C-suite Network: Södertälje Science Park

Improving the understanding of arranged business-to-business networks, potentials, and challenges: an applied research on a Science Park in Sweden.

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Abstract
This master thesis aims to investigate best practices related to arranged networks, focusing on their conditions, essential characteristics, challenges, and sustainability perspectives. Specifically, it explores the perceptions of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the manufacturing industry, with a particular emphasis on C-suite executives. This thesis utilizes qualitative methods, including interviews and observations, with both the selected target group and individuals actively engaged in and supporting these networks and communities. The primary objective is to gain insights into the current management, organization, and implementation of organized networks as well as insight in how the target group perceives networks. The research problem lies in the challenge of determining an optimal networking and network implementation approach, particularly within the context of Science Parks where limited research has been conducted in this specific domain. Given the complex and abstract nature of arranged networks, multiple layers and factors need careful consideration. It has been observed during the research that the relationships and trust among members play a critical role in the degree of openness and closeness within these networks, leading to increased complexity. Furthermore, the significance of relationships and trust in perceiving the value of the network is underscored, prompting inquiries into effective relationship-building and rapid trust establishment. Additionally, the roles assumed by network participants are crucial, with literature emphasizing the importance of a diversified group, while interviews with C-suite executives reveal a preference for a homogeneous group comprising like-minded individuals confronting similar challenges and issues.

The thesis was carried out in close collaboration with Södertälje Science Park (SSCP), a Science Park in Sweden. As a result, the findings have practical contributions for Södertälje Science Park in how they can implement a business-to-business network for C-suits. Additionally, the thesis seeks to contribute with theoretical insights that can facilitate the development of networks in various contexts, such as other Science Parks, incubators, and similar entities. Consequently, this research has the potential to offer valuable insights to policymakers and practitioners, including Science Park managers and companies operating within Science Parks.

Keywords: Innovation, arranged networks, Science Parks, network theory, social capital.
Acknowledgements

Before expressing my gratitude to some individuals, I would like to share a bit about my journey. Not only have I learned a lot about networking during these months, but I have also discovered some things about myself. These months haven't just been about studying full-time. I’ve also worked at Nyköping Municipality, where I have had the opportunity to apply my theoretical knowledge to practical tasks. However, most importantly, I have been (and still am) a mother to my amazing son, Charlie. Risking sounding a bit cheesy and sentimental, I must say that this wouldn’t been possible without him. He is my source of energy and my motivation to make him proud has driven me through many late nights and early mornings of hard work. Thank you, Charlie, I love you. Additionally, my fantastic partner Viktor has taken care of household chores, ensuring there was always dinner prepared and a warm bath to calm my nerves.

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Introduction

1.1 Background
We live in a world that is becoming more and more complex in the form of technology, high knowledge intensity and uncertainty, resulting in difficulties for companies to stay and remain innovative. Innovation is crucial for companies to stay ahead of their competitors (Beck & Schenker-Wicki, 2012) and knowledge is an important source of a company’s core competitiveness (Wang & Qi, 2022). These difficulties can be particularly noticeable in SMEs since innovation often needs a combination of diversified and specific knowledge that is less often available within SMEs (Benhayoun et al., 2020). Innovation management emphasizes a shift from knowledge creation to knowledge trading and managing knowledge flows. Innovation is therefore a network-based activity, and more and more firms and organizations are realizing that the innovative landscape is much less of a single enterprise activity (Tidd & Bessant, 2021). Indeed, the locus of innovation is no longer the individual or the firm but, increasingly, the network in which a firm is embedded (Powell et al. 1996). A network can be defined as ‘a complex, interconnected group or system’, and networking imply using the arrangement to accomplish tasks (Tidd & Bessant, 2021). There are certainly many types of networks, the one form that is being studied in this thesis is the so-called arranged business to business networks between small- medium enterprises (SMEs). These networks have gained popularity for two main reasons. Firstly, European Union policy-making programs believe that they can promote improved competitiveness and renewal for their participants. Secondly, many practitioners today engage in such networks to develop and strengthen their businesses (Wincent, 2005).

Arranged business-to-business networks could have many benefits, including gaining access to valuable resources from other firms (Pittaway et al., 2004) and participate with united efforts to develop their business operations or exchange/share resources for strategic implementation in joint productions, product development, or marketing issues (Wincent, 2005). However, as to what constitutes a successful network is debated widely in the literature, says Pittaway et al (2004). Some argue for an open network with many collaborative partners and claim that this has a positive relationship with innovation output (Shan et al., 1994). Others suggest that a closed network has been found to foster innovation more than opened ones (Coleman, 1988). Ahuja’s (2000) empirical findings shows that increasing trust, developing, and improving collaboration, and reducing opportunism can shape network structures and create cohesive interconnected partners, ultimately leading to
benefits for the firms involved (Ahuja, 2000). Moreover, the ties between the actors could have a significant effect whether they are so-called strong or weak ties (Granovetter, 1975). Due to these divergent views on networks, Pittaway (2004) argues that there is no consensus as to the optimal networking configuration (Pitaway et al., 2004).

Business incubators (BIs) is an umbrella term for any organizations that offer affordable office spaces and shared administrative services. Throughout the years, these BIs have been marketed using various labels, with Science Parks (SCPs) being one of the commonly used terms that is more or less synonymous with them. The opportunities provided by different incubators are often tied to their unique missions and goals. In the case of SCPs, their primary objective is to translate research and development discoveries into innovative products or technologies. Their focus lies in the pursuit of development as a distinct objective, rather than solely nurturing and fostering entrepreneurial talent, companies, and profits, as observed in other types of incubators, says Bollingtoft and Ulhoi (2005). A key argument in support of SCPs is the assertion of networking benefits they offer (Lindelöf & Löfsten, 2001).

Södertälje Science Park (SSCP) is located outside Stockholm, Sweden. SSCP works on behalf of Södertälje Municipality, AstraZeneca, Scania and KTH. Their mission is to create an open arena for innovation and development within sustainable production and production flows with a clear focus on SMEs (SSCP, 2023). SSCP has since 2018 worked with different types of programs with various focuses but all of them with the same purpose as described above, some of them being network programs. For SSCP sustainability is an overarching DNA. Triple helix is also a guiding principle for all Science parks, which entails the collaboration between academia, industry, and the public sector. As a result of the triple helix model, it is natural to work with networks between companies and to make sure that knowledge between companies, academia and the public sector can be transferred and shared.

I came in contact with SSCP; hence they requested the assistance from a student to investigate the potential implementation of a business-to-business network into their program catalog. This network would be targeted towards c-suite and executive managers in small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises. They had concluded that these types of arranged business-to-business networks were lacking in the region. Additionally, SSCP has a mission to assist companies with a focus on sustainability. Previous research has demonstrated that SCPs have the potential to serve as sustainable knowledge facilitators and exhibit a proactive
attitude towards environmental commitment. However, there is still room for improvement in their sustainability approaches. For instance, Laguna and Durán-Romero (2017) conducted a qualitative analysis in Spain and concluded that SCPs possess a high potential for promoting sustainability (Laguna & Durán, 2017; Sandoval Hamón et al., 2022).

The objective of this study is to increase the understanding of how SSCP can implement a C-suite/executive network for SMEs in the manufacturing industry in Stockholm. Moreover, this thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of how SCPs in general can manage networks for c-suits/top executives by suggesting actionable insights that can inform the development of science parks that aim to foster business-to-business networking to enhance innovative capacity as well as sustainable practices. Through this endeavor, the intention is to provide not only practical knowledge to the SSCP but also new theoretical insights that may be valuable to other SCP’s policymakers, businesses, and further research.

Based on this request the research was designed with a qualitative research approach. A theoretical framework was built regarding the problem definition and later, data was collected using qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and observations with c-suites and organizers and supporters of networks and communities. This research is mostly seen as applied given that it is aiming to find a practical solution to an existing problem (Booth et al., 2016) and therefore the aim was to co-produce, together with SSCP a framework/model for network programs that was based on the knowledge gathered in this thesis.

This thesis begins with providing a more thorough background of SSCP, followed by a problematization, previous research, and the aim of this research together with research questions. In chapter 2, a theoretical framework and a literature review is presented, which explains key concepts and relevant theories within the research field. In chapter 3, the research methodology is described as well as ethical concerns, which follows by chapter 4 where the empirical findings are presented. Lastly, an analysis and discussion of the research was conducted. And finally, conclusions and the framework/model for SSCP is presented together with recommendations for future studies.

1.2 The co-producing partner (Södertälje Science Park)
A science park serves as an environment that should foster the growth of knowledge-intensive companies by offering them access to infrastructure, networks, and business
development opportunities. It can be viewed as a hub that brings together individuals, ideas, knowledge, and creativity, and often serves as a catalyst for major innovation and development projects. Typically, a science park is closely affiliated with a nearby university (Sisp, n.d). Södertälje Science Park (SSCP) main partners and founders are AstraZeneca, KTH, Scania and Södertälje Municipality. SSCP is both a physical place which they describe as a knowledge-intensive area and a business which cooperates between business, academia, and society. They also describe themselves as a national actor that connects the public sector, academia, and business with the aim of strengthening the conditions for development and competitiveness. With their offering of different programs and activities their goal is to strengthen and develop SMEs in sustainable production/manufacturing or with industrial service. These offers include everything from business and idea development, to scale-up and support in finding and developing sustainable production solutions as well as forming networks, see below (SSCP, 2023).

The services provided by SSCP to companies:

- **Develop the business**- help find solutions to challenges and move the firm forward with focus on sustainability.
- **Product & production** - if the company has a prototype and is closing on a production phase or if the company has an overall challenge when it comes to production.
- **Build Networks** - on the site or through their networks the companies have the possibility to meet other companies with similar challenges (SSCP, 2023).

1.2.1 Commitment, content, practicalities, and capture

The task presented by Södertälje Science Park was to investigate how they could implement a C-suite/executive network into their program catalog that could potentially generate value for its members. The network should also reflect SSCP objectives which is to strengthen and develop companies within sustainable production and production flows with a clear focus on SMEs. As mentioned before, a gap had been identified in terms of a network for this selected target group. SSCP had numerous queries about the optimal approach to implementing a business-to-business network and accordingly the questions were many. This resulted in a list of ‘general questions of issues’ that they shared with me during one of our set-up meetings (see table 1).
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Table 1 - ‘General questions of issues’ and their thematic classification (SSCP and Siewerts, 2023).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘General questions of issues’ from SSCP</th>
<th>Themes/Topics</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which themes on meetings attract businesses?</td>
<td>content/practicalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long should there be between meetings?</td>
<td>practicalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many participants should be in the network?</td>
<td>practicalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What value does the companies see in arranged networks?</td>
<td>content/practicalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what order should different activities be done?</td>
<td>content/practicalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the benefits vs. challenges working with c-suite networks for a Science-Park?</td>
<td>content/practicalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the target group consider networks or networking? What are their feelings and thoughts?</td>
<td>commitment/content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can we motivate members in the network to be engaged and active?</td>
<td>commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can sustainability be integrated into the network structure, becoming a sort of DNA?</td>
<td>content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can we continue working with the firms after the program ends? Will they remain part of a network even after the program concludes, and if so, how do we facilitate this?</td>
<td>capture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These questions were later categorized based on what they would answer; the content of the program, practicalities relating to the design of the program, how to make its potential members commit and how to and how to capture the value created in the program for future programs, for example. This resulted in categorizations: content, commitment, practicalities, and capture. We concluded that a comprehensive investigation into successful networks was necessary, and therefore a macro analysis of relevant networks was suitable for this purpose. Also, a literature review that accounts for existing research on the subject, and interviews with C-suite executives in the manufacturing industry to gain insights into their perspectives, thoughts, and values on arranged networks and similar. The resulting findings will subsequently be transformed into a framework or model that can be integrated into their program catalog. The framework or model will be collaboratively designed during a workshop, adhering to these themes/topics. This way of categorizing was also a process of ending up with a couple of research questions for this thesis.

1.3 Problematization and problem definition

In highly industrialized countries, companies must be innovative to compete with other firms. However, it is difficult to become and remain innovative, especially given technological and market environments characterized by high knowledge intensity and uncertainty. Moreover, the knowledge and competence a company needs to create new products or processes are
scattered and many times difficult to locate (Beck & Schenker-Wicki, 2012). Innovation also requires the combination of diversified and specific knowledge that is less often available within SMEs (Benhayoun et al., 2020). Given this, SMEs are less likely to innovate by themselves (Powell et al., 1996). Therefore, one possible way for companies to become and remain more innovative is to participate in collaborative activities with other companies (Beck & Schenker-Wicki, 2012).

Several studies have shown the importance and benefits of networking in terms of improved innovation performance as well as staying competitive on the market (Woods et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2010; Nieto & Santamaría 2007; Pittaway et al., 2004). Business-to-business networks are set up to help make innovation happen, whether it is creating a new product, service, or processes (Tidd & Bessant, 2018). C-suite/executive managers are said to play a key role in networked environments as well as a critical role in the coordination and integration of activities across organizations (Bergquist and Dimovski, 2018).

Networking and innovation are studied in several fields within social science. These include economic and regional geography, organizational behavior, sociology, operations management, political economy, entrepreneurship and small business, technology management, marketing, and strategic management (Tidd & Bessant, 2021, p. 281). Studies on whether firms can create competitive advantage in networks and cooperations with other firms within cross-border regions has also been done as well as what role do the barriers to collaboration that firms face have (Leick, 2011). However, studies argue that there is no consensus as to the optimal networking configuration. The optimal design and how a network ought to be managed depends on the actions that the structure seeks to facilitate (Gemser et al. 1996) it is dependent on its industrial context and on what a firm is seeking to use its network for (Kaufmann and Tödtling 2000; Nootseboom 2000). Network forms are indeed complex. In addition, there are several identifiable factors that promote and prevent the establishment of business-to-business networks (Pittaway et al., 2005). As there is no ‘copy-paste’ function - consequently, there is a necessity to understand the critical success factors, different challenges, values, and potentially other layers regarding this. Additionally, research done on institutional mechanisms such as incubators and SCPs are lacking in the research of networks. According to Pittaway et al., (2004) this area clearly presents a priority for future research. The evidence of their research examining networks and innovation and the role of institutional mechanisms is considered insufficient to draw any useful conclusions. They
conclude that despite the insufficient evidence, it is possible that innovation policies and regional infrastructure can assist network activities leading to innovation. But, how they do so, and their effectiveness in doing so, is unclear. They also state that to which extent SCPs promote networking between firms appears to be mixed and more research on how SCPs can foster networks are lacking (Pittaway et al., 2004) A systematic literature review done by Sandoval Hamón et al., (2020) aims to investigate the relationship between science and technology parks (STP) and universities. In this article, the authors explain that research in this domain has progressed over the decades which includes according to the authors of three different phases. From pre-2000 most of the research was conducted with the objectives to investigate this novel phenomenon with many of the studies being case studies on the newly opened parks. 2011 and onward the authors say that more research has been conducted on the topic and that new areas of investigation have been identified and explored, including open innovation to a new generation of these parks. Also, studies of social capital, collaboration and innovation networks have been conducted from micro- and macro-level perspectives. The role of universities in STP has been emphasized, particularly in knowledge co-creation and acting as a channel for inter-organizational relationship building, and their contribution to regional innovation systems. Intellectual capital, especially intellectual property (IP), and sustainability issues in STP have also been explored. However, there are still gaps in the literature and further optimization of these contributions is necessary, claims the authors (Sandoval Hamón et al., 2020). Furthermore, one area that has received limited attention in relation to the company's network position is the firm's network strategy, which is characterized by the manager's attitude towards networking and collaboration (Pittaway et al., 2000).

1.4 Purpose/aim and research questions

The purpose of the study is to increase the understanding of how Södertälje Science Park can implement a C-suite/executive network for SMEs in the manufacturing industry in Stockholm. Moreover, this thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of how Science Parks in general can manage networks for leading positions/top executives by suggesting which specific factors are central to success and challenges as well as sustainability factors.

Research questions:
1. What are the necessary conditions for a Science Park to successfully implement a C-suite network tailored to manufacturing SMEs?
   a. What are the essential characteristics as well as primary challenges of a business-to-business network that effectively support SMEs?
   b. What factors influence C-suite executives' participation in networking activities within the manufacturing industry?
   c. How could sustainability be implemented in a business-to-business network?

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

   2.1 Theoretical framework
   This section introduces the relevant theoretical concepts and models pertaining to the subject. It provides an overview and explanation of the key theoretical frameworks and models that are applicable to the research topic. By presenting these theoretical foundations, it establishes the conceptual framework that will be used to analyze and interpret the research findings.

   2.1.1 Networks
   A network can be defined as ‘a complex, interconnected group or system’, and networking imply using the arrangement to accomplish tasks (Tidd & Bessant, 2021, p. 281). Innovative networks offer benefits in the form of internal development and have thus become more popular in recent years. A network consists of nodes that are occupied by individuals, firms, business units, universities, governments, customers, or other actors. And between these nodes there are links or interactions (Tidd & Bessant, 2021; Madill et al., 2004). These ties form patterns that create the network's structure. The positions of the nodes within this structure are determined by their connections to other nodes and their position in the network. These positions can influence how much control or influence a node has within the network, as well as the flow of information and resources through the network (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011). The ties can be divided into strong and weak ties. According to Granovetter (1983), strong ties often consist of relations as family, close friends, and relatives. These ties are often more available, more motivated to provide support and assistance. In contrast to strong ties, weak ties typically lack the same level of trust and reciprocity. They are often characterized as more transient connections and primarily involve business relationships. Weak ties can provide opportunities to access new networks and gain valuable information.
related to loans, contracts, laws and regulations, material resources, and other areas of importance (Granovetter, 1983).

2.1.2 Network theorizing
Borgatti and Halgin's (2011) study tries to clarify the concept of network theory. To accomplish this, the authors introduce two prominent network theories in the field: Granovetter’s (1973) strength of weak ties (SWT) theory and Burt’s (1992) structural holes (SH) theory. Granovetter (1975) proposed that as the bond between two individuals strengthens, the likelihood of their social circles overlapping increases, resulting in a greater probability of sharing connections with others. Granovetter (1975) argues that this transitivity is a natural outcome of tie formation, which is often driven by shared characteristics or homophily. In other words, people tend to establish connections with those who have similar attributes (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011). The second assumption of the SWTs theory is that bridging ties have the potential to generate innovative ideas. A bridging tie refers to a connection between an individual and someone who is not part of their existing friend group. The theory posits that through a bridging tie, an individual can be exposed to information and ideas that are not already circulating within their close network. The figure shows the relationships between nodes. When A and B share a strong tie and B and C also share a strong tie, it is suggested that A and C are more likely to have at least a weak tie. Regarding bridging ties, A's connection with G is a bridging tie. As A is the sole individual in their social group with a connection outside of the group, they have the advantage of gaining access to information from G that is not yet known by the rest of their group. If removing the A-G tie it disconnects the network (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011).
Burt’s (1992) theory of structural holes (SH) is concerned with ego networks, which are the nodes and ties surrounding a given node. Burt (1992) argues that a node with more structural holes, or non-redundant ties, is likely to have access to more novel information than a node with fewer structural holes. This is because a node with more non-redundant ties has connections to different pools of information, while a node with fewer non-redundant ties may receive the same information from multiple sources. According to Burt (1992), A has a greater number of structural holes compared to B, indicating that A has more unique connections (Burt 1992; Borgatti and Halgin, 2011).

However, strong social ties based on personal relationships can also play a significant role in networking activities. Bollingtoft and Ulhoi (2005) refer to a research done by Hu and Korneliussen (1997) which suggested that personal connections can lead to improved company performance. Through such social ties, individuals can access support, knowledge, and complementary resources, which promote social cooperation among key players (Bollingtoft and Ulhoi, 2005)

2.1.3 Network typologies

There are different types of networks that could be formed. In this study one of them is of more interest, the so-called engineered or arranged network. Emergent networks are networks that develop because of environmental interdependence and through common interests. An engineered or arranged network requires some triggering to form and develop. This type of network usually has a nodal firm which recruits the members without the rationale of environmental interdependence or similar interests (Tidd and Bessant, 2021). In this study the nodal firm is a Science Park. Tidd & Bessant (2021) claims that these types of engineered or arranged networks are set up to help make innovation happen, whether it is creating a new product, service, or processes (2021). A business network, by definition, enacts and is enacted by a specific organizational field including the relations within the business network’s boundaries (Ricciardi et al., 2018).

If the social interactions in the network involve the transfer of what the authors (Cook et al., 1983) refer to as valued items. These could be provision of information, affection or approval, advice, or more tangible things like goods and direct services. The authors
reference to Emerson’s (1972) earlier work and states that the definition of exchange networks is that (1) it is a set of actors either individuals or corporate entities, (2) a distribution of valuable resources among these actors, (3) a collection of exchange possibilities for each actor with others in the network, (4) a set of exchange relations that have been established and utilized over time, and (5) a series of network connections that connect exchange relations into a unified network structure (Cook et al., 1983).

2.1.4 The nature of networks

Tidd and Bessant (2021) state that the network can influence its members in two ways. The first one being the flow and sharing of information within the network and the second being about the position an actor takes in the network, which in turn affects the power and control imbalances. Networks can be dependent on its quantity, quality and type of the interactions or links; this controls whether the network is considered tight or loose (Tidd & Bessant, 2021).

There are different ways of categorizing networks; one way is to identify the objectives. Some of them are technologically driven, entrepreneurs in the form of joint ventures or commercial networks that focus on sharing resources and information (Serrano et al., 2022). According to Tidd & Bessant there are four major arguments why networks should be formed; collective efficiency, collective learning, risk-taking and intersections in different knowledge sets (see table x) (Tidd & Bessant, 2021, p.280).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why Networks?</th>
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<tr>
<td>There are four major arguments pushing for greater levels of networking in innovation.</td>
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| Collective efficiency | in a complex environment that demands a diverse range of responses, it becomes challenging for small to medium-sized firms to possess all the necessary competencies in-house. Networking, however, provides a means for accessing diverse resources through a collaborative exchange process, which is a fundamental principle underlying the cluster model. |
|-----------------------|
| Collective learning    | networking provides more than just a chance to share scarce or costly resources. It also enables a collaborative learning process, wherein partners can share experiences, challenge established models and practices, bring fresh perspectives and ideas, and mutually support experimentation. |
| Collective risk-taking | drawing upon the concept of collective action, networking allows for the consideration of higher levels of risk than what any single participant would be willing to undertake. This is the underlying principle behind many precompetitive consortia focused on high-risk R&D. |
| Intersection of different knowledge sets | networking also enables the establishment of diverse relationships across knowledge frontiers and exposes participating organizations to novel stimuli and experiences. |

Table 2 - Major arguments for greater levels of networking in innovation (Tidd & Bessant, 2021, p. 280).

Pittaway et al (2004) explain that their findings suggest that there are two major reasons that explain why networks between companies are formed. The first focuses on the resource
availability that the companies may need. So that the company in question is forced to form network relationships with other companies as a way of gaining access to valuable resources that are missing in the company. The second factor being that companies that are used to networking and have previously joined networks tend to have a greater ability to develop network contacts (Pittaway et al., 2004).

2.1.5 Social capital
This research also takes its starting point from social capital theory, which recognizes that beyond purely economic contractual relationships, social factors also play a significant role and need to be considered when looking into networks (Bollingtoft & Ulhoi, 2005). Social capital is defined based on its function. It is not a singular entity but comprises various elements that all share two common features: they are all constituted by some form of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions for actors - whether individuals or organizations - within that structure. Similar to other forms of capital, social capital is productive and enables the achievement of certain goals that would otherwise be unattainable without it. Unlike other forms of capital, social capital resides in the relationships between and among actors. It does not reside within the actors themselves or in physical production assets. Since purposeful organizations can be actors ("organizational actors") just as individuals can, relationships between organizational actors can also constitute social capital for them (a well-known example being the sharing of information enabling industry-wide pricing (Coleman, 1988).

2.1.6 Communities
The discussion regarding whether something can be referred to as a community, as well as the very definition of a community, has been subject to historical study (Cobigo et al. 2017). Aristoteles, a philosopher who extensively explored societies and their composition, played a significant role in this discourse. He employed the term "koinônia" (community) to describe a form of association or society in which various components share common functions and interests (Miller, 2011). Numerous attempts have been made to define the concept of community, and distinctions have been drawn between communities and societies, particularly in terms of the various bonds among actors. Cobigo et al., (2017) have undertaken the task of further researching this matter by presenting the different definitions in their article. From all the sources they studied, 13 themes were identified: physical proximity, sharedness, group, boundedness, interaction, belonging, support, sustainability, symbolism, territory-free, process, diversity, and tangibility. Some of them are more reported such as
physical proximity. The notion of community as something shared, like shared ties, common interests, and common identity. The term group referred to a collective of individuals, a network, a clan, or nodes. Bounded was used to describe definitions that highlighted the boundaries separating community members from those outside (such as age cohorts, religious or intellectual traditions, or employment statuses). Definitions that emphasized various forms of interaction, such as work-related interactions, social interactions, or engagement, were also acknowledged. Belonging refers to the definitions that specify feelings of connection, commitment, belongingness, or unity. And support, examples of such aspects include solidarity, cooperation, and help (Cobigo et al. 2017., p. 189).

2.2 Literature review

The literature review provides a thorough analysis of the existing academic literature on the research topic. It specifically focuses on the relationship between networks and innovation, including the nature and strength of their connections. It also examines examples in the literature that highlight important characteristics and challenges related to networks, particularly within science parks. The main objective of this investigation is to gain insights into how institutional mechanisms like Science Parks can influence and facilitate business-to-business networks, ultimately fostering greater innovation capacity and sustainable development.

2.2.1 Value creation and practicalities

The network needs a sustainable idea towards which the business can orient itself. The idea must be anchored with the members at an early stage. When the idé is embodied in a strong brand it has the potential to create a strong sense of community and belonging among members and can also serve as an instrument in marketing, says Klofsten (2004). It is also important to emphasize that the ideas are not static but should be developed and refined in interaction with the outside world, such as members, financiers, and other involved actors (Klofsten, 2004). Möller et al (2005) states that a network could be classified based on the objective or idea that they pursue. For instance, there are technological focused networks where the objective is to exchange knowledge and resources related to these types of issues. Networks with the objectives that lie in the undertaking of joint ventures could for instance be referred to as entrepreneurial networks (Serrano et al., 2022).
There is a value for firms to obtain access to new markets and technologies and in some cases speeding products to market. Coles et al. (2003) suggest that motivation behind firms collaborating in networks could be to acquire access to novel or complementary competencies, technologies, and markets (Coles et al., 2003).

The activities or the content in the meetings/programs should create benefits for the actors. However, some activities or content Klofsten (2004) states may not appeal to daily operations for some firms. There may also be a lack of time and financial resources for the companies to participate as well as a generally negative attitude and an ignorance of what these activities can generate in the form of value for the company (Klofsten, 2004).

It is important that the number of members is balanced. However, this can be a vague concept and many times difficult to know what the most suitable number of members is. More members can increase diversity but at the same time cause a loss of control, Klofsten claims (Klofsten, 2004).

The starting point should be that there is an organization that coordinates and develops the cluster's or the network's activities and manages relationships necessary for its growth (Klofsten, 2004). Coordination is required to obtain benefits of the network. Research done on inter-organizational networking suggests that a number of core processes need managing in a network. The network should be treated as a particular form of organization (Tidd & Bessant, 2021).

2.2.2 Network configuration
In Pittaway et al., (2004) systematic review, various studies on networks are presented. The author discusses network configuration and cites several studies to support the argument that network configurations are not static, but rather they are constantly evolving and adapting in response to partners' requirements and the context in which the network operates. It is also shaped by the actors in the network and how capable they are to manage networks (Kash and Rycroft 2002; Koch 2003; Larson 1991).

2.2.3 Different roles and diversity in business-to-business networks
So-called driving spirits and committed members are important and a system to support these people can be beneficial (Klofsten, 2004). Tidd and Bessant (2021) also highlight this and
name them ‘key individuals. These could be so-called champions, sponsors that lead, direct, and facilitate the cluster organization (Tidd & Besant, 2021). Opportunities that arise in collaboration between companies need to be taken advantage of and attractive offers need to be created for members (Klofsten, 2004). Tidd and Bessant (2021) claims that a key individual is responsible for both bringing people together and cultivating a comprehensive sense of purpose across the system.

Previous research has been done on related varieties (Boschma & Iamarina, 2007) which suggests that the most effective exchange of ideas and spread of knowledge takes place between companies operating in closely related but different industries. Glaeser et al., (1992), however, believe that learning takes place best when the members are within the same industry (Glaeser et al. 1992). Pittaway et al., (2004) also discuss the subject but in a broader term. They state that innovation system research has shown that effective innovation is often achieved through the exchange of knowledge between different systems. This means that it is beneficial for companies to collaborate with other companies, universities, suppliers, and customers to integrate different knowledge bases, behaviors, and ways of thinking, particularly in the development of complex and radical innovations. By promoting formal and informal communication between people with different backgrounds and competencies, the chances of unexpected novel combinations of knowledge are increased, which can lead to innovative discoveries and progress (Pittaway et al., 2004). The authors also report that different companies, based on the type of innovation work they are engaged in, tend to seek out different partners or systems. For example, firms focused on incremental innovation or small improvements are more likely to collaborate with their customers as innovation partners, while companies with new products in the market are more likely to collaborate with suppliers and consultants. Companies engaged in the development of more advanced innovations, particularly radical innovations, require greater interaction with universities (Pittaway et al., 2004).

Moreover, diversity among firms in collaborative networks could play a crucial role. Nieto and Santamaria (2007) conclude that companies should seek out diverse collaborations to increase their chances of developing innovative products, and that policymakers should work to create environments that encourage such collaborations (Nieto & Santamaria, 2007).
The role of third parties and institutional mechanisms are also discussed in the literature. Hanna and Walsh (2002) states that rather than encouraging the development of network relationships or innovations, publicly funded bodies should provide information and expertise but, more importantly, focus on fostering the development of trust and confidence among network members (Hanna & Walsh, 2002). Moreover, third parties have a dual role in promoting innovation. They ideally act as neutral knowledge brokers (Pittaway et al., 2004) but also act as important conduits for the development of informal relationships (personal relations between individuals), which are the basis for the development of network relationships, particularly between small firms (Hanna & Walsh, 2002).

2.2.4 Sharing knowledge and access to external knowledge
Woods et al., (2022) state that practicing open innovation such as external knowledge sourcing and cooperation may enhance and extend SME's resources and technological competences (Woods et al., 2022). Organizations should create mechanisms to encourage employees to share their knowledge because of the importance of knowledge sharing for organizational results (Balle et al., 2018). Networks play a crucial role in enabling organizations to learn about innovative work practices adopted by other organizations. They do so by facilitating access to knowledge, promoting awareness, and early adoption of innovations, as well as promoting social interaction and generating trust and reciprocity that facilitate knowledge transfer. For instance, a firm that observes another firm may try to imitate them and, in the process, create unintended innovation. In contrast, firms that operate outside clusters or networks do not have the opportunity to observe and learn from others, thereby missing out on these important cues to innovation, as noted by Bell (2005). However, given that knowledge flows between the different firms in the network there could be accidental knowledge spillovers that can impair innovation and competitive advantage, making knowledge protection essential claims the authors Balle et al (2018). To solve this contracts, patents, and copyrights, particularly in cooperation and cooperation settings could be set up, says the authors (Balle et al., 2018).

Moreover, Woods et al., (2022) states that the evidence shows that SMEs are not as capable as large firms to identify suitable partners and a suboptimal knowledge base to absorb external knowledge. Which explains why they are less likely to engage in these types of interfirm cooperation for innovation. Same study by Woods et al., (2022) also states that small firms may choose to decline being part of networks in favor of safeguarding their
limited stock of knowledge, skills and expertise. Older firms, the authors explain, may also be more inclined to collaborate and engage in the exchange of knowledge and information because they often have greater financial and human capital resources (Woods et al., 2022).

Tension may arise between the actors in the network when knowledge is shared. There could be questions regarding intellectual properties for instance (Tidd & Bessant, 2021). Where networks fail, it is due to inter-firm conflict, displacement, lack of scale, external disruption, and lack of infrastructure (Pittaway et al., 2004).

2.2.5 Size of the firms
The size of the firm might also matter in terms of being equipped in width (number of networking actors) and depth (networking intensity with the actors), says Wincent (2005). For SMEs the most prominent actors are often customers, suppliers, and competitors. This suggests that firms with limited resources to manage their internal operations may also lack the necessary incentives and capabilities to engage in networking activities (Wincent, 2005).

2.2.6 Relationship and Trust
A challenge for companies when building networks is firstly to identify the relevant new partners and secondly learning how to work with them. Relationships must be built for them to convert into high-performing partnerships (Tidd & Bessant, 2013, p. 317). Several factors can enable successful relationships between firms. Jansson and Sandström (2008) states that these include a shared vision, open communication, a willingness to invest resources, and a commitment to building trust. The relationship is also influenced by internal and external factors, company culture and industry norms being two of them (Jansson & Sandström, 2008). Håkansson et al (2009) investigate the role of trust in the formation of business-to-business relationships and argue that trust is a fundamental component of these types of relationship and is necessary for the exchange of resources and the coordination of activities. The authors argue that trust develops over time as actors in the network engage in repeated interactions and develop a shared understanding (Håkansson et al., 2009).

According to Mayer et al., (1995) a lack of trust between cooperative partners in networks can lead to opportunism, conflicts, and a reluctance to support each other. Conversely, when trust exists between partners, it can enhance the value of exchanges between cooperating firms (Mayer et al., 1995; Wincent, 2005). Moreover, to build strong networks and
relationships between partners is important for effective knowledge sharing and collaboration, and that trust is a key factor in making these networks successful (Pittaway et al., 2004). As a result, it can be inferred that SMEs that have trust in their partners are more likely to engage in networking with them (Wincent, 2005). Previous research on social capital (Bolino et al., 2002), suggests that individuals collaborate more efficiently and productively when they have established familiarity, trust, and a sense of identification with one another (Bollingtoft & Ulhoi, 2005).

Moreover, studies have shown that this trust could lead firms to network more with those inside the network than with those outside it. This is partly because SMEs have limited resources and networking requires significant resources. Also, as both companies have a mutual need to understand each other's requirements and act in a supportive manner, venturing outside the network can be both risky and unpredictable (Wincent, 2005).

Pittaway et al., (2004) discuss the matter of barriers linked to networking when it comes to forming relationships with other firms. One of them being mentioned is that firms with high levels of technical and commercial competence may be less likely to see the value in forming network relationships with other firms. This means that firms that are highly skilled and knowledgeable in their technical and commercial domains may believe that they can achieve their goals and objectives without the help of other firms or external partners. As a result, they may be less motivated to invest time and resources into building network relationships (Pittaway et al., 2004).

2.2.7 Open vs. Closed - Weak and strong ties.
Borgatti and Halgin (2011) draw upon Granovetter's (1975) theory of weak and strong ties and argue that strong ties are unlikely to be sources of novel information, as bridging ties are typically not strong. The authors state an example of two individuals and if they have a strong tie, then it is likely that they have at least one weak tie to each other's other strong friends. This means that the tie between them is not a bridge, as there would be multiple short paths between them via their common contacts. Therefore, it is weak ties that are more likely to be bridges and thus better potential sources of novel information (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011).

Mandill et al (2004) also discuss the concept of weak and strong ties by claiming that the value of a strong tie could be trust, sharing contacts and information. However, when looking
at it from a business perspective, strong ties can dampen the generation of new information and new perspectives that could create business opportunities for development and growth. Weak ties could allow businesses to benefit from information, advice, and assistance from a large diverse group of contacts, says the authors (Mandill et al., 2004). Moreover, Granovetter (1973) argues that weak ties are more effective than strong ties at connecting individuals from different small groups. He suggests that people with few weak ties may lack access to important information from outside their immediate network and may be overly influenced by their close friends and family. Granovetter (1983) argues that without weak ties, positive momentum in an individual's network may not extend beyond their immediate circle (Granovetter, 1983).

Moreover, Borgatti and Halgin (2011) address communities in their study and again refer to Granovetter (1975). According to the authors, Granovetter (1975) proposed that communities with many strong ties tend to have tightly knit groups with strong relationships within the group, but weaker connections to outside groups. In contrast, communities with many weak ties have less tightly knit groups with weaker relationships within the group, but stronger connections to outside groups. This means that communities with many weak ties are better able to access and share information from diverse sources outside their immediate group, while communities with many strong ties may be more insulated from new ideas and information (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011).

Bonds or ties to the members in a community is also something that the authors Cobigo et al., (2017) present in their article. In the section where the authors discuss their findings, they claim that there are indications that communities also can be diverse. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of mutual support among community members. During one of their conducted focus groups, an individual expressed that the community consists of individuals who provide support without receiving monetary compensation. The authors suggest that this statement implies that paid support may be perceived as artificial or less natural compared to support stemming from close social bonds or ties. In contrast, the study highlights the significance of natural support received from sources such as friends or family in fostering a sense of belonging (Cobigo et al., 2017).

Shan et al’s., (1994) paper examines the association between interfirm cooperation and the innovation output of startup firms in the biotechnology industry. Their results show that a
The startup's number of cooperative relationships has a positive effect on its innovative output (Shan et al., 1994, p. 387-388). When discussing open networks, the concept of open innovation can also be considered, as it represents a willingness to share and collaborate with others. Benefits of open innovation could be that it leads to increased innovation efficiency and effectiveness, as companies can tap into a broader range of expertise and resources than they could do internally. Open innovation can also help companies reduce R&D costs, accelerate time-to-market, and increase the likelihood of commercial success and lastly Huizingh (2011) claims that it could foster new business opportunities, improve customer satisfaction and loyalty, and enhance brand reputation and market positioning (Huizingh, 2011). Same author also raises some challenges regarding open innovation such as it requires significant changes to organizational culture, processes, and incentives, which can be difficult to implement and sustain. It involves managing intellectual property rights and ensuring the protection of confidential information, which can be complex and time-consuming. And lastly, open innovation entails effective collaboration and communication with external partners, which can be hindered by cultural differences, power imbalances, and conflicting goals and interests (Huizingh, 2011).

To discuss closed networks, we can delve into Coleman's (1998) theory of social capital and the ties or relationship between two actors. Coleman (1998) argues that when there is a relationship between two actors and one person does something for the other, the one performing the action receives a so-called "credit slip." meaning that the person can use this credit in future needs. This form of social capital depends on two elements: the reliability in the social environment, which means that obligations will be repaid, and the actual extent of the existing obligations. However, he argues that without a high degree of reliability among the members of the group, the institution would not be able to exist. This is because a person who receives an early payout in a series of meetings can disappear and leave the others with a loss. For example, one cannot imagine a successful rotating credit association functioning in urban areas with a high degree of social disorder or a lack of social capital, says Coleman (1988, p. 102-103).

2.2.8 Position in network
The actors in the networks will have different positions and it will reflect the power and influence of the network. Sources of power include tech, expertise, trust, economic strength and legitimacy (Tidd & Bessant, 2013, p. 303). Furthermore, factors such as size and age are
often viewed as variables that can influence one's position in a network, according to Woods et al., (2022). They claim that previous research done on these findings suggest that larger firms tend to assume the most central network positions and that smaller firms may in their belief of self-guarding knowledge take a less central position in the network. Firms that are older may also take a more central role, says the authors. However, smaller firms tend to have a more proactive and aggressive approach to collaborate as a means of securing access to resources and knowledge for the firm's survival and growth, says the authors and thus they may take a more central role in the network (Woods et al., 2022).

In a study done by Bell (2015) the author explains the relationship among clusters, networks, and firms' innovativeness. He states that the clusters or networks centrality and locations increases the firm's innovative capacity. And this is because they have better access to information. Bell (2015) refers to von Hippel (1987) who stated that innovation includes a pattern of information cooperative R&D which is a result of informal information exchange among firms, therefore forms better positioned to access information should be more innovative (Bell, 2015).

The owner-manager can also influence a SMEs position in a network and the development of network relationships. If the owner-manager believes networking as strategically important for the firm and may develop a greater number of relations within the network and in this way place the firm in a more central place within the network (Woods et al., 2022).

Wang and Qi (2022) also state that the better the position in the network the more favorable the outcome in the form of more and preferable knowledge. However, different scholars have different opinions on the network location, the same authors state. Some believe that a larger more extensive network might result in more knowledge whilst some say quite the opposite by claiming that these types of network connections will lead to difficulties with coordination and thus reduce the motivation to contribute with knowledge. Wang and Qi (2022) continue by explaining that the different studies implicitly assume that knowledge gathered through network location automatically can be absorbed, meaning that the acquisition of knowledge is equivalent to knowledge absorption (Wang & Qi, 2022).

Regarding the demographic position of the network, studies have shown that SMEs which form part of a geographically close network could take advantage of accessing specialized
labor, suppliers, and distributors. The authors also state that trust and reputations benefit from the physical closeness of the organizations (Serrano et al. 2022). However, Dahl Fitjar and Rodríguez-Pose (2015) states that firms that only interact locally risk to shield themselves from external knowledge that perhaps is happening outside the region. This could be problematic in smaller or peripheral regions, says the authors (2015).

2.2.9 A sustainable (responsible) network
In order to foster sustainable innovation, networks should be designed and governed in ways that prioritize sustainability outcomes. This can be achieved through a range of measures, such as incorporating sustainability criteria into network membership and governance, promoting cross-sectoral collaboration to ensure a diversity of perspectives, and ensuring that innovation outcomes are evaluated based on their social and environmental impacts.

Furthermore, networking for sustainable innovation requires a shift in mindset from a focus on individual actors and organizations to a more systemic and collaborative approach that prioritizes sustainability outcomes. This in turn calls for a rethinking of traditional models of innovation that emphasize competition and individual achievement, and instead emphasizes shared goals, values, and collaboration (Pittaway et al., 2004).

2.2.10 C-suite/executive managers role in networks and sustainable practice
C-suite executives are said to play a key role in networked environments as well as a critical role in the coordination and integration of activities across organizations (Bergquist and Dimovski, 2018). Foss et al., (2008) claims that C-suite executives need to be able to recognize and exploit opportunities that arise from changes in the external environment. They must also have a deep understanding of the organization's resources and capabilities, as well as the external environment, (2008). Bergquist and Dimovski, (2018) identify several challenges that C-suite executives face in networked environments, including the need to balance competing demands and to manage relationships with partners and stakeholders (2018).

According to Kiesnere and Baumgartner (2020), top managers are crucial to promoting sustainability within organizations. As key players, they provide resources and incentives to encourage employees to support sustainability initiatives, and their commitment and leadership can strongly influence the culture and decision-making processes of the entire company. With strategies for sustainability often being directed from the top-down, the
authors argue that the CEO plays a particularly important role in driving the movement towards sustainability. By setting appropriate incentives for employees, the CEO can motivate them to engage in sustainability issues (Kiesnere and Baumgartner, 2020).

Summary of findings from literature review:

- Networks should have a sustainable idea and a strong brand to foster a sense of community and support marketing efforts.
- Collaboration in networks allows firms to access new competencies, technologies, and markets.
- Effective coordination and management of core processes are necessary in networks, treating them as specific forms of organization.
- Network configurations are not static but continuously evolve and adapt to partners' requirements and the operating context.
- The configuration of a network is influenced by the actors involved and their ability to manage the network.
- Driving spirits and committed members are important in collaborative networks, and support systems can be beneficial.
- Effective exchange of ideas and knowledge can occur between companies operating in closely related but different industries or within the same industry.
- Collaboration with different partners, including universities, suppliers, and customers, can integrate diverse knowledge bases and lead to innovative discoveries.
- Diversity among firms in collaborative networks increases the chances of developing innovative products.
- Universities and other organizations play a crucial role in promoting innovation in collaborative networks.
- Publicly funded bodies should focus on fostering trust and confidence among network members rather than solely encouraging network relationships or innovations.
- Third parties have a dual role in promoting innovation, acting as neutral knowledge brokers and facilitating the development of informal relationships in networks, particularly among small firms.
- Networks play a crucial role in facilitating knowledge access, awareness, adoption of innovations, social interaction, and trust.
- Tension and conflicts, particularly regarding intellectual properties, may arise in knowledge sharing within networks. Therefore, knowledge protection measures, such as confidentiality agreements, contracts, patents, and copyrights, are essential in managing knowledge spillovers in networks.
- SMEs may face challenges in identifying suitable partners and absorbing external knowledge, leading to lower engagement in interfirm cooperation.
- For SMEs, the primary actors in their networks are typically customers, suppliers, and competitors.
- Limited resources to manage internal operations may result in a lack of incentives and capabilities for SMEs to engage in networking activities.
- Building successful networks requires identifying relevant partners and developing effective relationships.
- Factors enabling successful relationships include a shared vision, open communication, resource investment, and a commitment to building trust.
Trust is a fundamental component of business-to-business relationships, facilitating resource exchange and coordination of activities.

Lack of trust can lead to opportunism, conflicts, and reluctance to support each other, while trust enhances the value of exchanges between cooperating firms.

Strong ties are typically not sources of novel information and can limit the generation of fresh information and perspectives. While weak ties are more likely to be bridges and potential sources of new information. Weak ties can enable businesses to leverage diverse contacts and access a wide range of information resources.

Communities with many strong ties tend to have tightly knit groups with weaker connections to outside groups, while communities with many weak ties have less tightly knit groups but stronger connections to outside groups.

Natural support from close social bonds or ties is perceived as more significant in fostering a sense of belonging in communities.

Interfirm cooperation and the number of cooperative relationships have a positive effect on the innovative output of startup firms.

Social capital depends on reliability and existing obligations, and without a high degree of reliability, institutions cannot exist.

Larger and older firms tend to assume more central network positions, while smaller firms may adopt a less central position due to self-guarding knowledge. However, smaller firms can also take a more proactive and aggressive approach to collaboration, leading to a central role in the network.

Clusters or networks that are centrally located provide firms with better access to information, increasing their innovative capacity.

The owner-manager's beliefs about networking can influence a SME’s position and network relationship development, potentially placing the firm in a more central position within the network.

The network location can have varying effects on knowledge outcomes. Some studies suggest that a larger network leads to more knowledge, while others argue that extensive network connections can hinder coordination and reduce motivation to contribute knowledge.

Design and governance of networks should prioritize sustainability outcomes for fostering sustainable innovation.

Sustainability criteria should be incorporated into network membership and governance.

Cross-sectoral collaboration should be promoted to ensure diverse perspectives.

Innovation outcomes should be evaluated based on their social and environmental impacts.

Networking for sustainable innovation requires a shift from an individual-focused to a systemic and collaborative approach.

Rethinking traditional models of innovation is necessary, emphasizing shared goals, values, and collaboration over competition and individual achievement.
3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research approach and design
The research approach taken in this research is qualitative. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experience (p. 6). This fits in well with the research questions that this research aims to answer as it largely examines people's own thoughts, views, and experiences about networks. This research also ought to proceed in an inductive manner, meaning that theory is generated based on practical research results (Bryman, 2008). An inductive approach was deemed appropriate due to the limited body of research focused on the intersection of science parks, business-to-business networks, and c-suite executives.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that it can be useful to position research within the broader landscape of research methodologies by first examining the philosophical underpinnings of the study. This involves clarifying one's beliefs regarding the nature of reality (ontology) and the nature of knowledge (epistemology). Due to the lack of consistency in the discussion of these aspects within qualitative research, I have decided to explore and explicate some of the philosophical perspectives linked to qualitative research to make sense of them. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that it is not appropriate to adopt only one philosophical stance or way of thinking when conducting research, as there is no single way to extract the "optimal truth." Rather, the value of the qualitative approach lies in drawing inspiration from multiple philosophical perspectives, as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Interpretive research is the most common type of qualitative research, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016). This approach holds that reality is socially constructed and that there are multiple interpretations of a single event. In interpretive research, the researcher doesn't simply gather knowledge, but constructs it. This is also known as constructivism or social constructivism, which is rooted in phenomenology, as noted by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018). Most qualitative research is influenced by phenomenology, which focuses on experiences and how they are transformed into consciousness, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016). With that said, when conducting and analyzing my interviews and observations, I have chosen to bear in mind various epistemologies that I believe are relevant to my research, particularly given its focus on how people perceive the various elements of networking. I have found it helpful to draw on multiple philosophical perspectives, including social constructivism,
phenomenology, and interpretivism, among others. By taking inspiration from these diverse perspectives, I hope to gain a more nuanced understanding of the complex phenomenon of networking and to avoid limiting myself to any one particular perspective or worldview. Rather, I aim to approach my research with an open mind and to remain attentive to the diverse ways in which individuals perceive and interpret their experiences within the realm of networking. Through this approach, I hope to develop insights that are both theoretically rich and practically applicable to arranged networks, with special consideration given to Science Parks.

This thesis could be considered as mostly applied research, meaning that it addresses a conceptual problem that does have practical consequences. However, it could also be seen as pure research hence it also helps the readers understand the subject more (Booth et al., 2016). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), basic or pure research aims to produce knowledge, rather than solving a problem. Applied research on the other hand, focuses on finding a solution to a specific problem and that the work could be used by administrators/policymakers to improve the way things are done for instance (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.3-4).

3.2 Research process
As already mentioned before, in the beginning of the process some ‘general questions of issues’ were produced by SSCP. In step 2 together with SSCP, I selected relevant fields such as SMEs in the manufacturing industry in Stockholm and people to interview for the research which was C-suits in these selected industries together with people working with CEO-networks, communities and similar. In step 3 I started to collect data in the form of a literature review, interviews with organizers of networks, communities and similar as well as c-suits in the selected industry. In step 4 I started to interpret the data and add on to the result. In step 5 I started to conceptualize and theorize the data. In step 5a the general questions of issues where specified and resulted in additional data to collect in form of more interviews with both organizers and c-suits as well as looking into further research on the area (5b). As can be seen in figure 1 the process was iterative, meaning that it was a cooperation between on the one hand interpreting and theory formation and on the other data embedding. In step 6, a report of results together with an analysis was made as well as conclusions and a practical contribution in form of a framework/model for SSCP.
Bryman (2008) points out that qualitative research is not only about generating theory from the data that is collected, but it is also about testing theories. Meaning that theory can be tested during the research. As already mentioned, the research has been iterative, especially in steps 4-5. Data has been collected and interpreted resulting in additional collection of data to be interpreted. The consequences of this were that new questions to the people that were interviewed changed and evolved to try the concept and/or theory. Thus, the theory has sometimes been tested. However, with that said, the generation of concepts or theory has been the focus of this thesis. In an iterative project, Cresswell & Plano Clark (2017) explains that the problem, the questions and what we define as the hypothetical statements tends to evolve over the course of data collection and analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

3.3 Sampling
It was a purposive sampling, meaning that the people selected for the interviews and observations were chosen with direct reference to the research questions that had been formulated and with collaboration with the partner SSCP (Bryman, 2008). In the sampling of networks/communities four different networks/communities were selected where the decision was based on the thesis aim to create an understanding of the success factors representative of the networks that existed as well as the different challenges. This, in turn, was because the
selected networks/communities would have a general perception of being successful and have been active for several years. In the sampling of people being interviewed, C-suite/executive-level managers in SME manufacturing firms were picked, also based on the research questions. When it comes to the sampling of observations, I, together with SSCP, decided that I would be participating in two meetings in one of their other programs called Liften. This program is targeted at executive-level managers in SMEs within the manufacturing industry.

3.4 Data collection
A qualitative inquiry normally involves studying a smaller group or individuals who have certain characteristics in common; it is thus about depth and not breadth, which is sought in quantitative research (Bryman, 2008, p. 355). Therefore, five executive-level managers (C-suite) within the manufacturing industry were picked out for semi-structured interviews as well as four people who organize or support networks and communities (macro-analysis). Along with SSCP, two occasions were observed where executive-level managers (C-suite) participated during one of their other programs called Liften. For secondary data a literature review was conducted. The different methods are described in more detail below.

3.4.1 Literature review
The literature review serves the purpose of going through what is already known about the area and gaining more knowledge about the area that is under study (Bryman, 2008). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argues that a literature review is like a narrative essay that integrates, synthesizes, and criticizes the important thinking and research on a particular topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 95). It may also serve as a benchmarking for comparing the results with other findings, says Creswell (2009).

A comprehensive literature review was conducted in order to acquire knowledge at the beginning of the project to establish a theoretical framework. Additionally, it was undertaken iteratively throughout the study to gather further knowledge that could be linked to the empirical findings obtained during the interviews. Thus, the literature review served a dual purpose of both initial knowledge acquisition and iterative exploration.

The review explored a wide variety of articles and research papers about networks. Several different databases were utilized to search for literature, such as Scopus, Primo, and Science Direct. Only peer-reviewed articles were included to enhance the reliability of the study.
Additionally, articles were restricted to those published in English. No specific year of publication was imposed for this study, as numerous studies on networks have been conducted since its inception, which, in my opinion, could provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of how the research area has evolved over the years. Keywords related to the subject were identified based on prior experience, including terms such as networking, network theory, innovation, cluster, community, among others. These keywords were combined into different search string. The articles were initially screened by reviewing the title and abstract to exclude those that were not relevant to the topic of interest. The remaining articles underwent a more thorough examination using the identified keywords A snowball effect was also employed, whereby articles that proved to contain abundant information on the selected area were scanned for the literature they referenced. This approach aimed to identify additional articles that presented similarly rich content within the field.

After carefully analyzing and coding the gathered information from the selected literature, I identified major subthemes of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2009) that emerge from the review (Se themes in figure), according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) this is the most common way of organizing (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews
Nine interviews were done in total. Four of them were done with people organizing and supporting networks/communities and five of them were done with C-suite/executives. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explains that there are different types of interviews that could be done with different types of structures, in this case a semi structured one was chosen. Qualitative interviews are often more open ended and less structured (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I chose this approach because I wanted the interviews to be dynamic and interactive with the interviewees. It was also important to gather as much information as possible from them, and of course, to align with my research questions, which is why the choice fell on a semi-structured format. In consideration of my research's iterative nature, where the research focus could shift in accordance with the information collected, it was important that the one being interviewed would be able to steer the direction of the interviews. As Bryman (2008) notes, qualitative interviews differ from quantitative interviews in this regard, as the former seeks to understand the interviewee's perspective and what they consider relevant and
important, while the latter may view this as a disturbance, with the researcher more interested in what aligns with their own interests (Bryman, 2008).

Two different interview guides were conducted, one for the people who had worked with networks and one for C-suite/executive managers. Bryman (2008) emphasizes that the interview guide should be flexible and allow for spontaneity and follow-up questions, as this can lead to richer data (Bryman, 2008). A semi structured interview guide includes a mix of more and less structured questions and a part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues that the researcher wants to explore (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). In interviews conducted with actors organizing networks and communities, a set of questions was employed. These questions underwent modifications throughout the process to suit the specific individuals being interviewed. The primary objective was to explore their approaches towards working with content, practical aspects, and member commitment. These thematic areas formed the core structure of the interview guide, while sub-themes emerged along the way and were also investigated. However, it is important to note that all sub-themes were derived from the main themes of content, commitment, practicalities, and capture. Additionally, participants were encouraged to share anecdotes and provide examples of significant events that occurred during network, cluster, or community meetings. Follow-up questions were then posed based on the responses received. When it comes to the interview guide for c-suits an exploratory approach was employed, wherein a set of guiding questions was utilized to facilitate the interview process. However, as diverse responses naturally emerged, subsequent probing questions varied according to the unique individuals. Consequently, thematic patterns emerged along the way, eventually resulting in the identification of distinct emerging topics that could be clustered to organize the collected data (see interview guides in appendix 1 and 2).

3.4.3 Observations
According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) observations are done at the location where the phenomenon under study occurs naturally, and data from observations represent firsthand encounters with the phenomenon being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p 137). We observe every day in our daily lives, but for observation to serve research purposes, it needs to be systematic, address the specific questions that the research seeks to answer, and be conducted correctly according to principles of credibility. According to Merriam and Tisdell observations could be used with other methods such as interviews and document analysis. This is a way to support and validate the emerging findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017) and I believe it could also allow for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomena, as compared to relying solely on accounts obtained through interviews or other
secondary sources. The authors (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) also point out that some people may not feel comfortable discussing certain topics, as I’ve personally experienced during the interviews. In such cases, observation can be a helpful research method to use. It allows the researcher to see how people act and behave in real-life situations, which can provide valuable insights that may not be obtained through interviews alone (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 139).

As previously mentioned, according to the authors, the research problem or question determines what should be observed. In this case, two observation occasions were selected based on these factors: the target audience was c-suites in the manufacturing industry, and the setting was a networking or meeting format. Same authors (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) argue that how to structure the observation is determined by the situation at hand. Just as there are different ways to structure interviews, there are also various ways to structure observations. In this case, the observations were conducted in a less structured way, which can be compared to a television camera scanning an area. The researcher begins by observing the areas where their research problem is likely to be found and can choose to focus on certain behaviors or individuals in the room, for example. However, the researcher needs to be flexible since unexpected activities may occur, and they need to be prepared for potential changes during the observation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 140).

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), an observer can use a list of items to be observed and described as a guide. These items are presented by the authors in their book (2016). Prior to the observations, some of these were selected along with questions to be answered:

1. *The physical setting*: What is the physical environment like? What is the context? What kind of behavior is the setting designed for? What objects, resources, technologies are in the setting?
2. *The participants*: Describe who is in the scene, how many people, and their roles. What brings these people together? Who is allowed here? Who is not here that you would expect to be here? What are the relevant characteristics of the participants? What are the ways in which the people in the setting organize themselves? “Patterns and frequency of interactions, the direction of communication patterns, and changes in these patterns.
3. *Activities and interactions*: What is going on? Is there a definable sequence of activities? How do people interact with the activity and with one another? How are
people and activities connected? What norms and roles structure the activities and interactions? When did the activity begin? How long does it last?

4. **Conversation**: What is the content of conversations in the setting Who speaks to whom? Who listens? Quote directly, paraphrase and summarize conversations. Note silence and non-verbal behavior that add meaning to the exchange.

5. **Subtle factors:**
   - Informal and unplanned activities
   - Symbolic and connotative meaning of words
   - Nonverbal communication such as dress and physical space
   - Unobtrusive measures such as physical clues
   - What does not happen? Are certain things expected to happen but do not?

6. **Your own behavior**: How is your role, observer, or intimate participant, affecting the scene you are observing? What do you say and do? In addition, what thoughts are you having about what is going on? (observer comments) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 140–142).

3.5 The analytical process

In qualitative research, the collection and analysis of data require a flexible and dynamic approach. This iterative process made it possible to gain insights along the way and elaborate the research questions as more and new data was analyzed. This led to refinement of the research questions and the identification of new avenues of inquiry. At the outset of the study, the researcher may not be aware of all the possible interview questions or topics of inquiry, claims Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 195). However, by engaging in an iterative process of data collection and analysis, the researcher can develop a deeper understanding of the research question and generate more meaningful insights, says the authors (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Following each interview, the transcripts were produced in Swedish, which was the language used during the interviews. This decision was made to reduce the risk of errors that may arise when translating an interview into text. The transcriptions were then carefully reviewed multiple times to identify similarities and differences in the text and develop an initial framework for the analytical process.
3.5.1 Thematic analysis

A thematic analysis method was used to analyze the interviews. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method aimed at identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes that are found within a data set. Thematic analysis offers researchers a high degree of theoretical freedom, making it a versatile approach that can be adapted to suit the needs of various studies. It enables researchers to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their data, incorporating both richness and complexity. One of the key advantages of thematic analysis is its flexibility, allowing researchers to determine themes in multiple ways based on their own judgment. However, it is crucial for researchers to maintain consistency in their approach to theme identification within a specific analysis (Nowell, et al. 2017). Therefore, different way of coding or generating themes was done. A deductive approach for the analysis of interviews with organizers and an inductive approach when analyzing the interviews with c-suits. Nowell et al (2017) states that a deductive analysis is driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytical interests. In this approach, themes are generated based on existing theories or prior research. The researcher applies a preexisting coding framework or theoretical framework to analyze the data, focusing on specific aspects of interest. In this case a framework from the “general question of interests”; commitment and content/practicalities.

When it comes to themes generated inductively, Nowell et al., (2017) claims that these emerge directly from the raw data itself, without being predetermined by existing theories or research questions. This means that the themes are strongly grounded in the data and may not necessarily align with the initial research questions. Inductive analysis involves coding the data without trying to fit it into preexisting categories or the researcher's preconceived notions. It is a data-driven approach that allows new patterns and themes to emerge naturally from the data (Nowell et al., (2017). The themes gathered in these interviews are put in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interviewee 1</th>
<th>Interviewee 2</th>
<th>Interviewee 3</th>
<th>Interviewee 4</th>
<th>Interviewee 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge transfer</td>
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<td>Competitors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust and Relationship</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Size and Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meetings (dynamic in meetings)</td>
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<td>Meetings (productive meetings)</td>
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<td>Meetings (practicalities of meetings)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meetings (content in meetings)</td>
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</table>
3.6 Co-production research approach
Given that this research is an applied in some way case study it is important to have a close partnership during the whole project. In the IPR handbook (2018) the authors explain the importance of collaboration and co-creation between academia and industry. In this fast-paced changing world where we meet societal changes such as further globalization, technological advancements, and sustainability we have to stay competitive, have the right competencies and make sure we keep our competence, says the authors. To do so we need research to fully understand these components (Sannö et al., 2018). The close collaboration and co-creation in the proposed research could lead to more knowledge transfer between both parties that could be valuable for both the cases being studied as well as other research on the area. Throughout the course of the research, SSCP has played a significant role, with several meetings conducted to review the results achieved so far. Additionally, a half-day workshop was conducted to collectively examine the final findings and explore potential practical outcomes in the form of a model or framework.

3.7 Trustworthiness, authenticity, and reflexive methodology
External reliability, i.e., that the study should be able to be repeated/replicated, can be a challenge to achieve in qualitative studies, according to Bryman (2008). It is impossible to freeze a social environment and the different conditions that apply. External validity can also be difficult to achieve as many qualitative studies involve specific cases with a focused sample that is interviewed and observed. To have credibility in my research, I have used triangulation, which means that I have used several different methods to collect data and thus nuance the picture of the social reality that I portray. According to Bryman (2008), this can give a greater reliability to the result. As this qualitative study, like so many others, has its focus on the contextual uniqueness and importance of the aspect of the social reality being studied, it is, as said, often difficult to make it transferable, which is considered easier in quantitative studies. To make the study more transferable, I have chosen to focus on deep descriptions of the culture and social events I witnessed and interviewed myself for. In this way, my descriptions can form a so-called database that others can in turn assess how transferable judgments are to another environment. I have also had intentions to show clarity and context in my research by specifying the different research methods as clearly as
possible, expressing my arguments clearly and having a reflective or reflexive approach (Bryman, 2008, p. 351-357). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) define reflective research as having two basic characteristics, careful interpretation, and reflection. This refers to the researcher's role of being self-aware of one's own assumptions and biases when interpreting the data. This involves working in a systematic and iterative process when analyzing the data, which includes identifying patterns and themes, considering alternative explanations, and seeking out disconfirming evidence (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018, p. 11-12).

3.8 Ethical concerns
This study has followed the basic principles that apply to Swedish research and ethics. Thus, those who have been interviewed and will later in the process be observed have been and will be informed about the purpose of the research. Participants are given the choice to continue participating as their participation is voluntary. I also inform them about the specific moments that will be discussed during the interview/observation. A consent requirement applies, and those who participate are informed that they have control over their participation. If they wish to withdraw, they can do so at any time. There is also a confidentiality requirement, which means that all information included in the research should be treated with the utmost confidentiality and kept in a secure location. The final principle states that the data collected on an individual may only be used for research purposes, known as a utilization requirement (Bryman, 2008, p. 131-132). All interview participants have been asked if they agree to have their interview transcribed, and most of them have requested to remain anonymous in this thesis, which resulted in everyone being anonymous.

3.8.1 Responsible research
RRI stands for Responsible research and innovation which means that research and innovation should be conducted with a focus on addressing the needs and challenges of society. Owen et al (2012) presents three different concepts gathered from the discussion of responsible research and innovation. The first one emphasizes democratic steering and the purpose of the research meaning that it should be steered towards "right impact" that are anchored in societal values. The second approach emphasizes being responsive to societal needs and values by integrating established practices such as anticipating potential social and ethical implications, reflecting on values and assumptions, and engaging in open deliberation with stakeholders. By institutionalizing these practices, the direction of research and
associated policies can be influenced in a way that better aligns with societal needs and values. The third and last one is discussing the meaning of responsibility when it comes to research and innovation which can have unpredictable outcomes. The authors conclude by reflecting on the reasons why promoting responsible innovation is important, emphasizing that it should be driven by meaningful ethical and normative considerations, rather than simply being a tool to achieve predetermined policy goals (Owen et al. 2012).

4. Empirical findings

4.1 Interviews with network organizers (macro-analysis/benchmarking)
In the macro-analysis, I examine the operations of four different networks and communities. The primary focus of this analysis is to identify the different conditions, essential characteristics, primary challenges of a business-to-business network as well as factors that might influence c-suites and how sustainability could be implemented. Additionally, practical considerations such as duration, location, and critical mass are also examined to gain insight into how a science park, specifically SSCP, could integrate these conditions into its proposed network for C-suite/executives.

4.1.1 CEO-network
This network is designed for SMEs from different industries who are looking to improve their business strategies. The program runs for approximately one year with 4-6 weeks between on-site meetings. The duration of each meeting is a half-day, with the meetings scheduled for the afternoons following lunch. Give or take 10 people in the group. The cost of the program is 7000 SEK per participant. The findings obtained from the four distinct networks and communities are described individually, each starting with a brief description of the respective operations, followed by the findings derived from the analysis of commitment, content, and practical implementation.

Commitment:
The organizer suggests that creating commitment and pitching a CEO network to potential participants can be challenging due to the somewhat abstract nature of the concept. The tailored design of the network, depending on which companies are involved, makes it difficult to provide a concrete answer to what the content will be and how the overall
structure will look like. What seems to work best is to showcase role models or ambassadors who have already participated in a CEO network program organized by the host. They can either provide word-of-mouth referrals or be promoted as ambassadors through media channels.

Engagement exists among all members, but it varies in terms of how active they are during the meetings. For example, there are those who just sit quietly, and one may wonder why they are even there, according to the organizer, but then a question is raised that the person finds interesting, and they show themselves to be active. The organizer also cites an example of how people who do not seem to be very active also seem to perceive the meetings as valuable; a person who rarely contributed any inputs and mostly just attended the meetings sent an email to the organizers afterwards and stated that "this was great, just what I needed." The organizer would not say that it is necessary for some members to be more engaged or so-called firebrands, but rather that it is only a bonus in such cases. However, it is important to have a basic level of activity. "It is up to us as facilitators to drive the process forward", says the organizer and states that: "We don't want a big company to be the locomotive". The organizer also believes that engagement and activity during meetings may depend on the individual's mood. The organizer suggests that individuals have their ups and downs, and this is reflected in their level of participation during the meetings. Sometimes, a person may be very active and engaged, but the next time they are low due to factors such as poor sleep or business struggles, or the topic being discussed is not as interesting to them. This variability exists within the group, and it is not always the same person who is the most active.

Content/practicalities:
Regarding the content the organizer says that sales always come up as a subject. However, the focus here is more on soft values than on excel sheets. Learning to delegate is a classic challenge. Many entrepreneurs feel like they are bottlenecks in their own companies, believing that they need to have a handle on everything, the organizer says. Collaborations with other companies is also a theme that can be discussed, and acquisitions, and shareholding and selling parts of the company.

Before the program starts, the organizers have introduced a kick-off event that aims to "bring the group together". At this stage, it is almost more important to have a long coffee break with a disgusting almond pastry (mazarin), mainly just to have something to talk about and
bond over, according to the organizer. Here, the format is based on sharing where everyone who is present gets to contribute something. The contribution or the things the participants share during the kick-off can vary however the organizer had noticed something interesting which was that in the group they had now one of the members who started the sharing shared something quite personal and almost intimate. The normal would be that the person who starts to share says something about the company and how the company, for example, has achieved in terms of revenue this year and other things that are on the website. However, the organizer believes that they would rather get under the members' skin, and that those who opened up and were honest and humble about not being a world champion at everything made the other members also share something personal. So, right from the start, it became a good internal conversation, the organizer argues.

The format is such that the number of companies involved determines the total number of meetings. This is because each meeting takes place at the company's premises, where the company gets to act as the ambassador for the day and showcase its business. The organizers of the network visit the selected company a month before and spend half a day with them to jointly determine what the day will entail. For instance, if the chosen company is in the process of hiring new personnel, the topic of the meeting could be HR issues. Subsequently, the network organizers may select a consultant to come and speak about HR during the meeting or other relevant topics. Thus, the meetings are tailored to the needs of the companies involved. The network organizers emphasize the significant value of conducting on-site visits to gain a deeper understanding of the business being studied.

It is offered to have pre-meeting lunches as the organizers believe it provides an opportunity for relaxation or neutralization before the meeting starts. Thus, the group can chat informally before the meeting. The organizers argue that it is only when individuals talk about other things that they begin to establish trust, and then during the meeting, they feel comfortable enough to discuss important matters and challenge one another. The organizers stress that these lunches are crucial for this purpose and that it is noticeable when a company has skipped the pre-meeting lunch, as there is not the same mental presence in the group.

Some of the members of the network are quite lonely in their positions and need support from others to look at for instance best practice. Not having to feel alone and knowing that there are others who are struggling with the same questions can be a great source of comfort.
Although they may not have the solution, just talking to someone who has the same problem is a step in the right direction. Participants in the customized process are satisfied with the approach, as it caters to their needs, unlike watching a pre-recorded video on YouTube. The fact that their needs are being met has left them very pleased. They are happy to start doing business together and finding new contacts. They are looking forward to these days, investing a lot of time and effort into attending, and are pleased with the results, says the organizer. The organizer has also noticed that some of the members have started doing business with each other.

To ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute and feel comfortable, the network group consists of a maximum of nine companies. This is the organizer's chosen threshold for critical mass, as the organizer believes that having too many members may prevent everyone from being heard. The organizer emphasizes that it is crucial for everyone to feel comfortable in the group, otherwise the whole concept will fail.

The group is homogeneous in terms of revenue and geographical location, and they also tend to face similar questions and challenges. However, the group of firms belong to different industries due to the creative organization's perception of potential competition if they were to belong to the same industry.

This organization has implemented something called "Future Dialogue", which is mandatory for the organization's customers. It is based on the Agenda 2030 and starts with the firms identifying their current sustainability practices and areas for improvement or how they could for instance communicate their current efforts. According to the organizer, while everyone acknowledges its importance, many struggle with how to begin their sustainability journey. Thus, the organization encourages them to take the first step and initiate action. This encompasses social, economic, and ecological sustainability. Previously, compliance with laws and regulations surrounding sustainability drove companies to engage in sustainability practices. However, the interviewee observes a shift in motivation, where companies now desire to take responsibility and recognize the potential profitability of sustainability.

"Previously, companies might have started working on sustainability when they could afford it, but I believe it's the opposite now: if you don't prioritize sustainability, you won't be able to afford anything else in the future." he says.
4.1.2 Network between C-suits and academia

The format for the network involves 6-8 companies, with two representatives from each company, resulting in a total of 12-16 people. Each meeting is a full day of activities with mixed content such as lectures, workshops and discussions.

The network is a collaboration and development project that is being led by two actors, one being a university and one being an organization. It aims to connect the development needs of businesses with the research, learning, and collaboration needs of the university. This is expected to result in mutual benefits that strengthen the university's ties to the local business community and contribute to the growth of regional companies. The project involves researchers and teachers from various faculties and departments, each with different areas of expertise.

The offer reaches out to SMEs where the opportunity is to participate in two different programs. The programs are executed through CEO and management groups, each comprising 6-7 non-competing companies that meet under strict confidentiality. The meetings are a combination of lectures and discussions, and coaching is also provided between sessions if desired. Themes such as branding, digitization, sustainability and competence supply are included in the meetings.

Participating companies can benefit from discussing challenges and opportunities with other businesses, which can help them develop and grow. The program can also provide new insights and perspectives through cross-border collaboration. With the presence of researchers, companies can access cutting-edge knowledge based on scientific research, as well as explore potential collaborations with students and researchers.

Commitment:

When asked about the recruitment of companies and how they persuade them to participate, the organizer emphasizes the importance of highlighting the specific benefits that each company can gain from the program, such as access to tools, models, and networking opportunities. The organizer also mentions the uniqueness of the program in creating a dynamic environment where participants can learn from each other. Additionally, the organizer highlights the value of the program being based on scientific knowledge and how they inform participants about collaboration with universities at each group meeting.
In the context of networking events, the level of engagement among participants can vary depending on their individual personalities. It is important for process leaders and researchers to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate and that exercises are designed to accommodate different communication styles. For example, discussion groups can be organized with mixed individuals depending on their level of participation. Some individuals are more talkative and outgoing, while others are more reserved, but this does not necessarily mean that their level of engagement differs. The level of engagement is generally high among all participants, the organizer states. Regarding the engagement among the researchers, it can vary greatly. Some are very interested and engaged in finding collaborations with each other and initiate everything from research projects to student projects, while others find it exciting to meet these companies but then that's it, they simply do not have the time.

This network is a closed group of non-competing companies/persons, with approximately the same size of the companies. When asked about the formation of sub-groups among the members, the organizer stated that they do not observe any such trend. However, the organizer acknowledged that there is a possibility of forming such sub-groups among members who may have similar challenges or potential for collaboration. Despite this possibility, the organizer does not perceive any clear sub-group formations during the group meetings.

One of the challenges in this network is to balance the needs of both target groups, namely the academia and the companies. What are important aspects and values for the companies may not have been of interest to the academia, but how can we still bring these two together? In this case, the organizers delved deeper into the needs of the different actors from the outset and initiated a reference group and a development group, where both parties were given the opportunity to express their opinions and desires. As a result of these meetings, the organizers were able to perceive different needs and, therefore, arrange various focus areas or subject areas that would be beneficial to the companies, for instance. The various programs run for different time periods, meaning that the companies did not have different programs with different subjects to choose from. Instead, for example, if production efficiency was the subject, the recruitment process was directed towards manufacturing companies.

The organizer perceives that the companies are very open in sharing knowledge with each other, and the organizer believes that this is partly due to the confidentiality agreements that
members sign, but also because they are non-competitive. "If they were competing with each other, then this level of openness wouldn't be possible," says the organizer. The organizer also recognizes a third aspect, which is the position of the members within their respective companies. As all members work as CEOs or similar positions, the organizer states: "If we take the example of having one representative from a company who is a manager and another who is an employee, it is not certain that we would get the same openness."

Content/practicalities:
The organizer says that they always start with a kick-off event aimed at enabling the members to get to know each other on a more personal level, rather than just based on which company they come from. The kick-off contributes to creating greater engagement, according to the organizer, and provides a good foundation for the upcoming program meetings. The organizer also believes that members are often surprised at how quickly trust is established among them. Here, the organizer also observes that members often face similar challenges and issues, despite belonging to different industries. Given that a network often has a relatively quick turnover of members and that businesses are there to do business, getting to know each other and creating a good group dynamic encourages companies to discuss their challenges in an open and transparent manner.

The network meetings are full-day events. The format is such that in the meetings, the university in the form of researchers or such provide the content, and there is a mix of knowledge with workshops and discussion sections among the companies. It is also a crucial aspect of these groups that one learns from each other, says the organizer. Therefore, during a full-day meeting, one receives knowledge from the researchers, followed by discussion questions, exercises, or other activities where they learn from each other. Themes mentioned for the meetings was branding, digitization, sustainability, competence supply and leadership.

One challenge in organizing networking events is determining the length and structure of the meetings. Holding half-day events may be more convenient for companies with limited availability, but it can also result in less value and rushed discussions. To address this, some projects set three dates in advance, asking participating companies to block off those days in their calendars to ensure availability. However, there may still be conflicts that arise, so attendance is emphasized as important for group dynamics and engagement. There are varying opinions on the ideal length of these events.
The value for participating companies lies in the facilitation of their access to research and academic learning, which is perceived to be challenging by the organizer. On the other hand, the value for various actors within the university is to gain a greater understanding of SMEs, in order to identify a link or bridge between these actors. The primary focus on these types of cooperation between academia and industry may be on large companies rather than SMEs, as there is more data available. The project has an important task of ensuring that SMEs also gain insight, while enabling researchers to understand and approach the large number of businesses out there. Furthermore, the project serves as a means of providing students with an understanding of small business operations, and even potentially attracting them as potential employers.

Creating practical utility is considered important by the organizers, meaning that the companies need to find out, or rather understand, how they can create practical utility through the development of their business. The organizer argues that companies often have limited time, which means that the activities they engage in and undertake should be focused on something they know can create utility. Therefore, the program/network is aimed at companies within these areas that the program/network intends to address.

4.1.3 Women executive Network
This network is exclusively for high executive women. The process of joining the network involves companies sending a representative whom they have nominated, with each company paying a fee for each representative admitted to the network. As a result, it is typically larger companies that can participate in this process. This organization only has one network of this kind in Sweden. Each year, a program is organized for the selected women that includes five modules/meetings. These meetings typically last for 2.5 days and are filled with lectures, workshops, discussions, and other activities. The meetings take place off-site, and individuals from all over Sweden come to the designated location. The person being interviewed had been a part of the program in 2019 and is now an “alumni” and supporter of the network.

Commitment:
Since women in the network are selected and nominated to join, there is already a significant commitment and willingness to develop and share knowledge. The person I am interviewing
refers to it as an investment that companies are making. The interviewee also emphasizes the importance of feeling chosen to be part of a network, rather than just attending as a mere participant.

Another value mentioned is the long-term perspective, which means that the program functions as an alumni network after participants have completed the program. As a result of the proximity and sense of community created during the program, a commitment and engagement to be of assistance in the future is formed. "I expect that I will be active in one way or another, more or less, for as long as I feel like it, as long as I work or sit on a board. I learn a lot, and it's a way for me to stay up to date on things that are happening," the interviewee says.

The interviewee believes that it is important to be careful about who is accepted into the program. A careful matching process is crucial. The entire network is meticulously planned and not at all random. The person in charge of the program should be someone with great passion who wants it to be successful, which is a key factor. It is not a desk-bound project, she says.

Content/practicalities:
The meetings are structured with a set of modules that cover the content that the organizers consider suitable for the group. The content of these modules is very up-to-date and helps to create a sense of closeness between the participants. The content of the program is also very knowledge-driven and there is a lot of peer support provided. If one of the members has a problem or needs to seek information, they can easily and safely bring it up in the group, according to the interviewee. The content is very close and exclusive. There is a sense that "this is for us," as the interviewee puts it. Participants are not only expected to sit and receive, but also to actively participate, and there is an unspoken rule that those who are involved should contribute to the content themselves.

The interviewee also mentions that it is important to create content that makes people really want to invest time in such a network. When it comes to this network for women, the interviewee knew that it would generate value even before joining. It has not only given the interviewee knowledge in business but also helped the interviewee grow on a personal level.
The interviewee also believes that it is important to have a clear leader in the network who is passionate and in some way caring about the turn out.

According to the interviewee, there is value for the company in question as an individual can serve as a strong representative for the company by enhancing its branding and marketing. This can increase the motivation of the individual, as they strive to represent the company in the best possible way. Additionally, the value for the company lies in the fact that since many larger companies are represented, there can be opportunities for business collaborations. As she states, "you create an incredible network among several people in leading positions who are present in other important companies in Sweden". There is an unspoken “weight” in the network/program, influenced by various factors. One of these factors is the participation of many well-known CEOs and executives from large companies. Being a part of this network brings a certain level of prestige and can enhance one's career prospects. When encountering someone who has also been a member of the program, a relationship can be established more easily through the shared membership in the network. The individual being interviewed shared an example of when she met someone who was on the board of her new job and who had also been a member of the network. This common bond facilitated the establishment of rapport between them.

One of the values of this network is that highly positioned women come together to create a community based on their shared challenges. The interviewee explains that it is different to be a female CEO, there are many challenges and of course opportunities that come with it. The interviewee says, "...I think all of us who are in this network have in some way felt that we have had to work a little harder and it has been a little tougher, depending on which company you come from, it has been different". The interviewee also says that there is a strong trust and loyalty to the program and the group, which means that things that happen during the meetings are never disclosed.

4.1.4 Community
The interviewee is involved in community building and management. The person has been a part of several community startups where the person has assisted those looking to establish communities by utilizing a community canvas framework. This framework includes identifying values, target audience, community members, and collectively establishing the scope of the community during a workshop facilitated by the interviewee.
The interviewee explains that there is a difference between networks and communities in some aspects, the focus in communities often is more on the individual, for example, being a woman in the tech industry, rather than on the company one represents. Additionally, there is a difference in who drives it forward, she says that "the difference between a network and a community is that a community is participant-driven, and it is the participant who sets the agenda and drives it forward."

As the focus lies more on the individual in communities, it has also become common to meet in the evenings for a few hours.

Commitment:
The interviewee believes that there is an advantage in being a part of for instance SSCP, as many people may know that events organized by SSCP are of high quality. Therefore, these invitations may be prioritized by those who are invited. However, if one wants to create something entirely new, then one needs to first establish that trust so that those who are invited know that they will gain something from it, the interviewee says.

The interviewee also emphasizes the importance of having passionate individuals, or firebrands to drive the community forward. The interviewee gives an example of two women who wanted to start a community specifically for women in the tech industry. The community lasted for 1.5-2 years, but then the two women moved on to other stages in their careers and started families, and the same driving force behind the network was no longer present. She believes that there is power in having more people drive the community forward, and the interviewee says: "I think it's important not to rely on a single enthusiast or, in my case this is a part of my job, but time needs to be sufficient too. So now we are a group that can drive it and take different responsibilities for each meeting, and we have said that we will try to start it up again and see if we can find someone who is not part of our organizations who can take it further as well."

When I ask the interviewee how to continue engaging people after a networking program is over, the interviewee responds that it's important to consider what is worth investing energy in. Is it worth continuing a similar network or program with the participants? What is the value? Either you do it because you need to have the target group closer, such as Science Parks, or you do it for the participants because they need it. But what if it's for both? I ask. The interviewee thinks it can be difficult to get companies to continue meeting alone after the program is over. The interviewee gives an example of a group that took a training course
together in another project the interviewee had worked on, and they actually started socializing afterwards because they were in the same location and had common challenges. By creating a different type of relationship, there may be incentives to continue meeting.

The interviewee believes that the type of personality invited to a network can make a difference. For instance, the interviewee mentions a network for people who develop software and a network for those who work in HR. When she manages the software network and suggests they spend the first-time mingling, they ask why and express a preference for structured listening instead. In contrast, most people in the HR network group are open, talkative, and engaged. They want to be a part of it, the interviewee says.

Regarding how many people there should be in the group, the interviewee refers to quantity vs quality, she believes that it is more important to have a few people who truly want to be there rather than 50 people who are only there for the free breakfast.

Content/practicalities:
According to the interviewee, it is important to have a plan going forward and book several meetings. The interviewee believes that it is easy to start a meetup, but you need to set themes in advance, so that it doesn't just become a "flash in the pan". It is important to have a check-in and go around the group to introduce oneself, share expectations, and express curiosity. It is necessary to establish engagement immediately and not just start with a lecture. She believes that it is important to review the duration of the events. Both half-day and full-day events are too much, according to her. The interviewee mentions that their meetings usually last a maximum of 2 hours.

4.2 Interviews with c-suites
The target group for these interviews were C-suites in the manufacturing industry. The interviewees held various positions, including CEOs and CTOs. Some were more senior in their roles, while others were newer. Some of the interviewees had prior experience with professional networks and shared several related experiences. These individuals were typically more senior in their roles and were able to testify to the value that had developed over time from their participation. Moreover, all the people who were interviewed work in a production company. However, they differ as they work with different types of productions.
In this section, I begin by providing a brief description of each participant, while maintaining their anonymity as requested. Following this, I describe the themes that emerged during the analysis of the data. When the data from these interviews was analyzed through thematic analysis, additional themes emerged beyond those addressed in the macroanalysis (commitment, content, and practical implementations). Nevertheless, these overarching themes underpin the themes identified during the interviews with c-suite executives. For instance, under the category of "meetings," it encompasses not only what is valued in terms of content and practicalities but also what is considered valuable in a group setting, which can provide indications of commitment as well.

- **Interviewee number one (1)** is relatively new in the position as a CTO. (1) is in a network called Liften that SSCP is arranging, and this is the first network (1) has been a part of.
- **Interviewee number two (2)** is a senior CEO who has been part of several networks before. Given (2) experience of being part of different networks, (2) can demonstrate various values from the different networks (2) has been a part of.
- **Interviewee number three (3)** is relatively new in the role as CEO. (3), like (1), has participated in the Liften program organized by SSCP. In the past, (3) has also participated in a sustainability program where participants worked on various focus areas related to sustainability.
- **Interviewee number four (4)** has worked in various leadership positions and is now new in the position as CEO. (4) has participated in several different networks and mentorship programs before. One of the networking programs the person has attended is an explicitly female network program where those who get to participate are selected and nominated from their respective companies.
- **Interviewee number five (5)** is a senior CEO who has been part of several networks before, both in Sweden and abroad.

**Knowledge Transfer**

Interviewee number one (1) testifies that they have never really brought in external competence or knowledge before, as they have always considered themselves to possess the required competence and knowledge internally. However, increasingly, they have realized that they have poorer awareness of how others in the same industry operate and how they solve problems that arise. This has made them realize that it is beneficial to observe how
others operate but also to exchange ideas. Interview person number three (3) highlights the value of participation in the network as it provides the interviewee with a sounding board for the challenges that is encountered as a CEO, such as navigating laws and regulations. Through group collaboration, members can collectively solve problems and avoid reinventing the wheel. (3) also notes that networking with other members of the group provides a valuable learning opportunity. (3) stated, "Expanding your knowledge and learning from how others solve problems is important, but there are also many collaborations that you may not have been aware of, which are equally important". Furthermore, this also attests to number five (5) who states that a major value of networking and these types of organized networks lies in gaining access to information and knowledge that one would not typically encounter. Therefore, an important value lies in the external influences one receives and the multitude of perspectives and feedback obtained when addressing a question or challenge. (5) says that, of course, the interviewee could contact a friend in the industry or someone else within the interviewees established network to seek answers to the challenge. However, there is a risk that those the interviewee knows may provide the interviewee with the same solutions and information that he already possesses or is aware of. With a network encompassing multiple companies across various industries, (5) claims to obtain more diversified information.

When asked about how willing participants in the program Liften are to share knowledge, (3) responded that it likely varies from person to person. Some share very little, while others are very open during meetings. (3) sometimes feels that s/he has been "too open," but on the other hand, s/he wants it to be a climate or culture where people can speak from the heart. Additionally, the type of meeting and what is said during the meeting can make a difference. If the purpose is to network, then one should be open and supportive in (3) opinion. However, if it is an industry forum, then the approach may be different, s/he says.

(1) explains that s/he is a part of Liften and that the members on that program all face similar challenges, but with different approaches. Despite the diversity, they were all dealing with the same issues. (1) also explains that s/he found it useful to hear from others and gain new perspectives. Additionally, it was important to remember that they had valuable knowledge to share as well. For instance, (1) shared that many times s/he would think, "Yes, that's how I should do it," but never actually did it. However, in Liften, the interviewee might come across someone who has actually solved a similar problem in a very clever way that (1) might be able to implement to their own business. (1) believes that it is very comforting to be able
to exchange ideas in this way. Moreover, (1) also indicates an openness to sharing ideas between companies. One of the companies was exploring an app related to customer satisfaction and expressed a willingness to share it with the interviewee, inviting (1) for a coffee to discuss it further, without any conditions. (3) says that there are situations where you need to bounce ideas off someone, sometimes you can feel a bit alone in your role. (3) finds it enjoyable to attend these meetings (Liften). It brings the interviewee joy and happiness and, most importantly, the interviewee learns something new every time and always leaves with an idea. (3) also said that when s/he first joined Liften, s/he was unsure of what to expect and did not fully understand all the opportunities that were available. (5) also testifies to and shares that there is value in being "among peers" and how it makes one feel less alone and vulnerable in their role as a CEO, in (5) case.

"For example, if you aspire to become a CEO, it is a position where you are the most exposed in the entire company in a way. In a CEO network, you find yourself in a group where everyone is equally exposed in their respective positions. This creates understanding and empathy. Therefore, it is not about individuals trying to assert themselves, as there are several CEOs present; they are all there on the same vulnerable premise," (5) says.

When asked about (3) expectations before the meetings with Liften and whether s/he thought that everyone would be facing the same problems and challenges, (3) replied that s/he did not expect it. (3) noted that smaller companies, in particular, have a lot to accomplish in a limited amount of time, and thus their challenges may differ from those of larger companies.

Competitors
One of the reasons, according to the (1), why potential networks or partnerships are not considered is due to the fear of sharing information with competitors. (1) argues that today, they have confidence in their ability to offer something valuable to their customers, and therefore they do not need to be afraid of losing them. (1) mentions industry forums as a form of networking. However, since everyone in the forum belongs to the same industry, they become competitors and are not as willing to share knowledge. It seems that the purpose is more about showcasing their own business in a positive light rather than being open to knowledge exchange. "You have to present yourself as being really good, you don't really want to say what you're doing for customers, what you're working on. It's a bit secretive at the same time, not nearly as open." (3) also mentions industry forums as a way to meet colleagues, but one does not disclose, for example, which supplier they purchase from.
mentioned one of the network groups the interviewee has been a part of. According to (2), these groups were matched based on the participants' backgrounds to avoid any competition situations. The interviewee found this matching process successful, but after some time, a new facilitator was introduced who worked for a competing company. As a result, the interviewee was moved to a different group, which was not as successful, and this experience led the interviewee to eventually leave the network.

(4) is asked if s/he perceives that some members of the network are more inclined to share than others from a competitive perspective. (4) responds that in this network, there is no sense of competitiveness in that way. If there were a direct competitor present, it would not be a problem, "...because when I am there, I should be able to see this from the outside. I would never use anything I learned there that was unethical." Instead, (4) believes that members should be encouraged to benefit from each other and identify new business opportunities.

(5) argues that there are challenges associated with being competitive within a networking group. In such a context, one cannot openly discuss issues directly related to business operations, as it would reveal weaknesses or problems within one's own organization. However, as long as one avoids such topics, it is not a problem. It depends entirely on the value that the network provides and the specific content one chooses to focus on. There are certain questions or concerns that are simply not appropriate to discuss within a network, and in those cases, alternative sources of assistance need to be sought, according to (5) viewpoint.

Trust and relationships

(1) mentions that they had done business with a person they met at an industry forum who was based in Malmö. It was someone (1) had previously encountered and listened to a presentation from. In this particular case, it involved robots, and it had resulted in the interviewees purchasing a robot from this individual. "... there's probably some other company that's closer that we have no idea about, but that was the one we knew ... we probably wouldn't have gotten a robot if we hadn't met him."

(2) highlights the importance of building deeper relationships with the members of the network. In addition to discussing relevant topics, (2) believes that adding fun exercises throughout the year can be beneficial. The interviewee also believes that there is value in having a skilled process leader or facilitator who can navigate the discussions, preferably someone with experience running their own business.
When asked if there is value in obtaining information or knowledge from someone within the network rather than searching for it oneself, (3) responds by stating that while the internet is a great resource, there is a limit to what one can find there. Within the network, one can further develop and establish a sense of trust. For instance, one may be hesitant to try certain things, but if they hear from someone in the network who has experience and has done it, they may be more inclined to try it themselves.

(3) believes that both group dynamics and relationships within the network are crucial. S/he emphasizes that it is important for everyone to feel that attending the meetings is important. When asked about trust within the network, (5) argues that trust is an important factor to consider. For instance, (5) mentions that the organizers of one network s/he had been part of emphasized that what is said within this network remains confidential. (5) refers to a network that has also incorporated this principle into its name, containing the word 'close'. (5) believes it is important to have some form of framework that outlines how these confidential discussions should take place.

(4) emphasizes the importance of program organizers building a climate that fosters trust and confidence among members. However, s/he also believes that it is the individual's responsibility to ensure that this happens. (4) says: "When you build up a program like this, you have to create the climate and situations that build up this trust. It depends a lot on the individuals who are part of the program, they want to be present, generous, and trust the other people there. You create the closeness in the modules that exist and that you meet, but then it's up to each individual to make it happen."

(4) believes that relationships become stronger over time as individuals work together through longer periods and challenging situations.

Size and experience
(1) was asked if there were any links between the companies in the Liften program that created value for all parties involved. He replied that s/he believed so, and that the size of the company determined this. If a company is very large, it has more resources. "As a CEO, you don't deal with everything. In smaller companies, there are many other roles, and you get a completely different range of problems and very good insight into how the business works."
Therefore, companies have different problems depending on their size, and the CEO who will participate in the network group will encounter different problem areas depending on the size of the company (1) says. As a small company, (3) considers programs like Liften for instance, as a tremendous asset because they do not always have economic resources to pay for networks or such (3).

(2) shared that in one of the networks s/he had been a part of, there were many new CEOs in their roles and as a more senior member, there was a lot of repetition for the interviewee. The value for (2) at the moment may be more about the networking itself and not just attending meetings and exchanging knowledge because (2) already knows how to acquire it. (2) says, “If I have a problem nowadays, I call someone who I believe has worked with the issue, and then we discuss it together. The more senior you become, the less you might need these types of discussions. The value of these meetings decreases somewhat in terms of competence building. Therefore, it depends on which group you are targeting, I believe.” (2) also states, “I believe it is interesting to keep the group’s level of experience relatively similar, with members having worked as CEO or similar for 1-3 years. If a senior member is included, I do not think they would be as interested in the group, and they might feel that it did not provide them with much value”.

(5) states that as a CEO, there is a responsibility for the entire organization, which naturally creates an interest in certain overarching issues. When there are multiple CEOs in a network, these shared concerns are likely to be quite similar. However, if there are differences in the specific domains in which they operate, conflicts may arise. As a senior CEO, one may have more answers to operational questions, and therefore, may not be seeking that type of content. On the other hand, as a junior CEO, those operational questions may be precisely what they are seeking, leading to a clash in values, he suggests. Additionally, the size of the company can influence the range of responsibilities and perspectives. As the CEO of a medium-sized company compared to a smaller one, there may be more oversight and a less specific focus on different domains. For example, as the CEO of a three-person company, one may have a comprehensive understanding of everything from production to delivery and sales. This leads to different sets of questions and concerns, according to (5).

Sustainability
When asked about the types of sustainability issues that should be discussed during the network meetings, (3) acknowledges the importance of addressing these issues as a means of ensuring long-term competitiveness. However, (3) expresses concern that sustainability may sometimes overshadow other crucial aspects of running a business. S/he emphasizes the need to maintain focus on the core business operations while also integrating sustainability concerns. The interviewee also reveals that they are currently involved in sustainability initiatives, such as implementing various sorting systems for materials such as paper, copper, electricity, and fluorescent lamps. Moreover, they possess environmental certifications and actively strive to prioritize purchasing second-hand items over new ones whenever possible. (3) emphasizes that it is a shared goal within their organization to consistently opt for used items over new ones whenever feasible.

(5) emphasizes the importance of addressing sustainability issues in all networks, regardless of their purpose and context. (5) believes that sustainability should be woven into all discussions and inquiries. "Especially those of us in positions of responsibility, it is up to us to influence and drive the necessary changes," (5) states. The interviewee argues that sustainability is no longer an optional topic; it affects everyone and everything in society today, not just the sustainability manager. A few years ago, it was considered a specific concern for a select few, but now (5) believes that all leadership positions should take responsibility for it. (5) suggests allocating dedicated time within the network to discuss sustainability matters. However, (5) also points out that unless the network specifically focuses on sustainability, it should not be the main topic of discussion. “By acknowledging the significance of sustainability and integrating it into discussions and practices, leaders can play a vital role in promoting positive change within their organizations and beyond” says (5).

Meetings

Dynamics in meetings

(1) also acknowledges that individuals in a network can vary greatly in terms of their personalities and attitudes. (1) adds that during a recent meeting, they interacted with an individual who came across as bitter and sour. (1) explained that s/he thought that if s/he had only met this person once, s/he would have simply perceived them as a grumpy type. The person did not talk much and just answered questions. However, the person has been at every meeting so far and when they had been paired up (1) mentioned that (1) believed that the
person in question found the discussion to be engaging. The discussion was productive, resulting in a fruitful exchange of ideas. (1) stated that s/he felt that the experience had been valuable, and (1) believed that the person in question shared the same sentiment.

During the interview, (2) shared an example of a networking group that had been together for 15 years and got along very well. When asked if (2) saw any disadvantages to such long-term group cohesion, and if so, what they were. (2) responded that there were likely some drawbacks, such as it is becoming harder for others to join the group. Additionally, if there were too many changes, the group dynamics may suffer and the group could fall apart, (2) believes.

(2) shared one more experience from one of the networks s/he was a part of, where members gradually became more comfortable with being vulnerable around one another as time went on. (2) recounted an incident where one member openly expressed uncertainty about the person being suitable for the role of CEO, the organizer of the network prompting the group to set aside the agenda for the next meeting and work together to address the issues the person was facing. (4) also brings up this similar feeling of trust or group dynamics that leads to openness. (4) says that the group can also create a sense of safety in opening up about certain issues. For example, (4) was sure that at some point, if the opportunity arose, s/he wanted to try being a CEO (this was before s/he became one). (4) believed it would suit (4) well and chose to bring it up in the group to get feedback, talk to people, and discuss it.

(5) recounts that during one of the networking events s/he attended, everyone was asked to bring a challenge to the meeting. (5) found this to be a beneficial approach because it allows individuals to prepare and bring something they are personally interested in receiving feedback on, creating engagement and personal investment. It demonstrates vulnerability, as even as a senior professional, one does not have all the answers. It opens up the opportunity to seek feedback from others. This vulnerability is important, as it is not something that can be openly shown within one's organization. Revealing vulnerability in a company can be perceived as weakness or shortcomings (5) says.

(2) emphasized that the group's regular check-ins and updates allowed them to get to know each other better, which in turn made them more willing to both offer and seek help. (2)
believed that this strengthening of relationships was key to the group's success, stating that "when someone needs help, we all come together to try and fix it."

**Productive meetings**

(1) mentions that it is appreciated if the activities during the meetings can provide something concrete, such as exchange of knowledge that can generate business opportunities. By getting to talk to people in smaller groups, (1) believes there are opportunities for these conversations and discussions. "But the setup here is so good, you're paired up with someone, talk about this issue. That setup is great for networking. You can attend a seminar and not talk to anyone, maybe in the checkout line, but then it's mostly small talk. Here, it becomes more concrete, and there's always someone who has done something."

(1) says that it is important that there is some sort of purpose to the meeting, not just to join a group of people and go out to eat and drink and simply just talk and listen to someone. (1) appreciates the setup where there are activities involved.

“I've been to dinners where the most important thing was to eat and drink well. Now, after 1.5 days with an overnight stay, the only thing that has happened is that I'm behind on my tasks”.

For (4), it is important that there is a clear knowledge-driven focus and that the individuals in the network share this mindset, "...curious individuals who want to grow and learn new things. It is not about just talking and having a good time with wine." During the interview, (2) highlights the value of hands-on activities during network meetings. The interviewee shares an experience from one of the networks s/he participated in, where s/he discussed one of the challenges they had, and the group engaged in problem-solving. (2) emphasizes that this was particularly valuable because the group was able to closely relate to the issues at hand, and since many members were new in their roles as CEOs, they faced similar challenges.

One value of being part of a network is knowing where to turn for support when needed, says (3). (3) has experience working hands-on in another program aimed at educating companies on sustainability, also organized by SSCP. (3) explains that they had different focus areas, while also learning how to handle things practically. They had strategic dialogues and plans for moving forward. (3) also mentions that s/he is looking for this practical element in a network with CEOs. For example, how should one best structure a management meeting?
How does one write a smart protocol for follow-up? How does one achieve the best working environment?

For (4), the network is also a way to develop on a personal level. (4) recounts an occasion that was particularly impactful which was when s/he learned tools to see oneself from an outside perspective, and what is important for (4) career going forward. Taking the time to reflect on these matters can lead to a greater understanding of one's goals for the future (4) believes.

**Practicalities of meetings**

(1) believes that 10-12 people are good for these types of networking groups. It's enough to recognize everyone and remember what they are working on. In a larger group, it becomes difficult to know about everyone's business and to interact with all. If the group is smaller, (1) thinks there is a risk of agreeing too much, and the exchange may not be as valuable. (2) shared that in one of the networks s/he had been a part of the group was too large in his opinion. According to him, a group size of around 10 people is ideal. When it comes to the number of people in a group, (3) believes that eight people are optimal, give or take two. However, (3) also thinks that it depends on the individuals in the group, and that if there are only four people in a group, for example, one could still leave feeling a great sense of dynamism (3). Six weeks apart is a sweet spot according to (2). (1) believes that there should be meetings every other month. (4) and (5) believe that bigger groups could be valuable, given that there are more people and more diverse information spread in this case.

(2) mentions company visits as something positive as it provides insight into how other companies work. Additionally, the host company gets an opportunity to showcase their operations and receive feedback from the visitors. Preferable half-days according to (2).

**Content in meetings**

Effective leadership is crucial in any organization, regardless of its industry or sector. In the context of production, the specific focus can vary depending on the mix of companies involved, ranging from technological advancements to automation and digitalization says (1). Recruitment, staff termination, difficult employees, collective agreement issues, ISO certification are themes that bring value according to (2). According to (2), there are two approaches when it comes to proposing a program for a networking group. One can either
suggest a format or allow the participants to discuss and come up with one. Initially, it can be difficult to determine what the group needs, but the interviewee believes that it is important to create trust in the program, articulate its purpose, and provide some detail. It is essential to guide the participants towards what is considered good practice for the group to prevent improvisation during meetings. In addition, it is important to calibrate the frequency and schedule of meetings (2) says. Regarding content, (3) highlights that in addition to issues related to the working environment and personnel, there are also legal requirements and demands related to the company's operating system, such as ISO systems and ISO-14000 standards. (3) believes that meetings should vary in length and content. For example, one could have a lecture followed by working on their business plan and participating in a workshop related to the lecture. There is value in bringing one's documents to the meeting and having a dialogue around them, and then working on them with the help of others.

(4) believes that when it comes to content, it is important for the organizer to keep up to date with the topics that are of interest to the companies. For example, if AI is a topic of interest, a meeting should address the subject and feature skilled speakers who can discuss it. One example she mentions is a network that did not stay current and continued to cover the same content every year. (4) believes in the importance of interaction during the meetings. It's not just about the attendees sitting there and receiving information, but they need to be actively involved, (4) suggests.

(5) expresses that it would be interesting to understand sustainability from the perspective of everyday actions and thinking. Specifically, if he were in a role such as a manufacturing manager for plastic components, (5) mentions that s/he would like to comprehend the thoughts and considerations related to sustainability within (5) specific field. This could include aspects such as procurement practices and the selection of suppliers. By doing so, (5) believes s/he can confidently state that s/he has engaged with and understood best practices within the area of the one's expertise. By seeking to understand and incorporate sustainable practices within their specific domains, professionals can contribute to a more comprehensive and holistic approach to sustainability within their respective industries, (5) believes.

4.4 Observations
This section is centered on the events that took place during two observations. Six different themes were kept in mind when conducting the observations, as described in the
methodology section. The following narrative depicts the events in a dynamic sequence, combining the various themes with personal observations to provide a comprehensive and nuanced account for the reader.

The study focused on two distinct groups: one in their first meeting for the Liften program, and the other in their final meeting. The Liften program aims to identify the needs of productive companies and assist them in finding the right support. Each group consisted of approximately eight companies, with the option for additional representatives to attend the meetings, meaning there could be more than eight individuals present. Meetings occur every six weeks and alternate between sessions where participants receive business development guidance from SSCP and other experts in their field of need. The companies share a commonality in being within the production industry, which gives rise to several similar challenges. However, in most cases, they do not compete with one another.

**Observation number 1 - 9.00-12.00 (13.00 with lunch)**

The meeting began with the leaders of Liften presenting the SSCP business to the participants, using a slide presentation. The program participants sat in a semi-circle around the whiteboard and the presentation. All attendees were dressed appropriately, with a smart casual dress code, such as jeans and a blazer or blouse/top with nice trousers, and sneakers or boots. Most of the participants were middle-aged men, and the women in the group vary in age, with the youngest being around 30. The participants have different positions, such as CEO, COO, CFO, etc. There are also representatives from various companies, with some companies having both the CEO and CFO in attendance.

During the first part of the meeting, most of the participants had a visibly closed body language, with crossed arms, lips pressed together, and few smiles. The participants sat quite upright in their chairs with their arms crossed. What was particularly noticeable was the lack of smiles in the room. Early on in the meeting, one person asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. The request for a confidentiality agreement reinforced the serious nature of the meeting and the need for discretion.

Each participant was then asked to introduce themselves and the facilitator moderated the process by displaying a slide on the presentation that described the participant's company. The first few presenters provided a company overview based on figures such as revenue and the challenges they faced. These challenges were generally quite generic and did not touch on personal issues. Some participants read from a computer, while many mixed positive and
negative aspects. During these presentations, the body language remained somewhat stiff, with few smiles. However, during some of the presentations, a few participants dared to make a joke, and some laughed in agreement. The facilitators also asked some of the network members about their expectations for the program, and some of them responded that they had none. It was particularly evident with one of the participants who displayed a certain skepticism or tough exterior in response to the question, indicating doubt about the value that the program would bring. Later, this was also expressed by the same person during lunch when the person said that s/he was not sure that s/he would want to be in the program due to perceived overload in work. I also had the opportunity to introduce myself in the round by stating that I was from MDU and that I was currently working on my master's thesis on SSCP. Subsequently, the invited speaker for the day took the stage. This experienced speaker and lecturer aimed to talk to the participants about trust and communication and how they could work together effectively on a change journey within their company. However, the group remained quite closed off, and very few smiles or expressions of interest were visible. The speaker posed questions to the group but received no response. Questions such as "you surely know about this phenomenon?" went unanswered, with either no knowledge or reluctance to answer being possible reasons for the lack of participation. During the presentation, the speaker addressed relevant areas that may be of interest in change management, including artificial intelligence (AI). Several members of the group became engaged and shared their own experiences, such as how they had used chat GPT or similar tools. The speaker then divided the group into smaller groups to discuss specific topics such as trust, feedback, and leadership. Here, the group became more relaxed and engaged in discussions, with previously reserved members becoming more open and receptive, exchanging smiles. Some members were more active in contributing to the openness. For example, one of the group's VPs shared challenges they had faced over the years, which related to humility and lack of ego. Around 10 o'clock, after several exercises in small groups, the energy in the room felt very different compared to the beginning. Several previously fewer active individuals became more interested in sharing and talking, even without the speaker posing specific questions. It was evident that the speaker was skilled in facilitating conversation and discussion. Challenges are a recurrent topic during the morning session, but they are only superficially addressed. In other words, the challenges are often mundane and do not delve deeply into the vulnerabilities of those sharing them. Some even refer to them as "minor challenges," which raises the question of whether these are the most significant difficulties or if there are other,
more revealing issues that people are hesitant to share in the group, perhaps due to their personal nature.

Throughout the session, the presenter provides insights and tips on the questions raised by the group, which seems to be valuable for many participants. As previously mentioned, many participants also mix positive experiences with challenges, highlighting how they have overcome difficulties with a specific tool or approach. Moreover, it is evident that many want to share their successful practices and provide tips to others in the group to show themselves as good entrepreneurs.

It appears that an increasing number of individuals in the group are becoming more relaxed and active in discussions, both with the lecturer and during group sessions. Some members demonstrate more humility and vulnerability than others when discussing challenges or similar topics, while the majority strive to present themselves as competent entrepreneurs with a solution-oriented mindset. Comments such as "Yes, but we are already doing that well" and "I have no expectations for this context" suggest a questioning of the value that this network will create or why they are even there.

The final stage of the day was a check-out, the group was invited to share what they believe to be the value of the program and what they look forward to experiencing. There is an overall positive anticipation, ranging from the prospect of bonding as a group, sharing knowledge, learning new and interesting concepts, stepping outside of their individual businesses, and observing how others work.

Just before lunch, the process leaders introduced the CEO of SSCP and one of the board members, who is also associated with one of the partner companies of the Science Park. Both briefly explained the importance of the program and the significance of the companies who were represented here today. This might have provided strong motivation and a greater understanding for the participants about why they are involved in the program. One of the participants expressed gratitude for the existence of the program and for it being free of charge, and expressed admiration for the fact that the CEO of SSCP was present and greeted them.

**Observation number 2 - 13.00-15.15**

During the second observation session, there was a group present who had already gone through the Lift program and were attending their final meeting. They had been meeting
continuously for almost a year. Initially, I met some of them during the lunch break between the two meetings and had the opportunity to speak with a few of them. For today's meeting, only five people were present, including one woman. They were dressed similarly to the other group, neatly but not formally in suits. However, it was noticeable that they had tried. The meeting began with the Lift facilitators telling us about the room we were in, which was a Lean factory. This opened a dialogue about Lean, and one of the participants had been there before and had experience with it. The facilitator also had the opportunity to mention that the room could be rented for a certain amount if companies wanted to test how a Lean process works. The atmosphere was relaxed and friendly, and it was evident that the participants had met before as they asked questions about things that had obviously been discussed in previous stages or meetings. During the check-in, they shared what they were looking forward to for the summer, and it quickly became quite personal. One participant, for example, shared about a deceased family member that they were grieving and how it had led to them making new choices in life, such as possibly stepping back as CEO and focusing on living in the present by taking a longer trip in the fall. The other members reacted to this as friends and expressed sympathy for the person's loss, etc.

One of the process leaders opened the day's agenda with an exercise in innovation spirit. We (during this meeting, I was more of a participant) were asked to build a duck from a Lego set that we had received in just 1 minute. The process leader then remarked that he had never seen anyone build a similar duck from the many people he had done this exercise with. We were then paired up, and I sat together with one of the participants who worked as a CFO. The exercise involved participants telling the other person what they had done hands-on during the program that was related to the program. For example, the person who shared with me had worked with students on their thesis as one of the process leaders had paired him and his company with Liften. He had also received help on how to work with the company culture from one of the lecturers during various conversations. The remainder of the time was also led by the same lecturer who was with the first "new" group of Liften participants. She stitched the bag together and talked about similar things, i.e., change management, etc., which she had also discussed with this group during their first meeting. It turns out that many of the companies are in a process of change and openly share how they work with it. The lecturer does not need to interject questions during the presentation itself but rather holds them as a dialogue with the participants throughout the presentation.
During the entire meeting, the atmosphere was relaxed, and all participants were active and engaged. This was likely due to several different aspects, partly because they already knew each other, but also because they were in an intimate group of only five. The only one they didn't know in the room was me. The conversations were focused on both challenges and positive experiences with Liften. They talked a lot about corporate culture and the challenges surrounding it. Someone pointed out that things are more in our heads than in the walls.

What sets this group apart from the other is not only that they seem to be more open and relaxed, but they also dare to question each other and the presenter. For instance, one of the participants questioned why we should have something as old-fashioned as development talks with our employees, where we sit down and talk for an hour about what they have achieved during a whole year. We should work more closely with them all the time, he said. This sparked a discussion between him and the presenter, where they reached some sort of consensus that one does not need to exclude the other.

One of the participants, a 60+ man who is the CEO and is a bit more old-school, mentioned things like "it was better in the old days" and that AI, for example, feels scary. He did not get as much support from the other group members. It could be that they do not agree with everything he says, but that he is quite authoritarian, and they do not dare or want to challenge him.

5. Analysis of findings
This section aims to highlight the key aspects that have been analyzed based on both the empirical findings and the existing literature, in order to contribute to the purpose of the study. The purpose was to enhance the understanding of how Södertälje Science Park can implement a C-suite/executive network for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the manufacturing industry in Stockholm. Furthermore, this thesis also sought to contribute to the comprehension of how Science Parks, in general, can effectively manage networks for top executive positions. It does so by suggesting the specific factors that are central to success, challenges, and sustainability aspects in such endeavors.

Some motives for the firms to engage in networking might be to gain access to new markets and technologies (Coles et al., 2003). However, certain activities or content in the network meetings may not be suitable for all companies, and there can be constraints in terms of time and financial resources (Klofsten, 2004). Networking activities are sometimes perceived as
time-consuming and not directly related to one's daily work responsibilities, among companies. However, the notion that lack of time is the root cause of such perceptions may be misguided. Rather, individuals may require assurance that the time and effort invested in networking activities will yield tangible benefits, such as practical knowledge and actionable insights. During the interviews as well as observed in the observations, the members seem to have an overall difficulty in knowing beforehand what value the arranged network might have on their firm. For instance, during the observations there were some scattered concerns regarding the perceived value that the network would bring. However, many positive inputs emerged, such as anticipation for various aspects, including the potential for group bonding, knowledge sharing, exploration of new and intriguing concepts, and gaining insights by observing how others operate outside their individual businesses. Nevertheless, the question of whether they fully understood the value beforehand remains, and establishing a clear identity for the network is likely necessary even before the program starts to ensure that the members understand this. As Klofsten (2004) argues, it is important to anchor the idea with the members at an early stage. It seems like engaging and motivating business leaders to participate in the network program presents certain challenges due to its abstract nature and the need for customized or evolving content each year, making it difficult to define the value upfront. This can advantageously be addressed already in the recruitment process, emphasizing the specific benefits for each company, such as access to tools, models, and networking opportunities.

The configuration of networks is not static, but rather they are constantly evolving and adapting in response to partners' requirements and the context in which the network operates. It is also shaped by the actors in the network and how capable they are to manage networks (Kash and Rycroft 2002; Koch 2003; Larson 1991). Thus, tailoring the content or activities to the target audience is beneficial which in turn means that one needs to gain an understanding not only of the company they are trying to recruit to the group but also of the individual who will represent the company. This hence the value, needs and interests seem to vary between individuals. And, as Pittaway et al., (2004) states the network is shaped by the actors in the network and how capable they are to manage networks (Kash and Rycroft 2002; Koch 2003; Larson 1991). This requirement, in turn, imposes demands on the organizer to not only have a comprehensive understanding of the companies and individuals involved in the network but also on how they are matched with one another. According to the macroanalysis it is about ensuring that it is a homogeneous group in terms of revenue, geographic location, and facing
similar questions and challenges. This is also addressed by the interviewed c-suite executives who emphasize the value of discussing common challenges, collectively solving problems, and avoiding reinventing the wheel. This, in turn, raises a question concerning competition between the firms. Competition appears to be a two-sided issue that can vary in different situations, perhaps even from individual to individual. Some of those who were interviewed did not consider competing companies to be a problem, while others did. For instance, one of the interviewers said that yes, there might be challenges regarding this matter, however it becomes a matter of content during the meetings. Certain sensitive topics, such as those directly related to business operations, which could expose weaknesses or problems within one's own organization, may not be discussed for instance. The literature is also divided on this matter, as it suggests that tension may arise between the actors in the network when knowledge is shared. There could be questions regarding intellectual properties for instance (Tidd & Bessant, 2021). Therefore, knowledge protection could become important through agreements, patents, and copyrights. This is something that also emerged during the observation of the initial meeting, as the first question that arose was whether a confidentiality agreement should be drafted. However, studies also show that learning takes place best when the members are within the same industry (Glaeser et al., 1992), in this case, it can involve having similar issues and challenges, such as within the product industry, where they could seek assistance from each other in bouncing off ideas and thoughts. This was perceived as a value in the network by several c-suite executives.

As previously mentioned, there are challenges in attracting companies to join these types of arranged business to business networks, and to make them commit. Another reason why this proves to be a challenge is that SMEs may encounter difficulties in identifying appropriate partners (Tidd & Bessant, 2013), which could explain their lower tendency to participate in such activities. Moreover, once companies are part of the network, it can pose a challenge in determining the optimal approach to fostering effective collaboration among the participating entities, claims Tidd and Bessant (2013). In this context, it appears to predominantly revolve around interpersonal relationships and the establishment of trust among the participants within the network. Håkansson et al., (2009) examine the importance of trust in the formation of business-to-business relationships and argue that trust is a fundamental aspect. According to the authors, trust is built over time through repeated interactions among network actors, leading to the development of a shared understanding (Håkansson et al., 2009). This is also brought up during the interviews where one of them claimed that relationships become
stronger over time as individuals work together for extended periods and face challenging situations.

There appears to be a correlation between the openness or closedness of a network and the strength or weakness of the ties among its members. When a closed group is formed and builds strong ties between its members it seems to nurture trust and a sense of community. However this close group might also tend to share the same type of information and knowledge, group think. Thus, the question of whether a network should adopt an open or closed structure appears to vary on different factors, and each approach surely has its own advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, an open network offers greater prospects for identifying a larger pool of potential collaborators and as well as increased potential for knowledge sharing. Collaboration among companies, universities, suppliers, and customers is advantageous to integrate different knowledge bases, behaviors, and mindsets, fostering innovative discoveries and advancements (Nieto & Santamaria, 2007; Håkansson et al, 2009). Or as Burt (1992) puts it, a node with more non-redundant ties are more likely to gain access to diverse and innovative information compared with a node with fewer holes, thus a more open approach (Burt, 1992). As one of the interviewed C-suite executives testified, there is value in the loose ties you have with individuals in a new network. He explains that if he reaches out to someone he knows within his already established network, there is a risk that the information provided will be of the same type he already possesses, and people might want to “please” him by agreeing on things he believes for instance. With a network of multiple companies across different industries, where the ties are looser, he can obtain more diversified information he believes, newer information sort of. This suggests a correlation between what the literature (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1975; Borgatti and Halgin, 2011) suggests and the experiences reported by the interviewees. In contrast, Coleman (1998) asserts that it is specifically the strong bonds/ties with a select few individuals within a tightly knit and exclusive network that yield the most significant impact. Coleman (1998) argues that when there is a relationship between two actors and one person does something for the other, the one performing the action receives a so-called "credit slip." This means that the person can use this credit in future needs. This form of social capital depends on two elements: the reliability in the social environment, which means that obligations will be repaid, and the actual extent of the existing obligations. However, he argues that without a high degree of reliability among the members of the group, the institution would not be able to exist. This is because a person who receives an early payout in a series of meetings can disappear and
leave the others with a loss. For example, one cannot imagine a successful rotating credit association functioning in urban areas with a high degree of social disorder or a lack of social capital, says Coleman (1988, p. 102-103).

One potential value in networking is the ability to feel comfortable asking questions about topics that one may feel they “should already know about”, says one of the c-suits during the interview. It seems to be a level of openness and a willingness to be transparent about one's problems, as well as humility in approaching them. Furthermore, this is rooted in the presence of a deeper relationship and mutual trust within the network. The role of third parties is to promote trust and confidence among network members (Hanna & Walsh, 2002) and serve as neutral knowledge mediators (Pittaway et al., 2004) and vital connecting links for the development of informal relationships that form the foundation of network connections (Hanna & Walsh, 2002). Two factors similar to this are raised during the interviews with both c-suite executives and network organizers. Firstly, it involves the role of network facilitators in navigating this process and fostering trust and confidence among members. Secondly, facilitators are expected to exhibit a combination of passion and empathy in their approach. During the observations, it becomes evident that relationships play a crucial role in establishing a more inclusive and open climate within the network group.

Actors in networks have different positions reflecting their power and influence. Sources of power include technology, expertise, trust, economic strength, and legitimacy (Tidd & Bessant, 2013). Moreover, size and age can influence an organization's position in a network, where larger and older organizations tend to occupy more central positions (Woods et al., 2002). According to the c-suite executives, the size of the company appears to play a role in the types of challenges a business face as well. Moreover, the experience of the c-suite executives themselves is also a crucial factor. Once again, it revolves around the individual in question. For instance, a more senior CEO with extensive experience is likely to have accumulated greater knowledge, skills, and an understanding of how to access them compared to someone newer in their position. Therefore, this aspect also needs to be considered when recruiting companies and individuals to the network.

Regarding the sustainability aspect of the network, it has been discovered in the literature that to foster sustainable innovation, networks should be designed and governed in ways that prioritize sustainability outcomes (Pittaway et al., 2004). Also, previous research has
demonstrated that SCPs have the potential to serve as sustainable knowledge facilitators and exhibit a proactive attitude towards environmental commitment (Laguna and Durán-Romero, 2017). According to the macro analysis, sustainability issues are addressed in the different networks from various perspectives, including social, economic, and ecological dimensions. However, one of the interviewees points out that there seems to be a greater emphasis on the ecological aspect or how to preserve the environment. Companies tend to believe that sustainability mainly involves proper waste sorting, for example. This seems to be the case even in one of the interviewed companies, where priority is given to sorting and using recycled materials, for instance.

C-suite executives play a vital role in promoting sustainability within organizations. They provide resources and incentives to encourage employees to support sustainability initiatives. Their engagement and leadership can strongly influence the company's culture and decision-making processes (Kiesnere and Baumgartner, 2020). During the interviews with c-suite executives, the question of responsibility for sustainability efforts arises. Here, one of the executives also highlights that sustainability is a significant responsibility for leadership positions. They express that it needs to be approached differently today, as it should be addressed across all positions within the organization. Sustainability is no longer solely the concern of sustainability managers; it has become a broader issue that requires engagement and action at all levels of the company.

There also seems to be challenges for SMEs when it comes to managing sustainability within the organization. One of the interviewers says that surely sustainability issues are important, but it is crucial not to forget about core operations and maintaining competitiveness. When not having one person in charge of sustainability work. Thus, this constitutes an even greater undertaking for the CEO of the company to undertake. A network that addresses these issues could potentially provide support in the process.

6. Framework and model for Södertälje Science Park (practical contribution)
A workshop was conducted in collaboration with SSCP with the aim of presenting the findings from the macroanalysis, interviews, and literature review, as well as initiating an analysis of these findings. The workshop began with a presentation of the findings, during which SSCP had the opportunity to ask questions and share their thoughts. One of the SSCP representatives stood by the whiteboard, taking notes as the findings were presented.
Following the presentation, we discussed the notes that had been written on the whiteboard, where we also identified several themes or topics that emerged from the different parts of the presentation. These themes included value creation, commitment, significance and legitimacy, personal/company knowledge, and practical aspects. To assess potential gaps in SSCP’s capacity and knowledge regarding these network-related themes, a spider diagram was created (see image in appendix 3).

One of the deliverables that we agreed upon at the beginning of the project was to explore how a potential model or framework could look like. Networking programs are something that SSCP actively works with throughout the entire organization, and therefore, questions arose during the workshop regarding how the whole Science Park could ensure that these themes were addressed before each network launch, like a checklist or similar. I mentioned that one of the interviewees worked with a business model canvas when assembling communities, and that this concept could possibly be applied in this case, however with a network focus. I began sketching how this canvas could potentially look, and here is the result followed by a description of each topic in the canvas referred to the empirical findings:

**Identity, Values and Purpose**

*Themes and questions to ask in the blue section:*

- Purpose - Why does this network exist?
• Member identity - Who is the target group? Who is this for and what is the selection/matching/recruitment process?
• Values - What are the core values of the network?

Klofsten (2004) states that the network needs a sustainable idea towards which the business can orient itself and this and this in turn can make the group feel a strong sense of community and belonging (Klofsten, 2004). By sustainable he refers to an idea that lasts over time as well as being compelling. The idea or in this case the identity of the network should also be considered as non-static, meaning that it could change regarding the actors involved in the network (Klofsten, 2004). According to the macro analysis and interviews with c-suits, creating trust, communicating the purpose, and providing detailed information about the program are important factors to consider for the success of a network. The objective and purpose of the network must be clearly defined; it is not about being among like-minded individuals, but rather being among people in similar positions and roles.

Content, Commitment, Trust, and relationship

Themes and questions to ask in the yellow section:
• Content - What content creates value for the members of the network?
• Commitment - how do we create commitment, engagement, and activity in the network?
• Trust and Relationship - How do we create strong bonds and establish trust among the members?

According to the c-suits there is a value in productive meetings, meaning that the activities should provide concrete outcomes, such as knowledge exchange that can generate business opportunities. Practical activities can include engaging in problem-solving, strategic dialogues, and sustainability planning. "Bring your reports." Regarding meeting content, it is mentioned that technical advancements in production, automation, and digitalization are important topics. These topics are also addressed during the macro analysis and interviews: recruitment, employee termination, dealing with difficult employees, collective bargaining issues, ISO certification, and leadership are also relevant.
The activities or the content in the meetings/programs should create benefits for the actors. However, some activities or content Klofsten (2004) states may not appeal to daily operations for some firms. (Klofsten, 2004). This requirement entails that SSCP must get to know and learn about the company as well as the potential individual who will represent the firm in a network. This hence diverse values regarding content can be highly individualistic in terms of seniority, size of company, own interests, etc. However, as the macro-analysis and interviews with c-suits shows, there should be a mix of different content such as workshops, discussions in smaller groups and lecturers. Nonetheless, as mentioned, this needs to be reviewed with the selected target group and what they perceive as valuable.

Creating practical utility is considered important not only by the organizers of networks but also according to the c-suits. The companies need to find out, or rather understand, how they can create practical utility through the development of their business. One reason for this is that these companies often have limited time, which means that the activities they engage in and undertake should be focused on something they know can create utility.

When it comes to the value for companies to participate in network activities or programs, as mentioned in the literature review, there can also be variations in the types of companies that collaborate based on the nature of their innovation work (Pittaway et al., 2004). Therefore, it becomes crucial for SSCP during the recruitment or matching phase of companies to the network to assess the nature of their innovation work. For example, if a start-up is involved in highly innovative work, it might be necessary to approach universities in a different manner to find value for the company. However, the diversity of members/firms in the network can play a crucial role. Nieto and Santamaria (2007) conclude that companies should seek out diverse collaborations to increase their chances of developing innovative products, and that policymakers should work to create environments that encourage such collaborations (Nieto & Santamaria, 2007). The consideration of this trade-off in the matching process between companies is crucial for SSCP to review. For instance, they can either choose within the same industry or more variation and diversity, or they can incorporate other actors such as universities. Regardless, it is an important decision to make.

can lead to opportunism, conflicts, and a reluctance to support each other. Conversely, when trust exists between partners, it can enhance the value of exchanges between cooperating firms the authors state (Mayer et al., 1995; Wincent, 2005). Moreover, to build strong networks and relationships between partners is important for effective knowledge sharing and collaboration, and that trust is a key factor in making these networks successful (Pittaway et al., 2004). Accordingly, trust and relationships are important factors to consider when choosing the content of the program. Activities such as check-ins or kickoffs could be beneficial. In both cases the members can share something personal, express expectations, and curiosity, creating immediate engagement. Active participation of the members during the meetings is also important. It appears that group dynamics and the overall atmosphere within the network are crucial factors highlighted by many of the interviewees. Specifically, the culture and climate established within the network play a significant role in fostering and facilitating knowledge sharing. This appears to result in companies being more willing to help each other and might also lead to individuals daring to share the most difficult and challenging aspects of their business for instance. According to Hanna and Walsh (2002) third parties, such as SSCP, have a key role to play in fostering trust among network members (Hanna & Walsh, 2002). They ideally act as neutral knowledge brokers (Pittaway et al., 2004) but also act as important conduits for the development of informal relationships (personal relations between individuals), which are the basis for the development of network relationships, particularly between small firms (Hanna & Walsh, 2002).

Sustainability should be implemented in the content of the program. And this, of course, hence it aligns with their mission but also with what the research indicates. SCPs has a potential to serve as sustainable knowledge facilitators and demonstrate a proactive stance towards environmental commitment. As indicated by the macro-analysis and the interviews with c-suits, the sustainability challenges extend beyond the purview of the sustainability manager and encompass the entire organization. It is recognized that it is the responsibility of the whole organization and perhaps above all for those in a leading position. This responsibility is driven not only by the societal imperative but also by the need to adapt to laws, regulations, and other stakeholders involved in the firm's operations who prioritize sustainability.

**Practicalities, Organization/facilitators, and Capture**
Themes and questions to ask in the red section:

Practicalities - How do we design the layout of the program. When do we meet? Where do we meet? For how long, and so on...

Organization/facilitators - Who runs the network? Decision making etc.

Capture - How do we create an "alumni-effect" so the network “lives on”?

There are different opinions regarding the optimal duration of network meetings. In most cases it seems like the c-suits prefer half-days or shorter, however they could see the value in full-days but then it must be planned for in advance and the dates have to be set out and planned for. Meetings should take place approximately every 6 weeks.

In terms of group size most of the interviewee says it should be around 10-12 people and this is a critical mass sort off. However, this may vary depending on the individuals in the group. Fewer people can work if the group is dynamic. Maintaining a balance in the number of members is important to avoid loss of control and to enhance diversity within the network, says Klofsten (2004). Here, the concept of consideration comes into play, where the number of members involved can greatly influence the level of diversity and control. In general, having more members leads to increased diversity but reduced control, whereas having fewer members tends to result in the opposite effect.

Tidd and Bessant (2021) highlight the importance of people who direct and facilitate the cluster organization (Tidd & Besant, 2021). Enthusiastic individuals who act as facilitators can drive engagement and encourage more members to be active according to the macro analysis and interviews with c-suite. Moreover, having multiple people or stakeholders involved in running the network is preferable to relying solely on one enthusiast. Also, given that there are different types of people, both introverts and extroverts, the activities could be designed to accommodate different communication styles to make people more active. Furthermore, coordination is required to obtain benefits of the network. Research done on inter-organizational networking suggests that several core processes need managing in a network. The network should be treated as a particular form of organization (Tidd & Bessant, 2021).
Studies indicate that trust is a crucial factor when it comes to networking. Wincent (2005) argues that companies are more inclined to network and collaborate with actors they have already established contact with and developed a certain level of trust, rather than with external parties. In the female executive networks, strong bonds are formed among members who possess both loyalty and trust. These bonds are so strong that members are willing to support the network even after they have completed a program themselves. Not only because they want to, but also because they can learn something from it. These success factors are something that SSCP can learn from. In other words, how can they achieve a so-called alumni effect? Implementing an alumni program at SSCP could serve to forge closer ties with the participating companies and enable the organization to gain insights on how to effectively match them for future programs. So, how can they ensure that the companies/individuals who have been part of their programs have a desire to continue being part of the SSCP sphere instead of leaving it when the program ends? This implies that SSCP should focus on a long-term perspective. For instance, work with their credibility and legitimacy in the organization. Let's consider the example of the female network in the macroanalysis, known for its strong credibility and legitimacy. This network has no trouble recruiting CEOs; in fact, there's a waiting list to join and the women who want to join must be nominated. The participants in this network are highly engaged, proactive, and loyal. They remain committed even after the program concludes, making the organization sort of capture the value and reusing it.

7. Discussion, conclusion, and further research
There is no doubt that business-to-business networks are beneficial for innovation and development for particularly SMEs. The designing, configuring, and managing of networks should not be seen as a desk-bound project but to be regarded as a phenomenon with multiple intricate layers encompassing both tangible and intangible conditions and characteristics. First, considering the necessary conditions, characteristics, and challenges for a Science Park to take into consideration when implementing a network there are quite many. Firstly, the perceived value or anticipation of the network might be hard to grasp given its abstract nature. The desire for clarity is significant from the perspective of the C-suite executives, making it a crucial aspect to resolve before the network commences. In regards of values, there are numerous factors at play, which vary from individual to individual. At times, these interests stem more from the individuals themselves rather than solely from the company. It should not be forgotten that individuals represent their respective organizations, yet they
remain unique entities with distinct personalities, emotions, opinions, and, as mentioned earlier, interests that guide their preferences regarding suitable content. There are undoubtedly certain widely recognized and relevant areas to consider. As an organizer, it is vital to stay updated and informed, knowing which topics/themes are pertinent not only in the present but also for the future, to create this timely and relevant content.

Tailoring the content can undoubtedly provide value, as observed during several interviews. However, this task can be challenging as it may be difficult to ascertain beforehand. How do we truly know what the selected companies and individuals are seeking without getting to know them more intimately? It requires a certain level of familiarity to make informed predictions. It is not possible to assemble a group of individuals without having some understanding of their value expectations. Moreover, an important aspect seems to lie in the matching of these companies to one another, considering both the shared value appreciation in terms of content and how individuals/companies perceive competition among others in the network. While this may not be an issue for some, it can be a significant concern for others who may even seek to switch groups if placed with a competitor. There are two approaches, in my opinion, to address this matter. One option is to refrain from discussing sensitive topics related to operations within the network, while the other is to establish transparency with the companies beforehand and inquire about their perspectives on this matter.

Regarding the homogeneity of the group, literature, macro-analysis, and interviews with C-suite executives provide diverse perspectives. Considering a group of like-minded individuals in similar positions within the same industry, it is argued that they develop strong bonds over time, forming a tight-knit network. The advantages lie in the deep trust, strong relationships, and willingness to openly discuss personal and perhaps vulnerable matters within the group. Particularly for roles such as C-suite executives, and especially CEOs, who hold positions of vulnerability, there is value in belonging to such a group of like-minded peers. Being part of this group offers immense support from others who understand their unique circumstances and share similar experiences. However, what are the potential negative aspects? Firstly, there may be a limited influx of new information from different influencers into the network. Additionally, the group may fall prey to a phenomenon known as "groupthink," where cohesion becomes so strong that members refrain from questioning one another and instead contribute only information or knowledge they believe will be appreciated by their fellow group members.
The issue of whether a network is closed or open can be further debated, and there are evidently different degrees of closure and openness, so to speak. If we consider the female executive network, it can be referred to as a close network due to the high cost of membership and the selective nature of the application process (limited to women in leadership positions). Meaning that an open network has more often a broader reach and involves connections with a diverse range of individuals from various backgrounds. The network also seems to operate in a closed manner, as no information is allowed to leak out to individuals who are not part of the network. Surely, there is a power in this approach as it fosters closer connections among members and engenders a sense of loyalty, not unlike some of the aspects of a community in terms of for instance boundedness, belonging and support. It also appears that this can strengthen members' engagement and commitment. This, of course, can be linked to the aforementioned factors of relationships and trust. It is highlighted in macro-analyses and through interviews that building trust and relationships among members is crucial. The aim is to get closer to individuals and almost delve beneath the surface on a personal level. This is done to make the meetings more valuable in terms of knowledge exchange and to promote collaboration.

Therefore, it seems essential to consider the network's purpose. If the network aims to explore specific best practices within companies, utilizing existing information regarding capacity and efficiency, for example, a closed network may be more suitable. This allows network members to build strong trust and relationships, enabling them to collectively utilize knowledge for the company's improvement. On the other hand, if the network's goal is to foster new innovations, ideas, and solutions, an open network that allows new influencers to join may be advantageous.

To make it more complex, there seem to be different types of closed and open networks and that a network can be both, in other words, it can vary on a spectrum. Closed in terms of keeping information confidential and not letting it out, open in terms of allowing everyone to participate. Of course, there is a downside to keeping knowledge from spreading out, but apart from that, without considering these premises, perhaps it doesn't work? While closed networks may limit the spread of knowledge, it is important to consider the underlying reasons for maintaining such an approach. In certain cases, the nature of the information being shared may necessitate a closed network to protect sensitive or proprietary knowledge. Without these premises, it is plausible that the network may not function optimally.
When it comes to sustainability, the responsibility for addressing this issue has shifted from being solely the responsibility of the sustainability manager to being seen as the collective responsibility of the entire organization. However, according to research, this needs to be taken a step further, and this is where Science Parks may play a significant role. According to research findings, it is recommended that the design and governance of networks give priority to sustainability outcomes to facilitate sustainable innovation. This entails the incorporation of sustainability criteria into both network membership and governance. In essence, there is a need to transition from an individual-focused approach to a more systemic and collaborative approach. Additionally, it is imperative to reconsider traditional models and instead emphasize shared goals, values, and collaboration as opposed to competition and individual achievement. Science parks, with their focus on innovation and collaboration, can serve as catalysts for fostering this systemic and collaborative approach to sustainability. However, this requires a clear understanding of what sustainability can do for the actors in terms of value. Therefore, lacking a clear objective for sustainability initiatives, for instance, within a science park can present a challenge.

In the end, we need to consider a practical approach to why people attend networking events, such as finding community, as well as the theoretical discussion about the rationalist assumptions made in networking literature. While the literature review provides underpinnings that are normative, it may not be so challenging in terms of theoretical thinking. The interviews and observations that have been done in this study highlights that networking events are not just about doing business but are also social places where people form ties and bonds that go beyond simply exchanging information. These events could serve as a glue for the community, and we should pay more attention to this literature as well. We need to consider the different values, dynamics, and tensions between networks and communities to better understand what people get out of them.

Moreover, it remains unclear how actors perceive the value of network relationships. Is the primary purpose of networking to improve business operations and acquire new knowledge, or are relationships within the network as important as previously thought? Additionally, while networking undoubtedly offers various advantages, it is crucial to understand how actors view these benefits. Some studies suggest that the purpose of networking is primarily to enhance business operations and gain new knowledge, while others highlight the importance of relationships within the network itself. Therefore, further research is necessary.
to gain a comprehensive understanding of how actors perceive the value of business-to-business networks and the role that relationships and trust play in this context.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide (organizers)
In interviews conducted with actors involved in networks, clusters, and communities, a set of questions was employed. These questions underwent modifications throughout the process to suit the specific individuals being interviewed. The primary objective was to explore their approaches towards working with content, practical aspects, and member commitment. These thematic areas formed the core structure of the interview guide, while sub-themes emerged along the way and were also investigated. However, it is important to note that all sub-themes were derived from the main themes of content, commitment, practicalities, and capture. Additionally, participants were encouraged to share anecdotes and provide examples of significant events that occurred during network, cluster, or community meetings. Follow-up questions were then posed based on the responses received.
**Commitment**

What are the underlying drivers that contribute to commitment?

What is the main concept or idea behind the network, would you say?

How is this concept communicated to the members?

What business-related benefits do members derive from the network?

Is there any other value that you perceive, which is not directly related to business activities?

How would you describe the level of engagement among the members?

Are some members more active than others?

How does the group behave as a whole?

How do subgroups form within the larger group?

How open do you perceive companies to be when it comes to sharing information?

Do you have any positive experiences from a meeting that you can describe?

**Content/Practicalities**

What is the typical duration of the meetings?

What time of the day and day of the week are the meetings usually held?

What types of activities are typically included in the meetings?

What themes or topics are considered valuable for as many members as possible, considering that they operate in different markets?

Would you say that the group is homogeneous or comprises individuals with diverse needs?

In your opinion, what factors contribute to the success of the activity design?
Approximately how many members do you believe is the optimal number based on your experience?

**Organization**

What does the responsibility and division of work look like within the network?

How many individuals are responsible for various tasks, etc.?

**Appendix 2**

**Interview guide (c-suits)**

In interviews conducted with c-suits a set of questions was employed. These questions underwent modifications throughout the process to suit the specific individuals being interviewed. Here, an exploratory approach was employed, wherein a set of guiding questions was utilized to facilitate the interview process. However, as diverse responses naturally emerged, subsequent probing questions varied according to the unique individuals. Consequently, thematic patterns emerged along the way, eventually resulting in the identification of distinct emerging topics that could be clustered to organize the collected data.

Questions:

Have you had previous experience with networks, and if so, which ones, and what were the positives and negatives?

If you were to participate in a CEO network, what would be valuable to you in attending such meetings?

In your opinion, what are some interesting topics for a CEO meeting?

How frequently do you believe network members should meet?

Over what duration of time?
How do you perceive the level of engagement among the members (if you have been part of a network)?

What are your thoughts on knowledge exchange among different network members?

How do you view competition if you were all from the same industry, for example?

How do you perceive relationships and trust within the network?

If you have been part of a network, could you describe the different dynamics that can arise during meetings?

What do you consider valuable content for meetings, in your opinion?

Appendix 3

Pictures from workshop with Södertälje Science Park.
Läggningar

- ESA - likt smittning klockan
- Teamship - drömmare idé
- Vård- 
- 
- 

Affinity matrix

- Vården/Values

- Engagerade/commitment
  - Tyngd
  - Legitimitet
  - Förtryck kunnor

- Pescant-kommission
  - Allt att komma hit

- Praktik
  - 10-12 deltagerer
  - Praktik är fullständig
  - Ut 60 medie