards, we analyze the theme of ‘Tensions on Individual Level’, ‘Tensions on Organizational Level’, and ‘Tensions on Societal Level’ to unfold the tensions related to recruiters’ use of intuition. Lastly, we delve into how they navigate these tensions through the themes of ‘Navigating Tensions through Internal Interactive Practices’ and ‘Navigating Tensions through External Interactive Practices’.

Table 3. Overview of themes

Illustrative quotes	Subthemes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would say gut feeling. Like this feeling that you have in your guts. • It comes from an unknown place but as a product of your past experiences. • It's an additional tool to dig deeper because they may have the experience, but your intuition is telling you there is something there that doesn't seem right, so that's gonna force me to dig deeper. • Of course, I always try to do everything I can to have a justification for it, so I don't just say 'this is my gut feeling', because one day I had to call a candidate and give a rejection, 'well, it's my gut feeling'. There have to be words put onto it and that's where I use facts on my intuition. • Intuition is not something you can turn off; it's always there both consciously and unconsciously. 	<p>A gut feeling</p> <p>Based on past experiences</p> <p>A tool</p> <p>It cannot stand alone; it requires facts</p> <p>You cannot turn it off: it's always there</p>	<p>Intuition: a Multidimensional Phenomenon</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't see the difference between using intuition and then being judgmental, as well. For me, I feel like how do you prevent gut feeling from you not being judgmental or biased in your own way? • We have to be objective, because data are objective but we cannot be that because we'll always be affected by our own bias no matter how aware we are. • I think intuition was there also as a really new recruiter. I had intuition and then you have experience and experience will strengthen, I think, your recruiter-intuition, maybe. RECRUITER 12: And you may not use it at entry level. You may have it, but you may be scared to put it forth. • I think it's a strength if you're aware of it, because in some way it can take over if you're not aware of it and you only use your subjective opinion. Then there'll probably be some candidates who are excluded, who could've been relevant, if you've used your intuition. • I mean especially in these days where DE&I is so important. I think as a recruiter in every part of your job you need to, it's impossible to leave all your biases and values at the door, but it's part of your job as a recruiter to do the best that you can to when you open up your laptop and you start looking at resumes to have as few biases as possible. 	<p>Bias</p> <p>Objectivity</p> <p>Lack of experience</p> <p>Lack of confidence</p> <p>Lack of awareness</p> <p>Hierarchal differences</p> <p>The discourse of intuition</p> <p>A gendered phenomenon</p>	<p>Tensions on Individual Level</p> <p>Tensions on Organizational Level</p> <p>Tensions on Societal Level</p>

- The higher you get in hierarchy, there might be a greater need for supporting your gut feeling with some data.
- Because throughout many years, the way that we've talked inferiorly about emotions and gut feelings and all of this, I really think it plays a role on how you [Recruiter 3] see this, because actually you're presenting this patriarchal, this patriarchal company culture, right? Okay, these are tough words that I'm using right now, because this is how it's supposed to be when we get higher up into the hierarchy and that's how you are when you're at those levels, right? Now I also challenge you and myself, but I do think it's connected.
- Recruitment manager: Well, it's this female sense of inferiority, because we have to match in.
Recruiter 5: I don't want to be some kind of 'feely feely'-HR.
Recruitment manager: No, no that's exactly that!
Recruiter 5: And that quickly just becomes a label.
Recruitment manager: Yes, or that woman who just talks about feelings.
Recruiter 5: Yes.
- Recruitment manager: Way too vulnerable.

- If intuition is standing on it's own, it can seem a bit weak, but then I try to create a connection between what I hear, see, and experience, because I think it's important that you qualify your intuition with facts.
- It's important that you dare to speak up about your intuition and doubt and be vulnerable so that you can get sparring from others.
- Sometimes I find it difficult to put my gut feeling into words and that's where I think it's more important that I say it. That the hiring manager get's my gut feeling too. Not just my facts but also my gut feeling so the manager has a full basis for making his or her decision.
- It's almost like you go over a speed bump. You noticed it but maybe it's not making you go full stop, but you are just, you're aware of it and I think that can also be your intuition. Sometimes it's not making you go full stop, but you're noticing it and maybe that's a meaning towards a yes-direction or a no-direction
- I think it's important to be aware that your intuition is not always the right and that's actually one of the strengths you can have; being aware about it. But saying 'don't ever go with your gut', then we might

<p>Awareness</p> <p>Inner dialogue</p>	<p>Navigating Tensions through Internal Interactive Practices</p>
<p>Using facts to qualify intuition</p> <p>Voicing yourself</p> <p>Get sparring from others</p>	<p>Navigating Tensions through External Interactive Practices</p>

as well get an AI-computer to do our job, because that's one of the things I think we're hired to do; that is to use our experiences and what've experienced, which to me is what intuition is.

- I'm totally aware of it, my gut feeling, but I'm also very aware of whether I act on it or not. So to me it's very much about sensing it, when I sense it and it's a huge part of my work and I do it without exception. It's always a part of my assessment, what my gut feeling is telling me.
 - Always be critical towards it [intuition]. Trust it, but always be critical towards it. Be open and get other inputs for example by sparring with the hiring manager and also dare to be challenged on your intuition. And then analyze on your gut feeling, if you're able to do that. Ask yourself; 'Why is it that I think like I do?'
 - In former jobs, I've always trained my new colleagues where I said 'you should never dismiss your own gut feeling; if it's there, investigate it. You should never go with it based on nothing, but you should always investigate it.'
-

Intuition: a Multidimensional Phenomenon

Our analysis demonstrates that recruiters share an understanding of their intuition as a Multidimensional Phenomenon. The recruiters unanimously describe intuition as a gut feeling:

Recruiter 7: I would describe it as a kind of gut feeling. In other words, something that happens somewhere unconsciously, which can lead to something conscious.

Intuition comes from somewhere that you are not aware of, but which then leads to something conscious you can reflect on and ultimately act upon. The recruiters also describe intuition as based on past experiences:

Recruiter 7: It [intuition] comes from an unknown place but as a product of your past experiences.

They may not be aware of their intuition in the moment, but then afterwards, by rationalization, they can see that it happened. A certain stimulus may trigger such sensemaking:

Recruiter 14: It can be maybe like a response you have to certain stimuli like a tone of voice or a way to walk or maybe a word. It can be different stimuli that have this impact on you because you had an experience that left like a footprint and they come back whenever you see it again.

Furthermore, intuition is described as a tool:

Recruiter 8: It's an additional tool to dig deeper because they [candidates] may have the experience, but your intuition is telling you there is something there that doesn't seem right, so that's gonna force me to dig deeper.

Interviewer: Dig deeper, can you elaborate on that?

Recruiter 8: Dig deeper as in ask more follow-up questions, let's not just stop here and move forward but maybe take a step back, so that's why I see it as a strength rather than a weakness.

Intuition leads to reflection and action making it a strength. Intuition is, however, only seen as an additional tool, as facts are required:

Recruiter 2: Of course, I always try to do everything I can to have a justification for it, so I don't just say 'this is my gut feeling', because one day I had to call a candidate and give a rejection, 'well, it's my gut feeling'. There have to be words put onto it and that's where I use facts on my intuition.

As such, facts are necessary for the recruiters to justify their decisions. Finally, intuition is described as something that you cannot turn off:

Recruitment manager: Intuition is not something you can turn off; it's always there both consciously and unconsciously.

The analysis demonstrates that the recruiters understand intuition as vague in some way without, however, being unclear or meaningless. The meaning can only be made more precise through further elaboration, including a closer examination of the context in which intuition is used. Theoretically, the examples demonstrate that the recruiters understand intuition as creating paradoxical tensions (Putnam et al., 2016), which the analysis has found to exist on individual, organizational, and societal level. We will now elaborate on the tensions experienced by the recruiters according to these three levels.

Tensions on Individual Level

The analysis has identified tensions on an individual level expressed as uncertainty, discomfort, tightness, and anxiety among the recruiters in using their intuition in their work. The uncertainty stems from a feeling that the use of intuition is biased and lacks objectivity. This feeling is particularly strong if the recruiters also feel that they lack experience in using intuition as well as confidence and awareness of their intuition. The below quote shows how uncertainty or discomfort stems from a feeling that the use of intuition is biased:

Recruiter 9: I don't see the difference between using intuition and then being judgmental, as well. For me, I feel like how do you prevent gut feeling from you not being judgmental or biased in your own way?

The next example shows how tightness in their work stems from the same feeling of bias. Tightness is understood as working hard under pressure to have as few biases as possible:

Recruiter 11: I mean especially in these days where diversity, equity, and inclusion are so important. I think as a recruiter in every part of your job you need to, it's impossible to leave all your biases and values at the door, but it's part of your job as a recruiter to do the best that you can to when you open up your laptop and you start looking at resumes to have as few biases as possible.

The feeling of being biased reinforces a feeling that overall, the use of intuition lacks objectivity, which the recruiter finds challenging in relation to working with diversity, equality, and inclusion. This agenda is very often related to the topic of bias and remaining as objective and free of prejudice as possible to acknowledge and be open to diversity. Here, Recruiter 11 appears to find intuition to be a challenging phenomenon given its subjective nature, which therefore needs to be balanced up against objective facts to 'have as few biases as possible' and see diversity more clearly. However, Recruiter 11 further explains that it is impossible to be purely objective even though objective data are always present. As such, recruiters will always be affected by their own bias:

Recruiter 7: We have to be objective, because data are objective but we cannot be that because we'll always be affected by our own bias no matter how aware we are.

The example below also shows how uncertainty and tightness are particularly strong if the recruiters also feel that they lack experience and do not have confidence in and awareness of their intuition. The recruitment manager stresses that experience can reduce uncertainty among new recruiters and strengthen the use of intuition:

Recruitment manager: I think intuition was there also as a really new recruiter. I had intuition and then you have experience and experience will strengthen, I think, your recruiter-intuition, maybe.

The following example shows how a lack of confidence in one's own intuition creates anxiety among new recruiters. Thus, they might be scared to use it:

Recruiter 12: And you may not use it at entry level. You may have it, but you may be scared to put it forth.

The recruiters highlight the lack of awareness as something that creates uncertainty, here expressed in reflections about how intuition will take over if not being aware of it:

Recruiter 6: I think it's a strength if you're aware of it, because in some way it can take over if you're not aware of it and you only use your subjective opinion. Then there'll probably be some candidates who are excluded, who could've been relevant, if you've used your intuition.

The analysis demonstrates that the association of intuition with bias and a lack of objectivity creates tensions and particularly among new recruiters. Tensions are expressed through feelings such as uncertainty, discomfort, and tightness (Putnam et al., 2016). Such feelings can prevent recruiters in using and voicing their intuition. Experience may reduce uncertainty by instilling confidence and awareness of one's intuition, thereby strengthening the use of intuition. In the following, we analyze the tensions related to recruiters' use of intuition and how they are located not only on an individual but also on an organizational level.

Tensions on Organizational Level

The analysis has also identified tensions on an organizational level expressed as uncertainty and discomfort among recruiters in using intuition in their work. These feelings stem from a feeling that the use of intuition is challenged by hierarchical differences in the organization. The following

quote demonstrates how hierarchical differences between recruiters and hiring managers influence how some of the recruiters use their intuition:

Recruiter 5: I'll tell you, when I'm sitting with hiring managers on groupband 5, I don't say 'my gut feeling is telling me'. I don't really feel it's that legitimate. I feel there has to be more data. I don't know if that's true, but that's just a feeling I've got; that they expect, what I based my arguments on, is factual.

[The discussion continues and Recruiter 6 jumps into the discussion with an argument:]

Recruiter 6: It's just a follow-up on what Recruiter 5 said. It's more that I think, the higher you get, it might be that there has to be something more until you use your gut feeling. I think there might be a greater need for you to support your gut feeling with some data.

Recruiter 5: Yes, that's just what I wanted to say. I don't think it's that I'll use it less. I just think that I'm more aware of trying to support it with something.

Recruiter 6: Exactly. Exactly. The manager needs a bit more convincing in the form of data to support your theory, well not your theory, but your intuition, gut feeling.

Here, at first, Recruiter 5 appears reluctant to the idea of voicing her intuition to hiring managers positioned on higher levels, as she juxtaposes intuitive arguments as being 'less legitimate' than objective facts. However, Recruiters 5 and 6 conclude that when working with managers positioned in higher hierarchical levels, some recruiters are more aware of supporting their intuition with objective facts. This is rooted in their understanding that when working with managers positioned in higher levels, managers would expect the recruiters to use more objective arguments. This emphasizes that tensions of intuitive and objective rationales in recruitment can be strengthened through subjective notions of power and hierarchical differences in the organization. Next, we analyze how the tensions related to recruiters' use of intuition are located not only on an individual and organizational level, but also on a societal level.

Tensions on Societal Level

The analysis has also identified tensions on a societal level expressed as uncertainty and discomfort among recruiters in using intuition in their work. This theme occurred alongside the discussion of hierarchical differences, in which some recruiters start reflecting on the societal discourse of

intuition and a perception of intuition as being a gendered phenomenon. The following quote demonstrates how these tensions interfere with their own practices:

Recruitment manager: But no, I also think it's about our society and now I start with my social constructivism and my...

Recruiter 5: But I think you're right.

Recruitment manager: Because throughout many years, the way that we've talked inferiorly about emotions and gut feelings and all of this, I really think it plays a role on how you [Recruiter 5] see this, because actually you're presenting this patriarchal, this patriarchal company culture, right? Okay, these are tough words that I'm using right now, because this is how it's supposed to be when we get higher up into the hierarchy and that's how you are when you're at those levels, right? Now I also challenge you and myself, but I do think it's connected.

[...]

Recruitment manager: We also have to do a bit of insurrection against this.

Here, the recruitment manager and Recruiter 5 draw on the notion of a patriarchal society that sets out expectations of how 'you are supposed to be when you get higher up into the hierarchy' and here they do not envision gut feelings to be valued. Thus, objectivity, as represented by a patriarchal society based on male authority, is seen by these two females as undermining emotionality and intuition. Two phenomena that one might argue are often associated with female attributes. In their juxtaposition of male authority and objectivity with female emotionality and intuition, they clearly state that the 'inferior talk' of the latter dooms it as a loser to the former. A discourse that, according to the recruitment manager, needs to be revolted against by the recruiters. This emphasizes that tensions of intuitive and objective rationales in recruitment can be further strengthened through subjective understandings of how intuition is framed in society.

In connection with the discourse of intuition, the recruiters move the discussion onto a talk about the role of gender related to practicing intuition:

Recruiter 5: But sometimes it's exactly your own bias, so it can also be my assumption and thoughts on how they [hiring managers] see me that causes these biases. It's not even certain that's how they are.

Recruitment manager: Well, it's this female sense of inferiority, because we have to match in.

Recruiter 5: I don't want to be some kind of 'feely feely'-HR.

Recruitment manager: No, no that's exactly that!

Recruiter 5: And that quickly just becomes a label.

Recruitment manager: Yes, or that woman who just talks about feelings.

Recruiter: Yes.

Recruitment manager: Way too vulnerable.

Interviewer: What's your [Recruiter 6] thoughts as a man?

Recruiter 6: Well, it's actually funny because I've experienced something completely different from what you're talking about in relation to gender, male and female when it comes to intuition.

Recruiter 5: Wow, that's funny.

Recruiter 6: So I've tried a bit the opposite, just to challenge this thing about whether it's gender-based, but I think to a high degree, it depends on the manager on how much you dare to use your intuition.

The recruitment manager expresses the 'female sense of inferiority' as a sense of women having to 'match in' to the patriarchal company culture. Here, the recruitment manager and Recruiter 5 experience intuition to be a gendered phenomenon that is often ascribed to the female gender. By connecting intuition to the phrases 'I don't want to be some kind of feely-feely HR' and 'that woman who just talks about feelings', they distance themselves from what they believe the patriarchal company culture sees them as when using their intuition. A woman working in HR who mainly uses her feelings and intuitive judgements. As such, the female gendered framing of intuition becomes charged with negative connotations. However, their male colleague challenges this assumption by arguing that it might be the nature of the manager that determines to what extent the recruiters feel inclined to voice their intuition and not necessarily due to whether they are a female or a male recruiter. This emphasizes that tensions of intuitive and objective rationales in recruitment settings can be strengthened through subjective understandings of intuition as being a (female) gendered phenomenon charged with negative connotations thereby speaking in favor of objective reasoning.

The analysis demonstrates how tensions experienced by recruiters in relation to using their intuition are not only located on an individual level, but also on an organizational and a societal level that are difficult to untwine. In the following, we analyze how the recruiters navigate these tensions through internal and external interactive practices.

Navigating Tensions through Internal Interactive Practices

We define internal interactive practices as practices employed by individuals who are in a form of inner conversation or dialogue that involves posing questions on behalf of an imagined partner or oneself and answering them oneself. The analysis has identified how the recruiters navigate tensions internally in relation to using their intuition through awareness and an inner dialogue. In the example below, the inner dialogue focuses on awareness of intuition and is articulated as sensing gut feeling, assessing it, and deciding whether to react on it or not. The dialogue is aimed at investigating whether the use of intuition in a specific situation is a good choice:

Recruiter 5: I'm totally aware of it, my gut feeling, but I'm also very aware of whether I act on it or not. So to me it's very much about sensing it, when I sense it and it's a huge part of my work and I do it without exception. It's always a part of my assessment, what my gut feeling is telling me.

The next example focuses on being critical toward intuition. Here, the inner dialogue is articulated as being open, getting sparring, and asking yourself. The dialogue is aimed at analyzing intuition and investigating what may motivate it:

Recruiter 2: Always be critical towards it [intuition]. Trust it, but always be critical towards it. Be open and get other inputs for example by sparring with the hiring manager and also dare to be challenged on your intuition. And then analyze on your gut feeling, if you're able to do that. Ask yourself; 'Why is it that I think like I do?'

The analysis demonstrates that awareness and inner dialogue are used by recruiters to navigate tensions. Theoretically, the examples demonstrate that the recruiters approach tensions as sources of creativity (Keegan et al., 2018) by promoting awareness and inner dialogue.

Navigating Tensions through External Interactive Practices

We define external interactive practices as employed by individuals who are in an outer dialogue as a way of searching outside one's inner self to navigate tensions. The analysis has identified how the recruiters navigate tensions externally in relation to using their intuition by using facts to qualify their intuition, voicing themselves, and by getting sparring from others. The example below

shows how the recruiters view purely intuitive arguments as rather weak and search for external and objective facts to qualify their intuition:

Recruiter 7: If intuition is standing on its own, it can seem a bit weak, but then I try to create a connection between what I hear, see, and experience, because I think it's important that you qualify your intuition with facts.

This practice thus supports their understanding of intuition as something that cannot stand alone as it requires facts. As a way of navigating tensions, they therefore search for external, objective facts beyond their inner self to justify decisions. Besides using objective facts as ways of navigating tensions, recruiters also express the importance of daring to speak up about one's intuition and voice doubts and vulnerabilities to others:

Recruiter 2: It's important that you dare to speak up about your intuition and doubt and be vulnerable so that you can get sparring from others.

By voicing themselves to others, e.g., colleagues and managers, they receive sparring that might help them navigate the tensions associated with intuition. Though voicing one's intuition is seen as something you 'dare' and is associated with being vulnerable. The recruiters argue that voicing themselves is done with the intention of getting sparring from others that provide other viewpoints than those of their own. Thus, 'daring to be challenged' by others ultimately holds potential for relieving and navigating the tensions inherent in using intuition:

Recruiter 2: Be open and get other inputs for example by sparring with the hiring manager and also dare to be challenged on your intuition.

Additionally, sparring with managers is also seen as an intention from the recruiters in providing managers with a solid foundation for when managers should make their decisions:

Recruiter 5: Sometimes I find it difficult to put my gut feeling into words and that's where I think it's more important that I say it. That the hiring manager gets my gut feeling too. Not just my facts but also my gut feeling so the manager has a full basis for making his or her decision.

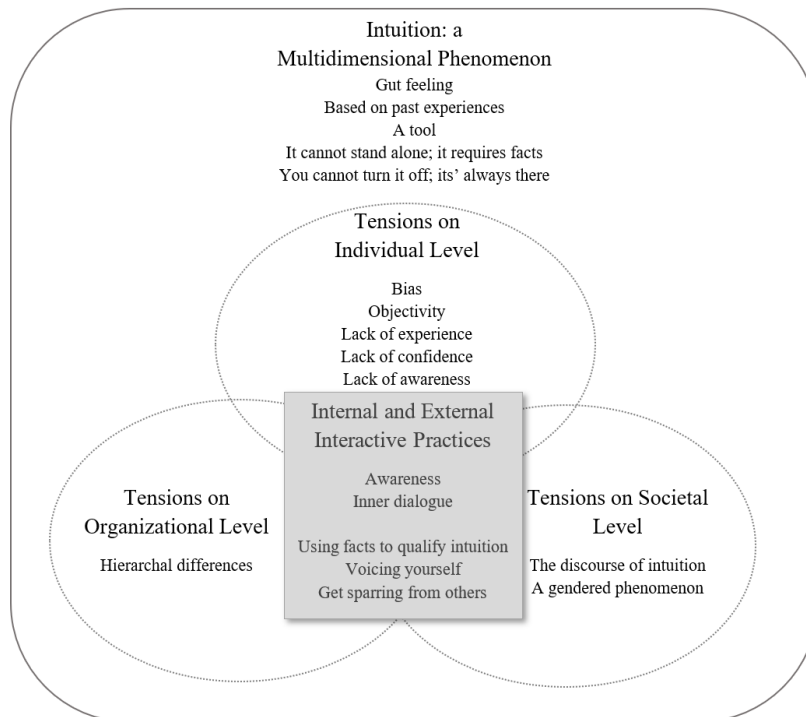
The relational interaction between the recruiter and the manager is found to be essential for the recruiters as it provides a room for sparring and being challenged on their intuition, which ultimately supports recruiters in their work. Theoretically, the examples demonstrate that the recruiters approach tensions as sources of creativity and development (Keegan et al., 2018) by cultivating proactive sets of responses including dialogic interactions (Putnam et al., 2016) with their colleagues and managers when recruiters find themselves in doubt about their intuition. Moreover, they rely on relational support (Putnam et al., 2016) from these peers as a means of being challenged by others to relieve the tension of being unsure about their intuition.

Discussion and conclusion

Main findings

The purpose of this study was to examine how recruiters understand their use of intuition in their work and how they navigate tensions associated with its use. Figure 1 below summarizes these findings demonstrating how recruiters navigate tensions of intuition on individual, organizational, and societal levels through internal and external interactive practices.

Figure 1. Navigating tensions of intuition in recruitment



Firstly, the analysis demonstrated that intuition is understood as a dynamic and contextual phenomenon or, as we have labelled it, a Multidimensional Phenomenon. Moreover, our findings demonstrated that the use of intuition creates tensions on Individual, Organizational, and Societal Levels. On Individual Level, recruiters felt that the use of intuition was biased and subjective, thus lacking objectivity, and such feelings prevented them from using and voicing their intuition. The feelings were particularly strong among recruiters who were lacking experience in using intuition as well as confidence and awareness of their intuition. We concluded that experience may reduce uncertainty by instilling confidence and awareness of one's own intuition, thereby strengthening the use of intuition. On Organizational Level, the analysis showed that the tensions originated from a feeling that the use of intuition is challenged by hierarchical differences in the organization. On Societal Level, the analysis showed that the tensions stemmed from the discourse of intuition in society and a perception of intuition as being a somewhat gendered phenomenon. Lastly, our analysis demonstrated that recruiters navigate tensions through Internal and External Interactive Practices. Internally, the analysis identified for example an inner conversation or dialogue related to topics such as awareness of intuition and being critical toward it. Externally, the analysis found that recruiters navigate tensions in relation to using their intuition by using facts to qualify their intuition, voicing themselves, and by getting sparring from others. Thus, to our surprise, intuition appeared as a tool that leads to reflection and action and in this sense, intuition is seen primarily as a strength by these practitioners and not as a "troublesome decision tool" as argued by Miller and Ireland (2005, p. 29).

Theoretical contributions

Our study contributes with two significant contributions to the recruitment literature within HRM and one contribution to paradox theory.

Firstly, we have responded to calls for further research focusing on conceptualizing intuition from data rather than from theory (Sadler-Smith, 2016), in specific qualitative data as proposed by Slesman and Davison (2022), by investigating intuition and its tensions from an empirical perspective within a particular context and case. Secondly, we have extended current understandings of intuition in the recruitment literature within HRM by foregrounding possibilities for integrating intuition into recruitment processes whilst navigating its tensions.

In relation to the utilization of paradox theory and more specifically paradox mindsets, we demonstrated how recruiters navigate tensions of intuition individually through their cognitive abilities, which resonates with the individualistic approach to paradox mindsets. We also demonstrated how tensions of intuition are made salient through contextually constrained processes as they are informed and strengthened through subjective notions of power, gender, and societal discourses. This resonates with the relational approach to paradox mindsets in which recruiters navigate tensions through external interaction with colleagues and managers. However, what is interesting from our findings is the importance for recruiters in internally interacting with themselves through critically informed awareness and inner dialogues to navigate tensions. Thus, we demonstrate how recruiters not only work together with peers to navigate tensions through external practices, but simultaneously also navigate tensions internally with themselves through internal practices. As such, we agree with Pamphile (2022) in her argument of viewing the navigation of paradoxes as fundamentally relational since it is through interacting with others that people debate the merits of competing demands. However, we offer an extension of this argument by arguing that responding to paradoxes may be thought of as both externally and internally relational, as people can interact with both peers and their inner selves and/or an imagined partner simultaneously as ways of navigating competing demands. Thereby, we do not discard neither the individualistic nor the relational approach. Instead, we argue that from an empirical perspective, the approaches might be thought of as interchangeable and that the expansion beyond the individualistic approach to a broader relational one (Pamphile, 2022) ought to be seen not as a way of separating the two but of investigating ways in which they coexist.

Practical contributions

The literature on intuition in recruitment within HRM has yet not conveyed a nuanced approach on how to navigate tensions of intuition whilst actively integrating the phenomenon into the daily work of recruiters. In this regard, this study is a pioneering effort as it has identified several reasons for acknowledging and actively integrating intuition in recruitment processes.

Based on these findings, we present Figure 2 that provides recommendations for organizations on how to integrate intuition into recruitment with the aim of becoming better at articulating and navigating its tensions, so recruiters can actively utilize their intuition. We argue

that organizations should work iteratively with the recruitment practices in three phases. This should be done in collaboration with recruiters, hiring managers, and other HR practitioners as a continuous cycle of learning about intuition, how to utilize it effectively, and how to navigate its tensions. We also advocate for integrating a mindset in the organization where intuition can be seen by practitioners as a valuable tool. To respond to Miles and Sadler-Smith (2014), we believe that these are valuable recommendations for how to acknowledge and manage “gut feelings” effectively in recruitment. We believe this will put intuition forward as an inherent and valuable human tool to be acknowledged in recruitment processes whilst navigating its tensions.

Figure 2. Recruitment practices for integrating intuition into recruitment

Recruitment practices	Activities	Organizational actors
Phase I: Uncover understandings and challenges of intuition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiters • Recruitment managers
Phase II: Share practices for navigating challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Shadowing colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiters • Recruitment managers
Phase III:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring between senior and junior recruiters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiters • Recruitment managers
Individual level:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools for how to converse about intuition with organizational actors 	
Educating junior recruiters about how to utilize intuition and navigate its challenges, while sustaining education for senior recruiters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onboarding initiatives • Cross-cultural knowledge sharing in multinational organizations 	
Organizational level:		
Educating the organization about intuition and involving other organizational actors beyond recruitment practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops for all employees • Workshop for recruiters and hiring managers on how to utilize intuition and navigate its challenges • Information on intranet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiters • Recruitment managers • Hiring Managers • Other HR practitioners • HR Managers

Limitations and future research avenues

Generalizability has not been the purpose of the study. Instead, we follow the argument of Cunliffe (2022) who see no point of talking about generalization from a subjectivist ontology, as this ontology emphasizes the “importance of more situated, contextualized, personal and fluid form of knowing and theorizing” (p. 9). Therefore, she introduces the concept of *resonance*, where

researchers present “insights that may connect, reverberate and provoke others into reflecting on an issue” (p. 7) that may allow us “to understand ourselves and our lived experience in different ways” (p. 3). Given the increased focus on the use of intuition in various business-contexts (e.g., Sadler-Smith et al., 2021; Sleesman et al., 2022; Larsen, 2023), we believe our study offers new insights into the phenomenon that may resonate and provoke others to reflect on themselves and their work in different ways that are meaningful and significant to their situation. Therefore, we believe our study opens for a dialogue within the field of recruitment and HRM, which may inspire to examine intuition in other contexts as well.

Additionally, the study investigated intuition in only one case organization. While the case organization was selected for sound reasons, the sample is not representative of all companies. Future studies are encouraged to study more cases to explore the role of intuition among more recruiters. Moreover, the focus on recruiters involved in recruitment could result in a self-report bias, thus questioning the reliability of the study. However, our findings demonstrate that recruiters do not only attribute great value to their own role and use of intuition. They also highlight the tensions that they face by using intuition in recruitment processes and we found participants to be surprisingly open in telling us about these tensions. For future research, it would be valuable to collect data from more actors, in particular hiring managers, to capture the full range of the use of intuition in recruitment. A final limitation is that the study was conducted with participants in only one industry. Different industry contexts may influence the way recruitment is practiced and thus the extent to which recruiters use intuition. Thus, future research is encouraged to focus on different industries to further explore how recruiters use intuition. The importance of internal and external interactive practices in the utilization of intuition in recruitment also opens for at least two future research avenues. Firstly, how recruiters and hiring managers collectively talk about and use their intuition and secondly, how recruiters learn to use their intuition. Moreover, we encourage future studies to apply a process perspective to study the evolvement of recruiters’ and hiring managers’ respective intuition throughout recruitment processes. This could provide novel and useful knowledge on how to utilize and navigate intuition processually in recruitment.

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CHAPTER 8:

Paper IV: The HRM function as a double-edged sword for recruiters' identities

Table 8.1. Overview of Paper IV

Author(s)	Maria Dahl Andersen* and Julia Brandl
Research question	How do recruiters experience tensions in relation to the Human Resource Management (HRM) function's implementation of a diversity and inclusion strategy and how do these experiences impact their identities?
Main findings	Findings demonstrate the experience of the HRM function as triggering recruiters' aspirations of becoming partners and diversity promoters. The HRM function allows them to test their aspirations because they make experiences, which leads to the loss of aspirations because of their failed attempts to properly practice these identities in a real HRM function. Thereby, the paper contributes to the diversity recruitment literature and the HRM literature with an understanding of the HRM function as a double-edged sword for recruiters' identities that both enable identity aspirations and abandon them.
Presentation outlets	None.
Status	1. Submitted for Human Resource Management (AJG 4), January 2024

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The HRM function as a double-edged sword for recruiters' identities

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Abstract

Recruiters rely on the Human Resource Management (HRM) function to perform their activities when the HRM function is implementing diversity and inclusion strategies. With these strategies being subject to tensions, the HRM function risk mismanaging the implementation thereby reducing recruiters' identity aspirations. However, with a predominant understanding of the HRM function as rather structural with a static link to specialists' identities, current literature has yet not shed light on the dynamic impact of the HRM function in relation to identities where ideals and reality deviate. Based on an ethnographic field study zooming in on five recruiters, this paper utilizes an interpretative phenomenological analysis in the study of how recruiters experience tensions in relation to the HRM function's implementation of a diversity and inclusion strategy and how these experiences impact recruiters' identities. Findings suggest that the experience of the HRM function's implementation of the strategy triggers recruiters' aspirations of becoming partners and diversity promoters. The HRM function allows them to test their aspirations because they make experiences, which leads to the loss of aspirations because of their failed attempts to properly practice these identities in a real HRM function. Thereby, the paper contributes to the diversity recruitment literature and the HRM literature with an understanding of the HRM function as a double-edged sword for recruiters' identities that both enable identity aspirations and abandon them.

Keywords

Human Resource Management function; Recruiters; Diversity and inclusion; Identity aspiration; Tensions; Ethnographic field study; Interpretative phenomenological analysis

Introduction

Recruiters are found to play an important role in the implementation of diversity and inclusion (D&I) strategies (e.g., Shen, Chanda, D'Netto, and Monga, 2009; Ng and Sears, 2020; Nachmias, Mitsakis, Aravopoulou, Rees, and Kouki, 2022). Successful implementation is linked to their commitment and support to the D&I strategy (e.g., Davis, Frolova, and Callahan, 2015; Ng and Wyrick, 2011; Guillaume, Dawson, Priola, Sacramento, Woods, Higson, Budhwar, and West, 2014). Here, recruiters rely on the Human Resource Management (HRM) function to perform their activities when the function is implementing D&I strategies. Though, such an implementation is subject to tensions – also for recruiters – due to the inherent balancing between inclusive and exclusive trade-offs (Nadiv and Kuna, 2020; Jaeck, Marais, Joly, and Preuss, 2023; Brøgger and Andersen, 2023). Understanding how recruiters experience tensions in relation to the HRM function's implementation of a D&I strategy is important because if the function mismanages the implementation, it risks reducing recruiters' aspirations. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore how recruiters experience tensions in relation to the HRM function's implementation of a diversity and inclusion strategy and how these experiences impact their identities.

Tensions in relation to the HRM function can be mapped along two dimensions (Brandl, Bos-Nehles, and Aust, 2018). The first dimension focuses on tensions between HR specialists and other HR actors, whereas the second dimension focuses on tensions within the HRM function. Research tends to see tensions with actors outside the HRM function as constraining for HR specialists (e.g., Cooke, 2006; Keegan, Bitterling, Sylva, and Hoeksema, 2018; Bennett, McCracken, O'Kane, and Brown; 2023), whereas tensions in relation to the organization of the HRM function is argued to be seen as neutral or solvable for HR specialists. We argue that this results in the development of HR specialists' identities aligning with the roles of the HRM function. For a long time, the HRM function has therefore been seen as unproblematic for HR specialists' identities because most HR literature implicitly assumed an ideal function operating under Dave Ulrich's business partner approach (Ulrich, 1997) that matches with specialists' identities in practice. However, studies have demonstrated how specialists' identities are also deeply intertwined with the HRM function (e.g., Pritchard, 2010; Gerpott, 2015), but these studies

fail to show the dynamics of identity construction in relation to the HRM function illuminating how the function enables identity to both emerge and to dissolve.

In this paper, we argue that the HRM function is a double-edged sword for recruiters' identities, because their experiences of the HRM function's implementation of a D&I strategy can both enable identity aspirations and abandon them. To convey this argument, we draw on 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork between 2021-2023 in a Northern European organization focusing on five recruiters working under a HRM function similar to Ulrich's approach (1997). The paper shows a key tension between the recruiters' identity aspirations triggered by the HRM function's implementation of a D&I strategy concerning their aspirations of becoming partners and diversity promoters and their experiences of not being able to realize such aspirations. Due to this gap, they experienced a state of tension, which they solved by resigning from developing their aspirations.

With our study we seek to elaborate on and challenge rather structural versions of HR identity development that portray a static link between HRM function identities and individual adjustment processes to match the role that the function implies. Our focus on dynamics requires attention to the *actual* function, i.e., how it is enacted and used by various individuals, and the interactions of the individual recruiters with these other individuals. As such, we do not approach the ideal function but study the function as it appears in the organization to the recruiters.

To do this, the study takes a processual and interpretive stance to the HRM function giving less emphasis to clear ways in which a HRM function operates and more emphasis to the way recruiters experience the function. To approach this stance analytically, the paper adopts an Interpretative Phenomenological approach (IPA) to analysis, as it offers analytical space to examine how a phenomenon like a HRM function is experienced subjectively. As such, the focus is not on how the HRM function *is*, but how it is *experienced* by these individuals. This provides a more differentiated picture of experiences of a HRM function than what current literature has contributed with so far. As we focus on the impact of the HRM function on an individual level, we apply identity aspiration as a theoretical concept as it allows a focus on the dynamics of recruiters' experiences with the HRM function. By bringing this lack of attention into the foreground, this paper contributes with novel theoretical and practical knowledge to the diversity

recruitment literature and the HRM literature on how experiences of a HRM function's implementation of a D&I strategy impact recruiters' identities.

In the following chapter, relevant literature on the HRM function and its impact on HR specialists' identities is presented followed by an outline of the theoretical concept. Afterwards, the methodology and the findings are presented followed by a discussion about these findings considering the literature and their broader contributions. Finally, the limitations of the study and future research avenues are presented.

Impacts of the HRM function on HR specialists' identities

HR departments are increasingly expected to strategically manage the workplace, which has prompted many organizations to restructure their HR departments according to Dave Ulrich's business partner approach (Ulrich, 1997). The approach should enable the HR function "to cope effectively with the requirement for both strategic and operational tasks and to enable a more strategic role for HRM specialists" (Keegan, Bitterling, Sylva, and Hoeksema, 2018, p. 1112). Many organizations have interpreted Ulrich's work into the common way of restructuring HR departments based on three functions: strategic business partners to deliver strategic HR services to the organization, centres of expertise to provide technical skills and capabilities, and shared service centres to manage operations (Gerpott, 2015). Studies have predominantly focused on two perspectives of the business partner approach: the process – what is being done when organizing the HRM function – and the people – how what is being done impacts the people involved.

Within the process-perspective, some studies demonstrate how organizations can gain many benefits when opting for such a structure when it comes to for example maintaining best practices throughout the HR function, being more sensitive to customer needs, and deriving a more strategic contribution from relevant HR specialists (e.g., Cooke, 2006; Maatman and Meijerink, 2017; Maatman, Bondarouk, and Looise, 2010; Meijerink and Bondarouk, 2012). However, Caldwell (2003) raises concerns about the challenges inherent in the approach. The approach is premised on the idea of separating various areas in the HR function e.g., strategic and operational objectives and short-term and long-term orientations, but do not sufficiently address the tensions arising from separating these and how to actively navigate these (Caldwell, 2003). An empirical study by Boglind, Hällstén, and Thilder (2011) on HR transformation in Swedish organizations

finds similar results demonstrating that after implementing the HR structure, the nature of HR work did not change much as the focus on cost and efficiency were still driving forces. Keegan et al. (2018) moves the field a step further by introducing insights from paradox theory defined as “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time” (Lewis, 2000, p. 760), to understand the variety and dynamism associated with organizing the HRM function according to Ulrich’s model. As such, the authors clarify why the business partner approach to organizing the HRM function takes on a variety of forms in practice and are more dynamic than what is prescribed. Recently, Häll, Tengblad, Oudhuis, and Dellve (2023) critically discuss the implementation of the approach in a global industrial company group. They found that the implementation led to tensions and conflicting interpretations of the mission of the HR function and a “tug of war” about work both within HR and between HR. In a newly published paper, Bennett, McCracken, O’Kane, and Brown (2023) also employ paradox theory to demonstrate how the HR business partner role can prevent to fall into an operational frame of reference through ensuring effective separation of HR roles as a means of paradox resolution thus illuminating the operational and strategic tensions of HR roles.

Within the people-perspective, Cooke (2006) highlights the tensions of identity arising from separating HR roles into different areas, as the approach “has fallen short of treating these role types as self-contained or internally consistent and has overlooked Ulrich’s emphasis (1997) that the HR function is founded on multiple roles that are inherently paradoxical” (p. 223). This is in line with other studies concluding that tensions of identity continue to be prevalent for HR specialists. For example, Cohen (2015) argues that a divide within the HR profession might exist as some strategic HR specialists see themselves as elite and differentiate themselves from administrative ones who deal with the ordinary day-to-day work. Thus, paradoxically, the push toward specializing HR can itself undermine a common identity or solidarity essential to the pursuit of specialist status (Turner, 1990 in Gerpott, 2015). In addition, Gerpott (2015) offers a critical stance to the approach by arguing that separating areas in HRM functions resolves tensions of identity, learning, performing, and organizing only in the short-term by addressing the opposing areas separately, e.g., focusing on the manager-oriented pole of identity tensions versus the employee-oriented pole. This provides a static view of HRM tensions that in the long run does not enable HR specialists to adequately navigate these in practice. She utilizes paradox theory to

discuss how HR specialists can reframe their work according to these tensions to embrace the paradoxical nature of HRM. Pritchard's (2010) ethnographic study of HR specialists 'becoming' strategic partners, is a novel contribution in bringing the identity-related tensions of the business partner approach into the foreground. She shows that becoming a strategic partner is an activity rather than an execution of certain tasks within a new job role and that tensions emerge in this process. Thereby, the study demonstrates how emergent and subjective processes of identity construction are prevalent in organizational role enactment rather than a pure objective categorisation of work.

Even though Pritchard (2010) argues that identities are fluid, neither her study nor others show the dynamics of identity construction in relation to the HRM function illuminating how identity emerges and how it goes away. While the identity construct is heavily on the subjective side, we might get the impression from previous research that these identities once a function is established, are solid and countable suggesting that identities are deeply intertwined with the function. This study is contesting this previous research by drawing on the paradox of stability and change. This unveils the duality of the HRM function, where on the one side, the function is enabling identities, which is what current research suggests. However, under certain circumstances, we argue that the function could also be a root cause for identity loss.

The focus of this study is therefore not specifically on the role occupied by the recruiters nor specifically on their identities, but on the interpretations from these specialists and how they interpret their various selves in relation to the HRM function's implementation of a D&I strategy. As such, when recruiters are trying to link their aspirations to the HRM function's implementation, they might have an *ideal* function in mind, but what they interact with is a *real* function that might not correspond to the ideal model. As we are interested in understanding recruiters' challenges with the HRM function's implementation of the D&I strategy, we need to approach not the ideal function but the function as it is experienced in the organization. Unfortunately, there is very little awareness of this fact from previous studies resulting in challenges to be blamed on the function. To unveil this fact, this study takes a more processual and interpretive stance to the HRM function that gives less weight to clear ways in which the function operates and more weight to the way recruiters are experiencing the function and its implementation of the D&I strategy. This stance would assume that in the end, all specialists are encountering each other based on individual

interpretations of a function and not on a representation of a function. This gives more emphasis to what recruiters are really facing and not what they could possibly do based on a function that does not exist.

The application of IPA allows us to obtain such a detailed look at the experiences of the recruiters with the HRM function's implementation of the D&I strategy. Here, the experiences could help to understand how an HRM function is not only triggering identity aspirations, but how the experience of a HRM function also has potential for identity loss, which is the very opposite of what HRM functions have been seen as in the past as enabling identity. We empirically substantiate this argument, by showing the dynamics from the aspirations over the experience to the loss. With this, our interest in dynamics comes forth as compared to previous research, because only through the dynamics of identities can we come to the argument that the HRM function has a duality. To convey this argument analytically, we introduce identity aspiration as the theoretical concept in the following section.

Identity aspiration

According to multiple perspectives within identity theory such as role identity (e.g., Stryker and Burke, 2000), social identity (e.g., Tajfel and Turner, 1986), self-regulation (e.g., Markus and Wurf, 1987), and self-verification (e.g., Burke and Reitzes, 1981), identity aspirations are desired images of oneself that influence individuals' motivation and engagement in activities that can support, reinforce, and/or confirm those aspirations (Farmer, Yao, and Kung-Mcintyre, 2011). The notion of identity aspiration has been used especially in entrepreneurship research (e.g., Farmer et al., 2011; Seibert, Nielsen, and Kraimer, 2021; Gregori, Holzmann, and Schwarz, 2021) studying "the future-oriented and subjective construction of a desired entrepreneurial identity" (Gregori et al., 2021, p. 1176).

It is rooted in the notion of possible selves theorized as cognitive manifestations of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats (Markus and Nurius, 1986, p. 954). As such, possible selves represent aspired to but yet not realized identities (Farmer et al., 2011) such as "I am a recruiter now, but I could be a diversity manager". According to Seibert et al. (2021), a desirable possible self-identity motivates individuals to engage in behaviors that help them to become what they envision for themselves. For the case of a recruiter, this could be engaging in

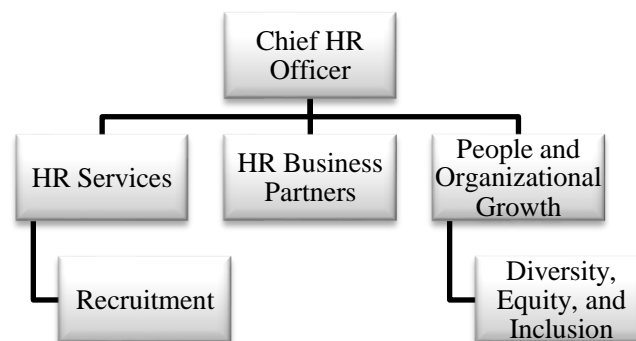
behaviors to identify and develop managerial skills in their profession. As such, identity aspirations are not stable but dynamically evolve with experiences that people make over time. This makes the concept highly relevant for our processual and interpretive stance to the HRM function. As such, we argue that recruiters' engagement in their work with diversity is very much related to their aspirations as well. Recruiters' identity aspirations reflecting their possibilities of advancements is thus likely to be important for these specialists when it comes to their engagement in diversity-related activities.

Method

The empirical setting

To examine how recruiters experience a HRM function's implementation of a D&I strategy, the study employs a qualitative methodology. The study is part of a larger ethnographic project with the aim of investigating recruiters' work with diversity and how they navigate the tensions and paradoxes related hereto. Throughout 17 months from October 2021 to March 2023, the first author studied the working lives of five internal recruiters in a multinational production company referred to as PIM. Specifically, the focus was on the recruitment team at the Northern European headquarters. In 2020, PIM launched its first official D&I strategy and build up a team of diversity specialists who are responsible for the strategic diversity agenda in the organization, which makes the organization particularly interesting for the purpose of this paper. The HRM function is organized according to Ulrich's model (see Figure 1), i.e., HR Services where recruitment is located, HR Business Partners, and People and Organizational Growth where the diversity team is located.

Figure 1. The HRM function in PIM



When the fieldwork was initiated, the recruitment team consisted of five full-time recruiters, but throughout time, some recruiters resigned and new ones were employed. Each recruiter has different functional areas in the organization in which they are responsible for hiring. While the fieldwork was mainly conducted in the recruitment team, it also captures talks with and observations of employees in the diversity team serving as contextual data to understand their work. For this analysis, we use one interview with each of the five recruiters, who are referred to by R and their respective number in the analysis.

Data collection

The data are a collection of observations and field notes (following Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995) from participating in different recruitment meetings. Moreover, it consists of informal talks with recruiters, HR-specialists, and diversity specialists to understand their work. Interviews with recruiters were collected during the recruitment process, whenever the need was to understand more about their way of working. Furthermore, when being present in the office, numerous informal talks were collected whenever spontaneous topics presented themselves. Additionally, the first author collected secondary data such as email correspondences, PowerPoints, content from PIM's webpage while also being allowed to look at – yet not collect – CV's, résumés, and assessments of candidates. This material served to inform the ongoing data collection and are used as background data for this paper. With time, feelings of greater trust and mutual respect emerged between the first author and recruiters. As a result, they began to share experiences of negative dynamics in relation to the HRM function's implementation of the D&I strategy. Therefore, we decided to focus on this topic by using one interview with each of the five recruiters that were conducted during fieldwork. The topic of the interviews revolved around the recruiters' experiences working with diversity and inclusion in PIM.

Data analysis

The analysis adheres to the three steps for conducting an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as proposed by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014).

In the first step, the first author conducted multiple readings of the transcribed interviews and made notes (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014) to reach a sense of familiarity with the data, which

allowed for an early emergence of topics. Especially the topics of negative dynamics in relation to the HRM function's implementation of the D&I strategy kept appearing when reading the transcripts. The first author found this topic particularly interesting to pursue further, as current diversity recruitment literature and HRM literature has yet not shed light on recruiters' experiences of HRM functions' implementations of D&I strategies.

In the second step, the first author aimed for transforming these notes into emergent themes (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). Therefore, a collaboration was initiated with the second author with the purpose of collectively making sense of the topics. This also helped the first author to avoid not going completely native. Here, the first author presented sentences and larger passages from the transcripts that were related to the topics. These sentences were then interpreted hermeneutically in which every single word and/or sequence were discussed. Thus, everything was potentially interesting. When it was impossible to add more and/or other interpretations, a consensus was reached about the most convincing topic. Here, two themes emerged, which we identify as how the HRM function impacts the recruiters' identities as partners and diversity promoters. The recruiters reported about experiencing tensions with the function that informed their identities as partners and diversity promoters. Contrary to tensions that people have mastered, the recruiters shared tensions, which they have not managed to master. As an outcome of this, the recruiters have shifted in how they see themselves and their job.

In the third step, the first author identified relationships between the themes and sub-themes and clustered them based on their relations (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). The two themes appeared in somewhat separation from each other but in a way where they were difficult to untangle, for which reason we find it relevant to analyze them separately but with a collective summary. We observed how the HRM function's implementation of a D&I strategy enabled recruiters to both aspire – where the function stimulates aspirations –, to practice – where the function allows recruiters to test how realistic these aspirations are –, and to adjust – where the function triggers an evaluation of either reconfirming or disconfirming aspirations. The two aspirations identified as partner identity and diversity promotor identity are displayed below in Table 1 together with their related sub-themes marked in italics, which will now be subject to analysis.

Table 1. Overview of themes and sub-themes

HRM function	Partner identity	Diversity promotor identity
Aspire	Aspiring to become partners	Wanting to be involved but lack being heard
Practice	Advancing but doing the same thing	Being decoupled from those up in the Ivory Tower
Adjust	Returning to being just recruiters	Prioritizing quantity over quality Fantasizing in a reality

Findings

The impact of a HRM function on partner identity

Aspire: Aspiring to become partners

The recruiters expressed a wish of wanting to be closer and become partners with the line managers to realize their role as partners even better. Here, the notion of ‘closeness’ is related both to the level of informality in the relationship with managers but also to the organizational position of the recruitment team relative to the managers, which is experienced as being somewhat troublesome in ways where the recruiters do not always work with the same line managers. During fieldwork, the recruiters expressed how continually working with the same line managers created closer connections, where the recruiters came to know both the line manager and the team. A closer relationship fostered trust and knowledge of each other’s ways of working, which aided the recruiters in better knowing what kind of diversity were needed in the team and how to convey that to the line manager. In the extract below, R1 formulates the phrase ‘we want to become partners’ as a way of describing the recruitment team’s aspired identity as a collective in an imagined HRM function:

R1: We want to become partners out there, because then this advisor-role would become more clear, because we would...Well then you could say that by getting to know the managers and the organisation even better you can also become a better advisor, because you know the area more.

By using the verb ‘want’, R1 highlights that what is aspired has yet not been achieved. What R1 aspires is the transition into becoming partners. For R1, a partner is someone who ‘knows the managers and the organisation even better’ and who acts as an advisor that knows the area in which

they are working. However, with the phrase ‘well then you could say’, a state of tension emerges, as what is aspired is a product of the person’s own fantasy about an imagined identity in an imagined future that has not been realized. As continuation hereof, R5 imagines below how closer connections to the managers facilitate ‘way more closer counselling’ that enables the recruiters to the understand the managers’ worlds and their needs even better:

R5: You’ve also heard me say that before, to get closer to the managers and become partners to give this way more closer counselling. Not because we have to be like them, but because we have to understand their world and then again say ‘well, last time you hired Paul and the time before that, you hired John, now we might hire Helen’. Whether it’s gender or competencies, it’s just much more easier than when you look at a recruitment in an isolated way and then it’s Recruiter X the second time, Recruiter X the third time and Recruiter X the fourth time. I just think it’s this thing about being closer to the managers and being a part in these talks that are going on about personnel. I now use the word ‘personnel’, personnel out there in the business, so that we can work more proactively and not so reactive all the time and if we can be more proactive, we can also become better. We know the business to become more proactive and we can then also become more proactive on inclusion and diversity. So, there’s an advantage in that we’re specialists in what we do and we are placed in this part of the organization and I also think that’s what we might should do, but there just have to be another connection, I think.

I: Is it an organizational setup that should facilitate you getting closer to the managers?

R5: Yes, I think so. No, well, in the ideal world, yes. Whether it’s divisions or just in some areas, I don’t know, but I believe we should do that to relieve the work of the recruiters and their workday, but also to give a better service out there, because we’ll come to understand the business even better. Yes, there’s a risk we’ll just get to hire the same again and again, but it also makes us more aware of whether we hire the same again and again, so it’s a bit like a double-edged sword.

R5 imagines how closer connections with the line managers would enable the recruiters to ‘become more proactive on inclusion and diversity’, as compared to now where the recruiters experience to be more ‘reactive’ in their profession and in their work with diversity and inclusion. According to R5, however, only in an ideal world would the HRM function facilitate recruiters becoming partners. Again, a tension emerges as the ideal world is not realistic, but R5 still imagines it to be. What R5 imagines is a more proactive approach where the recruiters work closer with the same line managers enabling the recruiters to anticipate diversity-related situations and taking steps to

either prevent them from happening or nurturing them in the beginning. With a state of belief, yet without proof, R5 believes that such reorganization will relieve the work of the recruitment team and enable them to provide better service, as they will come to understand the business even better.

Practice: Advancing but doing the same thing

The recruiters shared their experiences in relation to advancing in their career in the organization and the challenges they encounter in relation to this. For example, R3 elaborates on this by stating: “There’s this level and no matter what kind of level you’re on, you almost do the same thing. Structurally, there’s not many possibilities for development unless you search in other areas”. With this, R3 describes a situation where some sort of barrier stops the recruiters from advancing internally in the organization and forces them to remain in their occupation but also to relinquish their aspirations for something more. Whether it is their idea of a barrier, others’ ideas they have adopted, and/or a barrier that exists in the organization remain untold. Though, with the phrase ‘there’s this level’ it appears as if there is an actual truth to the statement and not just an account of R3’s inner world. Notwithstanding, the extract presents an illusion where despite an advancement, the recruiters would still do the same thing thereby giving a false look of the recruiters’ reality to something that is not real and most likely never will be. It creates a paradoxical situation where the recruiters cannot see themselves out unless they break free from this vicious cycle. The reason for this vicious cycle is some structural dynamics in the organization that withhold the recruiters from aspiring to develop their partner identity. Their fortune is either an acceptance of this reality or the creation of a new reality in other areas in the organization or even outside of it. In the following extract, R5 shares a similar experience and locates the area in which the vicious cycles are particularly present:

R5: Then I also think there’s something and now I’m back to this HR. It’s rare you’ll see someone from recruitment who moves further along internally in the company. We have a very... It seems like in HR, a lot of HR business partners have a very fixed way in looking at what they need. ‘We need someone who has complete experience within this’, where I actually think that if you’re a recruiter you’re an obvious candidate to become a business partner, but we’re really invisible.

According to R5, a perception exists inside HR and particularly inside the minds of HR business partners about what it takes to advance to become a business partner and this perception differs from the recruiters' beliefs. The business partners' perceptions are fixed and thus cannot be discussed nor changed. When the perception exists inside something and someone more powerful than the recruiters, which they are structurally part of but do not identify with, it paints a picture of the recruiters being overruled by something and someone superior to them. As such, people from their peer group are disregarding the recruiters' aspirations of developing their partner identity. This creates feelings of invisibility that have a consequence for the recruiters as they are lacking possibilities for advancing to something more even though they see themselves as qualified. The structural dynamics therefore appear to be related to a perception existing inside HR and particularly in business partners that sets forth expectations to what it takes for people to develop their recruiter identity into becoming a partner. The recruiters do not comply with this, which creates barriers to their internal advancement in the organization.

Adjust: Returning to being just recruiters

R5 shared the experience of being 'I'm just', which is elaborated on in the following extract:

R5: This thing 'I'm just' and I think, oh now I have to be careful what I say, but unfortunately, I think there's a bit of a tendency sometimes in the company that at least in HR we're just the recruitment team, you know? I don't feel we value recruitment enough so that we really can become these partners out there. I've challenged some of our business partners on it, where they say 'no, I don't buy it, it's silly, they're so happy about you out there'. Well, I know that, and I know we score high in this survey, but there's some sitting down there who feel overlooked, and they feel neglected in relation to our set-up.

This sequence indicates that the recruitment team had collective aspirations of their partner identity in the past of being more than 'just the recruitment team', but they have lost fights for more responsibilities to someone who were more powerful. The loss was mainly caused by rejections from peer-group people from HR in which the tendency of being viewed as 'just the recruitment team' is the strongest. As such, R5 has all the reason to 'be careful what to say', because people from the HR department are still the person's peers. We now see the result of such a fight being the recruitment team who gave up on their aspirations of broadening their responsibility areas. The loss is mirrored in the contradictory saying, 'I'm just' implying that 'this, I'm not anymore' and

‘this, I will never be’. As such, the recruitment team have resigned from their aspirations, which R5 summarizes through the collective acceptance amongst the recruiters in describing themselves as being ‘I’m just’.

It is clear though, that if recruitment as a profession was appropriately valued in the organization, it would translate into recruiters becoming partners. However, if the value of recruitment as a profession is not enough recognized or appreciated by the organization and especially the HR department, then the idea of really becoming partners is not realistic indicating some sort of disappointment. This is something that R5 recognizes but the person has distanced oneself from any hope from making this happen and believing it will happen. Thereby, it becomes a state of tension, because R5 is part of a larger machine where the person is doing something, which the person personally disagrees with. Though, the recruitment team as a collective seem to have recognized the limitations to developing their partner identity by being rejected in their role activities by people from their peer-group. Importantly, the conflict around how much aspirations people from recruitment could have, is not so much in relation to colleagues outside of HR. Instead, there is a strong indication that the ‘set-up’, i.e., the HRM function and colleagues who are from HR make a strong point in restraining identity aspirations amongst the recruiters resulting in feelings of being ‘overlooked’ and ‘neglected’ thus almost resigning from any future identity aspirations.

The impact of a HRM function on diversity promotor identity

Aspire: Wanting to be involved but lack being heard

The recruiters share the experience of not being heard about their diversity-related challenges and involved by the strategic specialists working with the strategy. R2 expresses this in the following extract:

R2: A strategy is being made, but if we’re not being heard about the challenges, we’re experiencing how can we move on? If these challenges that occur in the everyday work, at least in relation to the recruitment-part of diversity. Of course, there’s a lot of different managers that need to change their mind-set and internal mobility and so on, but the part where we are involved; if we’re not being heard in those challenges, how can we then move on from them?

The phrase ‘if we’re not being heard’ appears as if someone beyond the recruitment team should allow the recruiters to be heard. Yet, in this context, it seems like the recruiters are not being asked to speak even though they want, which causes feelings of frustration. Consequently, R2 anticipates the likelihood of moving on from these challenges as almost impossible. Thereby, it becomes a state of stagnation marked by a lack of development. R2 continues to elaborate on how the recruiters want to be heard about their challenges:

R2: I need for it to go both ways. They [the diversity specialists] cannot only tell us what the strategy is and then give us some tools. They tried doing a workshop. It didn’t work, which is another problem, but I also need for us to come along. That it’s not only them who should tell us what the strategy should be and how we can do it. But it’s also that they are given our inputs to figure out how we can do it.

With the phrase ‘go both ways’, R2 imagines a mutual and reciprocal relationship with the diversity specialists, where the recruiters are brought along and thus accompany the diversity specialists in working not only operationally both also strategically with the strategy. It is an imagination where the recruiters take on a more strategic role providing inputs to the strategy, which is imagined helping the work move forward. Compared to the beginning of the extract where the diversity specialists were mainly referred to as ‘they’, i.e., someone distant from the recruitment team, R2 now uses the wording ‘we’, indicating an imagination of togetherness if the recruitment team are being heard and involved compared to a feeling of separation if not. The lack of involvement stands in contrast to the recruiters’ experience of being positioned in a place in the organization where they can actively influence the diversity agenda. For example, R3 explains: “We’re actually positioned in a place where we can influence part of this direction in the company”. R3 continues in the following extract while also expressing that the recruiters might not be aware of their role in relation to diversity:

R3: Without it might being said, but we’re definitely driving a diversity strategy in the company, maybe without us really knowing it. Because it’s us who are concretely working with it, so we’re sitting operationally in the engine room, but therefore it’s still us who do the strategy.

R3 indicates that the lack of awareness might be due to it not being publicly stated perhaps in the recruitment team, the HR department, and/or in the entire organization. Despite this, R3 displays certainty in this argument through the adverb ‘definitely’ that they are in fact working with the strategy by ‘sitting operationally in the engine room’. The sentence ends with the phrase ‘but therefore, it’s still us who do the strategy’, where the conjunction ‘but’ contrasts or at least emphasizes that even though others formulate the strategy, the recruiters are nevertheless those who ‘do the strategy’.

R3 thus creates a vision where the success of the D&I strategy is based on the premise that those talking the strategy and those doing the strategy are in mutual collaboration. Though, the extract raises the question as to whether not everybody in the organization holds the same opinion or at least R3 is observing that not everybody holds the same opinion of the recruitment team’s role in relation to the D&I strategy. As such, R3 observes a connection between the strategic and operational areas in the HRM function in driving the strategy. However, R3 also recognizes that not everybody in the organization shares this vision. This invokes a tensional situation in the HR department and in the organization in general, where those strategic specialists involved in the strategy are not sufficiently acknowledging and involving the operational specialists, i.e., the recruitment team, resulting in the recruitment team’s visions of involvement not being taken seriously. As a result, the recruiters forecast a new reality where their lack of involvement prevents the organization from moving forward with diversity.

Practice: Being decoupled from those up in the Ivory Tower

The recruiters describe how they are missing a better link between the strategic specialists formulating the D&I strategy and those operational specialists working with the strategy, which in this case refers to the recruiters. R5 elaborates on this experience in the following extract:

R5: But I also think there’s this lack of connection where we get some continuous diversity training, some tools, or something we can use in recruitment, because we’re being decoupled from those up there in the Ivory Tower who believe they can walk on water.

The ‘lack of connection’ is resulting from a process which the recruiters are undergoing where they are ‘being decoupled’ from those ‘up there in the Ivory Tower’, i.e., strategic specialists formulating the strategy, ‘who believe they can walk on water’. ‘Living in an Ivory Tower’ is

associated with “an impractical often escapist attitude marked by aloof lack of concern with or interest in practical matters or urgent problems” (Merriam-Webster, 2023), whereas ‘believing one can walk on water’ refers to performing almost godlike and thus impossible tasks. Thus, by describing the strategic specialists living in an ‘Ivory Tower’ ‘believing they can walk on water’, R5 indicates that the strategic specialists either do not know or perhaps want to avoid the ordinary and unpleasant things that happen in relation to the strategy. For R5, it makes the strategic specialists appear to believe they can perform almost extraordinary tasks. This conception, according to R5, is what results in decoupling and thereby a lack of connection between the strategic and operational specialists involved in the D&I strategy. Here, the recruiters see themselves as being disconnected and left behind by someone who appear to be more advantaged than themselves. Thus, a tensional situation appears between the strategic and operational areas in the HRM function in relation to the implementation of the D&I strategy, where the recruiters are anticipating that the former trumps the latter.

R1 also lacks ‘a better link between those working with strategy’ and the recruiters ‘who are actually and practically able to influence some of these things and imagines what is needed for the link to be present:

R1: I’m just thinking about a better link between those, now I just say those who are working with strategy, now I refer to the diversity team, now I just take that as an example. They are talking about diversity strategy, but concretely, practically. Now I also make it very operational, but it’s us who are actually and practically able to influence some of these things. But do we hear something else besides Yammer [*internal communication tool*] and on a more overall level? No. So I actually don’t know what I should do concretely to help the company and its purpose about this area. I really don’t know. Yes, I know in general that we have a responsibility and I also think I try that. That’s one of the things, but I just think generally this difference in the company about the strategic level and the operational and the link, right? You know, where? We sometimes feel and we can say that right now, when we’re sitting down here on the operational level that we want something to say. When it’s coming the one way, we have some questions like ‘Why is it not like this? Or could we have done it like this?’. So, this thing about talking better together.

Even though R1 sees the recruiters as influential, they still lack information from the strategic specialists making R1 unaware of and even doubtful about how to carry out the role as recruiter in

relation to diversity. Though, the missing link does not only refer to the gap between strategic and operational specialists involved in work with diversity, as for R1 it also refers more broadly to a general ‘difference in the company about the strategic level and the operational’ where a link is also missing. As such, the tensional situation encompasses not only the gap between strategic and operational areas when it comes to working with diversity, but also a gap between the strategic and operational levels in the organization. The result is a process of decoupling where the recruiters begin to see themselves as being disconnected from someone superior to themselves. What is missing is for the recruiters to have a say in the work with diversity, which R1 imagines will create collaboration and better dialogue between the strategic and operational areas in the HRM function.

Adjust: Prioritizing quantity over quality

R2 shares feelings associated with the wish of speaking quality instead of quantity in the organization when it comes to recruitment:

R2: But you can see that sometimes it also depends what time and resources we have, because the dream scenario would be that we talk diversity more structurally than we do now. But there isn’t time for that when we’re busy and it hurts to say that, but unfortunately that’s how it is.

I: Why does it hurt to say that?

R2: Because we talk quantity instead of quality, but that’s a different discussion to have, what kind of decisions have been made in the company. We cannot sit with 30 recruitments, and it’s still being expected of us that we will deliver the best service and have a focus on diversity and all different kinds of things. Separate it from each other with equal emphasis, that cannot be expected, when the same kind of companies only sit with half of it.

Here, quality is associated with the goal of diversity that is contrasted with the goal of efficiency and according to R2, efficiency prevails. Though, efficiency only prevails because that is what the organization has decided. This brings emotional pain to R2, which is caused by the inner tension the person is experiencing. The inner tension is a conflict between dreams of diversity and realities of efficiency in which the latter appears to always prevail. It almost appears as if the prioritization of efficiency was made without considering the recruitment team, which is emphasized by the phrase ‘what kind of decisions have been made in the company’. R2 portrays the organization as

still asking the recruitment team to remain focused on efficiency while also focusing on quality and diversity.

During fieldwork, the recruiters expressed how diversity and efficiency are two goals difficult to combine as gender diversity is challenging and time-consuming, which conflicts with a remaining focus on efficiency. Therefore, R2 does not see any possibility of separating these goals and giving them equal emphasis, as the focus on efficiency is what needs to have the most priority in the current situation where they are busy leaving diversity to lose. Though, the loss appears bigger as it is also a personal loss of their professional values as recruiters and assumptions about diversity. Moreover, it is also a loss of an imagined future that cannot be achieved because the organization has decided to prioritize differently. As the recruiters are less powerful than the organization, those priorities will always prevail leaving the recruiters to face the loss of their dream and accept their fortune, which is what R2 has come to realize. R5 shares a similar experience and elaborates in the following extract of feeling of lacking some form of closeness from HR to get diversity to live with the recruiters:

R5: I think there has been missing something earlier, some closeness from the recruiters, some closeness from HR in relation to getting this diversity to live in the recruiters' daily work, because what was in focus when I started, was time to fill. We need to go under 60 days, THAT'S what it's about. It's about us being fast, we have to be efficient, it has to cost as little as possible. You might be able to combine that, but when there's this goal that's flying high up there and that you don't really get any follow up on unless you actively go into that site and look for it... That's some ideas I have, because I followed it, but then I just think it will come to live so far away for it to really become something present in the everyday work.

According to R5, what especially challenges the existence of the strategy in the recruitment team is the contradiction of diversity and HR's advocacy for efficiency that are difficult to combine. The contradiction results in the strategy 'flying high up there' thus not being not thoroughly anchored in the recruiters' reality. As such, the strategy is too distant for the recruiters that they will even consider its presence in their daily work. Instead, R5 envisions a future where the strategic HRM function is spatially closer to the recruitment department through continuous dialogue and knowledge sharing for diversity to 'live in the recruiters' daily work', i.e., for the strategy to both be alive, remain alive, and continue to live. This causes a paradoxical situation,

where the strategic area in the HRM function wants diversity, but they also want the recruitment department to focus on efficiency, which are two goals difficult to combine. Yet, what wins is efficiency. As such, HR has indirectly created barriers for the success of the D&I strategy in the recruitment department by prioritizing goals that are contradictory to those of the recruitment department. This damages the connection between the strategic and operational areas in the HRM function and takes away the recruitment team's dreams and aspirations for another future.

Adjust: Fantasizing in a reality

Experiences were shared by the recruiters regarding a lack of involvement in the strategic work related to diversity elaborated on in the following extract by R4:

R4: Then we can take it down to that level, where I think we're not included. Like, this thing I really miss sometimes, also when we have this 'I don't have anything to push back with'. Because we do, but are we involved? So, there might be a difference between who's talking the strategy and who's actually doing it.

R4 misses to be seen and heard by the strategic specialists and there seems to be a collective saying in the recruitment team of not having any arguments against someone superior to themselves, leaving them powerless and deprived of agency. R4 disagrees with this saying, yet it is conditioned by the recruitment team's involvement. They cannot gain agency and become powerful if they are not involved. R4 concludes that this is perhaps due to the gap between strategic and operational specialists involved in the strategy and the ones not being involved are the operational ones, i.e., the recruiters. In the following extract, R1 imagines the nature of this involvement:

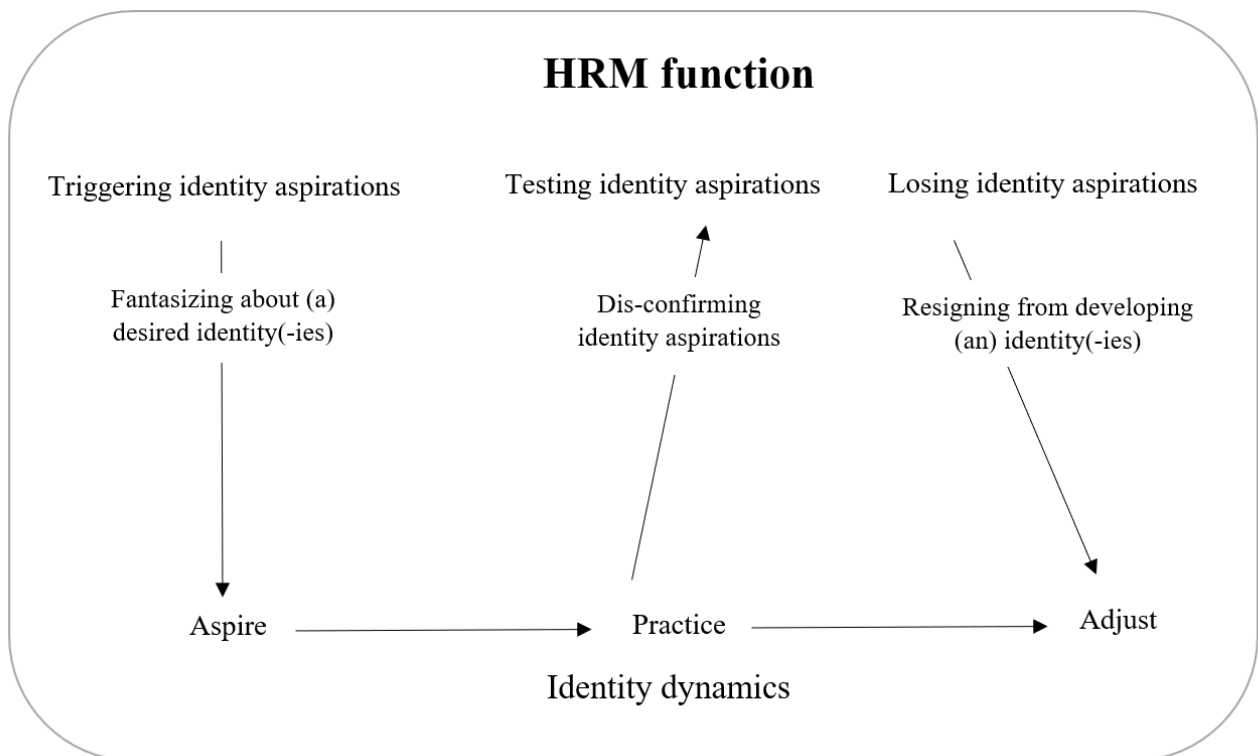
R1: I'm sure we have some operational know-how about reality and our work. How we experience doing recruitment and how we believe we can help the company's diversity agenda. How can we complement each other and how can we bring some insights? I actually think we can complement each other even better by collaborating. We can give them some knowledge and they can give us some tools or some targets or some data so that we can become even better at what we're doing. Now it's very idealistic, but this chain that goes around. That's what I mean about collaboration. You make each other better in both ends.

Involvement is imagined to be associated with a feeling of complementing each other through collaboration. For R1, this should result in a sense of coming together to support and build each other toward creating an even more successful strategy. However, R1 also realizes that such an imagination is so idealistic that it bears almost no relation to reality. As seen from R4’s experience, the reality is a gap between the strategic and operational specialists involved in the D&I strategy with the recruiters feeling excluded. This makes R1’s imagination a fantasy about a new reality but with the recognition that such a reality is unachievable. As such, the recruiters end up aspiring for a fantasy they know is unachievable.

Dynamics of identity aspiration and identity adjustment

The analysis has demonstrated the double-edged sword impact of the HRM function’s implementation of a D&I strategy on recruiters’ identities by showing how the function not only triggers recruiters’ identity aspirations, but also leads to the loss of aspirations resulting in identity adjustment. Figure 2 below illustrates the dynamics of identity aspirations and identity adjustment.

Figure 2. Dynamics of identity aspirations and identity adjustment



The analysis has demonstrated how the HRM function's implementation of the D&I strategy triggers recruiters to fantasize about their aspired identities as partners and diversity promoters, which they know is unachievable. The fantasy is a closer relationship between the strategic and operational areas in the HRM function involved in the work with diversity. However, the function also allows them to test how realistic these aspirations are. Here, recruiters acknowledge that their fantasy is far from reality where a gap exists between the two areas in the function that decouples them from the superior, strategic function. As a result, the analysis demonstrates how the function triggers an evaluation of either re-confirming or disconfirming recruiters' identity aspirations. As a result of their fantasy being unrealistic, they resign from their aspirations of developing their partner and diversity identities. As such, the key tension arising from the analysis is between the identity aspirations triggered by the HRM function's implementation of the D&I strategy and the recruiters' experiences of not being able to realize these aspirations. Due to this gap, they experience a state of tension, which they solve by resigning from developing their aspirations further.

Thereby, the analysis has illuminated the dynamics of identity aspirations and the role of the HRM function for this dynamic by showing how the HRM function's implementation of a D&I strategy triggers aspirations, it allows recruiters to test their aspirations because they make experiences, and this could lead to the loss of aspirations where recruiters resign from developing their identities. In the following chapter, we discuss these findings in light of the literature and their broader theoretical and practical contributions before arguing for the limitations and suggesting future research avenues.

Concluding discussion

Contributions

The theoretical aim of this study is a contribution to diversity recruitment literature and HRM literature looking at recruiters' ways of working with D&I strategies incorporating the impact of the HRM function's implementation of a D&I strategy on recruiters' identities. With this, we have brought attention to a neglected problem of the HRM function for recruiters' identities. IPA reveals the approach to understand this phenomenon, by showcasing how recruiters are trying to link their identity aspirations of becoming partners and diversity promoters to an ideal HRM function but

through their experiences, they learn how the function and their aspirations can deviate from these ideals. Based on the findings, we now present four theoretical contributions: three of them related to diversity recruitment literature and HRM literature and the fourth to paradox literature. This is followed by an account of the practical contributions of the study.

Firstly, the study found that in the case of the HRM function not working as expected it can lead to the loss of identity aspirations. A relevant model for understanding this loss is Identity Control Theory arguing that every individual holds different identities with competing meaning, which are ordered and bound together in an integrated structure referred to as ‘the self’ (Brandl and Bullinger, 2017). Individuals engage in interactions with others to verify these identities with the aim of controlling the self and maintaining their multiple identities in a hierarchical form (Stets and Burke, 2000). Other people not recognizing the individual’s identities can be a source of threat triggering negative emotions (Stets and Tsushima, 2001). In this study, we demonstrate how a malfunctioning HRM function can also be a source of identity threat and some of the reactions to this is identity adjustment and potential identity abandonment, which is a novel contribution to this theory and existing HRM literature.

Secondly, the study found that in the context of implementing a D&I strategy, the HRM function and strategic HR specialists make a strong point in restraining identity aspirations of recruiters. To the best of our knowledge, no direct literature focuses on the relationships among strategic and operational HR specialists in the implementation of D&I strategies, which so far has probably been assumed to be neutral and/or mutually supportive. However, in this case, it appears as if the strategic specialists and recruiters were also competitive with the strategic ones being the winners. Thus, the recruiters were not only performing their role themselves but also subjected to role-shaping expectations and activities by strategic professionals. We therefore encourage more research to look at the relationships amongst HR specialists in the work with diversity and how they impact each other’s identities.

Thirdly, the study has contributed to the diversity recruitment literature and the HRM literature that find recruiters to play a critical role in the successful adoption and implementation of D&I strategies (e.g., Shen, Chanda, D’Netto, and Monga, 2009; Ng and Sears, 2020; Nachmias, Mitsakis, Aravopoulou, Rees, and Kouki, 2022), by showing how recruiters gain and most importantly lose motivation for their work with these strategies. Here, the loss of motivation is

related to their experience of not being able to realize their aspirations of becoming diversity promoters, which is caused by the HRM function. With this, we have contributed to the call for more research on the role of HR specialists in implementing D&I strategies (e.g., Noon and Ogbonna, 2020; Tatli, Nicolopoulou, Özbilgin, Karatas-Ozkan and Öztürk, 2015; Donnelly, 2014) by illuminating some of the barriers for recruiters in succeeding with these strategies. We encourage more research to focus on the barriers to these strategies and how – or if – recruiters and other HR specialists overcome these to foster sustainable work with diversity.

Fourthly, the study found that the HRM function has a double-edged sword nature on identities. A function is needed for supporting identity aspirations, but if the function is not operating sufficiently this can also destroy aspirations. For paradox literature, this argument is not new but there are related challenges on the issue of structure, which have already been addressed in this stream of literature (e.g., Jarzabkowski, Lê, and Van de Ven, 2013; Abdallah, Denis, and Langley, 2011; Galati, Bigliardi, Galati, and Petroni, 2021). A closer look at the tensional operation of the HRM function is useful, in which this study has covered the aspect that has been neglected so far by looking at the destroying character of the HRM function for recruiters' identities.

A further aim of this study was to contribute with practical knowledge to those organizations employing a HRM function similar to Ulrich's model and how it impacts recruiters and their work with diversity. Firstly, the study calls for a focus on how the HRM function can both encourage and discourage recruiters' work with diversity. Secondly, it points to the need to pay attention to the relationships among operational and strategic HR specialists involved in work with diversity and the potential challenges stemming from these relationships. Thirdly, it suggests more attention to be paid to the relationship between operational and strategic areas in the HRM function in the work with D&I strategies noting that the strategic function in some organizations could be at risk of decoupling itself from the reality experienced by the operational function.

Limitations and future research

The methodological purpose of this study has not been on as generalization. Instead, we resonate with Cunliffe's (2011) concept of *resonance*, which is "far more influential than abstract generalizations because we are provoked and inspired to reflect on our own experience with new

eyes in ways that are meaningful to us and may highlight possibilities for change” (p. 12). As Ulrich’s model remains discussed in both academic and specialist literature, we believe our study offers new insights into the challenges stemming from this way of organizing HRM functions and their impact on recruiters’ work with diversity. These challenges may resonate and provoke other organizations to reflect on themselves and their structures in ways that are meaningful to them and open possibilities for change.

While we found it important to foreground recruiters’ experiences of a HRM function’s implementation of a D&I strategy, at the same time, we also recognize that including strategic HR specialists could have nuanced the findings substantially. A significant point of departure for future qualitative studies would therefore be to include both operational and strategic HR specialists involved in work with diversity to examine the potential boundaries experienced between them and how they navigate these. Moreover, aspiring to become someone or something is also related to a notion of process. Therefore, a useful extension of this study would also be to incorporate a process-perspective focusing on the events causing specialists’ aspirations in work with diversity to develop, how the aspirations change over time, what causes such changes, and how specialists deal with them thereby providing insights into processual experiences of a HRM function’s work with diversity. This study was unable to incorporate such a perspective as most of the recruiters resigned over a period causing internal changes to the recruitment team, for which reason we strongly encourage future studies to extend our findings through a process perspective.

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Part four – The contributions of the dissertation

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION

This chapter begins by summarizing the main findings of the four papers comprising the dissertation, with the next section discussing how these findings contribute theoretically to the field of diversity recruitment within HRM. The three major contributions of the dissertation can be defined as: how the findings *broaden diversity management through paradox theory*, how they *nuance diversity recruitment literature through a micro-foundational paradox perspective*, and how they *advance HRM literature through a constitutive approach to paradox theory*. Following, the dissertation moves on to argue for the methodological contributions of the dissertation, which is done through a reflexive lens enabling a discussion of my own role in the construction of knowledge. These contributions are separated into five topics that I have identified as crucial in my research, namely, *researcher subjectivity as a catalyst for co-constructing knowledge with the field*, *being exposed to a Northern European frame of reference*, *mirroring the field while not acting like it*, *empathetic distancing*, and *when practitioners use researchers for their own agendas*. The theoretical and methodological contributions are then used to present several practical contributions for industrial organizations as well as academic institutions. This is followed by a section arguing for the limitations of the dissertation as well as proposals for future theoretical and methodological research avenues before ending the chapter with a few concluding remarks.

Summary of main findings

The purpose of this dissertation has been to understand the tensions and paradoxes inherent in working with diversity, which is used to reveal some of the tensions and paradoxes in recruiters' work with diversity and how recruiters find ways to navigate these. Altogether, this is used to nuance existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity. To fulfill this purpose, the dissertation has raised the following overall research question: *How can we understand the tensions and paradoxes inherent in working with diversity and how can we use this knowledge to nuance existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity and their strategies for navigating tensions and paradoxes related hereto?* To answer the overall research question, the dissertation has contributed with four papers whose individual sub-questions have sought to

address the overall research question. The main findings of each paper will now be briefly summarized followed by an answer to the dissertation's overall research question.

Paper I demonstrates the tensions and paradoxes inherent in diversity management (DM) in a broader sense, which supports our understanding of how specialists involved in DM experience its intricate nature. The paper shows that applying a paradox lens to DM can bridge the tensions between the instrumental and critical approaches of DM by transitioning from an either-or mindset to a both-and mindset. Applying paradox theory and more specifically, paradox mindsets, allow for challenges to be brought to the forefront instead of hidden away, thereby creating space for utilizing paradoxes when working with diversity.

Paper II demonstrates two interrelated tensions faced by recruiters when working with hiring managers to foster diversity: (1) the tensional role undertaken in balancing between being administrators and being sparring partners who challenge managers and (2) the tensional situation that arises when managers struggle to hire between ideal and diverse candidates. Recruiters carry out their role and navigate these tensions to foster diversity by being adaptive to the needs of managers throughout the recruitment process to create closer relationships with them. Closer relationships enable recruiters to better challenge managers on issues of diversity. Adapting oneself to the needs of managers to build relationships while navigating tensions associated with too close a relationship is shown to be an imperative competence for recruiters in fostering diversity throughout the recruitment process.

Paper III demonstrates how recruiters use their intuition to make more informed decisions. Though, they also experience their use of intuition creating tensions on individual, organizational, and societal levels and the ways recruiters navigate these tensions are through internal and external interactive practices. Based on these findings, the paper foregrounds possibilities for integrating intuition into recruitment to utilize its potential whilst navigating its tensions.

Lastly, Paper IV demonstrates a key tension between the recruiters' identity aspirations triggered by the Human Resource Management (HRM) function's implementation of a D&I strategy concerning their aspirations of becoming partners and diversity promoters and their experiences of not being able to realize such aspirations. Due to this gap, recruiters experience a state of tension which they resolve by resigning from developing such aspirations. The paper argues that the HRM function is a double-edged sword for recruiters' identities, because their

experiences of the HRM function's implementation of a D&I strategy can both enable identity aspirations and inhibit them. Deviating from the three other papers, this paper demonstrates that in some instances, tensions can entrap recruiters and hinder them from responding to and moving forward in paradoxical situations because they cannot see any possibilities of escaping the situation.

With these papers, the dissertation demonstrates that we can understand the tensions and paradoxes inherent in working with diversity by applying a constitutive approach to paradox theory, which allows to foreground both challenges and possibilities in working with diversity as well as opportunities for moving forward in paradoxical situations. This knowledge is useful for revealing the duality of recruiters' roles, their relationships with hiring managers, the use of their intuition, and the HRM function as constituting tensions and paradoxes for recruiters in their work with diversity. Recruiters find ways of moving forward in these paradoxical situations through adaptive strategies, dialogic interactions, and relational support of their colleagues and peers. However, when facing identity-related tensions spurred by the HRM function's implementation of a D&I strategy, recruiters feel entrapped and cannot see any possibilities of moving forward in the tensional situation. This knowledge provides us with a more nuanced understanding of how these tensions and paradoxes can challenge recruiters in fostering diverse workplaces as well as facilitating learning for organizations in how to educate their recruiters about strategies for navigating these in the future.

Based on the answer to the dissertation's overall research question, the dissertation now moves on to discuss the insights gained from these four papers by arguing for the theoretical contributions of the dissertation.

Theoretical contributions

The dissertation aims to advance the field of diversity recruitment within HRM theoretically and methodologically. To do so, it has utilized a constitutive approach to paradox theory that contributes with a paradox perspective on diversity and a micro-level paradox perspective nuancing existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity enabled through ethnographic methods. This chapter presents three overall theoretical contributions, which are based on the findings of the four papers. The three contributions are defined as: *broadening diversity*

management through paradox theory, nuancing diversity recruitment literature through a micro-foundational paradox perspective, and advancing HRM literature through a constitutive approach to paradox theory.

Broadening diversity management through paradox theory

The dissertation has established how various researchers have found diversity management (DM) an inherently complicated and often paradoxical discipline for specialists (e.g., Daubner-Siva, Vinkenburg, and Jansen, 2017; Nativ and Kuna, 2020; Jaeck, Marais, Joly, and Preuss, 2023). This has prompted the application of paradox theory as a new theoretical approach to the field of DM as a means of dealing with the opposing nature of the business case rationale and the social justice rationale and acknowledging the paradoxicality of DM.

However, what can be observed from the current utilization of paradox theory within DM is the predominant focus on helping organizations and specialists create alignment between these competing rationales. This is not only an oversimplification of tensions and paradoxes but also of the potentials they offer within contemporary DM. Approaching those tensions and paradoxes instead as sources for development, could present a significant potential for organizations and specialists in moving forward when finding themselves in paradoxical situations. The constitutive approach to paradox theory applied in this dissertation is shown to offer such opportunities, as it foregrounds strategies for organizations and specialists in moving forward when facing paradoxical situations. Therefore, with the publication of Paper I (Brøgger and Andersen, 2023), the dissertation has contributed to a newer conceptual understanding of managing paradoxes in DM. Through the utilization of paradox theory, Paper I bridges the dissimilarities between the two main approaches to DM. In doing so, the paper demonstrates that embracing paradoxes in DM allows for liberating as well as constraining experiences to be foregrounded and utilized for development. This enables a move away from the dominant notion within the DM literature of creating alignment between competing rationales toward adopting a paradox mindset that acknowledges both the possibilities and challenges in managing diversity. Such a reconceptualization offers space for recruiters to approach diversity as something that creates both liberating and constraining experiences for themselves, hiring managers, candidates, and other stakeholders. Additionally, it offers space for recruiters to approach such tensions and paradoxes

as something not only to be managed but also something to be used for potential development. The reconceptualization of DM also allows for tensions to be uncovered and understood, especially in Papers II and IV, which demonstrate both the liberating and constraining nature of recruiters' work with diversity.

Paper II uncovers two interrelated tensions that recruiters face when working with hiring managers to foster diversity throughout the recruitment process: (1) their tensional role balancing between being administrators and being sparring partners who challenge managers and (2) the tensional situation when managers struggle to hire between ideal and diverse candidates. The paper shows that recruiters' work with diversity is both liberating and constraining in terms of their role and their work with hiring managers. Their role is liberating when they occupy the role of a sparring partner who successfully challenges managers on diversity and constraining when their administrative role becomes too dominant. Their work with hiring managers is liberating when recruiters succeed with challenging managers' conceptions of what makes a qualified candidate and constraining when the recruiters fail to do so, which could be thought to relate to attitudinal differences among managers toward diversity or a lack of resources. Through an ethnographic inquiry, the paper shows that instead of trying to choose between the opposites inherent in these tensions, recruiters have found strategies to respond to these tensions as a means of moving forward. Through an adaptive strategy focusing on the needs of the individual manager, recruiters are able to transition between and balance their dual role. They have learned that this adaptive strategy enables them to create closer relationships with the managers, which in turn aids recruiters in better challenging managers. By finding ways of navigating these tensions, recruiters move forward and experience the liberating feeling of hiring a candidate that differs from the manager's initial conception and who ends up being the most suitable. Contrary to Paper II, which demonstrates how recruiters find ways of moving forward in tensional situations, Paper IV tells a different story.

Paper IV reveals how the HRM function's implementation of a diversity and inclusion strategy can incite liberating feelings among recruiters, as it evokes aspirations of becoming part of the development and execution of the strategy. However, the paper also reveals the constraining nature of such an implementation when recruiters learn that they cannot outlive their aspirations due to destroying dynamics of the HRM function. In their work with diversity, recruiters are

therefore found to not always move forward when facing identity-related tensions, because they can feel entrapped and cannot see any possible escape from the tensional situation.

Broadening DM through the application of paradox theory therefore significantly advances the field by acknowledging the constraining and liberating experiences inherent for recruiters and other specialists in their work with diversity. This paves the way for the second theoretical contribution concerning the way the dissertation nuances diversity recruitment literature through a micro-foundational paradox perspective.

Nuancing diversity recruitment literature through a micro-foundational paradox perspective

The introduction to this dissertation has established how paradoxical implications have appeared from some of the previous research on recruiters' work with diversity, indicating that they both foster diversity (Shen, Chanda D'Netto, and Monga, 2009; Hodel, Formanowicz, Sczesny, Valdrová, and von Stockhausen, 2017; McKay and Avery, 2005) and hinder diversity (e.g., Cohen and Bunker, 1975; Graves and Powell, 1988; Graves and Powell, 1996; Newman and Lyon, 2009; Pyburn, Ployhart, and Kravitz, 2008; Ployhart and Holtz, 2008; Uggerslev, Fassina, and Kraichy, 2012; Hofhuis, van der Zee, and Otten, 2016; Brooks, Guidroz, and Chakrabarti, 2009).

The dissertation has been motivated to nuance this contradiction by approaching recruiters' work with diversity from a different theoretical and methodological angle than that of previous and contemporary research. Yet, it is puzzling that this dissertation is one of the first attempts to nuance this contradiction, as researchers have already found diversity recruitment to be inherently tensional (e.g., Ryan and Derous, 2016; Rivera, 2011; Evans, 2012) (see chapter 4), prompting calls for "greater discussion of how to manage tensions by both practitioners and researchers" (Ryan and Derous, 2016, p. 18). This should have long motivated researchers to question why recruiters should want to hinder diversity despite being custodians of people-centered activities. The dissertation argues that such lack of attention may relate to researchers having not discovered the usefulness and potential of applying a micro-level paradox perspective on recruiters' work with diversity uncovering how they navigate the paradoxicality of such work. Through the application of a micro-foundational paradox perspective guided methodologically through ethnographic methods and theoretically by a constitutive approach to paradox theory, the dissertation has

therefore nuanced these paradoxical implications significantly. This is evident in all three of the empirical papers, which will now be briefly discussed.

Paper II demonstrates that applying ethnographic methods concerning observations and interviews in the study of recruiters' work with diversity throughout the recruitment process, allows the researcher to study their activities and social interactions with hiring managers. The paper reveals that in these interactions, tensional experiences surface for recruiters in terms of the duality of their role and in finding themselves working with managers who have firm ideas of ideal candidates. Foregrounding these findings nuances the contradictory portrayal of recruiters as entities both fostering and hindering diversity significantly by underscoring that through the utilization of ethnographic methods focusing on micro-level accounts of recruiters' work with diversity, it is possible to reveal the tensional factors that challenge recruiters in fostering diversity. Through the utilization of the constitutive approach to paradox theory, the paper also reveals that recruiters do not give up when finding themselves in such tensional situations but instead find alternative strategies as means of moving forward to foster diversity.

In relation to the argument made in Paper I, paradox theory helps to understand both the liberating and constraining experiences of working with diversity. Relating this argument to the portrayal of recruiters as entities both fostering and hindering diversity, paradox theory argues for us to understand that dichotomy from a different perspective. Due to their people-centred activities, it is only natural to assume that recruiters should want to foster diversity. However, Paper II helps us understand that tensions related to recruiters' role and their relationships with managers can complicate that objective. For recruiters in PIM, these tensions are conditions of their work, and therefore, they have been compelled to find ways of moving forward when these tensions complicate their work with diversity. As such, it is argued that portraying recruiters as entities fostering and hindering diversity is an oversimplification of the recruitment profession. Instead, by approaching the profession from a constitutive approach to paradox theory, the dissertation demonstrates that the context concerning the expectations held for recruiters' role and their relationships with managers must be taken into consideration, as only then can we come to a more nuanced understanding of recruiters' work with diversity, the challenges they encounter, and how they navigate these.

In Paper III, the dissertation continues to nuance the diversity recruitment literature by focusing on another paradoxical phenomenon relevant for understanding recruiters' work with diversity, namely, their intuition. The discriminatory nature of recruiters' work is often attributed to their biases and prejudice (e.g., Sadler-Smith, Akstinaite, and Akinci, 2021; Gilovich, Griffin, and Kahneman, 2002; Derous and Ryan, 2019; Montoya, Horton, and Kirchner, 2008; Miller and Ireland, 2005), which is informed by their subjectivity and hence intuition. The paper unpacks this ever-present paradox for recruiters who are required to consistently rely on facts, while navigating the subjective nature of their intuition ingrained in their work. Despite experiencing tensions on the individual, organizational, and societal levels, recruiters find ways of moving forward through various interactive practices that eventually help them utilize intuition to make more informed decisions. Through this paper, the dissertation also demonstrates ethnographic methods as vehicles for contributing with these findings, because only through the countless observations of recruitment processes could Paper III have foregrounded an empirical account of recruiters' utilization of intuition and their ways of navigating its tensions. Intuition and its tensions are an inevitable condition not only for recruiters working in PIM, but likely for all specialists involved in recruitment required to find ways of moving forward when these tensions complicate their work. With this paper, we demonstrate that connecting the discriminatory nature of recruiters' work to the use of their intuition is an oversimplification of the recruitment profession. Importantly, we acknowledge the risks of blindly relying on intuition for decision making throughout recruitment processes, and nor is this the purpose of this paper. Instead, by approaching the phenomenon of intuition from a paradox perspective, we nuance existing diversity recruitment literature by demonstrating that the potentiality of intuition should be utilized in conjunction with learning how to navigate its tensions in order for recruiters to make more informed decisions throughout recruitment processes.

Finally, the dissertation nuances the diversity recruitment literature by highlighting the importance of the HRM function and other HR specialists in recruiters' engagement with the implementation of a diversity and inclusion (D&I) strategy. Though the paper does not directly utilize paradox theory, it uses the building blocks of paradox theory to reveal the tensions surfacing in recruiters' experiences with the function and its impact on their engagement with the strategy. While many studies approach the HRM function statically (e.g., Pritchard, 2010; Gerpott, 2015;

Bennett, McCracken, O’Kane, and Brown, 2023), thereby assuming a direct link between the function and specialists’ identities, this paper is inspired by the ontological assumptions of the constitutive approach to paradoxes by taking a processual and interpretative stance to the HRM function. Contrary to most literature, this allows us to assign more emphasis to the way recruiters *experience* the function’s implementation of the D&I strategy, revealing how the function enables both the emergence and dissolution of recruiters’ aspirations of becoming partners and diversity promoters. We therefore nuance existing diversity recruitment literature substantially by revealing how the HRM function – and especially strategic HR specialists – should be considered when studying recruiters work with diversity, as they are critical agents that can be liberating, but importantly also constraining for recruiters’ aspirations of becoming diversity promoters.

Nuancing the diversity recruitment literature through a micro-foundational paradox perspective therefore moves the field substantially forward by demonstrating that the portrayal of recruiters as entities both fostering and hindering diversity risks oversimplifying the recruitment profession. Instead, through ethnographic methods, various internal and external human and non-human agents must be studied on the micro-level in particular, as well as the meso- and macro-level to understand recruiters’ work with diversity more fully. This paves the way for the third and final theoretical contribution concerning the way the dissertation advances HRM literature through a constitutive approach to paradox theory.

Advancing HRM literature through a constitutive approach to paradox theory

Through the utilization of a constitutive approach to paradox theory within the context of diversity recruitment, the dissertation has advanced HRM literature and its predominant approach to paradox theory substantially. This contribution is novel because studies within the HRM field have approached tensions and paradoxes mainly from a prescriptive understanding (e.g., Link and Müller, 2015; Gerpott, 2015; Cohen, 2015) due to a functionalistic ontology guiding much HRM research more broadly (Harley, 2015; Janssens and Steyaert, 2009). A prescriptive understanding implies that it is possible to create alignment between contradictions. However, as in life itself, fixed strategies are rarely feasible because tensions and paradoxes will appear and what characterizes these are their ever-evolving and contextual nature requiring anything but fixed strategies. Therefore, by using the context of diversity recruitment, the dissertation has

foregrounded the value in approaching tensions and paradoxes differently within HRM by utilizing the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the constitutive approach. The context of diversity recruitment has rendered this contribution possible because in this field, tensions and paradoxes are inevitable due to the ubiquitous contrast between efficiency and human value. Recruiters are therefore relevant practitioners to study, as they are continually working among these ubiquitous contrasts, and we can hence assume that they have found or seek to find ways to navigate these. The three empirical papers have demonstrated in their own way how a constitutive approach foregrounds knowledge about recruiters' strategies for navigating various tensions, thereby significantly advancing the HRM field.

In Paper II, the constitutive approach has foregrounded how tensions and responses to these emerge sociomaterially and processually through the structure of the recruitment process itself and through the interactions between recruiters and hiring managers throughout the recruitment process. The recruitment process itself creates role-based tensions for recruiters, and when working with managers, tensions emerge when managers struggle to hire between ideal and diverse candidates. Moreover, the constitutive approach aids the paper in demonstrating that to move forward, recruiters also respond to these tensions sociomaterially and processually. They draw on the expectations the recruitment process constructs for their role and the expectations they themselves and managers construct for their role. This is expressed throughout the recruitment process in recruiters' activities and retrospectively when they account for these tensions.

In Paper III, the constitutive approach foregrounds how tensions associated with recruiters' use of intuition also emerge in a sociomaterial manner. Recruiters experience that intuition ignites tensions on three interrelated levels, i.e. individual, organizational, and societal, which are socially manifested in their interactions with managers, colleagues, and other stakeholders. For example, a societal tension concerning intuition as perceived as a somewhat gendered phenomenon made some female recruiters cautious about voicing their intuition when working with male managers. Additionally, the constitutive approach helps the paper illuminate how recruiters rely on dialogic interactions and relational support of their colleagues and managers when they find themselves in tensional situations related to their intuition. Relying on dialogic interactions and relational support was presented in chapter 4 as one of the central strategies for responding to tensions and paradoxes within the constitutive approach (Fairhurst and Putnam, 2023). As such, Paper III has not only

advanced HRM literature by demonstrating how the response strategies of the constitutive approach are valuable for studying recruiters' responses to tensions relates to their use of intuition. The paper has also proven how diversity recruitment is an optimal research avenue for researchers who are interested in enriching the constitutive approach by focusing on how recruiters rely on dialogic interactions and relational support in navigating tensions.

However, specialists do not always find ways of working through tension and paradoxes, as evidenced in Paper IV. Though previous research has demonstrated how HR specialists experience tensions when facing HRM functions (e.g., Cooke, 2006; Keegan, Bitterling, Sylva, and Hoeksema, 2018; Häll, Tengblad, Oudhuis, and Dellve, 2023), the HRM literature has yet not shown the consequences for these specialists in terms of their identities. Based on inspiration from the constitutive approach, the paper incorporates a more interpretative ontology to the link between HRM functions and recruiters' identities. This reveals the HRM function as an influential agent in constituting tension for recruiters, as it is both an aspiring and destroying factor for their identities in terms of becoming partners and diversity promoters. The interpretative ontology to the HRM function thereby moves the HRM field forward by showing that human as well as non-human agents are integral parts of the formation of tensions and recruiters' responses to tensions. The interpretative ontology also allows us to further reveal that these recruiters failed to see a way out of this tension and resigned themselves to giving up the realization of their aspirations. Hence, these findings also contribute to Fairhurst and Putnam's (2023) most recent handbook titled *Performing Organizational Paradoxes* with the acknowledgement that sometimes, practitioners cannot see themselves out of tensional identity-related situations and therefore end up resigning from developing their identities.

Collectively, the four papers advance the HRM literature through a constitutive approach to paradox theory that reveals the formation of tensions in relation to recruiters' work with diversity and how they navigate these. As discussed in chapter 4, the dissertation has questioned why the HRM field has not yet mobilized the constitutive approach. The dissertation has first and foremost proven how this approach is invaluable for understanding and revealing the tensions inherent in diversity recruitment. Second, the approach has enabled me to acknowledge sociomateriality as pivotal for the formation of these tensions and for the way recruiters respond to these. Third, it has enabled me to focus on the ongoing development of these tensions and how

recruiters find ways of working through them, underscoring the developmental potential of tensions. Finally, it has enabled me to reveal the consequences for recruiters when they do not find ways of working through tensions. Therefore, by utilizing a constitutive approach to paradoxes, the dissertation has “challenged the current norms of scholarship in HRM,” resulting in research that is “theoretically and methodologically rigorous and which put forward genuinely new arguments” through alternative methods and theory (Harley, 2015, p. 405). This has offered a reconceptualization of diversity as well as a more nuanced understanding of diversity recruitment that accommodates the tensions and paradoxes of recruiters’ work with diversity and their way of navigating these.

Due to the inherent paradoxical nature of HR specialists’ work (Keegan, Brandl, and Aust, 2018), I hope these contributions will serve as inspiration for other researchers to utilize the constitutive approach more broadly in the field of HRM to unpack the role of sociomateriality in the becoming of tensions for specialists. This should support the call for moving toward more constructivist and critical paradigms in HRM literature (e.g., Francis and Keegan, 2006; Watson, 2004; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007; Lê and Bednarek, 2023) with the aim of making room for greater methodological and theoretical pluralism in HRM literature.

Methodological contributions through a reflexive lens

The ethnographic method has been valuable in contributing with a micro-level account of the everyday working lives of recruiters and the tensions and paradoxes they navigate in their work with diversity. The findings presented in this dissertation would not have been realized through any other method, and for that, the ethnographic method is deemed highly pertinent for examining tensions and paradoxes and the way specialists navigate these in the field of diversity recruitment within HRM. Due to lengthy immersion in the field, ethnographers become a major part of the process of constructing knowledge. In this regard, Cunliffe (2022) introduces the concept of *reflexivity*, which is used in this section as a means of reflecting on my own role in the knowledge construction of this work and what I have learned methodologically in this process. Consequently, the section presents five topics that are intended to become methodological contributions to other researchers who want to embark on more ethnographic studies in the field of diversity recruitment within HRM.

Cunliffe (2022) defines the concept of *reflexivity* as a “means of questioning our own positionality, what we and others may be taking for granted, what we are seeing, saying and doing . . . and not seeing, saying and doing” (p. 20). As such, by being reflexive toward the research that we as researchers conduct, we “recognize our own and others’ situatedness” where we question “how one form of partial knowledge is privileged, reinforced, and why” (p. 21). This aids me in acknowledging how my own positioning shapes what I have theorized, and by being reflexive about that positioning, I recognize whose voices have been favored and what consequences this entails. If I refrain from considering this impact, I risk marginalizing and excluding the voices of others, resulting in the construction of a reality that fits best with my world as a researcher. The key reflexive questions that I found helpful in guiding me to question my impact are: What forms of knowledge do I privilege? How has my personal and professional background influenced my positioning in the research process? How has my position as a researcher influenced my relationships with the research participants? These questions have led me to retrospectively reflect on my research process and the choices I have made along the way. This spurred the following five topics: *researcher subjectivity as a catalyst for co-constructing knowledge with the field; being exposed to a Northern European frame of reference; mirroring the field while not acting like it; empathetic distancing; and when practitioners use researchers for their own agendas*. These topics relate to both my own insights and what I regard as methodological contributions, which will now be further discussed.

The first topic, *researcher subjectivity as a catalyst for co-constructing knowledge with the field*, relates to the ontological and epistemological assumptions guiding this dissertation in what it can and cannot report on. As the dissertation inserts itself in an impressionist tradition of ethnography (see section on *Ethnographic methods*) searching for multiple rather than true meanings (Cunliffe, 2010), it is important to acknowledge that the reality which this dissertation studies is socially constructed and that I as a researcher become the vehicle by which this reality is revealed. Without my subjectivity, I would not have been able to produce the knowledge that has been created. As such, I do not assume that there is *a* reality about recruiters’ work with diversity waiting to be discovered, nor that I have finally arrived at *the* truth about this reality. What is important to emphasize within this research tradition is that between that reality and how it presents itself lies my process of constructing knowledge about it, which, in turn, is impacted by

my assumptions about the world. This creates a relationship between me as a researcher, the research participants, and the data I have gathered; the gathered data which is produced by the specialists and processed through my ontological and epistemological assumptions are all elements influencing each other in a co-constructive process. Hence, I learned that my subjectivity as a researcher undeniably became a catalyst for co-constructing knowledge with the field I was studying, which I believe is especially relevant for other ethnographic researchers.

The second topic, *being exposed to a Northern European frame of reference*, relates to how my choices and actions in relation to the research process and research papers may have been shaped by my exposure to Northern European traditions in terms of observing recruitment practices primarily in a Northern European context. As expressed in Paper II, some cultural differences exist in terms of expectations held in different organizations and countries toward recruiters and their work with diversity. During my travel to the American headquarters where I collected data for Paper III, I was directly exposed to these differences. Here, I discussed some of the insights from Paper II with the American recruiters who shared their experiences of cultural differences in relation to the recruiter role. For example, an emphasis on hierarchical differences among recruiters and hiring managers complicated things at times for some of the American recruiters in directly challenging managers on diversity due to managers having different expectations from them. Over time, I therefore learned that studying recruitment practices in one subsidiary of a multinational organization sensitized me as an ethnographic researcher to report on those practices in subsidiaries beyond the one of principal investigation. This insight is also pertinent for other ethnographic researchers studying organizational practices in multinational organizations.

The third topic, *mirroring the field while not acting like it*, relates to the choices I made and actions I took when conducting fieldwork and how these have shaped the knowledge conveyed. As argued in the section *Conducting Fieldwork*, my process of conducting fieldwork became a constant balancing act between mirroring the recruiters while not acting like one, even when introduced as one to hiring managers. When introduced as a researcher (by the recruiters or by self-introduction), my presence felt like that of a researcher. However, when I came to realize that the way I dressed enabled me to shift more naturally between different types of involvement strategies, i.e., affecting the setting as little as possible or mirroring the culture of the recruitment

team as much as possible, I found myself resembling the field that I was observing more and more. Retrospectively, I have reflected on the consequences of these decisions for the knowledge conveyed. On one hand, similarity with the field created a sense of belonging that helped build and nurture my relationships with the research participants, helping me gain deep insights into the working lives of recruiters. On the other hand, I now also ask myself what knowledge I might have produced if I *had not* mirrored the field but instead remained a non-participatory observer, or conversely, what knowledge I might have produced if I *had* mirrored the field all the time by being a complete observer. By not mirroring the field, the dissertation could have produced a more systematic account of the reality observed, but distancing myself in such a manner would have impeded my ability to go in depth via probing questions to the people observed. By mirroring the field completely, the dissertation could have produced a native account of the reality of being a recruiter, but such immersion could blind me to the reality I was studying. When conducting fieldwork in recruitment settings, I have learned that my work as an ethnographic researcher demands that I am able to mirror members of the field while not acting like it to shift between the different types of involvement strategies required. This learning is valuable for other ethnographic researchers studying recruitment settings, as well as settings requiring ethnographic researchers to be sensitive to the field and to the individuals being studied.

The fourth topic, *emphatic distancing*, relates to my choices and actions during fieldwork when research participants shared personal information with me. In this vein, Berger (2013) draws on the work of Valentine (2007), who studied how bereaved people who had lost a significant other made sense of their experiences. The author articulated the struggle of trying to maintain an empathic distance “as a vehicle to establish rapport, yet, as much as possible, not disclose personal material to avoid getting involved to a degree that may compromise her researcher perspective” (Berger, 2013, p. 7). As a result of spending over a year in the field, it was inevitable that I would establish some sort of relationship with the research participants. Here, I was continuously aware of not disclosing any of my personal opinions toward what the participants shared with me as a way of protecting my role as an impartial researcher. Sometimes, however, when participants would share frustrations, I found myself in a constant battle between not disclosing my personal opinions and engaging in the discussion. This battle was like a double-edged sword, as engaging in the discussion often opened room for more nuances onto a topic but also meant exploiting that

room for my own benefit as a researcher. Over time, I realized that listening to their frustrations and further probing with questions served the needs of the participants well, as I was given the distinct impression that they wanted to include me in their feelings and reactions. I therefore learned that when immersing oneself in the field, it is crucial for ethnographic researchers to find ways of distancing oneself from the field so as not to exploit the trust being created while still leaving room for emotions to come to the surface.

The fifth and final topic, *when practitioners use researchers for their own agendas*, relates to the experiences I had in connection to the relationships I formed with the research participants. When my fieldwork began, the organization had just launched their diversity and inclusion strategy. I experienced that my presence was positive for the research participants, as they repeatedly told me that when I was present during recruitment meetings and when interviewing them for research purposes, they became more aware of the diversity agenda and would sometimes talk about it more up front with hiring managers. The extract below from an interview held with one of the recruiters (R) exemplifies their increased engagement due to my presence:

R: I don't know if it is possible to do a midway check-in, but sure, super relevant, but also for you to share these observations with us. Because first of all, for me right now, it gives me a lot of good energy that you've made these observations, because sometimes you just sit there and think "just try to understand that it's not just for me to get something in and then I execute an order. There are tons of tasks, political decisions, strategic decisions in the middle". So that is just lovely, but also for you to raise yourself up and say "but, why aren't they a part of it?". *[Excerpt from an interview with a recruiter at case organization]*

The obvious discussion in relation to this is the effect of the researcher on the research field and how I as researcher cannot avoid influencing the opinions, feelings, and behaviors of the participants. This is an unavoidable part of conducting ethnographic fieldwork that in this project has brought more possibilities than challenges. Instead, what I find interesting from my immersion in the field is how the participants gradually began to talk about me as someone that could help them pursue agendas that they felt they could not accomplish themselves. I include below an extract from a focus group interview with the recruitment team to demonstrate an example of this:

R1: Yes, because there is something in relation to what you're saying Recruiter 2; a strategy is being made but if we are not heard in the challenges we are facing, how can we move

on? If the challenges that occur in everyday life, at least the recruitment-part of diversity. Of course, there are some managers who need to change their mindset and internal mobility and so on, but the part that we are part of, if we are not being heard in those challenges, how can we move on from that?

R5: You just pass that on, Maria.

R3: But it sounds like we all have something to say about this and that we would like to influence, and I don't think that is only something you, Maria, can pass on, but also something you [the recruitment manager] can take with you in relation to the management-perspective.

[Excerpt from focus group interview with recruitment team at case organization]

Here, it becomes evident that the recruiters not only see me as a conversational recipient to whom they can vent their frustrations but as someone who enters the organization and is able to enact changes on their behalf. By making me knowledgeable of all the things they are not able to accomplish, they appear to hope that I would be able to help the team and claim justice on their behalf in the organization, and perhaps also in an academic sense. After having been in the field for around half a year, I started to realize that as much as I was using the field and the participants for my agenda, they were also using me for their own. However, the word "use" should not be mistaken as having a negative connotation. Instead, I use the term to describe my feelings of mutual help that formed through my relationships with the participants. Even though such relationships would risk me as a researcher becoming partial to the field, I am equally convinced that it contributed to the sense of trust among us that enabled me to provide a window into the challenging working lives of recruiters. Over time, I therefore learned that when immersing oneself in the field it is not only the researcher who has an agenda; the research participants might have their own, and it is the researcher's task to figure out how to approach these agendas.

Having presented and discussed these five topics as methodological contributions, the dissertation will synthesize the theoretical and methodological contributions and translate them into practical contributions in the following section.

Practical contributions

First, the findings raise awareness for organizations and practitioners in embracing organizational tensions and paradoxes in work with diversity for the purpose of utilizing their potential. By reconceptualizing diversity management from a paradox lens, the dissertation provides an

alternative and more dynamic perspective on managing diversity in industrial organizations as well as academic institutions. This reconceptualization suggests that instead of choosing between contradictory elements when facing paradoxical situations, practitioners can adopt a paradox mindset that aids them in finding ways of attending to the elements simultaneously as means of moving forward. The reconceptualization therefore supports practitioners' ability to bring diversity challenges to the forefront instead of ignoring them. Rather than attempt to reduce the complexity in managing diversity, practitioners should acknowledge both the liberating and constraining experiences that all individuals involved in work with diversity are confronted with to actively utilize paradoxes.

Second, the findings shed light on the importance for organizations – and especially recruitment managers – to raise awareness about the tensional duality inherent in recruiters' role fluctuating between administrators and sparring partners and the strategies for navigating this duality. Moreover, there is a demand for focus on the relationship between recruiters and hiring managers in their collective effort to hire more diverse candidates. On one hand, closer relationships with managers enable recruiters to better challenge managers on diversity, while on the other hand, too close a relationship can create a blind spot for recruiters (and managers) in regard to the diversity needed. What recruiters in PIM have learned in their effort to navigate this tension is the importance of being able to adapt to the needs of individual managers to build relationships. These findings are of course contextual for PIM, but as many organizations employ internal recruiters who work closely with managers throughout recruitment processes, these findings will undoubtedly be valuable for other organizations as well.

Third, the findings draw attention to an integral part of human life and the working lives of recruiters and practitioners, the phenomenon of intuition. The recruitment profession is critical when it comes to learning more about this phenomenon, as recruiters face an ever-present paradox of consistently relying on facts while navigating the subjective nature of their intuition ingrained in their working lives. Ignoring this paradox is unproductive, and it is pivotal for organizations and practitioners to find ways of utilizing the strengths of intuition while navigating its tensions properly. In this regard, recruiters, recruitment managers, and HR specialists involved in recruitment should know that when using their intuition, they can make more informed decisions but also risk experiencing tensions on individual, organizational, and societal levels. What is

critical for their way of navigating these tensions is discussing their intuitive thoughts with themselves and reaching out to colleagues, asking to be challenged on their intuition.

Fourth, the findings have drawn attention to the way HRM functions are structured and how these structures impact recruiters' aspirations negatively in terms of wanting to become partners and diversity promoters. First, this calls for organizations to employ a business partner approach (Ulrich, 1997) to the structure of their HRM function to become knowledgeable about the positive (and more importantly) the negative impact of such an approach. Annual Employee Motivation Surveys could be a way to operationalize this knowledge by asking questions about HR specialists' experiences working under the structure of the HRM function with a particular focus on the potential challenges stemming from this. Second, the findings demonstrate the need to pay attention to the relationships among operational and strategic HR specialists involved in the implementation of diversity and inclusion strategies and the potential challenges stemming from these relationships. In terms of working strategically and operationally with these strategies, organizations should be aware of the risk of the strategic HR function decoupling itself from the reality experienced by the operational HR function. This decoupling risks resulting in operational HR specialists losing their aspirations of becoming part of these strategies, as strategic specialists are perceived to make a strong point in restraining recruiters' aspirations of becoming diversity promoters, thereby asserting superiority.

Fifth, the findings are valuable for academic institutions, as for instance, in university courses and in master's programs for practitioners seeking to develop themselves professionally. The findings contribute with valuable nuances to the field of diversity recruitment within HRM by broadening how we can understand, approach, and work with diversity in recruitment settings through a paradox perspective. It is hoped that educators teaching within field such as HR, management, and organization courses will begin – or continue to – utilize paradox theory to understand and explain the intricate nature of organizational life. The methodological contributions are also of practical relevance for academic institutions, who should take inspiration from the value that this dissertation has shown in exploiting ethnographic methods for studying the complexity in practitioners' work with diversity. It is hoped that this will encourage academic institutions to continue valuing ethnographic methods for studying the complexities of organizational life and presenting the value of such methods to students and educators.

Last, in continuation of the methodological contributions of the dissertation, the findings also offer insights for industrial organizations embarking on diversity-related research projects in regard to the value of employing qualitative and especially ethnographic methods. The dissertation has shown that it is exactly through these methods that we can learn about the challenges of practitioners' work with diversity and how – or if – they overcome these. Altogether, it is hoped that industrial organizations and academic institutions will benefit from these practical contributions in their continued work with diversity.

Limitations and future research avenues

The four papers of this dissertation touch upon their respective limitations, but to understand these in a broader sense, this section presents the limitations of the dissertation concerning topics of *credibility*, *dependability*, *resonance*, *the cultural context*, and *the focus on merely recruiters*. This is followed by proposals for future theoretical and methodological research avenues.

The findings are shaped by the choices I made as a researcher, and those choices are governed by my ontological and epistemological assumptions about the world I am investigating. Given the qualitative nature of the dissertation, the purpose has not been to arrive at *the* objective truth about recruiters' work with diversity. Therefore, it is not of any relevance to apply the notion of validity and reliability to this dissertation, as these concepts are “tools of an essentially positivist epistemology” (Winter, 2000, p. 7) assuming that recruiters' world is made up of observable and measurable facts. Instead, I will apply the concepts of *credibility* (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and *dependability* (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) in arguing for the trustworthiness of the dissertation's findings, as these concepts correspond more closely to qualitative research traditions (Golafshani, 2003). Then, I will use Cunliffe's (2022) concept of *resonance* to argue how the dissertation's findings should be seen for others to learn from them.

Credibility refers to trustworthiness in the way research has been conducted (Golafshani, 2003). As my ontological and epistemological assumptions value the multiple realities that exist about recruiters' work with diversity, the dissertation has focused on triangulation by employing various ethnographic methods (Golafshani, 2003), including participant observations, interviews, and field notes. This helped me acquire in-depth, multiple, and diverse perspectives on those realities, thereby heightening the trustworthiness of the findings. Additionally, I continually

involved colleagues in the interpretation of the data either during research group meetings or through co-author collaborations, which helped apply different perspectives to the data than my initial readings.

In continuation hereof, *dependability* refers to whether future researchers are able to repeat the findings (Golafshani, 2003). Here, I focused on thoroughly arguing for and describing the relevance and application of the various ethnographic methods to ensure transparency. Moreover, I have engaged in a reflexive discussion about the methodological contributions derived from the findings, which supports others in revealing the continued complexity for recruiters and other practitioners in working with diversity, which does not necessarily imply similar results, because this dissertation is a contextually bounded project. The dissertation therefore aspires for the findings to resonate with researchers, which hopefully inspires them to continue utilizing paradox theory in the field of diversity recruitment within HRM. In this vein, the dissertation leans on Cunliffe's (2022) concept of *resonance*, referring to the presentation of insights "that may connect, reverberate, and provoke others into reflecting on an issue" (p. 7). As such, the concept emphasizes the "importance of more situated, contextualized, personal and fluid form of knowing and theorizing" (p. 9). With this, it bears a powerful objective in qualitative research traditions, as it allows us "to understand ourselves and our lived experience in different ways" (p. 3). The dissertation has paid homage to the complexity of recruiters' realities when working with diversity, revealing only a small facet of their truth. This truth is powerful because it is personal for these recruiters and therefore will hopefully provoke others to interpret the dissertation's findings in ways that are meaningful for them.

The cultural context is also important to mention in terms of limitations, as it influences the degree to which the dissertation's findings can resonate with others in cultural contexts that differ from PIM's. Due to the embeddedness in a Northern European context, the findings are contextually confined to the way diversity management and the recruitment profession is understood and practiced in this area. As described in chapter 3, during my trip to PIM's American headquarters, I became aware of the different expectations held by people in different cultures to the recruiter role and how recruiters should work with diversity. This underscores the need to bear in mind the cultural context when interpreting the findings of the dissertation. It would therefore be highly valuable for the field of diversity recruitment within HRM to extend the dissertation's

findings to cultures beyond the Northern European context to further nuance our understandings of recruiters' work with diversity.

Moreover, *the focus on merely recruiters* is of course natural due to these specialists being the focus of the dissertation. However, it also poses a limitation in terms of understanding the various stakeholders who take part in recruiters' work with diversity, including hiring managers, candidates, other HR specialists, and societal discourses concerning diversity. This is evident in all three of the empirical papers emphasizing how hiring managers (Paper II), societal discourses (Paper III), and strategic HR specialists (Paper IV) are influential agents in both aiding and restraining recruiters' work with diversity. Future studies would therefore benefit substantially by including these or other agents in the study of recruiters' work with diversity and how recruiters respond to the challenges and possibilities presented by these agents.

The findings of the dissertation also open for future theoretical and methodological research avenues, as well as future research beyond the topic of this dissertation. For future theoretical research, the dissertation calls for a further utilization of Fairhurst and Putnam's (2023) constitutive approach to paradoxes in the study of recruiters' work with diversity through a specific focus on the authors' notion of power and paradoxes. In their handbook, Fairhurst and Putnam (2023) contend that "power and paradox are inseparable, interwoven constructs because power embodies oppositional concepts that are dialectically interrelated" (p. 106). Especially in the constitutive approach, "tensions and contradictions enact power struggles, especially ones aimed at controlling meanings (definitions of situations) and practices" (p. 107). However, where the authors diverge from other paradox researchers is their recognition of preferring a framework that captures both the negative and positive aspects of power (p. 110). Relating these arguments to Paper II, it becomes clear that the notion of power could be extremely relevant to apply in understanding recruiters' challenges to contributing to creating diverse workplaces. Paper II demonstrates how recruiters' roles are largely negotiated and constructed through relationships with hiring managers. In PIM, the hiring managers have the final say throughout the recruitment process. With the tensions identified concerning the duality of recruiters' role and when managers struggle to hire between ideal and diverse candidates, it is only natural to assume that these tensions also enact power struggles, as the manager has the final say and therefore controls the negotiation of the recruiter role and the diversity needed. The risk of negative power in this situation is of

course overriding. However, structuring recruitment processes with the notion of managers having the final say could likely also lead to positive notions of power. For example, despite being able to make the final decisions, the exemplified recruitment process reveals how the manager continually praised the recruiter for challenging the manager's perceptions of the ideal candidate. This demonstrates that despite being in a position of power, the manager acknowledges the value of being challenged on her perception, thereby including the recruiter as an important decision maker.

For future methodological research, the dissertation calls for a further investigation of two of the central learning points I made during my fieldwork as discussed earlier in this chapter concerning *empathetic distancing* and *when practitioners use researchers for their own agendas*. The topic of *empathetic distancing* has primarily been introduced to social work studies (e.g., Valentine, 2007) and medical and nursing studies (e.g., Howarth, 1998; Cannon, 1989; Daly, 2018). However, to the best of my knowledge, almost no other researchers in the field of diversity recruitment more specifically and HRM more broadly have introduced this concept, making this dissertation a methodologically pioneering effort. When researchers within these fields embark on qualitative and especially ethnographic studies, immersing oneself in the field is paramount. Therefore, we need to know more about how to distance oneself emphatically and the tensions that poses for researchers. This is especially prevalent for researchers studying personal topics, including mental health, job performance, discrimination, sexism, ageism, grief, and loss, where sensitivity and ethical integrity are of crucial importance for researchers.

Additionally, the topic of *when practitioners use researchers for their own agendas* also proves an interesting departure for future methodological research not only in the field of diversity recruitment within HRM but for all qualitative researchers in general who engage with the field, regardless of their research topic. Initially, this was the idea for Paper IV, because all qualitative researchers will form relationships with their research participants whether intentionally or not. However, what was interesting in the case I was observing was the experience of the research participants regarding me as someone that could help them in agendas they felt they could not accomplish themselves. I therefore hope that future methodological research will focus on how experiences of mutual help form in relationships among research participants and researchers,

especially in contexts where research participants do not see themselves as able to make changes to situations.

Finally, the findings of the dissertation inspire research avenues for future studies to pursue beyond the exact topic of the dissertation concerning *future perspectives on diversity management and the rising of artificial intelligence (AI) in diversity recruitment*. With the increase in studies focusing on, e.g., remote workers (e.g., Steenkamp and Dhanesh, 2023), mental well-being (e.g., Behnke, Rispen, and Demerouti, 2023), neurodiversity (e.g., Szulc, McGregor, and Cakir, 2021; Doyle and McDowall, 2022), and employees with disabilities (e.g., Walkowiak, 2023) in the context of diversity management, the field of diversity is itself being increasingly diversified. Therefore, it is only natural that the field both academically and practically will become even more complex and paradoxical. By reconceptualizing diversity management from a paradox lens, Paper I (Brøgger and Andersen, 2023) shows that it is important for researchers to continually push the boundaries for how to utilize paradox theory in the field of diversity studies within HRM to be inclusive of employees with other diversity attributes and the numerous ways of managing these in the future.

In addition to continuing learning new ways of managing diversity, private as well as public organizations and practitioners are facing the rise of AI in diversity recruitment (e.g., Charlwood and Guenole, 2022; Ore and Sposato, 2022; Kelan, 2023; Jakobsen, Løkke, and Keppeler, 2023), to which the findings of this dissertation contribute with insights about the human role in diversity recruitment more broadly. In this regard, future research could investigate how recruiters collaborate with AI in their work with diversity and the tensions and paradoxes stemming from this. For example, at the conclusion of my fieldwork, some recruiters in PIM started working with a language editing tool that could help them write more inclusive job advertisements. Some recruiters expressed how the tool aided their work, because it opened their eyes to wordings they otherwise had not regarded as excluding for certain people. However, the tool also challenged them due to cultural differences in terms of how words and phrases are interpreted across countries. In the end, they were also the ones making the final decisions regarding the appropriate wording, which still leaves the final task of inclusivity in the hands of humans. Moreover, it is highly relevant to depart from the findings in Paper III concerning the use of intuition among recruiters

and use these findings for future studies focusing on the interface as well as paradoxes between AI and intuitive decision making in diversity recruitment.

Altogether, it is hoped that researchers will be inspired by these recommendations for future research avenues in the continued pursuit of nuancing our theoretical and methodological understandings of practitioners' work with diversity.

Concluding remarks

With recruiters being essential gatekeepers in inviting diversity into organizations, the dissertation has questioned the contradictory portrayal of recruiters as entities both fostering and hindering diversity, as presented in some previous research, by asking why recruiters would seek to hinder diversity. The dissertation has proven to the field of diversity recruitment within HRM how a constitutive approach to paradox theory is successful in revealing the liberating as well as constraining experiences associated with working with diversity. With this, the dissertation has nuanced existing understandings of recruiters' work with diversity by revealing the duality of recruiters' roles, their relationships with hiring managers, the use of their intuition, and the HRM function as constituting tensions and paradoxes for recruiters. A constitutive approach also sheds light on how recruiters find ways of moving forward in these tensional situations through adaptive strategies, dialogic interactions, and relational support of their colleagues. However, in some instances, recruiters also feel entrapped and fail to find any possible avenue for moving forward, leaving them to withdraw from any development. This knowledge provides us with a more nuanced understanding of how these tensions and paradoxes can challenge recruiters in working with diversity. Organizations can utilize this knowledge to educate their recruiters about strategies for navigating these tensions and paradoxes in the future.

It is with my sincerest hopes that both scholars and organizations will be inspired by these contributions and that future studies will continue to reveal, explain, and nuance what it means for people to work with the paradoxicality of diversity.

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CHAPTER 10: APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Declaration of co-authorship Paper I



SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
AARHUS UNIVERSITY

Declaration of co-authorship*

Full name of the PhD student: Maria Dahl Andersen

This declaration concerns the following article/manuscript:

Title:	Reconceptualising Diversity Management from a Paradox Lens
Authors:	Stina Rydell Brøgger and Maria Dahl Andersen

The article/manuscript is: Published Accepted Submitted In preparation

If published, state full reference: Brøgger, S.R. and Andersen, M.D. (2023), "Reconceptualising diversity management from a paradox lens", *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-01-2023-0029>

If accepted or submitted, state journal:

Has the article/manuscript previously been used in other PhD or doctoral dissertations?

No Yes If yes, give details: The paper is also part of my co-author's PhD dissertation. Our collaboration has been accepted by the PhD school.

The PhD student has contributed to the elements of this article/manuscript as follows:

- A. Has essentially done all the work
- B. Major contribution
- C. Equal contribution
- D. Minor contribution
- E. Not relevant

Element	Extent (A-E)
1. Formulation/identification of the scientific problem	C
2. Planning of the experiments/methodology design and development	C
3. Involvement in the experimental work/clinical studies/data collection	C
4. Interpretation of the results	C
5. Writing of the first draft of the manuscript	C
6. Finalization of the manuscript and submission	C

Signatures of the co-authors

Date	Name	Signature
12/12/23	Stina Rydell Brøgger	<i>Stina Rydell Brøgger</i>

Date: 12/12 2023

In case of further co-authors please attach appendix

Maria Dahl

Signature of the PhD student

*As per policy the co-author statement will be published with the dissertation.

Appendix 2 - Declaration of co-authorship Paper III



SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
AARHUS UNIVERSITY

Declaration of co-authorship*

Full name of the PhD student: Maria Dahl Andersen

This declaration concerns the following article/manuscript:

Title:	Navigating tensions of intuition in recruitment
Authors:	Maria Dahl Andersen and Christa Thomsen

The article/manuscript is: Published Accepted Submitted In preparation

If published, state full reference:

If accepted or submitted, state journal:

Has the article/manuscript previously been used in other PhD or doctoral dissertations?

No Yes If yes, give details:

The PhD student has contributed to the elements of this article/manuscript as follows:

- A. Has essentially done all the work
- B. Major contribution
- C. Equal contribution
- D. Minor contribution
- E. Not relevant

Element	Extent (A-E)
1. Formulation/identification of the scientific problem	B
2. Planning of the experiments/methodology design and development	A
3. Involvement in the experimental work/clinical studies/data collection	A
4. Interpretation of the results	C
5. Writing of the first draft of the manuscript	B
6. Finalization of the manuscript and submission	C

Signatures of the co-authors

Date	Name	Signature
13/12 2023	Christa Thomsen	<i>Christa Thomsen</i>

In case of further co-authors please attach appendix

Date: 12/12 2023

Signature of the PhD student

*As per policy the co-author statement will be published with the dissertation.

Appendix 3 - Declaration of co-authorship Paper IV



SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
AARHUS UNIVERSITY

Declaration of co-authorship*

Full name of the PhD student: Maria Dahl Andersen

This declaration concerns the following article/manuscript:

Title:	The HRM function as a double-edged sword for recruiters' identities
Authors:	Maria Dahl Andersen and Julia Brandl

The article/manuscript is: Published Accepted Submitted In preparation

If published, state full reference:

If accepted or submitted, state journal:

Has the article/manuscript previously been used in other PhD or doctoral dissertations?

No Yes If yes, give details:

The PhD student has contributed to the elements of this article/manuscript as follows:

- A. Has essentially done all the work
- B. Major contribution
- C. Equal contribution
- D. Minor contribution
- E. Not relevant

Element	Extent (A-E)
1. Formulation/identification of the scientific problem	B
2. Planning of the experiments/methodology design and development	A
3. Involvement in the experimental work/clinical studies/data collection	A
4. Interpretation of the results	B
5. Writing of the first draft of the manuscript	A
6. Finalization of the manuscript and submission	A

Signatures of the co-authors

Date	Name	Signature
12.12.23	Julia Brandl	<i>Julia Brandl</i>

In case of further co-authors please attach appendix

Date: 12/12 2023

Maria Dahl

Signature of the PhD student

*As per policy the co-author statement will be published with the dissertation.