Tampere University of Applied Sciences

The Social and Cultural Sustainability of Multicultural Workplaces in Finland

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BACHELOR'S THESIS

June 2023

Bachelor of Business Administration

Degree Programme in Entrepreneurship and Team Leadership

ABSTRACT

Tampereen ammattikorkeakoulu
Tampere University of Applied Sciences
Bachelor's Degree Programme in Entrepreneurship and Team Leadership

MUJA, ELLA:
The Cultural and Social Sustainability of Multicultural Workplaces in Finland

Bachelor's thesis 67 pages, appendices 3 pages
June 2023

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Demographic changes and growing immigration have increased the need for better integration in Finland, requiring workplaces to consider their cultural and social sustainability policies. The objective of this thesis was to help Finnish small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) develop practices to ease integration of multicultural resources. The purpose was to determine whether multicultural work environments have an impact on the cultural and social sustainability of a Finnish SME.

An anonymous survey was launched to collect quantitative data along with a series of interviews conducted to collect qualitative data. The data was analysed and connected to theoretical elements of cultural and social sustainability. The analysis indicated that multicultural workplaces added value to the social and cultural sustainability of companies through improvements, for example corporate language choice, although various challenges such as miscommunication may occur.

The thesis was commissioned by TAMK Talent Boost, a development programme with the goal of increasing internationalisation within Finnish companies and organisations. The research concluded that multicultural workplaces can have an impact on a company's cultural and social sustainability. The results developed from the analysis were shared with Talent Boost's networks. Further research is encouraged due to continuous internationalisation of the Finnish society.

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Key words: multiculturalism, cultural sustainability, social sustainability, development

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The subject of this thesis "The social and cultural sustainability of multicultural workplaces in Finland" is focused on helping small and medium sized enterprises in Finland with becoming multicultural and open to developing sustainably.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) make up 99% of all companies within the European Union (EU), therefore having a large impact on the EU's economic and entrepreneurial situation (European Commission N.d). According to Business Finland, a SME is defined as an enterprise with less than 250 employees and if the turnover is less than 50 million euros annually, or the balance sheet total is smaller than 43 million euros. In Finland over 99% of companies are considered a SME, which in turn should provide excellent employment opportunities for those living in Finland, however, 93,1% of those SMEs are made up of less than ten people (Business Finland N.d.). These micro enterprises form the majority of Finnish companies, meaning that they may have limited resources, capabilities, and networks to allow for integration of multicultural employees or development of practices.

A company's capabilities can be determined by analysing the tangible and intangible resources (Thompson, Strickland & Gamble 2009, 106). For example, personnel ability and skills are considered intangible, whereas financial resources are tangible. This analysation process allows for relevant understanding of what a company has to offer and where it may need to develop further. In the scope of multiculturalism and sustainable development, a company's resources and capabilities play a large role in how they are able to prioritise development and contribute to society.

For small and medium sized enterprises to continue to develop and remain relevant in the future they must utilise all people and skills found within their surrounding society. Socially and culturally sustainable SMEs consider and prioritise diversity, inclusion, equity, and company culture within their daily operations. For Finland, this means adapting further to the changing

demographics and developing company policies to accept and integrate multicultural individuals (Current Affairs Committee 2020, 2-9).

Larger and more successful companies have the resources to develop policies and practices to aid their development and growth related to social and cultural sustainability. However, small and medium sized companies in Finland may view the threshold too high for hiring a multicultural worker and modifying their policies.

By prioritising socially and culturally sustainable practices, Finnish companies and organisations will have a better chance at adapting to changing demographics and internationalisation, therefore increasing their chance at further success. The ability to quickly react is a valuable strength as it pushes the enterprise out of its comfort zone and increases the possibility for new innovations and learning of new skills (Lahti 2014, 24). In Finland's case, the continuously growing immigration rate has increased the number of multicultural persons, therefore creating a more culturally diverse recruitment pool (Statistics Finland 2021a). Embracing diversity on all levels can therefore expand networks, increase knowledge on various cultures, and assist in the building of a multicultural work environment.

1.2. Thesis commissioner

The commissioner for this thesis is Tampere University of Applied Science's (TAMK's) Talent Boost programme, a cross-administrative development programme with the goal of increasing internationalisation within Finnish companies, organisations, and educational institutions. More specifically, TAMK's Talent Boost programme aims to raise awareness about TAMK globally, attract skilled international workers to Finland, assist international students adjust and integrate into Finnish society and working life, and increase cooperation between TAMK and local businesses to support the utilisation of students and international talents (Tampere University and TAMK 2022). The programme is prioritising and promoting the retention of international professionals and students, as well as the growth of Finnish businesses.

Talent Boost was started in 2017 by Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government and has continued to run under Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government Programme starting in 2019 with the main objective of tackling labour shortages and Finland's low employment rate by focusing on integration of international students and talents in Finland. The Talent Boost program also supports the Finnish Government's goal of having a 75% employment rate (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment n.d.).

Tampere University of Appliances has formed a partnership with the Talent Boost government programme to support the continuous development of the Study & Stay model. This model was created by a collaboration between numerous regional organisations such as the Tampere Universities Career Services and especially International House Tampere and was launched in the autumn of 2020. Both TAMK and Tampere University each have their own versions of the model to adapt to the needs of their students. In short, the main objective of the Study & Stay model is to support international students with studying, integrating, and working in the Tampere region, as well as helping those starting their own company in Finland by providing various activities and services. (Tampere University and TAMK 2020).

Therefore, this thesis is being commissioned by TAMK's Talent Boost programme to support research being conducted on how small and medium sized Finnish companies can transition towards becoming multicultural. After approaching representatives from TAMK's Talent Boost programme and discussing together, it has been concluded that they require this research to further develop their work with Finnish companies and multicultural talents in the Tampere region. The commissioner will be actively involved in the completion of the thesis by providing input and support during the writing process, research process, and data analysation process. The results and concluding observations will be shared with TAMK's Talent Boost networks to provide assistance for companies and organisations transitioning towards multiculturalism.

1.3. Thesis objective, purpose, and research question

The objective of this thesis is to help small and medium sized Finnish companies develop their practices and policies to allow for easier integration of multicultural employees, networks, and resources. Currently, the threshold for shifting into multicultural networks and resources is high for many SMEs in Finland. Lowering that threshold and allowing companies to recognise and realise the opportunities found within multicultural networks is a key step for Finnish SMEs.

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the impact multicultural workplaces has on the social and cultural sustainability of Finnish SMEs. Meaning, that the research completed can provide information on whether multicultural work environments enhance a company's cultural and social sustainability. There has been ample work published on the importance and value of multicultural workplaces within Finland, however, there are limited connections to the sustainability of them, more specifically socially and culturally. For instance, Lahti's book, Monikulttuurinen työelämä (A multicultural work life) (2014), and Airala's book Monikulttuurinen työpaikka (A multicultural workplace) (2013) discuss crucial aspects that need to be taken into consideration when an enterprise shifts into becoming multicultural. Additionally, the research conducted in Kati Nappa's Master's Thesis on Multicultural workplaces in Finland (2020) thoroughly analyses workplaces, with more of a focus on educational institutions, and encourages further research to be completed. Multicultural companies are the future of the business world, and for them to develop sustainably, they must have the ability to adapt to demographic changes.

The purpose and objective can create the following research questions:

Why should Finnish SMEs allocate resources towards building a multicultural work environment?

- *Are multicultural work environments culturally and/or socially sustainable?*
- *What steps should companies take to build a multicultural work environment?*

1.4. Thesis outline

This section outlines the structure for this thesis. In this chapter the introduction and background to the topic, along with the description of the thesis commissioner and the objective, purpose, and research questions have been covered. The second chapter focuses on the theoretical framework of the thesis which will support the research conducted and data collected in chapters three and four. The main topics found in the theoretical framework are multiculturalism, company culture, internationalism, sustainable development, cultural sustainability, and social sustainability. The third chapter explains the research process, objectives, and methods used to collect data. Furthermore, the author describes the creation and distribution of both the survey and interview questions. The fourth chapter uses the theoretical research from chapter two to help analyse the data collected through the survey and interviews. During that process, answers from the two research sources will be compared to help the author arrive at a conclusion. The fifth chapter contains a thorough explanation of the results after the data has been compared to theoretical elements. In the sixth and final chapter, the author concludes the research conducted in the thesis and discusses additional observations discovered throughout the research process. Additional materials will be listed in the appendices.

2   THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The following chapter will thoroughly explain the theoretical background of the topics covered in this thesis. There are two overarching sections, multiculturalism and sustainable development, which house a multitude of sub-topics that provide a deeper and more specified background. The topics cultural and social sustainability will act as the secondary data, discussed later during the data analysation process in chapter 4.

2.1.   Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is the term used to describe how a society or community embraces cultural diversity. Various cultural or ethnic groups should be able to maintain their identity and have fair access to society and all the resources found within it (European Commission n.d.). The mix between the dominant culture that characterizes a society, and the smaller cultural or ethnic groups is what creates diversity and enhances the possibility for new viewpoints to be formed. However, the rich combination of various cultures and people can also harm a nation's identity and pivot the focus to the minority groups, decreasing the sense of unification (Eagan 2021).

The term 'multiculturalism' was formed in in the mid 20th century by Canadians to describe their society and differentiate from the situation within the United States at the time (van Teeseling n.d.). The opposite of the word multiculturalism is assimilation, which is the process of conforming or becoming alike (Harper 2022). In the case of the United States and Canada, during the 20th century the United States experienced a large influx of immigrants that led to the mix of various cultures and ethnic groups, and the result was assimilation or creation of a new American culture that everyone was to identify with (Peach 2005, 8). Whereas in Canada, the term multiculturalism was developed to describe their multicultural society that embraced the various cultural groups as their own.

A multicultural society, community, company, or organization has multiple different cultures apart of it that makes it unique. According to the Merriam-

Webster dictionary (n.d.), culture can be defined as, "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group." In some cultural groups, there may also be a common way of life or set of traditions that are passed down through generations and social groups.

One important aspect to note is the difference of the terms culture and ethnicity. Culture or cultural groups are characterised by their common traditions, customs, and beliefs, whereas ethnicity or ethnic groups connect cultural characteristics to race (Katarzyna et al. 2020, 62). A person's race can be determined by physical traits such as facial form or skin colour; however, it also encompasses ancestral and historical aspects (Pereira 2020). The terms race, ethnicity, and culture are all intertwined, and distinction between them is important to understanding the overarching term, multiculturalism.

Culture plays a vital role in a groups or individual's identity and can help form unique perspectives, that when combined with thoughts from alternative cultures can expand viewpoints even further (Lahti 2014, 20). These new perspectives can be formed from the combination of various cultures, ethnicities, and races. When diverse perspectives and cultures mix it allows for an increased understanding of diversity and inclusivity in practice. In Leena Lahti's book, Monikulttuurinen työelämä, she outlines how a change in diversity and communication methods can help push people out of their comfort zone and help them increase their ability to adjust to change (2014, 18-24). New environments, cultures, and working methods all create situations for people to step out of their comfort zone and learn more about their surroundings. For Finnish SME's, expanding into multicultural networks increases development opportunities and grows their professional experience and capabilities.

2.1.1 Company culture

Culture can also be focused to the business world and describe a company's internal values, goals, and policies. Company culture is unique to the company and is something determined by the employees. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2023), corporate culture refers to how a company treats its workers

and defines their working environment. There are many different factors that make up the culture of a workplace and depending on the characteristics of the company, some factors may be challenging to define. Below is a list of example factors that help define a company's culture (Airala et al. 2013, 12):

- Values

- Policies and practices

- Working atmosphere

- Attitude to various situations

- Spirit of the personnel

- Hierarchy of social relations.

In Katja Keisala's book, Monikulttuurisen työyhteisön viestintä, there is a concept that describes how corporate culture could be determined in a multicultural work environment, it's called a 'third culture' (2012, 175-183). Essentially, the third culture acts as a common culture between all employees at the company to prevent a hierarchy or dominance of other cultures. Although the concept seems ideal, it may also create divides between workers as some may have their expectations met better by the agreed upon customs (Keisala 2012, 181). To ensure that the third culture is used to its full potential, it must be created based on the company's values and policies (Keisala 2012, 183). A common culture becomes more and more crucial the larger a multicultural workplace gets since the higher the diversity, the more types of people there are to lead and include in daily operations.

Working together to determine a company's values or policies through dialogue can in turn determine the desired atmosphere and attitudes for the company's culture. Dialogue is a way for everyone to have an equal role in a conversation by allowing all participants to both share their own thoughts and listen to others' thoughts (Lahti 2014, 169). The process of deciding on how a company's culture will work in practice also creates trust, which is the base of strong organisations and makes it easier for future decisions to be made, understood, and taken into practice.

Trust, along with communication methods, varies between cultures. One's upbringing and social influence plays a large role in how different communication

methods are understood. Body language such as a nod or smile may seem self-explanatory to someone, however, to another it may have a hidden or deeper meaning (Lahti 2014, 178). Multicultural workplaces have a learning curve, and even if there are rules or policies written and distributed, the implementation of them takes time.

An important aspect of corporate or company culture not mentioned above is communication, as it helps create mutual understanding, a common perspective, and in some cases a common language for the company (Keisala 2012, 27-37). Within many multicultural or international companies, the common language has been set to English to efficiently adjust towards the global economy and new policies (Neeley 2012). Although Neeley's (2012) article was written over a decade ago, the point remains the same, and with improved technological resources and access to the internet the number of English-speaking companies has grown.

Since the common language of a company may not be everyone's native language, there must be a minimum language level requirement for everyone to ensure that work tasks are fulfilled and all official policies and practices are understood (Airala 2013, 45). If a company opts to set an official language, this may also require all digital platforms and documents to be translated, which is typically easier. However, to properly implement a common language that aligns with the company's culture, all unofficial conversations and meetings must also be held within that common language, even if all members in the situation have the same native language. For example, if a Finnish SME decides to operate in English and hires a few multicultural employees, the Finnish workers would still be required to speak English at work to maintain inclusivity and equity.

On the other hand, a company must be prepared for additional conflicts and misunderstandings if a common language is implemented (Lahti 2014, 165). When people of different language and cultural backgrounds work together there is automatically an increased amount of diversity to consider, which provides value but can also cause misinterpretations or tension at times.

A multicultural workplace has the possibility to create a supportive, innovative, and diverse environment which will help personnel discover their potential and help the business optimize operations and succeed (Lahti 2014, 24). New working methods and communication styles can be formed when the collaboration of people from various cultures, ethnicities, and races occurs, therefore enhancing both a company's and personnel's success and growth. However, to guarantee success on all levels, there must be a strong base created through trust and mutual understanding of the company's culture.

2.1.2 Multiculturalism in Finland

In Finland, multiculturalism is relevant and with the constantly growing immigration rate it will increase in importance. Throughout this section, the source Statistics Finland has been referenced many times due to the extensive and relevant Finnish demographical data published there. As of 2021 there have been over 36 000 immigrants who have relocated to Finland, which is the highest number on record (Statistics Finland 2021a). The most common motives for immigration to Finland include family reasons, work, studying, and refugee status, according to a survey conducted by Statistics Finland and the National Institute for Health and Welfare in 2014. However, according to InfoFinland (2022), a multi-language webpage funded by the state and published by the City of Helsinki, the reasons accepted for someone interested in moving to Finland are working, studying, family reasons, and starting a business.

In the past twelve months there has been a growth in immigrants from Russia and Ukraine due to the ongoing conflict, with a total of 61295 residency applications submitted from Russian and Ukrainian citizens since April of 2022 (Finnish Immigration Service 2023). Excluding the previously mentioned groups, the highest number of immigrants with foreign citizenships in the last 12 months have come from Iraq and India (Finnish Immigration Service 2023). According to Statistics Finland (2023b), between 2021 and 2022 there was a 27,2% increase in the population of people with Indian citizenship, which is one of the largest nationality increases within Finland between those years.

Officially, Finland has two main languages, Finnish and Swedish making it bilingual, however, there are multiple other languages whose speakers have legal rights (Institute for the Languages of Finland n.d). Östman and Mattfolk (2011, 75) point out that one of these languages is Sami, which is the language spoken by the indigenous population living in Lapland. Finland's other official language, Swedish, is mainly spoken on the Western and Southern coasts of Finland, in cities such as Vaasa and Turku. The above-mentioned regions are either dominantly Swedish speaking or much more bilingual compared to Central Finland, emphasizing the fluctuation of language dominancy within Finland. Additionally, the Åland Islands, an archipelago between Finland and Sweden located in the Baltic Sea, are an autonomous region of Finland that have Swedish as their only official language (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland n.d.). Although there are multiple national languages spoken in Finland, Finnish remains the overall dominant (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Population by Finland's National Languages. (Based on: Statistics Finland, 2023d).

	2022	% of population
Finnish	4 778 891	85,9
Swedish	287 052	5,2
Sami	2035	0,0

As of 2022, 85,9% of the population has Finnish as their native language whereas 8,9% has a foreign language as their native language (Statistics Finland 2023c). The most common foreign languages spoken are Russian, Estonian, Arabic, English, and Somali. Compared to the earlier mentioned Swedish speaking regions, the Eastern coast of Finland is highly influenced by Russia due to Finland previously being occupied by the Soviet Union, and many cities along the border speak predominantly Russian instead of Finnish (Fokkema et al. 2023).

The two most populous municipalities in Finland, Uusimaa and Pirkanmaa, are home to the largest cities such as Helsinki, Espoo, and Tampere. However, by the end of 2021, over half of the population with a foreign background born outside of Finland resided in Uusimaa, which contains both largest cities, Helsinki

and Espoo (Statistics Finland 2022). Finland's foreign population has grown steadily over the last couple of decades and the majority settles in cities and urban areas instead of rural regions.

Out of the over 5,5 million people living in Finland, 469 633 of them have a foreign background as of 2021 (Statistics Finland 2021b). This number is expected to increase, especially with the growing immigration rate. With Finland slowly becoming more and more culturally diverse, there is a necessity to develop employment options to ease the integration process for newcomers.

2.1.3 Internationalism

The term internationalism, often mixed up with internationalisation, refers to, "the condition or quality of being international in character, composition, or scope" as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (2023). Where multiculturalism describes how a society, nation, or group embraces various cultures, internationalism outlines the interaction and collaboration between various nations. Therefore, a group or company can be multicultural without being international if they do not operate or work with people located in a different country. In turn, this means that multiculturalism is a part of internationalism, but internationalism does not have to be a part of multiculturalism.

There are multiple different types of internationalism that focus on varying perspectives (Byram 2018, 67). Holbraad (2003, 6-10) states that the three main types include Socialist, Liberal, and Conservative, all of them originating from Europe between the 17th and 20th centuries. Conservative Internationalism focuses on implicit and pre-existing aspects within a nation or society, and often opposes Western views by remaining realist (Holbraad 2003, 11-14). On the other side of the spectrum is Liberal Internationalism, characterised by its idealistic viewpoints that focus on moral qualities, social progress, and international collaboration (Holbraad 2003, 39-43). Lastly, Socialist Internationalism is split into revolutionist and reformist viewpoints, with both having the same objectives of change and development. Revolutionist Social Internationalism aims at unification of nations and people, sometimes through

harsh ideas, whereas Reformist Social Internationalism aims at peaceful social reform and develop through justice and welfare systems (Holbraad 2003, 73-75, 78-80). Internationalism has been shaped throughout history and each individual, government, and country has its own way of defining it to this day.

Another aspect of internationalism is global competence. This describes the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values of people through intercultural understanding and interactions all while considering sustainable development (OECD 2018, 7-12). Global competence is made up of four dimensions, which often overlap, that should be used in everyone's daily life to allow for success when working with different people (OECD 2018, 7-8). As seen in Figure 1 below, the dimensions include examination, appreciation, understanding, engagement, and action, which when combined, create global competence (OECD 2018, 11). Examination refers to the understanding and transparency of various global and cultural situations when trying to form an opinion. Appreciation and understanding refers to the acknowledging and respecting of other people's views, as everyone has a different background and understanding of the world. The third dimension, engagement, is how people with global competence interact with various multicultural individuals, including the adaptation to behaviours. Lastly, take action promotes the concept of younger generations' continuous development of society. (OECD 2018, 10-11).
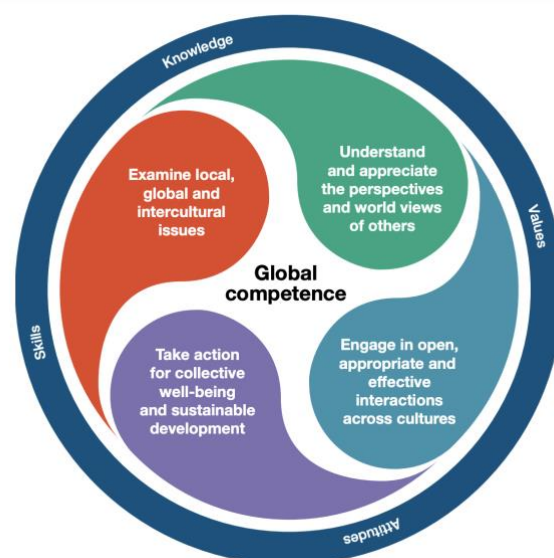
FIGURE 1. The dimensions of global competence. (OECD 2018).

Internationalism is a crucial concept within the 21ˢᵗ century, especially within the business world. Companies and organisations are continuously expanding their networks and operations beyond borders, which automatically results in communication and work between multicultural people. To ensure the highest level of potential and success, focusing on a specific type of internationalism and prioritising global competence is important.

2.1.4 Cultural diversity

One distinct aspect of multiculturalism that encompasses cultures, variety, value, development, and interactions is cultural diversity. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), cultural diversity is understood as cultural differences and variety between nations (Beukelaer, Pyykkönen & Singh 2015, 61-63). Cultural diversity allows people to recognize and value the rich variety of traditions, customs, beliefs, and characteristics there are in the world. In the source mentioned above, there is an important description of how every person, community, society, and nation has the right to continue to develop their culture and learn more about new ones (Beukelaer et al. 2015, 63-65). Multicultural workplaces are valuable and sustainable environments made up of culturally diverse people with the objective of developing and grasping opportunities.

2.2. Sustainable development

During the United Nations Brundtland Commission held in 1987, sustainable development was defined as, "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs," (United Nations Brundtland Commission 1987, 16). The overarching concept of sustainable development covers all aspects of supporting the growth and prosperity of humans and the world that they live in. To simplify the concept, it has been divided into three pillars, social, environmental, and economic, which can be visualised in Figure 2 below.
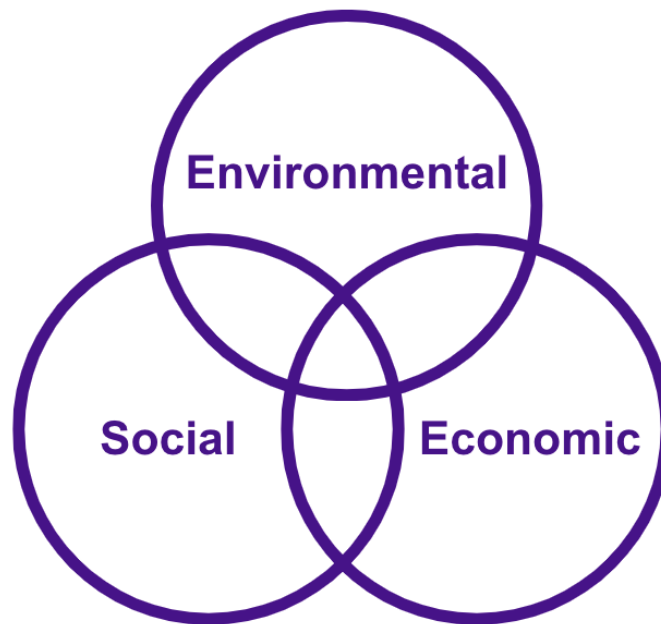
FIGURE 2. The three pillars of sustainable development. (Based on: Giddings, Hopwood & O'Brien 2002, 189).

Purvis, Mao and Robinson (2019) found that although the three pillars of sustainability are widely referred to within various reports, such as the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, there are no clear theoretical definitions for each pillar. Throughout research, the three pillars have been given definitions to support various studies or reports, however, common definitions do not exist. For instance, the United Nations Global Compact (n.d.) defines social sustainability as, "identifying and managing business impacts, both positive and negative, on people." However, this organisation works exclusively to improve the social sustainability of corporations, therefore excluding all other focus points of the pillar such as governments or communities.

Although there isn't a clear theoretical background of the pillars, their interdependence and constant growth is inevitable. To ensure an understanding of the difference between each pillar, a short description of each has been provided below based off a multitude of sources. The visual representation can be seen in Figure 2.

Economic sustainability refers to practices that satisfy current consumption needs and support future trends. This also includes consideration and utilisation

of technological advancements, various resources, and adaptability to global markets and situations without compromising the other pillars. (Mensah 2019, 9; Purvis, Mao & Robinson 2019; Zhai & Chang 2018, 369-370).

Environmental sustainability refers to the protecting and conservation of natural resources and ecosystems to ensure regeneration that will support the global population's wellbeing. This includes developing renewable energy sources, tackling climate change, and simultaneously maintaining safety and health. (Mensah 2019, 10; Purvis, Mao & Robinson 2019; ICSU 2017, 178).

Social sustainability is made up of the following elements to guarantee society's longevity: equality, equity, accessibility, diversity, and cohesion. In turn, this provides the space for people to grow and discover their needs within a certain society, institution, or community. (Mensah 2019, 9-10; Purvis, Mao & Robinson 2019; Kolk 2016, 32).

There is one additional pillar of sustainable development that has been introduced recently and doesn't appear in literature as much as the main three which is cultural sustainability. It wasn't until the start of the 21st century that cultural sustainability gained speed and was thought of as separate from the three main pillars (Naibei 2014, 6-8). Hawkes (2005, 12) argues that for a society to become culturally sustainable it will need to rely on a long-lasting cultural base, and without a strong culture, the society will struggle to survive and develop. Culture acts as an adhesive that holds together diverse people and customs and provides room for learning and further growth. Hawke's argument is directly supported by the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), which notes the importance culture has on a nations or society's identity and "social cohesion." A sustainable culture has no limitations and can be applied to any community, society, or company, therefore securing its importance as a base.

This thesis will focus exclusively on cultural and social sustainability as mentioned in the introduction. Although multicultural workplaces primarily fall into the two categories mentioned above, it is valuable to understand that both environmental and economic sustainability are equally as important as cultural and social sustainability.

2.2.1 Sustainable development goals

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) formed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to challenge the world to fight climate change, improve health and education, and decrease inequality by 2030. These goals address all three pillars of sustainability: social, environmental, and economic, where social is the primary focus when analysing workplace environments and cultural diversity. To further characterise the SDGs and all actions tied to them, the 5 P's of Sustainable Development – People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership were created (United Nations Sustainable Development Group 2022).

The following SDGs are the most relevant and important to the topic of this thesis. They have been shortly summarised below to highlight their connection and importance to the topic.

TABLE 2. Applicable UN SDGs. (Based on: United Nations 2015)

Goal	Explanation	Key Targets
4: Quality education	"Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." (United Nations 2015)	4.7: Ensure that information and skills required to understand sustainable development are known by all students.
5: Gender equality and women's empowerment	"Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." (United Nations 2015)	5.1: Eliminate all aspects of discrimination against women and girls globally. 5.5: Ensure equal participation and fair possibilities in leadership.
8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth	"Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all." (United Nations 2015)	8.5: Ensure working opportunities for people of all genders, ages and disabilities, in addition to equal pay for all.
10: Reduce inequality	"Reduce inequality within and among countries." (United Nations 2015)	10.2: Advocate for the inclusivity of all) socially, economically and politically by 2030. 10.3: Require fair opportunities for all and decrease inequalities created from discriminatory policies.

SDGs 4, 5, 8 & 10 are the most important goals in relation to the topics of multiculturalism, social sustainability and cultural sustainability. Key targets from each SDG have been outlined in the right-hand column to specify which aspects of the goal are the focus points. For example, target 8.5 touches on diversity, equity, and equality, which are all elements of social sustainability and can describe multicultural societies and communities.

2.2.2 Social sustainability

In addition to the description provided above, social sustainability encompasses the interaction and relationship between all systems, groups, communities, and other stakeholders. A socially sustainable society or enterprise supports its members by creating an inclusive, secure, and cohesive environment to enhance development or growth. In Finland's case, this means ensuring that immigrants and multicultural individuals and families are supported with necessary aspects such as employment and social welfare. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2020, 4-10, 13).

To support the efforts of multicultural inclusion, various projects and programs have been launched around Finland. For example, already on early 2020 Business Finland and the Helsinki region Chamber of Commerce introduced a 'Successful multicultural business' campaign to recognise multicultural and international Finnish companies. It had the goal of providing support for companies to develop multicultural work environments and with hiring persons of a foreign background (Helsingin Seudun Kauppakamari 2019). The campaign also provided companies with a diversity meter to help chart their success and possible further development strategies.

Another example is the Talent Traction: Co-Creating Multicultural Workplaces project that was a collaboration between TAMK and TE-toimisto (unemployment office) that occurred between 2021 and 2022. The aim of the project was to connect businesses in the Pirkanmaa region with foreigners living in Finland who have a higher education background. A positive aspect of this specific project was that companies involved were not required to pay anything, making it a low

threshold opportunity to get accustomed to working with multicultural people (Työmarkkinatori 2021). Projects and programs like the ones mentioned above are steps into the right direction for socially sustainable societies and businesses.

Although Finland has made an effort to support companies, organisations, and municipalities with the integration of multicultural people, there is still a continuous barrier, especially when it comes to employment. According to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (2023), as of February 2023, there were 35 548 unemployed foreigners in Finland searching for employment, making up 14% of the total. Within the same summary, it becomes apparent that the unemployment rate for native Finns is 5,8% whereas it is nearly double for foreigners at 11,7%.

In an article from Yle News written by Ndéla Faye in early 2021, many foreigners as well as returning Finns shared their struggles with finding any work, even if they have extensive career and education backgrounds from countries other than Finland. One example was of a Bahraini man who moved to Finland in 2017 for family reasons and although he has two degrees and over fifteen years of experience, he hasn't been able to find any work related to his field of expertise, and notes that many foreigners have to change their field altogether to secure a job of any kind (Faye 2021).

Another article written for Yle News in 2023 regarding Finnish language skills outlines the importance of an attitude change from employers to let foreigners feel more accepted and recognised as a part of society. Many Finnish employers assume that a lack of Finnish language skills is too large of a barrier for recruitment, resulting in skilled professionals to remain unemployed (Yle News 2023). There are articles and stories continuously being published related to foreigners or immigrants living in Finland who are unable to find jobs, which in turn restricts their integration into society and creates the feeling of unsupportiveness.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2020, 13) states that additional studies related to developing social welfare for immigrants, and more specifically women, need to be supported. Nappa's Master's thesis (2020, 109-

110) also encourages further research to be completed regarding culturally diverse and inclusive workplaces, which are direct determinants of whether a society allows for and supports integration of multicultural and foreign individuals. Multicultural societies must not only provide assistance for foreigners, but also ensure that the native population accepts them.

2.2.3   Cultural sustainability

Adding onto the description found in section 2.2, cultural sustainability has the ability to tie all unique characteristics of a culture together and connect them to surrounding social, environmental, and economic aspects (Sabatini 2019, 39). For example, cultural events or activities can promote both social and economic sustainability automatically, even if the focus is primarily on cultural development. Since culture is made up of numerous elements, both tangible and intangible, their development and preservation are crucial to maintaining cultural heritage and identity throughout demographic changes (Current Affairs Committee 2020, 2-9). The maintenance of a specific culture ensures for the longevity of the values and identity while giving space for it to flourish and adapt to changes. Aligning with or being part of a culture creates the possibility of unity, which can be lost if abrupt change occurs without the acceptance of diversity and reminder of the values or heritage of the culture. (Köchler 2012).

Within Finland, demographic changes such as increased immigration rates have resulted in the fear of Finland's culture being left behind. According to Statistics Finland (2023a), in the year 2022 the number of persons with a foreign language as their native language grew by 37 950. For context, in the city of Vantaa one in four residents has a foreign language as their native language (Statistics Finland 2023a). Language is just one aspect of culture, however, with the constant mingling of various cultures and increased immigration rates globally, it's inevitable that cultures will change based on higher levels of diversity. On the other side of the culture spectrum, Metsähallitus (n.d.), Finland's organisation that protects public lands, has begun preserving cultural heritage sites found within Finnish nature. One of the most important parts of Finland's culture is the nature,

and the efforts to both protect it and recognise it is an important step towards becoming culturally sustainable.

Cultures are unique and inclusive, and are often impacted by history, language, traditions, and values; meaning that new cultures can be formed without restrictions or specifications. Diverse people from various backgrounds can form cultures the same way a company made up of people of various fields and experiences can. When these diverse perspectives mix, new dynamics are created (Lahti 2014, 23-24), which was explained further in Section 2.1 Therefore, sustainable cultures based on common values and practices create a sense of community and belonging, all while adapting to changes.

3 RESEARCH METHODS AND MATERIALS

The following section dives into the research process and explores the reasoning for the tools and methods utilised to support the theoretical background and answer the research questions. The research process includes the design, which has been broken down into the survey and the interview to decipher their different purposes and aspects taken into consideration during their creation. In addition to the design, the process includes the objective, purpose, validity, limitations, and analysis, however, more in depth data analysis occurs in the next chapter.

3.1. Research objective, purpose, and question

The objective, purpose, and research questions for this thesis have been stated in section 1.2, however, they have been shortly reiterated here to remind the reader before the research process is opened.

Objective - The objective of the research for this thesis is to help Finnish SMEs develop their practices and policies to allow for easier integration of multicultural employees, networks, and resources.

Purpose - The purpose of the research for this thesis is to determine the impact multicultural workplaces has on the social and cultural sustainability of Finnish SMEs.

Questions - The research questions below have been formed based on the objective and purpose.

Why should Finnish SMEs allocate resources towards building a multicultural work environment?

- *Are multicultural work environments culturally and/or socially sustainable?*
- *What steps should companies take to build a multicultural work environment?*

3.2. Research design

The research completed for this thesis has been both qualitative and quantitative. Walliman (2011, 72) claims that quantitative data, "can be measured, more or less accurately because it contains some form of magnitude, usually expressed in numbers." Whereas Walliman (2011, 72) states that qualitative data, "cannot be accurately measured and counted, and are generally expressed in words rather than numbers." For this research, an anonymous survey was created to allow for understandable data collection and efficient data analysis. An important aspect to note is the difference between a questionnaire and a survey, as they are often used interchangeably and incorrectly. A questionnaire is a tool with a variety of questions and can be self-administered, whereas a survey is the process of collecting, evaluating, and analysing data to form a conclusion (Slattery et al. 2011, 831-832). For this work, a questionnaire has been used as the tool to complete the survey.

In addition to the survey, a set of interviews were conducted to create an opportunity for qualitative and quantitative data comparison. The interviews were designed and conducted using McCracken's (1988) 'Long Interview' method. This interview process is composed of preparation via literature review, evaluating one's personal understanding of the questions, conducting the interview, and analysing the answers to form a conclusion (McCracken 1988, 30-44). The main purpose of the 'Long Interview' technique is to allow for participants to openly share their experiences and thoughts without restrictive structure or limitations. The interviewer's role is to listen, observe, and allow for flexibility within the interview.

3.2.1 Survey

The anonymous survey was created and distributed on the Microsoft Forms platform as determined by TAMK and consists of exclusively multiple-choice questions, however, one open-ended field was added at the end for additional comments or questions. The purpose of the survey was to collect data to help

determine if multicultural workplaces in Finland are culturally and socially sustainable. The target audience of the survey was people who have past or present experience with multicultural workplaces in Finland. It was also encouraged for those who have aspirations or goals of one day working in a multicultural workplace within Finland to answer.

Since the main objective of the survey was to collect anonymous data that will be quantitative and easy to understand, all the questions related to the research had answers shown as numerical results. The majority of the questions had pre-formed responses as options, which when analysing the results, shows how many answers certain choices received. To visualise the data collected from the survey, it will be displayed with various charts and analysed with the data visualisation method (Tableau n.d.).

The title of the survey, Multicultural work environments, was followed by a description with information regarding this thesis, a short theoretical background, and notice of confidentiality to ensure transparency and validity (Appendix 1).

The questions were drafted and completed during four weeks between mid-February and the beginning of March 2023. The purpose, objective, and research questions of this thesis were taken into consideration when the questions were being formed. In total, there were eight questions, all written in English; seven were multiple choice and one was open-ended. The survey was intended to take no longer than five minutes to answer, as the purpose was to collect as many anonymous responses as possible from the main target audience.

List of questions:
1. What is your age? *
2. What field of work are you in? *
3. Have you worked in a multicultural environment in Finland? *
4. If you have not yet worked in a multicultural environment in Finland, are you open to the possibility of it?
5. Is working in a multicultural environment more challenging than in a non-multicultural environment?
6. If you answered yes to the previous question, what makes it challenging?

7. What are the positive aspects and opportunities of working in a multicultural environment?
8. Additional comments or questions

*Required questions for survey respondents

The survey was finalised, and the link distributed in various places and platforms (thesis author's LinkedIn page, Growth Corridor's Fast Expert Teams, and Facebook groups) on the 14th of March 2023. It remained open until the end of April 2023 to allow for as many answers as possible and was closed on the 5th of May 2023. During this duration, a total of 68 responses were collected.

3.2.2 Interviews

The interview was created with the objective to collect qualitative data based on individual's experiences that can be compared and analysed with the survey data. On the other hand, the purpose was to produce qualitative data which can help determine whether multicultural workplaces are culturally and socially sustainable. To further connect the qualitative results of the interviews to the theoretical framework of this thesis, key themes found from within the answers will be used analyse and understand the data (Mishra & Dey 2022).

The questions and notes were kept in two separate Microsoft Word documents where the thesis author was the only person with access to them. The target audience of the interviews were people who have experienced the Finnish job market and have experience working within a multicultural environment in Finland. All of the participants either currently work within a Finnish company, are aiming to start their own company, or are still finding their way within the Finnish job market.

The questions for the interviews were created within the first week of February 2023 and align with the purpose, objective, and research questions of this thesis. The interview questions allowed for each respondent to reflect on their own experiences and share their thoughts openly. Some of the questions (5, 7, 8, 9,

10) were directed to multicultural individuals who are not originally from Finland, however, any comments or thoughts related to them were accepted as answers. Out of the twelve questions, three (1, 2, 3) overlapped with the ones asked in the survey.

The first interview was conducted on the 3rd of February 2023 and the last interview was conducted on the 31st of March 2023, meaning that the survey and interviews occurred throughout the same time period. During this time, a total of six people were interviewed.

Questions:
1. Where are you from?
2. In what industry do you have job experience?
3. Have you worked in a multicultural company or environment before? How is/was the experience?
4. What is the most valuable aspect of working in a multicultural environment in your opinion?
5. How long have you been living in Finland? Why did you move to Finland?
6. Do you currently have a job in Finland? If not, are you currently looking for work?
7. Do you speak Finnish, if so what level? If not, are you planning on learning the language?
8. What experiences have you had when entering the Finnish job market?
9. If you have a job, how did the application process go? Were there any challenges or hardships? Did some companies seem more accepting than others?
10. How has it been working in Finland? Have you noticed differences, discrimination, acceptance, or openness within the workplace?
11. How could companies in Finland improve their working environments and practices?
12. In your eyes, what would an ideal workplace be like, considering sustainable practices and cultural diversity?

Prior to each interview, both a privacy notice and copy of the questions were sent to the respondents via email. The privacy notice complied with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, EU 2016/679) which gives individuals the right to personal data protection (European Commission n.d.). This privacy notice outlined what data would be collected, how it would be processed, where it will be stored and for how long. Additionally, it listed the individual's rights along with the contact details of the thesis author. (Appendix 2).

3.3. Reliability, validity, and limitations

When conducting academic research, both validity and reliability are important features which need to be considered. Reliability refers to the consistency or replicability of conducted research. Furthermore, a reliable study is one that could be run multiple times under the same conditions and still produce the same results. However, reliable research isn't necessarily valid. Validity is determined by whether the results accurately reflect the intended measurement. To sum this concept up, reliability is an obligatory condition for validity, however, it is not adequate on its own. (Adams, Khan & Raeside 2014, 245-247).

When considering this research, it maintains reliability especially through the survey. Due to its anonymity, the questions produce consistent results, and the survey could easily be launched in the future again to the same target audience. However, the field or background of a respondent could have a large impact on their answer in either the survey or the interview, meaning that although the questions asked remained consistent, the scope of the answers could vary. Moreover, the survey was not limited to exclusively multicultural individuals, meaning that native Finns were allowed to participate, which is a probable factor that influences reliability. Both the survey and interview questions followed the purpose and objective of the research, ensuring a minimum level or reliability and validity. In terms of validity, there were no possibilities for incorrect answers in either the survey or the interview, unless a question was entirely misunderstood, meaning that the accuracy is prevalent throughout the research.

It is important to be aware of possible limitations and faults when conducting research through an interview and survey. One overarching fault is the inability to know if an interviewee also answered the survey, accounting for two separate answers within the research. Additionally, since the interview and survey questions both required a respondent to evaluate personal experiences, there is a possibility for bias. This can occur during any part of the research, and in this case means that a respondent has prejudice towards a question (Pannucci & Williams 2010). Lastly, since the survey and interview questions were both in

English, there is a high chance for a respondent to misunderstand what the question is asking, therefore compromising the accuracy of the answer and possibly creating discrepancies.

4 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This section will describe the process of analysing and understanding the data collected through the survey and interviews. To clarify the type of data collected for this specific research, it is crucial to understand the difference between primary and secondary data. Walliman (2011, 69-71) states that primary data is observed or gathered as close to the truth or event as possible, whereas secondary data has already been reported and analysed in sources such as books or journals. In the scope of this research, the data has been collected via measurement, which is the collection of numerical results, and interrogation, which is obtaining results by asking questions or information from people (Walliman 2011, 70). As explained in section 3.3, this research process has collected both quantitative and qualitative data, however, it can also be further defined as primary data.

4.1. Analysis of the survey

The data from the survey was collected over a nearly two-month period of time to allow for as many answers as possible. Every answer was automatically saved and visible on Microsoft Forms, which made following the progress of answers efficient. The platform creates various charts to show the quantitative data, and when forwarded to Microsoft Excel, further analysis was simplified. Periodically reviewing the number of answers gained and reading through additional comments aided the thesis writing process.

The questions had the main purpose of collecting quantitative data regarding multicultural workplaces in Finland. Questions 1-2 collected background information and were formed to determine if there is a correlation between age, work fields, and multicultural work environments. There was no question that asked the nationality or homeplace of the respondent since the survey was not restricted, although it was targeted towards those with experience from a multicultural workplace. questions 3-4 collected data on whether a respondent had worked in a multicultural workplace in Finland. question 3 was mandatory, whereas question 4 was optional depending on whether the respondent had

experience. questions 5-7 were all optional and focused on experiences, as not everyone who answered the survey had worked in a multicultural workplace. questions 6-7 provided the opportunity for a respondent to select more than one answer choice, however, question 7 was limited to three choices as the list of options was longer. The curated options for 6-7 were based off of topics found in books written by Keisala (2012), Lahti (2014), and Airala et al. (2013), which have been cited in this thesis. Lastly, question 8 was open for additional comments or questions. Since the final question was open-ended, the data collected was qualitative, however, it was added to provide respondents the opportunity to share further but does not influence the data analysis or results as it remained anonymous.

As mentioned previously, the link to the survey was shared to the author's LinkedIn page via a public post along with various Facebook groups. The thesis author participated in Finland's Growth Corridor Fast Expert Teams (FET) process between February and March where the theme was Finland's skills shortage, and the link was shared in a general page for participants to access. Lastly, it was shared to various companies that shared an interest and had an employee that participated in an interview. This was to prevent the disruption of the anonymity. If the link would have been exclusively shared to individuals there would have been a higher chance for the respondents to have been predicted.

4.1.1 Survey answers

The answers to the survey will be analysed utilising the data visualisation method, which is a way of displaying data with figures such as charts or tables to ensure that the information shown is easy to understand for all readers (Tableau n.d.). For this specific survey, the data will be presented in pie charts to visualise percentages and bar charts to compare the number of answers different choices received. The analysation will focus primarily on the answers to questions 5-7 as they have the strongest possibility of helping answer the research questions. However, answers to other questions will be shortly outlined to provide a background and increased level of transparency. The questions are written in section 3.2.1 and further explained in section 4.1.

Out of the 68 responses, 37% were between the ages of 35-45 and 31% were between the ages of 25-35, making up for 46 of the total responses (Figure 3). There were no present outliers produced from the question regarding age.
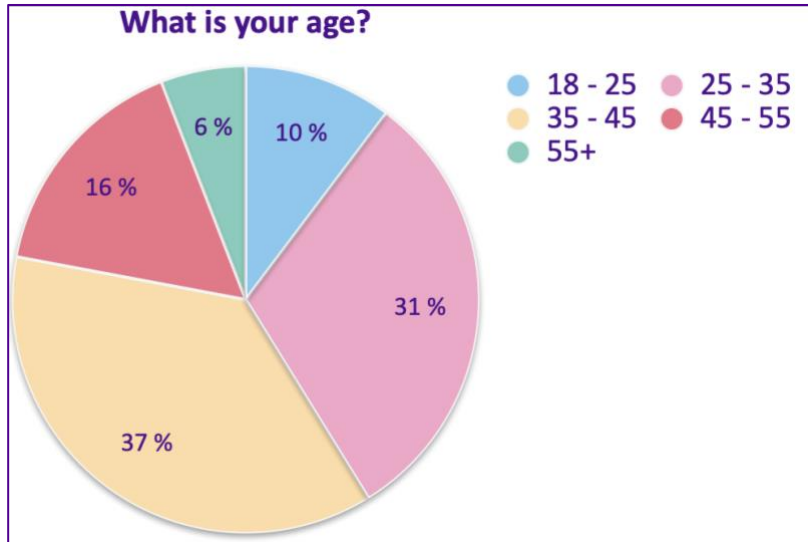

FIGURE 3. Answers to question 1.

The following question inquiring about field of work however had a clear majority with 27 respondents working in the technology sector. This was more than double the second biggest choice, which was 10 respondents working in the field of business (Figure 4). It can be assumed that the survey was possibly shared most within the networks of those from the technology sector.
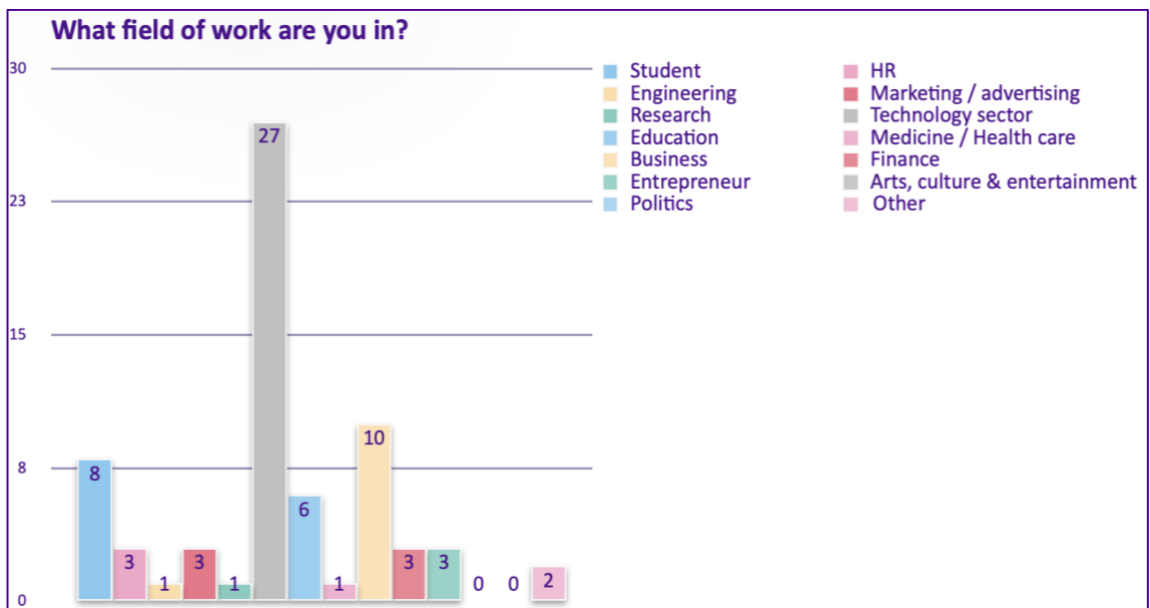

FIGURE 4. Answers to question 2.

The survey collected 68 responses in total with 90% of respondents answering 'Yes,' to having experienced working in a multicultural environment in Finland either currently or in the past, which can be visualised in Figure 5 below. This confirms that the survey aligned well with the target audience.

Have you worked in a multicultural environment in Finland?

- Yes, currently
- Yes, in the past
- No
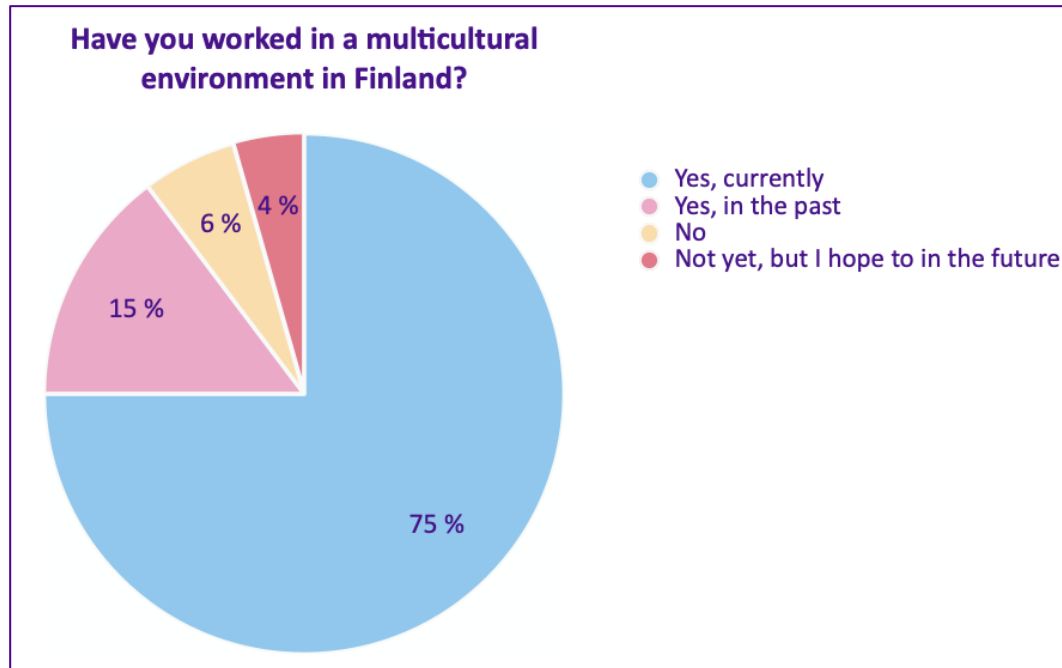- Not yet, but I hope to in the future

4 %
6 %
15 %
75 %

FIGURE 5. Answers to question 3.

Question 5, which asked about whether working in a multicultural environment is challenging or not, received a more divided response. This question was highly reliant on the respondent's personal experiences from multicultural workplaces, which could provide a reason for the results being split. The majority 50% answered 'No,' 44% answered 'Yes,' and the last 6% answered 'I don't know' (Figure 6). It received 68 responses where 94% of the respondents directly answered the question which required some level of experience from multicultural work environments in Finland, and this does not align with the answers from question 3 (Figure 5), showing that only 90% of respondents had experience. Although the answers of the two questions have discrepancies, it does not disregard that the respondents' answers were nearly split in half for question 5, which is visualised in Figure 6.
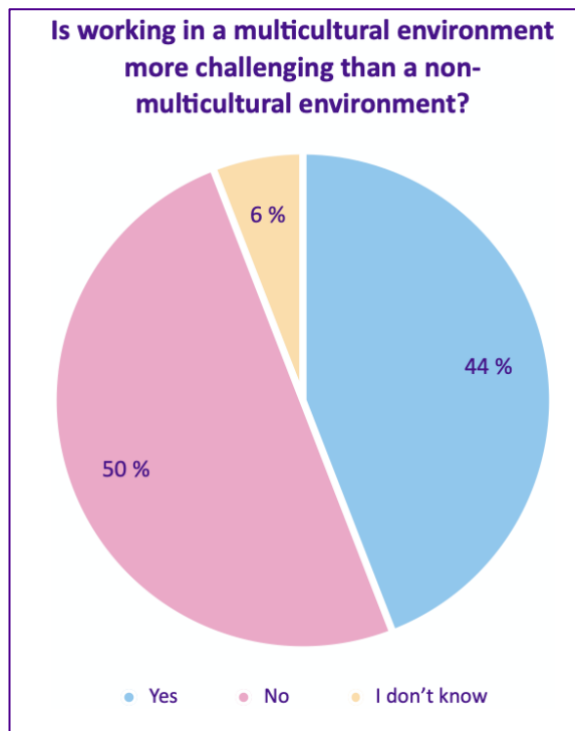
FIGURE 6. Answers to question 5.

Question 6 was a direct follow up for the previous one and dives deeper into the reasoning for why a respondent chose that multicultural work environments are more challenging than non-multicultural ones. One observation discovered that respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer choice, however, only seven of the respondents chose more than three options. This question received 31 responses, meaning that of the 30 people who answered 'Yes' to the previous question, one additional person also answered. The top three answer choices that provide insight into why multicultural environments are more challenging were, 'Communication/language related issues' with 25 answers, 'Requires more patience and open mindedness' with 19 answers and, 'Increase in misunderstandings and/or conflicts' with 17 answers (Figure 7).
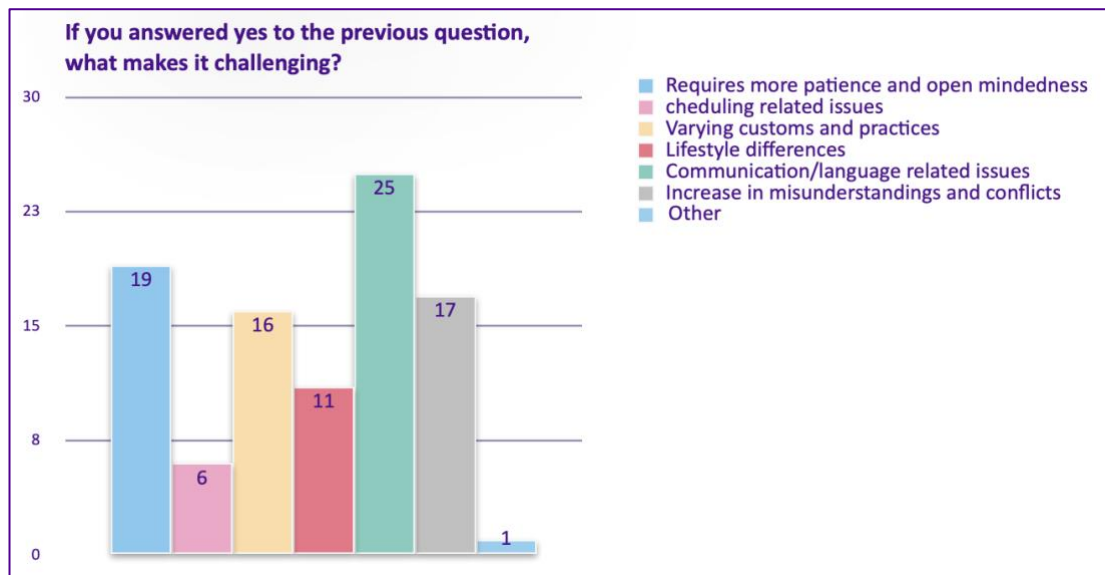
FIGURE 7. Answers to question 6.

Lastly, question 7 focused on the positive aspects and opportunities of multicultural work environments, receiving 68 responses in total. Once again, only 90% of the 68 total respondents have experience working in a multicultural work environment in Finland, meaning that a level of misunderstanding occurred when respondents completed the survey. This question had 11 possible answer choices, each getting selected at least once, and respondents were limited to only three choices. Out of the 11, there were three answers that had the clear majority, with the fourth most favourable choice having 14 fewer answers. The top three positive aspects and opportunities selected were, 'Meeting new people from various backgrounds' with 43 answers, 'Improving communication skills' with 37 answers and, 'Way to learn about different cultural norms and traditions' with 36 answers (Figure 8).
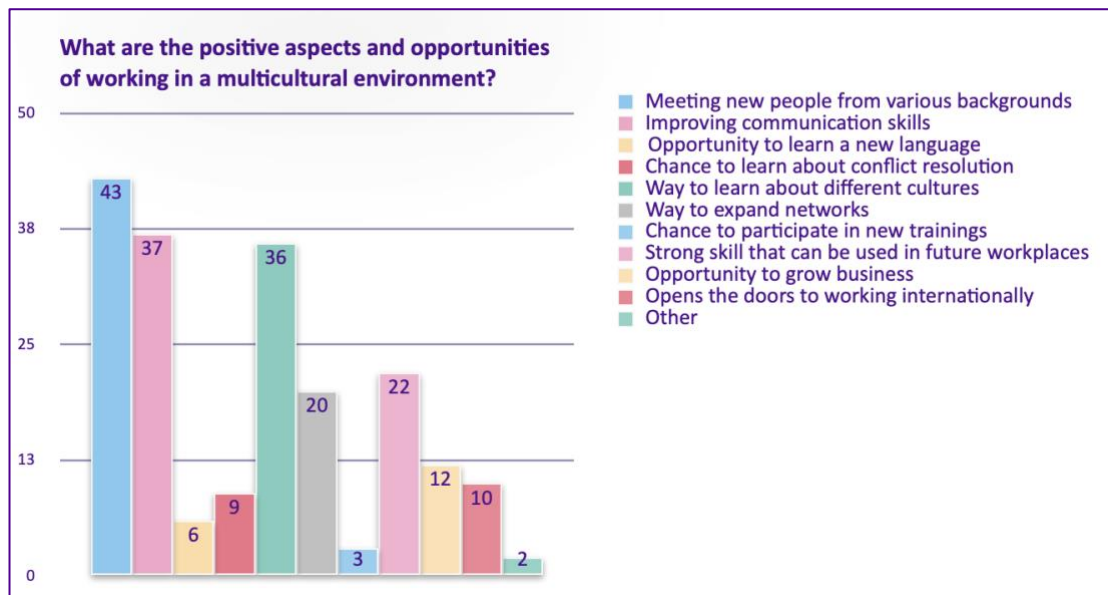
FIGURE 8. Answers to question 7.

The responses to the survey can be directly connected to key themes of both cultural and social sustainability. Within cultural sustainability, some of the key themes are traditions, values, and language, which aligns with the answers to both questions 6 - 7. For example, the third most favoured choice in question 7 was, 'Way to learn about different cultural norms and traditions,' which an overarching theme within both cultural diversity and cultural sustainability, and directly correlates with the statements made by Köchler (2012) and Lahti (2014, 23, 66, 160). An inclusive and sustainable culture based on common values, whether in society or in the workplace, requires an open mind and developed communication skills, which although were the two largest challenges that respondents have faced regarding multiculturalism (Figure 7), emphasise development efforts made.

When it comes to social sustainability, some of the key themes as outlined previously in section 2.2 are equality, equity, accessibility, diversity, and cohesion. Social sustainability is also the interaction and dynamic between diverse people found within a society, community, or workplace, which aligns with the most favourable positive aspect, 'Meeting new people from various backgrounds' from question 7 (Figure 8) and correlates to excerpts from Mensah (2019, 9-10) and Purvis et al. (2019). Additionally, although some of the most common challenges were related to aspects such as communication or language (Figure 7), respondents still found that multicultural environments provide the

space to develop skills that can be used in future workplaces (Figure 8), expressing the link multiculturalism has with efforts towards continuous improvements and sustainability.

4.2. Analysis of the interviews

The interviews were conducted between February and March 2023 either online utilising Zoom or in person, and all were held in English. Each answer was recorded in a Microsoft Word document to allow for efficient analysation and retrieval. As the objective of the interview was to collect qualitative data based on people's experiences and thoughts in a comfortable manner, there were little to no restrictions regarding the respondent's answers or nature of the interview.

Section 3.2.2 outlines the target audience for certain questions; however, this paragraph describes what type of answers they collected. One aspect to note, is that not every respondent answered every question, which was accepted and understood by the interviewer. Questions 1-3 collected background information regarding the respondent and their link to multicultural workplaces. Question 4 asks specifically for personal thoughts and opinions about their experiences from working in a multicultural environment. These abovementioned questions naturally draw upon the respondent's experiences and were a crucial part of understanding their career history. Questions 5 & 7-10 were targeted towards non-native Finns who may have had varying experiences entering the Finnish job market and society as a whole. Those questions were not limited to specific interviewees and all comments were accepted to widen viewpoints. Question 6 is focused on the respondent's current career situation and occupation. Questions 10-11 focus on the present and future of Finnish SMEs. Those last two questions gave respondents the ability to share hopes for the future of multicultural workplaces and reflect on improvements or experiences.

While the survey was open for anyone to respond and had the aim to collect as many responses as possible, that was not the case for the interviews. Due to the limited resources and schedule of this thesis, only six interviews were conducted. All the interview participants were located through different networks, increasing

the perspective of the answers. Two of the interviewees' contact information was linked to the thesis author via personal networks and one reached out via LinkedIn. The remaining three participants were contacted through LinkedIn by the thesis author.

4.2.1 Interview answers

The qualitative data collected from the interviews will be analysed by utilising themes observed from participant's answers and connecting them to the secondary research about cultural and social sustainability. Themes, also identified as concepts, are abstract patterns that can be found from within qualitative data (Mishra & Dey 2022). The analysis will primarily focus on the answers to questions 4 and 11, however, answers to the other questions will be acknowledged and outlined. The questions are written out in section 3.2.2 and further explained in section 4.2.

Out of the six interview participants, half were native Finns and half were of foreign descent. The participants of foreign descent enabled a wide perspective and scope as they were all from different countries and parts of the world, more specifically Australia, Turkey, and France. The Finnish participants were all from different areas of Finland. An aspect that remained consistent throughout all interviews were the answers to questions 2-3. Each participant had some level of experience in the field of international business, and they had all worked in multicultural environments prior to the interview. For a few of the participants, multiculturalism was automatically embedded into their lives, whereas others mentioned that working in a multicultural environment was a way to embrace change and learn about different cultures and experiences.

As questions 5 & 7-10 were targeted mainly towards the three foreign interview participants, the impact of these answers is not as strong when connecting themes to secondary data as the other half of the interviewee's were unable to answer. Instead, the answers provided a strong background towards understanding experiences within Finland from a foreign point of view.

During the analysis process for questions 5 & 7-10, discrepancies between each foreign participant's answers occurred. One interviewee shared their frustration with the Finnish job market and has found it challenging to find a job of any kind. Furthermore, this revealed expectations for Finnish companies to change their attitudes towards hiring multicultural talents. Another interviewee maintained a positive attitude towards Finland as a whole and shared their opinions on the value of networking when searching for a job in Finland. Additionally, they expressed the importance integration into Finnish society has for foreigners and encouraged everyone to avoid isolation.

The last interviewee also expressed the importance of networking when entering the Finnish job market, and that it varies depending on the field. In addition to having the time to search for a job, the last interviewee was grateful for their personal experience with global corporations and found it made a difference in the application process. Each foreign participant focused on a different aspect of their experiences within Finland, which in the end provided deeper insight and perspective the thesis author was not initially expecting.

Question 4, which asks about the most valuable aspect of multicultural work environments, uncovered the following themes: open and expanded view, variety of people and/or culture, possibility to break stereotypes, and a need for further development, which can all be supported by statements made by Keisala (2012, 12-14). An open and expanded view refers to the widening of perspectives and connects with the third theme, possibility to break stereotypes. One interviewee stated that when people of various backgrounds work together, their perspectives expand, and they have the ability to realise that stereotypes are hardly ever true. Those themes are linked to elements of social sustainability such as diversity and equality.

The theme, variety of people and/or culture, was brought up in 5/6 interviews, making it the most prevalent out of the themes listed above. The increased value placed on working with and meeting a variety of people is directly connected to cultural sustainability's norms, practices, and traditions that characterise people from various cultural backgrounds. The last theme which acknowledges the need for further development, highlights the importance of change and can be applied

to both cultural and social sustainable development. Each interview had produced at least one of the above-mentioned themes.

Question 11, which asked how companies in Finland could improve their work environments and practices, expressed the following themes: connecting students with job sectors, preparation and change of mindset, stepping out of comfort zone, and commitment to learning to work with internationals. In three interviews, the theme of connecting students with job sectors and companies was highlighted. Participants shared that they have noticed the discrepancy between what university programs teach and what skills are required for jobs in the same field and hoped for further collaboration between educational institutions and companies.

The second theme refers to the need for companies to prepare and change their mindset towards hiring multicultural workers. With a changing society and increased number of immigrants, all interviewees expressed the importance of the company's and management's attitude in the hiring process. The third theme, which encourages companies to step out of their comfort zone, is supported by Lahti's book, Monikulttuurinen työelämä (2014, 24). The three Finnish participants all commented on elements of Finnish working culture such as safety and comfort and encouraged companies to take steps towards pushing past boundaries. Although the last theme, commitment to learning to work with internationals, was only mentioned in two interviews, it aligns strongly with the concept of social sustainability. The support, integration and cohesion of all members of a society is what creates the sense of belonging which defines social sustainability.

5 RESULTS

Throughout the analysation process, the qualitative and quantitative data collected is compared to important elements of social and cultural sustainability, also defined as the theoretical secondary data. The objective for conducting a set of interviews and a survey is to allow for the possibility of comparing their results and arriving at a conclusion that provides answers to the research questions. The overall purpose of the research conducted for this thesis is to determine the connection and impact multicultural workplaces has on Finland's cultural and social sustainability. This section will therefore bridge the theoretical framework to the comparison of the survey and interview results.

To maintain the structure of the data analysis section, the comparison of answers will focus primarily on survey questions 5-7 and interview questions 4 & 11. Other observations and comparisons will be explained in one paragraph after the primary questions. The main elements of cultural sustainability: values, beliefs, traditions, language, and history will be utilised in addition to the elements of social sustainability: equality, equity, diversity, accessibility, and cohesion, to determine the connection between the theoretical framework and multicultural workplaces.

Question 5 of the survey received divided answers, however, in 4/6 of the interviews, it was clearly stated that multicultural environments are not more challenging and instead provide increased learning and networking opportunities, showing differing results. An aspect that possibly induced the differentiation was that the interview participants were given open ended questions to answer along with space to share reasoning and reflect on their experiences, whereas the survey had limited and closed options.

When comparing question 4 of the interviews to question 7 of the survey, there are more similarities. Although the interview asked for valuable aspects based on personal opinions and the survey asked for positive aspects and opportunities, the most common response was almost identical. The theme from question 4 of the interview, variety of people and/or culture, and the two most popular answer choices from question 7 of the survey, 'Meeting new people from various

backgrounds' & 'Way to learn about different cultural norms and traditions' conclude that people with experience from multicultural work environments in Finland find that familiarisation with new and various people and/or cultures to be the most important.

The responses and themes compared in the previous paragraph are linked to elements of both cultural and social sustainability. Multicultural workplaces create accessible and diverse environments that are made up of people from various cultural and language backgrounds, who may have differing beliefs. According to UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity from 2001, culturally diverse and sustainable environments, such as workplaces, provide increased options and intellectual opportunities for everyone involved, leading towards continuous development. The motivation to learn from colleagues' diversity can build cohesiveness and equity needed to remain sustainable and for instance, strengthen the workplace culture (Köchler 2012; Mensah 2019; Schindler 2019). As explained, the common answer from question 4 of the interview and question 7 of the survey emphasise the opportunities multicultural workplaces create for learning about various people and cultures.

When comparing question 11 from the interview and question 6 from the survey, there are varying results due to the different perspectives that the questions were asked from. In the survey, the question was focused on challenges faced in multicultural work environments, which directly targets people who have work experience from multicultural environments. On the other hand, in the interview the focus of the question was shifted to improvements that companies could take advantage of, which shined a positive light on Finland's situation in terms of multicultural companies. The improvements focused on first steps Finnish companies could take, such as a change in mindset or increasing collaboration between themselves and educational institutions. According to the survey, multicultural workplaces experience the most challenges related to communication and/or language (Figure 7). These results can however be connected, as the interview results suggest improvements and decisions companies could make towards multiculturalism, and the survey then recognises the challenges companies may face once multiculturalism has been integrated.

Both the challenges from the survey and improvements discovered via the interviews match and impact elements of social and cultural sustainability. As recalled in Nappa's Master's thesis (2020, 5-9), multicultural and multilingual workplaces are challenging to adapt to and take time to get accustomed to, however, they do provide new possibilities and growth as supported by the data analysation explained within sections 4.1.1 and 4.2.1.

Challenges related to communication and language can be connected back to cultural sustainability's elements of tradition and languages, as well as social sustainability's diversity. An individual's native language and communication style are a large part of identity and culture, and align with the aspect of equality, as every person deserves to communicate in their own way (UNESCO 2001). Diversity is an automatic result of multicultural workplaces (Tompos & Ablonczy-Mihályka 2018, 299) and can encourage new dynamics to be formed, which has been supported by Lahti (2014, 23-24). The abovementioned aspects are integral to multicultural environments, and although they may cause challenges, they also create learning and development possibilities.

While the challenges of multicultural work environments focused on communication and language, the improvements focused on further development and changes Finnish companies should take in order to become multicultural. The responses especially align with the sustainable elements of equity, accessibility, and values. For instance, the theme of increasing the collaboration between students and various job sectors prioritises fair and accessible opportunities for everyone. When considering multiculturalism and students of a foreign background, this is a crucial part of societal integration that can lead to higher retention of skilled workers required for Finland's job market, which is currently a goal of Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture (2022, 4). Alternatively, the theme preparation and change of mindset could require Finnish companies to redesign their values to help define their culture and bond with a multicultural demographic (Keisala 2012, 183). All themes from interview question 11 observe and impact social and cultural sustainable development as they are focused on improvements to grow Finnish companies and their practices to help them remain relevant and adapt to the changing demographic situation.

The following paragraph will summarise additional observations that were noted as a result of comparing the survey and interview results. Where the clear majority of the respondents of the survey were from the technology sector, the interview participants were mainly from the field of business, with two having experience from the technology sector as well. Another observation highlights the connection the survey and interview answers had to the OECD's (2018, 11) dimensions of global competence further described in section 2.1.3. For example, the dimensions, "Understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others" and, "Engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions across cultures" (OECD 2018, 11) match well with the respondents' answers regarding open mindedness and interest to learn about cultural differences and meet people of various backgrounds.

Additionally, a portion of the comments left in question 8 of the survey matched the themes gathered from the interviews. For the theme, open and expanded view, the following comments were aligned,

> *"Multicultural environment is nurturing, because it helps people from different backgrounds look at things from a different perspective"*
> *"You need to have an open mind, excellent communication skills, interest towards different cultures"*

For the theme, variety of people and/or culture, the following comments were aligned,

> *"Multicultural teams are better in problem solving, as they bring different aspects as they come from different backgrounds that have dealt differently with problems"*
> *"interest towards different cultures, understand different cultures, be ready to learn new not just work-wise but also from your colleagues."*

For the theme, preparation and change of mindset, the following comment was aligned,

> *"It more depends on individuals, mindsets and professional skills irrespective of whether they are from the same of different national/cultural background."*

For the theme, stepping out of comfort zone, the following comment was aligned,

"At first a multicultural environment may feel challenging, but it is a good challenge, and it soon turns to be a valuable source of inspiration, skills and meaningfulness."

The data analysation process for this thesis bridged various elements of social and cultural sustainability to themes uncovered through the qualitative and quantitative data collected via interviews and a survey. Additionally, after comparing the research results with elements of sustainability, it can be concluded that multiculturalism has a lasting and growing impact on both the social and cultural sustainability of Finnish SMEs.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this thesis was to support and help Finnish SMEs develop their practices and policies to allow for easier integration of multicultural employees, networks, and resources. Although it is not possible to measure the support that this thesis provides for companies, the recommendations created as a result of the research can encourage them to consider multiculturalism. The support could aid and lower the threshold for SMEs just beginning the process of becoming multicultural or those which have already taken steps by for example, hiring a multicultural employee. Since 99% of the companies within Finland are a small or medium sized enterprise (Business Finland N.d.), the aim of this work was crucial for further development especially due to Finland's fast-growing immigration rate (Statistics Finland 2021a).

The purpose was to determine whether multicultural work environments have an impact on the overall social and cultural sustainability of a Finnish SME. As thoroughly explained within chapter 5, the data supporting multiculturalism was linked to theoretical elements of cultural and social sustainability. The findings showed increased value, opportunities, and improvements for SMEs that shifted towards multiculturalism. For example, multicultural workplaces allow employees to learn about various cultures, developing the personnel's perspective and increasing diversity, which is an element of social sustainability. Cultural and social sustainability focus on continuous improvements both in society and the workplace, and multiculturalism has the ability to enhance it. The research confirms multiculturalism's growing impact on an SME's cultural and social sustainability; however, it does not determine the specific level due to the variety and amount of companies found in Finland.

In this work's research, both primary and secondary data were collected to ensure thorough and accurate answers to the research questions. An anonymous survey, which was distributed to various channels and networks and remained open for eight weeks, was conducted to collect quantitative data. To collect qualitative data, a series of six interviews were conducted over the span of two months with participants who all had experience from multicultural work environments in Finland. Secondary data was collected from sources such as

academic journals, articles, previous studies, and books about cultural and social sustainability. The data from the interviews and survey was then analysed to highlight important themes and compared to each other. Results from the interviews and survey were then connected to theoretical elements of social and cultural sustainability to determine the impact multicultural environments have on Finnish SMEs.

Throughout the process of completing this thesis, multiple other observations have been noted related to the topic of this thesis and previous studies. One observation was the concept of corporate language, which explained in Nappa's Master's thesis (2020, 9), is the introduction of an official company language, which may lead to discrimination due to different language proficiency levels among the staff. Furthermore, there are many jobs within Finland that cannot be completed without understanding of the Finnish language and it is discriminatory to require all companies to change their operating language, however, it is unclear how many of them require perfect levels of the language. The thesis author encourages further research to be completed on language requirements for jobs in Finnish companies, and whether multicultural persons who have learned the language are qualified.

Another observation finds that based on research, there is ample information published on multiculturalism on a global scale, however, much less on Finland, which was similarly observed by Nappa in their Master's thesis (2020, 3-4). For example, books written about multicultural workplaces in Finland by Keisala (2012), Lahti (2014), and Airala et al. (2013) were published a decade ago and emphasise the relevance of the discussion. Although multiculturalism is more prevalent in the present day, the topic has been brought up and considered in Finland for many years prior to the publication of this thesis, expressing its importance.

To narrow down the focus further, after conducting primary research and analysing secondary data, it has been observed that there are many people, such as the ones who participated in the interviews, that are passionate about multicultural workplaces and companies in Finland. Furthermore, multicultural companies, like the ones that they are employed at, can act as role models for

other SMEs interested in becoming multicultural. Companies considering multiculturalism and adjusting to changing demographics will assist with sustainability, equality, and inclusivity within the company as well as Finnish society. During the completion of this work, it is important to note that the thesis author did not discover any other studies that compare multiculturalism with cultural and social sustainability in Finland.

The final paragraphs of this chapter will ensure that the research questions introduced in the first chapter are answered while considering the conclusions gathered from the data analysis process. Each answer will be presented in the order that the questions are listed. The primary research question, focusing on why an SME should allocate their resources towards building a multicultural work environment, will be answered with an explanation, followed by the answer to the secondary questions. An important aspect to note is the connection that a company's resources have on their capability of taking the steps to building a multicultural workplace. A set of recommendations formed as a result of the research and analysis processes presented at the end will answer the last research question. To remind the reader, the research questions have been written below.

Research questions:

Why should Finnish SMEs allocate resources towards building a multicultural work environment?

- *Are multicultural work environments culturally and/or socially sustainable?*
- *What steps should companies take to build a multicultural work environment?*

The following paragraph will explain the answer to the primary research question, listed above. Finnish companies, more specifically SMEs, should allocate resources towards building a multicultural work environment to align with changing demographics within the Finnish population, provide accessible and equitable opportunities for all, and prioritise cultural and social sustainable development to remain relevant and updated with everchanging situations. As

discussed in chapters 4 and 5, multicultural workplaces create value by expanding employee knowledge and perspective as well as offering new networking possibilities, which can be strong advantages for SMEs aiming to grow within competitive markets. Possible resources found within companies that could be directed towards multicultural integration are employees, local connections, financial support, or skills found throughout staff. Continuous internationalisation and mixing of cultures are inevitable within growing societies, expressing the importance of companies also acknowledging the changes and taking steps to develop practices to allow for easier integration of multiculturalism into the workplace.

To answer the next research question, multicultural work environments have the possibility to become culturally and socially sustainable. As seen throughout the data analysation process in chapters 4 and 5, all three concepts are intertwined. The elements of cultural sustainability (language, history, values, beliefs, and traditions) and the elements of social sustainability (accessibility, equality, equity, diversity, and cohesion) are extensively discussed within this thesis and have been connected to the research results regarding participant's experiences from multicultural work environments. By embracing possible skills and networks found within Finland's multicultural population, companies can continuously improve, as characterised by sustainable development, and have the chance to stand out from competitors. Multiculturalism will have an ongoing influence on Finnish workplaces in the future due to population changes, internationalisation, and worker shortages, therefore impacting the overall social and cultural sustainability of the entire company.

To highlight the important aspects of what steps a company should consider when building a multicultural environment, the recommendations described below will answer the last secondary research question. These have been formed as a result of analysing the primary and secondary data and have the possibility to help SMEs decide which resources should be prioritised in the process of multicultural integration. In the initial stages, a few abstract recommendations should be taken into consideration, however, they are important to remember throughout the entire process of becoming a multicultural enterprise. The recommendations are as follows:

1. Change in mindset – meaning that companies, both their personnel and management level employees, must shift their attitude and perspective on the importance and benefits of multiculturalism. Although this may be vague, beginning with a reflection on bias and analysing where changes can be made is integral.

2. Patience – adjustments to company practices and personnel require time and patience to work or have a lasting impact. The timing for building an equitable and multicultural work environment varies on a company's size and resources, making it challenging to determine how long it will take to see the changes in action.

3. Prioritising inclusivity – inclusive workplaces both accept their diversity and ensure a sense of purpose and belonging for their employees. This can be difficult to track and manage, making it abstract, however, beginning with data collection and analysis to understand the diversity is an important step.

After the initial abstract recommendations are understood by all personnel, it is effective to advance towards establishing the action steps required for building and integrating multiculturalism into the work environment. Since every SME has different characteristics, the resources, such as size, available within a company determine the scope and effectiveness of the steps described. In turn, this means that steps may be re-arranged, and some can be left out.

1. Personnel changes – managers are often hired for specific reasons, such as for increasing profit or improving communication (Indeed Editorial Team 2023). Making the shift towards multiculturalism can be a strategic move to adapt to changes, and changes to the personnel, including managers, may be necessary.

2. Trainings – requiring all employees to participate in mandatory trainings related to topics such as culture or inclusivity can encourage changes in mindset and provide new opportunities for staff. When training topics are connected to policies and practices, implementation and understanding can occur easier.

3. Determining of practices – aspects such as a company's language and values create the base for workplace culture (Airala et al. 2013, 12) and are important when creating an inclusive environment. Practices and

policies must consider everyone that they apply to and be easily understood to prevent tension or discrimination.

4. Translation of documents – following the point of equal understanding, ensuring that all of the company's official documents such as contracts are translated into a language decided upon, typically this is the official language of the company or a universal language like English. Additionally, this specific step was mentioned in two of the interviews conducted during the research process.

5. Hiring requirements – changing requirements within the application and hiring process to eliminate room for bias and primarily focus on a person's credentials is important. Although not perfect, tools such as anonymous hiring can lessen the possibility of discrimination (Rinne 2018).

6. Collaboration between companies and local institutions – three interview participants highlighted the importance of increasing the collaboration between companies and local educational institutions like universities. Updating schools with changes to the industry or new training requirements can ease the process for hiring multicultural workers.

7. Utilisation of local resources – local resources such as organisations and governmental projects aimed at supporting foreigners living in Finland should be utilised to outsource. Recognising local expertise not found within company walls can increase efficiency and provide networking possibilities.

The completion of the research for this thesis confirms that multicultural workplaces enable the cultural and social sustainable development of Finnish small and medium sized enterprises. Multiculturalism is an inevitable factor in the modern world with continuously growing immigration rates and internationalisation. Sustainable development aims at improving the world for future generations and will remain a relevant concept. The research conducted has determined the intertwining of the two topics and highlights the importance and impact of them in regard to Finnish companies. Further studies are encouraged as situations and demographics are constantly shifting and new discoveries are made towards the topic.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Description of the survey.

Multicultural work environments

Hello, my name is Ella Muja, I am a third year student studying Entrepreneurship and Team leadership at the Tampere University of Applied Sciences in Proakatemia. Currently, I am in the process of writing my thesis on the social and cultural sustainability of multicultural workplaces in Finland. The data collected will help me develop practical recommendations for companies and organizations to build a multicultural environment and accept cultural diversity in the workplace.

Multiculturalism, cultural diversity, and internationalism, are terms often mixed and can easily be used in the wrong context. Here is a short description of their differences:
Cultural diversity refers to the characteristics that make a society or group unique, such as race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, etc. Whereas **multiculturalism** refers to the different cultural groups found within an organization or country. **Internationalism** then refers to being, relying on, or operating in more than one country. Companies can easily be multicultural and employ a diverse staff, but not be international, if all of their offices and operations are in one country.

The following anonymous survey will help me collect data and supporting information for my thesis. The data will be stored in an Excel spreadsheet for the duration of the thesis process, and be deleted once the thesis has been published. Any confidential personal information (name and contact details) submitted to the survey will be stored in an Excel and used for potential interviews, and personal information will only be published in the thesis with consent. Confidential data and information will be securely disposed from all platforms after the thesis has been published.

Please feel free to contact me with further comments or questions - ella.muja@tuni.fi

Appendix 2. Privacy notice sent to interview participants 1 (2).

PRIVACY NOTICE

EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, EU 2016/679)

Date of preparation: 08.03.2023

Purpose of the study?

The purpose of the research conducted for this bachelor's thesis is to develop a visual portfolio/pamphlet for Finnish companies with practical instructions for building a multicultural work environment.

The main objective is to emphasize the importance multicultural workplaces has on both cultural and social sustainability.

Purpose for collecting personal data?

The data is collected for Ella Muja's bachelor's thesis written about the social and cultural sustainability of multicultural workplaces in Finland.

What information is collected?

The personal data collected includes the name, profession, and contact details of the person being interviewed. Additionally, notes will be taken during the interview and transcribed into a document.

Where is the data collected from?

Data is collected via interviews between the thesis author, Ella Muja, and interviewees. In addition, an anonymous survey is conducted to collect general data.

To whom is the data transferred?

The information collected from the interviews and survey may be shared with Talent Boost's two representatives and the thesis supervisor. Talent Boost is the commissioner of Ella Muja's thesis. The data will remain in the Tampere region of Finland.

Where is the data stored?

Data is going to be collected and stored in secure servers and Microsoft platforms at the Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK). Access is restricted to only those with rights to the spreadsheet.

How long is the collected data stored?

The collected data will be used to aid in the completion of the thesis in the Spring of 2023, and once all thesis processes are finished, it will be deleted from all of TAMK's secure servers and Microsoft platforms. Considering the current schedule of the thesis completion, this will occur in the Autumn of 2023.

Your Rights

Appendix 2. Privacy notice sent to interview participants 2 (2).

The registered individual has the right to withdraw their consent to participate in the study. If the individual withdraws their consent, all personal data will be deleted immediately. The individual also has the right to file a complaint with the Office of Data Protection Ombudsman if the data legislation has been violated in the processing of any personal data.

The individual has the following rights according to the EU General Data Protection Regulation:

1. The right to review and check data concerning them.
2. The right to correct their data.
3. The right to delete their data. The right to delete data does not apply if data processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest or for scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes, if the right to delete data prevents or greatly complicates the processing of personal data.
4. The right to restrict their data.

The data controller, contact person, and conductor of the study

Ella Muja, ella.muja@tuni.fi

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