



Degree Project

Master's degree in Business Studies

Standardization and customization of the international recruitment and selection process

A study from the cultural and institutional perspective

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Abstract

Aim ~ The aim of the study is to explore the phenomenon of external international recruitment and examine how the international recruitment and selection process is designed in practice. Regarding this aim, the study's focus is on standardization and customization of the international recruitment process in terms of cultural and institutional aspects.

Method ~ The study is based on a qualitative research method and a thematic template analysis of 11 semi-structured interviews. The sampling technique is a non-probabilistic and purposive method, resulting in respondents who are recruiters or managers which in their work participate in full-cycle or parts of the external international recruitment process. The interviews were conducted during the time period of April - May 2022, through digital meetings or by phone.

Results ~ The methods used in external international recruitment were found to be online interviewing, tests, and sourcing. Findings disclose that the international recruitment process is affected by culture in terms of three features: national, global, and generational. Additionally, institutional aspects were found to affect the recruitment sources and thus influence the process by regional divisions. As well, corporate institutions such as company size and degree of centrality were found to influence the process design.

Conclusion ~ The external international recruitment process is characterized by high standardization in the preliminary phases, while a higher degree of customization according to institutional differences and cultural individuality of candidates is undertaken towards the selection phase. Thus, results are explained by institutional theory and the concepts of legitimacy and isomorphism, as the international recruitment and selection process is adapted to constraints in turn to create legitimate practices. As well, organizations are seemingly taking on the presented international recruitment process and becoming similar in their actions.

Keywords: international recruitment, global talent management, international human resource management, standardization, customization, culture, institutional theory.

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1. Introduction

Globalization has made a remarkable impact on the development of international business and multinational corporations, and thus also increasing the awareness of management of a global workforce (De Cieri & Dowling, 2012). This has created new terms and concepts such as strategic international human resource management (SIHRM), drawing upon the base of strategic human resource management (SHRM) and characterized by the global context such as how internationally operating organizations manage geographically dispersed employees (De Cieri & Dowling, 2012). Successful development of talent management practices of finding and attracting talented individuals is a crucial challenge faced by organizations in the international context, which should be given specific attention since it is regarded as vital for sustaining global competitive advantage (Schuler & Tarique, 2012). Furthermore, competitive advantage is also affected by the activities for recruitment, which in turn are central to attracting talents (Banks et al., 2019; Kabwe & Okorie, 2019; Schuler et al., 2011; Schuler & Tarique, 2012). This highlights the value and advantages of possessing high human capital and human resources, which according to Pulakos (2005) might even be the most important resource in an organization. Thus, human capital is also a generator of competitive advantage, and talent management practices are therefore contributing to the strategic goals of the organization (Kabwe & Okorie, 2019). As well, recruitment activities are the foundation of organizational performance (Phillips & Gully, 2015), which emphasize its importance.

1.1 Background of international recruitment

Recruitment represents one of the main staffing activities (Darrag et al., 2010), and is defined as the efforts and practices used to attract and identify talent (Banks et al., 2019; Holm, 2014). International recruitment thus coheres to recruiting talents across borders, where the recruiter and candidate may be based in different countries. Furthermore, recruitment is often described as a part of the practice of attraction within international human resource management (IHRM) and global talent management (GTM) (Schuler & Tarique, 2012). The process of building a strong talent pipeline is a practice described as challenging (Stahl et al., 2012), and recruitment within the international context faces both the local and global environment which adds to making it a difficult task (Banks et al., 2019).

Literature within the field of international recruitment may be divided between research focused on internal recruitment, and research focused on external recruitment. Internal

recruitment regards various types of abroad assignments for employees that are already part of the organization, while external recruitment concerns identification of talent not yet employed by the company (Phillips & Gully, 2017; Pulakos, 2005). The decision on whether to acquire talents from the external global labor market or to develop human capital within the organization is crucial to GTM practices (Schuler & Tarique, 2012; Shen & Edwards, 2004). In general, talent management is an under researched topic as well as that recruitment in international contexts is an area generally lacking research (Darrag et al., 2010; Kabwe & Okorie, 2019). However, previous works have tended to focus on internal recruitment rather than external recruitment, making the latter in its infancy.

Many publications within IHRM and GTM concerns aspects such as talent planning, which can be seen as a collection of practices such as making estimates of the type of competencies, knowledge, skills, and abilities needed (Schuler & Tarique, 2012), identification of pivotal positions (Collings et al., 2019; Kabwe & Okorie, 2019; Schuler et al., 2011), and the creation of job analyses, descriptions, and person specifications (Darrag et al., 2010). Furthermore, talent planning is followed by practices to attract applicants. Companies must make themselves attractive to potential candidates, due to the increased need for competitive approaches in the global environment (Schuler et al., 2011). However, once the challenge of attracting applicants to create a talent pipeline is overcome, recruiters must find ways to effectively select the best and most suitable talent for the specific position. Selection may be defined as the process of collecting information about candidates to assess and come to a hiring decision (Shen & Edwards, 2004). Selection is crucial to organizational success, as it may become costly for the organization when selection activities are misused (Hsu & Leat, 2000). While some known methods for selection practices in SHRM are interviewing and various tests such as cognitive ability, personality, or job sample tests (Pulakos, 2005), there are few studies that have examined the recruitment and selection processes within the international context. Since interviewing is the most common method in SHRM (Pulakos, 2005), it is no surprise that the vague research there is within the international context regards virtual interviewing as a method used by global companies. For example, Griswold et al. (2021) found that synchronous online interviews were perceived as more positive by candidates since they were more effective than asynchronous interviews were. However, when using virtual interviews as a selection method in global organizations, cultural differences may influence the candidate's perception of the method (Griswold et al., 2021).

This leads to another common topic within previous IHRM research, in which researchers seem to not reach consensus. This concerns the issue of whether HR practices, such as recruitment and selection, should be standardized or customized. Like Griswold et al. (2021)'s findings about cultural differences in preferences for online interviewing, other researchers (Kabwe & Okorie, 2019; Schuler et al., 2011) found that different groups of candidates are argued to benefit from customized approaches, due to value variations. For example, segmenting candidates will result in benefits for the organization such as cost savings, since the most talented individuals may be targeted and paid particular attention (Kabwe & Okorie, 2019). Other research results also indicate that companies who localize recruitment activities will attract better qualified applicants (Banks et al., 2019). As well, region and industry specific drivers of GTM are also argued to increase in realization of customizing IHRM activities according to specific needs of the region (Schuler & Tarique, 2012). On the contrary, Kabwe and Okorie (2019) found implications of standardization, as one of their examined cases clearly presented standardization as a goal to aspire, implying challenges with integrating and building consistency as well as alignment to the values of the corporation when designing global selection and assessment tools. Additionally, Sparrow (2007) discovered in a case study that many recruitment aspects, one of them being the interviewing process, could be directly copied from the mother organization. This means that some activities could be standardized, while others need more flexibility and adaptation to the local environment (Sparrow, 2007). Thus, country context differences such as cultural and institutional dimensions may be ways in which societies differ which is critical for IHRM research (Lazarova et al., 2017).

In summary, standardization seems beneficial due to a uniform process and immediate cost savings, but problematic due to lack of adaptation to the local environment (culture and institutions) and, thus, resulting in fewer qualified candidates and decreasing the value of the human capital possessed by the organization. On the contrary, customization seems beneficial due to flexibility and the ability to target talented individuals, thus increasing the potential human capital and resulting in long-term cost savings, but more problematic due to the challenging, expensive, and time-consuming nature of initiating such a process. Hence, there is no consensus in previous research whether standardization or customization is preferred within international recruitment and selection, as well as few studies providing practical examples. However, there is a strong need for companies operating internationally to apply the most suitable strategy, since correct identification of the balance needed will lead to

positive synergies and advantages over competitors (Banks et al., 2019; Zhong et al., 2012), which makes the question both challenging and important to international organizations.

1.2 Problem statement and relevance

Since most research in the field of international recruitment is focused on internal recruitment, as well as the fact that external recruitment processes are in greater need to use a proper recruitment process (Darrag et al., 2010), there is a need for research on the external recruitment processes and practices. Furthermore, while talent planning and talent attraction are subtopics of GTM that are not yet fully explored, the widest gap seems to be concerned with the recruitment and selection process, even though it may be difficult to separate the different stages of the overall recruitment process. By creating a deeper understanding of possible ways of conducting the recruitment and selection process within the global context, practitioners may be able to understand the practical significance of the adaptation of international recruitment practices. This is of relevance since, according to Phillips and Gully (2017), the competition for talents has increased due to globalization and increased mobility of employees. As well, according to Pulakos (2005), HR practitioners tend to show unawareness of which selection methods are effective leading to a lack of usage of formal assessment methods, which again emphasizes the relevance of research in this area.

Because great importance on the issue of standardization and customization is claimed, which is in the early stages of research, there is also a need to examine the practical take on how recruitment and selection processes are balanced according to the global and local environment. Marie Ryan and Deros (2016) specifically emphasizes that the tensions in recruitment and selection is creating a research-practice gap, meaning that it is a challenge to move from research to practice. This is a gap that is also discussed by Schuler and Tarique (2012), as well as by Kabwe and Okorie (2019) who argue that the talent management area needs specifically empirical research. Therefore, this study is an attempt to provide practical examples and empirical guidance for internationally operating organizations. Based on the assumptions of several authors, successful recruitment and selection practices are essential for organizational success (Hsu & Leat, 2000; Pulakos, 2005), as well as for gaining competitive advantage through talent management practices that develop human capital (Kabwe & Okorie, 2019; Schuler & Tarique, 2012; Pulakos, 2005). Thus, this study could contribute with valuable perspectives for HR practitioners, and consequently, also provides theoretical contributions to the area as a piece to develop crucial knowledge on the topic.

1.3 Aim and research questions

The aim of the study is to explore the phenomenon of external international recruitment and examine how the international recruitment and selection process is designed in practice.

Following research questions are developed to fulfill the aim:

1. *What recruitment and selection methods and sources are used in the international recruitment process?*
2. *How does culture and institutions affect the standardization and/or customization of the recruitment and selection process in the international context?*

2. Conceptual framework

This chapter presents existing academic studies within international recruitment and selection, followed by theory to be used as a guiding framework for the succeeding analysis.

2.1 Previous research

To commence with, it is crucial to understand what constitutes the international recruitment and selection process. For the framework of this study, the model presented by Darrag et al. (2010) will be developed and used for guidance (see Figure 1). Darrag et al. (2010) suggest a five-stage process which also may be further divided in two different stages; the preliminary recruitment process and the core recruitment process. While the preliminary process consists of HR planning and creating the specifications of the job and the talent needed, the core process consists of selecting the recruitment methods and sources, as well as assessment and evaluation of the process (Darrag et al., 2010). Thus, the first two steps of the core process relate more to attracting, sourcing, recruiting, and selecting talent. This means that the core process is the phase that constitutes the selection process within recruitment, making it the relevant part for this study. Therefore, selection of recruitment methods as well as sources are highlighted in the recreated model in Figure 1.

While Darrag et al. (2010) argue that the stage of selecting recruitment methods is connected to decisions of hiring internally or externally, this study solely focuses on the external recruitment. Hence, recruitment methods are here focused on activities and tools used to assess external applicants, and the stage is basically interconnected with the stage of selecting recruitment sources which rely on the sources where candidates are found. For instance, Darrag et al. (2010) suggests job fairs, recruitment agencies, newspaper advertising, and employee referrals as recruitment sources. However, since this study takes an explorative approach towards the international context it may also include different countries as recruitment sources.

Darrag et al. (2010) argue that the process also should consist of a feedback loop, meaning that this develops the process towards efficiency and effectiveness. However, in this study the assessment and evaluation stage as well as the feedback loop will not be considered. In summary, the model will be used as a template for the explanation of the international

recruitment process, with a focus on the core recruitment process and the design of recruitment methods and sources.

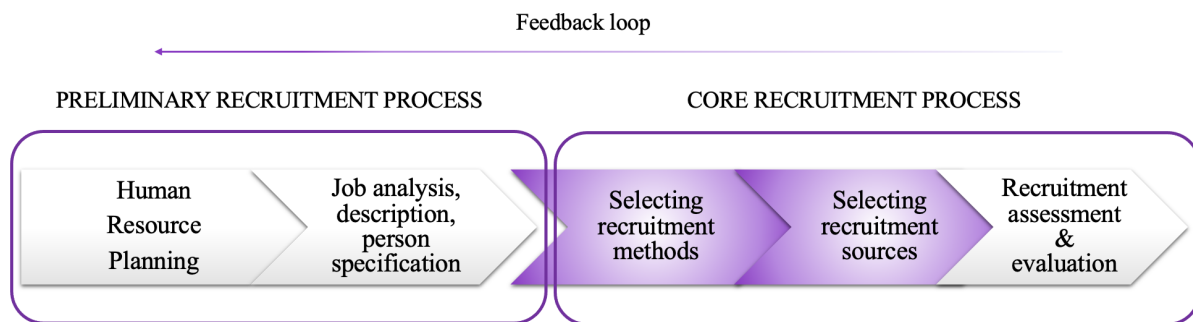


Figure 1. *The international recruitment process. Developed from Darrag et al. (2010).*

As presented in the problem statement, there is no consensus of previous research in the area of standardization and customization of international recruitment and selection processes. This problem seems to be created by national and country specific differences. HR practices are highly dependent on differences in countries such as cultural and institutional variations (Lazarova et al., 2017). Culture is related to deeply rooted and persistent values and norms of people within a country, which is regarded as less tangible than institutions (Björkman & Gooderham, 2012). Institutions are defined as legitimate legal frameworks and organizational structures, which in comparison to cultural aspects are easier to change, making companies face different levels of institutions in their operations abroad (Björkman & Gooderham, 2012). Thus, culture may be difficult to measure in contrast to institutions which are more visible (Wu et al., 2008). However, in the decision of standardizing or customizing the external recruitment and selection process of international organizations, both cultural and institutional aspects constitute the specific characteristics which are shared by people within one country. Therefore, both cultural and institutional aspects are crucial for IHRM and both are part of country context differences (Lazarova et al., 2017). Thus, this chapter will introduce the directions in which previous research found culture and institutions to be influencing the phenomenon of international recruitment in terms of standardization and customization of the core recruitment and selection process.

2.1.1 Impacts of culture

The cultural context may be a key indicator when it comes to investigations on selection practices and the applicants' attitudes towards them, as well as societal culture is an explanation for different perceptions of fairness in the selection process (Walsh et al., 2010).

Assessment methods may be affected by cultural heterogeneity of the applicant pool, meaning that the methods used must be adapted when candidates originate from different countries (Van de Vijver, 2008). One selection method used in international recruitment which is impacted by the cultural level is interviewing. Griswold et al. (2021) examined perceptions of online synchronous and asynchronous interviews in global contexts. Synchronous interviewing corresponds to live conversations over the Internet and asynchronous to a one-way interview where the candidate records answers to pre-recorded or written questions. During their study, Griswold et al. (2021) found that the specific cultural differences between candidates from different countries appeared as for example because of uncertainty avoidance and indulgence. Regarding indulgence, the overall satisfaction with the interviewing process was higher in countries with high indulgence, but the negative relationship found in low indulgence countries was stronger, than was the positive relationship in high indulgence countries. These results may be explained by the fact that candidates from less indulgent cultures may not enjoy live conversation and social interaction, like candidates from more indulgent cultures do (Griswold et al., 2021). Thus, these are signs of differences in cultures, leading to indications of customizing methods on the national level according to cultural variations of different countries.

However, placing emphasis on national culture also comes with some problems. Van de Vijver (2008) argues that it undermines the variations of individuality of the culture, as well as it views culture as a static phenomenon when it in reality may be affected by for instance individuals abroad experience. Hence, it underrates the influence of diversity management issues specifically in the assessment process of global manager applicants (Van de Vijver, 2008). There are also issues regarding how to decide to which cultural group or background an applicant belongs, since people may have more ethnic identities than only one (Van de Vijver, 2008). Thus, since it may be a difficult task to determine a cultural background based on minimal information which is obtained about individual applicants, this potentially speaks for standardization across national borders. On the contrary, generalizing and focusing on nation cultural traits could end up in a customization strategy on the local level, but also a risk of discrimination.

When choosing selection methods to use in the international recruitment process, different groups of applicants may be split within the same type of profession. For example, Van de Vijver (2008) highlights how assessment methods of candidates for global manager positions must be culturally sensitive and appropriate depending on which context the manager will

operate in, for instance in a multicultural team, in another cultural setting, or in an international and diverse context. It is also a topic which is highly relevant to consider when it comes to avoiding bias. Van de Vijver (2008) argues that construct bias is one of the most common threats in assessment of personality and that a specific method can be used in all cultural groups of the applicant pool. Choosing a correct tool for selection and assessment is also a question of validity and how well the method will eliminate biases caused by confounding cultural differences (Van de Vijver, 2008). In this sense, the cultural aspect may cause validity issues for organizations when it does not consider the risk of bias and discrimination, which again emphasizes the importance of a suitable design of the recruitment and selection process.

2.1.2 Digitalization and globalization

Even though findings of Griswold et al. (2021) lean towards synchronous interviewing as most effective and satisfactional, there are also indications that candidates across the globe in general are susceptible towards asynchronous interviews (Griswold et al., 2021). Therefore, asynchronous interviewing is a “. . . promising avenue for high volume, low-cost, and high-convenience interviewing on a global level” (Griswold et al., 2021, p. 22). This may be potentially accepted by other authors, as the use of technology and the Internet is increasing in popularity in international recruitment as well as in recruitment in general (Holm, 2014; Phillips & Gully, 2017). Additionally, the Internet is regarded as the best solution for organizations to reach larger numbers of applicants as it is a favored medium by job seekers (Kowo et al., 2019). The growth of the Internet and thus also social media increases the opportunities for recruiters to connect with candidates (Koch et al., 2018). One way in which this has affected the practice of recruitment and selection is through actively sourcing candidates across the globe, which may be related to both the attraction phase of the recruitment process as well as selection of candidates. Sourcing is often used synonymous with headhunting and will be in this study, and it is defined as a proactive method to identify and approach potential candidates creating a talent pool with the desired talent. Once the pool is created it thus becomes subject for recruiting (Phillips & Gully, 2015). However, it is crucial to first be able to decide where to search for the target applicants. The way in which a job vacancy is described, specified, and communicated, as well as the signal of the message which is sent, is a major determinant of whether an individual decides to apply for a job and it may therefore influence both the quality and quantity of applicants (Banks et al., 2019; Kowo et al., 2019; Phillips & Gully, 2017). In addition, it is essential that sourcing methods

are adjusted to organizational subunits and positions as well as across teams and work units, to allow for an optimized sourcing strategy and recruitment efforts (Phillips & Gully, 2015). Messages could for example be adjusted according to different types of job seekers (e.g., active or passive), which consequently may contribute to improved applicant quality as well as decrease the time and effort of the selection and assessment process when many applicants may not even pass the basic qualifications (Phillips & Gully, 2015). Thus, Phillips and Gully (2015) argue that sourcing becomes even more important in high volume recruiting. Furthermore, Koch et al. (2018) found in their study of recruitment in South Africa that the international trends of social media used for headhunting may not haphazardly be applied there. However, when specifically discussing the use of the social media platform LinkedIn, the trends in the country followed the international trends of LinkedIn being the most popular sourcing and headhunting media (Koch et al., 2018). Hence, it is implying a globally unified attitude for this method of sourcing and headhunting applicants, as well as a possibility of standardizing the process and tools used.

Advances in technology and the wide adoption of social media is also argued to influence the creation of a global culture that mitigates the effects of national culture since people are generally more exposed to other cultures (Griswold et al., 2021). Furthermore, Holm (2014) discovered in a study that the decision to use technology and the Internet in recruitment practices was caused by the external environment. In addition, digitalization itself is the root of institutional change which consequently is an outcome of changes in individuals' values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors (Holm, 2014). Hence, these findings may indicate that the recruitment and selection process may be successful as relatively standardized across an internationally operating organization, since the findings of an emerging global culture make individual and national culture differences smaller. Moreover, this may be connected to the cultural and institutional distance between countries. Institutional distance is explained by Phillips et al. (2009) as the similarities or dissimilarities of regulatory, cognitive, and normative institutional aspects of different countries, where more differences make the distance greater. For example, Lazarova et al. (2017) argues that the challenge of legitimacy increases when the distance is greater, causing lower control of abroad operations. Therefore, the likelihood of customizing and imitating already accepted practices in the specific local environment is larger (Lazarova et al., 2017). Thus, customization and standardization seem highly context dependent even though a global culture decreases the distance. In summary,

previous research provides indications of both customization and standardization methods within recruitment and selection practices.

However, Farndale et al. (2021) presents the other side of the story related to increasing the institutional distance. According to Farndale et al. (2021), the world is currently going into a deglobalization phase. Consequently, it limits the opportunities for international organizations to source talent worldwide due to uncertainty as well as talent shortages (specifically in the high tech-sector) (Farndale et al., 2021). Consistently, Phillips et al. (2009) argue that the greater institutional distance between two countries, the more a company will refrain from entering that market. From the institutional perspective there are, according to Farndale et al. (2021), constraints imposed due to government attempts to control for instance the level of domestic jobs as well as companies' possibilities to relocate positions to other countries. This consequently contributes to the deglobalization and causes extra costs for organizations as well as a challenge of having operations from a distance (Farndale et al., 2021). Hence, Farndale et al. (2021) concludes that long-term local talent pipelines are a result of deglobalization, which however is affected by globalization since the term 'local' may be anyone with the right to work in a particular country or location. Thus, deglobalization is indeed connected to institutional effects which in turn creates obstacles for international recruitment, hence indicating an influence on the international recruitment process towards local customization.

2.1.3 Risk of discrimination and bias

While the risk of discrimination and bias caused by adjustments according to cultural and institutional differences was briefly discussed in chapter 2.1.1, the importance of it deserves to be thoroughly considered. Mäkelä et al. (2010) touched upon the topic of discrimination when arguing that decision makers in the recruitment process which are in a different geographical, cultural, and institutional location than the candidate, may negatively influence the hiring decision of that specific applicant. While this is a problem based on the human being (i.e., recruiter or hiring manager) performing the recruitment process which may not be controlled that easily, Sparrow (2007) also emphasizes how unlawful discrimination against oversea foreigners may appear by the methods used in the process. Specifically, Sparrow (2007) highlights this aspect in terms of using assessment tests as a selection tool while keeping recruitment and selection practices centrally conducted by a head office. This is thus related to organizational structures in terms of hierarchy and the grade of centralization or

decentralization which consequently may affect how the international recruitment process is designed, which in turn is connected to institutions of the company.

Another problem with assessment tests in the global context is that, on the one hand, the test norms (the 'correct' answer or key to the test) are typically obtained in Western groups, making the test only applicable to that specific population (Van de Vijver, 2008). On the other hand, Azungah et al. (2020) reports on aptitude tests in international selection as transparent and fair, which thus minimizes discrimination and bias. Hence, using tests in terms of being fair regardless of cultural background has two sides. Furthermore, Van de Vijver (2008) makes a distinction between internal and external bias in relation to tests in the context of selection. Internal bias is focused on the meaning of scores and how they may be a threat across cultural groups, and external bias is related to operationalization between the measured predictor and criterion and whether it is identical across cultural groups or not (Van de Vijver, 2008). The external bias is the type which is highly relevant to the selection process, and in the global context it is connected to whether candidates from different groups obtain the same score, but do not show the same output (Van de Vijver, 2008). Thus, using standardized tests globally may imply problems in accurate assessment of candidates and consequently create a risk of unfair treatment. However, as mentioned previously, Kabwe and Okorie (2019) found that aligning the assessment tools with the global strategy is a suitable method, since it thus becomes positively aligned with corporate values.

Bias and equality are of highest importance questions to consider in international assessment of candidates (Van de Vijver, 2008). Consequently, this is a problem when deciding how recruitment and selection processes should be either globally standardized or locally customized. On the one hand, these findings indicate that global standardization but also local customization may cause a risk of discrimination, since cultural and institutional environments will affect the decision makers and the selection practices which are used. On the other hand, using standardized tests in assessment of candidates may dehumanize the process and thus decrease bias and discrimination, unless the tests are based on certain norms which are specific to one type of nationality, which then may cause inadequate assessment. Again, these results indicate that there is no consensus on what approach is preferred.

Furthermore, when using psychometric tests in decentralized and localized selection processes, the need of understanding how these tests work across cultures is increasing (Sparrow, 2007). Thus, this highlights how customization may enlarge costs related to the

international recruitment and selection process. This may in turn be a question related to the institutional aspect of organizational structure and company size, which is a topic investigated by Darrag et al. (2010). In the international context, Darrag et al. (2010) presented theoretical indications of a more formal process (related to the model described in chapter 2.1) adapted in large enterprises, while smaller companies may experience problems to develop and maintain a formal process due to the expensive nature of allocating separate resources. However, during their study Darrag et al. (2010) found the opposite and in practice it was found to be the smaller sized enterprises who adopted a more structured recruitment process. This was specifically evident in the early stages of the process as well as the final stage (i.e., planning and preliminary stages respective feedback and evaluation stages). Darrag et al. (2010) explained these results to be caused by the expensive nature of wrongfully designed processes and the limited resources of smaller organizations, as well as the time-consuming nature of evaluation. Thus, this may be implying that the organizational size and structure, relating to institutional aspects, is a determinant of whether an internationally operating company chooses to standardize or customize its recruitment and selection approach.

2.2 Institutional theory

This subchapter of the conceptual framework presents the institutional theory. According to Holm (2014), institutional theory may reveal how social forces such as cultural understandings and institutional laws will affect the actions and decisions made by organizations, which makes it highly relevant for this study.

2.2.1 Background of institutional theory

Grounded in the ideas of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), institutional theory is based on the foundations that socially constructed beliefs, rules, and norms are exercised and utilized over organizations and, thus, they are under the influence to adapt to the specific institutional environment. The theory is strongly connected to the concept of legitimacy, meaning that organizations search for recognition by taking on structures and practices that are believed to be suitable for the environment in which they operate (Björkman & Gooderham, 2012). Hence, organizations tend to imitate each other to avoid uncertainty as well as to comply with constraints, which leads to homogeneity in structure, culture, and output (Björkman & Gooderham, 2012; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). However, the environment may differ

between countries as well as differences may be persistent over time (Björkman & Gooderham, 2012).

Institutional theory is also imprinted by the assumption that organizations which operate in the same institutional environment will become more similar to each other (isomorphic), since they share beliefs and meanings (Björkman & Gooderham, 2012). According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), homogenization and isomorphism are produced by coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism corresponds to when the government or similar political institution impose pressures over organizations for which they are persuaded to follow. The effect of such a politically constructed environment will be applied across all affected organizations making decisions less adaptive and flexible, for which organizations may react in direct response to government mandate (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In terms of mimetic isomorphism, the notion relates to how organizations imitate successful organizations in times of great uncertainty and ambiguity to gain legitimacy. However, organizations may not strive to be copied. As well, using consultant firms and industry trade associations, or employee turnover in general, may cause unintentional modeling (i.e., imitation of the established practices of other organizations) (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). At last, normative isomorphism is causing homogenization when professional organizations disseminate structures and practices that are adopted by other organizations, meaning that professionalization is the cause of isomorphism. For example, universities and professional training institutions as well as the growth of professional networks are some determinants of organizational norms, and by recruiting top rated talents from firms within the same industry an organization may encourage normative isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Thus, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that these three types of isomorphism are the foundation of rational behavior for which organizations engage in to change their practices, making them less heterogeneous.

2.2.2 Institutional theory in IHRM research

Taking institutional theory to IHRM research, there have been some studies focusing on different levels such as the national and international levels (Björkman & Gooderham, 2012). According to an institutionalist point of view, domestic labor laws and regulations will create obstacles on the local level for diversity and heterogeneity and delimit the possible HRM practices, as well as local managers and employees' beliefs, norms, and views will influence their decisions about practices (Björkman & Gooderham, 2012). This may then be an

advocate for customization according to the local environment. However, coercive isomorphism and pressure from the parent organization may also impact on the local level and thus the global integration of HRM practices (Björkman & Gooderham, 2012). In turn, this would imply a standardization strategy towards recruitment and selection practices.

Institutional theory is widely mentioned by researchers that previously studied the international context of HRM. For example, Schuler and Tarique (2012) specifically argue that institutional theory is a framework that may serve as a foundation to GTM research. Furthermore, Holm (2014) highlights that the connection between the external environment and recruitment practices is perceptible but not sufficiently explored, as well as Björkman and Gooderham (2012) who argue that institutional theory previously have been used in IHRM research but still is under-exploited. Moreover, Phillips et al. (2009) emphasize how institutional theory is focused on companies operating in a single organizational field, thus meaning that the international context has been neglected in the past. One research area for future studies which is suggested by Björkman and Gooderham (2012) is to use institutional theory within the structure and role of HR departments in international corporations. This makes the theory relevant to this study since the aim is to explore the international recruitment and selection process, thus emphasizing the structure of the HR practice of recruitment and selection.

One important finding in previous research on institutional theory and IHRM is related to isomorphism, that however composes an additional perspective. For example, the local institutional environment of a country in which international organizations operates also seems to have effects across borders in terms of discrimination laws. Wu et al. (2008) found that anti-discrimination legislation in the home country of the company has strong positive impacts on criteria in other countries as well. Related to this comes the arguments of Phillips et al. (2009), who concludes that organizations operating in an international context do not only comply with their institutional environment, but also take action to manage it. Phillips et al. (2009) label this concept by 'institutional entrepreneurship'. Moreover, Manning et al. (2012) argue that multinational organizations will comply with institutional constraints through embedding in the local network, in order to for instance gain access to qualified talent. However, by engaging in institutional strategies they also tend to affect the local conditions for which they adhere to, to be adapted to their own interests. Manning et al. (2012) calls this concept of aligning local institutional conditions with global strategies 'active embedding'. More concretely, this contributes to a 'field structuration' meaning that

practices and relations with local institutions are adopted within and across borders of the internationally operating organization.

2.3 Summary of the conceptual framework

In summary, previous researchers present how the international recruitment process may be structured, and how it may be both beneficially standardized and customized concerning cultural and institutional aspects. Former studies have also indicated what recruitment and selection methods may be successfully used in international recruitment, as well as how globalization and differentiated environments may impact the design of the recruitment process. Consistently, institutional theory also contributes with a value perspective on the international recruitment process in terms of how isomorphic behavior may affect. Institutional theory also emphasizes the notion of legitimacy, which in conjunction with previous research findings may influence the design of the external international recruitment and selection process.

In this way, the concepts presented by previous researchers, as well as the scientific principle of institutional theory will be further utilized as a guiding framework in this study since it provides valuable indications of potential impacts on the international recruitment process. Thus, the conceptual framework serves as part of the foundation for data collection, as well as it is utilized in the analysis in chapter 5, and provides a potential explanation of the study's results. Consequently, the conceptual framework will contribute to serving the aim of the study as well as answering the research questions.

3. Method

This study is based on a qualitative method to explore the recruitment and selection process of the external recruitment in internationally operating organizations. To address the research questions, the phenomenon of international recruitment and practitioners' experience within the area will be the focus. This chapter presents the methodological design and the conduction of the study, as well as data quality issues followed by ethical considerations.

3.1 Research approach and design

To thoroughly address the aim and research questions of the study, a qualitative approach was taken. The qualitative research approach is suitable for studies searching for underlying meanings and an understanding of those (Taylor et al., 2016). As well, when the field of research is modest, exploratory approaches are relevant (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005, as cited in Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The qualitative and exploratory research method is additionally argued to be suitable for international business studies, since phenomena are scattered over distance and imprinted by differentiated contexts (Birkinshaw et al., 2011). Furthermore, the qualitative method generates data which is close to the empirical world and thus ensures accuracy of data and reality (Taylor et al., 2016). Therefore, it is an appropriate strategy for this study, especially since previous researchers (Kabwe & Okorie, 2019; Marie Ryan & Derous, 2016; Schuler & Tarique, 2012) found there to be a gap between research and practice.

The philosophical stance taken for the study is characterized as an interpretivist perspective. This is relevant for the aim of the study since according to Taylor et al. (2016) and Saunders et al. (2009) interpretivism concerns understanding of social phenomena, differences between humans, and the reality behind situational details, as well as how reality is perceived by people that are experiencing it. Additionally, the research is pursuing an exploratory study since the aim is to explore the phenomenon of international recruitment and address it in the global context. The exploratory study is common when seeking new insights of a phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2009), as well as it is a common type of study to conduct in new settings such as the international context (Birkinshaw et al., 2011). Thus, the exploratory type of study was regarded as useful to reach the aim of this study. Exploratory studies are usually also suitable when research questions are searching for an understanding of 'what' is happening (Saunders et al., 2009), which is another argument for the appropriateness of an

exploratory study approach. Since the exploratory research often is complemented by descriptive research as a forerunner (Saunders et al., 2009), this study also has parts of descriptive research traits. As well, the data which qualitative studies produce is descriptive in nature (Taylor et al., 2016). Since the research aim and research questions are searching for describing ‘what’ international recruitment and selection methods are used, as well as the state of ‘how’ culture and institutions affect the standardization and customization of processes of international recruitment, the exploratory and descriptive research approach were found appropriate. While the descriptive research is initiated by the literature review which was conducted prior to the empirical data collection, the exploratory research extends the findings by exploring the phenomenon of international recruitment through empirical data.

Since a literature review and theoretical framework was identified prior to the empirical data collection, the approach taken is not fully inductive. An inductive approach is usually how qualitative research is undertaken, however, pure inductive approaches are impossible since qualitative researchers also need a theoretical framework to operate within (Taylor et al., 2016). Thus, the study also has features of a deductive approach making the research approach abductive, which according to Saunders et al. (2012) is the combination of deductive and inductive research. However, to not miss out on important viewpoints or new insights that might occur during the study, the stance taken throughout the study was kept open. Furthermore, it is also one of the main benefits with exploratory studies, since the research is adaptable and flexible meaning that perspectives and focuses may change during the conduction of the study (Saunders et al., 2009), which in turn makes the study mostly inductive.

3.2 Data collection

The data collection method is qualitative, with a focus on practitioners working with external recruitment in the international context. This chapter presents how the data was collected, as well as the choices made regarding sampling.

3.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

According to previous research (Kabwe & Okorie, 2019), there is a lack of empirical data and studies within the area, which is why primary data was regarded as suitable for the purpose of this research. Non-numerical data is the predominantly aspired data since the study was

carried out qualitatively, and the data collection technique suitable for this purpose is interviewing (Saunders et al., 2009). To achieve the aim of the study and answer the research questions, the method of semi-structured interviews was regarded as the most appropriate. Semi-structured interviews are non-standardized and emanate from a list of predetermined themes and questions to be covered during the interview (Saunders et al., 2009). This type of interviewing technique was considered congruent with the approach to the research since it was both deductive and inductive, and the semi-structured interview provided flexibility to use the already existing knowledge about the topic while also leaving space for new topics to be uncovered. It is also common to use non-standardized interviewing techniques when conducting exploratory research, as well as it is an appropriate strategy when trying to understand and probe meanings of participants and their contexts, thus, increasing the depth of research (Saunders et al., 2009). Therefore, since the aim of this study is to explore the phenomenon of international recruitment, qualitative semi-structured interviews were found suitable to collect data.

The questions used in the interviews were both open and probing questions, since according to Saunders et al. (2009) these types of questions are more defining, describing, and exploring. However, closed questions were also needed, mainly in the introductory part of the interviews, to define the contexts of the respondents and to obtain more specific information that may be needed. Additionally, interpreting questions, which according to Qu and Dumay (2011) are similar to probing questions but more focused on clarifications, were used to ensure answers were understood correctly. The questions were focused on capturing the cultural and institutional features which affect the international recruitment process, guided partly by previous research and theory, and partly by new notions appearing during the conduction of the study. To examine how the cultural aspect affects the respondents themselves as predicted by previous research (e.g., Mäkelä et al., 2010; Van de Vijver, 2008), participants were also asked how they experience the effect of bias. Additionally, to connect to the standardization and customization dimension, the participants were asked about their opinion of advantages and disadvantages of both strategies. Because of the inductive approach of the research, the interview guide was developed during the course of the study. Consistently, it is important to stress that the semi-structured interview has its foundation in human conversation, meaning that there is flexibility in the structure of the interview for both the interviewer and respondent, and the guide must not be strictly followed (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The final interview guide is presented in Appendix 1.

Saunders et al. (2009) advise that semi-structured interviews should be recorded and documented by notes, since the nature and order of questions might vary between interviews, as well as questions may be added during the conversation. This was the case during the conduction of interviews in this study since questions varied relatively much. As well, the order of questions depended on the replies from respondents and the context they found themselves in as regard to their position and job responsibilities. Therefore, the interviewees who participated in the study were asked for consent to record the interviews, and all respondents agreed.

The time spent for each interview was between 30-50 minutes. Due to geographical distance between the researcher and respondents, the interviews were held through the digital video conferencing platform Zoom or by a regular phone call. The interviews were conducted in English, with the exception of one which was conducted in Swedish since this was the native language of both the researcher as well as the respondent.

3.2.2 Sample

A non-probabilistic, purposive sampling technique was used to gain access to respondents and thus empirical material. Saunders et al. (2009) advise that using personal contacts to gain access is easier when conducting in-depth studies focusing on a small sample, which is why this method was initially used to choose suitable respondents. However, since data saturation was not reached by only using personal contacts, additional respondents were found by contacting organizations and persons which were suitable for the aim of the study. This non-probabilistic sample was embossed of a purposive sampling technique, meaning that the choice of respondents was based upon the judgment of the researcher (Saunders et al., 2009). Thus, the choice of respondents for the study was based on how well their respective role or position within the organization was suitable for the aim of the study, as well as their willingness to participate. The criteria used when determining if potential participants were a good fit for the study was that the respondents should be a person holding a position where they come in contact with external international recruitment. For the purpose of this study, the phenomenon of external international recruitment is widely defined as recruitment related to finding and hiring external talents from any country to any country with some part of the process being cross-national based on the location of the recruiter, the candidate, and the place of work. Thus, the recruitment processes which are presented in this study are either conducted by recruiting employees from (1) the same country as the recruiter is located into

another country or the other way around (i.e., relocation), (2) another country to another country (i.e., completely out of the recruiters location) or (3) another country to work in the same country (i.e., offshoring of operations and remote positions). This definition was chosen since the area of international recruitment is under researched, and the study is proceeding an exploring approach towards the phenomenon. To ensure respondents were involved in any of such recruitment processes, the informants were early in the interview asked how they come into contact with international recruitment. Descriptive questions, such as for example ‘can you describe a typical day?’, are crucial as they let respondents form the answers in their own way on topics which are in the interviewer's interest (Taylor et al., 2016). Thus, to learn about what recruitment and selection methods and sources are used in the international recruitment process of the respondents, they were asked descriptive questions. For instance, participants were asked to describe a typical recruitment process as well as what selection and assessment methods they use (see Appendix 1).

Based on the above criterion, as well as the arguments of previous researchers about that the responsibility of recruitment have been subject for both the HRM department as well as line managers, with the first mentioned having the upper hand (Darrag et al., 2010), the most suitable persons to interview were found to be recruiters, talent acquisition specialists, and HR specialists (among others). Although the formal title of the respondent's positions varies, their jobs relate to the same duties such as conducting parts of, or full-cycle, external international recruitment and selection processes. Therefore, they will in this study be called recruiters regardless of formal title. During the data collection it was found that while recruiters have the essential knowledge about the international recruitment process needed to address the aim of this study, it was also found relevant to examine the perspective of hiring, unit, or line managers (as also were describe by Darrag et al. (2010) to play a role in decisions made about the recruitment process). Thus, an attempt to involve respondents with this kind of position in the study was made, however, only resulting in one respondent with a manager position. Despite this, data saturation was believed to be achieved when 11 respondents were interviewed.

The sampling of this study does not make limitations to a certain type of organization or industry, and thus the sample consists of various types of organizational types and structures from different sectors. Additionally, there was no limitation made in regard to specific regions of the respondents, and recruiters based in different locations across the world were contacted and asked to participate. However, the willingness of recruiters to participate was

stronger among recruiters located within the EMEA (Europe, Middle Eastern, and Africa) region. Thus, all 11 respondents are located in the EMEA region, but also with recruitment responsibilities in other regions such as LATAM (Latin America), APAC (Asia-Pacific), and more. For the purpose of this study, the respondents were assigned an alphabetical letter of which they will be called in this study. The respondents' respective company size in terms of employees, organizational structure, operation locations and place of the headquarters of the organizations, respondents' roles in regard to job description and recruitment responsibilities, as well as the time length of the interviews are presented in Table 1.

Respondent:	Number of employees:	Organizational structure:	Headquarters (HQ) & places of operation locations:	Job description:	Interview length:
A	≈ 1 000 000	Centralized & hierarchical	HQ in North America, additional operation locations globally	Recruiter managing the early stages of the recruitment process of entry roles within EMEA	31 minutes
B	≈ 50	Centralized	HQ in Europe, additional operation locations globally	Recruiter conducting full-cycle recruitment globally, specialized in the IT sector	29 minutes
C	≈ 400	Hierarchical, however consisting of multiple sections which are separated in structure	HQ in Europe, additional operations in Europe & Middle Eastern	Recruiter participating in full-cycle recruitment and HR administration on a global scale, but focuses mostly on the EU and Middle Eastern areas	47 minutes
D	≈ 650	Centralized & hierarchical, great influence of owners	HQ in Europe, additional operation locations in Europe & Asia	Recruiter specialized in sourcing, currently targeting Southeast Asia, Poland, and Italy.	31 minutes
E	≈ 10	Decentralized & flat	HQ in Europe, operating globally	Recruiter within the finance and IT sector in Europe, Middle Eastern, and APAC, mostly focusing on Europe.	33 minutes
F	≈ 10	Decentralized & flat	HQ in Europe, additional operation locations globally	Consultant recruiter specialized in logistics, marketing, and electronics, focused on the European market.	34 minutes
G	≈ 650	Centralized & hierarchical	HQ in Europe, operating in Europe & Asia	Recruiter specialized in sourcing on a global scale, currently targeting Slovakia, Malta, and Cyprus	39 minutes
H	≈ 8000	Centralized	HQ in North America & Europe, operating globally	Recruiter targeting talents in marketing, HR, IT, finance etc., within EMEA and LATAM	33 minutes
I	≈ 28 000	Hierarchical, however inclusive approach & thus some decentralization	HQ in North America, operating globally	Recruiter specialized in EMEA, managing the early stage process of the international recruitment	34 minutes
J	≈ 400	Decentralized & flat	HQ in Europe, operating in Europe, North America, & Asia	Corporate recruiter, managing the early recruitment process and with contract responsibility of EMEA and Singapore.	38 minutes
K	≈ 24 000	Highly centralized & hierarchical	HQ in Europe, additional operation locations globally	Manager of a unit consisting of approximately 400 employees, with recruitment responsibility for international positions	32 minutes

Table 1. *Sample.*

3.3 Data analysis

To ensure careful and accurate analysis of the raw data to a conceptualization of the phenomenon of international recruitment, a thematic template analysis was conducted. Data collection, transcription, and analysis were conducted simultaneously following the characteristics of qualitative research. Therefore, the template analysis was found suitable to conceptualize raw data since according to Saunders et al. (2009) the template is allowed to be

revised several times from an initial framework to a completed finalized template. Additionally, the method is argued to be valuable in inductive research, however, may also to a certain degree be deductively performed as some themes will be predetermined (priori themes) but also may be modified (King, 2004; Saunders et al., 2009).

The steps of template analysis presented by King and Brooks (2017) were followed, starting with *familiarization* of data by reading transcripts several times. This step was undertaken simultaneously as the interviews were transcribed. Transcription was conducted partly by using computer voice recognition, since according to Saunders et al. (2009) reduces the time needed for the process, but also by manually listening to the recording. As well, proofreading of the transcripts facilitated the familiarization phase. The second step of the process of template analysis by King and Brooks (2017) relates to *preliminary coding*, by identifying and highlighting themes as well as commenting on those, which was done in the margin of the printed transcripts. As recommended by King and Brooks (2017), double line spacing, page numbering, and line numbering was used in the transcripts as well as wide margins were used to enable coding and commenting. The coding was done by hand through highlighting themes with different colors that represented the categories. The major priori themes were methods used in the recruitment process, as well as cultural and institutional aspects from which the themes were guided but also open to new arising themes. The newly discovered subthemes were related to different types of culture (national, global, and generational) and institutions (regions and corporate structures). From these themes, codes for each subtheme were developed which are displayed in Figure 2. Other codes were related to the methods and design of the process, such as interviewing, test, and headhunting among others. The themes of standardization and customization also appeared as codes used in this phase and are presented in Figure 2 as an outcome of cultural and institutional aspects. As well, adaptation and personalization were used as extended versions of customization, inferring a more targeted type of customization.

Furthermore, the creation of codes is related to the next steps of the template analysis. King and Brooks (2017) describes the third step as *clustering* and organizing the identified themes into groups to discover relations between themes. This step was also undertaken simultaneously as the proceeding of data collection, by writing down line numbers from the transcripts related to the codes and thus key features of the interviews. Clustering was also conducted in conjunction with the fourth step of King and Brooks (2017) *production of an initial template* which, however, should not be over sensitized at this moment. Thus, the

clustering and the revision of the template was iteratively adjusted once new interviews were performed, resulting in an initial template. Even though King and Brooks (2017) sets the production of an initial template as the fourth step of the analysis, they also emphasize how it may be sketched at any point of the process. Thus, this step was firstly undertaken prior to all interviews, with the priori themes based on theory and literature, while iteratively changed and developed during the process. King and Brooks (2017) presents the final two steps as *developing and applying the template*, which involves reviewing raw data and applying to the template, and thereafter, *final interpretation* which is managed by examining patterns and prioritizing themes to develop connections. Thus, the final stage of the analysis process concerns interpretation and is where the conceptual framework was guiding the analysis. Figure 2 therefore constitutes the final template, of which the coming chapters are based on.

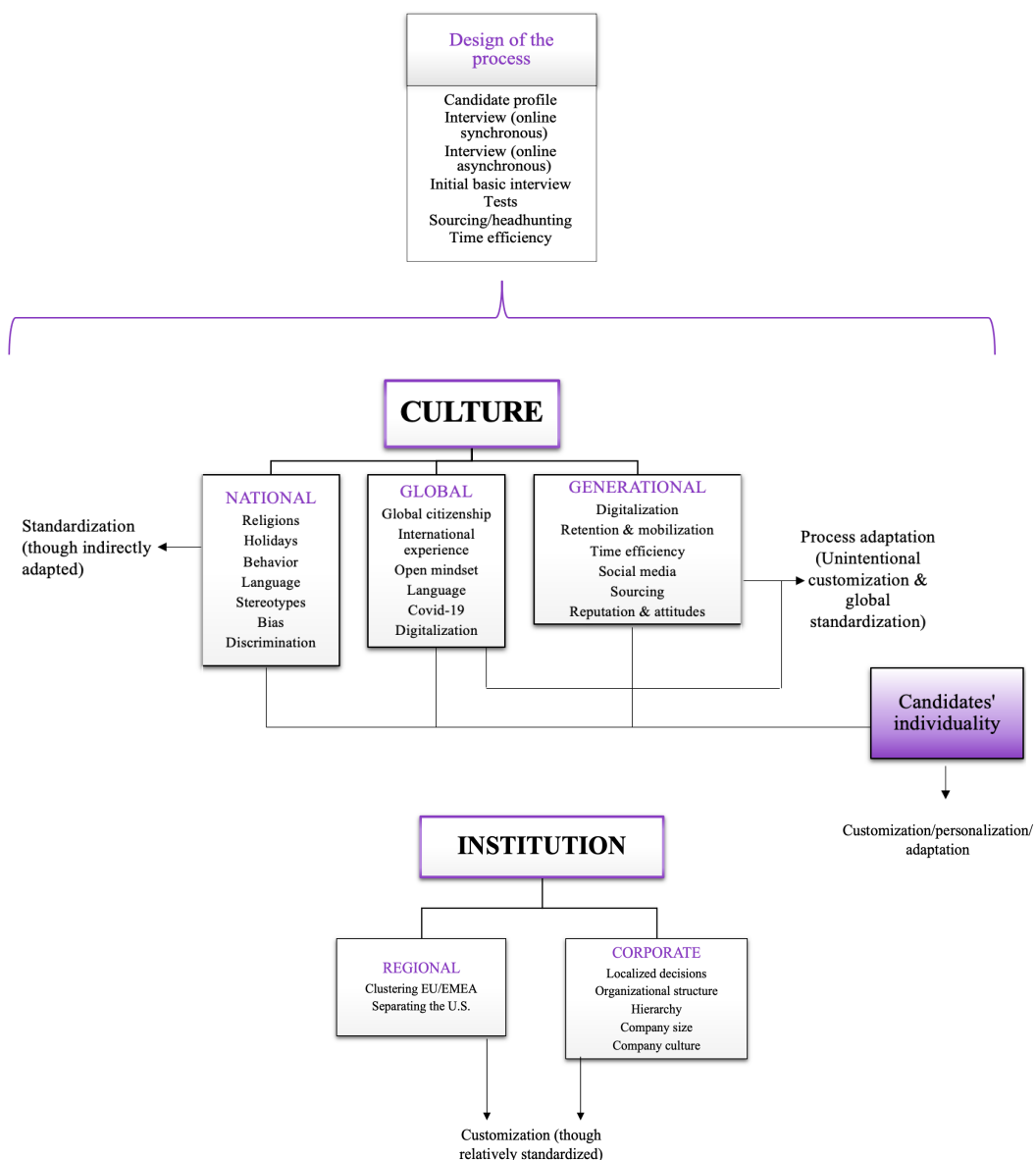


Figure 2. *Final template.*

Results of the empirical findings are presented in chapter 4 which summarizes the data and the identified themes in a descriptive analysis, where citations from the interviews demonstrate the findings. As a complement to Figure 2 as well as those quotations presented in chapter 4, a wider overview of citations extracted from the interview transcripts are presented in Appendix 2, with the purpose of providing transparency of how the themes and codes in the template presented in Figure 2 were developed. However, it is crucial to be informed that the quotations presented in Appendix 2 as well as in chapter 4 are only examples and, thus, do not include all data that was collected for this study and for which the final template, results, and analysis are based on.

While the process design, culture, and institutions are direct findings from the empirical data, the feature of candidate individuality is a deeper interpretation of the results, as to why the theme is highlighted by the differentiated color in the final template in Figure 2. Thus, the aspect of individuality, i.e., the individual characteristics of candidates influenced by the different kinds of cultures, is rather discussed and analyzed theoretically than as empirical data. Hence, it is scrutinized in the theoretical analysis in chapter 5, in which previous research and institutional theory is applied to the findings and hence also including the other themes presented in Figure 2.

3.4 Data quality

While the methodological choices made are proposed from a theoretically grounded base and adheres to the aim of the study, there are naturally shortcomings which need elaboration. Thus, this chapter presents the data quality issues that must be considered throughout this study.

3.4.1 Methodological issues

While the semi-structured interviewing method is argued to be the most appropriate technique for the purpose of this study, it also comes with issues related to the quality of the data and research. One concern is related to the availability of checking accuracy of the findings, which in turn is related to confirmability (Shenton, 2004). To ensure confirmability the methodological shortcomings are discussed below. Another term discussed by Shenton (2004) is dependability, which is related to whether other researchers may find the same results. This issue is also highlighted by Saunders et al. (2009), making it an important

quality issue to consider. To address this problem, Shenton (2004) advises on frequent reporting, which is how this project has been undertaken and the results were written up iteratively in this report during the whole period of the research. This is also related to credibility, which according to Shenton (2004) is essential in qualitative research and may be managed by, for example, establishing a correct research method, ensure honesty in respondents by giving them the opportunity to refuse to participate (elaborated further in chapter 3.5), frequent debriefing, peer scrutiny, and examination of previous academic studies. To ensure credibility, the study has taken all of the above-mentioned actions in mind.

Methodological quality issues of the study also adhere to the low possibility of generalizing results due to the small sample, as well as the sampling technique which does not provide a representative sample. When using a qualitative approach, no statistical generalizations can be made (Saunders et al., 2009). However, a quantitative method would not have been appropriate as an alternative since it would not sufficiently fulfill the aim of exploring the phenomenon in focus. As well, since the study does not strive for generalization or repeatability, it is not realistic to seek to ensure generalizability. An attempt to do so would rather, according to Saunders et al. (2009), undermine the strength of qualitative and non-standardized research. Thus, by exploring the international recruitment and selection process to fulfill the aim of the study might provide guidance for practitioners, however not generalizability. Consequently, it is an important issue for data quality and transferability that a thick description of the topic and context examined is provided, for practitioners to determine whether findings may be applied to their organizations or not (Shenton, 2004). While it is argued that sufficient interview time was allocated to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon, it is also relevant to highlight how the time restraints of completing the study and the time-consuming process of interviewing and transcribing may have impacted on data quality. As presented previously, interviews lasted between 30-50 minutes due to the above-mentioned restraints. While some argue that it is enough time with half an hour for in-depth semi-structured interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), others argue that it is difficult to explore phenomena sufficiently in less than an hour (Saunders et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 2016). Thus, the length of the interviews is a potential data quality issue. However, as Saunders et al. (2009) also demonstrates issues to gain access when interviews are expected to be lengthy and time-consuming, it was unfortunately a compromise that was needed in terms of gaining access to respondents willing and who had time to participate.

3.4.2 Bias

According to Saunders et al. (2009) there are several kinds of biases to consider during in-depth interviews that both the researcher and respondents may be influenced by. To minimize bias caused by the researcher, the questions asked during the interviews were asked in a way that strived for not imposing one's own beliefs or frame of reference, to the extent which is possible in a qualitative study. Adding to that, tone, comments, and non-verbal behavior strived to be neutral (as recommended by Saunders et al., 2009). To overcome bias which may influence the respondent, there were no sensitive questions asked to not make the respondent give inaccurate or false replies. Other bias issues may be related with cultural differences and bias caused by misinterpretation (Saunders et al., 2009), which for this particular study may be an issue since the topic is dependent on international differences and the interviewer and respondents were geographically dispersed. Another potential issue which might have affected the quality of data is language, which according to Welch and Peikkari (2006) is a problem that may arise in qualitative studies conducted through interviewing in the international business environment. The interviews were conducted in English (except for one) since this is the universal language. As this might not be the mother tongue of respondents nor the interviewer, there may be potential misunderstandings arising. While there are some benefits of using foreign languages during qualitative interviews, for example not needing to translate interviews for the sake of reporting (Bryman & Bell, 2015), there are also problems arising due to a threat of inaccuracy in responses (Welch & Peikkari, 2006). However, the choice of semi-structured interviews allows for follow-up questions which can clarify answers, which assures data quality is kept on a good level. However, it is important to consider that misinterpretations that cannot be traced may have been done, although the aim was to not, which are out of control for the researcher of this study.

Since qualitative research is in nature subjective and highly dependent on the researcher's own point of view, this is also an issue that must be considered. According to Taylor et al. (2016), research can never be value free even though qualitative research strives for an understanding of other social actors' perspectives and experiences, and a single viewpoint must be taken. Since the study was undertaken from the organization, recruiter, and manager point of view, there may be shortcomings in the width since the candidate perspective was not examined. Therefore, the research is angled from a company perspective, which is a consequence of the one way defined aim of the study. However, to be able to fulfill the aim

and answer the research questions, the study was required to take on the organizational perspective, rather than the candidate perspective.

3.4.3 Secrecy

Another potential issue affecting the quality of the data retrieved during the interview phase is connected to secrecy. While no respondent indicated that this was a problem, it is not possible to be completely certain that information was not held back. Even though this may be an issue to the data quality, the calculated risk for this event to have happened is small since recruitment processes are not typically subject to secrecy. However, the issue of secrecy is out of control from the researcher of the study. While this would affect the quality of research negatively, it is of greatest importance to research ethics (further elaborated on in section 3.5) that respondents are not pressured to cooperate if it is out of their capacity or authority in order to avoid negative outcomes for individual participants as well as their organizations. To avoid secrecy issues, the respondents were informed about the purpose of the study prior to the interview phase, as well as respondents were able to take part of the interview guide before the interview if they asked for it. Thus, it minimized the threat when respondents were aware of the aim prior to the interviews. The threat is also argued to be minimized since respondents and the organizations are anonymous.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Since the study is undertaken through Dalarna University, the code of ethics of the university was strictly followed. The *Ethics self assessment form for degree projects that involve humans* (Dalarna University, Forskningsetiska nämnden [FEN], n.d.) have been considered and results from the self assessment indicated that there was no need to submit an application to the Research Ethics Board at Dalarna University. However, since ethics, privacy, and consent are highly emphasized aspects, an information letter as well as a consent letter was sent to the participants. The information and consent letters are based on the template and guidelines produced by Dalarna University (Dalarna University, Forskningsetiska nämnden [FEN], 2022), and are presented in Appendix 3 and 4. Thus, all participation in the study was voluntary and participants were thoroughly informed about the terms of their participation. The respondents were also able to withdraw their participation at any point of the process.

There were also no children or vulnerable adults asked to participate in the study, and therefore, no special care treatment was needed related to age and mental capacity. Personal

data has not been handled nor needed to answer the research question and aim of the study. However, interview recordings and transcriptions are part of the research process and these have been stored securely and confidentially handled. Thus, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is strictly followed according to the policy of Dalarna University (2021). For the interviews that were held through Zoom, the participants were allowed to choose whether to use the camera or only audio in respect of their privacy, since usage of the camera might have been a risk of intruding on the participants personal lives because some performed the interview from their home. Two out of the 11 respondents chose to not use cameras during the interview, and one respondent was interviewed by phone meaning that the option of camera was not available. Recordings and transcriptions have been available for respondents if they asked for it but have been deleted upon the completion of the research. Thus, there is no interference with laws or other regulations.

Furthermore, there have been no risks that participants, nor their respective organizations, suffer any physical, mental, economic, social, or legal harm or damages, as well as there was no threat of putting respondents in danger. The only possible loss respondents may have suffered is the one of time, however, respondents were not forced to participate as well as the time of interviews was flexible and adjusted according to the respondents' schedules. All participants, as well as their respective organizations, are kept anonymous to ensure protection of participants, their organizations, as well as good quality data.

Finally, it is important to consider how research methods are suitable for the purpose of producing high quality findings, as well as that the researcher is competent in conducting the study (Denscombe, 2012). As described previously, the chosen method is the most suitable for the project. To ensure this, the researcher that performed the study received training in the method as well as the project was supervised by an Associate Professor and Senior Lecturer in Business Administration and Management at Dalarna University. Finally, the methods used are openly and honestly written and the potential data quality issues of bias and other limitations of the study are reflected on previously in this chapter of the study. There are no sponsorships that may be linked to the study, and participants have been treated with equality, justice, and fair play which makes no risks of scientific integrity.

4. Results

This chapter presents the key results of the interviews and descriptively summarizes the empirical data which will serve as a foundation for the analysis. The structure of the chapter is organized according to the template demonstrated previously in Figure 2 in chapter 3.3. Firstly, the recruitment and selection processes used in practice by the respondents of this study are introduced. Secondly, the aspects of culture which were found to affect the international recruitment process are presented. Finally, the institutional aspects for which the results indicate an effect on the standardization and customization of the recruitment and selection process are demonstrated.

4.1 Design of the international recruitment process

The study found that according to the respondents, the candidate profile and requirements for the position that is subject for hiring are the base for the design of the recruitment process, contributing with the insight that talent planning is a crucial step in international recruitment. The importance of a good base is highlighted by for example respondent I:

“... obviously I need to be able to sell the company and sell the position, but I cannot sell something that I don't know right, so the first step would be to do research. Do as much research as possible, and get as much information as possible ...” (*Respondent I*)

The results of the study also found that candidate profiles are rather standardized across the respective organizations. This is stressed as important by respondent A who discussed how their candidate profiles for the same role are based on identical requirements, for example regarding years of experience, university degrees etc., regardless of the geographical location of the role. While the requirements are naturally differentiated depending on the role, the recruitment process is in general similar. Respondent H additionally argues that the process is similar for all roles as well as in all countries but with additional interviews if the role is on a senior level, highlighting the benefits of standardization:

“... I would say that the processes are definitely, ... similar from position to another, the only difference is, you know if we go maybe higher in the the level of the position maybe there will be more interviews ... but yeah it's pretty much standardized. ... for whatever the country is. In Spain or Sweden ..., the requirements will be the same so, I guess having standardized the process... we will have the same quality of person.” (*Respondent H*)

A common selection method used in the international recruitment process was found to be interviewing, and specifically online synchronous interviewing. This study found that the recruiters are mostly part of the initial interview, which can be said to start with a broad perspective. To exemplify, respondent F performs the first part of the recruitment process, where the initial interview is based on presenting the job to the candidate, as well as collecting information about their expectations of the opening. After that, the candidate performs additional interviews which are conducted by hiring managers. Similar to this, respondent J also performs the first interviews which are basic and rudimentary focusing on the company culture-fit of the respondent, and additional interviews are conducted by other stakeholders in the organization. In the case of respondent I, the first interview is described as a phone screening, which is informal and has more of an introductory character rather than assessing the candidate. The other respondents have similar processes and respondent B also highlights how the first interview is also for the applicant to familiarize with the company, rather than only the company getting to know the candidate:

“... we get the chance to exchange information regarding the job position, and assess whether the job is suitable for the candidate and, and it's important that the candidate should get a feeling for what the members of the management are like, and it will help to you know influence whether they want this position or not.” *(Respondent B)*

Thus, the first rounds of interviews were found to be conducted by the recruiter, while second or even third and fourth interviews are conducted by other persons of relevance within the organization, who then makes the final hiring decision. That makes the process rather lengthy with multiple interviews for candidates to go through before reaching a hiring decision. Despite that, the respondents also declare that it still makes sense to keep the first round of interviewing quite general as it is a first meeting between the candidate and their potential future employer. This is exemplified by respondent J who argues that the first interview is essential to not waste time:

“Sometimes some people have a lot of expectations from the company, ... so it's good to know where the person stands at rather than wasting the entire process ... So I always make sure I set the criteria at the start so that I don't waste the candidates as well as the company time ...”
(Respondent J)

As mentioned, findings show that online synchronous interviewing is a popular method in the international context. However, the interviewing process of which respondent A is part of differs, as only this respondent uses asynchronous interviewing as a selection tool. Therefore, the first interview is conducted solely by using digital tools, and not even by a recruiter involved in the actual interview. In this case, the asynchronous interview is conducted prior to two or three synchronous online interviews which follow later in the process, conducted by the recruiters which in the end are the decision makers. Respondent A highlights how the company culture-fit is important even in the second and third rounds of interviews for entry roles, and how their interviews are all competency-based as well as that the corporate values play a big role in the creation of candidate profiles:

“... we make sure they fit with the requirements, we assess them against the (company specific corporate values) ... so competency-based interviews, that we manage both in the video interview and the final interviews, everything is competency-based.” (*Respondent A*)

Furthermore, respondent G expresses one's opinion about how interviewing is the best selection tool to assess candidates, whether it being a long in-depth interview or an initial phone call, especially when assessing soft skills. However, to assess some hard skills, using tests might be a necessary tool according to respondent G, even though the organization does not use tests in the international recruitment process. For example, concerning tests such as intelligence, aptitude, personality, or work sample tests, this study found that the choice to include such tests depends on the qualifications and requirements for the role. This consequently makes the required skills and competencies of the role the determinants of what type of test is included in the respondents' recruitment processes. Further examples are portrayed by respondent B, C, and F, who specifically mentioned that recruiting for roles within IT needs a test task to be able to assess the level of competency of the candidate. However, respondent C discusses how test tasks are not only used to determine the skill level, but also to assess ethical approaches to handle the test:

“... for digital marketing, we do not have a test task. However when it comes to IT, you must have a task that just to see ... if they're able to write the code, how they write the code, if their way of writing is ethical even, ... you don't want to put someone in your company that is not going to follow the guidelines or just the way you do things.” (*Respondent C*)

Regardless of that, all candidates no matter of cultural background or nationality are given the same task and are being assessed in the same way. It was also found that the tests are adjusted according to organizational culture, which in turn was found to be affected by the culture of the company's origin. The results also show that the company culture influences the decision on whether to include tests as a selection tool. Respondent J argues that their company culture is not only important in terms of how well the candidate fits in, but also that it is imprinted by the European culture as to why tests are not used anywhere in the company:

“... for me it's more of a culture-fit, if they fit the company, if they fit the team, ... because in my company, culture-fit is very very important ... it's a very European culture we have ... my company also doesn't believe in actually testing out someone, sending out assignments and all of that.” (*Respondent J*)

Due to the high competition for talent which exists in the global environment, a part of international recruitment which the majority of respondents include in their work is headhunting. Headhunting is conducted at the beginning of the process and is for example a method used by respondents B, J, E, F, D, G, and I as a part of their daily job tasks. This study found headhunting to be an important recruitment method in the global competitive environment and according to respondent E, headhunting is even a necessary method in international recruitment. Respondent E also describes headhunting as the part of the process which still needs humans, which relates to the otherwise digitized process:

“... it's a necessary method and I'm happy for headhunting because it means that we still need humans to do that, ... we still need that human touch, I think, in order to have the right, you know quality candidates.” (*Respondent E*)

The method of sourcing is described as relatively new, which in turn makes it more adjusted towards the younger generation which are the users of social media, and thus it was found to be connected to digitalization and globalization. Moreover, it also was found to have a connection to the time efficiency of the recruitment process, which this study found being more important in the global competitive environment as well as since the context was found to be subject for higher levels of mobilization. While many of the respondents describe their process as lengthy or intensive, they also emphasize the importance of efficiency, not to lose talents. Respondent E described their process as quick and focused on time efficiency

meaning that the process only takes about 10-12 days, from the point of initial contact until a final decision:

“What kind of like sets us aside from different companies is that like our recruitment process usually takes ... 10 to 12 days, so we kind of work fast. We ... believe in the time efficiency and we really put like I said emphasis on that one.” (*Respondent E*)

In connection with the time efficiency aspect, respondent J argued that keeping the initial stage of the recruitment process within two weeks is a main objective across the organization. Despite that, the process of interviewing is more time consuming due to it consisting of multiple interviews, as well as the intensity may vary globally. For instance, in the U.S., the process of respondent J's organization is compressed into one day full of interviews, while in Europe it is rather spread out making the process lengthier:

“I usually ask the managers and their teammates to give me an availability as fast as possible because I can crunch it below two weeks, and finish off the process because we have quite a big process, because ... after I interview a candidate we usually have at least a minimum of four rounds of interviews, with different teams ...” (*Respondent J*)

4.2 Culture

In terms of cultural aspects, the findings revealed that it may be divided into three categories which are national, global, and generational. The national culture relates to the stereotypes, different values, beliefs, behaviors, and norms of different countries, as well as religious traditions and holidays, language differences, and varying company reputation across the world. The global culture represents the aspects of global citizenship, international experience which consequently is creating open-mindedness, as well as the aspect of common languages. While the national and global cultures were somewhat foreseen themes to be further explored, the study additionally resulted in generational culture to be a phenomenon appearing in the international context. The generational culture may be explained as a culture shared by the younger generation, as a result of globalization and digitalization, and thus is connected to the aspects of global culture. These three different culture types will be further explained in the following subchapters.

4.2.1 National culture

Findings of this study showed national variations of features related to for example formality or informality in the use of language, work ethics, mindsets, personality traits, as well as how candidates engage in the recruitment process for instance in terms of questions asked and general contact between the candidate and recruiter. Based on this, adjustments were found to be made by international recruiters causing a customized approach. For instance, respondent F highlights the actions candidates take during the process which may be somewhat generalized as characteristics as from the nation they come from:

“Spanish people are ... energetic and warm, during the interview and during the recruitment process. ... German people are like more cold, ... they have so much confidence, and they are asking like specific questions about the process, about the next step and ... for kind of Turkish people like, ... asking like many many questions ... Taiwan people like sending a little follow up email.” (*Respondent F*)

While these aspects have been noticed as a difference between national cultures, they are treated by the respondents as individual differences. For example, concerning religious traditions or holidays, respondents A and B specifically mentioned that actions are taken to reschedule interviews and adjust the process in a way that is preferred by the candidate. Nevertheless, to ensure that discrimination is avoided, respondent A argues that these aspects are respected in any country since religions may not solely adhere to nationality:

“... we decided that anyone who is going through the process, who is observing Ramadan, ... even if they're from you know the UK, ... because obviously we can't discriminate, ... we say 'if you're observing Ramadan please let us know and we will completely adhere to your needs'.” (*Respondent A*)

While this approach towards adjusting the process according to national culture is also focused on avoiding discrimination, it was found that there are no specific changes to the methods made by the organizations. In terms of sourcing and headhunting, however, the need of avoiding discrimination when customizing according to national culture was found to be less of a problem. Respondent E simply argues that they refrain from contacting potential candidates with certain nationalities, for example focusing on the Asian market rather than European market during Christmas time, which is a matter of respect. The reason why the risk of discriminating candidates may be smaller during the headhunting phase is because

they are not actually in the process yet. As described by respondent I, even though potential candidates are sourced and contacted by the recruiter, the candidates must actively apply for the job before they may be considered as part of the talent pool and additional information may be collected, due to institutional matters such as GDPR. Thus, customizing the headhunting according to national culture was found to be less problematic than customizing the selection process, i.e., when the candidate has actively applied for a position. To additionally exemplify this aspect, even though a lot of the organization employees of the company respondent G works for is working remotely, the respondent usually has predetermined countries and nations to source from which are determined centrally based on organizational strategies. Thus, it highlights how targeting specific countries and nations is possible in the sourcing and headhunting phase:

“... we're assigned with specific markets, target countries, where I should look for candidates. ... I have for example Slovakia, Malta, and Cyprus, ... because those are our attractive markets for expanding our business.” (*Respondent G*)

Further findings regarding headhunting show a standardized method such as a standard and generic message that is sent to potential candidates, which does not take national culture into account. While the reply rate may differ between national cultures and candidates from different countries, respondent D argued that national culture in terms of language have a great impact on the success of headhunting, since applicants are more prone to reply when approached in their own language:

“... for example if I source to countries around me, ... they tend to answer me more because I understand their language and I approach to them in their own language. So that language barrier doesn't exist there. ... We are trying to find people who speak the same language and who have the same culture as the markets where we are working in.” (*Respondent D*)

Thus, respondent D means that sourcing may be customized according to national culture for instance by translating messages to other languages, or by localizing the sourcing to domestic headhunters. This issue is also touched upon by respondent C, who argues that localizing recruitment activities in general is a better approach since there are always cultural matters related to nationality involved to consider:

“So when you have someone that is local from there, just knows the culture, knows the people, you're much better prepared to tailor your recruitment approach to people, your interview

approach, and it's not just about people, how people behave, it's about their financial expectation, about their willingness to ... even talk about money.” (*Respondent C*)

Concerning headhunting and national culture, respondent D additionally argued that some platforms are more popular in some countries. An example in relation to this proposed by respondent D is that some cultures do not use LinkedIn, which is the main sourcing tool used by the respondent. This is also agreed upon by respondent K who argue that social media such as Instagram and Facebook in general are focused on the Western world and thus appropriate when targeting applicants from those countries and cultures, in turn to find candidates who fits in with the company culture:

“... we have chosen a Western model, by using such social media for example. It's simply because you want a uniformity in the culture, now we are talking about (company specific reference) culture and it is just like any other culture, it differs depending on where you come from.” (*Respondent K*)

Additionally, when it comes to the interviewing phase, respondent J describes how video conferencing tools such as Zoom may be forbidden in some countries, for instance Iran, which also highlights the institutional restraints causing customization to their recruitment process. However, the results mostly indicate less of a difference in terms of social media usage between national cultures. For example, respondent G argues that there are no differences in culture regarding social media usage and specifically concerning sourcing and LinkedIn. Another example is respondent C, who argues that younger people use the same social media, which leads to the next cultural types presented in this study, the global culture and the generational culture, which are closely related and presented more in depth in chapter 4.2.2 and 4.2.3.

Returning to the topic of discrimination for which results present as a potential issue when recruiting internationally, there are also biases of the recruiter that may affect the international recruitment and selection process. While most of the respondents regard themselves as inclusive and open to any culture or nationality of candidates, they realize that everyone is affected by the culture of the nation they come from. As well, personal life experiences consequently affect how recruiters as individuals perform the recruitment and selection process. However, to avoid this affecting the candidates in a negative way, standardization of the process was found to eliminate some of the threat. For instance, this could be by interviewing all candidates in the same language, having two independent

persons conducting the interview, or different decision makers judging by a globally standardized profile. These examples are pointed out by respondents E, I, and A:

“... there's a lot of stereotypes are always present, ... for example even if I'm conducting an interview with somebody from the Balkan countries you know where we all speak the same language, I still try to do it in English ... just to kind of get rid of those biases.” (*Respondent E*)

“... I think it's so important, I know that the interviews now are conducted by two different stakeholders, that's done to minimize bias.” (*Respondent I*)

“... everything is exactly the same in every single country, so we have final hiring decisions made by many different stakeholders across the EU because we hold one hiring bar.” (*Respondent A*)

4.2.2 Global culture

The global culture may be defined as a result of digitalization and globalization. The respondents of this study agree that it is most definitely a global phenomenon influencing the design of the international recruitment and selection process. One concept that was found contributing to global culture is the international experience of a person. Respondent E described international experience as contributing to a mixture of cultures for an individual that in turn have positive effects on how the recruitment process is conducted. Another example is presented by respondent C, who despite arguing that recruitment is based on judging individuals which in turn is done based on personal values and beliefs, also discusses that international experiences contributes to an open-minded approach, and thus minimizing bias and discrimination. Respondent I also discusses international experiences and labels it by global citizenship:

“... I'm a big supporter and fan of the concept of global citizenship. ... I have a lot of international friends, I used to live abroad and I really like, appreciate cultural diversity, I think it's very enriching.” (*Respondent I*)

Overall, globalization in conjunction with digitalization was found to create a unified culture across the globe, such as for example similar trends of social media across the world as alluded previously. Other evidence of the emerging global culture highlighted by respondent I is how LinkedIn, one of the most popular tools for headhunting in the international context, recently introduced the EU as a filter for location. Consequently, this means that recruiters,

sourcers, and headhunters may search the whole of the EU simultaneously rather than each country separately. This is a function that respondent I describe as game changing for international recruitment. However, even though these results present possibilities of standardizing the recruitment and selection process regarding global culture, there may still be slight adjustments made to adapt to the local environment. According to respondent A, these adjustments are mostly needed in terms of attracting candidates, while the international recruitment process and the methods used to select candidates remain standardized:

“The process is exactly the same, for everyone. I would just need to learn and adapt to that specific culture in terms of attraction, but I could hire in North America tomorrow if you asked me to, because the process is exactly the same, and I think that’s important in terms of flexibility.” (*Respondent A*)

As previously demonstrated in relation to national culture, some respondents mentioned that languages of different nations may create barriers and appear as an obstacle for international recruitment, as well as it may need customization to communicate with candidates. Despite that, from the global culture perspective there are also respondents who argue that a universal language (i.e., English), is a key to removing barriers and creating common grounds. Respondent B describes how people become more homogeneous when having a common language:

“... if you speak English you become similar you know ... cultural differences doesn't affect, because you know it transcends, languages and nationality.” (*Respondent B*)

Finally, it was found that the recent outbreak of the Covid-19 virus and the pandemic that came along with it had impacts not only on how work is performed, but also on the design of the international recruitment process. Some of the respondents argue that it contributed to the global culture since digitalization increased, as well as remote working became more popular. While remote working was a necessity during the pandemic, the respondents argue that it will remain as an option. Likewise, this is also the case for online interviewing. However, respondent C still believes physical interviews are more suitable for recruitment since online interviewing does not give an accurate image of a candidate, and respondent I specifically highlights how recruitment changed due to the pandemic and in terms of creating global citizenship:

“... during virtual interviews you're not able to see exactly the whole picture. ... you're missing out on body language, on just the way people behave. People behave quite differently

when you're face to face ... here comes the, the conflict between face to face and online, however feel like most people are going to stick to ... online.” (*Respondent C*)

“I think the one thing that really had a huge impact in recruitment was Covid, because the one good thing about Covid is that people actually discovered that ... they could do it remotely, ... So, before Covid, I'd never seen a position that could be based anywhere in EMEA.” (*Respondent I*)

4.2.3 Generational culture

The generational culture is evidently caused by globalization and digitalization, and findings of the study disclose that it has effects on the standardization and customization of the recruitment and selection process. The existence of a generational culture is highlighted by several respondents, for example respondents C and B:

“... a teenager from the U.S. and a teenager from Germany, they are both on the same app, they both have similar views on politics, ethics, environment, and things like that. ... now it's more a generational difference rather than a regional difference.” (*Respondent C*)

“... when we were teenagers we didn't really have Internet and now they have Internet the younger generation, they ... become more, ... understandable, ... about the culture and about internationality and they're very open-minded.” (*Respondent B*)

Results disclose that the global culture apparently has a larger imprint on the younger generations. In addition, respondents argue that globalization is also causing larger mobilization and willingness among young talents to relocate while older people were said to be more risk averse. However, the mobility of the younger generation is also creating retention issues, as well as globalization creates large competition in turn making retention of employees a challenge. Respondent J describes the global market as ‘a candidate's market’, with the applicants given the upper hand. Consistently, respondent C specifically describes how leaving a stable job for a competitive pay at another global company is something occurring often among the younger people. Thus, the recruitment process cannot be too lengthy, as there seems to be a trend among youngsters to switch jobs frequently which makes a need for an attractive and efficient recruitment and selection process. This was found specifically true when also accounting for the high competition for talent in the global context. When discussing the relevance of asynchronous interviewing, respondent C emphasizes that it is one of the steps which would make an international recruitment process burdened:

“... the employer is not only choosing an employee, ... a candidate is also choosing a company. So it has to be a balanced process, you cannot ask that much out of a candidate without giving them something in return.” (*Respondent C*)

Even though the problem of retention occurs after the recruitment and selection process, it was found to have implications for the design of recruitment methods. For instance, in the early stages of recruitment of graduates (i.e., the younger generation), respondent A argues that it is of importance to research and attract the young top talents, for example by working with the leading universities. Additionally, the company reputation is also a means to attract candidates in the global environment. However, this aspect does not only differ between national cultures, but is also affected by the generational culture:

“... Millennials love (company name), and I’m gonna be completely honest; Gen Z does not ... it’s a complete shift and complete change in culture, in attitudes, ... I’ve done a lot of research on it but it’s a big challenge.” (*Respondent A*)

Another finding of the study corresponds to the recruitment sources which are chosen. Respondent D argues that the older generation is not using social media to the extent that the younger generation is, which makes it more difficult to reach older generations through social media and the method of headhunting. Findings additionally suggest that the choice of social media platforms to source candidates on is also connected to the target candidate, again emphasizing the importance of creating a good candidate profile to know who the target is. While some of the respondents report on usage of platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Google, etc., the most frequently mentioned platform was LinkedIn and specifically LinkedIn Recruiter which provides additional functions for recruiters. However, the choice of recruitment source, and thus also the social media platform, is dependent on target candidates. Consequently, it is a generational question of where the target candidates are active. For example, respondent D discussed that the platforms must be professional when approaching people who possess financial stability (i.e., the older generation), meaning that TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook are not suitable to reach the older generation. As well, it has connections to how the company is presented externally to in turn create a good employer reputation. According to respondent K, the target candidates for their roles are people from 20 years up to 40 years old. Thus, their focal platforms used to communicate with candidates are Instagram and Facebook (however not used for headhunting purposes but rather to attract and communicate with applicants). In this sense, they are excluding for example TikTok due to the even younger audience of that specific media.

4.3 Institutions

In terms of institutional aspects, findings observe that laws, regulations, and corporate policies are placing restraints on the extent to which the recruitment process may be standardized. The foremost crucial aspect to abide by within this area were naturally found to be the labor laws and regulations which need to be considered when hiring personnel. On the one hand, these seem to be quite similar in different countries, with some exceptions where there are small adjustments to be made which may make the recruitment process longer time wise. On the other hand, the generic recruitment processes of the organizations are mostly applicable anywhere making the institutional environments of the world fairly similar in this sense.

4.3.1 Regional institutions

Despite that the recruitment and selection processes were found to be rather standardized across the world in all the respondents' respective organizations, there is a division between regions. For example, the clustering of EMEA is frequently used, as well as divisions within this region are also attempted such as the Nordic countries, Southern Europe, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, and Middle Eastern. For example, respondent H oversees Southern Europe as well as Latin America, while other members of the recruitment team handle the Nordic countries, Germany, as well as Middle Eastern. However, it was found that it is not necessarily the recruitment and selection process which is customized. The process appears to be taking on the same methods and structures regardless of region, but the partition of different recruitment teams is making the practice customized. For instance, respondent A, who is part of the EMEA recruitment team of the organization, called attention to how standardizing the recruitment process is crucial even though there are different recruitment teams:

“... standardization is important, in terms of recruiting processes you know the video interview, the final interviews, everyone goes through the same, cause we do exactly the same as North America ... so I think in terms of recruiting process everyone should go through the same thing for the same role ...” (*Respondent A*)

The above citation from respondent A also represents the most apparent regional division which was found to be sort of best practice in international recruitment. That is, to separate the recruitment process of North America (mainly the U.S.) from the one of the EMEA region, to be conducted by different recruitment teams. The respondents, who are all based in

the EMEA region, indicated that these divisions are mostly made because of institutional aspects which place restraints on hiring from or within the U.S., as well as that legislation differs which creates a need to separate the regions:

“... it's possible to work almost from anywhere in the world, excluding some countries like the U.S.A because of the laws in those countries.” (*Respondent D*)

“Europe is completely different from ... U.S. ... in U.S. you're not allowed to ask someone what is their salary or what is their expected salary. That's, that's apparently illegal and and there are certain rules that you ... can't talk about the salary until you reach the final stage.” (*Respondent J*)

Additionally, the free movement of labor within the EU simply makes it easier to recruit talents within the EU to work at another location within the EU. As well, it reduces the costs associated with the recruitment and onboarding process. This was found to be a reason that international operating companies tend to stay within the EU even though the recruitment is open to any nationality. This is exemplified by respondent H:

“... we will always go for the European guys first ... because it's it's easier for us..., if we decide for example to to hire someone who comes from India ... the administrative process is so long, it's so tough to, you know getting the pay, the visa, and the permit and so on.” (*Respondent H*)

However, even though the respondents argue that it is easier to recruit within the EU and separate the recruitment processes, there are implications that recruiting international talent and sacrificing short term loss for long-term value is an opportunity cost which should be taken. Respondent J is one of the advocates for this aspect, as well as respondent I who specifically described how the costs are small compared to the return on investment which human resources will turn out to in the long-term perspective:

“... we're happy to do it, and you know I think it's very sad to see, ... but a lot of companies all over the world were very reluctant in doing so, because you're missing out on so much potential just because you don't want to spend that extra, I don't know, 1000 euros.” (*Respondent I*)

Thus, it is not impossible to comply with the institutional aspects to recruit internationally or outside of the EU. However, it certainly creates obstacles as well as it was found to be time consuming and inconvenient, and in some cases recruiting internationally is a problem due to national laws requiring to hire national citizens. For example, this is highlighted by

respondent K and C. Due to the institutional aspects and legislations of different countries creating hindrances to recruit internationally, respondent C expresses a wish to only recruit within the borders of the country to avoid inconveniences:

“Bulgaria is part of the EU, however, that's this big however, you have laws that require you to hire Bulgarian nationals and if you ... do not want to have a Bulgarian national you have to, ... point out to the government that you are not able to find a Bulgarian for the position, ... when possible we stay away from such inconveniences.” (*Respondent C*)

4.3.2 Corporate institutions

As explained previously, some of the respondents in their role of being a recruiter conduct headhunting to find potential candidates as well as the initial interviews with applicants. Later in the process, they hand it over to the hiring manager, unit manager, or another local stakeholder of the country in which the candidate will be based. Findings present this to be because of the benefits of localizing the process in turn due to institutional differences. For example, respondent D describes how there is a legal department in charge of handling the compliance to different countries' labor laws. Additionally, while there are standardized contracts used in the final hiring stages, respondent D argues that institutions such as labor laws do not play a big role for the headhunters at the company and thus at the sourcing phase of the recruitment process:

“... they pay in their own country for themselves, they pay their taxes, health insurance and stuff like that. So ... our contract is standardized ... for the whole world. ... Because we really have experienced legal department and they constantly research countries labor laws ... so I've seen that labor laws and cultures do not play a big role in our side of the job.” (*Respondent D*)

As well, the company of respondent I uses a payroll service provider which creates a legal entity for the organization in the whole region of EMEA, again emphasizing the localization but also possibilities of clustering according to this region. In the case of respondent J there are also third-party organizations involved which are localized to handle the institutional aspects such as the payroll levels of different countries, for which the recruiters themselves are unaware of or unable to administer. These findings are also highlighted in terms of the selection process since the final hiring decisions are made by local hiring managers, as emphasized by most of the respondents. However, the process which respondent A is part of differs, since the final decision is not localized to the hiring manager or unit manager, but rather to any interviewer at any location within the region. This was found to have a

connection to the company context and structure which respondent A argues to be highly centralized. As well, with around a million employees worldwide, this particular organization is much larger than the other organizations in this study. However, even though the process is, according to respondent A, currently standardized for which there is a clear need, there seems to be a wish for a customized process but which is pointed out to be possible only for smaller companies:

“... my team hires a thousand people plus a year, we have to have the same processes throughout the team to assure that we can manage the volume, ... If we were a small company, and I was hiring you know two people a year ... I could absolutely customize my process. ... and actually I'd probably like to.” (*Respondent A*)

Similar to this standardized process, respondent H who works for a company with around 8000 employees which may be characterized as a large company, also acknowledges how standardization of the process is affected by the company size and in terms of efficiency:

“... we have entities in so many different countries, if we were to customize the recruitment for every country ... would be tough to be honest, ... I believe having everything the same way for all the countries is ... more efficient for us.” (*Respondent H*)

As mentioned, the company of respondent A has a hierarchy structure, and the recruitment and selection methods are centrally decided making it standardized across all their operations. Respondent K also recruits for a large organization which has a centralized hierarchy structure. In this organization, the effect of the hierarchy is evident through a central document regulating what methods as well as recruitment communication channels to use during the recruitment process. According to respondent K, this is mainly to control that a unified process is in place and integrated across the organization's units. However, findings of this study implies that this is also the case for some of the smaller organizations. One example is the company of respondent D who argues that the hierarchy creates a lengthy international recruitment process, as well as it creates a standardization across the company and thus also the world:

“... it's a big structure of interviewing, and the whole process is really big, but that's not up to me to decide and that's up to our higher managers and our owners. ... we have like standard that process of recruitment and sourcing because, I kind of use the same methods in every country ... because they are standardized not just in our company, but in other international companies that use the same method of sourcing candidates ...” (*Respondent D*)

As implied by respondent D, other international companies use the same sourcing and headhunting methods as part of the international recruitment process, which is also evident by results of this study. For example, the recruitment process of the organization of respondent D remains lengthy despite their relatively small company size. Nevertheless, when comparing it to the organizational size of respondent E, which only consists of approximately ten employees, there are no clear signs that the recruitment process of the company of respondent E would be more customized than the one of respondent D. They are both standardizing the process, while final interviews and decisions are more customized and localized according to corporate policies and managers locations. However, as respondent E highlighted, it becomes even more crucial that creating time efficient international recruitment processes is more important for small companies. In additional remarks, while most of the respondents' organizations are imprinted by hierarchical and centralized structures, respondent J is recruiting for a decentralized organization. Regarding corporate policies, there are no such regulations which would constraint the international recruitment process. However, the process remains standardized across their locations since the company culture works as an informal guiding framework, as well as it flourishes the general recruitment process towards being integrated across all their operations:

“...we just have a concrete process that we go through in the company, ... we don't have anything policy as such, ... we basically try to maintain a flat hierarchy in the company ...”

(Respondent J)

5. Analysis of the international recruitment process

This chapter presents the discussion of possible reasons behind the empirical findings, as well as it presents a conceptualization and reflection upon the findings. Firstly presented is a modification of the model presented initially by Darrag et al. (2010), based on the results of this study and how the international recruitment process is practically conducted regarding its standardization and customization. Compared to the first model presented in chapter 2.1, an additional stage in the core recruitment process was added due to its significance for the standardization and customization of the process. Based on research findings, the model indicates that towards the end of the international recruitment process, it becomes more customized. Therefore, the highest level of standardization will be processed in the preliminary recruitment process, to avoid discrimination as well as to produce an efficient process. The model is presented in Figure 3, and a detailed analysis of the focal stages will follow in the sequent chapters.

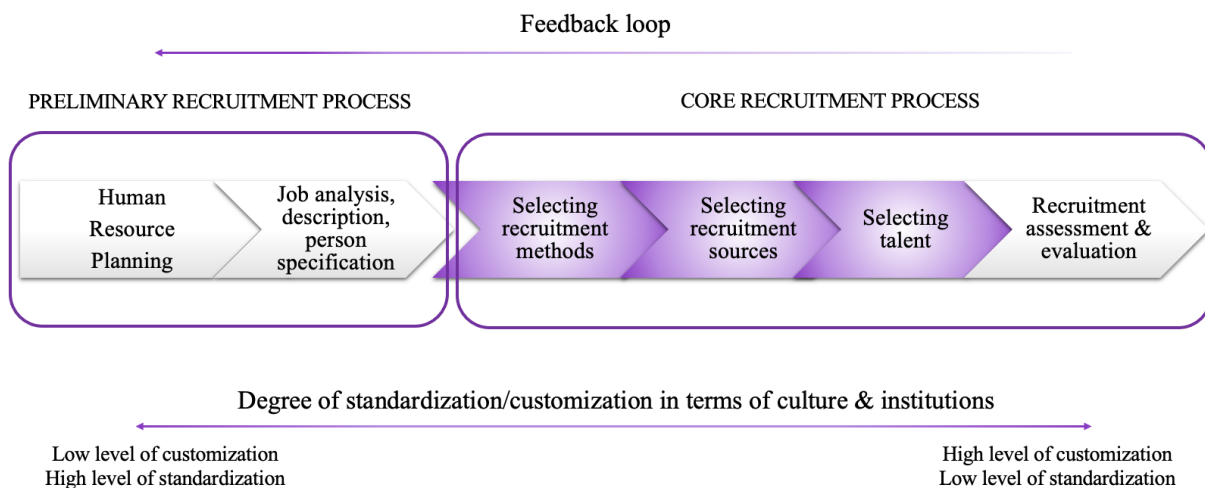


Figure 3. *Modified version of the international recruitment process. Developed from Darrag et al. (2010).*

5.1 Preliminary recruitment process

While the preliminary recruitment process is not the center of attention in this study, it is essential for the sake of analysis to shortly highlight how the preliminary process is conducted in the international context since it is a crucial ground for the next phase, i.e., the core recruitment process. Based on the findings of this study, the degree of standardization

and customization may be assessed at different levels such as depending on the position that is being filled, or across the global operations which is the primary focus here. The candidate profile was found to be of crucial importance when designing the recruitment and selection process, as respondents argued that research about the role prior to the recruitment is essential. In addition, candidate profiles were discovered to be standardized across the organization's different international operations. The recruitment process in general came across as standardized no matter of location or roles, hence not accounting for cultural differences. Consistently, no specific indication of institutional interference with the standardization approach at this point of recruitment was made, which is why standardization was found to be the most efficient way of designing the process. Thus, the process is in general characterized by a low level of customization in the preliminary phase of the process, and therefore a higher level of standardization at the same phase as shown in Figure 3.

In relation to the previous research presented earlier, Van de Vijver (2008)'s results indicated that there may be different groups even within the same profession. In this study's perspective, it would be applied as if groups are segmented according to cultures and nations. However, judging by the respondents' statements, no such customization of clusters and adjustments of the recruitment process was made. It was rather a standardized approach in the early stages of recruitment that was taken. Additionally, no specific differences were found regarding the perspective of how the international recruitment was undertaken (i.e., which borders were crossed during the hiring process), which again makes results inconsistent with Van de Vijver (2008)'s above-mentioned results. As presented as part of the conceptual framework, culture and institutions were argued to be affecting the HR practices especially in the international context (Lazarova et al., 2017). However, with a lot of previous research pointing toward customization, there was still said to be a lack of consensus. For the preliminary stage of the recruitment process, this study found the process to be standardized and hence contradicting earlier researchers such as Lazarova et al. (2017), Van de Vijver (2008) and more. In this case, the findings may instead be explained with results of those that advocate standardization of the process, such as Kabwe and Okorie (2019) who argued that global integration and thus standardization is essential, which in the preliminary stages was found to be accurate in this study. As well, the reasons for it may be elucidated by Kabwe and Okorie (2019) who additionally argued that alignment of recruitment design with the corporate values is a determinant of selection and assessment tools. Hence, this again provides arguments for the advantages of implementing standardized processes, which may

explain the results regarding the standardized approach of the preliminary phases. In relation to institutional theory, the fact that organizations seem to take on the same kind of standardization in the early process could be explained by isomorphism. According to Björkman and Gooderham (2012), shared beliefs and meanings will result in similarity in organizations. This may demonstrate why the preliminary recruitment process is presented as standardized within all respondents' organizations. In addition, it may be connected to DiMaggio and Powell (1983)'s concepts of mimetic and normative isomorphism. Thus, it creates a best practice for standardization at this stage, meaning that as it is regarded as successful, other organizations in the international environment will adopt similar practices. Hence, isomorphic behavior could explain why the process and the presented model is generally standardized in the preliminary recruitment process.

5.2 Core recruitment process

When moving into the core recruitment process which has been the heart of this study, the process is seemingly gradually turning towards a more customized process. However, the process is still adhering to a mostly high level of standardization in the beginning. This subchapter describes the standardization and customization of the core process, i.e., selecting recruitment methods and sources as well as selecting talents.

5.2.1 Selecting recruitment methods and sources

The line between the first two stages of the core process, selecting recruitment methods and sources, was found relatively blurred which is why they are treated as one step for the analysis. In comparison to Darrag et al. (2010)'s original model, the choice of recruitment methods is in this study, as described in the conceptual framework, only related to the external process. It is also based on the tools and practices used to find and recruit international talent, as well as it is highly interconnected to the selection of sources, i.e., where the talent pool is derived from.

In terms of institutions, these stages of the core process are suggested to be standardized in general. Corporate policies, hierarchy, and organizational size were some of the influencing institutional matters. It was found that large hierarchy, large organizations, and great controlling corporate policies indicate a high level of standardization due to the efficiency of such a design. In relation to Björkman and Gooderham (2012)'s presentation of how parent

organizations impose pressure on the local level to create global integration, this may explain why centralized organizations take on this kind of standardization. However, standardization at this stage of the process was also found in this study as a condition in the smaller organizations and more decentralized organizations. These results may thus be acknowledged by findings of Darrag et al. (2010), who in relation to the initial model presented in chapter 2.1 argued that smaller organizations adopt a more formal process. However, Darrag et al. (2010) also found that these results contradicted previous studies. Thus, there was no concurrence among previous researchers, and this may therefore unravel why this study found institutions such as the company structure and size to have similar effects on the international recruitment process regardless of the different organizational types. While Darrag et al. (2010)'s arguments were applied specifically for the preliminary and final stages, this study also found standardized designs appropriate for the core process. Thus, since both large and small organizations standardized their methods, it means that not only such institutional structures matter. For example, it was found that company culture may also be a corporate institution which affects how the recruitment and selection process is designed in decentralized organizations. In one of the cases in this study, it was more towards standardizing the process and specifically the methods and sources used across the units. Thus, the model in Figure 3 indicates that the beginning of the core process is relatively standardized.

However, the methods and sources are also leaning towards customization since results indicated some adaptation according to regions. Nevertheless, the regional divisions were in practice found to be quite large, meaning that numerous countries were included in the same region. This was found due to similar institutional conditions specifically within the EU, making the recruitment sources fairly standardized since many nations and candidates could be grouped and concertedly targeted. As well, it was found that some laws are restraining European based organizations to hire abroad or outside of the EU. These findings influenced the international recruitment process of different organizations towards taking on the same kind of structures regarding the division of regions. In turn, this is argued to create legitimacy as well as a best practice to cluster countries into specific regions. As a consequence, it creates a customization of methods and sources to be adjusted according to certain national norms of operation locations. It was additionally found that company culture may be based on the region where the headquarters of the organization is based, for instance Europe, in turn making the process adjusted according to European norms. Connected to the concept

presented by Van de Vijver (2008) regarding test norms which were found to be retrieved from Western focus groups, the same concept may be applied here in the overall decision of recruitment methods and sources. In this study, this concept was for example highlighted when choosing social media platforms for communication with candidates. These sources were found to be based on Western norms or on cultural preferences due to having a specific target market predetermined. Thus, the recruitment and selection methods may be designed based on certain cultural norms, which are in turn based on the nations for which institutions require the hiring from. Consequently, this makes a standardization of the overall methods, but adjusted to the preferences of target candidates and sources decided by institutions, rather than the purpose being to directly change methods to adhere to institutions. In other words, governmental institutions do not put direct restraints on the choice of methods in the recruitment process, but rather on the sources and where the talent pool is derived from, meaning that the international recruitment methods and the process in general will be adapted to this.

This has a connection to creating legitimacy by adhering to institutional restraints as regards recruitment sources, as well as customizing recruitment methods to create legitimacy in the environment for which the recruitment is undertaken. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), coercive isomorphism is when governmental or political institutions impose pressure for which organizations must adhere to. Thus, coercive isomorphism can be said to imprint on this aspect since it was found that organizations adjust recruitment methods to the nation which is predetermined by institutions. These results may also be explained by arguments of Phillips et al. (2009), who discussed that organizations will refrain from entering other markets due to these kinds of restraints. This was found to be the case in this study regarding recruitment outside of the EU or EMEA region, making the international recruitment limited to these regions. Additionally, it was also found that the institutional restraints as such are more positioned towards influencing how recruitment teams are divided, rather than towards creating a need for completely different recruitment processes in terms of recruitment methods. Hence, while the findings of this study indicate that the institutional aspects are forcing internationally operating organizations to customize the recruitment sources and focusing it on regional aspects, it does not create any specific obstacles for standardizing the methods used. This would therefore imply that there is a distinction between selecting recruitment methods and selecting recruitment sources, which is why these stages of the core process should be divided in the model as presented in Figure 3, even though presented

together. Despite this, the indirect customization of methods according to the institutionally decided sources makes the steps interconnected. Another argument of the appropriateness to treat the stages of selecting methods and sources as one, is due to the iterative process in international recruitment. This means that the choice of sources may be decided prior to the choice of methods due to institutional or cultural features, while it also may remain in the order as presented in the model of Figure 3. For instance, respondent G notified that target markets (i.e., sources) may be decided prior to the conduction of headhunting, while this additionally may have effects on what methods to use after the headhunting phase. In another example by respondent J, some interview tools for online meetings were found forbidden in some countries making the methods decided prior to the sources, while adjusted again according to the source, in turn making the choice of methods and sources interconnected.

As regards cultural aspects, a complete separation of the stages of methods and sources in the model in Figure 3 is also difficult to pursue. The starting point of the core process is argued to be related to firstly a standardization strategy for the choice of recruitment methods, consistent with how the institutional dimension also was found to affect towards a possible standardization of methods. Concerning culture, none of the respondents indicated a customization according to culture when designing the international recruitment methods. For example, as previously presented, the results indicated a standardized process for online synchronous interviewing across locations with the same methods used, even though intensity and the length of the process may vary. Those respondents who used tests in their international recruitment process also discussed how identical tests were used regardless of national culture. Although this means that the recruitment methods at this stage are standardized, a strategy of adjusting the methods and sources according to different candidate profiles and overall company culture was the more appropriate type of customization to address. In turn, this approach was standardized across the operations, making this step also globally standardized. One way of exemplifying this is that methods were found to be customized as in including tests for some positions, while excluding those for other positions, while the same design was used across all global locations making it globally standardized.

However, both the methods and sources used in the overall process were found to be affected and customized according to global and generational culture. This was for example influenced by the frequent use of digital tools such as social media sourcing, online synchronous interviews (and to some extent online asynchronous interviews), and online tests. Headhunting, which was found to be popular in the international recruitment context,

may as well be seen as a result of globalization and digitalization. In turn, this means that the target candidates in international recruitment are those that are willing to relocate, which indeed was found to be the younger generation. Thus, this may be indicating that the relocation willingness of this generation, and hence the trends of generational culture, is impacting on how the recruitment and selection process is designed in terms of methods and sources. As well, the current generational shift of the workforce is always moving towards the younger generations making the process customized to them, which in turn is a result of the aging workforce. Consequently, the recruitment process as well as the methods and sources used are thus customized and influenced by the above-mentioned aspects. This may be explained by previous research that in summary indicated that globalization and digitalization affect the recruitment and selection methods which are used (Griswold et al., 2021; Holm, 2014; Koch et al., 2018; Kowo et al., 2019; Phillips & Gully, 2017). For instance, Holm (2014) argued that digitalization is the cause of frequent use of technology in recruitment. As well, institutional change origins in changes of values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors (Holm, 2014). This is therefore an idea which is expounding the results of this study, as the uprise of both the global and generational culture and the consequent impact on the design of the international recruitment process has been found as a distinct pattern. Thus, it is both digitalization, globalization, and the changes in culture that comes with evolution of new generations that affects the design of the recruitment process.

Nevertheless, despite the frequent use of digital tools in the international recruitment process, the research-practice gap discussed by Marie Ryan and Deros (2016) may explain why asynchronous interviews were not a popular method with the respondents. While Griswold et al. (2021)'s study implied a potential upswing for the asynchronous interviewing method, the respondents in this study did not agree since such a time-consuming recruitment method is challenging for organizations competing for talent in the international context. Additionally, it may be connected to what the respondents described as 'a candidate's market', meaning that a recruitment process cannot require too much of an applicant since they may have many employment options. In terms of institutional theory, this would then imply that asynchronous interviews are not regarded as legitimate by applicants in the international context, which in turn makes organizations unwilling to apply this method. Another probable explanation is that, since the methods used are globally standardized (customized according to global and generational culture, while standardized as in the same methods used no matter the role and in turn age of the applicant), the method of asynchronous interviewing is not yet established

or recognized by society. In comparison to sourcing and headhunting which were found to be proactive, creative, and new methods which are essential in the global environment, asynchronous interviewing has seemingly not reached the same legitimacy yet.

In summary, the core process is both standardized and customized, with the beginning of the core process inclined towards a more standardized strategy since the methods used are rather unaffected by institutions and culture. However, institutions which predetermine recruitment sources were found to create a chain effect for adjusting the chosen recruitment methods. With the same logic, the uprisings of the generational and global cultures create a chain effect as the chosen methods and sources are adapted to those cultures, and thus customized. Nevertheless, there is yet a standardization across all operations. Again, the recruitment process turns indirectly customized according to the global and generational culture as well as the institutions which are limiting possible sources, while the process is standardized across all operations. Thus, the standardization is related to the cultural and institutional distances affected by the global culture, making it possible to adapt the process to global and generational culture since the cultural distance is smaller between different countries. For example, Lazarova et al. (2017) argued that the distance has a connection to challenges of creating legitimacy which increases when distance is larger, and Phillips et al. (2009) argued that regulatory, cognitive, and normative institutions differ between countries, as well arguing that distance increases when differences are larger. This argument may explain this study's findings about the global integration and standardization of the international recruitment process, since globalization makes distance smaller, and legitimacy is thus achieved more easily. Therefore, standardization across operations is prosecutable. For the core process of the international recruitment process, it may be connected to normative institutions since institutions impose ideas of what is normative behavior for organizations and thus how they design the recruitment process. As well, different cultures, values, and beliefs will also affect what is regarded as normative and legitimate methods and sources.

5.2.2 Selecting talent

The discovered supplementary stage of the presented model in Figure 3 is called 'selecting talent', which was not originally presented by Darrag et al. (2010). This is related to the practical conduction and implementation of the recruitment, by using the methods and sources chosen to find and recruit talent, which was found to require specific consideration in terms of standardization and customization.

Firstly, this stage of the process needs consideration in terms of institutional matters, as results indicated that the process was wider affected by institutional constraints towards the end of the process which is the selection of talents. Hence, the stage of selection is argued to be localized to the national level, making domestic hiring managers organize and manage the selection process. Therefore, it is also customized according to different institutional environments (with some exceptions where internationally dispersed recruiters made final decisions). For example, decisions were found to be made by hiring managers as well as final interviews were conducted by local managers at this level, since institutional features were found to affect the process. Additionally, some of the respondents implied third parties involved as well as localizing activities to other departments of the organization, which emphasizes the customization approach taken at this stage. This may be explained by the deglobalization discussed by Farndale et al. (2021) meaning that governments impose restraints to control abroad operations. Thus, this is limiting the possibilities of standardizing the process across global operations. In addition, this also has connections to institutional theory and specifically DiMaggio and Powell (1983)'s concept of coercive isomorphism. Besides this meaning that organizations adapt to the institutional environment they find themselves in making similar organizations even less diverse, it also creates a greater institutional distance between countries and thus requires a customization strategy. The institutional distance was found to cause limitations to the extent which internationally operating organizations in this study were able to recruit and relocate talents. For instance, some of the respondents clearly preferred and were bound to recruit domestic talent due to labor law complicating the international possibilities. As well, it was found that respondents tend to keep recruitment within the EMEA region or EU countries, for the benefits of easy hiring and onboarding relating to the selection stage. Again, this is a condition which is elucidated by Farndale et al. (2021), who besides arguing that deglobalization is the current state of the world, also inferred how institutional restraints causes extra expenses and challenges to organization wanting to source talents globally, which therefore may explain the results of this study in terms of customization due to such institutional measures.

The stage of selecting talent is also based on the customization, or personalization, of the process which is implemented to adapt to national culture such as holidays or religious traditions. The respondents of this study also adjusted the selection phase concerning interviewing techniques according to cultural values or behaviors, such as for example formal or informal way of speaking. Likewise, headhunting was also found to be customized as for

example adapting the language used, or customizing the message sent when approaching potential applicants. This may be explained by previous researchers (Banks et al., 2019; Kowo et al., 2019; Phillips & Gully, 2017), who argued that customizing the communication with candidates may make the recruitment more successful. An important observation to note is that the customization according to cultural differences at this stage of the process were found to be more characterized by adjusting to individuality of different candidates, rather than generalizing by culture. Thus, the aspect of candidate individuality is a key discovery of this analysis since it is also connected to global and generational culture, which impacts on individual values and behaviors.

As earlier presented, Griswold et al. (2021) as well as Walsh et al. (2010) argued that there may be cultural differences in perceptions of recruitment methods. While this study did not account for the applicant perspective, it was found that segmenting candidates in terms of culture may be insufficient as well as it may cause problems such as discrimination and in turn legitimacy issues. Thus, even though candidate perceptions of the methods may vary, the decisions of which methods to include as well as how to use them in the selection phase does not consider the national differences. This may be explained by the fact that the selection process must be regarded as fair by candidates based on the arguments of Walsh et al. (2010) presented earlier. If a specific culture or nation was favored, it could be argued that the process cannot be regarded as fair. Additionally, as explained by Van de Vijver (2008), candidates may have more than one ethnicity and, thus, there may be problems in determining the group to which a candidate belongs. This aspect of variations of candidate individuality in culture was in this study found to be crucial to not undermine when designing the international recruitment processes. Therefore, since individuality of a candidate is difficult to predict specifically in the early stages of the recruitment process, the first stages are as explained previously characterized by high standardization. Results may consequently be explained by Van de Vijver (2008)'s arguments presented above. Hence, candidate individuality is a reason for the process being standardized in the preliminary phases, moving towards customization in the end stages when individual characteristics of applicants are easier to recognize, and thus enhancing customization and personalization. This also draws attention to the challenge of adjusting to cultures as also emphasized by Wu et al. (2008) who discussed that culture is more difficult to measure than institutions. Hence, extending that argument in this study, the culture of an individual is here postulated to be even less visible. Therefore, the above results of Wu et al. (2008)'s study also provides a possible explanation

of why standardization is highly undertaken in the beginning rather than in the phase of selecting talent, specifically concerning culture and candidate individuality.

Moreover, individuality also has connections to globalization. As described previously, international experience creates an open mindset which changes the behaviors, values, and norms of individuals to move further from their national culture. For example, results of this study indicated abroad experience as a base of creating open-mindedness. As well, it was argued to minimize bias caused by the recruiter, likewise making candidates' personalities less like their stereotypical national culture. In brief summary, individuality is characterized by the combination of national, global, as well as generational culture which is consequently making individuals more different than what would be seen as the stereotypical version of them based on their cultural background. Again, this was emphasized by Van de Vijver (2008) who specifically inferred that abroad experience influences culture, as well as it makes culture non-static. Therefore, this notion is hereby applied in this study, suggesting that the international recruitment process should not either be static. Accordingly, it is proposed that the recruitment process should be customized according to candidate individuality in the latter stages of the core process, since this is where the recruiter or manager comes in direct contact with the candidate. Thus, stakeholders administering the selection process may personalize their approach and procedure without it characterizing as directly discriminating against candidates in terms of process design. Hence, this is how the model in Figure 3 was developed by including the stage of selecting talent by the end of the process where it is characterized by a high degree of customization in terms of candidate individuality.

In summary, globalization makes individuals obtain values, norms, and behaviors which are beyond their national stereotype. Related to DiMaggio and Powell (1983)'s concept of isomorphism (though usually not applied to individuals), this may indicate a change of terms for internationally operating organizations. On the one hand, the dynamic nature of culture and candidate individuality is making applicants less alike which is creating a need for customization. On the other hand, global culture will perhaps make up for smaller distances and create a possibility of standardizing the process of international recruitment and selection. The international recruitment process as it appears today, was anyhow found to be customized according to individuality of applicants which emphasizes the need to create a good candidate experience and organizational reputation. In turn, it confirms the high competition for talent and human capital in the global environment, as well as the need for

competitive advantages by creating high human capital as concluded previously by several authors (e.g., Kabwe & Okorie, 2019; Schuler & Tarique, 2012; Pulakos, 2005).

5.3 Discussion on process design, isomorphism, and legitimacy

In general, the international recruitment process as it is presented in Figure 3, seems applicable to the processes observed in this study. This is argued to be a result of organizations striving for legitimacy, as well as it is also a result of isomorphism. This section provides a reflection upon the results more specifically in respect of institutional theory, previous researchers' view on IHRM research within this theoretical field, as well as how the concept of legitimacy is affecting.

5.3.1 Adopting similar designs of the process

First, it is important to stress that the model created which was displayed in Figure 3 is not an attempt to generalize the results. However, it is also needed to emphasize that regardless of company size and context, the differences in the process were found to be relatively small, as well as that there were similarities of where in the process it was found to be standardized or customized. Globalization is making the cultural and institutional distance smaller and, thus, internationally operating organizations may apply a similar international recruitment process, since they basically operate in the same environment when operating internationally. This may be explained by findings of Manning et al. (2012), who presented 'active embedding' in local networks as aligning of the conditions to global strategies, in turn creating 'field structurations' meaning that local institutions are adopted across the whole organization. In this study, it may be presented as the global environment constitutes a 'field structuration' of the international recruitment process, since the process is adapted to local and individual institutions but standardized globally. It can be said to be perceptible in this study that by embedding the final stages of the core recruitment process to the local network, internationally operating organizations may have a chance to adapt and align those with their global strategies. Moreover, from another perspective and connected to Phillips et al. (2009)'s concept of 'institutional entrepreneurship', there are no indications of actions taken to manage local institutions. Nonetheless, there is unquestionably an effect of globalization on international recruitment, for example by LinkedIn creating a filter for the EU as was highlighted by findings of this study. In turn, this may be affected by the institutional constraints causing internationally operating organizations based in the EMEA region to

segment regions and target Europeans. Additionally, while institutional and cultural aspects may differ and cause a need for adjustments and customization in the last stages of the core process, the design of the recruitment process in terms of when and where standardization respective customization is undertaken is similar in all organizations. This indicates that the model presented in Figure 3 is conceivably applicable to several organizations, making it a best practice and normative structure of the practice in terms of standardizing or customizing the different phases of the international recruitment process.

5.3.2 Isomorphism and legitimacy

Certainly, the previous stated reflections are connected to isomorphism. The propensity of internationally operating organizations to standardize the preliminary phase of the international recruitment and selection process was in the previous chapters presented as a result of both mimetic and normative isomorphism. Concerning mimetic isomorphism, it is an aspect to consider in the international business environment since it is characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity which is most likely caused by the fast-changing as well as differentiated global environment. Hence, DiMaggio and Powell (1983)'s concept of mimetic isomorphism may be applied not only for the preliminary stages, but also for the core process. This is argued since the organizations international recruitment processes are generally close to identical as regards when to standardize and when to customize, following the theoretical rule of imitating each other's best practices to gain legitimacy. Furthermore, normative isomorphism may explain the similarity of the methods used, such as how interviewing and headhunting was popular, which in turn has great connection to creating legitimate and accepted practices. Furthermore, normative isomorphism was also presented as a reason for standardization in the preliminary recruitment process; it was argued to be 'the way things are done'. Again, this stresses the importance of a legitimate recruitment process. While coercive isomorphism cannot directly be said to influence the preliminary phase of the international recruitment process, it was in the previous chapters explained as a reason for the process turning gradually towards customization in the core process and in terms of selecting recruitment methods and sources. Accordingly, the core process considered in this study, i.e., the phases of selecting methods and sources as well as selecting talent, is allegedly imprinted by all three types of isomorphism in terms of standardization and customization according to cultural and institutional aspects.

Moreover, differences in candidate individuality and the tendency to customize accordingly was claimed to be a central finding in this study. Thus, it is a point to consider when designing the international recruitment process regarding legitimacy and how culture is hidden behind human beings' personalities, irrespective of it being affected by national, global, or generational culture. Results indicate that it is legitimate to adjust the process according to candidates' individual preferences, while it is not legitimate to solely favor one specific culture when recruiting internationally due to discrimination issues, unless it is required or restrained by institutions. Nevertheless, when recruiters adjust to individuals it is automatically an adjustment according to cultural values of either the recruiter themselves or the candidate. In this sense, it may appear as if the process and how recruiters conduct it is objective, while in fact it may be based on certain aspects that may fundamentally be cultural. From the recruiters' and managers' side, their own values and beliefs were found to influence their actions taken to adjust the practices, for example personalizing an interview. This is in line with arguments presented by Björkman and Gooderham (2012) regarding how local managers' and employees' beliefs, norms, and views may cause biased decisions on which practices to adopt. Nonetheless, the problem does not stop there, but continues in the process once methods and practices are adopted. This is connected to the findings of earlier research (Mäkelä et al.; 2010, Sparrow, 2007; Van de Vijver, 2008), which implied difficulties in international selection methods such as for example tests, being standardized when the foundations truly lie in a certain culture of which undeniably has its own established values, norms, and behaviors, that may not that easily be overlooked by decision makers. However, it is easier to avoid legitimacy problems when the efforts are focused on standardization of the process and customization based on candidate individuality. Again, this seems to be a subject for isomorphism due to the findings of the frequent use of this type of strategy, not least due to institutional restraints such as enforcement of discrimination laws.

Another compelling point of view also related to isomorphism implies that cultural distance may not affect the design of the international recruitment process, in terms of legitimacy and that organizations will take on the practices which are globally accepted. Again, this would emphasize that the global culture is highly affecting the design of international recruitment processes towards a globally unified strategy for the methods and sources chosen. For example, organizations are similar when it comes to implementing headhunting and sourcing as a main tool to identify talents, as well as interviews and tests to assess the applicant's capability of conducting the job. Nevertheless, it is also essential to point out that the

methods and sources used in terms of designing international recruitment processes in fact may not differ from the usual recruitment process (i.e., national recruitment process where hiring is conducted within the borders of a single country). Thus, it can be claimed that the international context has additional constraints to adhere to, but the process is not substantially affected due to globalization and creation of smaller cultural distances between different countries. Assuredly, this may offer possibilities of copying the national recruitment process and applying to the international context as well, but with some customization to the international environment. In addition to that argument, there appears to be a strong legitimacy with typical SHRM selection and assessment tools (i.e., the recruitment methods classically used in domestic or national recruitment) that come across as accepted by candidates. As an exemplification, Pulakos (2005) appointed interviewing as the most popular selection tool, which was found to be the case also in this study's international context. Therefore, it means that there is most likely a strong normative isomorphism creating legitimacy for certain recruitment methods that are globally accepted. In contradiction to Björkman and Gooderham (2012) who argued that legitimate practices and structures may vary between countries, it was found in this study that for the practice of recruitment the legitimate and recognized practices may be relatively congruent. Thus, results of Koch et al. (2018) who found similar trends across country borders concerning social media used for headhunting, may explain results of this study. Firstly, it can be directly applied as LinkedIn was a method and source that was found to be appreciated by recruiters in several countries. Secondly, the logic could also be applied as the same methods were adopted regardless of country. Consequently, the methods used for selection may be successfully replicated from the national recruitment process and implemented, with some adjustments, to the international recruitment process as well.

6. Conclusion

This chapter will present the conclusion of findings in accordance with the research aim and questions, as well as practical implications, contributions, limitations, and suggestions for future research directions.

6.1 The research questions

The aim of this study was to explore the phenomenon of external international recruitment and examine how the international recruitment and selection process is designed in practice. The research questions focused on *what* recruitment and selection methods and sources are used in the international recruitment process, as well as *how* culture and institutions affect the standardization and/or customization of the recruitment and selection process in the international context.

The study found that online interviewing (synchronous to a wider extent than asynchronous), tests, and headhunting were the methods used in the international context of recruitment. As regards sources, social media platforms and foremost LinkedIn were found to be the sources used. Regarding country context, it was found that institutional matters may restrain the possible sources. Thus, this affects internationally operating organizations to customize the sources by regions, for example by grouping the EMEA region as one source of talent due to similar institutions of the included countries. Consequently, this makes the methods also adapted to specific cultures influenced by institutions, in order to create legitimacy. As well, institutional matters were found to affect not only regional divisions, but also in terms of corporate structures such as company size and level of centrality. However, a standardization effect on the process was found in both small and large organizations, as well as in both centralized and decentralized organizations.

The study additionally found that the cultural aspect influences the international recruitment and selection process on three different levels; national, global, and generational. While the national culture was found to constitute some differences, the international recruitment process was found standardized regarding national culture. It was rather the global and generational culture that were found to have an effect as international recruitment methods and sources were found to be customized according to specific preferences of the younger generation, in turn affected by globalization and digitalization. However, to create legitimacy and avoid discrimination, global standardization was undertaken and culture was

acknowledged as individuality of candidates. Thus, the process was found customized according to individual applicants rather than segmenting cultural groups. These findings were explained as a result of isomorphism and the strive for legitimacy. The accepted and legitimate international recruitment process was found to be standardized in its preliminary phases, while gradually turning customized towards the selection phase which is imprinted by institutions in terms of localized hiring decisions and domestic laws, as well as of cultural aspects in terms of respect for candidate individuality.

6.2 Practical implications and contributions

A crucial managerial implication and practical recommendation of this study is that during the process of designing an international recruitment process, national culture should not be directly considered as it might pose a threat to legitimacy of the process design. However, as there is a current generational shift as well as rapid pace of globalization, the global and generational culture may beneficially be considered by practitioners. Hence, recruiters and managers should be acquainted with current trends of candidate preferences, as well as the legitimacy of recruitment methods and sources and adjust the process accordingly. Moreover, it is crucial that practitioners adjust the process and foremost recruitment sources, consistent with institutional aspects as it is otherwise a threat to legitimacy as well as the efficiency of the process. Thus, practitioners should also be aware of the advantages of standardization in the preliminary phases of the recruitment process. On the contrary, customization as in personalizing the candidate experience according to candidate individuality as well as localizing the selection of talents to domestic managers is appropriate in the final stages. In this sense, this study has contributed with a valuable perspective of practical relevance.

Moreover, this study is positioned in the theoretical field of institutional theory, hence contributing with a view on the phenomenon from this perspective. As explained as part of the research gap in chapter 1.2, previous researchers argued that the field of GTM needs empirical research (Kabwe & Okorie, 2019; Schuler & Tarique, 2012), which is how this study contributes. By the development and expansion of Darrag et al. (2010)'s model of the international recruitment process, this study thus also contributes with additional insights of how the practice of international recruitment may be theoreticized.

6.3 Limitations and future research directions

While the methodological shortcomings were presented in chapter 3.4, the issue remains that the limitations of the study are foremost concerned with time and funding shortages. This is consequently causing obstacles to create a certain depth that could only be achieved with research conducted with more time and financial resources. For example, this has limited the sample size to 11 respondents, which is why it is suggested that future researchers conduct similar studies on a larger scale. Additionally, these restraints also create limits to the sample as all participants were located within the EMEA region. This makes the sample homogeneous in terms of geographical dispersion which may have significant effects on the result. It was also found that hiring managers have great insight to the phenomenon of focus and it is suggested that future research include the manager point of view to a greater extent. In addition, to gain more depth into future studies on the topic, in-depth single case studies with triangulated research methods are suggested to gain even greater understanding of the international recruitment process. For example, respondent A's organization was found to differ in terms of not localizing hiring decisions, making it an extreme case which future research is encouraged to investigate further. Another limitation to consider is the fact that this study only takes the organizational perspective into account, which is why future research also should observe the perspective of candidates. For instance, researchers could investigate the phenomenon of international recruitment through a quantitative questionnaire study, since it was found to be of importance to how a recruitment process is experienced by applicants as well as in terms of organizational reputation.

The scope of the research may also be limited since the recruitment and selection methods and sources used may continually change; culture and institutions are evolutionary. Thus, the research is contemporary and limited to the present time. As mentioned earlier, there is a current generational shift which has implications on practice. As well, the recent pandemic had great impact on both digitalization as well as globalization, in turn changing how international recruitment and working practices in general are conducted. Hence, future researchers are advised to study the effects of these aspects continually since international recruitment is not a static phenomenon.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Context

- Company context: How many employees? Where is the company operating?
- What is your position/role? What are your daily tasks? For what positions do you recruit?
- How have you come in contact with international recruitment?
- What is a typical recruitment process in your organization?

Selection methods

- What selection and assessment methods are used?
 - o Interviews? (Online/Physical/Synchronous/Asynchronous/Competency based)
 - o Tests? (Personality/Intelligence/Aptitude/Work sample)
 - o Sourcing/Headhunting?
 - o Other?
- Are there any corporate policies that regulates the recruitment/selection process?
- What role does internet, digital medias, social media platforms play in the selection process of international recruitment? (Online interviewing? Online tests? Headhunting?)

Standardization & Customization

- o How does culture affect the international recruitment & selection process?
 - Religion/holidays
 - Behavior & attitudes
 - Norms/values
 - Reputation
 - Other
- o How does institutions affect the international recruitment & selection process?
 - Labor law, visas, citizenship
 - Corporate policies
 - Other
- o What else affects the chosen selection methods, and the international recruitment process? (the standardization/customization of the process)
 - Generations
 - Globalization, digitalization, global culture
 - Candidate profile/target candidates
- What are the advantages/disadvantages of standardization?
- What are the advantages/disadvantages of customization?

Other:

- How does your own values/beliefs/norms/culture/personality etc. impact on how you conduct the international recruitment and selection process?
 - o Bias & discrimination

Appendix 2: Complement to Figure 2

Design of the process

A: "... I'm very aware with the profile and because it's standardized it means you can manage quite international pipelines of every single country simultaneously...it's important to have the same process ... we employ by one hiring bar by one profile"

I: "...perform an initial phone screen, ... it's just an introductory, usually 20 minute phone screen, and then yes they do have an interview with the hiring manager which is about one hour long usually. "

E: "I do most of my screenings online because most of my candidates are ... abroad. It's usually either a phone call or Zoom meeting. "

A: "...we start with a CV review to ensure that the people meet the basic qualifications, then ... one interview on video and then a final interview..."

K: "... recruits someone who is (specific role), so I know that they have gone through this package, ... they have had this education ... to become (specific role) so it's intelligence test, psychologist test (...)..."

F: "...after the interview we are sending them kind of gamification assessment. So after ... we are doing the second interview. Which we base on the competency-based method."

B: "... I think online testing has become increasingly popular. ... we use for example aptitude test, intelligent test, turnability tests, and personality tests."

G: "We use mainly the LinkedIn Recruiter ... so it's a social media strategy for sourcing candidates. "

D: "I would say is a bit, uh long structure, it's a big structure of interviewing, and the whole process is really big ..."

J: "...I try to make sure that you crunch the time as short as possible because it's a candidate's market right now."

National culture

A: "We have high processes during Ramadan, which is uhm, tough,...so we have to adhere, ... meet the needs of the customer, because obviously they're fasting we can't have them go through the intense interview process in one day, but split it over several days. So that's a way that culture impacted. ..., obviously we give everyone the option ..."

B: "...it's about candidates' choice and we appreciate, I mean we respect their decision and you know I try to you know, reschedule if they want " (about Ramadan)

C: "Because even if you're recruiting for example let's say Bulgaria, you're going to address people with the same respect for example you have to be prepared when asking a person if you can talk on the first name basis with them during the interview..."

D: "...it's easier for a candidate do connect with our company if we approach them for example if we, if we approached an Italian, in Italian, by Italian. We are trying to find people who speak the same language and who have the same culture as the markets where we are working in. "

I: "Different cultures have different senses of humor, and uhm... I'll tell you one thing, reliability, right, so I've noticed that in Italy or in Spain, in general, people are not really reliable, so they say they're going to do one thing, but it's very rare that they actually do it. "

H: "We don't have the same personalities, you know in in all the countries, so you know we kind of adapt sometimes. I don't know for example in Germany is definitely definitely not the same, you know, mindset as in Spain for example or in Latin America definitely not the same, but yeah we kind of adapt. "

D: "There are some countries where people don't use LinkedIn a lot. So it's really hard to reach reach out to them even using emails and finding their emails is really hard... So that that would be difference in cultures in our markets. "

Global culture

I: "I'm a big supporter and fan of the concept of global citizenship. Right? I have a lot of international friends, I used to live abroad and I really like, appreciate cultural diversity, I think it's very enriching. So I never judge, and I think it's so important "

E: "Uhm like I said I'm from (country) originally but I lived in (country) for four years, before this I was living in the (country), so it's kind of like this little mixture of all these like different cultures, and I kind of try to stay as objective as possible. "

B: "We are, actually, if you speak English you become similar you know. "

C: "If you have had the opportunity to be, to go abroad, or talk to a different culture, you're more open to the idea of letting such people into the organization and into your team. "

J: "...I am an expat as well,... it's a very international team that we have that's why we have a very big cultural wide thing going on in the company... so the person coming in also will be in the office so it's preferable to have that sort of mindset "

F: "Because of that, like because of the globalization we have a lot of opportunities to work with other companies, to work with other cultures. ... So that's creates like digitalization and remote working, create us to get to know them more maybe deeper (...) ... I guess is being more diversity, being more inclusive for all candidates, is a international globalization side is like feeling more closer. "

I: "...now after COVID you know they said "you know what you could do it remotely that's absolutely fine".

D: "...since of Internet, we regard ourselves as international company, because there are more than 30 nationalities in our company, ..."

Generational culture

C: "We already have this thing that people, for example a teenager from the U.S. and a teenager from Germany, they are both on the same app, they both have similar views on politics, ethics, environment, and things like that. So this, such communication channels definitely unify people and generations, and makes the difference in generations extremely big. It's not only, now it's more a generational difference rather than a regional difference. So it can definitely be felt now, harder than ever before."

D: "...older generations they are more experienced and they are tougher to get into, and also like older generations do not use social media's that much. And therefore we are, it's a bit tougher to contact them and approach them regarding this, so yeah older generations. I'm not generalizing but they are using less and less social media ... "

G: "...some people don't even have a LinkedIn, especially those people who are maybe senior, maybe 15 years or more of experience. "

A: "...graduates have been Millennials, uhm but now, graduates are Gen Z. So, it's huge shift in focus, it's a huge shift in the type of people that we're hiring, uhm, so that is a main focus for us now, uhm as in assuring that we're engaging the new generation that's coming in, uhm and it's a completely (...) shift, in terms of Millennials love (Company name), and I'm gonna be completely honest; Gen Z does not "

F: "I'm currently working with the Z generation. And they are always looking for opportunities, making globalization for all people and they are like more likely ... to have mobilization in their career, and so that's why they're always open to new opportunities and always open to relocate to other countries "

C: "...it has to be a balanced process, you cannot ask that much out of a candidate without giving them something in return."

Regional institutions

I: "I specialized let's say (...), in EMEA ... this payroll provider is able to create a legal entity in any country then also pay taxes in the country, right, so that role can be based anywhere in EMEA. ..."

A: "... I ... recruit international candidates to all over EU, uhm, so I do recruit both you know German candidates for Germany, Spanish candidates for Spain, Italian candidates for Italy, but also I can have German candidate into Luxembourg, I could have Spanish candidates into Germany, uhm so yeah it's completely international, my role. "

G: "...we cannot for example... hire ... candidates and clients ... from U.S., because that's completely different jurisdiction so we are mainly focused on the European countries, and also our Balkan region, Serbia, Croatia."

J: "Europe is completely different from ... US. Because salarywise they they have a whole different calculations, they have a whole different taxation system that is very different from us, plus they have a lot of restrictions that you can't ask certain questions up front, in Europe you don't have that... the recruiters in U.S. are more used to it because I've always always recruited for the Europe and Asian market "

H: "... between myself and between my my boss we kind of divided you know the the recruitment into, between us two. So she is in charge of, I would say, the Nordic regions, also in charge of Germany and Middle East, and myself I'm in charge of all the, more like the South of Europe, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Latin America ... Obviously to recruit in Europe we always try to recruit some people that have the European nationality, ... because it's you know it's always easier. "

Corporate institutions

B "...depending on the industry has their own laws, labor laws and etcetera. But ... my job is full cycle recruiting, ... it's the hiring managers business, or you know yeah."

A: "It's centrally decided, so we run our entire recruiting system ... so, uhm, everything is centrally decided."

D: "So well, I'd say that the owners of the company decide what the process looks like. Because the hierarchy of our company's like that that you owners are really into everything that we do, they want to know every step "

K: "There is a central document that regulates so that everyone does it the same way and that you use about, yeah the same channels so to say, we can't deviate too much... and then we have our own personnel instruction which for (...) may be tougher than the law sometimes ..."

J: "... we basically try to maintain a flat hierarchy in the company. The structure is, ... there's no in between that's the engineering head, it's the managers, and then the teammates. ... we basically don't have the seniority thing going on or in the company or anything as such. That's one thing also I saw that's quite European than U.S."

H: "... we have entities in so many different countries, if we were to customize the recruitment for every country for each country would be, would be tough to be honest"

G: "... some people, candidates, have really highly skilled, hard skills, but it doesn't it doesn't mean that they are a good fit for our company in terms of soft skills. ... you then determine that they are not good fit. ... we value some specific goals, for example integrity, responsibility, equality ..."

Candidates' individuality

H: "I would say it's more, I mean per individual individual individuality. I don't think a culture, I mean a country has you know people that are less talkative or more talkative to, to, to another. So yeah I think it's really based on the personality of the person more than the culture."

E: "... it's important to kind of, I mean, for example when I start the interview process like within 2-3 minutes you can see how the course of the of the conversation will go. So according to that I ask specific questions you know, just depending on the candidate"

G: "... every time I source candidates and reach out to them I had to send them personalized message because it's all about personalization and individual approach to each candidate if you send them generic templates I think candidates will be able to notice that"

A: "...I would like to provide a personalized service for my candidates, every single candidate I see go through. ... it's about engaging as I said and providing a personalized service for candidates and supporting them through the process."

I: "Well I deal with people, right? So if I customize the experience with people, it means that I'm able to deal with different stakeholders, different nationalities, different personalities, and I'm able to adapt. And this is something that I am proud of, you know. I think it's inevitable you know, to be a little bit different depending on the person that, you know, you have a front of you because we're all different..."

B: "It's about, it's about personality, it's about, you know, not cultural, it's about person."

Appendix 3: Information letter



DALARNA
UNIVERSITY

Information about participation in study “The standardization and customization of selection methods in MNCs”

This study is undertaken as a master’s degree project at Dalarna University, during the time period of April – May 2022.

The aim of the study is to understand the selection methods and practices used by MNCs within the external recruitment process. The relevance of the research is related to filling a gap of research within international human resource management, by providing HR practitioners with empirical research on recruitment and selection methods used within external international recruitment.

To address this aim, the organization of which you are part of is chosen as a case organization, and interviews will be held with different persons in positions which in their work encounter the external international recruitment process. Hereby, you are asked to participate in the study.

By participating in this study, you are asked to join one interview (estimated time 30-90 minutes). You will be asked to consent to recording of the interview, which will be deleted after completion of the project. Your participation will be anonymous, as will your organization be. There are no risks or discomfort calculated and no personal data will be treated. The ethical rules for essay writing and research of Dalarna University by the Research Ethics Committee (FEN) will be strictly followed, including GDPR. The interviews will be used only for the purposed of this study.

If you wish to take part of the recording or transcription of your interview, please contact the undersigned. Only yourself, the researcher/student (Nicole Bergman), examiners and supervisors of the degree project will be allowed to take part of your interview recording. After the completion of the degree project, you may take part of the full thesis.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You may, at any time, withdraw your participation without further justification.

If you have questions, please find the contact details below.

Sincerely, Nicole Bergman

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Appendix 4: Consent letter



Consent to participate in the study “The standardization and customization of selection methods in MNCs”

I have received oral and written information about the study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I may keep the written information.

☐ I agree to:

- participate in the study “The standardization and customization of selection methods in MNCs”
- that information about me is processed in the way described in the information letter
- no personal data is collected
- data collected will only be used for the purpose of the study
- the data collected will be retained until the essay is approved

Place & date	Signature

Responsible for the study

Place & Date: _____

Signature: _____