The Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage of Fashion
A Study of Swedish Fashion Brands

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Abstract

In recent years the fashion industry has experienced a high frequency of famous Creative Directors departing the companies for unknown reasons. The same problem does not seem to occur in the Scandinavian fashion industry. This study’s purpose is to explore why Scandinavia does not experience the same problem, contribute a deeper understanding of the leader-designer relationship in the Swedish fashion industry, and to examine how the Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage is applicable in the Swedish fashion industry. Three case studies were conducted at the Swedish fashion companies TRIWA, Baron and Weriseg where both leaders and designers were interviewed. The findings showed that the leaders view their designers as an essential part of the organisation but how they are prioritised depend on the situation. Further more, this study indicates that all of the studied companies have a stakeholder approach, uses a value creating strategy based on cooperation with their stakeholders, are aligned with a typical Swedish organizational culture, and has a Swedish Management Style. Thus this study indicates that the notion of Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage is applicable at the Swedish fashion industry and that this might be a factor for their success.

Key words: Fashion, Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage, Cooperative Advantage, Swedish Fashion Industry, Hofstede’s Dimensions, Swedish Management Style, Stakeholder Theory, Stakeholder Salience, Designers
Preface
I would like to express my sincerest gratitude towards several individuals and organisations that have meant a great deal for me during this study. First and foremost I would like to thank the companies TRIWA, Baron and Weriseg for their availability and the kind contribution of interviews. Without this support the conducted study would not have been possible and I am extremely grateful, as both Management & Control and the fashion industry are personal interests of mine. I would also like to thank my supervisor Göran Nilsson who has contributed with valuable inputs, recommendations and opinions throughout the whole process of this study. This is highly appreciated as it provided a continuous conversation and the possibility to discuss ideas regarding the study. Furthermore, I would like to express my appreciation towards my opponents and other individuals who has given me several perspectives and comments during my work-process.

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1 Introduction

In the introductory section, the background, problem definition and the research questions are presented to motivate the purpose of this study.

1.1 Background and Problem Definition

“Beware of All Enterprises that requires new clothes” (Henry David Thoreau, 1854)

The fashion industry might not be a common field of research but it is a 1.5 trillion dollar industry that employs millions of people and contributes to the global economy (Amed 2013). The fundamental characteristics of the fashion industry are known for its competitiveness, turbulence and constant change as it has to constantly create new trends, align with the trends set by other competitors or align the business with the demands from the customers. Even though the industry is in constant state of change, recent years have shown an uncommonly high frequency of change. First of all there is the transformation in collections and runway show, Burberry has now removed the seasonal-collections and has combined the womenswear and menswear runway show into one (Abnett & Amed 2016), Gucci has also mixed womenswear and menswear into one runway show for menswear and womenswear (Friedman 2016). Secondly, there have been several changes in well-known Creative Directors (CD) within the industry where some have moved to another brand and some chose to leave or was fired. To mention a few, in 2013 Marc Jacobs left Louis Vuitton to concentrate on his own brand, which is in the corporate group LVMH (Menkes & Wilson 2013). Raf Simons left Christian Dior in 2015 for “personal reasons” after 3 years (BOF TEAM 2015a), Alber Elbaz was ousted from Lanvin the same year after 14 years (BOF TEAM 2015b), Hedi Slimane left Saint Laurent in 2015 after four extremely successful years (Carvel 2016; Amed 2016), Maria Grazia Chiuri left Valentino in 2015 after 17 years and moved to Dior (Hoang 2016), Frida Gianni and former CEO Patrizio di Marco left Gucci in 2015 after 3 years (Roberts 2015).

The change of a CD may not be an uncommon initiative in the fashion industry but there have been a high frequency in recent years. The CDs have either been with the company for a long time or have contributed with high growth during their years with the brand. Most of these changes have been initiated under cloudy circumstances and the reasons behind them

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1The terms fashion industry, fashion brand, fashion company could be interpreted in many different ways, but for this paper the definition is set as “A company, brand or industry that produces products that one could wear, this includes clothing as well as accessories such as hats, gloves, bags, jewellery, watches, shoes, wallets and sunglasses”. Thus a fashion company is not strictly bound to a company that produces whole clothing lines.
are not officially announced. However, it is appropriate to assume it can be of financial reasons such as the case of Hedi Slimane leaving Saint Laurent after not agreeing on a renewal of his contract (Socha 2016). Slimane is also currently in legal dispute and seeking monetary compensation from Saint Laurent’s parent company Kering (Diderich 2016).

In 1984 Freeman published the book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* and the concept of stakeholders was introduced to management. Today there are many definitions of a stakeholder but the definition from Freeman is “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objective” (Freeman 2010, 46), which is also the definition used in this paper. Designers, such as CDs, fashion designers and graphic designers, is a group who is directly affected by the organisation. Since the company employs them and their livelihood might depend on their wages, which are dependent of the successfulness of the organisation’s goals, they could and should be seen as stakeholders.

Nevertheless, if the decision of the CDs leaving was mutual or not, there is a difficulty in the relationship between leaders of the company and its designers. There are reasons to believe that the leaders of the organisation do not see their designers as stakeholders enough, do not take the designers claims and interests into consideration enough or that the designers chose to leave because of better offers from other companies. The difficulty that occurs in the leader-designer relationship could depend on the lack of cooperation between the two parties and the inability to create value for the organisation and its designers.

In more recent years, Freeman published the article *Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage: The Theory and Practice of Stakeholder Engagement in Scandinavia* together with Strand. They argue that Scandinavian researchers could claim the theory of stakeholder engagement and they explored six Scandinavian companies and their practices. They conclude by endorsing the term Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage, meaning that Scandinavian companies often seek a cooperative advantage for value creating strategies, and propose that Scandinavia offers a prosperous context from which to draw inspiration regarding company-stakeholder cooperation. (Strand & Freeman 2015)

Still to this day the Scandinavian region are top actors in sustainability and regard for its stakeholders. Iceland ranks first in the Sustainability Competitive Index and the Scandinavian countries ranks after Iceland, and the Scandinavian region has been in the top from 2012-2015 (Solability 2016). In the Social Progress Index Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway
are ranked 1st, 3rd, 6th and 7th. All of them are also included in the top tier in the aspects of Basic Human Needs, Foundation of Wellbeing and Opportunity. (Social Progress Imperative 2016) All of which further indicates for the high sustainability e.g. the regard for the stakeholders in the Scandinavian region.

Even though the internationally leading fashion companies seem to have trouble keeping successful CDs, Scandinavian brands do not have the same problems to a similar extent. This might be a cause of different underlying factors than the tendency for Scandinavian companies to have a cooperative-mind set. Such as the size of the organisation, the target group, the Scandinavian brands are fairly new, the designers are often one of the founders, being in a globally larger market than the Scandinavian brands etc. As mentioned earlier, the Scandinavian region is a world leader in sustainability and in seeking a cooperative advantage together with its stakeholders (Solability 2016; Social Progress Imperative 2016; Strand & Freeman 2015). Hence, there are reasons to examine the matter of why Scandinavian fashion brands do not have the same problem of CDs departing the company, as Scandinavia seems to have prosperous context (Strand & Freeman 2015) which international brands could draw inspiration from. Since there has been limited research in the area of cooperative thinking in the fashion industry and because of the high frequency of CDs departing the companies it raises further incentives to study this matter. Thus, this study will investigate the notion of Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage in the Swedish fashion industry and to explore designers (CDs, fashion designers, product designers and graphics designers) as stakeholders.

1.1.1 Research Question

How is the Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage applicable to the Swedish fashion industry?

What is the character of the relationship between the leaders and the stakeholder group designers in Swedish fashion companies?

1.2 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine if the notion of Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage is occurring within the Swedish fashion industry and if there are contexts, which other fashion companies outside Scandinavia could draw inspiration from. It also aims to explore how leaders in three different Swedish fashion companies view their designers and its stakeholders, and how the designers view their leaders. This paper seeks to contribute to the relatively low or non-existing research of fashion designers as stakeholders within Scandinavian companies.
2 Theory

Initially, this section presents the Stakeholder Theory to set the basic understanding of stakeholders. It is followed by a deeper presentation of the relevant theories and thereafter summarised in a literature overview to present how the theories are related.

2.1 Stakeholder Theory

During the twenty-first century the business world has gone through changes that has changed the landscape. The rise of information technology, awareness of the impact businesses has on communities and nations, globalization etc. (Freeman et al. 2010, 3) Since information travels through the speed of light and the awareness of businesses’ impact rises there is a need for organisations to deal with their external and internal environments. An organisation affects or is affected by the environment the organisations exists in. This environment can be categorised into groups who each has an essential role in the success of the organisation, the groups has a stake in the organisation and thus are called a “stakeholder”. It is important to note that Exhibit 1 is an oversimplified stakeholder view, it shows common stakeholders of an organisation but that is not necessarily applicable for every organisation. These stakeholders could be broken down to further smaller categories, as it is not favourable to generalise a group. All suppliers are not alike; some might be more essential for the organisation’s objective than others. (Freeman 2010, 24-26)

Exhibit 1 Stakeholder View (Freeman 2010, 26)

From Exhibit 1 it is argued that there are two major areas for analysis. Firstly, there is a need for understanding of the organisation’s strategy for each individual group. Thus, an
expertise in each stakeholder group is needed. One must understand how stakeholder groups and the issues related to them and the organisation arose, the key issues, and the groups’ willingness to use resources to either help or hurt the organisation on these issues. Secondly, the issues that affect a vital stakeholder group must be identified and the organisations must understand how to handle this relationship. This through the knowledge of how to formulate, implement and monitor strategies when handling said stakeholder group. (Freeman 2010, 26)

There are three levels of an organisation’s process of handling and managing the relationship with its stakeholder. The first level – Rational perspective is about understanding who the stakeholders are and what the stakes are in the organisation. It is important to note that many member of a certain stakeholder group is also a member of another stakeholder group and thus these groups could merge into a force of one group by sharing a certain issue. The second level – Process level is about understanding the organisational processes that manages the organisation’s relationship with its stakeholders. The third level – Transactional level is about understanding the bargains and/or transactions between the organisations and its stakeholders. To achieve successful transactions there is a need from the organisation to have continuous interactions with its stakeholders and to understand the “currencies” the stakeholders are paid with. (Freeman 2010, 53-74) Even though the third level is about transactions it is essential to remember that the focus of Stakeholder Theory is about the jointness of stakeholders interests and not about the trade-offs that sometimes has to be made e.g. “the stakeholder approach to business is about creating as much value as possible for stakeholders, without resorting to trade-offs” (Freeman 2010, 69-74; Freeman et al. 2010, 15).

2.2 Competitive-, Cooperative- and Scandinavia Cooperative Advantage

In the following sections of 2.2 Competitive Advantage and Cooperative Advantage are presented, followed by the Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage. This is due to the need for understanding of the two types of advantages in order to comprehend the Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage.

2.2.1 Competitive Advantage

A company possess a Competitive Advantage when any current or future competitor does not simultaneously implement the value creating strategy that is used (Barney 1991). The ground-setting pillar of Competitive Advantage is Porter’s work of The Five Competitive Forces (Strand & Freeman 2015).
In this framework the five competitive forces are the industry competitors, potential entrants, suppliers, buyers, and substitutes. Each of who has a potential competitive threat against the company. (Porter 1985, 4-11)

In Magretta’s book Understanding Michael Porter. The Essential Guide to Competition and Strategy she states that managers often think that competition is a form of warfare (Magretta 2012, 17), meaning that managers tend to see competition as win-lose. This is a devastating mindset, as the key to success in competitive business lies in organisations’ ability to create unique value (Magretta 2012, 17).

2.2.2 Cooperative Advantage
Because of the tendency to see competition as a form of warfare Strand and Freeman (2015) promotes a shift from Competitive Advantage to a Cooperative Advantage. However, as the primary language in the field of strategic management is a competitive language (Wang, Malhotra and Murninghan 2011; Ferraro, Pfeffer and Sutton 2005) the probability for the shift to cooperation between companies and its stakeholders is lowered. As the common win-lose mentality and expressions like “survival of the fittest” all are competitive-based and thus competitive behaviour is more likely to be followed.

The expression Cooperative Advantage is not new and has been coined before but Strand and Freeman define it as “when a company implements a value creating strategy based on cooperating with its stakeholders that results in superior value creation for the company and its stakeholders”. To seek a Cooperative Advantage is thus coherent with the Stakeholder
Theory. (Strand & Freeman 2015) This concept is also generally coherent with the concept of creating shared value by Porter and Kramer as their concept is based on the Stakeholder Theory’s “jointness of interests” (Porter and Kramer 2011). However, the creating shared value differentiates in an essential aspect. Even though it promotes a shared value it is still more consistent with a narrow economical view of the firms (Strand & Freeman 2015). This can be seen as Porter and Kramer claims that the most important objective of creating shared value is to legitimise the business (Porter and Kramer 2011). According to Stakeholder Theory the goal is not to legitimise the business but to create value for the society as a whole thus Porter and Kramer’s creating shared value indicates a more self-interested way of thinking than Freeman’s Stakeholder Theory. However, it is important to know that the creating shared value is closer to the cooperative mind-set than Porter’s previous contribution of the Five Competitive Forces. As well as the fact that stakeholder view rather focuses on cooperation with the stakeholders and not on legitimising the business e.g. the work of Porter and Kramer from 2011 is closer to the stakeholder view but not entirely the same. (Strand & Freeman 2015) It should also be noted that in a stakeholder view the relation happens horizontally in the Five Competitive Forces e.g. the suppliers and buyers cooperate with the organisation but the organisation usually does not cooperate with its competitors.

2.2.3 Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage

Strand and Freeman concludes that there are Scandinavian historical roots of the stakeholder concept and that Scandinavians could claim the first publications of the stakeholder concept. Also, their research shows that the stakeholder concept is occurring in current practices in six Scandinavian companies that are leaders in sustainability. And with the Competitive and Cooperative Advantage in mind, Scandinavian contexts offer evidence and inspiration for a shift, in creating value, from a Competitive Advantage to Cooperative Advantage. Hence, they propose the notion of Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage, which is defined as “the general tendency for companies in a Scandinavian context to implement a value creating strategy based on cooperating with their stakeholders that results in superior value creation for the companies and their stakeholders”. (Strand & Freeman 2015)
2.3 Stakeholder Salience

By the definition of a stakeholder one could see that there could be countless of different stakeholders and thus countless relationships an organisation bears and need to manage. To address the phenomenon of the stakeholder approach Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) created the framework of Stakeholder Salience to define which stakeholders to prioritise. The Stakeholder Salience is defined as “the degree to which managers give priority to competing stakeholder claims”.

The framework is based on that each stakeholder has a relative absence or presence of the attribute Legitimacy, Power and Urgency. Each stakeholder group can be in possession of none, some or all of these attributes and depending on the number of possession of the attributes there is a stakeholder salience. It is important to understand that each single attribute could be obtained or lost by the stakeholder depending on the situation. (Mitchell et al. 1997)

Legitimacy is defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions”. (Mitchell et al. 1997)

The attribute Power has three categories, Coercive Power that is based on physical means and can be obtained through violence. Utilitarian Power that is based on material means and there is the Normative Power, which is based on symbolic means such as acceptance, normative and social symbols, and respect. (Mitchell et al. 1997)

The last attribute Urgency captures the dynamics of stakeholder-manager interactions. This attribute is based on time sensitivity – the degree to which the relationship is unacceptable to the stakeholder and the manager delay in attending the claim from the stakeholder, and criticality – the importance of the stakeholder’s claim. Urgency is defined as “the degree to which stakeholder claims for immediate attention”. (Mitchell et al. 1997)
As shown in Exhibit 3, stakeholders can be sorted into different types depending on the presences of each attribute. Type 1-3 are categorised as Latent Stakeholders and have a low stakeholder salience. Type 4-6 are the Expectant Stakeholders and has a medium stakeholder salience. The last type 7 is the Definitive Stakeholder that possesses all three attributes and thus has the highest stakeholder salience. (Mitchell et al. 1997)

2.4 The Art of Management in Sweden

To understand the style of management that is often used in Sweden it is important to understand the culture that is deeply rooted into the inhabitants’ values, understandings and how they see different subjects. For a better understanding of the culture, Hofstede’s Dimensions and Sweden’s score on the dimensions will be presented in the following section of 2.4.1.

2.4.1 Sweden as a Culture

In Hofstede's article *Dimensionalizing Cultures; The Hofstede Model in Context* he mentions six dimensions where a country receives a score depending on how well the data matches the dimension. (Hofstede 2011)
**Sweden**

Exhibit 4 Sweden’s six dimension (ITIM International Sweden) - The data is on a scale from 0-100 and is the 3rd edition from 2010.

*Power Distance* refers to the extent to which hierarchy and unequal power distribution are accepted, as Sweden has a low score in this dimension the culture is characterised by being independent, low hierarchical, equal rights etc. *Individualism* refers to the preference of a tight- or loose social fabric. The high score of 71 means swedes are very independent and that the employer-employee relationship is often a contract of mutual advantage. A high score in the *Masculinity* dimension fundamentally means that the culture’s members are motivated by “being the best” and has the attitude “live to work” while a low score means that the culture is *feminine* e.g. motivated by “liking what you do” and has the attitude “work to live”. A feminine culture is also known for having several discussions, to compromise, to reach a consensus and to favour flexible work hours. Sweden is the most feminine country according to Hofstede’s Dimensional framework and thus the quality of living is important to the Swedes. *Uncertainty Avoidance* is about to which degree a society is comfortable with ambiguity and unknown situations. The low score shows that swedes often accepts uncertainty, they believe there should not be more rules than necessary. *Long Term Orientation* dimension refers to how a society maintain links to its past while dealing with the challenges in the present and the future, Sweden’s score of 53 show there is not a preference. The *Indulgence* dimension is about how a society is related to the gratification
versus control of basic human desires related to enjoying life. The high score indicates that Swedes accept the basic human desire of enjoying life and they often possess a positive attitude and optimism. (Hofstede 2011; ITIM International, Sweden)

2.4.2 The Swedish Management Style
In the Swedish management style there are two elements worth mentioning and the relationship between them – Empowerment and Coaching. The element Empowerment is mainly about delegating tasks and responsibility to your subordinates, to share the decision-making with them and appreciating their initiative. Coaching is mainly about making sure everyone feels like they are a part of the organisation. It is also about encouraging the subordinates to cooperate, keeping them informed and generally taking an interest in the individual performances. (Birkinshaw 2002)

There are difficulties to conduct both of these elements simultaneously as there are fundamental collisions between them. As Empowerment is about giving the employees space and creating a freer work-environment but Coaching is about generally showing interest to the employees and being involved in their work. When an employee is working day-to-day and the boss keeps asking questions about the work there is often difficulties for the employee to know if the boss is checking up on you or if it is about showing an interest. Thus it is important to find the balance between the two elements. (Birkinshaw 2002)

Swedish companies often emphasises more on Empowerment than on Coaching and dislike close supervision from their managers. Hence, they prefer a model with a lot of freedom to work uninterrupted by their boss and that they should have an objective but reach the objective by figuring out how they should reach it by themselves. They also believe that their boss should take their advice regarding their responsibilities, since the employees are the experts in that particular field. (Birkinshaw 2002)

This Swedish style of management often requires absolute trust in the subordinates. The manager needs to believe that the subordinates are qualified to fulfil the tasks that are given. There is also a need for the belief that the subordinates possess the maturity and interest to act for the benefit of the company when difficult situations arise. The Swedish style also requires the superiors to accept that occasionally the wrong decision will be made or that work will be less effective because some learning only occurs through mistakes. (Birkinshaw 2002)
However there are difficulties with the Swedish model, firstly the model has an inherent tension. The employees need the space to make their own decision but at the same time the superiors need to set clear boundaries so the employees will not roam. The subordinates need to be given the power to act on their own but if the employee does not have the necessary training and skills and are given too much power it can easily lead to severe mistakes. Secondly, there is also an inherent fragility in the Empowerment model, as the model requires the superiors to give their subordinates space and room. This could lead to managers giving their employees more space when the company is doing well, but as soon as problems and difficulties arise they pull back the control to themselves to an excessive extent resulting in interference of the employees’ jobs. (Birkinshaw 2002)

2.5 Literature Overview

The Stakeholder Theory could be summarised as acknowledging the stakeholders, possessing the knowledge to handle them and integrating this into the business, thus having a stakeholder approach. This stakeholder approach is needed to identify a stakeholder as a Stakeholder Salience Type, but it is also needed in the Cooperative Advantage since the Cooperative Advantage is when a company uses a value creating strategy based on cooperating with its stakeholders that results in superior value creation for the company and its stakeholders.

The typical Swedish organisational culture could also be summarised by Hofstede’s Dimensions regarding Sweden and The Swedish Management Style. Hofstede’s Dimensions is used to give a basic understanding of the Swedish culture and The Swedish Management Style regards how the leaders approach their employees. A typical Swedish organisational culture usually consist of organisation members who negotiates, discuss a lot, tries to reach consensus, cooperates with the employees through empowerment, low hierarchy etc. Therefore there are similarities with the typical Swedish organisational culture and the Cooperative Advantage, and these two combined would reach the notion of Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage. Since the Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage is dependent on the usage of a value creating strategy based on cooperating with the stakeholders and also dependent on the presence of a Scandinavian Culture e.g. Swedish, Finnish, Danish, Norwegian, which are all similar.
3 Method

In this section the methodological choices are presented and why they are relevant to the purpose of this study is motivated. Further on, the possible biases and consequences of the methodological choices are discussed and how the author has managed these factors.

3.1 Research Design

As previously mentioned, there are reasons to believe that there are cooperative contexts in Scandinavian fashion companies which other fashion companies could draw inspiration from. This could be done to gain better relationships with its designers, approach them as important stakeholders and gain a long-term value. Since this is also relatively unexplored, it indicates for additional research on the topic of Cooperative Advantage in Scandinavian fashion companies and how their leaders relate to their stakeholders, but particularly their designers. The research conducted in this paper presents such a contribution to the area through qualitative exploratory case studies. As these case studies aims to describe the Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage and how the leader-designer relationship is in the Swedish fashion industry, it is appropriate to conduct a qualitative research method. Since a qualitative research method would present an in-depth understanding of the relationship and enables the interpretation of each interviewee’s response (Saunders et al. 2016, 184-187 393-396).

Because of the author’s geographical location, this research aims to seek a deeper understanding of the Swedish fashion industry. There also has not been a high frequency of CDs leaving their company in Sweden and many CDs are a part of the leaders in the company.

Therefore, this study strives to explore how Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage is applicable in the Swedish fashion industry and how the leader-designer relation is in the Swedish fashion industry e.g. how a phenomenon is applied in a certain setting (in a Swedish company with Swedish values) in contrast to what the phenomenon is or how much the phenomenon is applied in a certain setting. As how questions are more explanatory they often lead to histories, experiments or case studies as the preferred research method. What differentiates these three is the “extent of control of behavioural events” and “degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events”. The usage of histories is preferred when there is no access or control e.g. when the study is about the past, where those involved are not accessible. Experiments are preferred when the event is contemporary and
the researcher can control the behaviour directly, precisely, and systematically, which can occur in a laboratory as the variables can be focused and/or isolated. Lastly, case studies are preferred when researching contemporary events, but the behaviour cannot be controlled. (Yin 2009, 8-14) The research question of this study investigates the phenomenon in currently active organisations where the behaviours cannot be controlled or manipulated, therefore a case study is the most appropriate choice of research method.

There are also critiques against case studies as research methods where a common concern is that it lacks rigorousness. Case studies often has biased views and lacks a systematic procedure this is a consequence of the case study’s nature, there is not one best way of executing them and there are no specific step-to-step instructions. A second concern is that several researchers find it problematic that there are generalisations from case studies. But the generalisation that occurs in case studies is, mistakenly, often thought as a generalisation of the whole population of the universe. (Yin 2009, 14-16) Instead it should be seen as an expanding and generalisation of a theory and not as a statistical generalisation, as it is an in-depth study that is based on comprehensive investigations and analyses to identify a certain phenomenon (Yin 2009, 14-16; Gummesson 2000, 84-91). “It is about generalizing not about particularizing”. (Lipset, Trow and Coleman 1956 referred in Yin 2009, 15) There is also a choice of a single case study or multiple case studies, where multiple case studies strategy is often preferred, as the findings would show a more significant support to the theory. In contrast a single case study is preferred when it investigates a critical, extreme or unique case since it enables the ability to observe and analyse a phenomenon that is relatively unexplored. (Saunders et al. 2016, 184-187) As this paper aims to investigate a field with limited previous research it began with a single case study. But as the interviews and the study progressed, more interviews were conducted in other companies. Further on, the choice of organisations and respondents for the interviews was based on how they would contribute to the purpose of this study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as it provides the opportunity for the respondents to elaborate, build-on and explain their responses. It also provides the possibility to ask follow-up questions and continuation of exploring key areas for the interviewer. In a qualitative study this enablement is essential as respondents may use phrases and words in particular ways. The ability to ask follow-up questions provide a depth and clarification to the data and it may also provide data to the interviewer that was unexplored prior to the study. The semi-structured interviews also provide comfortableness
to the respondents, as there is a personal contact with the interviewer. (Saunders et al. 2016, 396-401) To further ensure the respondents' comfort and trust they were informed beforehand about the topic, that they could be anonymous if they preferred, that they could deny answering any questions and that they will be informed about what will be written.

To avoid unnecessary questions that are answerable through accessible information and to ask more in-depth questions, the author did a short background research for each company before the interviews occurred. The background research was also conducted to adapt the interview questions to each organisation and the two perspectives, leaders and designers. The interviewed CDs was considered as leaders, as they are either a founder or shareholder of their respective company and thus has a leader perspective. Since the aim of the interview questions is also to examine if and how the academic theories occur, the interview questions was written in a casual language for the respondents understanding. After the interviews, the data were summarised in English and analysed.

3.2 Choice of Organisations

All of the studied organisations were a beneficial sample as the author has contacts in several Swedish fashion organisations but the chosen organisations was the most fitting for the purpose of this study.

3.2.1 TRIWA

TRIWA is a Swedish company that mainly create watches but also other fashion accessories such as bracelets and sunglasses. They are inspired by the city of Stockholm and the contemporary Scandinavian simplicity, thus TRIWA can be seen as a very Swedish company that is closely linked to Sweden. All of the design and product development is also created in TRIWA's creative studio in Stockholm. Even though they are distributed worldwide TRIWA has also kept their products' style. Since this paper aims to study Swedish fashion companies TRIWA were an appropriate choice of study object. After the first interview occasions the sample continued with a “snowball-sampling” model as more interviews occurred afterwards.

3.2.2 Weriseg

The company Weriseg is a fictional name for a Swedish fashion company, which chose to be anonymous for this study. Weriseg's brand image is influenced and built around the Swedish culture and values, the company is also distributed worldwide in well known stores. Thus
Weriseg was another fitting choice of organisation, as this would enhance the study’s result. Weriseg has also temporarily changed their organisational structure where the Board of Directors (BoD) is more involved in the operative functions of the company than a common BoD usually are. The main difference is that the BoD is involved in the production and design process, which is the process this study aims to investigate as the relationship between designers and the leaders mainly occur there.

3.2.3 Baron

To further raise the reliability of this paper and to validate the empirical data another case study was conducted at the Swedish fashion company Baron. The company was founded in 1978 in Sweden and has been operative in Sweden since. Baron is a very small organisation that creates leather and canvas goods in the premium segment from vegetable tanned leathers². Today the only Swedish baron family owns and operates the company and thus the brand is inspired by their family’s history in Sweden as well as the country Sweden. Baron was a fitting choice of organisation as the company is shareholder-lead by a Swedish family that has been in Sweden for several generations.

3.3 Choice of Respondents

An important factor when choosing the sample of respondents is that it needs to be carefully selected to enable the collection of data in order for the interviews to be relevant to the study (Kvale, Brinkmann 2014). During the selection process this was taken into consideration as the sample was carefully and properly selected to gain the relevant data that was needed for the study.

Firstly, the CEO of TRIWA was selected, as his knowledge about the business and TRIWA’s values and goals is both practical and technical. This contributes an overall knowledge of TRIWA and its operations, what kind of company they aspire to be, what success factors the company may possess and how they approach their stakeholders. Secondly, the graphics designer was interviewed to gain information regarding the graphics process, how his creative process is conducted, how he relates to the company and its values, and what his relationship to the leaders of the company is like. Thirdly, the product designer was interviewed to gain information regarding the production and design process in detail, how she relates to the company and its values, and how her relationship is with the leaders of the

² Vegetable tanned leather is a leather tanning method, which only uses natural ingredients, is recyclable and thus eco-friendly. (Matu 2016)
company. Lastly, the CD was chosen, as his role would contribute with overall data and information regarding the creative process, what image their brand strives for and how he relates to this.

At Weriseg a person with a leader role and at Baron the CD was chosen as the respondents of the respective companies. Since the respondents at Weriseg and Baron only consisted of leaders the author considered this and the interviews was thus longer and the majority of the questions were follow-up questions. It is also important to note that in the case of Baron the CD does not have a design team and thus he has the role as designer too.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent’s Occupation</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Date &amp; Length of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>TRIWA</td>
<td>2016-12-02 49 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphics Designer</td>
<td>TRIWA</td>
<td>2016-12-02 27 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Director</td>
<td>TRIWA</td>
<td>2016-12-15 46 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products Designer</td>
<td>TRIWA</td>
<td>2016-12-15 28 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader-Role Respondent</td>
<td>Weriseg</td>
<td>2016-12-19 76 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Director/Largest Shareholder</td>
<td>Baron</td>
<td>2016-12-19 88 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Table of Respondents

All of the interviews with TRIWA took place at their creative studio in Stockholm during two days. The interview with Weriseg took place outside their office in a café of the respondent’s choosing during one afternoon, as this would feel more casual for the respondent. The last interview with Baron occurred in the home of the CD, as the author is close to the owner and as the respondent asked for it. All of the interviews were, as mentioned earlier, semi-structured and also face-to-face to provide personal contact, which enhances the respondent’s trust to the interviewer. This was of importance as a higher trust often results in more reliable responses (Saunders et al. 2016, 394). To enhance the trust of the respondents the interviews was constructed to be casual and considerate to the respondents and the interviews began with social questions to ease the mood of the interviews. Before the interviews began the respondents were informed about the recording that would occur, it was also emphasised that they would be informed about the coding so the data would match their thoughts and statements.
3.4 Bias

Even though there were several actions taken to gain un-biased and reliable responses through the consideration of the respondents’ comfort, it is important to note that the critique against case studies of biased data still may affect this study. Firstly, the author is close to Baron’s CD that may affect the responses through the CD’s biased perception. Secondly, there were no interviews with designers or employees at Baron and Weriseg because of access barriers. This may affect the conclusions as cooperation and relationships are based on two parties. However, the leader-perspective does contribute to the study as it raises the reliability and generalisation if all the leaders at the studied organisations have a coherency in their responses. Furthermore, during the interviews with Weriseg and Baron it was also noticed that the organisations’ structures, in addition to the access barriers, prevented findings of the designers’ Stakeholder Salience. As the designers’ stakeholder salience does not only consider how the leaders view the stakeholder salience, but also how the designers perceive the leaders view. Since this was noticed during the interview the author chose to focus on the theories related to Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage. Lastly, there are possibilities for a biased view at TRIWA as the interviewed designers knew that their leaders were aware of the designers’ interviews and it may have affected the designers’ will to speak freely. However, the sample at TRIWA provides different perspectives from several hierarchical positions throughout the leader-designer relation, which would heighten the reliability.
4 Findings

The findings from this study are presented in this section. The section is divided by the organisations and a short background is presented for each organisation.

4.1 TRIWA

Four friends with the ambition to change the way society views the watch industry founded the company TRIWA, they believed the watch had become a symbol of status and wanted to create watches that were rather a fashionable and stylish accessory. They started as a small company that operated from a garage where all four of them helped and was involved in each other’s main tasks. As the company grew larger they started to hire employees who had a background and experience in their specific field of work, such as designers, sales associates, BoD etc. Today, the four friends have the majority of the shares of TRIWA and they are operative in the company as the CEO, CD, CFO, and Sales Director. Other than to transform the watch industry from being a status of symbol to a fashionable accessory, TRIWA has the core values of having creative design with inspiration from Stockholm, sustainable sources as using vegetable tanned leather, only creating products they would wear themselves, and aiming to have a flat organisation where employees can work independently and responsibly but most importantly enjoy their work and feel inspired.

Both the CEO and the CD mentioned several internal and external stakeholders and explained how each stakeholder is strategically linked to the organisation’s operations. They also showed a clear knowledge of what the stakeholders desire, they use vegetable tanned leather that is made in Sweden for the cause of the environment and the customers. They also care for their employees through several benefits such as massage at the office, occupational-pension, workshops, bonuses, health benefits, and also through symbolic means such as communicating the appreciation for their work. TRIWA has even done co-brandings and the CEO stated that one of his most important tasks is networking, as he wants to seek stakeholders he could cooperate with and create a mutual value.

The designers at TRIWA also stated that they feel appreciated in their work environment and that the leaders listen and appreciate their opinions and claims. All of the respondents said that the employees often have requests and claims, but a recent claim that occurred and was prioritised by the leaders was the claim for occupational-pension. It was prioritised as the leaders knew it was asked for by several employees and several times. Therefore,

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3 Co-branding is when two separate companies cooperate and together create a product.
TRIWA decided to give out the occupational-pension as soon as they could afford it. The CEO also stated that they try to acknowledge as many of the employees’ claims, but it often depend on the situation if they give what it is asked for. Further on, the graphics designer and the product designer stated that the appreciation shown from the leaders is a very strong motivation for them at their jobs. This kind of appreciation is further explained as both of them felt a loyalty to TRIWA as they like their work, colleagues and leaders.

The leaders believes that each and every stakeholder has an essential role as TRIWA’s objectives would not be obtainable if one of the stakeholder groups was not considered. But both of them stated that one important external stakeholder group is their customers because of the simple reason that if no one bought their products the business would crumble. Secondly, they stated that one important internal stakeholder group is their employees as many of the employees who work there sought the company as they have a genuine interest in the company, its brand and products, which is also what the leaders at TRIWA seek when employing. Thus, the soul of the brand TRIWA is built by their employees (TRIWA Creative Director). The leaders also believes that their employees have an expertise in their field of work that the leaders does not, the leaders are aware of this fact and believes that the employees’ expertise is needed for the product and brand image development. There is also a bi-annual meeting between each employee and the leaders where they together evaluate the employee’s accomplishments as well as how the employee’s skills could benefit both sides through an integration of the employee’s possible contributions with TRIWA’s objectives. The leaders also has a point of view that no one in the company has all of the knowledge and thus cannot decide everything, there is a need for cooperation with the employees and their individual skills.

Both of the designers at TRIWA stated that they have an expertise in their tasks and thus they could affect the company in the sense of its brand image, what kind of company TRIWA strives to be, and in what direction the company goes. This was clearly noted as they have a relative freedom to make their own decisions but also that they are encouraged to speak their opinions regarding their work tasks. Many of their opinions are considered and discussed and thus the designers feel that the leaders does take the their claims into consideration. The designers notably stated that even though they are aware of their expertise a lot of the decision-making is through discussion and thus the decisions are made as a group with several opinions and thoughts combined. When the designers’ opinions differs with the leaders’ opinion they often discuss and argue for their opinions to reach a
consensus, which is often the point of having the discussions. The CD emphasised the importance of these discussions, as the employees are encouraged to speak their minds regarding the designs. There are often disagreeing opinions. This creates a dynamic between everyone at TRIWA and leads to superior outcomes. There is another dynamic at TRIWA that is important to the CD, which is the dynamic to create the right product. As one of TRIWA’s philosophies is to only create products they would wear themselves, there is a dynamic between what TRIWA would wear themselves and what the customers demand. There is an importance to find right balance in everything, especially as the dynamics that occur are encouraged to happen.

The designers’ creative process was summarised by all of the respondents at TRIWA in the same way. The leaders often give the designers a task with a certain objective. Then the designers have a relatively high degree of freedom to interpret the task and how to reach the objective, and they are also seldomly interrupted during this phase of the creative process. The leaders rarely give the designers step-by-step instructions. When the task is interpreted and the designers have made a sketch, there is a discussion about it. The discussion regarding the products and 2D-material occur often and nearly all of the arguments and disagreements are solved in these discussions. TRIWA has a “Board for Products”, which has the purpose to discuss ideas and products with each member’s personal opinions as well as trying to see their products through the view of other stakeholders. The Board for Products have regulated meetings and this meeting is an essential factor when creating new products or improving existing products, it is also integrated into TRIWA’s business strategy.

The CD’s involvement in the creative process often varies depending on the situation. He sometimes takes a step back as he does not have the detailed knowledge of the tools they use. He also takes a step back and let them do their work independently as this fosters the designers’ creativity and as they work more freely, there is room for them to try different things and new designs. There is an awareness that this sometimes lead to too many ideas and suggestions for products and 2D material. But to give the designers freedom and independent work is a factor that is of essence, since it sustains creativity at TRIWA. The CD’s responsibility is rather to evaluate and discuss sketches of products, graphics and ideas rather than doing the detailed work and closely supervising the designers. (Creative Director TRIWA)
The CEO is also sometimes involved in the creative process as he is personally interested in their products as well as he sometimes have product design ideas (CEO TRIWA). As mentioned before there is a lot of discussion in the meetings where both the leaders and the designers participate, and the designers feel that there is a low hierarchical barrier. There is also an awareness of flexibility at TRIWA, there is no strict working hours as long as everyone finishes their tasks, do their job and are reachable.

4.2 Weriseg

The organisational structure change at Weriseg happened because of a former initiative for change. A few years ago, Weriseg’s BoD and leaders took the initiative to start launching seasonal-collections when they otherwise are mainly focusing on their never-out-of-stock collection. This was motivated by trying to achieve a more creative line into the brand to reach new customers. However, this led to Weriseg creating too many creative and artistic clothing that did not sell. The Leader-Role Respondent believes that if they did not take the first initiative to focus on seasonal-collections Weriseg would not have the same brand awareness as they do today. In the end their seasonal-collection went in another direction from Weriseg’s brand image. Thus the new structure of BoDs’ involvement in the company’s operations began in 2016. The BoDs’ involvement is a temporary solution that occurred because Weriseg lack the resources and the employees do not have the time to keep up with the growth of the company. They are going to end this solution, as it is not a long-term solution and instead hire a new employee to help unload the workload.

The new structure could be seen as bureaucratic and controlled top-down but it is important to note that the BoDs’ involvement was not to supervise and control but rather to help the leaders and employees to achieve the organisation’s objectives through cooperation. Since the BoD has more experience than the CEO, CD and employees this change was a mutual decision from the organisation as a whole.

The Leader-Role Respondent at Weriseg is also aware of the many stakeholder groups the company has and finds everyone important as each of them fulfil a specific role in the chain of Weriseg’s objectives. One stakeholder group that stands out are other companies, which is because Weriseg often does limited edition co-brandings with them. Weriseg usually does one or two co-brandings every year and has been doing it for 4 years and it is a part of the company’s business objectives.
The reason for Weriseg’s co-branding is that the company is a relatively young up-and-coming company, thus they seek to cooperate with other companies, fashion department stores, and artists etc. that could help them reach a larger target group. For the other company that does the co-branding with Weriseg gains the attraction because of the fact that Weriseg is a new, young, successful, and in they eyes of the customers “a cool brand”. Hence, when co-brandings are initiated every year Weriseg seeks to gain a win-win situation with the collaborator.

When the 2016 organisational re-structure occurred at Weriseg it was partly to prevent roaming and to insert structure in the departments that are involved in the design and production process. The involved BoD and the leaders of Weriseg still maintained a relatively free working environment for the employees that were involved. There were no close supervision and they were not involved in the detailed process. Instead they rather pointed to what direction the company should go. They approached the design and production department with this direction and gave them the usual task and responsibility, such as the seasonal-collection, and gave them a budget to work with.

4.3 Baron
A lot of Baron’s core values lies within their motto “Made to last for generations”. They strive to create long-lasting products; this does not only refer to the products and its raw material but also to make products that possess a timeless style. Another core value is to have a long-term view in several aspects such as long-term development, long-term growth and long-term ownership. Thus Baron prioritise high quality in their products, the company’s structure and company’s operations before high growth rate and dividends. It is more important to take the necessary time and do things the right way than doing it fast and carelessly.

The CD at Baron mentioned several stakeholder groups both internal and external. Since Baron is such a small company the CD has a very broad role, as mentioned earlier he also has the role as the designer. Most of his work focuses on product development where he mainly has three tasks. To further develop existing products and make improvements, have strategic product development meetings where the company look at all of their products to see if they need to make additions, and to develop new product samples\(^4\) with the

\(^4\) A product sample usually has the goal of testing the product in terms of usage, look, production etc.
cooperation of their suppliers. Additionally, he sometimes has the task to create a whole new collection line.

Because of his broad role he mentioned the importance of the stakeholder group customers. He also states that all of the stakeholders are very important because of the small size of the company. The design process at Baron includes working with their suppliers and together with the suppliers they have certain steps where the suppliers help Baron with the production-technical part of the design process.

Regarding the customers at Baron they are integrated into the company in the way that Baron listen to the customers’ feedback through a log that the Flagship Store Manager (FSM) keeps updating every time they receive feedback, which the CD reads and listens to. Also, as Baron only uses vegetable tanned leather they demonstrate an awareness of the environment that is often a concern of both the customers and the society.

In Baron the cooperation with their stakeholders is an essential factor for their business objectives, especially when it concerns the design process. This process usually looks in two different ways. When Baron starts a whole new collection of products they hire an external designer that has more expertise and knowledge than the CD, as Baron’s CD does not have an educational background in design. And with the cooperation between the external designer and Baron’s CD, they create a new collection. When the task is to further develop an existing product, the CD makes sketches of products and discusses them with their suppliers for production-technical solutions. After this phase they make a product sample so they can see the physical product that they evaluate and make adjustments if they want to continue to the next phase. If they do another product sample with the adjustments, they try it out on the market. In this phase they cooperate with their customers to receive feedback and see how well the product is received, this also includes cooperation with Baron’s FSM who knows the aspect of how well the product is sold and received by the customers. If the market test is successful Baron puts a pre-production order from the suppliers, which is a final controlling phase, where small adjustments can be done before going into a complete order.

The CD at Baron stated that each and every stakeholder group is extremely important, as the organisation is relatively small. But the reoccurring mentioning of a group was the customers. The customers have the power to decide to buy or not buy and the legitimacy to
give feedback on Baron's products. As mentioned earlier, Baron keeps a log of customer feedback, they usually do not take action about what one individual customer thinks but when there are several customers with similar feedbacks they listen to the claims and prioritise the claims higher. The company also has brand ambassadors whom they seek to cooperate with, the purpose of the ambassadors is both marketing reasons and to have another group than the customers that tests the products.

Discussion is also a reoccurrence at Baron, as the CD has a very broad role he is in a lot of discussions with the FSM about how the products are received, with the Production Manager as he is the one who has the daily contact with the suppliers, and with the suppliers regarding the production-technical part of the design process.

The role of the Production Manager at Baron is to be involved in the both the production and design process, and to have the contact with the suppliers for administrative reasons, thus he works closely with the CD. The CD stated that he is not closely supervising the Production Manager and that he simply delegates the tasks when it is needed and simply encourages the Production Manager do his work in his way.
5 Analysis

The analysis of the empirical findings is presented below and is based on the theories presented in this study. The section is introduced with if and how a stakeholder approach is occurring and followed by analyses of each theory.

5.1 Stakeholder Theory

All of the three levels in an organisation’s process of handling and managing its relationship with its stakeholders were found in all of the companies. The rational perspective of understanding the stakeholders and the stakes is found as several stakeholders was mentioned and explained by the leader respondents, but also as they are differentiated into different smaller groups and not only in general terms. The findings also show that the process level and transactional level is present. The cooperation with the organisations’ stakeholders is of essence for the organisations’ survival and are thus integrated into the business. The organisations are also aware of the currency each stakeholder desire, many of the stakeholder groups desire a monetary transaction but stakeholders such as the customers often desire products that are made with environmental-friendly methods and employees often seek an appreciation from the leaders. There are also an awareness of other companies and their desires, it is mostly found at Weriseg and TRIWA as they seek to cooperate with them for co-brandings.

5.2 Stakeholder Salience

Stakeholder Salience is how managers and leaders in a company prioritise a stakeholder’s claim, in Mitchell et al.’s framework they categorises the attribute of Power into Coercive, Utilitarian and Normative, but the findings show that there is another type of Power that the author would like to add into Mitchell et al.’s framework. The Specialty Power – the power that is gained through a special expertise and knowledge in an uncommon field. The Specialty Power differentiates from the other types of power as they are defined as “coercive power, based on the physical resources of force, violence, or restraint; utilitarian power, based on material or financial resources; and normative power, based on symbolic resources” (Mitchell et al. 1997). The Specialty Power is not based on physical, material or financial, or symbolic resources but rather based on expertise and knowledge resources. This can be seen as related to the attribute of Legitimacy but Specialty Power differentiates from it as the expertise one possesses creates a power that could carry out his or her will.
The designers’ stakeholder salience is most noticeable at TRIWA as the leaders emphasised the importance of their designers. All of the respondents at TRIWA stated the leaders often listen to the designers and want them to speak their opinions regarding the designs and its process, and want the designers to take own decisions. And in that sense the designers also felt that they possessed the power to affect the company. The designers’ and employees’ degree of stakeholder salience is further heightened when they claimed for an occupational-pension, which TRIWA prioritised. During this specific claim the designers could be seen as a Definitive Stakeholder. They had the Specialty Power, Urgency for the claim as it was asked by everyone and several times, and the Legitimacy since it is generally assumed that occupational-pension should be included in the employee’s contract.

But it is important to note that the attributes could be lost or gained depending on the time, situation, and the claim. The findings show that the change in possession of attributes is quite frequent and that the managers prioritise the claims depending on this.

5.3 Cooperative Advantage

The definition of Cooperative Advantage, “when a company implements a value creating strategy based on cooperating with its stakeholders that results in superior value creation for the company and its stakeholders” (Strand & Freeman 2015), can be interpreted as companies cooperating with its stakeholders to create win-win situations. This theory is also coherent with the stakeholder approach that companies may have.

The three organisations in this study did not only have a stakeholder approach but also the mind-set to create win-win situations with its stakeholders. At Weriseg this is mainly interpreted with their co-branding with other companies, as both Weriseg and the other co-branding company gain a superior value from each other. In addition to the benefits of the co-brandings that are mentioned in 4.2 the products that are made are always limited addition, which always creates hype with several marketing benefits for both of the companies. Internally at Weriseg, there is a Cooperative Advantage with the initiative for the BoD to be involved in Weriseg’s operations. This initiative is not only a cooperation between the BoD and the company but also includes the employees as it unloads their workload. The BoDs’ involvement in Weriseg’s operations is a temporary solution but the initiative for the change raises the indications for a Cooperative Advantage. At first it can be argued that the BoDs’ involvement can be interpreted as bureaucratic and not Cooperative,
but it is important to consider that this initiative was a mutual decision from the whole company as it would benefit everyone.

At Baron there is a constant Cooperative Advantage as the cooperation with Baron’s stakeholders is integrated into the tasks of each employee. The FSM is closely linked to the customers and has the direct contact with them and keeps the customer-feedback log updated, which provides Baron with feedback for improvements on their products and provides the demanded products from the customers. The CD at Baron is also in constant cooperation with their suppliers as they are an essential part of the design and product development process. The cooperation Baron has with their suppliers indicates that Baron’s value creating strategy is partly based on it, as they are discussing ideas and sketches of Baron’s products and designs. The superior value creation is gained through the relationship that is made but also that Baron creates improved products and the suppliers receives a monetary transaction that they seek.

Even though the suppliers have an important role in Baron’s operations, Baron’s value creating strategy is not solely based on the cooperation with their suppliers. The strategy also involves the internal cooperation within the company but also with the customers, such as the CD’s cooperation with the FSM and the FSM’s cooperation with the customers.

The presence of Cooperative Advantage at TRIWA is the most apparent of the three organisations. The findings indicate that cooperation is almost a culture at TRIWA, it can be rooted back to when the company was founded and the four founders was involved in each other’s tasks when they were operating from a garage. Later on they sought new stakeholders to cooperate with and to recruit, such as investors who has become members of the BoD, other companies for co-branding, employees with a background in design and sales etc. The characteristics to help each other’s tasks even though they have their own main roles are found even today. This can be interpreted in the Board for Products, the regularly occurring discussions, and in reaching consensus on a regular basis between the leaders and the designers. The bi-annual meeting with each employee at TRIWA, which is a regulated meeting, often creates win-win situations. As its purpose is to evaluate the employee’s work and to find possible solution where the employee’s contribution leads to a mutually beneficial situation. Lastly, the leaders’ view that no one at TRIWA can decide everything and that there is a need for internal cooperation further indicate that there is a high presence of Cooperative Advantage.
Since the Cooperative Advantage is a matter of cooperation, it is not solely the leaders’ point of view that needs to be considered but also the stakeholder groups’ point of view. Even though the findings from the leaders at Weriseg and Baron indicates that they have a value creating strategy based on cooperating with their stakeholders it cannot be completely validated as other stakeholder groups has not been interviewed. However, as the findings at TRIWA show that they are in use of Cooperative Advantage the findings at Weriseg and Baron raises the reliability of Cooperative Advantage usage in the Swedish fashion industry. And at the least indicate that leaders in the Swedish fashion industry seek a Cooperative Advantage.

5.4 The Swedish Culture

Sweden has the lowest score on the dimension of Masculinity in Hofstede’s framework and thus it could be seen as Sweden’s most typical trait. The findings presents that Sweden’s low score in Masculinity is aligned with the culture occurring in all of the organisations. Negotiating, discussion and meeting a consensus was a reoccurrence during all of the interviews. Such as, the Board for Products, bi-annual meetings and the leaders encouragement for discussion at TRIWA, product development meetings at Baron and their cooperation with their suppliers and customers etc. The dimension of Masculinity is further indicated as the employees at TRIWA are allowed to have flexible working hours. Sweden’s high score on Individualism and low score on Power Distance can also be seen as the discussions, negotiations and reaching consensus in the three organisations indicates for a low social fabric and an equal power distribution. The case studies at the organisations did not consider the dimensions of Indulgence, Uncertainty Avoidance and Long Term Orientation. This was an intentional choice as the dimension of Indulgence regards the basic human desires of enjoying life, which is mainly about how the society accepts this desire. Uncertainty Avoidance was excluded, as avoiding uncertainty is less applicable in the fashion industry since it is built on creativity. Long Term Orientation was not considered since Sweden does not have a preference.

The management approach in all of the three organisations is mostly aligned with the element of Empowerment. All of the respondents from TRIWA showed that the designers have an expertise and thus a trust from the leaders, whose approach is to delegate the tasks with a few directives but the tasks can be completed and interpreted in an individual way as long as the job gets done. The same approach can be seen at Weriseg after their re-
structuring when the BoD gave directions, and also at Baron but the management approach is directed to the FSM and the Production Manager since Baron’s CD is also the designer. The approach that is found is also about giving a freedom to the employees, in the aspect of sharing decision-making through the discussions, not interrupting the employees with close supervision.

As the element of Coaching is about making sure everyone feel like they are a part of the organisation and encouraging the employees to cooperate, the leaders’ approach at TRIWA is partly about Coaching. Since all of the respondents at TRIWA stated that the leaders encourage the employees to speak their mind and have discussions but the leaders also tries to show an interest and appreciation to the employees’ work. Even though there is a presence of Coaching at TRIWA the most occurring element is Empowerment. At the remaining organisations, as mentioned earlier, the findings showed several incentives to believe that the main management style is about Empowerment, in both what the respondents said but also in the general way of speaking about their subordinates. Thus, the management styles in the organisations are mainly coherent with the Swedish management style since it consists of both elements but emphasises on Empowerment.

The inherent fragility of the Swedish Management model when balancing the elements of Coaching and Empowerment is found as Weriseg gave the designers too much freedom that led them to roaming and designing too creative and fashionable product. Which later led to the restructuring of the BoDs’ involvement in the organisation’s operations. At TRIWA they have the same fragility but with a different solution. They aware that they are giving a little bit too much freedom and that their designers sometimes make too many design sketches that are turned down. Even though it is a cost for TRIWA, they have found the appropriate balance of Coaching and Empowerment since the designers’ freedom in their work tasks is needed for them to maintain creativity and discussing the sketches is needed for the product and graphics development is aligned with TRIWA’s objectives.
6 Conclusion

In this section the conclusions regarding the research questions are presented. Thereafter the study’s limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

6.1 Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage in the Swedish Fashion Industry

To contribute to the limited research regarding cooperative thinking in the fashion industry, this study firstly aimed to examine if the notion of Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage is occurring in the Swedish fashion industry and if there are contexts that other fashion companies could draw inspiration from. Thereby answering the first research question: How is the Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage applicable to the Swedish fashion industry?

All of the studied organisations demonstrated a presence of Cooperative Advantage since their value creating strategy is based on the cooperation of its stakeholders. The cooperation creates a superior value to both the company and its stakeholders, but it is important to note that this study only interviewed leaders as the representative of the company and the stakeholder group designers.

Furthermore, the results showed that the organisations have an alignment with the Swedish Management Style and Sweden’s dimensions from Hofstede’s framework. The organisations’ alignment with the theories shows that the organisations possess the characteristics from a typical Swedish organisational culture. Since the study did not attempt to find the dimensions of Indulgence, Uncertainty Avoidance and Long Term Orientation it is discussable to exactly what extent the three organisations are aligned with Sweden’s scores on Hofstede’s Dimensions. However, as the findings also state that all of the organisations are in use of the Swedish Management Style it is apparent that the studied organisations are generally coherent with the typical Swedish organisational culture. With the typical Swedish organisational culture that is found, combined with the presence of Cooperative Advantage, it is concluded that this study indicates that the Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage is applicable in the Swedish fashion industry.

Another interesting conclusion is that this study indicates that there is a correlation between the Scandinavian Cooperative Advantage and a fashion company’s success. All of the organisations have a similar feature of using a Cooperative Advantage. In addition to this feature what the organisations have in common is their success. The organisations are all successful in terms of turnover, dividends and international recognition.
6.2 The Designer-Leader Relationship
The second research question this study aimed to explore was: What is the character of the relationship between the leaders and the stakeholder group designers in Swedish fashion companies? The findings in this study provide three conclusions regarding the designer-leader relationship in the Swedish fashion industry.

Firstly, the previous research of Strand and Freeman (2015) remarks Scandinavia generally possesses a stakeholder approach in their organisations, the provided case studies in this study indicates that the generalisation may also be applicable for the Swedish fashion industry. Secondly, all of the findings also had a coherency regarding how the leaders view their designers. The designers have a certain knowledge that the leaders do not, which is acknowledged by all of the respondents in this study. Thus it is suggested to add the Specialty Power to Mitchell et al.'s framework on stakeholder salience. The Specialty Power is defined as – the power that is gained through a special expertise and knowledge in an uncommon field. Lastly, this acknowledgement and the currency of appreciation the leaders give to the designers indicates that even though the designers’ possessions of the attributes in the Mitchell et al.’ frameworks is in constant change, the leaders acknowledge the importance of their designers and consider them as an essential part of the organisation.

6.3 The Study’s Limitations
The conclusions from this study may not be applicable on every fashion company in Sweden. The comprehensiveness of this study should be kept in mind and that the respondents and the organisations may have a subjective impact on the study. Other factors that should be considered are: the organisational structure, difficulties to define a culture, and the size of the organisation in terms of the quantity of employees. The studied organisations’ small size may have an impact on the conclusions, as it is easier to cooperate internally when there are fewer to cooperate with. It is also important to consider that Cooperative Advantage is not only a cooperation with the employees, customers or suppliers. Stakeholder groups such as society, government, distributors, subsidiaries etc. should also be researched to further validate the Scandinavian Cooperate Advantage in the Swedish fashion industry.

6.4 Future Research
The conducted case studies in this paper have examined organisations that have fewer than 50 employees and only one office. Future researches may thus conduct case studies at larger Swedish fashion companies, and perhaps Swedish fashion companies that have several
geographical office locations. Further more, a more comprehensive research that also studies other stakeholder groups and more respondents would contribute to the rather limited researches in this field. Another suggestion for future research is to conduct a case study in another fashion company outside of Scandinavia that has a Cooperative Advantage, as this would further answer if there are contexts from Scandinavian fashion companies other companies could draw inspiration from.
References


Nordstrom, B.J. 2000, Scandinavia since 1500, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.


8 Appendix

8.1 Interview Questions for the Leaders, TRIWA (CEO, Creative Director)

1. Kan du berätta lite om företaget?
   a. Företagets historia?
   b. Vad för bild har du av företaget?
   c. Vad anser du är företagets mål?
   d. Vad eller vilka core-values har ni?
   e. Hur ser ägarformen ut?
   f. Tycker du att ni har en hierarkisk struktur eller en platt struktur?
   g. Antal anställda?
2. Har du som ledare någon sort av inspirationskälla? En organisation eller person som du ser upp till och vill efterlikna?
3. Vad har du för arbetsuppgifter?
4. Hur ser en vanlig arbetsdag ut för dig?
   a. Är vissa perioder unika? Ex. Så som när ni ska släppa nya produkter?
5. Hur ser du på din roll i företaget?
6. Ni har ett väldigt intressant kontor som ni kallar Stockholm Creative Studio, hur kommer det sig att ni valt just den benämningen?
   a. Är detta som ert ”huvudkontor”?
7. Så som jag har förstått det har ni även ett kontor i Hong Kong, hur ser det ut där?
   a. Varför just Hong Kong?
   b. Hur ser er kontakt ut med dem?
8. Varför tror du att det har gått så bra för er? Jag har sett mycket av era produkter bland vänner, på stan, butiker utomlands, i media både svensk och internationell, och ni är utbredda på en stor global marknad.
   a. Hur har ni differentierat er från era konkurrenter? Eller har ni inte tänkt på det utan enbart gjort det ni vill skapa?
9. Kortfattat, hur går processen till när det går från idé till att produkten är i kundens händer?
   a. Kreativa processen
   b. Finansiella processen
   c. Ni använder er av mycket svenskt material, hur tycker du att det påverkar produkten, konsumenten, och företaget?
10. I vilken utsträckning skulle du säga att du är involverad i den kreativa processen?
    a. I vilken utsträckning skulle du säga att du kan påverka processen?
11. Känner du att du kan påverka åt vilket håll företaget går mot?
   a. Om ja, på vilket sätt?
   b. Om nej, varför inte?
12. Vilka intressenter anser du att företaget har?
   a. Hur ser relationen/kontakten ut med dessa?
      i. Kunder?
      ii. Leverantörer?
      iii. Återförsäljare?
      iv. Anställda/Kollegor?
      v. Samhället och dess uppfattning om er?
   b. Vilka anser du är viktigast?
      i. Varför?
13. Hur ser du på din relation till era designers?
   a. Hur förhåller du dig till dem?
   b. Vad för approach har du mot dem? Till vilken utsträckning tycker du att du delegerar ansvar och uppgifter till dem?
      i. Låter du dem utföra uppgifter så som de vill eller har de specifika instruktioner att följa?
14. Till vilken utsträckning skulle du säga att de tillför till företagets mål?
15. Har ni några medvetna åtgärder så att era designers ska trivas på arbetet eller för att visa uppskattning gentemot era designers?
   a. Om ja, hur ser dessa åtgärder ut?
16. Finns det några åtgärder som har gjorts för att försöka göra dem lojala mot företaget?
   a. Om ja, vad för åtgärder? Känner du att den lojaliteten är tillräcklig?
17. Har du någon gång fått förfrågningar/önskemål av era designers?
   a. Om ja, vad var det för önskemål? Och hur hanterades dessa önskemål?
18. Hur ser du på din relation till CEO/Creative Director?
   a. Hur förhåller du dig till honom?
19. Om du stöter på ett problem i den kreativa processen, hur gör du då?
20. Inträffar det några konflikter…
   a. … internt i företaget?
      i. Kollegor, anställda?
   b. … externt från företaget?
      i. Kunder, återförsäljare, leverantörer?
21. Hur hanteras situationer där ni är oeniga om något?
   a. Oenig med kollegor
   b. Oenig med designers
      i. När detta händer, känner du att designers åsikter påverkar dig starkt?
22. Har du möjligtvis någonting du skulle vilja tillägga?
23. Skulle jag möjligtvis kunna få kontakta dig om det skulle komma upp några kompletterande uppgifter eller frågor?

8.2 Interview Questions for the Designers, TRIWA (Product, Graphics)

1. Hur länge har du jobbat på företaget?
2. Vad har du för arbetsuppgifter?
3. Hur ser en vanlig arbetsdag ut för dig?
   a. Är vissa perioder unika? Ex. Så som när ni ska släppa nya produkter?
4. Hur ser du på din roll i företaget?
5. Varför tror du att det har gått så bra för er? Jag har sett mycket av era produkter bland vänner, på stan, butiker utomlands, i media både svensk och internationell, och ni är utbredda på en så stor global marknad.
6. Hur ser du på din relation till CEO/Creative Director?
   a. Hur förhåller du dig till dem?
   b. Vad för approach känner du att de har emot dig? Till vilken utsträckning tycker du att dem delegerar ansvar och uppgifter till dig?
      i. Låter de dig slutföra dina uppgifter så som du vill eller har du specifika instruktioner som följs?
7. Hur ser du på din arbetssituation?
8. Hur trivs du på jobbet? Fördelar och Nackdelar
   a. Vad tycker du om arbetsmiljön?
9. I vilken utsträckning skulle du säga att du är involverad i den kreativa processen?
   a. I vilken utsträckning skulle du säga att du kan påverka den kreativa processen?
10. Hur fungerar den kreativa processen?
11. Känner du att du kan påverka åt vilket håll företaget går mot?
   a. Om ja, på vilket sätt?
   b. Om nej, varför inte?
12. Känner du att du kan påverka företagets image?
   a. Om, ja på vilket sätt då?
15. Vad motiverar dig på jobbet?
16. Var finner du inspiration från?
17. Känner du en lojalitet till CEO/Creative Director/företaget?
   a. Om ja, på vilket sätt då?
18. Om du stöter på ett problem, hur gör du då?
19. Inträffar det några konflikter…
   a. … internt i företaget?
      i. Kollegor, chefer, anställda?
   b. … externt från företaget?
      i. Kunder, återförsäljare, leverantörer?
20. Hur hanteras situationer där ni är oeniga om ett beslut?
   a. Oenig med ledarna
      i. Känner du i dessa fall att dina åsikter tas upp av ledarna i tillräcklig
         utsträckning, att du får din vilja igenom?
21. Har du möjligtvis någonting du skulle vilja tillägga?
22. Skulle jag möjligtvis kunna få kontakta dig om det skulle komma upp några
    kompletterande uppgifter eller frågor?

8.3 Interview Questions for the Leader Role Respondent, Weriseg

1. Kan du berätta lite om företaget?
   a. Företagets historia?
   b. Vad för bild har du av företaget?
   c. Vad anser du är företagets mål?
   d. Vad eller vilka core-values har ni?
   e. Hur ser ägarformen ut?
   f. Tycker du att ni har en hierarkisk struktur eller en platt struktur?
   g. Antal anställda?
2. Vad har du för arbetsuppgifter?
3. Hur ser en vanlig arbetsdag ut för dig?
   a. Är vissa perioder unika? Ex. Så som när ni ska släppa nya produkter?
4. Hur ser du på din roll i företaget?
5. Kortfattat, hur går processen till när det går från idé till att produkten är i kundens
   händer?
   a. Kreativa processen
b. Finansiella processen

c. Ni använder er av mycket premium material, hur tycker du att det påverkar produkten, konsumenten, och företaget?

6. I vilken utsträckning skulle du säga att du är involverad i den kreativa processen?
   a. I vilken utsträckning skulle du säga att du kan påverka processen?

7. Ni har även en hel del samarbeten med andra företag, hur började det?
   a. Vad var målet med dessa samarbeten?
   b. Hur har dessa samarbeten påverkat Weriseg?

8. Känner du att du kan påverka åt vilket håll företaget går mot?
   a. Om ja, på vilket sätt?
   b. Om nej, varför inte?

9. Vilka intressenter anser du att företaget har?
   a. Hur ser relationen/kontakten ut med dessa?
      i. Kunder?
      ii. Leverantörer?
      iii. Återförsäljare?
      iv. Anställda/Kollegor?
      v. Samhället och dess uppfattning om er?
   b. Vilka anser du är viktigast?
      i. Varför?

10. Hur ser du på din relation till era designers?
    a. Hur förhåller du dig till dem?
    b. Vad för approach har du mot dem? Till vilken utsträckning tycker du att du delegerar ansvar och uppgifter till dem?
       i. Låter du dem slutföra uppgifter så som de vill eller har de specifika instruktioner att följa?

11. Till vilken utsträckning skulle du säga att de tillför till företagets mål?

12. Har ni några medvetna åtgärder så att era designers ska trivas på arbetet eller för att visa uppskattning gentemot era designers?
    a. Om ja, hur ser dessa åtgärder ut?

13. Finns det några åtgärder som har gjorts för att försöka göra dem lojala mot företaget?
    a. Om ja, vad för åtgärder? Känner du att den lojaliteten är tillräcklig?

14. Hur ser du på din relation till de andra ledarna?
    a. Hur förhåller du dig till honom?
15. Om du stöter på ett problem i den kreativa processen, hur gör du då?
16. Inträffar det några konflikter…
   a. … internt i företaget?
      i. Kollegor, anställda?
   b. … externt från företaget?
      i. Kunder, återförsäljare, leverantörer?
17. Har du möjligtvis någonting du skulle vilja tillägga?
18. Skulle jag möjligtvis kunna få kontakta dig om det skulle komma upp några komplettterande uppgifter eller frågor?

8.4 Interview Questions for the Creative Director, Baron

1. Kan du berätta lite om företaget?
   a. Företagets historia?
   b. Vad för bild har du av företaget?
   c. Vad anser du är företagets mål?
   d. Vad eller vilka core-values har ni?
   e. Hur ser ägarformen ut?
   f. Tycker du att ni har en hierarkisk struktur eller en platt struktur?
   g. Antal anställda?

2. Har du som ledare någon sort av inspirationskälla? En organisation eller person som du ser upp till och vill efterlikna?
3. Vad har du för arbetsuppgifter?
4. Hur ser en vanlig arbetsdag ut för dig?
   a. Är vissa perioder unika? Ex. Så som när ni ska släppa nya produkter?
5. Hur ser du på din roll i företaget?
6. Varför tror du att det har gått så bra för er?
   a. Hur har ni differentierat er från era konkurrenter? Eller har ni inte tänkt på det utan enbart gjort det ni vill skapa?
7. Kortfattat, hur går processen till när det går från idé till att produkten är i kundens händer?
   a. Kreativa processen
   b. Finansiella processen

8. I vilken utsträckning skulle du säga att du är involverad i den kreativa processen?
   a. I vilken utsträckning skulle du säga att du kan påverka processen?
9. Känner du att du kan påverka åt vilket håll företaget går mot?
a. Om ja, på vilket sätt?
b. Om nej, varför inte?

10. Vilka intressenter anser du att företaget har?
   a. Hur ser relationen/kontakten ut med dessa?
      i. Kunder?
      ii. Leverantörer?
      iii. Återförsäljare?
      iv. Anställda/Kollegor?
      v. Samhället och dess uppfattning om er?
   b. Vilka anser du är viktigast?
      i. Varför?

11. Hur ser du på din relation till era leverantörer?
   a. Hur förhåller du dig till de?

12. Om du stöter på ett problem i den kreativa processen, hur gör du då?

13. Inträffar det några konflikter…
   a. … internt i företaget?
      i. Kollegor, anställda?
   b. … externt från företaget?
      i. Kunder, återförsäljare, leverantörer?

14. Har du möjligtvis någonting du skulle vilja tillägga?

15. Skulle jag möjligtvis kunna få kontakta dig om det skulle komma upp några kompletterande uppgifter eller frågor?