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External Digital Communication of Employer Branding Inclusivity

A Multiple Case Study:
CGI Inc., Nexer Group & Toxic Interactive Solutions

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Abstract

Background: To win the “war for talent” and recruit highly skilled candidates, employers need to distinguish themselves from their competitors by securing employer-of-choice (EOC) status. In competitive industries such as information technology (IT), companies focus on shaping unique employer branding (EB) strategies to help find or retain top talent and the indispensable edge or advantages that come along with them. At the same time, diverse IT employees are contending with different forms of prejudice and discrimination within the industry, making it essential for companies to clearly present their agendas of diversity and inclusivity through EB that communicates a “great place to work” for employees.

Purpose: While there are various bodies of EB-focused research, few studies have empirically explored how diversity and inclusion are communicated across industries. Accordingly, this study explores the use of external digital communication for promoting EB inclusivity deployed by the human resources (HR) and marketing departments of IT companies.

Method: This study uses exploratory research within a qualitative research design, along with an abductive approach, preexisting theories, and empirical data gathered from seven semi-structured interviews and digital communication materials from three IT companies: CGI, Nexer, and Toxic. The data is analyzed using the Gioia method and content analysis. Finally, a revised conceptual framework is developed.

Conclusion: The results of this study show that a range of external digital communication channels are needed to effectively communicate EB inclusivity. This can be achieved by portraying diversity and inclusion in different dimensions, in addition to successful diversity- and inclusion-driven projects, initiatives, and storytelling. It is essential to highlight different demographics within the company, for instance, from junior and senior, to male and female employees, as well as individuals from underrepresented groups. Furthermore, the results demonstrate that the IT industry is in a state of continuous innovation and evolution while also being highly competitive in terms of securing top recruits who can choose between their prospective employers. There is also a need to gain wider perspectives when creating IT solutions for diverse groups worldwide and there is a clear shortage of women in the industry. Therefore, it is important for IT companies to communicate their EB with diversity and inclusion in mind — and in practice through using the revised framework that presents relevant actors, tools, communication channels, and dimensions of D&I. On a managerial level, local and international actors are recommended to work in close collaboration, utilize modern technology, and follow up their external communication to attract potential employees who may one day become ambassadors for the company.

Key interview quotations from the study:

“Strengthen your brand by working with employer branding.”

“We communicate inclusive leadership and inclusive practices internally, not externally.”

“We highlight different nationalities, juniors, and seniors in different countries.”

“Swedish society still suffers from an image that we have the best systems since the 1970s.”

“I really think that there's very little knowledge about what equity is all about.”

“It is tricky and there is a really long chain of communications regarding who decides what to publish.”

“Most communication materials are in English — to reach everyone.”

“The industry has a high number of people changing the industry, particularly women because they don't feel included, so they go to other industries.”

“They need to be persuaded, as they are busy, have high salaries, and maybe feel appreciated at their work.”

“We need to be in the front with technology.”

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Ad(s)	Advertisement(s)
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
D&I	Diversity and inclusion
DE&I	Diversity, equity, and inclusion (or diversity, equality, and inclusion)
EB	Employer Branding
e.g.,	exempli gratia (“for example” or “such as”)
et al.	et alii (and others)
etc.	et cetera (and other similar things)
EOC	Employer of choice
H	Human resources interviewee
HR	Human Resources
i.e.,	id est (in other words)
IT	Information Technology
LGBTQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning persons, or the community
M	Marketing interviewee
min	minute(s)
NA	Not applicable
n.d.	no date
p.	page
RQ	Research Question

Key Terms

Digital communication relates to the online presence in this digital era, where websites and social media platforms communicate employer branding attractiveness (Smith & Smylie, 2021).

Diversity branding uses diversity dimensions to attract talents through photos, videos, and statements or testimonials (Jonsen et al., 2019).

Employer branding (EB) involves creating a unique employer image (Pham & Vo, 2022) that directly affects the quality and quantity of candidates an employer attracts (Sarabdeen et al., 2023).

Employer of choice (EOC) means an employee consciously selects to work with an employer with the most attractive profile or status (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019).

Inclusion branding refers to the communication of workplace attractiveness using inclusion dimensions to achieve EOC status in which employees feel appreciated, respected, and valued (Jonsen et al., 2019).

The information technology (IT) industry is a knowledge-based sector (Atouba, 2021) that has impacted most industries through digital solutions and virtual offices (Dabirian et al., 2019).

1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to the background of employer branding inclusivity. Furthermore, it highlights the research gap and purpose of this study.

1.1 Background

In modern Western countries, knowledge-oriented economies face dynamic workplace changes or disruptions, ushering in new challenges and opportunities when recruiting highly skilled talent (Behrends et al., 2020). Within this ever-changing context, employer branding (EB) has emerged in international contexts to confront such challenges through a distinguishable employer brand that helps position a company as an employer of choice (EOC) in the minds of prospective employees (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Behrends et al., 2020; Edwards, 2010). The concept of EB concerns the creation of a unique employer image that outshines competitors or, at the very least, shines differently, memorably (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Pham & Vo, 2022). It also relates to the process through which an employee consciously selects to work with one employer over another, owing to their EOC status (Herman & Gioia, 2000; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019).

Employer branding has gained increased relevance due to the COVID-19 pandemic, since employees remember how employers treated their staff during the compounding health and economic crises (Sarabdeen et al., 2023). However, the concept was already trending within academic research circles over the last 25 years (Saini et al., 2022) and has established itself using modern human resources (HR) management (Behrends et al., 2020). Through EB, an organization may generate a competitive advantage or line of defense against talent shortages, known as the “war for talent” (Behrends et al., 2020; Chambers et al., 1998; Elving et al., 2013). The many dimensions of EB include diversity (Dabirian et al., 2019; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019), which has seen an upward trend or increasing popularity within organizations (Igboanugo et al., 2022; Shore et al., 2018). Diversity is considered to be the prerequisite for inclusion (Jerónimo et al., 2022; Jonsen et al., 2019; Mor Barak et al., 2022).

In heterogeneous organizations and societies, businesses need to transform their operations by embracing diversity and inclusion (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022),

particularly in a multicultural marketplace (Demangeot et al., 2019) in which workplaces have growing diversifications, including technological innovation, high immigration rates, and increased participation of marginalized groups (Shore et al., 2018). Moreover, with the latter diversification comes more racial and cultural stereotypes across marketing activities (Duffy, 2022) in which minorities or minoritized groups face new and old prejudices and discrimination (Fletcher & Beauregard, 2022). Objectives within diversity and inclusion have seen inconsistent improvements across many industries (Kipnis et al., 2021; Murgia, 2019). According to Hellerstedt et al (2022), many studies about diversity, not equity and inclusion, make mitigating biases and inequity more difficult. However, an employer aims to be the EOC by differentiating themselves from their competitors through establishing or enhancing workplace inclusivity employees feel appreciated, respected, and valued (Jonsen et al., 2019). Companies should prioritize these challenges in their diversity and inclusion strategy (Microsoft, n.d.) and present any related initiatives on their career website (Deloitte, n.d.; KPMG, n.d.; PwC, n.d.).

Today, top talent can choose which company to work for, due to the vast online landscape that facilitates contemporary recruitment opportunities and processes — thus strong, targeted EB sets up a company for success when it comes to winning highly qualified jobseekers (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). Therefore, companies seeking new employees often come up against the “war for talent” (Sharma & Tanwar, 2021). This mounting challenge can be tackled by applying marketing tactics and HR strategies and through clear communication with the employer brand (Jonsen et al., 2019; Kele & Cassell, 2023). Employer branding is among the best ways to create an EOC-anchored workplace that attracts top recruits (Jonsen et al., 2019; Sharma & Tanwar, 2021) while also fostering, in the stakeholders’ eyes, an employer image that depicts a “great workplace” (Jonsen et al., 2019; Pham & Vo, 2022; Sharma & Tanwar, 2021). Accordingly, companies should communicate their workplace attractiveness through “inclusion branding” to be seen and regarded as an EOC in the eyes of prospective talent (Jonsen et al., 2019).

Promoting the image of diversity- and inclusion-oriented business requires the use of different communication methods, including reports and websites (Burgess et al., 2021; Kele & Cassell, 2023; Pasztor, 2019) as well as social media channels (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). For instance, information technology (IT) firms should actively communicate their EB to gain a reputation as a desirable workplace (Dabirian et al., 2019), since it plays a crucial role in contemporary recruitment practices (Ahmadi et al., 2020).

1.2 Research Problem

Based on the research conducted in this study, scholars often lack clarity when conceptualizing effective EB communication frameworks (Kaur et al., 2020; Theurer et al., 2018; Sarabdeen et al., 2023). Such confusion arises because the concept is multidisciplinary and broad, incorporating HR and brand marketing (Sarabdeen et al., 2023; Theurer et al., 2018). However, clear communication can be the determining factor between success and failure for an inclusive or inclusivity-concerned organization (Wolfgruber et al., 2022). Thus, more profound research is still needed to help define the communication of inclusion within EB practices (Wilhoit Larson et al., 2022). Additionally, targeted empirical studies should be conducted to develop the conceptual theory (Dabirian et al., 2019; Gilani & Cunningham, 2017; Graham & Cascio, 2018; Sarabdeen et al., 2023).

Limited exploratory studies have explored how companies use diversity and inclusion branding differently; at the same time, leading organizations are paying greater attention than ever to diversity and inclusion, as mainly presented on company websites (Jonsen et al., 2019). While studies of diversity branding are already explored to attract talent, more research is needed concerning the relationship between the communication of inclusion branding and the achievement of EOC status (Jonsen et al., 2019). Tanwar and Kumar (2019) argue for the necessity of more studies that identify the role of EB in earning the EOC designation. Most researchers within EB used data from social media. However, it would be beneficial to expand that field of inquiry to other critical sources, such as a company's annual reports and website (Burgess et al., 2021; Kele & Cassell, 2023).

There is a growing concern within the IT industry about the lack of women in the workforce and companies' external communication (Ahmadi et al., 2020). IT companies gain many advantages when hiring from a diverse talent pool (Sinha et al., 2020), they also face many obstacles, including in recruitment, labor mobility (Dabirian, 2020), and rapid innovations that may reproduce biases against unrepresented or underrepresented groups (Tilmes, 2022). The industry's dynamic culture now requires a focus on inclusivity in the workplace (Sinha et al., 2020; Hughes, 2016) to foster feelings of belonging (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). Companies should work closely and consistently with EB to be perceived by modern jobseekers as an EOC (Smith & Smylie, 2021).

1.3 Research Purpose

This study responds to the calls mentioned earlier by Jonsen et al. (2019), Burgess et al. (2021), Kele & Cassell (2023), Sarabdeen et al. (2023), and Wilhoit Larson et al. (2022), exploring the concept “inclusion branding” within EB to achieve EOC status. Specifically, the research focuses on the use of digital communication made in collaboration between the HR and marketing departments in the IT industry (Ahmadi et al., 2020). In the era of digital technology, employers will find it essential to maintain a website and online presence to position their brand as an EOC (Smith & Smylie, 2021), since communicating workplace inclusivity may assist in attracting potential employees (Jonsen et al., 2019). The author first assumes the employer’s perspective to reach diversity branding, then inclusion branding, and ultimately to win the “war for talent”. Therefore, *this study explores how external digital communication can help IT companies reach EB inclusivity*, particularly through the combined efforts of HR and marketing departments. Based on this study’s purpose, a research question and two sub-questions were formulated to guide the research as follows:

RQ: How can external digital communication promote EB inclusivity in IT companies?

- **Sub-RQ 1:** How can external digital communication be used to create EB inclusivity in IT companies?
- **Sub-RQ 2:** How can collaboration between HR and marketing departments improve external digital communication of EB inclusivity in IT companies?

1.3.1 Research objectives

- Exploring EB inclusivity using external digital communication means in IT companies' HR and marketing departments.
- Building a conceptual framework that creates an understanding of the relationship between EB and workplace inclusivity through the use of digital tools and channels.

1.3.2 Target audience

- Companies: IT industry and wider engineering service industry where there is intense competition for talent pool.

- Researchers: within Business Administration fields (HR and marketing).
- Society: general public who are interested in EB trends, or considering future careers within IT or related industries, students within Business Administration fields (HR and marketing).

1.4 Perspective

This research takes on the employer's perspective of EB since the concept is put into practice by the company, thus making it essential to understand how they approach it first. However, it is also crucial to assess the broader workplace landscape, for instance, by considering the employee's perspective, due to the interdependence of both views. Accordingly, the employee's perspective would be recommended for future research.

1.5 Delimitations

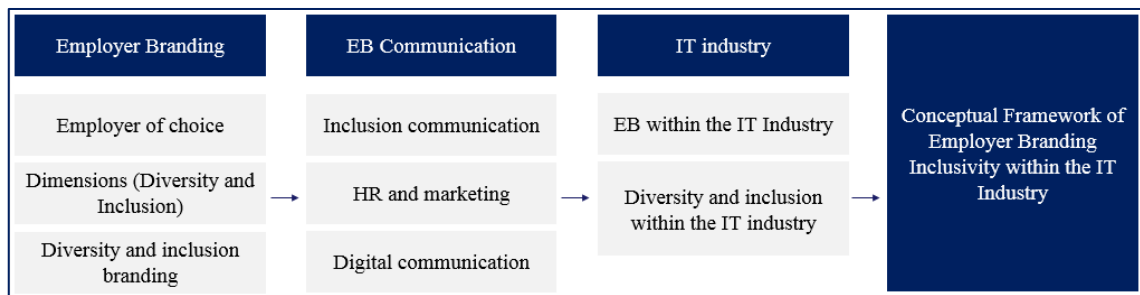
While EB involves multiple interrelated dimensions for drawing in talent (Dabirian et al., 2019), this research only delves into the diversity dimension. A company can extend its diversity branding to cover inclusion, resulting in inclusion branding to reach EOC status (Jonsen et al., 2019). Such companies portray their diversity and inclusion branding through digital communication tools such as website pages, job advertisements, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports. This study explores those tools and conducts a series of semi-structured interviews with one Swedish and two global IT companies. All companies are located in Sweden, as the author drew from his personal professional networks due to preexisting foundations of mutual trust and understanding.

2 Literature Review

This chapter aims to present the preexisting theoretical background of employer branding, using theories, frameworks, research gaps, similarities, and differences found within the concept. Furthermore, it links employer branding to diversity and inclusion branding using digital communication within the IT industry.

Figure 1 shows the overview structure of this chapter; it uses preexisting theories about the topic to help devise a conceptual framework by the end of the chapter.

Figure 1: Author's overview of Chapter 2.



2.1 Employer Branding

Since the 1960s, marketing scholars have been working with brand and branding concepts (Marcet Alonso et al., 2022). Three decades later, a new area of focus emerged: how a company's external image is being used for recruiting purposes (Gatewood et al., 1993; Kargas & Tsokos, 2020). A company brand distinguishes one employer from another (Theurer et al., 2018), with top employees creating a competitive advantage on local, regional, and global scales (Graham & Cascio, 2018). In that sense, employees create value through financial and nonfinancial aspects alike, including customer satisfaction (Graham & Cascio, 2018). The **employer brand** was first conceptualized as "the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company" (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187 as cited in Marcet Alonso et al., 2022). In essence, the concept is centered on an employer's reputation (Lane, 2016) and represents a psychological contract between employer and employee (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). A company's identity as an employer is constructed by gathering policies and value systems to motivate, attract, and retain current and potential employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Candidates also have choices when it

comes to selecting their employers (Kargas & Tsokos, 2020). The employer brand is the responsibility of the HR manager who focuses on current and potential employees through their department's communications, including internal channels, vacancy advertisements, and university or college outreach to gain employee value proposition, as seen in **Figure 2** (Balmer, 2001; Banerjee et al., 2020; Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

Figure 2: Comparison of brands

Comparison area	Corporate brand (CB)	Product brand (PB)	Employer brand (EB)
Management responsibility	Chief executive	Brand manager	Human resource manager
Functional responsibility	All/most departments	Marketing	Human resource management
Disciplinary roots	Multidisciplinary	Marketing	HRM
Brand gestation	Medium to long term	Short term	Medium term
Stakeholder focus	Multiple stakeholders	Consumer	Current and potential employees
Values	Real	Contrived	Real
Communications channels	Total corporate communications	Marketing communications mix	HR communications: internal communication, recruitment advertisement, campus communication
Dimensions requiring alignment	Identity (corporate attributes/ subcultures) Corporate strategy Vision	Product performance	Employee value proposition
Common characteristics EB characteristics additional to PB and CB	Being seen as relevant and resonant	Being known and noticeable	Being differentiated from direct competitors Fulfilling a psychological contract Unintended appropriation of brand values

Source: Banerjee et al. (2020).

Importance of Employer Branding

The employer brand not only aims to differentiate the company from competitors, but also to build a unique employer identity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In other words, the employer brand assists in creating an intention by potential employees to apply for a job at a particular organization. At the same time, it is EB that establishes the employer's reputation as a great place and team to work" in the minds of potential employees (Banerjee et al., 2020). Organizations should sharpen their strategies within EB to face the challenges of the "war for talent" that was coined in 1997 (Lane, 2016), and which is also referred to as the "battle for talent" (Stiglbauer et al., 2022).

Employer branding is a long-term strategy for working with the perceptions of existing and potential employees (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Brusch et al., 2018). It involves organizational branding efforts made to retain and attract employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Marcet Alonso et al., 2022) by influencing the mindset of potential applicants and creating the intention to apply for the employer (Pham & Vo, 2022; Theurer et al., 2018). The core objective is to create a unique employer image that outshines competitors

(Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Pham & Vo, 2022), especially one in which the best talents can be secured at reduced costs for acquiring them (Mishra & Mishra, 2023). This image, when handled effectively, assists in elevating current and future employees' attitudes toward and awareness of the company (Kaoud & ElBolok, 2022). Therefore, working with EB is essential to retain a talented workforce, particularly in industries that suffer from talent shortages (Kaur, 2013). Hence, EB is the marketing strategy needed for gaining the best skills in a landscape of restricted talent pools and high levels of competition (Lane, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the relevance of EB, especially since employees remember how employers treated their staff during the crisis (Sarabdeen et al., 2023). Accordingly, there has been a shift in employer brand focus to EB within literature (John & Jagathy Raj, 2020), as the concept is seeing continuous growth and popularity (Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

Over the last quarter of a century (Saini et al., 2022), EB has become a trend within the workplace market. The concept creates a competitive advantage for companies since its factors of innovation, business mergers, advanced technology, and organizational restructuring should consider employees' motivation, attraction, and retention (Biswas & Suar, 2016; Potgieter & Doubell, 2018). It also stimulates and shapes an employer's reputation, image, communication style, organizational identity, and branding and corporate culture (Huseynova et al., 2022) that can be marketed to highly sought-after candidates (Biswas & Suar, 2016). Furthermore, EB directly and significantly promotes the quality and quantity of applicants an employer attracts (Sarabdeen et al., 2023). Strong EB often results in better financial results for employers and the essential asset that is human capital (Dabirian, 2020). When applied, this concept is among the best practices for securing new talent (Dabirian, 2020) and retaining current employees (Dabirian, 2020; Thomas & Jenifer, 2016).

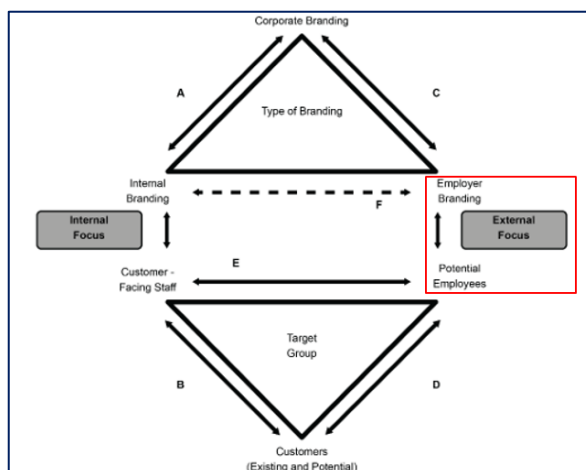
2.1.1 Employer Branding Processes

Today, traditional marketing and branding, including brochures and websites, are insufficient or limited when it comes to reaching potential employees, as there is a growing interest in having personal marketing from both the company and its employees (Kaur, 2013). In this sense, EB could help secure potential talent through portrayals of unique value, for instance, by highlighting the company's distinct characteristics and

offerings (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2005). Moroko and Uncles (2008) propose that one of the defining characteristics of the concept is the “psychological contract” that focuses on actual employment and employee experiences, in addition to fulfilling communicated promises within external EB. It is also essential within EB that companies generate awareness and provide psychological benefits to attract and retain a desirable team (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Current employees see EB factors presented in the organization’s overall success and external image, and the product attitudes (Maxwell & Knox, 2009).

Three different actors come together to create EB: the employers shaping their brand, the outsiders with expectations (e.g., potential employees), and the current employees with experiences and insights (Dabirian, 2020). **Figure 3** shows the relationships between different types of branding and their areas of focus, including EB that is concerned with attracting potential hires, while internal branding focuses on current employees (Dabirian, 2020).

Figure 3: Branding Types



Source: Dabirian (2020).

There are three processes within EB, as shown in **figure 4** (John & Jagathy Raj, 2020). The first process is about employer or employee value proposition, which is foundational to all EB strategies in which companies communicate their strengths to current and future employees (Behrends et al., 2020), perhaps including financial and nonfinancial benefits (John & Jagathy Raj, 2020). The second process concerns marketing value propositions and benefits to external audiences, ones from outside the organization, namely, potential employees and recruiting companies that assist in creating EOC status (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; John & Jagathy Raj, 2020). And the final process involves a focus on

internal marketing within the organization to help fulfill promises made during the recruitment process (Kaur, 2013). All organizational promises to potential employees should be reflected in the true workplace reality to create positive employee experiences and attitudes (Itam et al., 2020). From an employee perspective, this is an important display of trustworthiness, potentially inspiring their commitments toward shared organizational values and goals (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) and enhancing brand loyalty (John & Jagathy Raj, 2020). Using the three above-described processes of EB promotes greater employer visibility and improves the presentation of their unique image and workplace attractiveness (John & Jagathy Raj, 2020).

Figure 4: Employer Brand Process



Source: John and Jagathy Raj (2020).

The employer brand process approaches external marketing that reflects on internal marketing (John & Jagathy Raj, 2020), as external marketing assists in creating EOC status (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; John & Jagathy Raj, 2020). Furthermore, EB studies often focus on external branding to attract the top talent (Dabirian, 2020; Itam et al., 2020). *For these reasons, the use of external EB is the precise perspective of this study.*

2.1.2 Employer of Choice

Employer value propositions seek to achieve employer brand attractiveness (Behrends et al., 2020), which is considered a key outcome of EB (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Jonsen et al., 2019). **Employer attractiveness** is defined as the benefits a potential employee would gain while working at a specific company (Berthon et al., 2005; Joglekar & Tan, 2022), or, as “an attitude or expressed general positive affect toward an organization, toward viewing the organization as a desirable entity with which to initiate some relationship” (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001, p. 221). Accordingly, this concept influences both employer retention (Helm, 2013; Joglekar & Tan, 2022) and recruitment processes (Gatewood et al., 1993). Working with EB further increases attractiveness and brand equity (Barbaros, 2020), as the stronger the positive perception of the employer is the stronger the employer brand becomes (Barbaros, 2020; Berthon et al., 2005). Employer

brand equity increases the employer attractiveness and is considered an intangible asset for current and potential employees (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

To achieve attractiveness, companies need to provide both financial and nonfinancial benefits (Viktoria Rampl & Kenning, 2014). Financial benefits include monetary compensation, while nonfinancial benefits include brand personality and social value (Viktoria Rampl & Kenning 2014). The benefits of employer attractiveness differ across industries, cultures, and even company sizes (Bilgin et al., 2021; Theurer et al., 2018), and may vary depending on gender, age, and employer status (Joglekar & Tan, 2022). Retaining employees has been challenging for many organizations, particularly in highly competitive industries (Tenakwah, 2021). Therefore, organizations need to clearly differentiate their EB to be portrayed as **the workplace of choice** in the watchful eyes of all stakeholders (Pham & Vo, 2022).

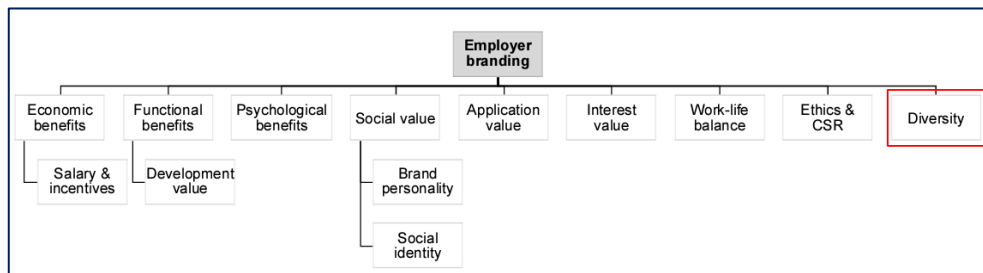
Employer branding activities assist in producing many benefits that are felt within and beyond the organization, such as differentiation from competitors, increasing employer attractiveness, and being perceived as having EOC status (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Hoppe, 2018; Kissel & Büttgen 2015; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019), with other benefits including employee and customer satisfaction and employee attraction and engagement (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). **The EOC concept** means an employee consciously selects to work with one employer over another due to their image and status (Bejtkovský & Copca, 2020; Herman & Gioia, 2000; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). It is considered a strategy for creating a sustainable competitive advantage in the talent market, as employees aspire to work for companies with an attractive reputation (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). A company can win the “war for talent” by being the first-choice employer for the employee as well as their personal professional community or network (Hult, 2011; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). The experiences of current employees directly affect the EOC status (Bejtkovský & Copca, 2020). At same time, the aspects of what makes a company an EOC may differ among employees based on such factors as their age, gender (Jain & Bhatt, 2015), region, as well as parental and educational situation. (Dutta & Punnose, 2010).

2.1.3 Employer Branding Dimensions

According to Dabirian et al. (2019), EB should take into consideration eight value propositions: social value, interest value, application value, development value, economic value, management value, work-life balance, and brand image. Social value focuses on

having fun at work with talented people and a desirable workplace culture. Development value focuses on having access to professional opportunities and advancements. Economic value focuses on building up a reward system through financial payments and benefits. Management value focuses on honest leaders who work to inspire and increase trust and respect among employees. Lastly, brand image focuses on employee perspectives of the company (Dabirian et al., 2019). And within that multifaceted landscape, EB has nine dimensions, including diversity (Ambler & Barrow 1996; Berthon et al., 2005; Tanwar & Kumar 2019), see **Figure 5**.

Figure 5: Employer Branding Dimensions



Source: Tanwar and Kumar (2019).

Global demographic trends increase organizational diversity (Shore et al., 2018), presenting an upward trend of diversity (Igboanugo et al., 2022). Therefore, companies need to embrace diversity and inclusion in their heterogeneous organizations (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022) as a critical strategic approach (Schubert & Tavassoli, 2020), particularly in a multicultural marketplace (Demangeot et al., 2019) in which workplaces have growing diversifications, including technological innovation, high immigration rates, and increased participation of marginalized groups (Shore et al., 2018). However, objectives within diversity and inclusion have seen inconsistent improvements across many industries (Kipnis et al., 2021). *Therefore, this research will concentrate on the diversity dimension.*

2.1.3.1 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

As one of nine dimensions within EB, diversity (Ambler & Barrow 1996; Berthon et al. 2005; Tanwar & Kumar 2019) usually intersects with several other concepts, such as diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I), for example, Hellerstedt et al. (2022) and Brodowsky et al. (2022) highlight equity. In contrast, other research focuses on equality rather than equity, including Wolfgruber et al. (2022) and Berber (2021). In addition, many researchers only focus on diversity and inclusion (D&I), for example, Mor Barak

et al. (2022), Kipnis et al. (2021), and Jerónimo et al. (2022). *For the most part, this research will mainly take on D&I perspectives, since they result in diversity and inclusion branding; however, equality and equality will also be mentioned shortly due to their strong relevance to the research topic.*

Diversity is defined by various identifiers, from cultural background and place of birth to experience, language, and worldview (Clark, 2017). According to Hays-Thomas & Bendick (2013, p. 195), diversity is “the mixture of attributes within a workforce that in significant ways affect how people think, feel, and behave at work, and their acceptance, work performance, satisfaction, or progress in the organization” (Hays-Thomas & Bendick, 2013, p. 195 as cited in Shore et al., 2018).

Importance of Diversity

Global demographic trends increase organizational diversity (Shore et al., 2018). Many factors drive workplace diversification, including technological innovation, high immigration rates, and increased participation of marginalized groups, particularly women, racial minorities, persons with disabilities, and the LGBTQ community (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning persons, or the community) (Mor Barak & Levin, 2002; Shore et al., 2018). A multicultural and multifaceted marketplace is essential for social cohesion, or a sense of “living together,” as it depends on experiences of diverse market actors representing different cultures and groups (Demangeot et al., 2019; Kipnis et al., 2021). With this upward trend of diversity (Igboanugo et al., 2022), organizations need to embrace D&I (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022) as part of a healthy workplace culture and informed business strategy (Schubert & Tavassoli, 2020).

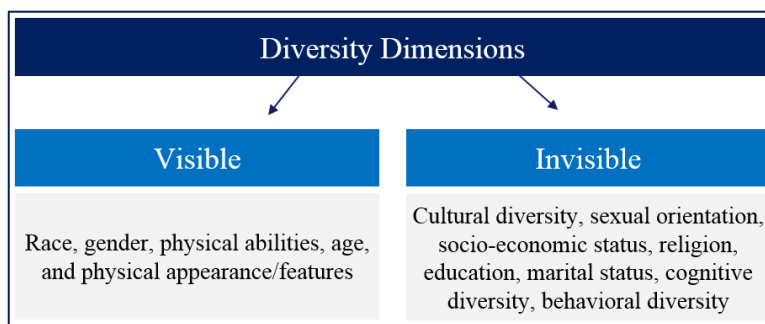
A diverse top management team creates unique organizational outcomes (Ponomareva et al., 2022), including discovering new or untapped business opportunities, improving brand equity (Garg, 2019) and creativity and quality performance (Schubert & Tavassoli, 2020), and adapting to dynamic changes (Cox & Blake, 1991). Moreover, diversity creates a competitive advantage by drawing together people from different cultural, economic, and social backgrounds (Garg, 2019), expanding minds and markets. Furthermore, such outcomes can enhance team-building efforts and workplace harmony while contributing to effective communication, for instance, when it comes to understanding the requirements of international customers using different languages within a diverse workplace (Garg, 2019). At the same time, diversity presents organizational challenges, from discrimination to stereotypes (Walkowiak, 2021), and it

can be used as a commercial tool or public relations strategy rather than a means of tackling the real issues facing marginalized groups (Kele & Cassell, 2023).

Diversity Constructs

Diversity is presented by demographic differences, both observable or surface attributes and unobservable or deep attributes (Mor Barak et al., 2022). It is classified into two types: the visible (e.g., race, gender, age, appearance, abilities) and the invisible (e.g., culture, sexual orientation, religion, education, behaviors) (Garg, 2019), as seen in **Figure 6**. Academics and practitioners usually focus on a few dimensions of diversity, such as gender and race (Köllen, 2019).

Figure 6: Classification of Diversity



Source: Garg (2019).

Diversity and inclusion are known as D&I, since they usually come separately or together (Mor Barak et al., 2022), and may be considered as two sides of the same coin (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022; Roberson, 2006).

Equity Versus Equality

Hellerstedt et al. (2022) claim that diversity is given greater focus than equity and inclusion, which negatively impacts the mitigation of biases and inequalities. Stereotypes and discrimination against minoritized and minority groups are examples of workplace inequalities (Fletcher & Beauregard, 2022). Such inequalities have been highlighted in recent social movements, including the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements (Shore & Chung, 2022), as well as different cases of workplace discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kipnis et al., 2021), and racial stereotypes in marketing campaigns conducted by several organizations (Duffy, 2020). Fairness depends on both equality and equity. People are treated the same regardless of their individual needs in equality, while they are treated according to their individual needs in equity (Shore & Chung, 2022). However, some white people in Western societies may feel excluded in multicultural

organizations that focus on minority cultures, which may result in potential cultural anxieties among different societal groups (Heath et al., 2022; Plaut et al., 2011).

Inclusion

Diversity may create ongoing challenges for organizations that aim to establish an inclusive workplace (Shore et al., 2018); however, inclusion may be lost in a diverse workforce (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022). **Inclusion** is defined as “the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness” (Shore et al., 2011, p. 1265 as cited in Canlas & Williams, 2022; Roberson & Perry, 2022). **Belongingness** is defined as the feeling that captures individual personal connections to the people and cultures within a social circle (Berber, 2021). It is also defined as the need to shape and maintain relationships strongly and interpersonally using emotional and cognitive effects (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) that particularly engage those who seek similarities with and validation from other people (Ashikali et al., 2021). **Uniqueness** relates to that which has, or seeks to have, individual and distinctive characteristics (Ashikali et al., 2021).

Inclusion was introduced as a buzzword in the global business world (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022), and it has since been reframed by traditional diversity management practices (Nkomo, 2014). Accordingly, there is a strong need for a clear understanding of what inclusion means, and how it can be nurtured in the workplace and beyond (Shore et al., 2018). Furthermore, inclusion can be defined differently across cultures, with inclusive leaders often being the ones who adapt to such differences (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). In particular, inclusion-related theories are commonly seen through the lens of Western dominance (Klarsfeld et al., 2019).

Importance of Inclusion

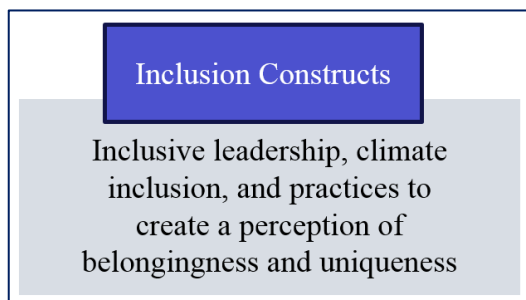
Businesspeople and researchers describe inclusion as an element of a sustainable competitive advantage through which organizations can reach the well-being of their employees (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). It is claimed that inclusion depends on the handling of representing multiple types of differences at work to gain the benefits of diversity (Johnsen et al., 2022; Ferdman & Deane, 2014), and it often amounts to an ongoing, long-term process (Booker & Williams, 2022; Ferdman & Deane, 2014). A company can reach its full potential as a diverse workplace through inclusionary practices (Igboanugo et al., 2022). Diversity can be mandated, while inclusion is voluntary and thus

more challenging to approach (Berber, 2021; Shore et al., 2018). A study found that 85 percent of employees are not engaged at the workplace, therefore, inclusion should be integrated into as many company initiatives as possible (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022).

Inclusion Constructs

Many authors highlight common constructs like inclusive leadership, inclusion climate, and inclusiveness practices (Ferdman, 2013; Shore et al., 2018), in **Figure 7**. Inclusion constructs are manifest when employees feel a sense of appreciation or recognition for their workplace contributions (Mor Barak et al., 2022).

Figure 7: Inclusion Constructs.



Source: Adapted from Canlas and Williams (2022), Ferdman (2013), Shore et al. (2018).

Inclusion Climate

To create the feeling of belongingness, individuals should feel that they belong to their group by being treated as an “insider,” particularly when it comes to having the opportunity to express their own identities and uniqueness (Ashikali et al., 2021). Employees should be able to express themselves at work while also having the feeling of “being home” (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). Differences between individuals should be valued, allowing them to keep their authentic selves without disappearing into the culture and norms of their teams’ most dominant groups (Dwertmann & Boehm, 2016; Jansen et al., 2014; Nishii, 2013; Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2011). Informed leaders adopt inclusive leadership behaviors to create belongingness and uniqueness for all team members (Perry et al., 2021). Their inclusive workplaces assist in creating and promoting a culture of collaboration, fairness, and flexibility in which all employees may contribute and reach their full potential (Shore et al., 2018). Employee engagement levels tend to rise when they perceive a culture of inclusion within the workplace (Ariani, 2014; Shore et al., 2011), with the impact of inclusion and diversity on employee perceptions related to inclusion (Hendy, 2022) and fairness, varying by gender and race (Hoang et al., 2022).

Inclusion Practices

Practices in managing diversity aim to include women, people of color, and underrepresented groups in the workplace, while managing inclusion intends to provide all employees with rights in terms of resources and decision-making (Shore et al., 2018). The HR department oversees the implementation of inclusion practices (Boehm et al., 2021; Nishii et al., 2018), which will be ineffective if perceptions of bias and unfairness exist or persist (Jordan et al., 2019). This yields inconsistent improvements (Kipnis et al., 2021) and creates a gap between what is planned and what is implemented among diversity and inclusion practices (Mor Barak et al., 2022). Furthermore, the employee's perception of inclusion influences their engagement levels, thus it is essential for organizations to promote and implement D&I policies through demonstrations of their commitment to inclusion across communication networks or channels and engaging employees in the problem-solving and decision-making processes (Jerónimo et al., 2022). Organizations need to focus on real issues by creating a culture of expression and respect (Shore et al., 2018) in which biases and discrimination toward migrants, transgender people, people with disabilities, among other marginalized groups are addressed and remedied (Kulkarni et al., 2016; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016; Ponsoni et al., 2017) by platforming voices rather than silencing them (Solebello et al., 2016; Wolfgruber et al., 2022). Here, the concept of allyship can be crucially applied to provide an active support mechanism that manages heterogeneity through inclusion-oriented policies and practices (Fletcher & Beauregard, 2022) in which all members should be represented, especially the unrepresented (Hendy, 2022). It is essential to communicate, implement, and reflect that agenda in daily actions, and to walk the talk and promote an inclusive climate focused on real engagement (Ariani, 2014; Jerónimo et al., 2022; Shore et al., 2011) in addition to fostering generative interactions for both short- and long-term inclusion (Bernstein et al., 2020). However, without inclusive leaders, such policies and practices will likely face considerable, even insurmountable, challenges in today's competitive landscape (Nishii & Leroy, 2020).

Inclusive Leadership

Leadership is one of the most influential factors of EB (Jain, 2020). In our dynamic, digital-era societies, it is necessary for companies to undergo a shift from traditional leadership to inclusive leadership (Booker & Williams, 2022; Tapia & Polanskia, 2020).

Inclusive leadership is defined as “a set of leader behaviors that are focused on

facilitating group members feeling part of the group (belongingness) and retaining their sense of individuality (uniqueness) while contributing to group processes and outcomes” (Randel et al., 2018, p. 192 as cited in Booker & Williams, 2022). Inclusive leaders are open, accessible, and available in their interactions with employees (Carmeli et al., 2010; Younas et al., 2022). They seek to balance the need for belongingness and uniqueness, moderate the relationship of team ethnic-culture diversity, and set the tone for an inclusive climate (Ashikali et al., 2021). The psychological safety of their employees is a priority for such leaders. To achieve that objective, they aim to show respect to all employees, regardless of their group identity, and to support their authenticity or personhood (Shore & Chung, 2023; Shore et al., 2018) through building trust, rewarding contributions, and providing opportunities for them to raise their voices and participate in decision-making processes (Hendy, 2022; Mor Barak et al., 2022; Romani & Holgersson, 2020).

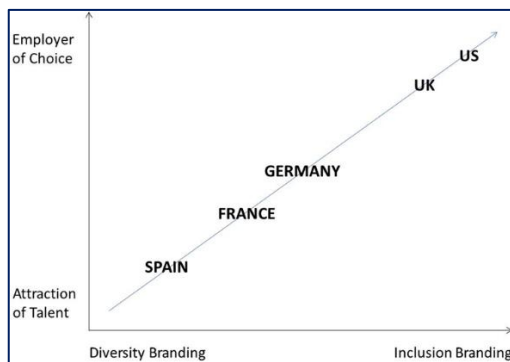
More research is needed on the topic of leader inclusion and exclusion (Shore & Chung, 2023), since there are many unanswered questions surrounding its various conceptualizations (Boekhorst, 2015; Shore & Chung, 2021; Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). For instance, most bodies of research on inclusive leadership are problematic because they have been conducted within Western countries alone and are thus heavily influenced by a specific set of cultural values and rights (Kirkman et al., 2009; Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). In Eastern cultures, the hierarchy in management plays a leading role in the workplace, thus employees in such countries would not argue or openly discuss their perspectives with managers when it comes to decision-making — which is a fundamental facet of inclusive leadership.

2.1.3.2 Diversity Branding Versus Inclusion Branding

Promoting gender and sexual orientation diversity may lead to a wider, more diverse customer base (Quach et al., 2017), especially since gender-related topics are popular in marketing communications (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004). However, diversity alone may not support marginalized groups in a mostly homogenous environment, but with a focus on inclusion, too, real changes can be made to a company’s workplace culture. Accordingly, both D&I branding tackle the challenges of reconciling homogeneity within EB and managing heterogeneity within diversity (Jonsen et al., 2019). There are a few studies on D&I branding, meanwhile, there is a greater and growing organizational focus on D&I aspects within different countries (Jonsen et al., 2019).

Jonsen et al. (2019) explored the websites of 75 major companies in the West and concluded that their websites present workplace inclusivity by providing photos, videos, and statements about diversity to attract talented candidates. Moreover, they also focus on individual diversity dimensions, including age, gender, disability, marital status, maternity, race, and religion. While diversity branding is already closely studied and underlined as a means for attracting talent, more research is still needed on inclusion branding, particularly in relation to achieving EOC status (Jonsen et al., 2019). Furthermore, even though there is a tendency for companies to shift from diversity branding to inclusion branding (Jonsen et al., 2019), the latter approach is more advanced and accommodating (Jonsen et al., 2019), see **Figure 8**.

Figure 8: Diversity Branding Versus Inclusion Branding



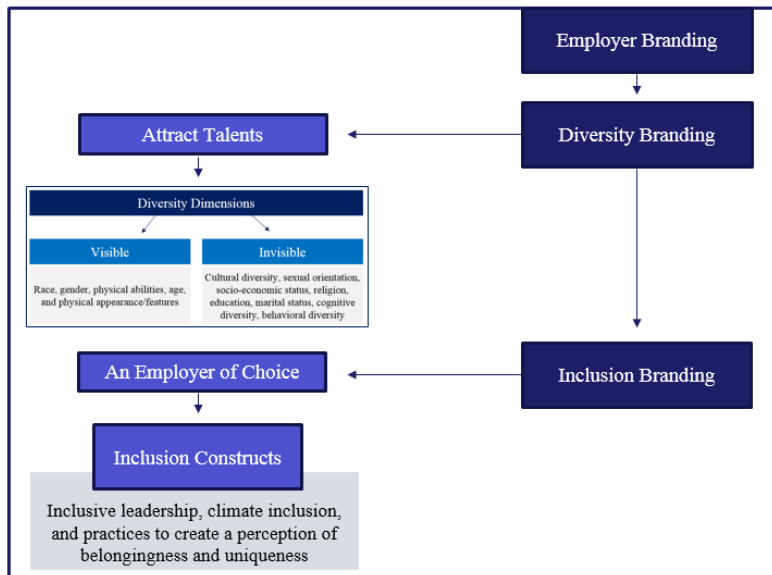
Source: Jonsen et al. (2019).

To be seen as an EOC, companies can communicate their workplace attractiveness within their inclusion branding using inclusive language and mediums, with a focus on belongingness and uniqueness (Jonsen et al., 2019). A company should foster the benefits of D&I to achieve EOC status (Guerrier & Wilson, 2011; Jonsen et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2015; Nishii & Ozbilgin, 2007; Roberson, 2013), for instance, by portraying itself as a top workplace for all genders from all ethnic backgrounds (Guerrier & Wilson, 2011) and providing inclusion-oriented statements and organizational messages about diversity. In short, communicating workplace attractiveness within inclusion branding can make a significant difference in the “war for talent” (Jonsen et al., 2019).

As described earlier, EB includes diversity among its dimensions, however, diversity is tightly interlinked with inclusion. Thus, EB can be first portrayed by communicating diversity factors, both visible and invisible, to achieve talent-attracting diversity branding, feelings of belongingness and uniqueness, and inclusion constructs (e.g., climate

inclusion, inclusive leadership, and inclusion practices) that can help foster inclusion branding and EOC status among current and potential employees, as seen in **Figure 9**.

Figure 9: Diversity Branding Versus Inclusion Branding.



Source: Author's adaptation from Canlas and Williams (2022), Jonsen et al. (2019).

2.2 Employer Branding Communication

Employer branding is represented by the sum of communication efforts used to portray a workplace culture as desirable and inviting. Therefore, it is essential for organizations to communicate their EB using a range of communication channels and efforts (Kaoud & ElBolak, 2022). Attracting employees can be achieved through promotional means and material that position an employer as a workplace of choice (Marcet Alonso et al., 2022) and a uniquely better company compared to competitors (Marcet Alonso et al., 2022). To achieve that, organizations need to focus on effectively communicating their series of employer value propositions (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Dabirian et al., 2019) and specific attractiveness (Berthon et al., 2005; Marcet Alonso et al., 2022).

Employer branding activities include employer value propositions and marketing (Pham & Vo, 2022; Theurer et al., 2018). Employer value propositions show the benefits organizations provide to attract potential talents (Pham & Vo, 2022). Lane (2016) claims that employer value propositions are the accurate articulation of an employer brand: through clear, credible, and consistent communication, and with the help of various channels, they reach internal and external audiences, primarily current and potential employees, as well as customers, investors, suppliers, media, government influencers,

and alumni (Lane, 2016). The communication methods of employer value propositions include career website and Intranet, corporate public relations and advertising, training and development, onboarding and induction, recruitment process, consultants, and recruiters, print and online advertising, professional and social networking, policy documents, and internal and management communications (Lane, 2016).

2.2.1 Inclusion Communication

Inclusive language is necessary in the workplace, as policies and norms change over time, decreasing the harm of exclusionary words and actions (Mulki & Stone-Sabali, 2020). From terminology to tone, inclusive language should consider diversity and equality, demonstrate respect, and treat differences with sensitivity (Mulki & Stone-Sabali, 2020). It is the duty of organizational leaders to integrate inclusive language into the organizational culture, because the behaviors of top management and managers impact the employees' feelings toward workplace inclusion and exclusion. By way of illustration, terms used in the workplace should concentrate on inclusion, not exclusion, for example, “you guys” could be changed to “everyone” (Mulki & Stone-Sabali, 2020).

Respectful communication and leadership are central aspects of inclusive workplaces that embrace differences (Garg, 2019). There is a need to conduct research to define the communication of inclusion, since inclusionary language is used within organizational communication and has its own set of practices (Wilhoit Larson et al., 2022). Furthermore, inclusive organizational communication contributes to inclusive social realities within organizations and beyond (Wilhoit Larson et al., 2022). Inclusionary practices should exhibit respect to cultural differences, a culture of trust, and a common understanding by valuing employee perspectives — which, in turn, creates the authentic company brand (Garg, 2019).

According to Nakamura and Milner (2023), leaders work under multiple, often simultaneous, demands by interacting with people using different communication methods, including face-to-face meetings, phone calls, video conferences, or direct written messages. Such interactions require empathic conversations as a key force within inclusive leadership, because leaders need to understand both the emotions of others and their own to best forge an effective workplace collaboration. Leaders may find it challenging to be cognizant of their empathic and non-empathic approaches, particularly when working in a context of hybrid communication, where some people work in the

office, while others perform their roles remotely (Nakamura & Milner, 2023). Therefore, it is essential for leaders to practice their communication skills in a range of contexts, with a focus on both verbal and non-verbal communication forms (Nakamura & Milner, 2023).

2.2.2 Communication within the Human Resources and Marketing

Employer branding emerges within “the principles of marketing,” particularly in the “science of branding,” as it applies to HR activities in relation to current and potential employees (Edwards, 2010; Gupta & Saini, 2020). While the concept has the attention of academics and practitioners from HR and marketing departments and backgrounds (Davies, 2008), scholars show a lack clarity when it comes to communicating and capturing the essence of EB (Kaur et al., 2020; Sarabdeen et al., 2023; Theurer et al., 2018). Such confusion arises because the phenomenon of EB is multidisciplinary by nature, incorporating HR, brand marketing, psychology, public relations, and organizational behavior (Berthon et al., 2005; Sarabdeen et al., 2023; Theurer et al., 2018). Therefore, EB should be managed by a diverse team with a common strategy, one that includes HR and marketing (Barbaros, 2020), since both departments are critical forces behind the concept (Jonsen et al., 2019; Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Verma & Ahmad, 2016), and an effective EB can be potentially achieved through their collaborative efforts (Barbaros, 2020). Top management should share their vision and promote EB through clear and targeted communication strategies (Ambler & Barrow, 1996), particularly toward HR and marketing, which play central roles in attracting and hiring talent (Jonsen et al., 2019; Kele & Cassell, 2023). Therefore, companies need to customize employer brand strategies to effectively target different demographic groups and reach all attributes of the stated value propositions, rather than just working on a few select details and profiles (Sarabdeen et al., 2023).

Human resource managers focus on current and prospective employees through their department’s communication channels to present employee value propositions (Balmer, 2001; Banerjee et al., 2020; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Their department is responsible for D&I within the workplace (Schloemer-Jarvis et al., 2022), where best-case scenario, communication and leadership should take place within a culture of inclusivity (Garg, 2019). The creation and development of an EB approach is conducted separately from HR and marketing, and thus presents a gap of interconnection between those areas

(Bejtkovský & Copca, 2020). Moreover, effective communication within recruitment processes is a significant part of EB (Ahmadi et al., 2020). While studies within EB have increased (Saini et al., 2022), research is still needed to define the communication of inclusion and related communicative practices in the workplace (Wilhoit Larson et al., 2022). Accordingly, empirical studies should be conducted to develop this concept (Sarabdeen et al., 2023), as the majority of EB studies have focused on the nature of EB using d theoretical frameworks, not lived frameworks (Dabirian et al., 2019; Gilani & Cunningham, 2017; Graham & Cascio, 2018). An organization can achieve EOC status by embracing workplace diversity and inclusivity (Byrd, 2018; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015; Jonsen et al., 2019; Kele & Cassell, 2023). Therefore, leading organizations tend to communicate their commitment to D&I (Burgess et al., 2021; Pasztor, 2019). However, communicating practices and policies of D&I may not reflect the workplace reality (Schwabland & Tomlinson, 2015; Windscheid et al., 2018) and the actual company practices (Heres & Benschop, 2010; Jonsen et al., 2019; Singh & Point, 2006).

2.2.3 Communication in the Digital Era

It is of vital importance for companies to have an online presence in this era of digital transformation, with websites and social media platforms communicating the attractiveness of their EB to people far and wide (Smith & Smylie, 2021). Digital platforms facilitate the creation of content that draws from both oral and visual communication and has the capacity to reach wide-ranging talent pools and consumer bases (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Yu et al., 2022). For instance, channels of external communication promote EB on career websites and across multiple social media and digital networking platforms (Backhaus, 2016; Berry & Martin, 2019; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Sivertzen et al., 2013). Companies may communicate their brand in words, images, videos, and banners, in addition to promoting organizational initiatives and awards to wide audiences (Dineen & Allen, 2016; Walker et al., 2009; Yu et al., 2022). Organizational culture, insights, and policies can be widely disseminated across social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and YouTube (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). Employer branding actively incorporates social media channels to set up a company for EOC status, in particular, by making employees feel that their values match that of the organization's workplace culture (Tanwar &

Kumar, 2019). To achieve this status, employers should openly strive to keep their promises for as long as their organization exists (Priyadarshini et al., 2017).

Building a strong employer brand through social media and websites (Baum & Kabst, 2014; Joglekar & Tan, 2022) is a crucially relevant strategy, as studies show that an estimated 55 percent of potential employees spend more than an hour researching a company online before applying for a job there (Smith & Smylie, 2021). At the same time, whether on a personal or professional basis, existing employees could become ambassadors for their organizations and help attract future talent with their own social media accounts (Biswas & Suar, 2016). For example, positive reviews and coverage on social media will assist in creating a positive company image and EOC status (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Sabir et al., 2022). These internal and external interactions between employers and social media users can reach candidates from around the world (Aggerholm & Andersen, 2018; Halová & Müller, 2021; Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2019). In particular, LinkedIn is a popular global social media platform that is used professionally to promote the attractiveness of a range of employers and employees and generate helpful connections or links between them (Kargas & Tsokos, 2020).

While potential employees often give great weight to a company's social media profile in this digital era, they will also search for information about jobs on career websites (Eger et al., 2018; Halová & Müller, 2021). To further promote the image of a diversity- and inclusion-oriented business requires companies to employ different communication methods, including annual reports and websites (Burgess et al., 2021; Kele & Cassell, 2023; Pasztor, 2019).

Career Websites

Career websites can be used within online EB by showcasing unique values to employees, including work-life balance, women empowerment, job satisfaction, and financial benefits (Smith & Smylie, 2021). Additionally, career websites reflect organizational values and goals to secure employees whose own values and goals are in alignment with those of the employer (Smith & Smylie, 2021). Potential employees gain information about a company's diversity and inclusion branding through organizational career websites (Jonsen et al., 2019), which assist in shaping the jobseekers' perception of the workplace culture (Jonsen et al., 2019; Windscheid et al., 2018).

Employer branding can communicate credible organizational sources of information, from employee testimonials that can then be posted on the company website to attractive

job ads (Gupta & Saini, 2020). Organizational websites are the main source for providing information about EB (Allen et al., 2007; Berry & Martin, 2019). The use of websites contributes to creating a stronger influence in terms of attracting potential employees (Behrends et al., 2020), even more so than print ads (Baum & Kabst, 2014), since companies generate their employer image using recruitment websites that give them control over their published materials (Yu et al., 2022). Job posts on career websites help promote a company's EB (Backhaus, 2016; Berry & Martin, 2019), since potential hires and current employees will search for information on those platforms (Eger et al., 2018; Halová & Müller, 2021). Moreover, jobseekers consider corporate websites to be a key source of information about their potential employer (Dalvi, 2021). For example, in the IT industry, corporate websites are regarded as an indispensable tool for attracting the best talent (Muhammad et al., 2022). On the other hand, employees also turn to credible online employer reviews, as employers do not have control over the comments left on review sites (Dabirian et al., 2017; Huseynova et al., 2022).

Corporate Social Responsibility Reports

A major aspect of EB is CSR (Boehncke, 2023; Tanwar & Kumar 2019), a relevant force in the ongoing “war for talent” and an influence in the hiring process and pool (Chambers et al., 1998). After the COVID-19 pandemic, CSR became a trendy topic with a sharp focus on employer brand communication in recruitment processes (Boehncke, 2023). Corporate social responsibility initiatives enhance equality and inclusion (Choi et al., 2023; Jiraporn et al., 2019; Pichler et al., 2018), for example, by focusing on LGBTQ friendliness and allyship as a significant dimension (Choi et al., 2023). However, there are many risks related to the role of inclusion in CSR reports, since inclusion should have its own agenda rather than being placed under the umbrella of CSR (Armstrong & Green, 2013; Jonsen et al., 2019). There is limited research on the relationship between social contributions and potential employees who value those contributions (Boehncke, 2023). *Thus, CSR reports are relevant to explore because of that evolving relationship.*

2.3 Information Technology Industry

The IT field is described as a knowledge-based industry (Atouba, 2021), for it has impacted most industries through its digital solutions and virtual offices (Dabirian et al., 2019; Kietzmann et al., 2013). At the same time, the industry faces a talent shortage, resulting in a high demand for IT experts over the past two decades (Dabirian et al., 2019;

Lo, 2015) and increased competition for talent (Dabirian et al., 2019). There are continuous dynamic changes in workplaces and across generations (Dabirian et al., 2019). For instance, the age demographic is in flux as one workforce retires, while the number of students within computer science is declining — which creates challenges for IT recruiters (Dabirian, 2020; Wilden et al., 2010). Labor mobility also creates an issue for the industry, leading to an increase in the cost of recruitment, training, and even improving the skills of current employees (Dabirian et al., 2019). Therefore, IT firms often have a limited number of highly qualified employees (Dabirian, 2020) due to the “war for talent” (Malati et al., 2013), rapid changes within the industry (Benamati & Lederer, 2001; Sung & Choi, 2014), and the necessity of highly qualified talent (Aasheim et al., 2009). Further afield, there are also many challenges within recruitment and retention (Dabirian, 2020; Malati et al., 2013).

2.3.1 Employer Branding Communication within the IT Industry

Organizations that adapt to the modern technology within and surrounding their operations may create a positive outcome in terms of employer attractiveness (Joglekar & Tan, 2022) and recruitment processes (Gatewood et al., 1993; Joglekar & Tan, 2022). In the IT industry, firms work in the form of business-to-business, through which they should work with EB strategies that help establish a positive, desirable reputation — simply, “a great place to work” (Dabirian et al., 2019). The concept of EB has been related to the IT industry in many studies (Dabirian, 2020; Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2012; Malati et al., 2013), as it is an effective way for companies in this field to hire and retain talent and thus secure competitive advantages (Dabirian, 2020; Pham & Vo, 2022; Thomas & Jenifer, 2016). Furthermore, measuring the efficiency of external communication is needed to increase the number of women within the industry, or, at the very least, to assess why female candidates are underrepresented (Ahmadi et al., 2020).

Experts in the industry tend to change their employers to find more attractive working conditions, which, in turn, creates an issue for IT firms that work continuously to attract and retain talent (Dabirian, 2020). For that reason, IT companies should work to improve their EOC status (Atouba, 2021; Su et al., 2009). Furthermore, these companies should provide many organizational benefits to highlight their attractiveness (Pham & Vo, 2022), including the main eight value propositions within EB — social value, interest value, application value, development value, economic value, management value, work-life

balance, and brand image (Dabirian et al., 2019). These propositions are essential for current, former, or potential employees, bringing internal and external EB together (Dabirian et al., 2019). For example, IT employees can work remotely nowadays, which affects the work-life balance and potentially adds value, as employees expect flexible schedules, whereas different generations may expect fixed scheduling (Dabirian et al., 2019).

2.3.2 Diversity and Inclusion within the IT Industry

Bilgin et al. (2021) state that many attributes impact employer attractiveness, since it varies among different cultures, branches, and even company sizes (Theurer et al., 2018). For instance, using new technologies increases inequalities in the workplace by having biased recruitment toward some groups, resulting in a shortage of digital labor (Walkowiak, 2021). There are rapid improvements within the IT industry, in particular, there is artificial intelligence that uses algorithms and could increase biases against marginalized groups (Tilmes, 2022). Artificial intelligence systems make decisions on recruitment and management work that create consequences with respect to workplace exclusion and inclusion (Whittaker et al., 2019). By way of illustration, using algorithms to create job ads that present gender-neutral language showed that more men than women saw the listing (Lambrecht & Tucker, 2019). Digital transformation creates the need for ever-evolving workplace employment practices, while artificial intelligence algorithms, for example, are designed based on the stereotypes and values of their designers — which reproduces and perpetuates human biases against individuals (Walkowiak, 2021). Accordingly, there is a need to integrate moral and human values in such far-reaching technologies (O'Neil, 2016).

The IT industry is known to have a male-dominated workforce and few improvements have been implemented over the years to produce a gender balance (Ahmadi et al., 2020). Fewer women within the IT industry have a negative effect on the fundamental design flaws (Tarpley, 2020) and decreases the usability of IT solutions or, in some other situations, causes the exclusion of user groups (Ahmadi et al., 2020). Cultural stereotypes, unequal salaries, lack of promotion opportunities and access to personal networks at companies, even missing or unreported female role models, are among the many reasons behind the absence of women within the field (Ahmadi et al., 2020).

The tech sector gains benefits from D&I strategies in different ways, such as obtaining potential diverse skillsets that generate creative and innovative products and services, or reflecting a global society by providing services through a diverse workforce, or attracting a diverse talent pool within an inclusive workplace (Sinha et al., 2020). There is a dynamic culture of transformation and disruption within the industry, one that increasingly requires shifts in leadership, as inclusive leaders need to improve their diversity intelligence, foster encouragement, respectful treatment, participation, and act in an authentic manner (Sinha et al., 2020). Furthermore, the use of new technologies in digital workplace transformations is already changing the way people carry out their work and engage with their coworkers (Meske & Junglas, 2021). Such transformations trigger changes in the expectation and engagement levels of employees (Alieva & Powell, 2023; Chatterjee et al., 2021). Therefore, the work styles of an organization are expected to shift in the wake of this century's digital revolution (Chatterjee, 2020; Skare & Riberio Soriano, 2021). For example, working from home during the pandemic required greater focus from inclusive leaders, as they had to foster feelings of belongingness amid physical separation (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022).

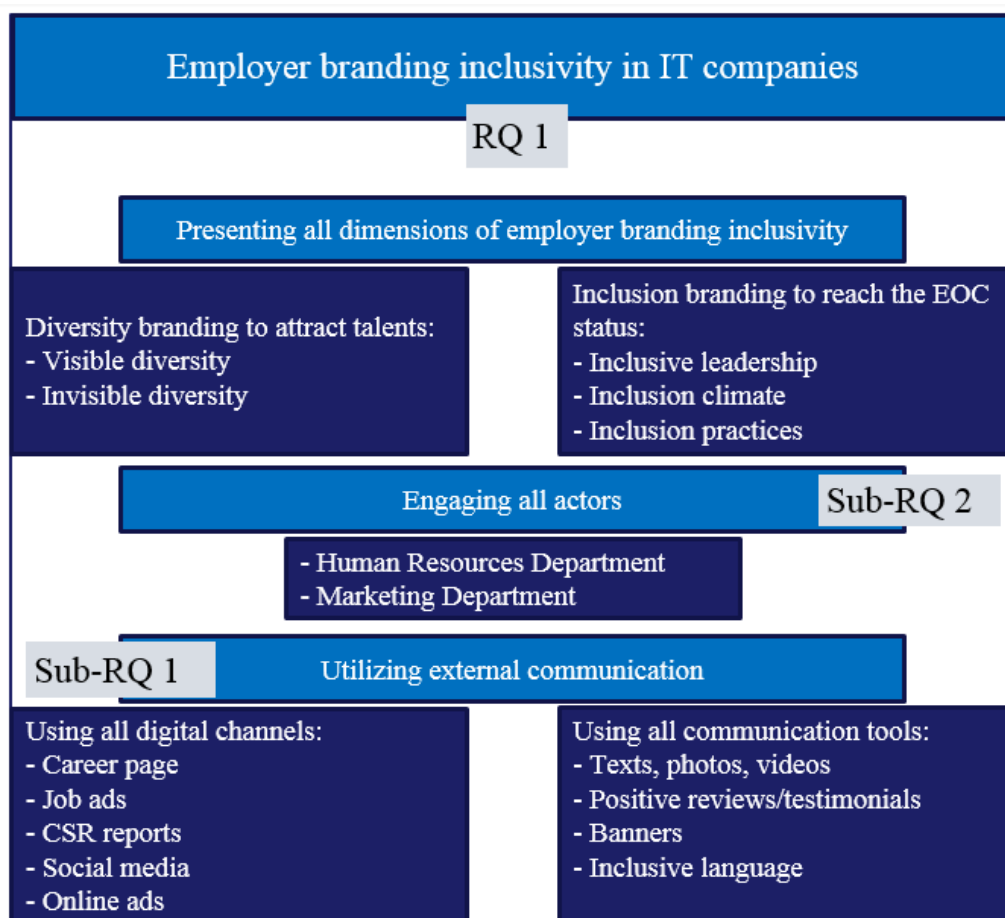
2.4 Conceptual Framework

Internationally, EB has become a trendy topic in the marketing field because of the “war for talent,” the pandemic and other crises, as well as digitalization (Behrends et al., 2020; Saini et al., 2022; Sarabdeen et al., 2023). However, the concept can be used inauthentically when the external organizational image does not reflect the internal one (Itam et al., 2020). Both HR and marketing departments work with EB, but it is the latter that usually deals with external communication to reach future hires. These departments should collaborate effectively in the external digital communication of EB inclusivity (Jonsen et al., 2019; Verma & Ahmad, 2016), perhaps using their company website as the starting point to present pages about DE&I, job posts, and CSR reports (Berry & Martin, 2019; Jonsen et al., 2019; Kele & Cassell, 2023). For instance, an employer can demonstrate diversity branding to attract talent using photos, videos, and statements about the diversity dimensions (e.g., visible and invisible) (Garg, 2019; Jonsen et al., 2019). However, an employer takes diversity branding further by communicating inclusion branding to portray attractiveness and reach EOC status by showing an inclusive workplace with inclusion constructs (e.g., climate inclusion, inclusive leadership, and

inclusion practices) to create the feelings of belongingness and uniqueness (Canlas & Williams, 2022; Ferdman, 2013; Jonsen et al., 2019).

Inclusion branding is highly relevant within the IT industry, as employees often work remotely, and there is a shortage of skillful workers; women are one of the underrepresented groups and face discrimination issues caused by both humans and technologies (Ahmadi et al., 2020; Dabirian et al., 2019; Pham & Vo, 2022; Tilmes, 2022). The author proposes a conceptual framework derived from the literature review as a basis for this study, covering EB inclusivity within the IT industry, as seen in **Figure 10**.

Figure 10: Conceptual Framework of EB Inclusivity's External Digital Communication.



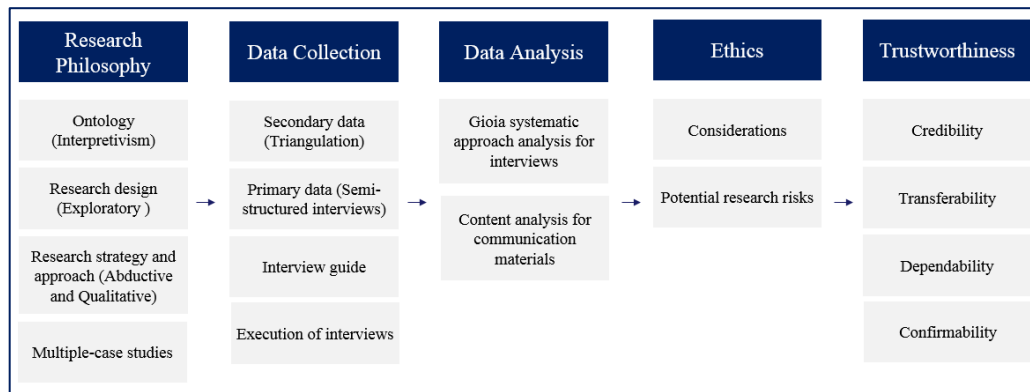
Source: Author's adaptation from **Chapter 2**.

3 Methodology

This chapter presents the foundation and process of the methodology used in this research, starting with the philosophical standpoint behind it. After that, the justifications of the exploratory design, strategy, and approach will be examined, along with collecting secondary and primary data, sampling, and data analysis. Finally, ethics and trustworthiness are examined, and detailed insights about the selected method are provided.

The methodology choices of this research are shown in **Figure 11**.

Figure 11: Visualization of the Chosen Methodology.



Source: Author's presentation.

3.1 Research Philosophy

It is essential to understand a chosen methodology's primary philosophical standpoint because it defines the appropriate way to collect, analyze, and use data (Galliers, 1991). Such a determination leads to higher quality research outcomes with data that was gathered in an effective, in-depth fashion to create valuable research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018; Galliers, 1991; Nunan et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2012; Saunders et al., 2016). Research philosophy has two branches: *ontology* focuses on human beings and their existence, while *epistemology* focuses on knowledge (Saunders et al., 2012). Since this body of research explores varied perspectives on EB inclusivity, *ontology* is the branch of choice. Out of the five research paradigms — interpretivism, positivism, pragmatism, critical realism, and postmodernism (Eisend & Kuss, 2019; Nunan et al., 2020) — one

should be selected to launch a targeted study with structure and momentum (Saunders et al., 2012).

3.1.1 Interpretivism

Positivism is used in quantitative research (Devers, 1999), as it emphasizes only one reality to discover, while interpretivism “stresses the dynamic, participant-constructed and evolving nature of reality, recognizing that there may be a wide array of interpretations of realities or social acts” (Nunan et al., 2020, p. 153). Interpretivism studies have focused on the social interactions, motivations, understandings, and effects of humans within a social context and thus avoid generalizing outcomes (Saunders et al., 2019), due to the limited samples used (Nunan et al., 2020). The interpretive approach is one of the most common philosophies within marketing research (Eisend & Kuss, 2019; Nunan et al., 2020), and it is often employed when conducting interviews within qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2009) as well as for unexplored or underexplored research topics (Saunders et al., 2012).

Accordingly, *interpretivism* matches the purpose of this research, mainly due to its double focus on the HR and marketing departments, and how they can approach and portray EB inclusivity differently. Most of this research is drawn from digital media-derived data about EB inclusivity; it would also be beneficial to use other resources, including annual reports and websites (Burgess et al., 2021; Kele & Cassell, 2023).

In interpretivism-driven research, the researcher’s values impact how they observe, question, and interpret the material at hand (Nunan et al., 2020). Therefore, interpretive researchers need to be involved in all research steps to fully process the interview subject’s beliefs, views, and attitudes (Nunan et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2012). Furthermore, individuals are often driven or guided by their complex experiences, motivations, beliefs, and values. Thus, interpretivism appears to be more conducive to the purpose of this research: a case for inclusive communication in EB.

3.2 Research Design

Research design should have a clear direction for collecting and analyzing data using one of two marketing research design classifications: conclusive and exploratory (Nunan et al., 2020). Conclusive research describes the precise characteristics of situations, events, or people as a way to understand the context and details at play (Babin & Zikmund, 2015;

Nunan et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2009). Additionally, this approach tests relationships between specific hypotheses and existing studies through a structured and formal research process in which many samples are gathered, as is common among quantitative bodies of work (Malhotra et al., 2017). On the other hand, exploratory research delves into a research problem that still needs to be defined or clearly understood and thus works to make sense of the phenomena (Saunders et al., 2016). A primary objective of exploratory research is to provide deeper insights into that which exists while evaluating related topics from existing studies to present new ideas and arguments (Saunders et al., 2009; Sreejesh et al., 2013). This approach helps researchers answer their queries without having the aim of arriving at a problem resolution (Saunders et al., 2009), and it can be employed in both qualitative and quantitative research (Nunan et al., 2020). Furthermore, its process is unstructured and flexible and involves a small sample size, thus making it suitable for qualitative research (Malhotra et al., 2017).

This research uses *an exploratory research design to better understand the communication of EB inclusivity* from both HR and marketing departments, with their different intentions and approaches and the patterns shared between them. The chosen design explores different conceptual frameworks to present their relationships and identify what should be explored in the interviews to reach this study's overall purpose. At present, there are limited exploratory studies that concentrate on how companies can use diversity and inclusion branding; meanwhile, there is an increase in organizational focus on communicating diversity and inclusion, which is mainly evident on company websites (Jonsen et al., 2019).

3.3 Research Strategy and Approach

According to Saunders et al. (2019), one of three research approaches needs to be established to determine the research design: abductive, deductive, or inductive. The deductive approach tests hypotheses and theories and evaluates collected data for generalizations (Saunders et al., 2019); it also includes using logical reasoning to conclude (Ghauri et al., 2020) from numbers and figures (Saunders et al., 2019). On the other hand, the inductive approach aims to develop new theories from collected data. The approach starts from specific observations to broader generalizations (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), as conclusions can be drawn without using absolute evidence (Nunan et al., 2020). The author does not aim to follow the processes in the inductive approach, or to show a

reality without going deeper into the deductive approach. Lastly, the abductive approach, which combines the deductive and inductive varieties, employs an existing theory to modify or build a framework (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.3.1 Abductive Research Approach

An abductive research approach is usually connected to qualitative studies (Farquhar, 2012). It was chosen for this study because it uses data to explore the topic across all the research stages in which the researcher needs to go back and forth between theory and empirical findings, particularly during the research stage, resulting in interconnected findings (Saunders et al., 2019). To identify patterns and themes, the relationships are presented in a framework and then the topic is explored using empirical data through original interviews. The data, collected and used, becomes empirical data that assists in generating new research (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Saunders et al., 2016). It explains facts using known rules to broaden perspectives and find surprising insights (Fisher & Aguinis, 2017), primarily through the elaboration of current theories in combination with empirical findings (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014) as well as research gaps to help create meaningful outcomes that reveal unexplored relationships and patterns (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Such elaborations aim to explore the latest trends and theories in the digital communication of workplace inclusivity, EB, D&I, and the IT industry overall as a basis for the conceptual framework, as mentioned in Chapter 2.

A surprising research's finding inspires the researcher to further explore the subject matter (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010; Saunders et al., 2019). One of this study's most surprising findings is that inclusion branding is not commonly explored in EB-related academic literature (Jonsen et al., 2019). This fact brings challenges, as HR is responsible for both EB and workplace inclusivity; however, there may be gaps in collaboration with the company's marketing department to reach inclusion branding.

3.3.2 Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research explores the meanings that individuals assign to problems, even creating new ideas or dynamics within research, as interaction is required to gain the particular meaning in a complex situation (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative methods are common in interpretivism and inductivism research (Nunan et al., 2020; Saunders et al.,

2019); as explained earlier, this study chose interpretivism. Recent research on EB focuses on its conceptual nature (Dabirian et al., 2019; Gilani & Cunningham, 2017; Graham & Cascio, 2018); accordingly, development through empirical studies is still needed (Sarabdeen et al., 2023). This study uses *qualitative research* because it aims to interpret data about the topic from interviewees' different approaches to communicating EB — which would be impossible in the case of using a quantitative approach that relies on numbers instead of interpreting data. In an effort to build upon existing literature about EB, D&I, and digital communication, this study employs one-on-one interviews to gain deeper insights into the research questions. Those interviews are conducted within three case studies.

3.3.3 Case Study

A case study is “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence.” (Robson, 1993, p. 146). It is commonly used within research strategies to help lay the path ahead for researchers (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014). Furthermore, case studies are employed in qualitative studies using empirical data and evidence covering the research field that focuses on a particular phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). They are used to closely explore a specific organization, probe their operations, and cover a wide-range of topics within different traditions, cultures, ideas, attitudes, and worldviews (Harrison et al., 2017). There are various types of case studies, including exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory (Saunders et al., 2012). The *exploratory case study* fits the exploration-driven nature of this research. Moreover, the case studies strategy contributes to generating in-depth explanations that show how and why the phenomenon occurs, which is beneficial when conducting interviews and can contribute to answering the research problem.

This study explored the topic, in part, through case studies. Accordingly, the case study design should be multi-structured (Gustafsson, 2017). A multiple-case study strategy uses a collection of empirical sources to assist in presenting similarities and differences about the research topic (Gustafsson, 2017). In the IT industry, firms work on a business-to-business basis (Dabirian et al., 2019). Therefore, research on business-to-business marketing has traditionally used qualitative case studies to help advance the related theoretical knowledge (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010). This study uses a **multiple-case**

study approach (Eisenhardt, 1989), for it is known as a means of gathering valuable theoretical insights (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) and providing in-depth data (Bluhm et al., 2011; Yin, 2012). Therefore, this study's above-described strategy aims for detailed, vivid research on the communication of EB inclusivity. The author avoids using a single-case study approach that may lack sufficient scientific proof (Saunders et al., 2012). At the same time, multiple case studies have disadvantages, too, including the time-consuming nature of conducting different interviews along with the challenges related to accessing contacts within organizations (Myers, 2019; Yin, 2003). Moreover, it is claimed that both single and multiple case studies may include bias in their verification (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

3.4 Data Collection

Data collection in this research includes both primary and secondary sources; the material was gathered from these sources and later analyzed for relevant theories and academic journals that could help answer the research questions. Data triangulation was also employed by using both primary and secondary material.

3.4.1 Secondary Data

Researchers collect secondary data to help them approach new research rather than the current research purpose (Hox & Boeijs, 2005; Serra et al., 2018); therefore, previously collected data holds relevance and can be used for new research purposes (Vartanian, 2011). The analysis of preexisting data created by others is regarded as secondary data analysis (Donnellan & Lucas, 2013), upon which the theoretical background and framework of this research are based. Therefore, it is essential to provide a wider understanding of the research's primary purposes (Nunan et al., 2020). For this study, **various academic research channels and electronic databases** were used within the secondary data. The academic research included Primo (i.e., the library database of Jönköping University), Google Scholar, and Web of Science. The databases included Scopus, JSTOR, and Emerald database, which presents an academic article about the interconnectedness of the research topic. Secondary data should be reviewed carefully, as it may lead to the propagation of misinformation due to the use of non-credible sources (Donnellan & Lucas, 2013). Therefore, the author used many keywords and created criteria for including and excluding secondary data, as seen in (**Appendix 1**).

Triangulation

Triangulation can be used in qualitative studies by gathering evidence from multiple sources within the primary data, such as interviews and texts from websites (Suter, 2012), since it helps with gaining a deeper understanding of the different research aspects (Rothbauer, 2008). According to Saunders et al. (2016), it is claimed that the secondary data can support the interviews, for it is not less important than the primary data. Referring to different sources is essential when using multiple case studies (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010; Robson, 1993). Data source triangulation can be achieved by combining different data sources that assist in creating a comprehensive understanding of the study (Carter et al., 2014); therefore, the author analyzed the websites of the interviewed companies because they are created by their marketing departments, a main subject in this study, along with HR. Those websites included pages about EB focusing on D&I and presenting that topic in their job ads and CSR reports. The analysis of website data provides a more detailed image of the company and can be used in relation to the claims gathered from key stakeholders during the interviews, potentially supporting the outcomes of this study.

3.4.2 Primary Data

Researchers create primary data “for the specific purpose of addressing the problem at hand” (Nunan et al., 2020, p. 86) by collecting and analyzing original source material (Nunan et al., 2020). They can use primary data within the qualitative method, starting with evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of conducting interviews (Eisend & Kuss, 2019; Nunan et al., 2020). A powerful way to examine the inner workings of the human mind is to conduct in-person interviews that leave space for pause and deliberation (Fontana & Frey, 2005). It would be beneficial to use *one-on-one interviews*, where the author finds ways to gain more input from the interviewees while minding potential sensitivities and offering anonymity, confidentiality, and flexibility.

Interviews within the qualitative method may be divided into structured, semi-structured, or unstructured interviews (Mueller & Segal, 2014). Structured interviews have a predetermined list of questions that are asked in the same order and tone (Mueller & Segal, 2014). On the other hand, unstructured interviews concern the storytelling of the interviewee, which helps guide the interview, *instead of the interviewer*. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews include some degree of predetermined questions, order, and flexibility when it comes to forming the interview questions (Mueller & Segal, 2014). For

this research, *the semi-structured interview* was selected because it offers the adaptability of two-way communication between the interviewer and the interviewee, encouraging the exploration of both professional and personal insights (Bryman & Bell, 2011); *the approach is useful for reaching deeper insights since this study is exploratory*.

3.4.3 Interview Guide

The nature of semi-structured interviews includes open-ended and closed-ended questions that help guide a simultaneously focused and flexible discussion. For instance, the style of questioning can be tailored to each individual's approach, whether the dialogue is quick and sharp or protracted and in-depth (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). There is a need to conduct a thorough and comprehensive study that traces the links between EB and employer attractiveness (Kaoud & ElBolak, 2022). Within the qualitative method, in-depth interviews can serve as a technique for data collection using less unstructured and personal interview styles with each participant. This method may enrich the research topic with unexpected insights into underlying attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs (Hox & Boeije, 2005; Nunan et al., 2020). An atmosphere of mutual trust may yield the most revealing data (Johnson, 2002).

An in-depth interview can be conducted in an hour, or longer, based on the interviewee's availability and level of interest. The researcher explains the purpose of the interview before posing a set of introductory questions and following them up with more specific, targeted queries about the topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Flexibility should be prioritized, with the interview evolving depending on the participant's answers; however, researchers can use probing questions to gain specific insights by asking for further descriptions and clarifications (Nunan et al., 2020; Warren, 2002).

One interview guide was created for all interview participants (see **Appendix 2**), but each participant was free to introduce different topics (Gioia et al., 2013). The **interview guide** includes an explanation of the interview methodology, along with the ethical and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) aspects (see **Appendix 3**). The set of interview questions featured in the guide come in different combinations and sequences to ensure utmost relevance in terms of presentation, i.e., "knowing your audience," or interviewee (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Probing and **follow-up questions** come into play when needed or according to the atmosphere of the interview. For example, probing questions are direct, targeted questions that aim to generate interviewee insights, while follow-up

questions seek elaboration or clarification on certain contextual details and other information (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

3.4.4 Sampling

The selection of certain case studies should be justified, as random selection would not serve the study's purpose (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). The author explored markets that generally need to communicate EB inclusivity. The IT sector was the most relevant choice in this digital era and author since it operates locally, regionally, and internationally. The industry represents a worldwide challenge in terms of attracting talent and utilizing technologies, as seen in Chapter 2.3. This study has pandemic and personal-professional forces underpinning it: not only was there an increased need for digitalization during the outbreak, with a media that focuses on the shortage of IT talents, but the author works at a global IT company. Many IT companies in Sweden were contacted for interviews, starting with professionals from the author's networks — to lay a foundation of mutual trust — followed by contacting unknown suggested interviewees as well as searches on company websites and LinkedIn accounts. The complete list of contacted companies includes Afry, CGI, Consid, Knowit, Nexer, SoftHouse, Technia, Tietoevry, and Toxic; selected host companies were the first to accept the interview and inquire about the sampling criteria.

Sampling is the process in which a researcher chooses a small group of people within a determined population (Sharma, 2017). It is preferred to use a small sample size in unexplored research that takes on an interpretive philosophy (Saunders et al., 2012). The non-probability sampling technique is efficient, adaptable, and accessible (Nunan et al., 2020). It is particularly useful amid time and capacity constraints (Malhotra et al., 2017) and for exploratory qualitative research that aims to gain insights from a small sample size (Nunan et al., 2020). Accordingly, the ***non-probability sampling method*** was chosen for this research, as the technique aligns with its purpose of moving beyond literature gaps and generalized outcomes. **Snowball sampling** can be used to find suitable participants within non-probability sampling: the researcher initially forms a small group of people who make up a sample that relates to the research questions, and, at some point, they ask each interviewee to suggest other suitable participants (Bryman, 2012). There is a risk of bias within the research when using purposive sampling, because of the




judgements of the researcher (Sharma, 2017). Bias risks can be mitigated by using relevant sampling criteria of participants.

The sampling criteria includes a mix of gender and age groups that work across IT companies, hold expertise in HR or marketing in relation to EB inclusivity, and demonstrate interest in the subject matter (**see in 3.4.5 Execution of Interviews**). For each company, an EB expert within the marketing department was interviewed, along with another one from HR. Their combined work using external digital communication means led to the surprising fact of this research: the underexplored topic of inclusion branding. It was essential to compare the HR and marketing findings and trace any patterns or possibilities related to seeing the wider landscape or drawing conclusions from more diverse and inclusive analysis.

Summary of the host companies:

Three case studies were conducted in total: Toxic, a local Swedish company; Nexer, a Swedish company that globalized; and CGI, a global Canadian company that operates in Sweden.

Figure 12: Author's presentation of the chosen companies.

	CGI is among the world's largest IT and business consulting services firms, with its head office in Canada (CGI, n.d.-a). Founded in 1976, the company currently has 90,250 employees across 400 locations worldwide (CGI, n.d.-b), with 30 of them in Sweden, employing 3,800 people (CGI, n.d.-c). The firm's goal is to become Northern Europe's most equal management and IT consulting company by 2025, at the latest. It is recipient of the Excellent Employer certificate by Nyckeltalsinstitutets and is included in the equality index by Nyckeltalsinstitutets Jämställhetsindex JÄMIX®. In Sweden, in 2023, it was voted the most attractive employer by IT students, and one of the top 25 most attractive employers, as well as the most attractive trainee program for students, according to Karriärföretagen (CGI, n.d.-c).
	NEXER is a global tech company with a Swedish and family-owned background that guides its approach toward entrepreneurship and innovation. The company operates in 15 countries with 2,300 employees (Nexer, n.d.-a), including 20 offices in Sweden and 19 abroad (Nexer, n.d.-b). NEXER Group has a range of different business areas, including Cyber Security, Data Management, Enterprise Applications, Infrastructure, Maverick, MyTeam, Nexer Recruit and Tech Talent (Nexer, n.d.-a). It focuses on education, equality, and diversity within its corporate social responsibility initiatives (Nexer, n.d.-c), and was recognized as a career company in 2023 by Karriärföretagen (Nexer, 2022), with Nexer Recruit being a finalist in the 2022 recruitment awards (Nexer, n.d.-d).
	Toxic is a digital agency founded in 1996 in the heart of Småland, Sweden. The company's head office is located in Anderstorp, with offices in Borås and Jönköping that employ 70 people (Toxic, n.d.-a). The company has expanded to operate in Gothenburg, Sweden (Toxic, n.d.-b). Its business areas include digital transformation in web, e-commerce, system solutions, and digital marketing (Toxic, n.d.-a). For several years, the company has actively worked for an equal and inclusive workplace culture as well as an equal tech industry in general (Toxic, n.d.-c).

The author works at CGI, one of the IT firms featured in this body of research, and he is engaged in company initiatives within DE&I. His role at CGI was one of the central driving forces and inspirations behind this study where the employee becomes the researcher and draws data from lived experiences. The author's unique access to internal CGI contacts, data, and initiatives benefited this research, along with his years spent building networks within the organization and elsewhere across the IT industry. It is

important to note that when interviewing CGI participants, the author took on the role of researcher, *not employee*, to avoid any potential biases or conflicts from having a hybrid researcher-employee role. For instance, the different companies in this study were approached with the same guidelines and questions.

3.4.5 Execution of Interviews

The first interview was a **pilot test** to verify the corresponding guide, from its material to the flow, as part of a process that led to necessary clarifications and revisions on certain interview questions (Gani et al., 2020). *All questions were amended to reflect a more conversational interview style and hold the interviewee's interest.* At the start of the interview, each participant was informed that their answers would be valued: there are no right or wrong replies, just honest assessments. Participants were also informed about their ethical and legal rights (see in **3.6 Ethical Consideration**), and that they could end the interview or withdraw their answers at any point (Saunders et al., 2016),

When possible, the author prioritized physical interviews to gain access to a wider range of interactions, including body language and facial expressions, to help him better assess the interviewee's intentions, motivations, and feelings. However, online interviews save time and money, making it more accommodating for participants with a keen interest in the subject matter but a demanding schedule (Archibald et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2020). It was easy for the author to conduct the online interviews since all interviewees work at IT companies and were familiar with different online communication tools. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in English to increase the research trustworthiness, as mentioned in **Chapter 3.7 Trustworthiness**. Seven in-depth interviews from the three IT companies (i.e., CGI, Nexer and Toxic) were conducted, including four with marketing people and three with HR. Keeping the industry's longtime gender imbalance in mind, the author selected five female interviewees and two male ones. The interviews took place this spring over a five-week period, from 7th April to 11th May. Each interview was conducted for a different duration, ranging from **60 minutes to 120 minutes**, in total **10 hours**. One interview was carried out on a face-to-face basis, while the rest were conducted via Microsoft Teams. A list of interviews is provided below (see **Figure 13**).

Figure 13: Demographics of all Interviewees

Interviews of HR and marketing departments and interview durations (author representation).

ID *	Name, age, gender & nationality	Company	Department and position	Date, interview form & duration (m:s)
H1**	Anonymous	Toxic	HR (Top management)	7 th April 2023, Teams***** & (75)
M1	Anonymous	Toxic	Marketing	14 th April 2023, physical & (120)
M2	Nils Gronvall, 29, male & Swedish	CGI	Marketing*** (Head of CGI Selected Trainee program)	21 st April 2023, Teams & (70)
M3	Robert Almqvist, 58, male & Swedish	CGI	Marketing (Director of Communication)	26 th April 2023, Teams & (120)
H2** **	Ulrika Nord, 30, female & Swedish	Nexer Enterprise Applications	HR (recruiter)	28 th April 2023, Teams & (75)
H3	Johanna Havervall, 37, female & Swedish	CGI	HR (Talent Acquisition Manager)	4 th May 2023, Teams & (60)
M4** **	Anna Falconer, 42, female & Swedish	Nexer Enterprise Applications	Marketing (Marketing Manager for Sweden)	11 th May 2023, Teams & (84)

*ID: M relates to the marketing department while H relates the HR department.

**Toxic does not have an HR department; however, the author enriched the data by interviewing a strategic leader who is generally responsible for the firm's EB, HR, and DE&I.

***The participant does not belong to CGI's marketing department but is working with EB for the company's trainee program, holding a unique perspective to help enrich this study from different actors who work with the concept.

****The participants presented their own thoughts, not those of Nexer Group, however they follow the guidelines created by Nexer Group.

***** Microsoft Teams is a business communication platform.

3.4.6 Recording and Transcription

There are challenges when it comes to maintaining a balance between asking questions and observing body language, or "reading the room," during an interview. Therefore, with the consent of the interviewees, the discussions were audio-recorded on two devices while the virtual interviews were recorded using Teams to eliminate the risk of losing data, since the material would be transcribed, anonymized, and analyzed. All of the recordings will

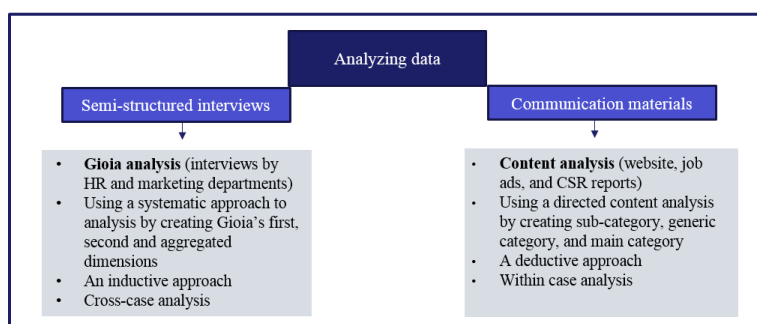
be erased after conducting the research. The author kept track of the input generated during the interviews; recording the interviews helped him capture and cover many useful details (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The data generated from the interviews were transcribed by the author using the recorded interviews to avoid errors and ensure the reliability of the collected material (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

All interviews were recorded in 10 hours (604 minutes) and generated 200 pages of transcription material. The interviews need to be fully reviewed, even transcribed, to help identify patterns across the data sets (Boddy, 2016). *The author analyzed the full transcriptions as well as the communication materials presented on the company websites (e.g., career pages, CSR reports and job ads).*

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis is considered a main procedure in qualitative research that helps shape the study's conclusion (Flick, 2013). Therefore, it is essential to select a suitable analysis method for one's study (Flick, 2013; Saunders et al., 2016). The author reviewed the semi-structured interviews and communication materials separately, but with equal attention, to gain a deeper and clearer understanding. Codes and themes were created based on data presented, starting with the statements of experts within HR and marketing departments, followed by an exploration of their online communication materials. The Gioia method was used for analyzing the data from the HR and marketing interviewees, while content analysis was used to analyze online communication materials, see in **Figure 14**. All of the data was analyzed in a Microsoft Excel document.

Figure 14: Visualization of the Chosen Analyses.



Source: Author's presentation.

3.5.1 Gioia Systematic Approach for Interviews

The Gioia analysis is employed in qualitative research by using a systematic approach analysis following an **inductive approach** (Gioia, 2021; Gioia et al., 2013). It assists researchers in reaching deeper insights from comprehensive findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and interpreting actual evidence of themes across the empirical data (Gioia, 2012). This process helps show the dynamic relationship between concepts and themes by creating first-order, second-order, and aggregate dimensions from case studies (Kumar & Noble, 2016). First, all of the recorded material was transcribed from the raw data that the researcher should be familiarized with (Gioia, 2012). Secondly, the first-order concepts should be generated after gathering terms from the different interviewees, in case there are any relevant patterns presented in the transcription data that could be categorized to show similarities and differences (Gioia, 2012). Thirdly, similarities and differences should be presented in codes by giving them labels that suit the concepts within a domain (Gioia, 2012; Saldaña, 2016). Lastly, the researcher can create aggregated dimensions when they are satisfied with the second-order codes, which help in advancing the study (Gioia, 2012). Moreover, case studies can be presented in a horizontal contrasting approach, which shows contrasting observations across different contexts for all the three companies, cross-case analysis (Fisher & Aguinis, 2017). Therefore, the interviews' outputs were presented for the three companies in different contexts.

3.5.2 Content Analysis for Communication Materials

Promoting the image of a diversity- and inclusion-oriented business requires companies to use different communication methods, including reports and websites (Burgess et al., 2021; Kele & Cassell, 2023; Pasztor, 2019). Therefore, career websites, job ads, and CSR reports were analyzed to assist in enriching the conceptual framework of this study. A company website is a clear starting point, or anchor, for the communication of companies' EB, even before establishing accounts on social media and other digital communication channels. With that in mind, this research focuses on that main channel — websites — in addition to website materials that relate to D&I, including job listings and CSR reports. However, the qualitative research approach used in this study proved to be challenging when it came to analyzing large data that is valuable and contributes to strong insights and results. The data should be handled and analyzed correctly (Saunders et al., 2012),

though it can be challenging to find a strategy to help manage all the data (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Content analysis is used in qualitative studies (Neuendorf, 2017) to explore unknown phenomena (Vaismoradi et al., 2013) and analyze large texts (Malhotra, 2010), in any format, and its source can be created within an interview or a book (Denscombe, 2007). Content analysis has been used over the last sixty years in different communication disciplines within social studies in terms of media, texts, and videos (Neuendorf, 2017). Additionally, it can be used to categorize any written communication (Weber, 1990), and to show themes or ideas that interact in texts (Leavy, 2019). The coding approach chosen was **directed content analysis** to extend a theory or a framework in which codes **are determined prior to and during the data analysis of relevant** theories and empirical findings in **a deductive approach** (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The author selected this method because it fits the exploratory nature of the research, offering a map of ideas and insights about the communication of EB inclusivity — one that compares media content to real life. Promoting the image of a diversity- and inclusion-oriented business requires companies to use different communication methods, including reports and websites (Burgess et al., 2021; Kele & Cassell, 2023; Pasztor, 2019). Therefore, career websites, job listings, and CSR reports will be analyzed to assist in enriching the conceptual framework of this study.

Data can be effectively managed by using codes that are then used as labels to assign units of meaning. Thus, codes present different words, phrases, or whole paragraphs to sort the data and present it in various relevant codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Braun and Clarke (2006) claim that codes are used to show interesting data of the study through a common pattern across the findings. Saldaña (2013) describes coding as an interpretive act in which the author interprets data and creates codes iteratively, in different rounds, to ensure the data is presented in a way that serves the study. For instance, they start by reading all of the texts over and over until a common idea or understanding emerges from the data; next, the coding is structured in relation to pre-determined codes based on the research's frame of reference, since it was created to answer an established set of research questions. Later, a mix coding can be added as a way of emergent coding to create new codes for interesting input that serves the study but that were not included in the pre-determined codes.

All of the pre-determined and new codes should be closely reviewed to make sure they are cogent and organized. Therefore, the categories used included **sub-category, generic category, and main category** (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Finally, **vertical contrasting** is used to show contrasting observations across different levels of analysis for all the three companies (Fisher & Aguinis, 2017). Moreover, communication materials were presented in a within-case analysis to understand the data and then discuss it as cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). Therefore, the communication materials of the three companies were presented separately for each company in a structured and clear way based on either website pages, job ads, or CSR reports.

Translation from Swedish to English: When analyzing data from websites, job ads, and CSR reports, the author translated the Swedish texts himself since he speaks the language.

Using Tables: The tables were used in the quantitative research as well as in this qualitative method, particularly to present a comparison between the interviewees to show similarities and differences in a clear overview.

3.6 Ethical Considerations and Potential Research Risks

Ethical considerations should be a central concern throughout the research process to prevent any conflicts in or around the study, or between the interviewer and the interviewee (Nunan et al., 2020). Such considerations help guide the study with respect to the rights of those who participated in or were affected by the research (Saunders et al., 2009). The author prioritized mutual respect during this process and aimed to create an experience in which the interviewees would feel at ease (Liedtka, 1992).

Before the interview, the author submitted a consent form provided by the author (see **Appendix 3**) to the interviewee, confirming that all the collected personal data of the research aligned with the GDPR requirements. To protect their privacy, the author provided anonymity to two of the participants, H1 and M1, based on their requests to hide their identity, while the author gained approval to publish their business units within their company. However, since this study is exploratory in nature, presenting participants' information was important to increase the trustworthiness of this study. Therefore, the author presented information about other participants after their approvals, including, name, age, nationality, position, and gender.

Throughout the interview process, participants received information about the research, recording methods, and transcribing process; it was also explained to them that the

recorded data would be safely stored in the Jönköping University cloud alone. Moreover, the author would sole hold access to the recordings without any third-party involvement. It is important to foster a stable link between the interviewer and the interviewee, especially in qualitative research (Nunan et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2009). The communication of D&I can be a sensitive topic, as targeted or probing questions could be misunderstood when communication is focused on, for instance, marginalized groups or persons with religious or cultural backgrounds that vary from the dominant groups. As previously stated, the author explained earlier how he differentiated between his roles as academic researcher and CGI employee (see in **3.4.4 Sampling**).

The participants were guaranteed confidentiality prior to their interview and informed they could avoid answering certain questions if they felt that the replies would harm their organizations or roles there. The author was careful about not asking sensitive, misleading, and bias-ridden questions, for instance, he focused on staying neutral so the interviewee could speak without intervention, as their beliefs, emotions, and thoughts commanded the space. All the sorted data is set to be erased after the grading of this study to make sure that the material is available in case the university wishes to check the trustworthiness of the research.

3.7 Trustworthiness

The quality of the research directly relates to the data's trustworthiness in qualitative research, since there may be challenges in terms of generalizing and replicating studies (Nunan et al., 2020). Trustworthiness is defined as "the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study" (Connelly, 2016, p. 435). Research becomes trustworthy after a reader reviews and confirms its trustworthiness (Sandelowski, 1993), which can be used when measuring the research quality through evaluation criteria using credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative studies (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility is the most important factor in demonstrating the trustworthiness of a body of research (Guba, 1981). It includes internal validity to ensure the research measures its intended topic (Shenton, 2004). The seven interviewees in this study offered deep dives into the research topic; they come from different backgrounds, generations, and genders,

but all work with EB in the same industry. However, case studies may include unreliable self-reported data by interviewees who may claim they do a certain task or activity. In contrast, they do not, which creates a problem in the credibility of the study. To remedy this, the author used triangulation in this qualitative research to increase the level of credibility, since a smaller sample of companies were interviewed. The author scrutinized the relationship between the empirical data findings and the communication of online materials via websites and then drew comparisons with preexisting theories. For example, data concerning EB inclusivity was gathered from current theories, semi-structured interviews, company websites, job ads, and CSR reports. Follow-up questions were also used during the interviews to establish the veracity or credibility of the discussion and avoid any misunderstandings. The credibility of the research was evident in the clear communication style and the thorough and transparent descriptions on how the data was collected (Shenton, 2004).

One author conducted this research; thus, it was not affected by any miscommunications or misinterpretations concerning the data collection and analysis processes. Moreover, all interviewees received the transcribed text to check its reliability and accuracy. M2, M3 and H3 approved texts' transcriptions without changes; H1, M1 and H2 conducted minor changes; and M4 requested addressing misinterpretations.

3.7.2 Transferability

External validity is “ensured through transferability since it relates to generalizing the study and demonstrates that the findings and conclusions apply to other situations and populations” (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). First, the author guaranteed transferability by providing the reader with explanations about the background and purpose of the research in **Chapter 1**. They used existing theoretical frameworks and theories in **Chapter 2** to help guide and explain the research methodology, data collection, sampling selection criteria, and how the interview would be conducted, step by step in **Chapter 3**. Next, the empirical findings are presented in **Chapter 4**, and the analysis in **Chapter 5**. Finally, the conclusion and limitations are shown in **Chapter 6**. Throughout the process, the author also included emotions, experiences, and theoretical backgrounds to provide a complete picture of the similarities and differences while offering detailed and diverse information that could assist future researchers.

3.7.3 Dependability

The consistency and credibility of the research are related to the dependability of what the author provides; best-case scenario that involves clear and transparent information about the data collection and analysis process, so that the study can achieve the same results again (Korstjens & Moser, 2017), or it can be replicated at any time by other researchers (Shenton, 2004). The author ensured dependability through transparent descriptions of the research design, approach, strategy, and data collection process. Additionally, the author included and explained in detail the guidelines for conducting and analyzing interviews to make it easier for other researchers to replicate the same study.

3.7.4 Confirmability

The objectivity of the researchers is related to confirmability, which shows the effect of the researchers on their research outcomes and determines if the findings could be approved by other researchers (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Confirmability can be reached by minding and avoiding the personal perspectives of the researchers since they should remain neutral throughout the interview process (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Many actions may trigger biases in the researcher; for instance, they may impose their own beliefs on the interviewee or exert their sensitivities toward specific topics, affecting the exploration of the semi-structured interview and leading to underexplored or unexplored data. Additionally, the researcher with unchecked biases may interview the wrong sampling group or provide inadequate time for the most relevant interviews, resulting in biased data (Saunders et al., 2009).

In this study, the author paid close attention to potential bias issues by following the previously mentioned selection criteria and ethical considerations. The author transcribed the complete interviews, and the gathered data was read, analyzed, and finalized by him first. Following that, the transcription was sent to the interviewees to mitigate any unrepresentative subjectivities of the researcher (i.e., misinterpretations).

4 Empirical Findings

This chapter presents the empirical findings derived from semi-structured interviews to answer the research questions. The data also includes communication materials presented on company websites, CSR reports, and job ads. The findings and results are presented in codes that are supported by quotations from the interviewees and communication materials.

These quotes from three IT companies (see in **3.4.4 for the list of case studies**) represent marketing departments (M) or human resources (H) (see in **3.4.5 for the list of interviewees**). The chapter presents the following data sources (see in **Figure 15**):

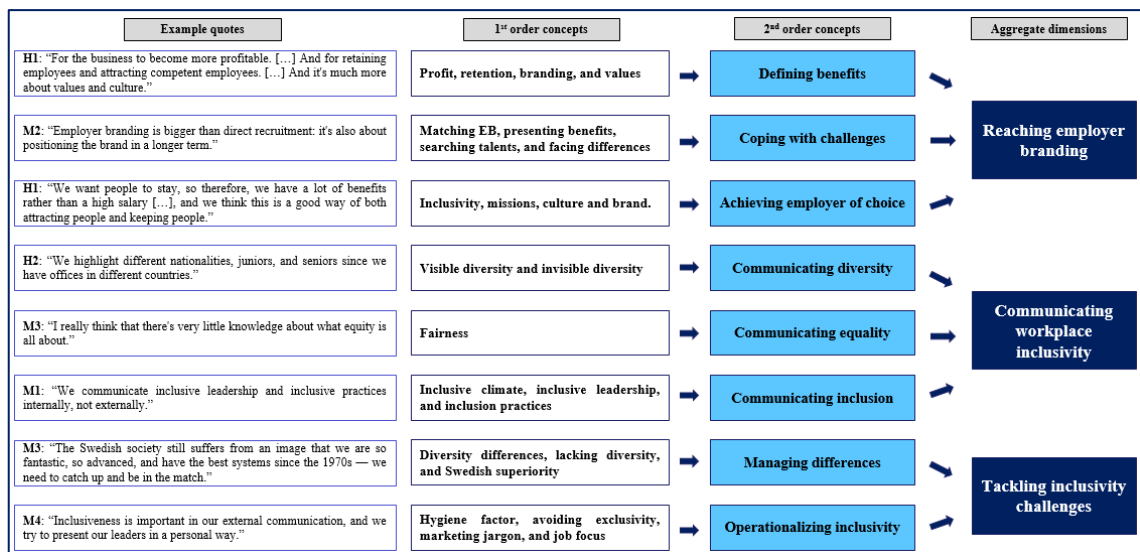
Figure 15: Sources of Analyzed Data

Data/companies	CGI	Nexer	Toxic
Interview of HR department	X	X	X
Interview of marketing department	X	X	X
Website pages	X	X	X
Job ads	X	X	X
CSR reports	X	X	NA

4.1 Employer Branding Inclusivity

This theme mainly explores the relevance of the EB concept by presenting different themes associated with first- and second-level codes (see in **Figure 16**).

Figure 16: Employer Branding Inclusivity



4.1.1 Theme 1: Reaching Employer Branding

A range of EB aspects were identified by the interviewees, from the advantages, to the challenges, and the approaches along the journey for EOC status.

Defining benefits include many advantages that companies can gain from working with EB to sharpen their image or brand, attract talent, and present the organizational culture, as **M1** stated:

“Strengthen your brand by working with employer branding [...] to attract people to join, and to make people feel proud when they have joined. [...] It is to be able to communicate the culture and the feelings about our company.”

Many statements pointed to the advantages of EB in relation to *profit-making*, gaining and retaining *top talent*, portraying *organizational values* and *culture*, positioning the *brand* to stand out among the competition, and presenting *projects* or *initiatives* that the company works with. However, the concept and its importance have a different focus when comparing marketing to HR across each of the three companies in this study. For instance, HR focuses on advantages in relation to recruitment, while marketing focuses on communication and the company brand.

Coping with challenges include various obstacles that need to be overcome for a successful EB platform. Companies need to unify their external and internal EB, as **H1** stated:

“Your external employer branding matches your internal culture, to attract potential people. Otherwise, you will lose these people to the next company, and that costs a lot of money and competence.”

It is essential to create a welcoming environment for new employees and meet their expectations, as stated by **M4**: “When people join, they should be greeted and experience the same feeling and culture as we're showing [...] people will not stay if we don't meet their expectations.” There are many challenges that may need to be faced during the EB process. By way of illustration, companies need to build a trusted image when communicating with potential talent pools, showing the true image and nature of the internal work environment — and, in turn, increasing or reinforcing the company's credibility. New hires may exit the company due to such discrepancies, with higher turnover and time-consuming recruitment efforts being costly. Additionally, **M2** talked about the importance and challenge of long-term visibility, stating: “It's also about positioning the brand in a longer-term”.

Companies need to show all their benefits to attract employees; however, overcommunication does not sharpen a unique brand, as stated by **M3**: “We need to include all benefits, but if you communicate with everyone, you reach no one. [...] It’s tricky.” An additional challenge comes with the time-consuming search for all the desirable hires across different positions, as stated by **H3**: “Our challenge is that we work with everything within IT. So, it’s hard for us to be specific in reaching candidates.” There are also different perspectives on the communication of EB to consider, since cultures and religions may influence the understanding, as stated by **M1**: “It is challenging since we have different stages in cultures, religions, and communication.”

The quest for EOC status presents the various approaches a company can use to differentiate itself. **M1** pointed to the importance of individual needs when pursuing potential employees, for example, by allowing them to work remotely, as stated:

“You need to see the personal benefits [and] needs and include all people. [...] People like to work from home.”

Individual needs are changing to satisfy employees by providing many benefits and an inclusive environment, as stated by **H1**: “We have a lot of benefits. We differentiate ourselves in terms of being more friendly, more inclusive.” At the same time, **M2** stated multiple factors that change over time, including values, cultures, structure, clarity, job security, career development, and stating the right expectations. For **M3**, they highlighted the importance of creating a personal brand for employees, having fun at work, and creating a work-life balance for women in particular.

Senior employees are more interested in working with the best technologies and customers, in addition to working with CSR initiatives and holding organizational value while also organizing fun activities, as stated by **H2**: “Exciting, challenging, and developing assignments for our employees to work with customers that use the most-advanced technologies. [...] CSR initiatives with good values at the company. [...] It is important to do fun activities together.” Furthermore, **M3** claimed the importance of current employees in terms of shaping EB by using personal networks with professionals and students. However, external communication is still needed since employees do not have knowledge about the whole company’s work, as **M3** stated: “If we instead took our 3,800 members and made them fans to present our company. [...] We have a referral program, projects with universities. [...] Our employees don’t really know all the amazing stuff that we do in all our 400 offices worldwide.” Lastly, it can be promising or appealing

for employees to be involved in expanding the company's future and creating values for different stakeholders, as stated by **M4**: "We are growing a lot globally. [...] So, hopefully that attracts people to be working toward our vision of a promising future and make a difference for businesses, for customers, and for the world at large."

4.1.2 Theme 2: Communicating Workplace Inclusivity

This part presents different aspects of inclusivity, including DE&I branding.

Communicating diversity presents both visible and invisible elements of diversity. **H2** stated the importance of presenting employees from different nationalities, experiences, and genders by portraying them in photos and videos.

"We highlight different nationalities, juniors, and seniors since we have offices in different countries. [...] We use pictures and videos to show our diversity of both female and male trainees, juniors, and seniors."

Diversity elements can be used in communicating EB, as there are many factors included in diversity that companies should use to show their diversity branding within their EB.

M1 mentioned the use of current employees: "We always use pictures of people who work here — women, men, and different ages." At the same time, it is claimed that invisible diversity is not used in communication, as stated by **M3**: "I don't think we communicate externally about health diagnosis as a part of diversity." Diversity should be included in all job listings, as stated by **M4**: "We talk about diversity in every job ad."

Communicating equality presents how fairly a company treats its employees, for instance, by being welcoming to everyone in the workplace, as stated by **M1**:

"We focus on equality in our communication materials, such as texts [on how] to approach everyone with inclusion."

However, another participant noted the lack of knowledge about what equity is, since it means offering everyone the unique opportunity to succeed based on their unique needs and performance, as stated by **M3**: "I really think that there's very little knowledge about what equity is all about."

Communicating inclusion has three elements that can be used in communication: inclusive leadership, inclusive climate, and inclusive practices. Communication with employees should be conducted in inclusion-oriented modes in which individual benefits of work-life balance, working remotely, workplace appreciation, and feelings of belonging and should be communicated particularly within the Swedish workplace, as stated by **H1**:

“It's a language that's very inclusive and friendly. [...] In Sweden, for example, you attract employees through work-life balance, including remote work, while in some other countries the tasks you have are the most attractive to employees. It doesn't matter how your appearance is. Be whoever you are [...] For me, companies should show things that make me feel connected.”

All of the interviewees mentioned the inclusion climate in different contexts. For instance, interviewing current employees to present their experience and story is a way to show inclusion branding, as stated by **M1**: “We interview current employees to tell others about what they work with, what is best with Toxic.” Furthermore, **H2** highlighted the importance of telling the stories of those who have worked longer at the company to learn from their journey: “We want people to share their story, especially people who have worked for a long time with us.” However, there is a need for continued work on presentations of inclusivity, as stated by **M3**: “We have not been as active in talking about inclusivity, but now these questions are on the top of HR's agenda.”

One participant mentioned the use of inclusive leadership or practices in internal rather than external communication, as stated by **M1**: “We communicate inclusive leadership and inclusive practices internally, not externally.” However, another participant pointed to the greater relevance of communicating inclusive leadership externally, as stated by **H1**: “We haven't spoken about inclusive leadership separately in communication, actually, yet. But it's one hundred percent important that companies communicate their inclusive leadership within their external employer branding.” Moreover, it is essential to present an inclusive workplace in addition to celebrating diverse celebrations, as described by **M4**: “Inclusiveness is important in our external communication, and we try to present our leaders in a personal way. [...] We highlight that we are flexible and possible to work hybrid, onsite and remote from your current location [...] And to celebrate international events such as Christmas, Easter, or Diwali and other traditions of different cultures.”

4.1.2 Theme 3: Tackling Inclusivity Challenges

This part presents challenges that emerge in the communication of workplace inclusivity and highlights the reality of communicating it.

Managing differences include challenges in understanding diversity in different contexts, a lack of diverse groups, exclusivity aspects, and a Swedish superiority complex. Regarding the latter challenge, **M3** stated:

“Swedish society still suffers from an image that we are so fantastic, so advanced, and have the best systems since the 1970s, but we have no idea how they do things in other countries.”

As an example, diversity is approached differently across countries in relation to the LGBTQ community, since some European countries still criminalize or target members of that group, as stated by **M1**: “In Sweden, we’ve come far with the LGBTQ community.” It can be challenging to communicate diversity, at the same time, workplaces are not as diverse as they are supposed to be, as stated by **M2**: “If you’re not already diverse, then it’s hard to make people feel included, so we can’t communicate it.” The same participant claimed that it is challenging to include everyone since the market requires having educated people with a university degree. Thus, it is difficult to exclude those who do not hold standard credentials, but it’s also essential to find candidates with the suitable skills: “We just try to attract people with the right competence.” Moreover, the participant highlights the importance of not having to communicate with everyone, as this affects the uniqueness of the company brand, as stated by **M2**: “But if you should include everyone, then your identity will become less strong, as you can’t include everyone.”

Operationalizing inclusivity presents different dilemmas in communicating EB inclusivity. The need for communicating EB inclusivity decreases since employees take it for granted that IT employers in Sweden would presumably have an inclusive workplace. Therefore, the firms do not need to finance communication campaigns about that, as stated by **H3**:

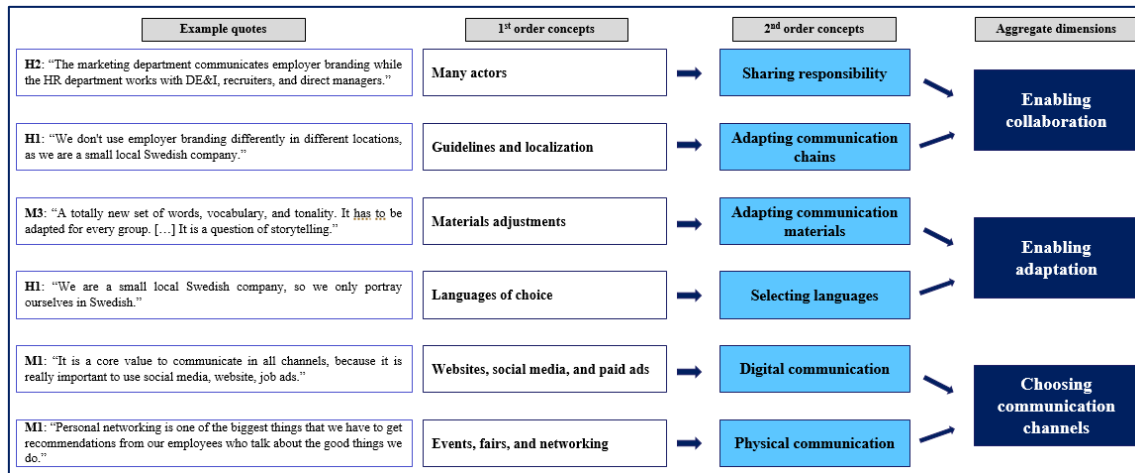
“They take that we are working with diversity and inclusion for granted. [...] I will say, it’s not that we are going to do a specific campaign about D&I, but we have it on top of mind every single day.”

This statement is echoed by **M3**: “Diversity, equity, and inclusion are not rated among the top in statistics of potential employees, because everyone expects you to provide them.” The same participant underscored the different realities at play, for example, the lack of actions to highlight working with DE&I in big campaigns and banners. However, it’s also important to show the tasks people would work with instead of just focusing on DE&I, because LGBTQ issues can be instrumentalized as marketing jargon, as stated by **M3**: “Personally, I’m still not seeing all the [necessary] actions — I would like to see CGI at the top and in the front communicating all big actions. [...] A safe zone for LGBTQ people [can] become marketing jargon, greenwashing, or equity washing. [...] It is important to communicate what it is you do and what you’ll be doing once you start working with us.”

4.2 External Communication

This part focuses on different considerations that should be used by companies when communicating externally — for instance, which actors contribute to shaping the communication materials, how do they collaborate, and what languages and channels do they use in communication (see in **Figure 17**).

Figure 17: External Communication



4.2.1 Theme 1: Enabling Collaboration

Many actors within IT companies should collaborate on the communication of EB inclusivity, especially when working across different countries. Such collaborations could even assist in decreasing the wait times of the decision-making and publication approval processes.

Sharing responsibility concerns the roles that are involved in shaping communication materials, approval processes, and global guidelines. Many actors are engaged in those activities, including marketing, HR, recruiters, and direct managers, as stated by **H2**:

"The marketing department communicates employer branding while the HR department works with DE&I, recruiters, and direct managers."

Other participants mentioned different roles that are also part of that process, such as talent acquisition, as stated by **H3**: "We have talent acquisition that works with talent marketing toward talent groups." Additionally, there are communication initiators, for example, in case the event would be communicated locally in a specific city rather than nationally, as stated by **M2**: "Stakeholders who initiate an employer branding activity are in charge of communication, especially if it is about local events in cities." However, it was mentioned that actors do not evaluate external communication materials to measure

the influence of the communications or even to get feedback from newly interviewed employees to improve future communication strategies, as stated by **M1**: “I do not think we all evaluate the communication results together [...] Marketing needs to get input from recently hired people to be better in the future.” Lastly, recruiting managers should be engaged in creating content in collaboration with HR and marketing, as stated by **M4**: “Marketing, HR and our recruiting managers to plan employer branding content, events and recruitment ads.”

Adapting communication chains include the process undertaken by companies to receive the approval of communication materials or global guidelines compared to local guidelines. There may be a considerably long chain of approvals required when communicating externally on social media, while, on the other hand, it may be easier when using other means, such as publishing an article or publications on the websites, as stated by **M3**:

“It is tricky and there is a really long chain of communications regarding who decides what to publish on press releases and social media. [...] But it is easier to publish on the website, articles, or blogs.”

Many business units should collaborate before communicating externally, as stated by **H2**: “We are a big company. [...] Different units need to work together to create the whole picture.” Conversely, the decision-making process may be easier or more streamlined in small companies, as stated by **M1**: “We decide for all our offices here from Jönköping.” Furthermore, small local companies can create the same communication strategy among their few offices, as stated by **H1**: “We don't use employer branding differently in different locations, as we are a small local Swedish company”. Responsible managers should approve advertising content according to EB guidelines, as stated by **M4**: “All ads are approved by responsible managers and according to our employer branding guidelines.”

4.2.2 Theme 2: Enabling Adaptation

It is essential to decide what material to use when communicating to external audiences, since materials could be used differently and in different languages.

Adapting communication materials include how texts, videos, pictures, and symbols communicate EB inclusivity. It is essential to adapt the tonality in communication using specific words, speaking a common language with prospective employees, and presenting real inclusive actions using storytelling, facts, best practices, and actions as the most powerful communication materials, as stated by **M3**:

“A totally new set of words, vocabulary, and tonality. It has to be adapted for every group. If we want more recruits like Juvva, then we need to speak like Juvva. [...] That is the true force of inclusion to talk about, with real actions, since you can’t tell the story without actually hiring that diverse somebody. [...] I wish to see the best processes and programs; we need facts, stories, and actions about how we treat and interview people.”

Five of the seven participants emphasized the importance of adapting communication materials, for example, by showing individual benefits to attract people and using natural language to reach both men and women or juniors and seniors. **M1** described that process: “Be aware of the words you use to avoid male or female words. [...] Other performances, ages, junior or senior employees. [...] State that people can work remotely in any country.” Furthermore, communication materials can be presented in videos, articles, or any other content formats to give future employees enough information about how they could be included if they would work abroad, as stated by **H3**: “We create videos, articles, and content constantly, and information if someone wants to move to another country to work for us.” Moreover, head office communication materials, guidelines, and other content should be followed, as stated by **M4**: “Nexer Group has employer branding guidelines, materials, and contents that we follow and use.”

Selecting languages present the spoken and written words that companies communicate in, from Swedish to English, or both. Employing Swedish — the customer language — is a necessary aspect of the company strategy toward approaching clients and leaving them with a sense of familiarity and clarity. That same company could face challenges in using Swedish to attract international talents, since the local language would only apply or accessible to an extremely small demographic globally, as stated by **M3**:

“We work and speak the language of the client. [...] But that has made a problem in attracting very well-educated refugees from Syria because they could not understand us using Swedish. [...] CGI Canada wants us to share in Swedish since we are in Sweden, as we have only one account on each social media platform in which we share in different languages.”

Another interviewee stated that English is the most-used language when it comes to reaching a wide audience. However, local managers and employees share work-related posts in Swedish or English to reach their targeted groups, as stated by **H2**: “Most communication materials are in English — to reach everyone. [...] Local managers or employees publish things in Swedish or English.” This statement is supported by **M4**: “If we only use English, maybe it feels less local to many. [...] We have videos and ads in Swedish, but as a global company, English is used the most.” On the other hand, local

Swedish companies, such as Toxic, do not face the same challenge since they operate locally in the national language to best serve their employees and customers alike, as stated by **H1**: “We are a small local Swedish company, so we only portray ourselves in Swedish.” **M1** echoes that statement: “We only communicate in Swedish since our market is Swedish.”

4.2.3 Theme 3: Choosing Communication Channels

Future hires can be approached through various communication channels, as a wider range of communication channels reach a wider range of people, with prospective talent among them.

Digital communication presents all online digital communication means used in external communication. Websites are essential as a first source for information targeted toward future employees. Social media platforms, mainly LinkedIn, then Instagram, are also key tools. However, other platforms are not prioritized in external communication. Moreover, the online engagement of current employees on worked-related topics is helpful in the eyes of the employer, as stated by **M3**:

“The website and LinkedIn are key for everything we do. [...] In Sweden, we were the first of the whole CGI [team] worldwide to use Instagram to support recruitment through expressing our culture and personality. [...] We never invested a lot into Facebook, and we have Twitter technically, but we’ve never been active users. [...] We want employees to share about us on social media. [...] We have a luminary program to train our experts to tell our stories better.”

All participants highlighted the importance of using the career page on the company website to share information with potential employees, such as job ads, interviews, articles, and benefits. The website shows the formal information, while social media shows more expressive work interactions and environments, as stated by **M1**: “The website focuses on customers and formally shows employer branding. Social media is about the feeling and interaction with current and potential employees to get ideas about who we are.” LinkedIn was the top choice of all participants among the leading social media platforms. However, Instagram offers glimpses into the work environment, as stated by **M1**: “Instagram is about internal employees, as people get a quicker view of what Toxic is.” Many communication means can be used such as ads, recruitment pages, social media in video and posts format to present inclusivity, as stated by **M4**: “We present our leadership in our ads. [...] On our recruitment page, we highlight things like our business areas, present employees but also things like our values, CSR initiatives, and

benefits. We use videos and posts on social media, paid ads, and career pages. Also, we have job ads on LinkedIn.”

It is also important and cost-effective to use paid ads to reach talents who are not connected to the company, as stated by **M2**: “Ads are important because then we can reach people who we don't otherwise reach on social media fairs that we are visiting [...] Paid ads are cheap, interactive, and very easily controlled.” The idea for the company’s current talent is to keep them engaged and active on sharing information about work, which can be beneficial in terms of outreach, as stated by **H2**: “We motivate employees to share on social media.” However, such engagement should be voluntary, as stated by **M1**: “We do not want people to feel forced to do it, but that they want to do it.” Employers appreciate employee engagement on social media, as stated by **M4**: “We have a really nice engagement in the company of many employees that share our news and posts on social media.” Moreover, CSR reports can be used to present inclusivity, however, it is not utilized yet at Toxic according to **M1**: “Right now, we do not have a CSR report, but we plan to write one next year or the following.”

Physical communication comprises all communication means that occur during an in-person, face-to-face dialogue. For instance, being physically present at events and finding new jobseekers with the help of current employees are solid recruitment approaches, as stated by **M3**:

“I think we did 13 student events last year. We have an enormous amount of recruitment done through referrals from somebody already working at CGI.”

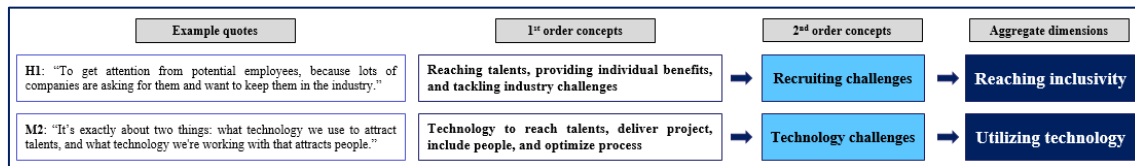
It is a common industry approach to yield new talent from the networks of current employees, according to **M1**, **M2**, **H2**, and **H3**. People often change their jobs through personal networks rather than going through the formal recruitment process, as stated by **H2**: “Potential employees use their networks to change positions without applying for positions.” This illustrates the importance of personal communication, as online visibility alone is not enough, an observation shared by **H3**: “It is not only about you seeing ads but also about the people close to you, recommending you to be a member.” Lastly, there is a need to be more present at recruitment events and schools to help students learn about opportunities, internships and trainee programs, as stated by **M4**: “We sometimes attend external recruitment events, and we are conducting our own trainee program. [...] We just started to have more of a presence at schools. Juniors come from school and want to

know about our trainee program, internships, and the possibilities to grow in our company.”

4.3 Employer Branding within the IT industry

This theme presents the relevance of EB inclusivity in the IT industry (see in **Figure 18**).

Figure 18: Employer Branding within the IT industry



4.2.1 Theme 1: Reaching Inclusivity

This part presents the relevance of EB inclusivity in the IT industry.

Recruitment processes come along with many challenges, from gaining the attention of IT employees and providing them with individual benefits, to managing dynamic industry changes in an effective way using EB inclusivity. The IT industry is highly competitive, thus, communicating EB inclusivity is needed to help distinguish an employer from their competitors, especially when employees change employers using personal networks. That may include attracting the few top candidates by offering them an array of benefits in combination with an inclusive work environment, as stated by **H2**:

“There is a high competition between IT companies [...] IT employees change companies through their networks without applying for positions, so you need to stand out to reach out to candidates who are not available, have good positions, and benefits. [...] Therefore, it is important to be really visible, to have great offers and make them feel included.”

Almost all of the participants, including **H1**, **M1**, **M2**, **M3**, **H2**, and **H3**, highlighted the difficulties of finding IT talent. For example, a participant discussed the issue of women leaving the industry, even though the company communicated benefits of work-life balance, remote work, and presenting case projects to attract them, as stated by **H3**: “The problem with the whole tech industry is not having enough women since they leave the tech industry. [...] We communicate about work-life balance, hybrid work, projects, and so on.” **H1** also supported the lack of women in IT: “The industry has a high number of people changing the industry, particularly women because they don’t feel included, so they go to other industries.” This shortage of employees may correspond with the stereotypes about IT employees, as described by **M1**: “Many have stereotyped that IT employees need to be nerdy, not social, and so on.”

Attracting IT talents who are already employed and experiencing great working conditions may pose a challenge, as stated by **M3**: “They need to be persuaded, as they are busy, have high salaries, and maybe feel appreciated at their work. [...] We have to be so unique with a strong employer brand.” Furthermore, Western countries have a greater demand for talent and aging populations, which together highlight the need for EB inclusivity, as stated by **M2**: “The Western world has a big market with little talent to work, since the younger generations are less and less.” Additionally, more diversity in the workplace provides many advantages to companies, as stated by **M1**, “We develop things for everyone and take perspectives from everyone,” and supported by **M4**: “The demand for specialists in the digitalization is really, really high; it's hard to find specialists. [...] We need to have more perspectives, experience, and expertise.” **M2** echoed their statements: “[Be] more profitable by getting more perspectives and a bigger talent pool, so you have no choice except to be inclusive.” Lastly, companies need to offer the best packages to attract employees, ones that include a focus on EB inclusivity, salaries, meaningful work, and attractive customers to work with, as stated by **M1**: “The challenge is that you need to be on top of everything — the company, benefits, salary, projects, customers.”

4.2.2 Theme 2: Utilizing Technology

Different technologies are utilized in the IT industry to find talent and attract them to work with modern technologies, to further an inclusionary agenda with underrepresented groups in mind, and to optimize various work processes.

Technology challenges include all the obstacles that emerge when using different technologies to attract and retain employees. **M3** described the primary role of the most-advanced technologies when it comes to adapting to dynamic changes in the workplace and helping to facilitate difficult administrative work activities for those who do not like to work with administrative tasks. Moreover, it is essential to create an IT system that keeps track of the whole employee journey, from being attracted by the EB communication to applying for the job, going through the interview process, and ultimately being hired, as many actors are engaged in the process. **M3** describes the problems and a potential solution, a new system:

“We need to be in the front with technology [...] to decrease administration work by including people who hate that. [...] It is so important to optimize the recruitment processes to go through the whole funnel, from waking up [someone’s] interest on social media, and then the person coming to our

website. [...] But our system does not allow for that, and we can't do it manually either. [...] I wish we had such a system at our chain of business units because we lose people when the system is not connected.”

Another participant argued for the importance of using the most-advanced technologies to attract jobseekers who want to experience the latest innovations, as described by **H2**: “We emphasize the technologies we are using to keep our employees and to attract new employees.” That statement was echoed by **M2**: “It’s exactly about two things: what technology we use to attract talents, and what technology we're working with that attracts people.” Moreover, IT talents want to produce IT solutions that create positive societal changes, as stated by **M1**: “Employees want to develop things that make an impact.” On the other hand, such technologies may cause and perpetuate biases, thus making workplaces less inclusive, particularly when using uncredible data and exclusive language, as **H1** described: “ChatGPT¹ is a good way of finding information and creating job ads, but make sure the data is inclusive, otherwise you just use biased data on top of bias towards men, age, ethnicities, and so on.” **M1** supported that: “Artificial intelligence creates solutions according to what they know, as it can make it less inclusive or less diverse because you do not know the source of information. We get different answers based on our perspectives that fit our bubble.” IT systems should be optimized to generate or reproduce strong values in relation to EB inclusivity to get statistics from external ads, along with deeper insights about recruitment, as explained by **H3**: “Our current recruiting system does not show how many applicants viewed our ads or campaign.” Technologies can also assist in creating inclusivity and may even be used in cooperation-based channels and processes, as stated by **M4**: “I hope technology will bring us closer together and [help us] find new ways of communication and collaboration.”

4.4 Online Communication Materials

Triangulation was used in this research, as both the HR and marketing representatives offered data in their interviews, in addition to using the secondary data presented in online communication materials from the three companies interviewed. Using such materials helps in showing how companies prioritized EB inclusivity in external communication. This section shows how CGI, Nexer, and Toxic communicate their EB inclusivity on their

¹ ChatGPT is a free chatbot that uses artificial intelligence to generate human-like conversational dialogue (Reiff, 2023).

websites, job ads, and CSR reports. Texts and photos from those communication tools are presented and analyzed in the same structure for all companies. The three companies were compared to one another, for example, starting by presenting their websites, then job ads, and later CSR reports. The within-case analysis is conducted using content analysis.

Note: There are hundreds of links on websites about DE&I at CGI and Nexer. This research showed only a few targeted examples of the most relevant data in relation to this study.

4.4.1 Websites

This part shows the pages on companies' websites and career pages that present topics about DE&I.

4.4.1.1 CGI company:

The company website mentioned DE&I in different contexts, including pages about DE&I, articles, and initiatives, showing numbers, pictures, and videos (see in **Figure 19**).

Figure 19: CGI website

Quotes and communication materials	Sub-category	Generic category	Main category
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- DE&I page- DE&I initiatives- Facts and statements about DE&I- Overseas benefits- Articles- Media materials- Case studies- Ambitions- Stories of current employees- Latest awards- A working day- Benefits in Sweden	Benefits	Achieving employer of choice	Reaching employer branding
	Visible diversity	Communicating diversity	Communicating workplace inclusivity
	Invisible diversity		
	Fairness	Communicating equity	
	Inclusion climate	Communicating inclusion	
	Inclusive leadership		
	Inclusion practices		

The website pages of CGI are presented in (**Appendix 4**).

4.4.1.2 Nexer company:

The company website mentioned DE&I in different contexts, including articles, initiatives, and by showing numbers, pictures, videos, and career pages that highlights topics about DE&I (see in **Figure 20**).

Figure 20: Nexer website

Quotes and communication materials	Sub-category	Generic category	Main category
- Facts and statements about DE&I - DE&I initiatives - Promising future - List of initiatives - Overseas benefits - Articles - Media materials - Latest awards - Career page - Stories of current employees - Employer branding - Unique benefits	Benefits	Achieving employer of choice	Reaching employer branding
	Visible diversity	Communicating diversity	Communicating workplace inclusivity
	Invisible diversity		
	Fairness	Communicating equity	
	Inclusion climate	Communicating inclusion	
	Inclusion practices		

The website pages of Nexer are presented in (**Appendix 5**).

4.4.1.3 Toxic company:

The company website mentioned DE&I in different contexts, including articles, initiatives, and by showing numbers, pictures, videos, and career pages that highlights topics about DE&I (see in **Figure 21**).

Figure 21: Toxic website

Quotes and communication materials	Sub-category	Generic category	Main category
- Commitment about DE&I - DE&I initiatives	Benefits	Achieving employer of choice	Reaching employer branding
- Assigning equality officer	Visible diversity	Communicating diversity	Communicating workplace inclusivity
- Benefits	Invisible diversity		
- Career page	Fairness	Communicating equity	
- An inclusive culture	Inclusion climate	Communicating inclusion	
- Stories of current employees	Inclusion practices		
- Latest awards			
- An inclusive workplace			
- Inclusive statements			
- Introducing new employees			

Note: Toxic has no English version of its website.

The website pages of Toxic are presented in (**Appendix 6**).

4.4.2 Job Advertisements

This part shows the job ads present on companies' career pages and that present data about DE&I.

4.4.2.1 CGI company:

All explored job ads at CGI included texts about DE&I (see in **Figure 22**).

Figure 22: CGI job ads

Quotes and communication materials	Sub-category	Generic category	Main category
Job ads 1-6	Benefits	Achieving employer of choice	Reaching employer branding
	Visible diversity	Communicating diversity	Communicating workplace inclusivity
	Invisible diversity		
	Fairness	Communicating equity	
	Inclusion climate	Communicating inclusion	
	Inclusion practices		

The job ads of CGI are presented in (**Appendix 7**).

4.4.2.2 Nexer company:

Out of 30 local and international job ads, just a few of Nexer's ads include statements about DE&I (see in **Figure 23**).

Figure 23: Nexer job ads

Quotes and communication materials	Sub-category	Generic category	Main category
Job ads 1-6	Benefits	Achieving employer of choice	Reaching employer branding
	Visible diversity	Communicating diversity	Communicating workplace inclusivity
	Invisible diversity		
	Fairness	Communicating equity	
	Inclusion climate	Communicating inclusion	
	Inclusion practices		

The job ads of Nexer are presented in (**Appendix 8**).

4.4.2.3 Toxic company:

All job ads at Toxic include a standard text about equality, diversity, and a feeling of inclusion (see in **Figure 24**).

Figure 24: Toxic jobs ads

Quotes and communication materials	Sub-category	Generic category	Main category
Job ads 1-2	Benefits	Achieving employer of choice	Reaching employer branding
	Visible diversity	Communicating diversity	Communicating workplace inclusivity
	Invisible diversity		
	Fairness	Communicating equity	
	Inclusion climate	Communicating inclusion	
	Inclusion practices		

Note: Toxic has no English version of its job ads.

The job ads of Toxic are presented in (**Appendix 9**).

4.4.3 Corporate Social Responsibility Reports

This part shows the companies' CSR reports that present topics about DE&I.

4.4.3.1 CGI company:

The company report mentioned DE&I in different contexts, including DE&I goals, and initiatives, as well as showing numbers and pictures (see in **Figure 25**). The last online available reports English (2022) and Swedish (2020) were analyzed.

Figure 25: CGI CSR reports

Quotes and communication materials	Sub-category	Generic category	Main category
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- DE&I focus- Diversity- Equity- Inclusion- inclusive workplace- Facts and numbers- DE&I strategy- Sustainable Development goals about DE&I- Human rights about DE&I- Latest awards- Strategy and results- DE&I statements and initiatives	Benefits	Achieving employer of choice	Reaching employer branding
	Visible diversity	Communicating diversity	Communicating workplace inclusivity
	Invisible diversity		
	Fairness	Communicating equity	
	Inclusion climate	Communicating inclusion	
	Inclusive leadership		
	Inclusion practices		

The CSR reports of CGI are presented in (**Appendix 10**).

4.4.3.2 Nexer company:

The company report presented the importance of DE&I within the IT industry by conducting a few interviews with industry experts (see in **Figure 26**). The last online available reports English (2022) and Swedish (2022) were analyzed.

Figure 26: Nexer CSR reports

Quotes and communication materials	Sub-category	Generic category	Main category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Industry interview 1 about DE&I - Industry interview 2 about DE&I - Industry interview 3 about DE&I - The IT industry and UN Sustainable Development Goals 	Benefits	Achieving employer of choice	Reaching employer branding
	Visible diversity	Communicating diversity	Communicating workplace inclusivity
	Invisible diversity		
	Fairness	Communicating equity	
	Inclusion climate	Communicating inclusion	
	Inclusion practices		

The CSR reports of Nexer are presented in (**Appendix 11**).

4.4.3.3 Toxic company:

Data cannot be provided since Toxic does not have any CSR reports.

5 Discussion and Analysis

This chapter aims to analyze and discuss the empirical findings in connection to previous theories within the topic and follows the same structure presented in Chapter 4. A revised framework that takes into consideration the outcomes of the study findings is also presented.

5.1 Employer Branding Inclusivity

Defining the benefits of working with EB have been highlighted in preexisting studies about winning the “war for talent” and attracting desired hires (Behrends et al., 2020; Jonsen et al., 2019; Kele & Cassell, 2023; Stiglbauer et al., 2022). This study result agrees with that approach, since a company can show their workplace culture, values, and personality while creating a positive feeling among employees and better positioning the brand now and into the future.

Coping with challenges, both internal and external EB efforts, should match one another (Itam et al., 2020) to avoid losing newly hired employees. The majority of participants in this study agreed with that by stating that if the external EB was different to the internal, then newly hires would likely leave the employer. For that reason, it is critical to communicate the true image of the company internally, featuring current employees and the work environment in the form of storytelling, particularly about the company’s attractiveness for potential employees. Moreover, the benefits of employer attractiveness differ across industries, cultures, and even company sizes (Bilgin et al., 2021; Theurer et al., 2018). These assessments were supported by the empirical findings of this study into communicating EB.

A company may **achieve EOC** status by distinguishing its EB about diversity from its competitors, which was also stated in Tanwar and Kumar (2019). Diversity is grouped with equity and inclusion, as mentioned in Brodowsky et al. (2022), Hellerstedt et al. (2022), which is also supported by the current empirical data. This study shows the importance of D&I in turning a company into an EOC, since only a few studies identify the advantages of targeted EB in this scenario (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). Additionally, more research is needed regarding the role and communication of inclusion branding for reaching EOC status (Jonsen et al., 2019). The process behind attracting talent varies

depending on gender, age, and employer status (Joglekar & Tan, 2022), as well as region, parental and educational situations in which employees may not choose an employer who chose them (Dutta & Punnose, 2010). This was supported by the empirical findings, for instance, companies reach juniors by communicating job opportunities and an inclusive workplace while reaching seniors by communicating options of remote or hybrid work, exciting missions and customers to work with, or the employer's CSR initiatives. Meanwhile, potential employees expect multiple benefits from employers, including high salaries, job security, career advancement opportunities, and an accommodating workplace culture with values that match their own. While it is challenging to communicate the complete list of desired benefits, employers should consider each employee's individual needs.

With respect to **communicating workplace inclusivity**, this study focused on communicating D&I within EB to cover the need for exploratory studies about D&I branding, as mentioned in Jonsen et al. (2019). Companies **communicate diversity** by presenting it with visible and invisible elements (Garg, 2019); however, academics and practitioners usually focus on a few dimensions of diversity such as genders and races (Köllen, 2019). Interviewees of this study stated that they show their diverse employees working in different roles, from other countries and cities, and with unique backgrounds. The common diversity groups mentioned by most interviewees related to students, women, and the LGBTQ community, while less focus was given to cultural diversity and invisible diversity. As previously stated, some white people in Western societies may feel excluded in multicultural organizations that elevate minority cultures, which may lead to potential cultural anxieties among them (Heath et al., 2022; Plaut et al., 2011).

With respect to **communicating equity and equality**, Hellerstedt et al. (2022) claim that diversity is given greater focus than equity and inclusion, which negatively impacts the mitigation of biases and inequalities. The outcome of the study supports that finding, as there was a lack of focus on equality or equity among the interviewees, except using neutral language when adapting communication materials and treating people fairly. Another insight presented in the empirical data is the lack of knowledge by companies about the definition of equity, which makes it challenging to work with it and communicate. Furthermore, it is important to establish equality before reaching inclusion, according to one of the interviewees.

With respect to **communicating inclusion**, this study filled a gap within the current research to help capture and define inclusion communication (Wilhoit Larson et al., 2022). Communicating inclusion can be approached by demonstrating its elements, including an inclusive climate, leadership, and practices (Shore et al., 2018). Some interviewees described how they communicate their workplace inclusivity by filming current employees recounting their experiences in their friendly and inclusive work environment. Moreover, they claimed that employees will have an “at home” or “insider” feeling in an inclusive workplace (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). Across the board, interviewees emphasized the importance of welcoming everyone to create feelings of belonging. For instance, employers present their newly hired employees to current employees by posting about them on social media, making them feel like insiders, too. On the other hand, less focus was presented on empirical data regarding communicating inclusive leadership and practices externally, because most interviewees only focused on communicating them internally, while communicating an inclusive climate and workplace externally. However, an interviewee described the importance of communicating all of those aspects externally as well.

The empirical data shows a need for managing differences by showing how challenging it is to work with diversity, since it has different meanings in different contexts, and it would be challenging to include all types of employees, as companies need to hire those who can fit into the company culture. Therefore, some companies have less diverse members than others. Working with inclusion can be challenging in Sweden, as one interviewee succinctly stated that Swedish society often suffers from a superiority complex. Employers still need to strive to reach EB inclusivity in Sweden compared to other countries where companies more rigorously approach DE&I. On the other hand, an interviewee opined that Sweden had done more than other European countries to embrace the LGBTQ community.

For operationalizing inclusivity, portraying diversity can be used as a commercial tool instead of a means of tackling the real inclusivity issues facing marginalized groups (Kele & Cassell, 2023). This finding was also supported by the empirical outcomes, specifically when an interviewee mentioned that the LGBTQ community could be instrumentalized through “marketing jargon” and “equity washing” rather than working with inclusivity issues.” The study also shows that companies do not need to communicate DE&I, as potential employees consider these aspects to be part of the hygiene factors at play —

which means they are already thought of as a given. However, companies tend to avoid excluding people when communicating externally. Another key aspect is the job focus, as explained by the daily work environment for potential employees rather than communicating DE&I. It was stated that companies care most about competencies, not DE&I. At the same time, others claimed that they could not make everyone happy by including all, with few stating that DE&I may negatively influence the Swedish atmosphere at their workplaces or within their communication. These contrasting feelings and operationalizing challenges show higher complexity in reality when working with DE&I, thus communicating it would be challenging due to that.

5.2 External Communication

When working with EB, HR and marketing departments need to **closely collaborate and share responsibilities** (Barbaros, 2020; Kele & Cassell, 2023; Sarabdeen et al., 2023) to mitigate any clarity issues (Kaur et al., 2020; Sarabdeen et al., 2023; Theurer et al., 2018). This study offers an important contribution to the IT industry through its practical insights in relation to communicating EB locally and internationally while also showing additional actors who are engaged in shaping the image of EB inclusivity, including talent acquisition, direct team manager, recruiters, DE&I officers, and top management. All actors within a country, and in collaboration with the headquarters abroad, should work together on a regular basis to achieve EOC status, particularly when tackling any obstacles related to communicating in different languages and locations. Such challenges can create barriers in cultures, languages and administrative processes, which are time-consuming to deal with and could cause a gap between what is planned and what is implemented within communication of EB inclusivity.

Another contribution of this study includes its exploration into the general differences between HR and marketing departments, as both highlight the importance of EB inclusivity and the need for more collaboration throughout the whole journey of attracting, hiring, and retaining employees. The major focus of HR is recruitment, retaining current employees, and working with DE&I aspects, while marketing's major focus is on the company image and clarity of communications, in addition to adapting communication materials and channels toward sought-after talent. Companies also rely upon the common strategies that they work with the HR and marketing departments, CGI focuses on sharpening the brand image; Toxic highlights the importance of maintaining

an inclusive and friendly workplace; and the latest future-facing technologies are the center of attention at Nexer.

The empirical data shows the importance of adapting the communication chains, as it is common for headquarters to make unilateral decisions about communication materials, which may pose various challenges depending on the efficiency of the communication chain during collaborative processes that include a range of actors. For example, this type of decision-making is generally easy to work with in a local company such as Toxic, because they have just a few offices in Sweden, and the main office is in charge of EB. On the other hand, CGI and Nexer are instructed to follow their headquarters' guidelines and generate a balance between local, international, and global efforts. This long chain of communication approval creates a challenge that companies need to effectively manage and work through.

From terminology to tone, crucial communication strategies include **adapting communication materials** and employing inclusive and respectful language (Mulki & Stone-Sabali, 2020), as well as presenting the brand across various mediums (e.g., text, photos, videos, banners, and promoting organizational initiatives and awards) (Dineen & Allen, 2016; Walker et al., 2009; Yu et al., 2022). These strategies and aspects resonate with this study's empirical findings, with interviewees stating the importance of adapting communication materials to fit individual needs, ages, genders, languages, and tonality, in addition to communicating different DE&I initiatives to attract potential employees.

When putting forth representations of a workplace inclusivity and other diversity and inclusion elements, a personal storytelling approach is often a winning approach. The findings of this study underscore the importance of presenting successful inclusive projects, processes, numbers, and initiatives, both externally and internally. Such materials can be disseminated in articles, videos, and pictures, as well as adapting phrases, texts, statements, and hashtags to cover DE&I, demonstrating the employers' commitment to inclusivity, which, in turn, may help them achieve EOC status.

The contribution of this study points toward the importance of selecting the most accessible and appropriate languages when communicating, according to the majority of the interviewees. For example, using the Swedish language alone is enough for Swedish operations, as is the case with Toxic. Conversely, CGI and Nexer operate in multiple countries and thus should turn to both local and international languages, such as English, to reach a larger or the largest talent pool. Companies often maintain one social

media account that uses different languages across each digital platform. For CGI's team in Sweden, they require the approval of the headquarters in Canada before posting on social media platforms, which is time-consuming and challenging. Moreover, CGI in Sweden should post on social media using Swedish because they operate in Sweden, according to the global guidelines; whereas, including some people in Sweden by using English may impact the local cultural presence, making them feel excluded. Accordingly, regional managers and employees use Swedish in their social media posts to address the local audiences.

Choosing communication channels starts with **digital communication**. The communication of EB primarily occurs within digital communication channels (Berry & Martin, 2019; Smith & Smylie, 2021), such as websites (Jonsen et al., 2019), CSR reports (Boehncke, 2023), and social media (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). Among social media platforms, interviewees named LinkedIn as the most popular and influential (Kargas & Tsokos, 2020). The empirical findings also showed the usage of different communication means, from websites to job ads and CSR reports to social media in which LinkedIn was the most used platform within social media. Another one of this study's unique contributions to the research field concerns the importance of using paid ads to reach potential talent, as this is a time- and cost-effective option for reaching all targeted employees, especially those without prior knowledge about the employer. On the other hand, professional and social networking activities are essential in the communication of EB (Lane, 2016). This study's outcomes support using networking and highlights the advantages of **physical communication** at fairs and events, whether one is trying to reach junior or senior prospects.

A specific empirical finding in this research matches a study by Biswas and Suar (2016) that highlights the crucial influence of current employees when it comes to sharing ideas and information about the attractiveness of their employer on social media, as digital platforms are an increasingly popular pathway to achieving EOC status (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). The findings show that companies actively encourage employees and managers to share their thoughts about work on social media and provide posting guidelines. Companies share their newly published posts with their employees to repost, comment, or like on social media; this not only helps to keep discussions alive, interactive, and thriving across various platforms, but also to communicate the EB approach through existing players.

5.3 Employer Branding within the IT Industry

With respect to **recruiting challenges** in the IT industry, past studies have called attention to the importance of EB. For instance, EB shapes EOC status (Dabirian et al., 2019), employee shortages (Sharma & Tanwar, 2023), and the lack of women in the workplace (Ahmadi et al., 2020). Moreover, there is fierce competition for highly skilled candidates who have many jobs' offers (Dabirian et al., 2019) — i.e., they choose their employers, not the other way around (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). Different stereotypes about current and potential employees (Duffy, 2022), the need for inclusivity (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022), and the benefits of having diverse teams (Sinha et al., 2020) each depend on workplace inclusivity. Employees need to work remotely more than ever before and want work-life balance, which Dabirian et al. (2019) has previously underscored. All of these stated aspects are present in this study's empirical findings, thus making it evident that IT companies need to improve their external EB communications to better tackle work-related challenges in our challenging times. For example, conducting compelling and nuanced communication about D&I can attract more women to the IT industry, which has also been claimed by Ahmadi et al. (2020).

Regarding **technology challenges**, this study further identified the importance of attracting desirable hires by providing them with opportunities related to using modern technologies and working for big clients. At the same time, the findings highlight the risk of using modern technologies for EB, since new tools, such as ChatGPT, may include biased data that increases discrimination. On that topic, Tilmes (2022) and Walkowiak (2021) have also explored artificial intelligence bias in recruitment processes. Still, modern technology can decrease or delegate administrative work more efficiently, which may help include those who require more experience and training, or who currently dislike certain tasks within the job.

Previous studies have claimed that adapting technologies to create a positive outcome about employer attractiveness can be achieved by influencing employee recruitment (Gatewood et al., 1993; Joglekar & Tan, 2022). This was supported by this study's empirical data, with some interviewees stating that they use modern communication and internal technologies throughout collaborative processes related to finding and reaching talent.

5.4 Online Communication Materials

Channels of external communication promote employer branding through job posts on career websites (Backhaus, 2016; Berry & Martin, 2019). Companies may communicate their brand in text, photos, videos, and banners, in addition to promoting organizational initiatives and awards to a mass audience (Dineen & Allen, 2016; Walker et al., 2009; Yu et al., 2022). An organization can achieve EOC status by embracing its workplace diversity and inclusivity (Jonsen et al., 2019; Kele & Cassell, 2023). Accordingly, such organizations openly and widely communicate their commitment to D&I (Burgess et al., 2021; Pasztor, 2019). Company websites present workplace inclusivity by providing photos, videos, and statements about diversity while also focusing on individual diversity dimensions (e.g., age, gender, disability, marital status, maternity, race, and religion). Furthermore, to be seen as an EOC, companies can communicate their workplace attractiveness within their inclusion branding using inclusive language and mediums, with a focus on belongingness and uniqueness (Jonsen et al., 2019) in addition to inclusion elements (Shore et al., 2018).

Communication materials from company websites, job ads, and CSR reports were **analyzed separately** from the interviews to determine the similarities and differences between them, in addition to extending the tools used in communicating EB inclusivity. For example, the collected data was presented using numbers, initiatives, stories, projects, and the latest awards in different tools (e.g., photos, texts, voice, and video records).

Current employees from diverse groups, ages, roles, backgrounds, and interests are featured. The common diversity groups they tend to concentrate on include students, women, and the LGBTQ community, while differences in terms of cultural backgrounds were less represented. Such presentations showed more visible diversity than invisible diversity. The three companies in this study highlighted the importance of equity and/or equality while showcasing their friendly and inclusive work environments to create feelings of home and belonging. For instance, employers present their newly hired employees to current employees, spotlighting their personal stories and professional journeys.

Inclusion was frequently presented in relation to the inclusion climate, instead of inclusion practices and leadership, which makes inclusion branding underrepresented. Therefore, companies need to work on communicating invisible diversity, inclusive leadership, and inclusive practices to succeed with EB inclusivity. An additional

contribution relates to the analysis of the companies' communication materials, which showed few differences when communicating in English or Swedish, because the data was created and adapted to reach the target groups in different countries. For example, there was more focus on LGBTQ issues in Swedish than English communications; similarly, more EB benefits and the latest award shows have a greater presence on Swedish pages. Additionally, a strong focus on diversity and inclusion was more common on websites than job ads. For instance, none of the three companies presented inclusive leadership on their job ads. Lastly, the CSR reports of CGI covered DE&I more than Nexer's reports; Toxic, on the other hand, does not conduct these reports.

5.5 Summary Findings of the Analyzed Data

A general summary of interviews and communication materials in relation to the main dimensions of D&I in this study (see in **Figure 27**).

Figure 27: General Summary Findings of the Analyzed Data

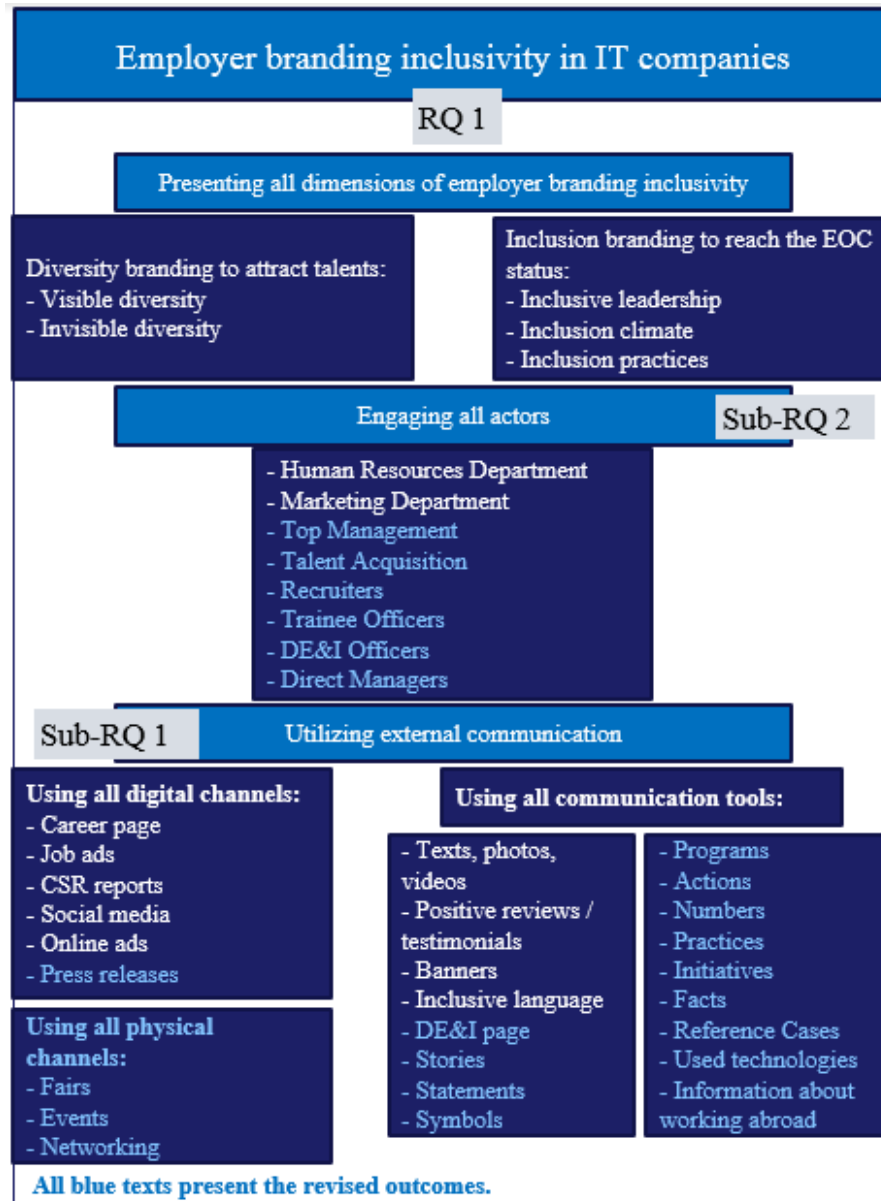
Existence of dimension/data sources	Marketing department	HR department	Website pages	Job ads	CSR reports
Importance of EB inclusivity	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI & Nexer
Presenting visible diversity	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI & Nexer
Presenting invisible diversity	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI & Nexer
Presenting inclusion climate	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI, Nexer & Toxic	CGI & Nexer*
Presenting inclusive practices	CGI* & Nexer*	CGI* & Nexer*	CGI, Nexer* & Toxic*	CGI*, Nexer* & Toxic*	CGI & Nexer*
Presenting inclusive leadership	CGI* & Nexer*	CGI* & Nexer*	CGI	NA	CGI

*The dimension is presented slightly by the company.

5.6 Revised Framework: EB Inclusivity

Based on the preexisting theories, empirical findings, media materials, and discussions within this study, the author revised the research framework based on all of the collected data. In contrast to the former conceptual framework, presented in **Figure 10**, many actors were identified in the EB inclusivity communication process using a wide range of communication materials and means. The revised framework is shown in **Figure 28**.

Figure 28: Revised Framework of EB Inclusivity's External Digital Communication.



Source: Author's illustration Al-Sharif (2023).

6 Conclusion and Implications

This chapter presents the research's theoretical, social, ethical, and practical contributions, as well as its limitations and various suggestions or recommendations to be explored by future researchers.

6.1 Conclusion

This qualitative study explored how IT companies use external digital communication within EB inclusivity to help achieve EOC status and attract talent. The study used semi-structured interviews and communication materials combined with literature in an abductive manner to answer the research question and develop a revised framework of EB inclusivity.

6.2 Research Question

How can external digital communication promote EB inclusivity in IT companies?

External digital communication can be used to promote EB inclusivity by creating effective collaboration among all relevant actors within IT companies and accurately portray workplace inclusivity. Reaching EOC status within EB inclusivity can be achieved through fostering the benefits of diversity and inclusion, which can be a decisive factor in the “war for talent” (Jonsen et al., 2019). However, it is more beneficial for companies to be seen as an attractive employer rather than using EB as a calculating management fashion. Therefore, the internal and external communication image should match. If there are discrepancies between the internal and external, newly hired employees may feel misled and move on to the next company. Beyond digital communication, it is also essential to develop an outreach strategy for approaching potential talent groups in person, from student fairs to industry events and personal networking activities.

Sub-RQ 1: How can external digital communication be used to create EB inclusivity in IT companies?

Firms in the IT industry can communicate their external EB inclusivity by generating feelings of belongingness and uniqueness, mainly when potential employees see themselves in, or identify with, friendly and inclusive portrayals of the workplace culture.

This can be achieved by portraying all of the elements of diversity (i.e., visible and invisible) and inclusion (e.g., inclusion climate, inclusive leadership, and inclusive practices) in all external digital communications (e.g., websites, job ads, CSR reports, social media posts, paid ads, and press releases.) LinkedIn, for example, can be an invaluable resource for retaining current and future talent.

The storytelling approach is an effective way of approaching representations and signs of workplace inclusivity and diversity, in conjunction with highlighting successful inclusion-driven projects, processes, facts, latest awards, and numbers concerning EB inclusivity. These stories should show current employees, underrepresented groups, actual thoughts and actions rather than just sharing short texts and stock photos related to workplace inclusivity. This material can then be disseminated in articles, videos, pictures, voice records, and by adapting phrases, texts, and hashtags to directly cover and spotlight DE&I efforts and achievements. It is essential to produce targeted communication materials when addressing juniors or seniors, depending on the communication's purpose and what would serve those best interests of each group. Moreover, diverse and underrepresented groups should be addressed or approached with inclusive language. Selecting the correct language is essential, for instance, by using the local language for local talent and a common language like English for reaching global talent. Moreover, current employees can also contribute to this process by sharing posts on their social media and external networks.

Sub-RQ 2: How can collaboration between HR and marketing departments improve external digital communication of EB inclusivity in IT companies?

A company's HR and marketing departments need to closely collaborate when working with EB (Kele & Cassell, 2023). The focus of HR is recruitment, current employees, and DE&I aspects, while marketing concentrates on the company image, the clarity of communication, and adapting communication materials and channels toward different talent pools. However, the answers to this sub-research question depends on the company's size. For example, while Toxic, a small-scale enterprise, does not have an HR department, it does employ an equality manager and marketing expert who collaborate with a strategic manager to communicate Toxic's EB inclusivity. In the case of international or global companies, such as CGI and Nexer, a collaboration between the HR and marketing departments alone does not suffice, as many other actors are also

engaged in shaping the EB inclusivity image, including top management, talent acquisition, direct team manager, recruiters, and DE&I officer.

Those roles need to follow guidelines and approval processes provided by their head offices overseas in addition to local guidelines and plans in which a different language can be used to reach locals. Those aspects make dynamic challenges for companies, and any disconnect among actors may create a gap between what is planned and what is implemented. Also, they need to match their internal and external image of EB inclusivity, as any inconsistencies could negatively affect their reputation and, in turn, talent acquisition. Therefore, stronger collaboration should occur in each unit, country, and globally in collaboration with all relevant actors which assist in reducing time of approval processes. For instance, the HR department can help marketing by presenting success stories and promising projects and putting the voices, numbers, and other data into a storytelling framework while marketing selects the communication channel and language, adapts communication materials, and communicates them externally.

Lastly, the use of digital technologies plays a massive role in reaching, selecting, attracting, retaining, and including potential employees. However, those same technologies can also simultaneously increase bias and exclusion, which then affects the workplace inclusivity. It would also be beneficial to use modern communication and technologies on both an internal and external basis. For instance, teams could move to improve IT approval processes among business units and create modern follow-up IT systems to trace the whole EB journey, starting with attracting an employee, hiring them, and then later naming an ambassador for the company.

6.3 Theoretical Implications and contribution

This study's main contribution to the existing literature is that it fills a gap by exploring the digital communication of inclusion branding (Jonsen et al., 2019; Wilhoit Larson et al., 2022). The author succeeded in creating a potential framework of EB inclusivity, one that was conceptualized based on preexisting theories, diversity and inclusion branding, EB external communications, and new empirical findings about achieving EOC status.

The gap of collaboration between HR and marketing departments (Sarabdeen et al., 2023; Theurer et al., 2018) was also explored through the perspectives of various EB actors, including HR, marketing, top management, recruiters, talent acquisition, direct managers, and officers of DE&I and trainee programs. All of the actors can collaborate to create

communication materials to deliver compelling images about the workplace, including storytelling via videos or articles, and providing the elements of diversity and inclusion that can be used in different channels.

The research further contributes by filling other unaddressed gaps, including the need to explore EB inclusivity within a new or newer industry (Jonsen et al., 2019; Sarabdeen et al., 2023), specifically the IT industry (Ahmadi et al., 2020). Other critical sources, such as a company's annual reports or website (Burgess et al., 2021; Kele & Cassell, 2023; Pasztor, 2019), are also addressed and contextualized. This study created a unique research design by analyzing multiple sources at local and global IT companies, from semi-structured interviews with HR and marketing departments to digital communication means, including websites, job ads, and CSR reports.

6.4 Managerial Implications and contribution

This study provides recommendations for IT companies working with EB inclusivity, as it offers thoughtful assessments of the industry's standard communication practices and EB challenges across different contexts and groups, from cultures, business units, target groups (juniors and seniors), to organizational aspects. For instance, it is essential to create and maintain a DE&I-dedicated page on the company website, and to portray an authentic internal image to external employees to avoid conflicts or contradictions between the portrayals. An inclusive internal climate is often key to EB success. Additionally, IT firms need to cultivate their visibility and EOC status through online and offline external communication channels. Personal networks also influence the choices of potential employees if they're considering another IT employer.

The **HR department** needs to work on spreading knowledge and understanding about DE&I efforts and sharing top stories, processes, and projects with marketing to use in their external communications. For the **marketing department**, it is recommended that they focus on gaining deeper insights into DE&I to effectively communicate their company's relevant stories and make a positive impression or impact. It is recommended to consult employees about the use of their stories and journeys, as it may be complicated to assume who in the office wants to be visible or invisible in certain instances. A storytelling approach and successful inclusion-driven projects and data are the most powerful, meaningful modes of communication regarding DE&I, as this research has presented. It is recommended to use different dimensions of visible and invisible diversity

and inclusion elements, such as inclusive leadership, climate, and practices, to portray the company's EB inclusivity.

Diverse pictures, phrases, hashtags, and videos are preferable communication tools for companies, along with considering the potential targeted employees (e.g., their gender, seniority, and background). At the same time, the communication tools should be practical, even exciting or inspiring, information for marketing in terms of understanding how potential employees perceive the company's EB inclusivity efforts toward achieving EOC status. Accordingly, it is recommended to establish regular meetings between various actors and units to help foster a common understanding and vision, as well as to employ best practices to avoid ineffective communications and instead focus on what generates the highest value for the company. Actors can work collectively on prioritizing EB inclusivity initiatives and giving feedback after interviewing potential employees in addition to gathering insights about what strengths and weaknesses they see in the company's EB strategy.

Swedish companies need to explore how other countries work with DE&I to adapt to the best practices worldwide through communicating EB inclusivity and the daily work environment of different roles at the company. However, it is challenging to communicate EB inclusivity when a company operates in many countries. Employees may face new challenges associated with working in more complex international business units that require different collaborative approaches from local and international actors. Therefore, it is recommended to use modern advanced IT systems to trace the journey of attracting employees who are later hired as an internal ambassador, since newly hired employees may have a different understanding and perspective of the company image. The HR department should then share such perspective with the marketing department to improve communication materials and means. Furthermore, multinational companies may have different roles and business units in charge of communicating EB and DE&I initiatives along with marketing, HR, recruitment, talent acquisitions, and direct managers. A climate of well-established cooperation that uses modern IT systems would greatly assist these actors in achieving EOC status and attracting top talent.

6.5 Societal Implications and Ethical Considerations

The author covered social benefits in this research, as more EB inclusivity implies more inclusive workplaces that benefit employees at the office and in the broader society.

Ethical considerations are not only applicable to communities and employees but also generate many benefits for inclusive workplaces, which may motivate innovation and competitive advantages. Another moral aspect is related to women's empowerment: since IT services are used by both men and women, women should be involved in (re)designing those services with more inclusivity in mind. Societies and companies should tackle discrimination, stereotypes, and longtime inclusivity issues, particularly in the traditionally male-dominated workplace and industry. Furthermore, companies need to work with diversity and inclusion challenges at the workplace before communicating their EB inclusivity. The inclusion climate is an ethical aspect in which organizations should work with inclusive leadership and inclusion practices to create a physiologically safe environment for all employees without any exceptions. Minority groups are often underrepresented, which may diminish their sense of belonging and sideline or silence their voices.

The author of this study calls for an expanded awareness with respect to DE&I aspects on both organizational and social levels, for mutual benefit often comes from approaching the world and working from a place of understanding. Finally, working with DE&I should be a core goal, not surface-level efforts to satisfy some customers, managers, or employees. At the core, the intention should be to provide equal opportunities for people to succeed, fair treatment, and a common ground for all, regardless of differences.

6.6 Limitations

The author aimed to conduct this study with utmost precision and professionalism, however, some limitations emerged along the way. Firstly, the research focused on IT companies located in Sweden, with all interviewees being Swedish citizens, which could be considered a limitation since DE&I can be understood, used, and communicated differently in countries around the world. In some instances, this study may only be applied to IT companies in Western societies. Moreover, while conducting the interviews with CGI and Nexer, new company actors were identified in the global IT context, with roles relevant to external EB inclusivity including direct team managers, talent acquisitions, and DE&I officers. Such roles and functions could bring varied insights into the conversation and change the result of this research while also adding a limitation. Additionally, saturation was not reached since only seven interviews were conducted,

although the author aimed to conduct more interviews, but it was challenging to contend with the availability of the interviewees.

There was no previous academic theoretical framework for EB inclusivity, thus this study's resulting framework may need to be applied using other research methodologies or in a different industry. Moreover, the author used his own networks within all host companies due to a limited timeframe and the difficulty of scheduling in-depth interviews with busy IT companies. Although the author succeeded in interviewing three companies, the study would have benefited from a larger selection, as it would be helpful to interview companies without going through personal networks.

This study assumed the employer perspective regarding EB inclusivity, since a company's longevity often depends on recruiting and securing top talent. But the whole picture remains incomplete without exploring the topic from the employee perspective and seeing the landscape from a critical inside perspective. For example, internal and external talents may have different understandings, interests, and priorities regarding EB inclusivity. Finally, this study included two anonymous participants, however, it is difficult to completely hide their identities because they work in a small company and people may find their information on the internet.

6.7 Recommendations for Future Research

The previously mentioned limitations can be reframed as opportunities for knowledge and understanding in future research efforts, potentially helping to enrich and expand this study and subject matter through different critical research methods and perspectives. For example, a new potential research approach could begin with exploring the same topic, interviewing HR and marketing departments and other actors, such as top management, talent acquisition, DE&I officers, and direct team managers. Moreover, conducting a single case study on a global company, such as CGI or Nexer, may yield even deeper insights. Furthermore, this same study could be directed toward another cultural and geographical context, for example, in Africa, Asia, or Latin America, where a Western approach to EB inclusivity may or may not be practiced.

It would also be interesting to test the framework of this study in future research that uses a quantitative method with a large sample, which can be generalized later or by applying the framework to another industry. To strike a balance, the research could also be explored from an employee perspective. The communication of EB inclusivity involves

many challenges in relation to different communication styles and cultures, business units, ethical aspects, and expectations from audiences. According to most interviewees, one of this study's main findings concerns the importance of having an active personal network of current employees. It would be interesting to explore their role in shaping EB inclusivity within the IT industry, for example, as direct or indirect ambassadors for their employers across digital and physical spaces.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Secondary Data Keywords

For this study, other keywords were used: “dimensions of employer branding”, “inclusion”, “diversity”, “website”, “employer of choice”, “digital tool”, “communication”, “IT industry”, “EB”, “EOC”, “information technology”, “diversity branding”, “inclusion branding”, “employer brand*”, “IT”, “IT company*”, “career web*”, “communication channels”, “communication means”, “communication framework”, “external communication”, “digital communication”, “equity”, “D&I”, “DE&I”, “inclusive leadership”, “IL”, “inclusive workplace”, “leader inclusiveness”, “inclusivity”, “CSR”, “corporate social responsibility”, “job ads”, and among others. These terms were helpful for researching specific definitions and literature gaps.

The criteria for searching secondary data involved keywords used in database searches either inputted individually or combined with other keywords in American and British English. Abbreviations, such as D&I; using different ways of writing about the same concepts since authors write about topics differently, for example, inclusive leader versus leader inclusion; and using * to find the different presentation of a concept such as an employer brand* or leader inclusion* to find other ending words, such as inclusion, inclusivity, and inclusive.

Most secondary data articles were limited to English-language publications between 2020 and 2023 to ensure the gaps are still valid and the literature is updated to generate valuable outcomes. In many cases, the author used related articles suggested to him while reviewing other database articles or found in their list of references. This led to the collection of the latest, most relevant literature about this research topic. Furthermore, the author searched using all keywords presented in similar studies and in the vast Scopus database to find even more relevant literature.

A search about “inclusion” on 1 April 2023 in Scopus generated 734,495 results, with “employer brand” yielding 722. There were many **limitations (inclusion)** in this research regarding including credible sources, such as using several systematic literature reviews, peer-reviewed studies, and most-cited articles. Moreover, the author included only business and marketing topics in his search to narrow down the research to what is relevant. On the other hand, many **eliminations (exclusion)** were conducted since the inclusion topic is applicable across many fields of study; this involved database searches free from irrelevant keywords, domains, languages, and so on.

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

The interview starts with welcoming the interviewee, introducing the author and specific subject matter, and explaining the data processes. Additionally, the author highlights the rights of the interviewees, according to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), including that they can skip any question or withdraw from the interview at any point and give their permission for the conversation to be recorded.

Personal, general questions about the interviewee:

- What are your primary areas of study and your interests?
- Additionally, what is your position at the company and your age, nationality, and gender?
- Do you feel like you belong and are appreciated at your company?

Questions about employer branding:

- Why is employer branding important to your company? And what is prioritized, internal or external employer branding?
- How is your employer branding different from other IT companies, or how do you aim to stand out and attract junior and senior talents?
- What are the benefits of employer branding that your company communicates to attract potential junior and senior employees?

Communication of diversity and inclusion branding:

- How do you communicate your company's visible and invisible diversity across the communication channels?
- How does your company communicate inclusive leadership and inclusion practices within external employer branding?
- What are the biggest challenges in communicating employer branding inclusivity?

Communication of employer branding:

- Which external communication channels are used to communicate employer branding, and why?
- How does your company adapt external communication material to different groups, cultures, and languages?
- Would communicating employer branding inclusivity be enough to attract new employees, or do you need other benefits to attract employees?
- What are the challenges of communicating employer branding globally, regionally, and in Sweden? How do you collaborate with all levels?
- How do you motivate your employees to share your employer branding on social media? And do you follow what is being written and said about your employer branding online?

Communication means of employer branding:

- What are the most relevant external communication channels in employer branding inclusivity? What is their importance, and how are they used?
- What prioritization do you have in all external channels, from most to least relevant?

- What are the most used tools or communication materials within diversity and inclusion branding?
- How do you adapt communication materials in employer branding inclusivity, and why?

Human Resources and Marketing:

- Who is in charge of your company's employer branding communication and DE&I (diversity, equity and inclusion)?
- How do those units or parties collaborate on employer branding?
- What kind of feedback do they give each other to improve communications?
- How do they evaluate communication of diversity and inclusion? And how do they follow an employee from being attracted to being hired?
- How can they improve to communicate employer branding in the future better?

Employer branding within the IT industry:

- How relevant is employer branding to the IT industry, from its employees to technologies?
- How relevant is diversity and inclusion to the IT industry, and why?
- How do modern IT technologies affect employer branding communication and workplace inclusivity?

Additional Interview Questions

Probing Questions:

- How do you feel about it? What are your preferences, and why?
- Can I use that phrase as a quotation?
- Can you provide me with examples of that?
- Can you elaborate?
- What do you like the most?
- In which ways do you mean?
- What would that mean if we consider it differently, such as ...?


Follow-up Questions:

- Did I understand correctly that it is essential for you to ...?
- What is the reason behind that?
- What are your preferences, in case you are in charge?
- Do you want to share something else that is related to this research?
- Is there anything in particular from our discussion that interests you?
- Can we book a follow-up interview if needed?
- Can I edit your input for length and clarity?
- Again, do you consent for me to publish your input publicly on the Internet?

Thank you and farewell:

- The interview concludes with gratitude toward the interviewee for their valuable and meaningful contribution.

Appendix 3: GDPR Form


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GDPR Thesis Study Consent Form

This is a *template* to assist thesis students in the design of their GDPR consent form. You may adapt this template to the requirements of your particular project, using the notes and suggestions provided. the below information should always be included in any GDPR consent form on paper and as text in a web survey **when personal data is processed** within the framework of thesis work at JIBS. When using a web survey, add a box to the survey and a hyperlink to the survey, followed by this text: *I choose to take part in the thesis study and consent to JIBS processing my personal data in accordance with current data protection legislation and the data delivered.*

Required by European Union General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679

The GDPR consent form should always be accompanied by a Participant Information Sheet
[see JIBS' guidelines at the end of this template]

GDPR Consent for [Employer Branding External Communication]

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking part in the study		
I consent to JIBS processing my personal data in accordance with current data protection legislation and the data delivered.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

My signature below indicates that I choose to take part in the thesis study and consent to JIBS treating my personal data in accordance with current data protection legislation and the data delivered.

Name of participant [IN CAPITALS]

Signature

Date

Thesis contact details for further information

Ebrahim Al-Sharif

0727316626 or via aleb22na@student.ju.se or Ebrahim.alsharif@gmail.com

Version: January 2020

Participant Information Sheet template

This is for guidance only, You MUST, however, include contact details and the Data Protection Privacy Notice.

Invitation paragraph

For example: *'You are being invited to take part in a thesis study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.'*

What is the purpose of the study collecting personal data?

The background, aims and duration of the study should be described briefly and that it contributes to student learning, particularly methodology. You should say how the [interview/questionnaire] will contribute; and indicate if it is a Bachelor, Masters or Civilekonom thesis study.

Please **always** add the following parts:

'It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to give your consent.' All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any ensuing reports or publications.'

Under GDPR you have the following rights over your personal data:

- **The right to be informed.** You must be informed if your personal data is being used.
- **The right of access.** You can ask for a copy of your data by making a 'subject access request'.
- **The right to rectification.** You can ask for your data held to be corrected.
- **The right to erasure.** You can ask for your data to be deleted.
- **The right to restrict processing.** You can limit the way an organisation uses your personal data if you are concerned about the accuracy of the data or how it is being used.
- **The right to data portability.** You have the right to get your personal data from an organisation in a way that is accessible and machine-readable. You also have the right to ask an organisation to transfer your data to another organisation.
- **The right to object.** You have the right to object to the use of your personal data in some circumstances. You have an absolute right to object to an organisation using your data for direct marketing.
- **How your data is processed using automated decision making and profiling.** You have the right not to be subject to a decision that is based solely on automated processing if the decision affects your legal rights or other equally important matters; to understand the



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reasons behind decisions made about you by automated processing and the possible consequences of the decisions, and to object to profiling in certain situations, including for direct marketing purposes.

You should also know that you may contact the data protection officer if you are unhappy about the way your data or your participation in this study are being treated at dpo@ju.se

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering whether to take part in this research study.'

Contact details for further information

Thesis supervisor Lucia Pizzichini (lucia.pizzichini@ju.se)

Thesis student Ebrahim Al-Sharif (aleb22na@student.ju.se or ebrahim.alsharif@gmail.com)

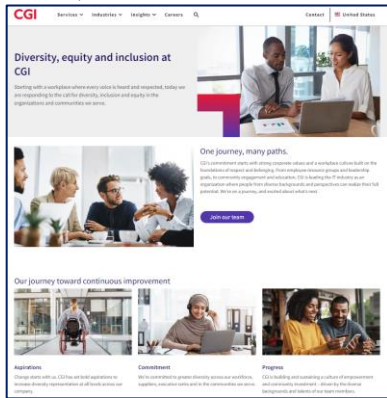
Version: January 2020

Appendix 4: Website pages of CGI

English website

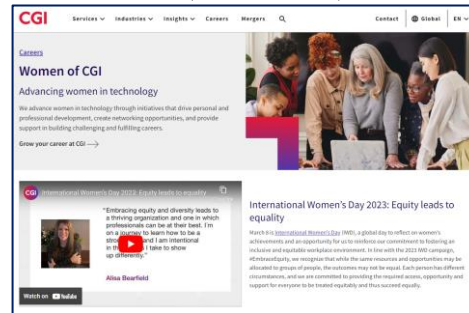
DE&I page

The company presents a page about the company commitment toward DE&I (CGI, n.d.-d).



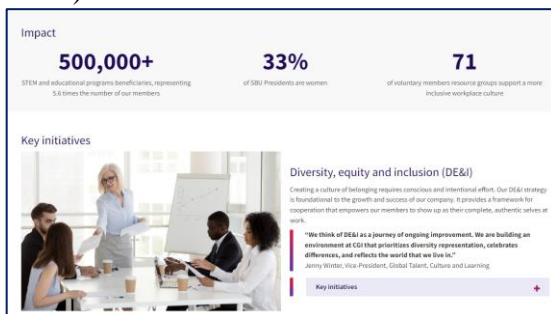
DE&I initiatives

There are many initiatives for women, students, people with disabilities, and local communities (CGI, n.d.-e).



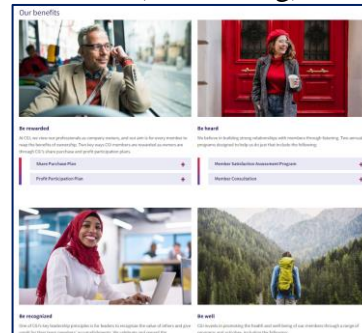
Facts and statements about DE&I

The company presents numbers, facts, and statements about DE&I at the company (CGI, n.d.-f).



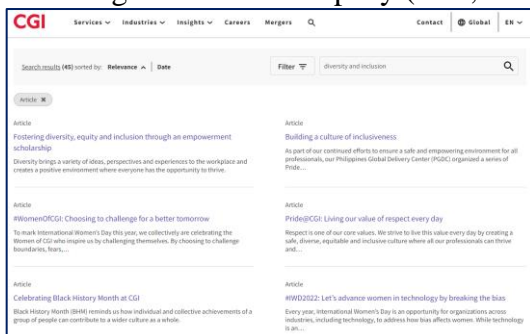
Overseas benefits

Headlines like “be rewarded, be heard, be recognized, and be well” can be connected to feelings of belonging and uniqueness within inclusion (CGI, n.d.-g).



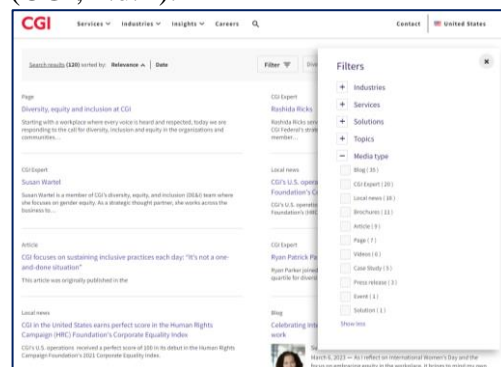
Articles

Showing 45 articles about DE&I to present its importance and key aspects, such as inclusiveness culture, inclusive leadership, LGBTQ, DE&I daily practices, and other topics, and to tell the stories of people working for a long time at the company (CGI, n.d.-h).



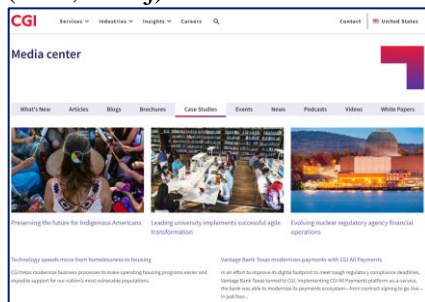
Media materials

Searching the website for DE&I presents many media materials related to the topic, including blog posts, brochures, events, experts, press releases, case studies, etc. (CGI, n.d.-i).



Case studies

The company presents different case studies to attract potential employees and be an EOC (CGI, n.d.-j).



Swedish website

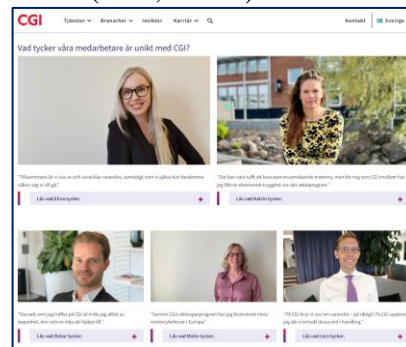
Ambitions

The ambitions or goals in Sweden are different to those of CGI, as with other countries. The company aims to be northern Europe's most equal company by 2025, in which all management levels would be divided 50/50 between men and women. Also, Sweden has its own DE&I efforts, such as IT Women of the Year (CGI, n.d.-c).



Stories of current employees

The company shows stories about current employees in photos, articles, videos and audio (CGI, n.d.-k).



Latest awards

The company shows all awards it holds as an employer (CGI, n.d.-c).



A working day

Employees describe their working days in audio (CGI, n.d.-c).



Benefits in Sweden

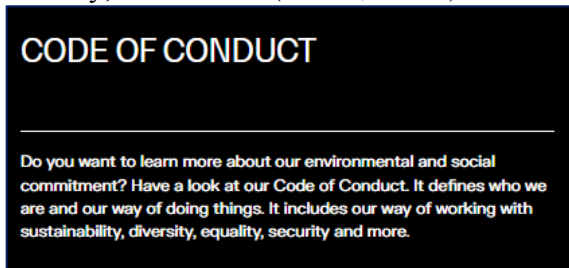
The company has different benefits in the Swedish market compared to the international market (CGI, n.d.-c).



English website

Facts and statements about DE&I

The company shows commitment of DE&I in its code of conduct, stating: “Our way of working with sustainability, diversity, equality, security, and more.” (Nexer, n.d.-e).



DE&I initiatives

The company conducts initiatives about women, young leaders, the next generation of young coders in Sweden, female role models, events, and other network meetings. For instance, Nexer focuses on education, diversity, and inclusion (Nexer, n.d.-f).



Promising future

The company shares statements about a promising future to create an accessible and inclusive experience (Nexer, n.d.-g).



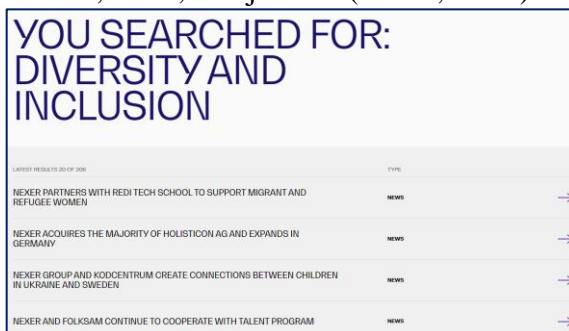
List of initiatives

The company provides a list of initiatives about female empowerment, employees with international background, and CSR initiatives to attract employees who want to make a social impact (Nexer, n.d.-h).



Media materials

The company lists at least 206 media materials about diversity and inclusion, including in articles, news, and job ads (Nexer, n.d.-i).



Latest Awards

The company has been awarded 2023 Career Companies of the Year – an award for employers offering unique career and development opportunities for recent graduates and young professionals (Nexer, 2022).

NEXER AWARDED AS CAREER COMPANY 2023



Career page

The company presents its commitments, stating: “We embrace diversity and believe that people from different backgrounds with different identities and experiences, make our offers and our company better.” (Nexer, n.d.-j).

OUR CULTURE

Passion and execution permeate our entire business, and tech is at the heart of everything we do. We have the boldness of a start-up, the atmosphere of a family business and the expertise of a global corporation. We embrace diversity and believe that people from different backgrounds, with different identities and experiences, make our offers and our company better.

Employer branding

The company offers different benefits within its EB to gain an EOC status (Nexer, n.d.-h).

ICING ON THE CAKE

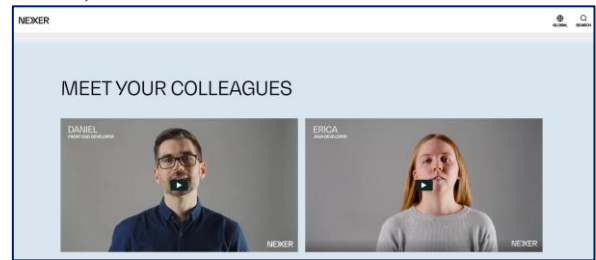
In addition to salary, you also receive a large smorgasbord of compensations and benefits. Many of them are easily accessible through the portal Benify, who also offers a lot of attractive discounts. From car rental to movie tickets, and a lot of good stuff in between. It's your choice.

- Collective agreement
- Flexible working hours
- Over-time compensation
- Pension according to ITP
- Passion Days, two leave days
- 16 free comp hours per year
- Parental leave benefits
- Health insurance
- Health exam
- Car leasing
- 4000 SEK wellness allowance
- Benify portal
- Yearly kick-off
- WorkWise - remote or onsite

Benefits may vary depending on your country of employment.

Stories of current employees

Current employees talk to the camera about their experiences with the company (Nexer, n.d.-h).



Unique benefits

The company offers two free days to practice an interest outside the scope of work as a way to prioritize the individual benefits that employees may appreciate (Nexer, n.d.-h).



PASSION DAYS

[REBOOT] YOU

You may have heard the rumour. It's true. At Nexer core you get 2 extra days off, just for your passion. It doesn't matter what it is, as long as it fills you with joy and excitement. It's a chance to reboot and focus on just you. How will you spend your passion days?

The company presents individual benefits to attract employees: “You can choose to work away from the office when it is suitable for you and your assignment.” (Nexer, n.d.-j)

WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

You'll never stop growing at Nexer. In fact, you will have a steep development curve, as you get to try out new industries, assignments, and tech stacks. We offer training, mentors and certification programs and organise inspirational lectures and other social activities. Finally, we provide a flexible work policy, where you can choose to work away from the office when it is suitable for you and your assignment. We come together wherever we are - across time zones, regions, offices, and screens.

The Swedish website is the same as the English, however it has less media materials about diversity and inclusion (Nexer, n.d.-k).

Appendix 6: Website pages of Toxic

Commitment about DE&I

The company shows its commitment toward inclusion (Toxic, 2023a).



DE&I initiatives

The company is engaged in an initiative about building the skills for female IT programmers (Toxic, 2023b).



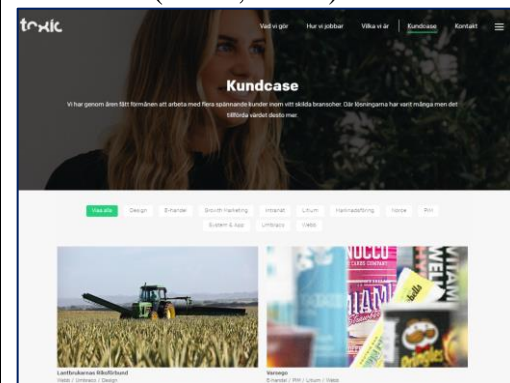
Assigning equality officer

The company assigns a responsible person for equality to contribute to an equal and inclusive IT industry (Toxic, 2021a).



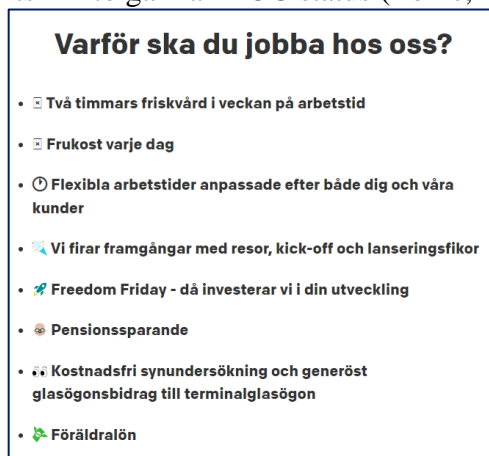
Benefits

Customer cases serve as a way to attract junior and senior talents to work with those cases and customers (Toxic, n.d.-d).



Career page

The company offers different benefits within its EB to gain an EOC status (Toxic, n.d.-e).



An inclusive culture

The company presents its inclusive workplace in statements (Toxic, n.d.-f).



Stories of current employees

The company shows stories about current employees in articles (Toxic, 2021b).



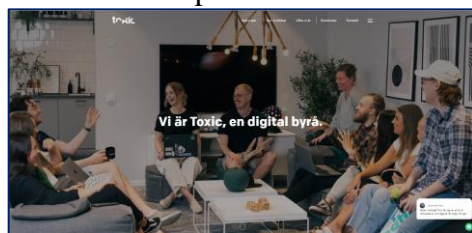
Latest awards

The company shows all of the awards it holds as an employer (Toxic, 2020).

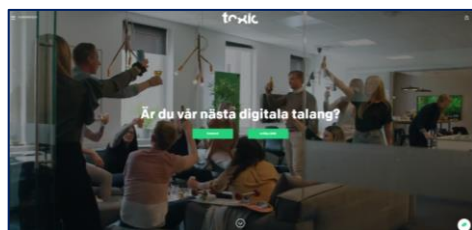


An inclusive workplace

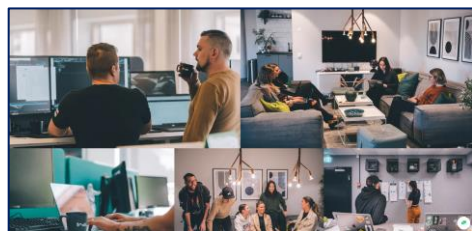
The company presents many photos of an inclusive workplace.



(Toxic, n.d.-a).



(Toxic, n.d.-e).



(Toxic, n.d.-e).



(Toxic, n.d.-g).

Inclusive statements

The company describes its inclusive workplace in which employees have the chance to feel home and be themselves, in addition to having a work-life balance.



(Toxic, n.d.-g).

Känslan av hemma

Toxic är en plats där kreatörer, innovatörer, strateger, utvecklare och tech-nördar har sin hemvist. En plats där utveckling sitter i väggarna. Här är vi alltid oss själva, och bra på det vi gör. För oss är det viktigt att våga tänja på gränser, göra annorlunda och tänka nytt. Här föds dagligen starka och kreativa idéer som leder till stora förändringar! Hos oss är målet att alla ska trivas, ha kul och känna sig som hemma. Men naturligtvis är det lika viktigt att alla medarbetare har en bra balans mellan arbetsliv och privatliv. För oss är det, och har alltid varit, personligt. Här är vi alla vänner och bryr oss om varandra, på riktigt.

(Toxic, n.d.-g).

Introducing new employees

The company presents its newly hired employees in personal interviews.



(Toxic, 2021c).



(Toxic, 2023c).

Appendix 7: Job ads of CGI

Job ad 1:

The ad was for a position in the United States; it showed the importance of diversity, feelings of belonging, an inclusive workplace, and equality. It provided information for accepting all diversities, both visible and invisible, in a long list, to show the inclusion of everyone. For example, the company promised to provide accommodation to persons with disabilities, if they have the skills needed, which would be an example of inclusion and feeling appreciated (CGI, n.d.-l).

At CGI, we recognize the richness that diversity brings. We strive to create a work culture where all belong and collaborate with clients in building more inclusive communities. As an equal opportunity employer, we want to empower all our members to succeed and grow. If you require an accommodation at any point during the recruitment process, please let us know. We will be happy to assist.

Ready to become part of our success story? Join CGI – where your ideas and actions make a difference.

Qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to their race, ethnicity, ancestry, color, sex, religion, creed, age, national origin, citizenship status, disability, pregnancy, medical condition, military and veteran status, marital status, sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and gender expression, familial status, political affiliation, genetic information, or any other legally protected status or characteristics.

CGI provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities. If you need an accommodation to apply for a job in the U.S., please email the CGI U.S. Employment Compliance mailbox at US_Employment_Compliance@cgi.com. You will need to reference

Job ad 2:

The ad was for a position in the United States; it had the same text as ad 1, however, it included a video about empowerment and individual needs — “finding my fit” — which communicates belongingness and uniqueness through inclusion and showing appreciation, or “the best version of us starts with you.” (CGI, n.d.-m).



Job ad 3:

This ad was for positions in Canada, the United Kingdom, and India, as it did not cover all aspects included in ad 1.

Note: The text is standard and shown in English, even in Spanish job ads. Exceptions existed in French ads, and even also using the Swedish versions, as in ad 4 below (CGI, n.d.-n).

At CGI, we recognize the richness that diversity brings. We strive to create a work culture where all belong and collaborate with clients in building more inclusive communities. As an equal opportunity employer, we want to empower all our members to succeed and grow. If you require an accommodation at any point during the recruitment process, please let us know. We will be happy to assist.

Job ad 4:

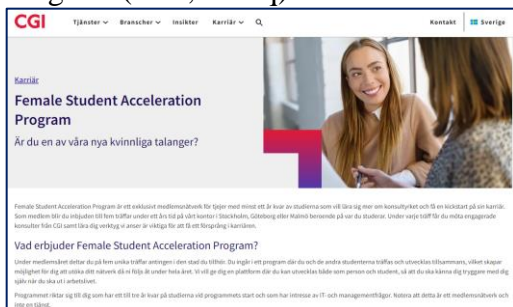
“At CGI, we recognize the richness that diversity brings. We strive to create a work culture where everyone belongs, and we collaborate with clients in building more inclusive communities. As an equal opportunity employer, we empower all our members to succeed and grow.” (CGI, n.d.-o).

The Swedish ad has no information about providing help in finding accommodation as stated in ads 1, 2, and 3.

På CGI vet vi vilken rikedom mångfald ger. Vi strävar efter att skapa en arbetskultur där alla känner sig välkomna och vi samarbetar med våra kunder för att skapa ett inkluderande samhälle. Som en jämställd arbetsgivare vill vi ge alla våra medlemmar samma möjlighet att lyckas och utvecklas.

Job ad 5:

The company includes female students by providing the Female Student Acceleration Program (CGI, n.d.-q).

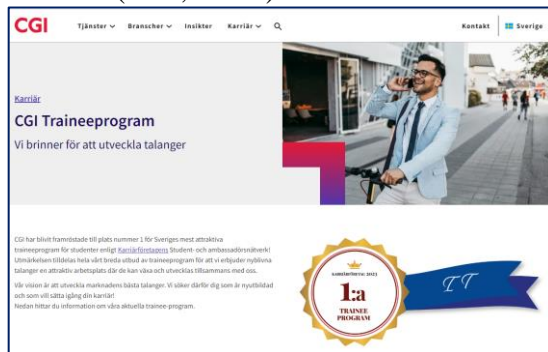


Job ad 6:

The company includes students by providing opportunities about internships and thesis writing (CGI, n.d.-p).



CGI has been voted as having the most attractive trainee program for students in Sweden (CGI, n.d.-r).



Appendix 8: Job ads of Nexer

English

Job ad 1:

This ad stated that an employee can work with “smart and talented” people and “several other exciting customers”, all “to develop [their] own skills.” It mentioned as well the different benefits the company offers, including individual benefits of flexible working hours and passion days, or having extra vacation days to enjoy private interests outside of work in addition to offering fun activities such as After Works and playing games (Nexer, 2023a).

The sun always shines in Karlskrona and in our office and we are a great group of people who spend our days here. You will work with smart and talented developers, project managers, business intelligence consultants and other experts. Even if you will belong to our office in Karlskrona, you will work with several other exciting customers and nice colleagues around the country. To develop your own skills, we have internal education, pluralisight, learning lunches, etc. Everything to make you feel that you are progressing in your development with us! Our community is incredibly important and that is why we do a lot together. Everything from spontaneous After Works to playing paddle to a whole evening with lots of different games. Take a look at what a game night at our place looks like!

In addition to the above, you see here some of what we at Nexer in Karlskrona can offer you.

- * Collective agreement [3]
- * Flexible working hours [3]
- * Over time compensation [3]
- * Pension according to ITP [3]
- * Passion days, two extra vacation days [3]
- * Parental leave benefit [3]
- * Health insurance [3]
- * Health exam [3]
- * Leasing car [3]
- * 4000 kr health care [3]
- * Benify portal [3]
- * Yearly Kick-off [3]
- * WorkWise – remote or onsite [3]

Job ad 2:

We embrace diversity and believe that people with different backgrounds and experiences make our work and our company better. And most importantly – we have fun at work! (Nexer, 2023b).

Our culture

Our vision is Promising future – it's important for us to make a difference and contribute to a better future. We are committed to our customers and have a sincere concern for each other. We embrace diversity and believe that people with different backgrounds and experiences make our work and our company better. We value innovation and the will to develop and take the next step, onwards and upwards. And most importantly – we have fun at work!

Job ad 3:

“We respect all and want to learn from others’ experience, just as we want to share our experience with others. We believe that diversity contributes to creativity and helps us expand as individuals and as a company.” (Nexer, 2023c).

NEXER SOM ARBETSGIVARE

På Nexer arbetar vi efter ledorden Passion and Execution. För oss betyder det att vi älskar det vi gör och vi får det gjort. Vår företagskultur är stark och något vi är stolta över, därför är dina personliga egenskaper extra viktiga för oss. Vi har både affärsmannaskap, kundorientering och teknikutbildning i blodet, och såklart en förmåga att snabbt ta till oss ny information och omvandla den till kreativa lösningar.

Vi respekterar alla och tar gärna del av andras erfarenheter samtidigt som vi gärna delar med oss av våra egna. Vi tror att mångfald främjar kreativitet och hjälper oss att växa både som individer och företag.

Swedish

Job ad 4:

“Diversity: To us, diversity is really important. What makes us different is what develops us the most. Different perspectives, experiences, and personalities are considered key to our success. Be yourself and contribute in your own real way – welcome to the Öresund (city name) force.” (Nexer, 2023d).

Mångfald

För oss är mångfald viktigt på riktigt. Det som gör oss olika är också det som utvecklar oss mest. Olika perspektiv, erfarenhet och personligheter är en stor del av vår nyckel till framgång. Var dig själv och bidra på ditt alldeles egna sätt - välkommen till Öresundskraft!

Förmåner

På Öresundskraft är vi måna om vårt välbefinnande och att det finns en hållbar balans mellan arbete och fritid. Därför erbjuder vi våra anställda flera förmåner. Läs mer [HÄR!](#)

Job ad 5:

“We embrace diversity and believe that people with different backgrounds and experiences make our work and our company better. And most importantly — we have fun at work! We have an entrepreneurial spirit and a genuine desire to do business — and we celebrate our successes. That is why we have regular events, trips, team activities and conferences within both the business area and the rest of the Nexer group.” (Nexer, 2023e).

Vår kultur

Vår vision är Promising future – det är viktigt för oss att göra skillnad och bidra till en bättre framtid. Vi har ett engagemang för våra kunder och en uppriktig ömtanke om varandra. Vi omfamnar mångfald och tror att människor med olika bakgrunder och erfarenheter gör vårt arbete och vårt företag bättre. Vi värdesätter innovation och villan att utvecklas och ta nästa steg – framåt och uppåt.

Dessutom har vi roligt på jobbet! Vi har en anda av entreprenörskap och en genuin vilja att driva affärer - och vi firar våra framgångar. Därför har vi regelbundna events, resor, team aktiviteter och konferenser inom både affärsområdet och övriga Nexer group.

Job ad 6: Inclusion of students

The company provides opportunities to include students: “Students do their master’s thesis with us.” (Nexer, n.d.-j).

MASTER'S THESIS AT NEXER

Each year, students do their master's thesis with us. Are you interested? Find our available openings or contact Nexer in the city or town where you study.

FIND YOUR OFFICE >

Appendix 9: Job ads of Toxic

Job ad 1:

“At Toxic, we strive for an even gender distribution and believe that diversity is one of our main strengths. Therefore, we welcome applicants with different backgrounds and experiences that make us even stronger.” (Toxic, n.d.-h).

Varmt välkommen med din ansökan!

Start: Enligt överenskommelse

Lön: Individuell lönesättning

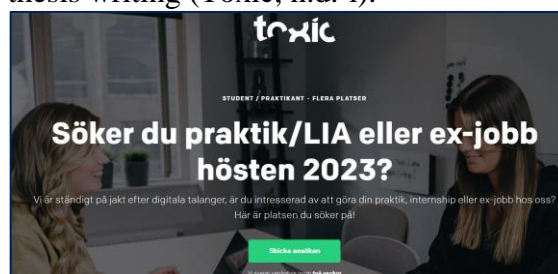
Placering: Hybrid Remote med utgångspunkt från något av våra kontor i Anderstorp, Borås eller Jönköping

Omfattning: Enligt överenskommelse

På Toxic strävar vi efter en jämn könsfördelning och tycker att mångfald är en av våra främsta styrkor. Därför välkomnar vi sökanden med olika bakgrunder och erfarenheter som gör oss ännu starkare.

Job ad 2:

The company includes students by providing opportunities of internships and thesis writing (Toxic, n.d.-i).



Appendix 10: CSR Reports of CGI

English report

DE&I focus

The company presents its approaches toward DE&I (CGI, n.d.-s, p.45).

People
Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I)

Creating a culture of belonging requires conscious and intentional effort. Our DE&I strategy is foundational to the growth and success of our company. It provides a framework for cooperation that empowers our members to show up as their complete, authentic selves at work.

We are committed to driving positive cultural change by increasing diversity in our workforce and embracing the differences in race and ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, language, culture, national origin, religious commitments, age, and disability status, and the intersectionality of one or more of these characteristics. Moreover, we recognize that it is every individual's right to work in an environment free of sexual, psychological, and racial harassment.

We strive to ensure equal opportunity and build a culture of respect and belonging aligned with our values as a company.

Providing a diverse and inclusive workplace helps us strengthen the bond of trust with our members, so they can be who they are without fear of speaking up with ideas, questions, or concerns.

We believe fostering authentic relationships, connection, and belonging leads to respectful curiosity, innovation, retention of top talent, and a shared vision of success.

DE&I is embedded in our operations strategies, professional development, personal well-being, and career advancement programs. We provide awareness training, webinars, and resources to help members and leaders develop the skills to lead and collaborate inclusively. For example, new hires in India and the U.S. attend mandatory anti-discrimination and anti-harassment training, and all members in Germany and Canada are required to undergo unconscious bias training.

Diversity dashboards and key performance indicators (KPIs) are tracked and published based on local compliance requirements and cultural practices in which we operate.

Our Respectful Workplace Policy is designed to prevent workplace harassment and includes our non-discrimination and harassment standards. We also have additional local ethics policies in place, and our Third-Party Code of Ethics consists of a "Do Not Harass or Discriminate" statement.

Our conflict resolution policy provides an easy and safe way for any member or third party to report workplace situations that violate our Code of Ethics. These include, but are not limited to, harassment, theft, substance abuse, bribery, bribery, conflicts of interest, data privacy, intellectual property violations, and unsafe conditions. In addition to our ethics hotline, we have whistleblower procedures to ensure that actions and follow-ups are taken after an ethics or compliance incident is reported.

DE&I governance

DE&I is endorsed at the highest level in the company by the CEO and the Executive Committee of CGI.

Ownership and accountability for DE&I is a shared responsibility with global and local steering committees to set direction, report on progress and approve programs and initiatives. DE&I is embedded in the annual business plan for each Strategic Business Unit. The Code of Ethics and global and local policies create the framework to protect our members, clients, and the trust of our DE&I activities and increase the engagement of our members.

Beyond our formal governance, we have an engaged group of global DE&I experts, champions and advocates who support our DE&I vision every day. This broader community is essential to amplify the reach of our DE&I activities and increase the engagement of our members.

Diversity

The report includes many aspects of diversity, both visible and invisible, highlighting the importance of allyship and advocacy to create an inclusive workplace (CGI, n.d.-s, p.44). For example, there is a focus on gender on page 45, racial diversity on page 46, disabilities on page 47, and LGBTQ+ on page 48.

People
Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I)

Diversity

We believe the ability to be truly authentic, self in the workplace contributes to a culture of trust and cooperation.

Diversity refers to the full spectrum of human differences, including visible and invisible attributes. As a company, we are proud to embrace the differences that bring members and clients to the workplace, and we are committed to creating an environment where everyone can thrive and succeed.

We are committed to creating an environment where everyone can thrive and succeed. We are committed to creating an environment where everyone can thrive and succeed.

Allyship as a condition for success

Allyship is the ability to have someone from the lived experiences of others with the goal of working toward removing barriers, mitigating risk, and creating safe and inclusive spaces in which diversity can thrive. This takes the form of advocacy in the workplace, such as speaking up, supporting and amplifying voices, and being an ally to those who are not. Allyship is a condition for success.

"The LGBTQ+ community is incredibly diverse. For this, being an ally is all about listening, understanding the issues, and bringing that knowledge back to CGI to inform the company's goals and priorities, and in return, influence the company's goals and priorities accordingly."

Barb Anderson
Manager, Strategic Engagement and Inclusion, CGI U.S. Member

Member resource groups

Our member resource groups (MRGs) are among our most effective drivers of change. Member-driven and supported by CGI leadership, executive sponsors, and the DE&I team, these groups work to empower and engage our professionals with common backgrounds, interests or passions, and to share awareness on how we can best understand and celebrate our differences.

Our MRGs provide internal networks of individuals, independent members working together to create a safe space for members to openly and respectfully share their personal experiences, concerns, and wishes to create more diverse and inclusive CGI. They also provide opportunities for external knowledge and learn development and serve as incubators for innovation.

10/2022

71 member-led resource groups worldwide

Equity

The company presents its approaches toward equity (CGI, n.d.-s, p.49).

Equity

Through our policies, we are committed to fair and just practices for all members and clients. We provide access, opportunity, and advancement to all. We also strive to identify and eliminate barriers that could prevent the full participation of some groups.

We equip our members with the tools they need and provide them with quality opportunities to support their professional growth.

Specific actions and recognition

In the UK, CGI is an accredited Living Wage Employer. In Australia, Germany, and the U.S., we publish gender pay gap reports. Additionally, we publish our annual *Investment in Equity* report, detailing our actions plan for gender equality within Sweden.

Gender-equal employer award in Sweden

For the first consecutive year, CGI in Sweden received the top rating as a gender equal IT employer in the Nordics. This award recognizes our commitment to gender equality, including our focus on equal pay, employment conditions, working conditions, and work environment.

We have also achieved complete gender equality within our Swedish Member team.

STORY
Helping members achieve a work-life balance

Whether a member is supporting their child's homework, giving the law of a loved one, or responsible for the primary care of a dependent family member, CGI provides access to resources that help members and their families achieve a healthy work-life balance. Around the world, CGI has both created and supported initiatives and policies to prevent discrimination, offer flexible, emotional and practical support to our members who are caring for their loved ones with chronic health conditions and family challenges.

100% STRESS

Inclusion

The company presents its approaches toward inclusion (CGI, n.d.-s, p.50).

Inclusion

Creating a welcoming and diverse workplace environment free of discrimination and harassment requires everything we do. We are committed to creating an environment where everyone can thrive and succeed.


We are committed to creating an environment where everyone can thrive and succeed. We are committed to creating an environment where everyone can thrive and succeed.

Specific actions and recognition

In France, we are a signatory of the *Charte Nationale LGBTQ+* (National Charter) and participated in the 2022 LGBTQ+ survey which led to more open discussions between members. Members in Germany developed a new Microsoft Teams app called the *Diversity Feedback Form (DFF)*. It encourages members to share their personal DEI experiences safely, raises awareness of existing challenges, and contributes to our DE&I strategy. DFF is easily accessible, completely anonymous, and now also available in Canada.

In the Netherlands, our members designed an unconscious bias training that encourages members to become allies to marginalized communities.

CGI in the U.S. is certified as an Inclusionary Committed Employer, reinforcing our commitment to integrate fairness into our company culture and recruitment processes through sustainability, mental health, well-being, talent management, and DE&I initiatives.



Inclusive workplace

The company presents a fair and inclusive recruitment process to attract potential employees (CGI, n.d.-s, p.65).

People
Fair and inclusive recruitment

Fair and inclusive hiring practices are crucial to our recruitment strategy. They allow us to build a diverse and high-performing workforce with a wide variety of skills, experiences, views, and ideas to drive innovation and help our clients and communities meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving business and economic environment.

Our primary model enables us to apply targeted recruitment strategies through local partnerships so we can build diverse teams representative of the communities in which we live and work.

Our members live the DEI culture every day, putting them in a unique position to recommend qualified talent. Through our global Member Referral Program, our members have the opportunity to identify and refer top talent within their networks. Incentives are available for members who refer successful candidates.

Broadening our recruitment

We take several approaches to recruiting diverse candidates, including supporting diversity programs in our local communities and sponsoring talent immersion. Our immersion teams in every Strategic Business Unit have processes and partnerships in place to facilitate cross-border hiring.

Every job description includes a statement that reflects our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and informs potential candidates of available accommodations.

We provide a candidate with a best-in-class, fair, and transparent recruitment process with clear information and answers to frequently asked questions on various subjects.

Through the *Disability* program in Germany and a partnership with *Teddy* in Canada, we use software to review and suggest language updates to our job descriptions to ensure we use inclusive language to encourage applications from qualified candidates from different backgrounds.

To further support broader diversity and inclusion in our recruitment process, we continue to train our current and new leaders on avoiding unconscious bias. In 2022, we dedicated a module within our recruitment model (RM) to educate managers on identifying bias through training materials and local guidance.

"I've had an unusual career path, so I hope I can show others that it's always possible to change direction, and that it's never too late to get into tech!"

Joy Macchia
Consultant, CGI Australia

GLOBAL
Hiring and nurturing neurodiverse talent

At CGI, we recognize the unique innovation, creative, technical and analytical skills that neurodiverse talent brings to our organization. We have launched several initiatives to help build a more inclusive workplace through recruitment practices, advocacy, education and resources for all of our members and potential talent alike – irrespective of their neurodivergent differences – is to think.

In the U.S., we established a new member resource group called *Disability and Neurodiversity Advocates*. Through this group, we are forming a partnership with *Microsoft*, a non-profit providing jobs and opportunities for people with disabilities in the greater Washington, D.C., area. As part of the partnership, we plan to expand our *STEM&D* program to build a STEM camp for neurodivergent individuals.

In France, to bridge the gap between people with atypical cognitive abilities seeking employment and companies looking for talent, we have joined forces with *Agility* and *ONIS* to produce a new generation assessment tool. The tool is designed as an open source, fun, accessible and inclusive video game that detects the skills needed for a testing and development career.

Facts and numbers

The company presents numbers and facts about its DE&I now, and its goals for the future, stating: “Achieve the same level of diversity representation at the leadership levels as the company population as a whole by 2025” (CGI, n.d.-s, p.16).

Diversity, equity, and inclusion progress				
DE&I targets, progress, and achievements*				
Targets	Climate	People	Communities	Global Governance and Responsibility
Climate	Climate emissions reduction Net-zero emissions by 2050 100% renewable electricity by 2030	Diversity and education CGI: Achieve the same level of diversity representation at the leadership levels as the company population as a whole by 2025 Education: Train 100% of our employees on DEI by 2025	Procurement 100% of business units to implement DEI in procurement by 2025	Board Diversity – Supply chain 30% women on the Board of Directors 75% of suppliers' suppliers assessed on environmental and social criteria by 2025
Progress and achievements	85% reduction of CO2 emissions from 2019 76.1% of net-zero electricity from renewable sources 46.8% of total energy from renewable sources	33.3% of SBU Presidents are women 27.5% women in leadership* 34.2% women in senior roles ~502,000 DEI and inclusion programs beneficiaries, representing 6.5 times the number of our members	58% of our business units implemented DEI in procurement 16,724 DEI training sessions, impacting more than 100,000 employees 46,819 hours of participation in DEI programs and community activities	31.5% of women on the Board of Directors 16 members of the Board of Directors representing expertise in more than 12 national markets 58% of suppliers' suppliers assessed on environmental and social criteria

33,3% of SBU Presidents are women.

DE&I Strategy

The company presents its strategy toward an inclusive workplace, one that works with DE&I (CGI, n.d.-s, p.41).

People

Our strategy to create a safe and inclusive environment


We care about our members and their physical, mental, and financial well-being and are committed to providing a safe and empowering environment where they feel respected and comfortable in bringing their whole selves to work.

An interview with Jenny Winter

Our mission, vision, and values

What is your global strategy around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I)?

We treat DE&I as a journey of ongoing improvement. We are building an environment at CGI that provides diversity, representation, inclusion, effectiveness, and reflects the world we live in.



Jenny Winter

Our strategy continues a global approach with a very strong local focus. At the global level, our DE&I programs are grounded in our CGI values – particularly our core value of respect – because we believe providing an inclusive and equitable work experience cannot be tied to a one-size-fits-all model. It requires understanding, respecting, and supporting the unique needs of each individual so that our members feel respected and comfortable.

How do we develop actions that resonate globally and locally while considering the fundamental differences between countries?

At a global level, we have a common DE&I framework that unites us as a company. Among our focus areas is the advancement of our members who identify as women, which we can examine at a global level to ensure that we're supporting gender equity.

DE&I also needs to reflect local cultures, regulations, and compliance requirements. Our decentralized model allows DE&I at the local level, leading to ensure our programs resonate with our members and reflect the unique needs we want to see in the world around us. Furthermore, each Strategic Business Unit develops a customized DE&I plan and measures progress to demonstrate continuous evolution.

Sustainable Development Goals about DE&I

The company presents its commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals related to DE&I (CGI, n.d.-s, p.126).

OUR MOST RELEVANT SDGs	OUR PROGRAMS AND CONTRIBUTION	TARGETS	PROGRESS 2022	PELLARS
3 Good Health and Well-being	We provide our members with a safe work environment and undertake specific prevention and mitigation measures to avoid negative effects on their physical and psychological health and occupational safety. In the context of mental and hybrid work, we understand the importance of giving our members opportunities to work in a healthy and safe workplace. Key initiatives include programs to foster member engagement, social connections, a sense of belonging, and mental well-being.	Overall member satisfaction 8.5/10	Overall member satisfaction 8.6/10	People Communities
4 Quality Education	Our educational programs focus on developing a diverse and robust future T-talent base. While many valuable opportunities exist in the way of talent and economic mobility, education is undoubtedly a key to reducing inequalities, reaching gender equity, and providing populations from being left behind in the global world. Through our educational programs, we share our core expertise with both young people and adults, providing the next development. By investing talents at CGI, encouraging upskilling and reskilling, we seek to achieve a more successful future for those most at risk. We help advance our members' careers through training, upskilling or upleveling technical and soft skills, and supporting their professional journey.	Reach twice as many participants for our education and not-for-profit programs as CGI members by 2025	1,202 STEM and educational programs delivered 450,000 STEM and educational programs beneficiaries, representing 54 times the number of our members	People Communities
5 Gender Equality	We drive positive cultural change by increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of our work. We embrace differences in race and ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, language, culture, religion, age, and disability status. Moreover, we recognize that everyone has the right to work in an environment free of sexual, psychological, and moral harassment. We ensure that our members at all levels are treated fairly, with respect, and without discrimination in recruitment, compensation and benefits, and career development. We support our DE&I programs in all our geographies and support member resource groups to give all members a voice and encourage diversity.	Achieve the same level of diversity representation in the leadership as the company as a whole by 2025	34.2% of women members overall 27.6% of women in leadership 30.3% of women are Strategic Business Unit Presidents	People

Human rights about DE&I

The company shows its commitments to the human rights aspects related to DE&I (CGI, n.d.-s, p.97).

Human rights

Our commitment

We are fully committed to respecting human rights throughout our operations and supply chain in accordance with United Nations (UN) guidelines. Our understanding of these rights is drawn from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and we strengthened our commitment in 2020 by signing the UN Global Compact.

As a people-oriented organization with 90,000 members, a global company operating in a variety of countries with diverse cultures and local regulations, and a buyer with more than 50,000 suppliers in our supply chain, we recognize human rights to be fundamental.

The human rights referred to in this section of this report are:

- The right to equal opportunity and fair treatment, particularly for people belonging to vulnerable groups
- The right to protection against harassment and discrimination
- The right to a healthy and safe work environment
- The right to freedom of expression and association
- The right to privacy of personal data
- The right to education and digital inclusion
- The right to protection from forced labor, child labor, and human trafficking

Our policy

Our Code of Ethics for our members and our Third-Party Code of Ethics for our suppliers are based on the values and philosophy that define our Human Rights statement and have guided us successfully since the founding of CGI in 1978. These codes express that "Every person has the right to equal treatment with respect to employment and the right to be free of discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, color, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, pregnancy, record of offense, marital status, social conditions, political beliefs, language, veteran status (U.S. only), family status, disability, or means used to overcome a disability." This statement is reinforced by our specific policies on equal opportunity, and discrimination, and harassment, and modern slavery.

In 2022, we updated our Code of Ethics to reinforce our principles of human rights protection, specifically as it pertains to modern slavery. Section 1.7 of our Code of Ethics was amended to add the following statement:

Modern Slavery

CGI recognizes that slavery is both illegal and unacceptable. As a services organization in which most of our members are highly skilled and directly employed by CGI, we consider the risk of modern slavery within our own organization to be low. However, CGI has implemented an additional procurement process to mitigate the risk of slavery in our supply chain. We expect all third parties with whom we seek to comply with and human trafficking and anti-slavery legislation. To that end, the CGI Third-Party Code of Ethics aims to provide suppliers with the appropriate guidance to make informed business decisions while working with CGI.

More information can be found in the Ethics section (see page 55).

Latest awards

The company shows all of the awards it holds as an employer to gain EOC status (CGI, n.d.-s, p.124).

Awards

People

Career

- Forbes' World's Best Employers and America's Best Employers for New Grads recognition: Top Workplace in the U.S. and in the states of Connecticut, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia
- Great Place to Work in India, the Philippines, and Canada
- Best Workplaces in Tech in the UK

Education & Training

- Brandon Hall Excellence Awards (Bronze medal in the "Best Program for Upskilling Employees" category, Silver medal in the "Best Results of a Learning Program" category)
- Scottish Cyber Awards (shortlisted for "Best Cyber Education Programme" in the UK)

Health and well-being

- Healthy Working Wales Workplace in the UK

Communities

- India Leaders for Social Change
- Digital Companies Trophy ESN & ICT (Trophy) for our CGI for Good tool in France

Climate

- "Sustainable IT" label in France
- Global Good Award for Climate Action in the UK (for our UK not-for-profit program)
- Business Green Leaders award in the "Best Nature-based Project" category (for our volunteer work on the Seagrass Project in the UK)

Responsible Business

- Recognized as a "Leader" in Canadian security services by EOC Market Scope in Canada
- First digital services company to obtain ISO 27701 certification in France

Swedish report

Strategy and results

The company presents its strategies and results toward an inclusive workplace that works with DE&I (CGI, n.d.-t, p.17).

Område	Beskrivning	Mål 2020	Resultat 2020	Mål 2021
Klimat	Minska koldioxidutsläpp från våra egna verksamheter – fokusera på tjänsteresor och energianvändning på kontoren och i datacentren	Minska koldioxidutsläpp från tjänsteresor med 8%	✓ Se sidan 21	Minska koldioxidutsläpp från tjänsteresor (ta i beaktande ökning av utsläpp jämfört med resultatet för 2020, pga effekter av Covid-19 på tjänsteresor)
Utbildning	Kontinuerligt förbättra medvetenhet och utbildning om målbaser på medierna- och organisationsnivå	Att 90% av medlemmarna fullföljer miljöutbildningen	✓ 90% av medlemmarna har fullföljt den interna miljöutbildningen	90% av medlemmarna ska fullfölja miljöutbildningen (ny kurs kommer att lanseras under 2021)
Miljöansvar	Fortsatt efterlevnad av Miljöledningssystem EMS, som säkerställer integrering av miljöaspekter i interna processer och fortsatt efterlevnad av ISO 14001-standarderna.	ISO 14001-certifierad.	✓ Senaste externa revision: oktober 2020	ISO 14001-certifierad.
Karriärer	Fostra en inkluderande arbetsplats, attrahera och behålla en varierad arbetsstyrka för att leverera större innovation	• Uppmuntra och utbilda fler unga människor att bli tekniskt kunniga	• Trainee- och accelerator-program (se sidan 25)	Samarbete med ideella organisationer och skolor för att stötta utbildning bland barn och ungdomar Ökat fokus på jämlikhet, mångfald och inkludering

DE&I Statements and initiatives

The company presents a statement and initiatives related to empowering women within an inclusive workplace that works with DE&I (CGI, n.d.-t, p.32).



Jämställdhet, mångfald och inkludering

Som ett globalt företag erkänner vi den rikedom som mångfald tillför vårt företag och välkomnar denna mångfald samtidigt som vi omfattar CGIs övergripande affärskultur. På CGI anser vi att det är nödvändigt att skapa en rättvis arbetsmiljö och vårt mångfaldsarbete är viktigt för oss för att attrahera, rekrytera och behålla de mest talangfulla individerna och det gynnar både våra kunder och CGI.

Jämställdhet mellan könen är en prioritet, men vi betonar också vikten av att bredda perspektivet för att fokusera på mångfald och inkludering i ett bredare sammanhang. Det handlar om att bygga en dynamik som behövs i vår organisation och se till så att vi lyssnar på och utnyttjar alla perspektiv och kompetenser bland våra medlemmar. Under 2020 har CGI i Sverige fokuserat på att implementera målvärden och höja medvetenheten om vikten av inkludering som en naturlig del av vårt dagliga arbete och våra kärnprocesser. För att se till så att vi speglar samhället vi lever i kommer detta ämne förbli ett viktigt fokusområde under det kommande året och det är inbäddat i alla våra utvecklingsprogram, ledarskapsdagrar och rekryteringsprocesser.



Womentor

CGI i Sverige är medlem i IT- och telekombranschens initiativ "Womentor", för att aktivt bidra till en jämmer kvinnors i IT-sektorn. Genom Womentor kan CGI främja, utveckla och presentera våra kvinnliga IT-medarbetare och arbeta tillsammans med våra kollegor för att skapa jämställdhet mellan män och kvinnor. Under 2020 har CGI deltagit i ett nätverk av adapter och mentorer för att dela erfarenheter och lära av varandra.



Hälsa och välbefinnande

Vi anser att våra medlemmars hälsa och välbefinnande är avgörande och vi har åtagit oss att förbättra våra medlemmars livskvalitet. Detta åtagande styrs av CGIs policy för hälsa och välbefinnande och sätts i praktik genom olika resurser som är tillgängliga för alla medlemmar. Vi investerar i aktiviteter, tjänster och verktyg för att stötta medlemmars mentala och fysiska hälsa och välbefinnande som riktar sig till medlemmars behov av hälsa, välbefinnande och intressen.

Appendix 11: CSR Reports of Nexer

The English report includes many interviews with external stakeholders who highlight the importance of DE&I.

Industry interview 1 about DE&I

WORKING IN TECH GIVES YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHAPE OUR FUTURE



ÅSA ZETTERBERG
MANAGING DIRECTOR TECHSVERIGE

Tech is a necessary enabler and a basis for societal development, sustainability, competitiveness and prosperity. The tech industry is Sweden's new basic industry, a growing industry of the future, and thus an engine for employment.

The industry is broad and larger than what has traditionally been referred to as the IT and telecom industry. It includes companies in, for example, computer games, health (HealthTech), finance (FinTech) and education (EdTech). The employers range from multinational tech companies, major telecom operators and consulting companies to small technology-intensive startups. It is an industry that offers many different types of jobs. People can work with everything from coding and data analysis to design, project management and business development.

It is gratifying to see that the tech industry is growing and that interest in working with IT and digitalisation is increasing among the population. More and more people see tech jobs as attractive, as the industry offers many different career paths and meaningful jobs where workers can contribute to solving many of the biggest challenges of our time. Working in tech gives you an opportunity to play an active role in shaping our future.

It is especially gratifying to see that more and more women see a career in tech as attractive, and above all, a fun option. Attractive aspects of the tech industry include good working conditions, permanent employment and flexible workplaces. At the same time, more needs to be done to increase diversity in tech. The industry needs to work actively to attract and retain more women and people from diverse backgrounds. We need to get even better at communicating the opportunities of working in tech by broadening the image of the tech industry and tech jobs.

We also need to signal that the tech industry has a need for many different types of people, with different experiences and abilities. As part of this work, we at the trade and employer organisation TechSverige have gathered information about different career opportunities and career paths in tech through the campaign [adtech](https://adtech.techsverige.se/): <https://adtech.techsverige.se/>

“It is gratifying to see that the tech industry is growing and that interest in working with IT and digitalisation is increasing among the population. Working in tech gives you an opportunity to play an active role in shaping our future. It is especially gratifying to see that more and more women see a career in tech as attractive, and above all, a fun option. Attractive aspects of the tech industry include good working conditions, permanent employment and flexible workplaces. At the same time, more needs to be done to increase diversity in tech. The industry needs to

work actively to attract and retain more women and people from diverse backgrounds. We need to get even better at communicating the opportunities of working in tech by broadening the image of the tech industry and tech jobs. We also need to signal that the tech industry has a need for many different types of people.” (Nexer, n.d.-I, p.6).

Industry interview 2 about DE&I

DIGITALISATION IS FOR EVERYONE, NOT JUST PEOPLE SIMILAR TO ME



TOMAS FRIMMEL
CEO, MICROSOFT SWEDEN

The tech sector needs to recruit roughly 70,000 new workers by 2024. The impending shortage of staff is something that is confirmed by Microsoft's Swedish customers and partners when I speak to them - and for many of them the skills shortage is already present today.

The lack of both professionals and diversity in tech poses a serious threat to Sweden's continued digitisation, innovation and growth. Not even a third of people working in the tech industry today are women. It is not good enough as we know from experience that diversity leads to heterogeneous group dynamics which lead to innovation. An interesting finding from this year's Tomorrow Report is that as many as 9 out of 10 Swedes lack in-depth knowledge about IT and digitalisation.” (Nexer, n.d.-I, p.16).

enough as we know from experience that diversity leads to heterogeneous group dynamics which lead to innovation. That's why we at Microsoft Sweden have implemented many initiatives over the years aimed at bringing more perspectives into tech.

An example of this is Tech Girl of the Year, our annual award where we highlight and celebrate inspiring young women who are pursuing tech-oriented studies so that in return they can inspire more people to embark on tech studies. This and similar initiatives are vitally important to challenge the traditional preconceptions about what types of people work in tech and IT - which will ultimately make more people realise that there is also a natural place for them in our industry.

An interesting finding from this year's Tomorrow Report is that as many as 9 out of 10 Swedes lack in-depth knowledge about IT and digitalisation. At the same time, there are many opportunities today for pursuing further studies in various areas of technology, regardless of prior knowledge. One example is Microsoft's own free course offering Microsoft Learn and the many initiatives run by our partners in Sweden. There are courses for everyone, regardless of their level of skill in the subject.

There is, in principle, no limit to what we can achieve as a society with the help of digitalisation. Through digitalisation, we can increase our competitiveness, improve Swedish welfare, and ensure a better future. An attractive prospect, don't you agree?

“The tech sector needs to recruit roughly 70,000 new workers by 2024. The impending shortage of staff is something that is confirmed by Microsoft's Swedish customers and partners when I speak to them - and for many of them the skills shortage is already present today. The lack of both professionals and diversity in tech poses a serious threat to Sweden's continued digitisation, innovation and growth. Not even a third of people working in the tech industry today are women.

It is not good enough as we know from experience that diversity leads to heterogeneous group dynamics which lead to innovation. An interesting finding from this year's Tomorrow Report is that as many as 9 out of 10 Swedes lack in-depth knowledge about IT and digitalisation.” (Nexer, n.d.-I, p.16).

Industry interview 3 about DE&I

WE NEED TO CHANGE THE IMAGE OF THE TECH INDUSTRY



OLIVIA HARLIN
TECH GIRL OF THE YEAR 2022

Olivia Harlin is studying the civil engineering programme in interaction and design at Umeå University. In April 2022 she won the Tech Girl of the Year award, which Microsoft Sweden has been awarding for two decades with the aim of inspiring girls and young women to get an education and work in tech.

Just under a third of people working in the tech industry today are women. This uneven gender distribution is even more pronounced among high school students; according to the employer organisation Teknikföretagen, only 18.3 percent of girls applied for the technology programme during the 2021/2022 academic year. To increase diversity, Olivia believes we need to review the tech industry's image and how we work with recruitment.

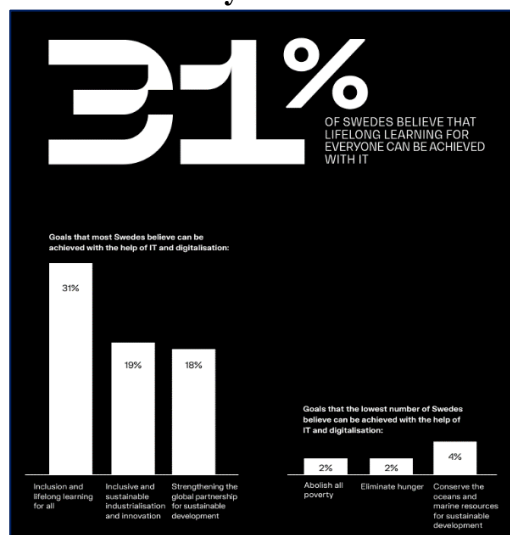
"Many people probably think of technology as a bit square, but it's the exact opposite. It's through creativity and diversity that we drive development forward. That's why people of all ages, from diverse backgrounds and of different genders, are needed. To succeed in creating a society where technology is at the core, we need to see diversity in the creative process itself," says Olivia.

Olivia is optimistic about the future since all industries need technical skills in one way or another.

"My future is absolutely in the tech industry. The beauty of technology is that there are no limits to what, where or how you can work. I also think it feels great to live in a time when technology is changing so much. It means there's always something new to learn. Things are never boring! It might sound like a cliché, but I believe the possibilities in tech are endless. All you have to do is look back a few years and compare it with today," concludes Olivia.

"To increase diversity, Olivia believes we need to review the tech industry's image and how we work with recruitment. "Many people probably think of technology as a bit square, but it's the exact opposite. It's through creativity and diversity that we drive development forward. That's why people of all ages, from diverse backgrounds and of different genders, are needed. To succeed in creating a society where technology is at the core, we need to see diversity in the creative process itself. Only 18.3 percent of girls applied for the technology programme during the 2021/2022 academic year. People of all ages, from diverse backgrounds and of different genders, are needed." (Nexer, n.d.-l, p.22).

The IT industry and UN Sustainable Development Goals



"Almost 1 in 3 (31%) believe that IT has the greatest possibility of solving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which include inclusive and equal education and lifelong learning for all. People working in IT are more optimistic that IT and digitalisation will contribute to gender equality." (Nexer, n.d.-l, p.47).

The Swedish report is the same as the English report (Nexer, n.d.-m).